The Politics of Authenticity in Rock and Electronic Dance Music

By

Luke Pearson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty Of Graduate And Postdoctoral Affairs in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Music and Culture

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

© 2012
Luke Pearson

Library and Archives
Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-91588-2

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-91588-2

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

Scholars have rejected immanent and essentialized theories of authenticity in popular music studies, choosing instead to view all instances of the concept as ideologically constructed. Using this as a foundation, this thesis examines how authenticities operate and are constructed in the allegedly polarized genres of Rock and Electronic Dance Music (EDM). I examine these constructions from historical, performative, and racial perspectives, ultimately coming to the conclusion that, although they arrive by different routes, both Rock and EDM adhere to a similar Romantic version of authenticity. Among others, I employ Philip Auslander's theory of Liveness, Richard Peterson's theory of the misremembered past, the notion of 'work' in DJ culture as theorized by Farrugia and Swiss, and Bertram D. Ashe's interpretation of the Post Soul Aesthetic.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Introduction	1
A Note On EDM	8
Chapter One: Authenticity And Romanticism	9
Chapter Two: Disco And The Birth of Inauthenticity	33
Chapter Three: Authenticity And Performance	48
Chapter Four: Authenticity And Race	75
Final Conclusion	97
Bibliography	105
Discography	111

Introduction

One of the most difficult concepts to wrestle with in popular music discourse is the notion of authenticity. Listeners both demand and crave it; in fact, one could argue that the Western world's post-war obsession with popular music has more or less been a sustained pursuit of it. Since the mid twentieth century it has been discovered in the crackle of a Motown snare, the scrape of a distorted power chord, and the rasp of Bruce Springsteen. Artists that possess it seem to achieve it effortlessly, and those who lack it are obvious. It is like being cool: if you have to work at it, you are hopeless already. It is usually described using synonyms, like genuine, real, or honest, and while these qualities all feed *into* authenticity, the concept has traditionally had "higher, more spiritual claims to make."¹ And yet it is precisely this spiritualism that is the source of authenticity's problematic instability, for a certain aspect of 'the spiritual' will always remain beyond explication.

This project seeks to shed a light on the ways authenticity operates in popular music, with a particular focus on rock and electronic dance music, the latter of which is arguably the most inauthentic of all by traditional standards. In doing so I will argue that despite their superficial differences, both rock and EDM share a common obsession with authenticity, although it is constructed differently in either case. What links these constructions however, is an undergirding of Romantic philosophy, which places an emphasis on individuality, honesty, and originality in artistic expression.

¹ Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Hoboken [NJ]: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1.

Unfortunately, much of the casual debate remains caught up in circular disputes over who is or is not authentic. In an effort to elevate the discussion, scholars have focused instead on how authenticity is constructed, abandoning the task of defining it as an aesthetic quality. Auslander rightly points out that

Taken on its own terms, rock authenticity is an essentialist concept, in the sense that rock fans treat authenticity as an essence that is either present or absent in the music itself... It is my intention to recognize this usage and to explore its implications... I treat Rock authenticity as an *ideological* concept and as a discursive effect.²

Following Auslander's lead will allow us to examine authenticity—in rock and elsewhere—without being held hostage by its somewhat mystical connotations. The important thing to take from his statement is that anything ideological is by definition constructed, and not a naturally occurring phenomenon. Crutchfeld's exploration of authenticity in folk culture shows this construction in action, and highlights the importance of audience participation; if authenticity is a good to be traded, both buyer and seller must agree on its character. In an examination of the promotional material for the reissuing of the *American Anthology of Folk Music*, he uncovers part of the formula that guided the collection of its songs: "the public reaction to the perceived 'authenticity' of a performance dictated its success, and also directly influenced what talent scouts subsequently searched for when they were recording performers."³ Thus, 'percieved' authenticity is shown to be the product of a confluence of desire—one deeply spiritual, the other purely financial.

² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance In A Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 70.

³ Rory Crutchfeld, "Discovering Authenticity: Harry Smith's Anthology of Folk Music." *Popular Music History* 4 (2009), 10.

And yet the concept must have come from somewhere originally; any construction needs an original model to work from. Drawing from the philosophical contributions of Descartes, Rousseau, and Byron, I explore authenticity's roots in Chapter One, arguing that the idealized notions of individuality, originality, and honesty that these thinkers introduced to the world formed the philosophical building blocks of authenticity, long before it was articulated as a discrete concept. I will also briefly examine Johann Gottfried Herder's more collective conception of Romanticism as an interesting source of tension in continental Romantic philosophy. With its Romantic roots accounted for, I trace authenticity's development in rock music, where I argue its Romantic leanings reveal themselves fully in the overlapping ideologies of Rockism and Liveness. By tracing the development of the concept from its nascent beginnings in Romantic philosophy to its fully articulated form in the mid sixties and beyond, I hope for us to understand authenticity in its historical as well as ideological sense.

I continue this historical trajectory in Chapter Two, where I provide a brief history of disco during the late sixties and seventies. Disco was viewed as completely inauthentic by its detractors, and I provide the reader with a few of the reasons why this was so. These include its pluralistic culture, its emphasis on dancing, its embrace of anonymity and facelessness via the rise of the producer over the artist, and of course its synthetic, technologized sounds. For most rock fans, disco was inauthenticity defined, and the reasons for this will prove salient as we move on to discuss modern EDM. This rock versus disco dichotomy is important, as it stands in for other binaries that will be of interest, the most obvious being authentic versus

inauthentic, but also organic versus technological. These dualities continue to play out today in the relationship of rock-based musics with modern EDM, so it will be helpful to know their origins.

Even before Chapter Two however, we will have been introduced to authenticity's true nemesis, of which disco is only the carrier. As we shall see, technology is the real threat. Technology is either the best or worst thing to happen to authenticity in popular music, depending on whom you ask. Frith points out that "for most rock fans there's a deep-rooted sense of difference between 'real' musical instruments —guitars, drums, sax, piano, voice— and false ones, electronic instruments of all sorts,"⁴ and one can easily substitute the term authentic for 'real' in this quote and still have it ring true. What is at stake in the clashing of authenticity and technology is the human touch. Traditionally authentic music must consist of sounds made by human beings, with as few electronic sounds or filters as possible. As Frith says, "a plays to b and the less technology lies between them the better."⁵

Of course, at the average rock concert today, literally no sound enters our ears that has not passed through multiple pieces of technology along the way: voices may be auto-tuned, percussion perhaps sent through a triggered drum system, and guitars are almost always filtered through any number of patches. Crucially, in addition to processing sounds, technology can *create* them as well, as is the case with synthesizers, sequencers, and music software. These are brand new sounds,

⁴ Simon Frith, "Picking Up The Pieces," in *Facing the Music* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 120.

⁵ Simon Frith, "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case Of Popular Music," *Media Culture Society* 8 (1986): 267.

created by technology and merely controlled by humans. It is these technologies that rock has historically had a difficult time absorbing into its praxis, as they allegedly threaten the liveness of a performance.

The concept of liveness will be central to the project, and as we move on to Chapter Three—which examines live performance as a specific manifestation of authenticity—I will unpack it at length through the work of Philip Auslander. Essentially an ideologized interpretation of Romantic expectations of performance, liveness makes demands out of honesty and transparency, and excludes certain musics that do not meet them. Liveness and Romanticism, along with Rockism (another important concept), will form something of a nexus of authenticity for us; there is much overlap, and things can get complex. For instance, Theodore Gracyk notes that although rock fans view live performance as the ultimate acme of rock authenticity, the majority of the average fan’s musical experience is with recordings. As a result, he argues that the status and importance of performance in rock culture has lessened.⁶ While Auslander accepts the disproportionality highlighted by Gracyk, he suggests that far from becoming obsolete, rock performance is rendered all the more powerful for its infrequency in the lives of its fans: “while recordings... proffer evidence of authenticity, only live performance can certify it for rock ideology... The concert answers the question raised implicitly by the recording.”⁷ In this debate I side with Auslander; liveness remains key, in fact one could argue that the more indebted rock becomes to technology, the more important the authenticating effect of live performance is.

⁶ Auslander, op. cit., 64.

⁷ Ibid., 76, 83.

Examining the role of performance in EDM will point us to the work of Rebekah Farrugia and Thomas Swiss. Their concept of ‘work’ in DJ culture will prove an essential tool for our navigation of the authenticity debate in that culture. Work can be interpreted in a few ways, but its principles largely dictate what is or is not acceptable performance practice for a DJ. There has to be effort, human involvement with one’s instruments. And, as DJ technology advances, much of this human element is being removed and automated. To some it has never been more easy or convenient to be a DJ, but to others these advancements rob the DJ tradition of its core skill-set. I will spend the latter part of Chapter Three tracing this development of DJ technology, with an eye for the ever-shrinking space left over for the human touch.

Chapter Four will deal with a more controversial aspect of authenticity, race. The spectres of essentialism and primitivism will rear their heads in this section, as we examine the mythological blackness that informed constructions of authenticity for much of the early twentieth century. Race is especially salient to this project, as today’s EDM has its roots in the largely black sounds of seventies disco, an origins story that would be echoed in the early eighties with the creation of Detroit Techno. Given EDM’s putatively white culture today, the fact that its roots (twice over) are largely black is noteworthy. Philip Tagg’s thoughts on essentialism will aid us here, as well the theory of the Post Soul Aesthetic, the black cultural paradigm that Techno’s founders were arguably working within.

Throughout this project I will draw from the work of a number of theorists. For instance, working alongside the Romantic expectations and assumptions that I feel

most constructions of authenticity exhibit, is Richard Peterson's theory of the misremembered past. Essentially, this concept is suggestive of a space outside historical time, or in a hazy pre-historical period, where myth can masquerade as fact in a haze of nostalgia. For the West, the Garden of Eden is arguably the ultimate archetype of this space. Also important is the abovementioned concept of Rockism, the belief that all forms of popular music must ultimately face off against rock in a bid for authenticity. Rock indeed enjoyed a period of artistic hegemony during its initial years, and although this is no longer the case, vestiges of its ideology remain. The term was used as recently as 2004 by Kelefa Sanneh in an oft-cited *New York Times* article,⁸ but it is most often seen in the wild in the unspoken assumptions that undergird the reviews of many mainstream media outlets.

Rockism is key, as it is linked directly to Romanticism via its emphasis on honesty, originality, and individuality. Linked to this in turn is the emphasis on liveness that Rock so emphasized. In a world of technological mediation, the authenticating force of live performance takes on an especially important tone. Many of these theories cohere with a broad interpretation of Romanticism, which I argue is at the core of contemporary constructions of authenticity in both rock and EDM, two polar opposites that, ironically, have a lot in common.

⁸ Kelefa Sanneh, "The Rap Against Rockism," in *The New York Times*, Oct. 31st, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/31/arts/music/31sann.html?_r=3&scp=7&sq=kelefa%20sanneh&st=cse (last accessed Jan. 2012).

A Note On EDM

For those unfamiliar with the genre, a brief description is in order. Electronic Dance Music, which I abbreviate to EDM throughout, is style of electronic music made specifically for dancing. It is most often played in bars and nightclubs by disc jockeys (DJs) who mix together the beginnings and ends of tracks (the term 'song' is rarely used), to create a continuous mix. This seguing from one track into the next is the defining skill of the DJ, but he or she may also augment a track as it plays by manipulating various parameters such as equalization, speed, pitch, or by filtering it through any number of post-production effects. Traditionally this is accomplished through a setup comprised of two turntables which communicate via a mixer, although various other methods are available today. Musically, EDM may contain any kind of instrumentation, but is most often comprised of electronic or synthetic sounds created by synthesizers or computer software programs. Rhythmically, EDM is known for its incessant kick drum, which occurs on the first and third beats of the bar at a rate of approximately 120 beats per minute. The genre is popular around the world but its largest markets are centered in North America and Western Europe, with France, Germany, and Britain forming something of a historical nexus for its creation and later development.

Chapter 1

Authenticity and Romanticism

Authenticity is such a foundational term within popular music discourse that it deserves significant unpacking in its own right before any examination of its specific manifestations can begin. This chapter will trace the concept from its origins in the seventeenth century, through its coming of age during the Romantic period, to its recent manifestations today. Ultimately, I will argue that today's forms of popular music authenticity, although heavily contingent on context, have nonetheless retained a Romantic form, despite the fact that our current culture is steeped in a distinctly unromantic element: technology. How to reconcile the disparity between Romantic constructions of authenticity and the realities of today's highly mediated musical experiences is a question that has yet to be answered, and is perhaps impossible to answer without amending Romantic constructions of authenticity to fit our current era. In any event, a history of the concept itself will furnish us with many of the theoretical tools we will need later when we arrive at our discussion of authenticity's specific manifestations in Rock and EDM.

Although it is impossible to lay the beginnings of a concept as foundational as authenticity at the foot of any single person, French philosopher René Descartes certainly provided one of the more famous germs of possibility. His pursuit of the truths of existence began with the basic premise that a mind pondering such a pursuit at all must therefore exist, and that this fact must therefore be true. His

declaration of “Cogito ergo sum”⁹ in 1637 suggested for the first time that human identity emanated from within the individual, as opposed to its being dictated by a socio-religious hierarchy. Suddenly, one’s existence didn’t end at blacksmith, shepherd, or sinner, and what before had been the mundane commonplace of personal awareness was reframed as the first and foremost truth, the point of embarkation towards all future understanding. Before this, truth had been transmitted via religion and other institutionalized authorities; Descartes’ theory left the door open for more personal perspectives. German philosopher Christian Thomasius came to similar conclusions in his own country a few decades later, emphasising in his work the “secularization of knowledge” and “the recognition of the primacy of the individual.”¹⁰ Simply and profoundly, the concept of the individual —the self— was emerging, and with it our centuries-long obsession with its authenticity.

The concept of the individual had important consequences for the arts as well as philosophy, for if truth is good, and the self (that is, mental awareness), is true by dint of its very existence, then it stands to reason that the best of artistic expression is that which most closely reflects the opinions and beliefs of that self. This shift from philosophy to the arts modifies the definition of truth in an important way, however, for it leaves room for potentially incompatible views of the world around us. A poem, lyric, or painting may well reflect the inner truths of its creator, but if those self-expressed truths fail to comply with objective reality, they are relegated

⁹ René Descartes, *Discourse On The Method and Principles Of Philosophy*, 4th Edition (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 27.

¹⁰ F. M. Barnard. *Herder’s Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment To Nationalism*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 10.

to the status of mere opinion. In other words, artistic expression may operate outside the parameters of truth, but not outside the parameters of authenticity. Artistic and factual truths may not always line up, and since Descartes was after the latter only, we will leave him at this point and look to another, more artistically leaning philosopher.

Indeed, it was another Frenchman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who would give the nascent concept of authenticity the character it retains today. His *Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1782) inaugurated the genre of self-explication we know today as the autobiography. Known for its embarrassing personal details, this uncompromising self-exposé set the tone for the incipient Romantic period, and was an unsparing examination of the still relatively recent concept of the individual. Rousseau explains more emphatically: “let them listen to my confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings, let each in his turn expose with equal sincerity his failings.”¹¹ This exhortation to unbridled sincerity was key in paving the way for a Romantic philosophy that would emphasize honest expression as a key attribute of authenticity.

Rousseau also inadvertently articulates the profound difference mentioned above between philosophical and artistic conceptions of authenticity, opting (unlike Descartes) for the latter. “I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with,” he writes, “perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality.”¹² Whereas for Descartes the truth of the self was merely a stepping-stone to further enlightenment, it became for Rousseau a central focus, setting the

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin Books), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

tone for a cult of this 'originality' – what I believe we know today as personality. This tendency would be exemplified later during the height of the Romantic period by Lord Byron, who, in his 1812 poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, introduced the immensely popular character trope of the Byronic Hero¹³. Possessed of an "attitude of titanic cosmic self-assertion"¹⁴, the Byronic Hero was Rousseau's emphasis on honesty and originality writ large, with the addition of a potent sense of individuality. Free in thought, expression, and action, the Byronic hero was utterly original, and naturally honest. He was also –crucially– removed from society, sometimes for shameful or socially transgressive reasons. This last, a seed of imperfection, is often the catalyst for the character's trademark philosophical and often eloquent soliloquies.

The impact of this trope, which "helped shape the intellectual and cultural history of the later nineteenth century"¹⁵, is not to be underestimated: the popular cliché of the tortured artist has its roots in Byronism for instance, and it continues to appear in popular culture today. A radical interpretation of Byronism would even go on to figure greatly in Nietzsche's concept of the superman.¹⁶ However, since Existentialism focuses mainly on how to *live* authentically, as opposed to how to artistically express oneself in such manner, I will use as my base model the predominantly Romantic conception of authenticity outlined above, the one

¹³ While the Byronic Hero first appears in 1812's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, it's more mature and definitive version appears later in 1817's *Manfred*.

¹⁴ M.H. Abrams and Jack Stillinger, "Lord Byron" in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 2 eds. Abrams et al. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 551-555.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 552.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 552.

eventually transferred to North America, where it still thrives in popular culture today.

Another strain of Romanticism ran counter to the individualist focus of the French and British, however. Herder's Romanticization of the German *volk* marks an explicit departure from these philosophies, opting instead for a more communal focus. Predicated on the sacred and foundational unity of a nation's language (in this case German), Herder's organic philosophy of society —the *volk*— posited the individual as *emerging* from society as opposed to standing against it. "Applied to the human realm," writes Barnard, Herder's organicism "attempts to reconcile the uniqueness of man as an individual with his social dependence upon other individuals within the larger whole of his social setting."¹⁷ He continues: "to think of the individual as something outside society is to think in terms of an abstraction," Herder's theory "precludes[s]... the supposition of an *a priori* antagonism between an isolated unit —the individual— on the one hand, and a collective body —society— on the other."¹⁸ The 'titanic cosmic self-assertion' of a Byronic hero would have trouble fitting into such a framework. This more collective imagining of Romanticism had an explicit nationalist bent to it however, a reflection of Germany's history of instability and disunity during this time— Barnard calls it a "political monstrosity."¹⁹ This tension within European Romantic philosophy —artistic individuality on one hand, and a collective nationalism on the other— is worth

¹⁷ Barnard, op. cit., 54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 54-5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

noting, as it foreshadows similar tensions between individualist tendencies and later North American folk traditions which I will explore shortly.

If reaching back to seventeenth century philosophy seems like a strange approach to a study of popular music, I would suggest that outlining the foundational nature of authenticity as a concept is important, as today its profundity is often forgotten in the rush to embrace its contextual multiplicities. I do not argue against these multiplicities as they are necessary in a fragmented popular music environment; but we should not forget the original definition of authenticity, as it is a necessary springboard towards analysis of how the concept functions in its specific manifestations today.

The Byronic Cowboy and Early Rock and Roll

The transfer from Europe to North America marks a major shift in Romantic authenticity's construction, a development that reflected the social climate of the latter at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is crucial to take note of the cultural differences between Europe and North America during the lead-up to popular music's arrival.²⁰ In Europe, Romantic expression was filtered mainly through the written word, specifically its more literary forms– poetry, essays, and closet-dramas like Byron's *Manfred*. These works were generally consumed by the aristocracy or those with similar social capital, and resonate with a certain elitism to this day for many. This elitist, 'high art' aspect of Romanticism would have been unappealing to a young America eager to build a hierarchy-free culture where

²⁰ I speak mainly of Western Europe here, specifically Britain, France, and Germany, from whence our Romantic building blocks of authenticity derive.

demonstrative worth outweighed title and birth. However, core aspects of Romantic authenticity like honesty, originality, and individualism were nonetheless desirable traits, and we can see them at work in the purely American figure of the cowboy, what John Lomax called “an indigenous American folk phenomenon”.²¹

The cowboy and the American West are arguably the most highly mythologized aspects of America’s early years, precisely because they are so Romantic— awe-inspiring vistas, hearty naturalism, a sturdy individualist spirit. Could it be that America’s nostalgia for the simpler times of the Wild West is really just a sublimated yearning for the Romantic philosophy it left behind in Europe? Indeed, as much as America sought to distance itself from its British roots, the iconic figure of young America, the cowboy, is simply a variation of Lord Byron’s enduring archetype, an exemplar of Romanticized individuality, simply transplanted from heath to desert.

What we are missing for a full comparison of the American cowboy with the Byronic hero, however, is the Romantic emphasis on self-expressivity. This seems unlikely, as the American cowboy is famously laconic. However, the *singing* cowboy is an important sub-variation of its type, and as such is arguably one of the originary manifestations of artistic proto-authenticity in America. Alan Lomax, who along with his brother John was one of the earliest ethnomusicologists of American folk musics, writes that “out in the wild, far-away place of the big and still unpeopled west... yet survives the Anglo-Saxon ballad spirit that was active in secluded districts in

²¹ Rory Crutchfeld, “Discovering Authenticity: Harry Smith’s Anthology of Folk Music.” *Popular Music History* 4 (2009), 9.

England and Scotland.”²² The singing cowboy is individualistic in that he chooses to live literally on the frontier of society; original in that his voice is untouched by classical training and is therefore a more natural conduit for the emotion of song; and honest due to a lack of any financial motive in his early recordings.²³

Crutchfeld emphasizes this last point, pointing out that the very notion of having one’s voice recorded in the early twentieth century would not have carried the symbolic weight it does today. He writes that “the arresting unfamiliarity of the performers with the new recording devices meant that capturing a sincere performance was in some ways easier. The unaffected manner of the performance commends the performer immediately to the listener.”²⁴ These uninhibited voices come from a time before technology pervaded everyday life, and so carry with them an unabashed sincerity that is undeniably affecting. This technological angle cannot be underestimated, as it is what would throw authenticity into a state of crisis a few decades later. I would argue that the singing cowboy retains the key Romantic aspects of individuality and honesty, but swaps European notions of originality (interpreted here as ostentation, ‘purple prose’, a marker of higher education, social class, etc.) for the simple (and theoretically honest and genuine– i.e. authentic) style that was the norm of early American language, which “eschew[ed] complexity in

²² Crutchfeld quoting Lomax himself, from the latter’s *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

²³ In Herdian terms, he is also a prime example of the American *volk*, although the nationalistic tendencies of German Romanticism are not as prominent in America’s cowboy mythology.

²⁴ Crutchfeld, *op. cit.*, 13.

favor of direct expression.”²⁵ Compare the effusions of Byron’s *Manfred* to any protagonist of Hemingway’s to see this difference in microcosm.

These cowboy ballads, along with other incipient American styles,²⁶ eventually coalesced into rock ‘n’ roll in the mid 1950s. Even by then however, authenticity had not yet been enshrined as the ideal it would soon become. While the appeal of Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and other early rock ‘n’ rollers was unprecedented, Keightley notes that “during the 1950s rock ‘n’ roll was regularly viewed as just one in a series of passing dance crazes... and even rock ‘n’ roll performers themselves might have scoffed at the idea that they were doing anything more than entertaining their audiences.”²⁷ These early figures were still thought of as entertainers, not artists; it would take the arrival of rock proper to elevate musicians from mere entertainers to the arbiters of authenticity they would become.

The In-Between Years and Folk Authenticity

Before we arrive at rock however, some space needs to be devoted to the so-called in-between years of 1959-1964, the period after rock ‘n’ roll had subsided but before the British Invasion in 1965. The February 1959 deaths of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson are often cited as the symbolic end of the rock ‘n’ roll era. The three had been midway through their Winter Dance Party tour, and were replaced the day after their deaths by teenage idols Frankie

²⁵ Ed Ward, Geoffrey Stokes, and Ken Tucker, *Rock Of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Rolling Stone Press/Summit Books, 1986), 18.

²⁶ I will deal with the racial complexity of this period in Chapter Four.

²⁷ Keir Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 115.

Avalon and Jimmy Clanton. Of this switch Ward writes that “the replacement of real rock and rollers by pretty faces after this incident was sort of a metaphor for what was happening to rock and roll itself.”²⁸ In the words of Reebee Garofalo, it was being supplanted by “schlock rock,” and “in a few short years, rock ‘n’ roll had degenerated from Sam Phillips’ dream of a white man who could sing black, to a white high-school kid who couldn’t sing at all.”²⁹ Both writers agree that by the end of the 1950s, rock ‘n’ roll’s original energy had been spent. People, even adults, had gotten used to it; it was no longer the language of a “secret club” of youth existing outside the mainstream³⁰— it was the mainstream. This is problematic for authenticity, which, through its emphases on individuality and originality is almost fundamentally rebellious. By conquering the mainstream, rock ‘n’ roll had robbed itself of a major source of its authenticity.

While it would be hyperbolic to say rock ‘n’ roll was dead, it had certainly lost its potency, had been “integrated into everything else... [and] subdued.”³¹ Instead, it was teen idols like Avalon and Clampton, and vocal groups like the Shirelles or Shangri-Las, who dominated the charts, as well as surf bands. And although there was no shortage of quality music produced outside the rock ‘n’ roll paradigm during this time, there is a general tendency to view these years as a lull in innovation before the explosive arrival of the Beatles in 1965, who would reveal the shining

²⁸ Ward, Stokes, and Tucker, op. cit., 195.

²⁹ Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out: Popular Music in the USA* (Upper Saddle River [New Jersey]: Pearson Education Inc., 2002), 133.

³⁰ Ward describes the incipient youth culture of the 1950s in this manner throughout his chapter in *Rock of Ages* (17-249).

³¹ Ward, Stokes and Tucker, op. cit., 198.

path to rock. This is mythology of course, a Rockist perspective, and at this point I will break from our history briefly to elaborate on this concept.

Rockism is an ideological position within popular music discourse that prioritizes the role of rock in the history of popular music, viewing it as the peak of artistic achievement in popular music by which all other subsequent styles are measured. Kelefa Sanneh, in a relatively recent article in the *New York Times*, defines it nicely: “Rockism means idolizing the authentic old legend (or underground hero) while mocking the latest pop star; lionizing punk while barely tolerating disco; loving the live show and hating the music video; extolling the growling performer while hating the lip-syncher.”³² There is much to unpack in this quote, and I will return to it often during this project; for now I merely want to introduce the concept and make note of its assumption that rock has a monopoly on authenticity, as this assumption is often at play when discussing the in-between years. For instance, Ward, Stokes, and Tucker, from whose *Rock of Ages* I have been quoting often in these pages, call their chapter on the in-between years “The Dark Ages,”³³ and it is not surprising to learn that the book was published by *RollingStone*, leading disseminator of Rockism– at least certainly back in 1986 when *Rock of Ages* was published. Even the relatively neutral-sounding “in-between years,” a common enough phrase in popular music studies, is suggestive of its being an inferior, stop-gap period.

Borrowing Sanneh’s terms, the teen idols and girl groups of the time were most definitely ‘pop stars’ as opposed to ‘legendary’ in any way, and as such were

³² Kelefa Sanneh, “The Rap Against Rockism,” in *The New York Times*, Oct. 31st, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/31/arts/music/31sann.html?_r=3&scp=7&sq=kelefa%20sanneh&st=cse (last accessed Jan. 2012).

³³ *Rock of Ages* is otherwise a fine and detailed account of the story of Rock.

regarded as a manufactured, cookie-cutter approach to music- “The ‘Girl Groups’ and the Men Behind Them.”³⁴ This new wave of music seemed to have more in common with the production-line songwriting of Tin Pan Alley than with the spontaneous and electrifying styles of early rock ‘n’ roll. Garofalo quotes Bob Marucci, co-owner of Chancellor Records in the late 1950s: “We now run a school where we indoctrinate artists into show-business... We teach them how to walk, how to talk, and how to act onstage when they’re performing.”³⁵ They would also provide them with the songs they had to sing of course, as very few teen idols or vocal groups wrote their own music; in other words, they weren’t authentic, although the concept had yet to be fully articulated.

The American Folk Revival of the early 1960s would aid in this articulation quite clearly. Garofalo writes that “in Folk circles at the time, there was a fiercely argued, if not terribly relevant, distinction between performers who were ‘authentic’ and those who were ‘commercial.’”³⁶ This sets up a socio-economic opposition as well. Groups that were ‘commercial’ were not authentic. This dictum lays out simply what had happened to rock ‘n’ roll and what would happen to rock as it achieved mainstream (and inevitably commercial) prominence. Authenticity and money do not mix easily. This borderline socialist perspective reaches as far back as the 1930s protest songs of Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, a link made explicit by Bob Dylan’s regular visits to the latter during his final days. Tawa writes that authenticity in the folk world was valued “above all”, elaborating that it “meant appearing sincerely

³⁴ Garofalo, *op. cit.*, 153.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

and honestly genuine, and not false to yourself or your listeners, in the songs you sang.”³⁷ These traits would also go on to form the basis of Rockist constructions of the concept.

In this way, the American Folk Revival was something of an incubation period for the values that would go on to form the basis of Rockist authenticity, and Bob Dylan is the perfect transitional character. It was Dylan who would steer folk away from the political world towards more personal and self-expressive lyrical content. Dylan in 1964: “I don’t want to write *for* people anymore– you know, be a spokesman. From now on I want to write from inside me...”³⁸ This self-expressive attitude is distinctly Romantic in nature, stretching back to Rousseau’s exhortations to be original, and Byron’s focus on individuality— more descriptive of Rock’s burgeoning culture than folk’s established one. For instance, ‘folk’ is by definition democratic, a ‘music of the people,’ which jars with Romantic emphases on originality and individuality– notions with the potential to alienate. Byron’s Manfred expressed himself from atop a mountain in the middle of nowhere, not a soapbox in the community square.

This antagonism echoes the tension mentioned earlier within European Romanticism itself, between the individualist leanings of the French and British traditions (as seen through Byron and Rousseau), and those of the German Herder, who emphasized the collective —the *volk*— in his thought. Herder’s nationalism and eagerness to fashion a homogenous German culture led him to favour heavily the

³⁷ Nicholas Tawa, *Supremely American: Popular Song In The 20th Century* (Lanham [Maryland]: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 162.

³⁸ Ward, Stokes, and Tucker, op. cit., 306.

originary medieval folk songs of Germany at the expense of more recent, exotic themes and motifs. “The young Lapp,” he writes, “who speaks with his little reindeer instead of with Venus paints love seven more times truthfully than the sweetest Sappho pedant in the most artificially convoluted ode structure with all its rules.”³⁹ These academic, rule-based poets — “scientific rhymers,”⁴⁰ composers of “word labyrinths”⁴¹— are what we would call ‘inauthentic’ in Herder’s view; that is, they do not work towards establishing a unified *volk* bound together by a common language and experience. This *common* language is important, as it presupposes a directness and simplicity necessary in order for it to be of use to the uneducated masses— how can a nation’s music be its own if it is only created and consumed by an academic elite? This emphasis on directness and simplicity echoes young America’s approach to artistic expression; the young Lapp and singing cowboy are helpful analogues.

Clearly, not all Romantic thought during this time stood in opposition to the less embellished and unadorned style of early American expression. Romantic philosophy was home to its own tensions and contradictions, and Herder is an interesting figure with which to augment our understanding, especially as his thinking coheres so neatly with that of American folk culture. For instance, Herder would have most certainly approved of (American) folk music’s organic, natural outgrowing from its nation’s people, as well as its simple and direct nature. This opposition between individuality and the collective raises the issue of authorship, as

³⁹ Stefan Greif, “Herder’s Aesthetics and Poetics,” in *A Companion To The Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*, ed. Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke (Rochester [New York]: Camden House, 2009), 161.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

in order to aid in the development of a *volk* —whether American or German— a store of common songs is necessary; this is the case in most folk traditions.

However, no matter how Romanticized the *volk* may be, this notion runs up against the similarly Romantic expectations of individuality and originality.

For instance, Ward writes that “from the start of the pop music industry [in the US], it was the song that counted, as the artist almost never wrote his or her own material.”⁴² Indeed, if a song proved popular, multiple versions of it might be recorded, sung by various artists. Entire A&R departments existed to successfully match up the disparate entities of artist and song. And, while certain artists might be seen as performing a song better than others —making it his or her ‘own’ so to speak— the creative link between singer and song lacked the symbolic importance it carries today. Folk music, given its explicit connection to ‘the people,’ is especially beholden to a standard canon that could be passed from generation to generation. Online site *allmusic.com* explains that during the folk revival, “interpretation was considered more important than original composition by most of [the] audience”.⁴³ Dylan was one of the first to move beyond this constraining system, opting to inhabit the role of artist as opposed to spokesman, even if it meant alienating his core folk audience. Released in 1964, his aptly titled *The Times They Are A-Changin’* was a decidedly self-expressive affair that contained solely original material, and it is no coincidence that this shift occurred around the time of Dylan’s budding

⁴² Ward, Stokes, and Tucker, op. cit., 50.

⁴³ Bruce Eder, “Review: Bob Dylan; *Bob Dylan*” for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/album/bob-dylan-r2289590/review>, (last accessed Jan. 2012).

interest in the poetry of Romantic writers like Keats and Rimbaud.⁴⁴ However, another, more widespread injection of British culture was just around the corner.

Authenticity and The British Invasion

The musical and cultural impact of the British Invasion has been analyzed in many ways. Among others, the story can be told from socio-economic, technological, and aesthetic perspectives.⁴⁵ While I may visit these threads during my own account, my main focus will continue to be the development of the concept of authenticity, and the British Invasion forms an important stage in its growth. As stated above, much of the folk music in America leading up the British Invasion placed an emphasis on performance over material, and I would further argue that this emphasis was present in other indigenous musics of the US at this time as well. Early blues artists for instance—men like Muddy Waters, Lead Belly, and Big Bill Broonzy—are more often recalled for their haunting and soulful voices than their material, which was often pieced together from a floating pool of verses and themes familiar to all blues musicians, and the rock 'n' roll and R&B scenes were similarly covers and standards-oriented. Similarly, Faulk points out that pre-Rock popular music, on both sides of the Atlantic, was simply one of many escapist entertainments on hand, lumped in with British music hall and American vaudeville traditions.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Bob Dylan Biography" for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/artist/bob-dylan-p4147/biography>, (last accessed Jan. 2012).

⁴⁵ Both *Rock of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll* by Ward, Stokes, and Tucker, as well as Reebee Garofalo's *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA* touch on these threads; other accounts can be found in Nicholas Tawa's *Supremely American: Popular Song In The 20th Century*, David Brackett's *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*, and *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, edited by Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street.

⁴⁶ Barry J. Faulk, *British Rock Modernism 1967-1977*. (Burlington [VT]: Ashgate, 2010), 34.

The music of Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and Buddy Holly was undoubtedly fresh and different after an era of crooners and big-band fare, but it was their *performances* that were especially electrifying. The swinging hips of Elvis, the paroxysms of James Brown; these were the elements that stayed in the minds of young Americans.

This all changes with the British Invasion, when a new-found emphasis on original material became prevalent. Perone explains that “... the most successful and longest-lasting British Invasion bands either wrote their own material or had writers supplying them with material— they were not cover bands.”⁴⁷ This is not to say these bands were not hugely influenced by their neighbors in the US, as almost all of the first wave Invasion bands are on record professing their love for American blues, rock ‘n’ roll and or R&B— and almost all of them began their careers by covering American tunes. However, *something* had obviously been added to the American formula by the time it reappeared in 1965.

Keightley points out that there is a “recurring sense that the Invasion bands represented a revivalist sensibility, that they were re-representing a lost musical spirit with a new twist and a new seriousness.”⁴⁸ I think this ‘seriousness’ is due in no small part to the shift from performance-based to content-based interpretations of originality— authorship in other words. Once the notions of performance and authorship were conflated into the same figure, popular music could finally be

⁴⁷ James E. Perone, *Mobs, Rockers, And The Music of The British Invasion* (Westport [Conn.]: Praeger, 2009), 60. Outsourced writing duties are of course famously inauthentic, but the practice can be viewed as the intermediary step between a covers/standards-based approach and the rock ‘artistry’ waiting in the wings.

⁴⁸ Keightley, *op. cit.*, 118.

considered an art and not merely a form of entertainment. Robert Walser connects this to Rock's self-conscious cultivation of classical styles of playing during the late seventies and especially the eighties, the latter of which gave us the 'virtuosos' Eddie Van Halen and Yngwie Malmsteen: "Performers who haven't composed their own material —'girl groups,' Motown, soul singers— have rarely won critical respect comparable to that granted artists who better fit the model of the auteur, the solitary composing genius."⁴⁹

It is this emphasis on original content, and the pretensions to high art it implies, that sets post-British Invasion popular music apart. Faulk explains that "soon after the beginning of the British Invasion, pop musicians quickly adopted the... persona of musician as artist and savant."⁵⁰ As mentioned above, even a figure as quintessentially American as Bob Dylan was nonetheless experimenting during the same time with a more "literate and evocative [style]... heavily inspired by [Romantic] poets like Arthur Rimbaud and John Keats"⁵¹. This shift to content-based originality would go on to be perhaps the most important aspect of Rockist constructions of authenticity.

Besides this shift, another core notion of Romantic authenticity went through significant changes during the British Invasion: individuality. A superficial example of this can be seen in the abandoning of identical outfits in bands, a habit the Beatles and the Rolling Stones took a while to break. The painstakingly identical getups of pre-Invasion groups like the Coasters, Crickets, Orioles, and Shangri-Las would soon

⁴⁹ Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 61.

⁵⁰ Faulk, op. cit., 34.

⁵¹ Erlewine, for *allmusic.com*, op. cit., <http://allmusic.com/artist/bob-dylan-p4147/biography>

give way to the casually individual looks of the Animals, Yardbirds, and Kinks. However, most bands would still be united by a particular style, and this dynamic operated at a level beyond the merely sartorial. Perone argues that "... the prototypical British Invasion band celebrated both individualism and a sense of the collective whole... [and] exhibited a strong group identity while allowing the individual personal and/or musical identities of its members shine."⁵² If the ultimate individual is, as I have argued, the Byronic Hero, I would further argue that the diminution of this archetype from utter solitude —a Manfred atop a mountain, a brown speck of a cowboy on a barren plain— to that of being a member of a small group of individuals —a 'band'— is simply a side effect of the formal shift in our popular cultural products. There is no group or 'band' equivalent in the world of poetry.

Rock

It is within rock culture, fed and galvanized by the British Invasion, that authenticity really becomes a cultural force. Keightley writes that "authenticity can be thought of as the compass that orients rock culture in its navigation of the mainstream".⁵³ Of course 'mainstream' in this context means pop music, rock's polar opposite. What set rock apart from pop was the sense of artistic seriousness it inherited from the British Invasion through its (re)introduction of Romantic ideals like originality and individuality. It is this connection to a broader philosophical past that gives rock its pretensions. Keightley again: "Because authenticity is such a core

⁵² Faulk, *op. cit.*, 36, 68.

⁵³ Keightley, *op. cit.*, 131.

cultural value, it generally provides the foundation on which rock's sense of its own seriousness has been built."⁵⁴ Geoffery Stokes writes similarly in *Rock of Ages* that in 1967, "with the occasional exception, non-rock performers had been driven from the charts, and the major figures of rock were not only selling albums by the ton but were accepted as 'serious' cultural figures"⁵⁵

This was the year of releases like the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*, which, "reaching a previously unheard of level of sophistication and fearless experimentation,"⁵⁶ was the album that once and for all catapulted popular music into the realm of artistry, and it is interesting to note that for all of rock's subsequent monopolization of the trappings of artistry, it was the Beatles, a through-and-through pop band that is often seen as providing the first seminal example of the trend.

Along with emphases on authorship and seriousness came the assumption that the appreciation of rock music was akin to the appreciation of other 'real' art forms. Frith, highlighting the European pedigree of this trend as I have, writes that "from Romanticism rock fans have inherited the belief that listening to someone's music means getting to know them, getting access to their souls and sensibilities."⁵⁷ Philip Auslander uses similar language, also citing Romanticism: "The concept of rock authenticity is linked with the romantic bent of rock culture, in which rock music is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁵ Ward, Stokes, and Tucker, op. cit., 409.

⁵⁶ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Review: The Beatles; *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*" for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/album/sgt-peppers-lonely-hearts-club-band-r1701846/review>, (last accessed Jan. 2012).

⁵⁷ Simon Frith, "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case Of Popular Music," *Media Culture Society* 8 (1986): 267.

imagined to be truly expressive of the artists' souls and psyches."⁵⁸ The effective transmission of these souls and psyches is paramount to Rockist ideology.

It is indeed within Rockist ideology that all the proto-authentic ideals espoused by Romantic philosophy outlined above —honesty, individuality, originality— finally crystallize. This was due in no small part to the rise of rock journalism, which would come to canonize rock's official history. British publications like *Melody Maker* (1932), *NME* (1952), and *Sounds* (1970), along with the American *RollingStone* (1967) created and maintained an echo chamber of expectation for fans.⁵⁹ This Romantic/Rockist version of authenticity eventually grew to hegemonic proportions during the late sixties and early seventies, and it is not an exaggeration to say that it was the sole metric of worth in mainstream popular music for those years.

Much like Romanticism itself, Rock's ideology is home to certain contradictions however. These mainly stem from certain Romantic tenets that are no longer feasible in the post-industrialized environment Rock inhabits. The main contradiction that will interest us in the pages ahead is Rock's relationship to technology, which I will take some time here to introduce. Technology and authenticity simply do not mix in a Romantic paradigm. Many Romantic thinkers thought it would ultimately make us lazy, and in its most radical form Romanticism does not shy away from embracing luddism. And yet Rock's praxis is as steeped in technology as its ideology is steeped in Romanticism. For instance, *Sgt. Pepper's*, the Beatles opus that ushered in the era of popular music as art, could not have been

⁵⁸ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance In A Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 70.

⁵⁹ *Spin*, the other major American publication wouldn't arrive until 1985, at the end of rock's halcyon days.

achieved without technology; in fact, its groundbreaking use of studio overdubs and tape-splicing are exactly what made it so special and complex. Romanticism's relationship with technology is Rockism's ultimate conundrum, and its inability to solve it is one of its defining failures as a workable and enduring paradigm.

Keightley presents things simply in "Reconsidering Rock," providing a chart that will prove helpful in seeing the impossibility of Rockism solving its complex relationship with its Romantic roots on one hand, and its Modernist (technological) ambitions on the other. As the chart makes clear, it cannot be had both ways:

Romantic	Modernist
Tradition and continuity with the past	Experimentation and progress
Roots	Avante Garde
Sense of community	Status of artist
Populism	Elitism
Belief in a core or essential Rock sound	Openness regarding rock sounds
Folk, Blues, country, rock' n' roll styles	Classical, art music, soul, pop style
Gradual stylistic change	Radical or sudden stylistic change
Sincerity, Directness	Irony, sarcasm, obliqueness
'Liveness'	'recorded-ness'
'Natural' sounds	'shocking' sounds
Hiding musical technology	Celebrating technology ⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Keightley, op. cit., 137.

I will return to some of the above oppositions as they become pertinent later on; for now it is simply a good list to have floating in the background of our theoretical framework.

Later, as rock matured through the 1970s, its suspicion of technology was most openly manifested by its grudging acceptance of electronic synthesizers into its sound– ‘false’ instruments; “electronic devices of all sorts.”⁶¹ Interestingly, pianos and organs, the obvious precursors to synthesizers, had been readily used in rock’s earliest examples (The Doors used organs liberally), and were not seen as problematic. The difference, I would suggest, is that Frith’s ‘real’ instruments, while still ‘technology’, remain mechanical; we know how they work, can picture their moving parts. This is important. Without this knowledge there is no cognitive link between music and its mode of production/performance. This is why, even though synthesizers are essentially just electric pianos, the inclusion of a synth in a band’s lineup was often met with skepticism, as it eliminated the necessary ‘touch’ and ‘feel’ of musicianship, what Auslander might call an artists ‘soul’ or ‘psyche.’

Conclusion

My intent in the above has been to illustrate that despite authenticity’s many contextualizations today, there remains a baseline definition of the concept at least as old as the Romantic era, built on core attributes of individualism, honesty, and originality, which in turn feed into emphases on authorship, artistic seriousness. This Romantic construction of authenticity is what would ultimately give rock its

⁶¹ Simon Frith, *Facing The Music* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 120.

distinctly Romantic flavour: the lofty, proto-Nietzschean individualism of the Byronic hero, brought to solid ground in the form of the singing cowboy (or the troubadour of Folk tradition), would find a home in the role of the touring rock auteur; the emphasis on authorial expression emphasized by Romantic writers, swapped for a culture of covers and standards during the years leading up to the British Invasion, would be reinstated in the form of rock's pretensions to artistic seriousness; and finally, honesty, construed in early American popular music as pertaining mostly to the integrity of a performance, would become a crucial aspect of content as well.

What emerged in the mid-twentieth century was the conception of authenticity that was hegemonic for a crucial time in popular music's history. This was Rockism, an ideological interpretation of Romantic authenticity that is still present today if you scratch the surface. For a long time Rockism was synonymous with authenticity, but all hegemonies are challenged at some point, and Rockism was no exception.

Chapter 2

Disco And The Birth of Inauthenticity

The preceding examination of authenticity's roots will serve us well as a backdrop for a closer look at its specific manifestations in EDM. One of the great ironies regarding authenticity is that even EDM, a genre generally labeled as inauthentic from a Rockist perspective, is nevertheless just as concerned with authenticity as rock. In the following, I will give a brief history of disco, the genre that gave birth to today's EDM, and the one that fully crystallized the authentic/inauthentic divide that was such a large part of popular music discourse during Rock's prominence in the late 60s and 70s.

A brief clarification is in order before we begin, as the term 'disco' can be used in at least two ways. Firstly, it describes a style of music popular in the 1970s, as mentioned above. However, it is also a generic name given to clubs that feature pre-recorded music as their main entertainment. In the 1970s the two were synonymous –discos played disco music– but the concept of a club designed for dancing where the musical source was pre-recorded stretches back to the post-World War II clubs in Paris, most famously the Whisky á GoGo¹. It was there that the term *discothèque* –literally record library– was first used. This concept was then transferred to the US, where discos popped up in major US cities –most notably New York– by at least the mid-fifties, although these US clubs were often known as

¹ Joe Radcliffe, *This Business of Disco* (New York: Billboard Books, 1980), 23.

'Record Hops.'² The term disco thusly calls to mind both a music and its venue, but the two have not always accompanied each other. This chapter will explore both uses of the term, as it is impossible to talk about disco music without talking about disco culture.

Throughout this chapter, I will draw heavily from Radcliffe's *This Business of Disco*. Published in 1980, just as the genre began to fade from prominence, Radcliffe's account is very much of its time, and close enough to the genre's beginnings that they are not forgotten in the rush to analyze the genre's glamorous 1970s peak. Radcliffe places disco music in a long line of American popular dances, linking it with early twentieth-century examples like the Charleston, Jitterbug, Boogie-Woogie, and later on the Twist, the latter of which he describes as a "foretaste of disco."³ The Twist would also herald the coming of rock 'n' roll, and was an example of the increasing black influence in American popular music. Radcliffe: "Quietly but relentlessly, [black] influence kept growing, refusing to be stifled, until inevitably its forces began, almost subconsciously, to inspire the creative efforts of white Americans..."⁴ This 'subconscious' co-optation of black expressive dance styles would soon prove extremely lucrative with the wild success of Elvis Presley, who added just enough of a white country sound to R&B to create rock 'n' roll.

² Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, And Subcultural Capital* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 28.

³ Nicholas Tawa, *Supremely American: Popular Song In The 20th Century* (Lanham [Maryland]: Scarcrow Press, 2005), 241.

⁴ Radcliffe, op. cit., 15.

Early History

Radcliffe cites Terry Noel as “the first successful club deejay of record in the United States...”⁵ and credits Italian-American Brooklynite Francis Grasso as first perfecting the technique of ‘mixing’ records into a seamless progression, the technique that would go on to define the DJ’s skill-set. Both men had been spinning pop, soul, and early Rock records in urban clubs since the mid-sixties. Thus, as mentioned above, disco culture (dancing in clubs) and professional practice (spinning records) both existed before any kind of specific music became associated with it. However, its distinctly technological praxis was in place: discos featured records played over a PA, not live bands. This aspect emphasized the newfound importance of the DJ, upgrading the role from mere radio personality to a technologically skilled professional. As such, both disco clubs and DJ practice predate disco music.

Radcliffe describes a waning of this late-sixties proto-disco scene due to its having attracted unwanted criminal elements –mostly drug-related– as well as the inability of its artists to fit within the established star/album-oriented (that is, Rockist), music industry. Another problem cited is the discrepancy between audience demand and the pace of development of disco itself. Disco audiences “had an insatiable appetite for new and more exciting music”,⁶ which could not be met by the smaller infrastructures of the local/independent scenes that typified this era. In any event, it is at this point that the disco scene goes ‘underground’ as Radcliffe

⁵ Radcliffe, op. cit., 17

⁶ Ibid., 27

describes it, reappearing in the mid seventies in the form with which we are most familiar.

Just what the first song that was known as 'disco' was is uncertain. Radcliffe writes that in 1973, "a number [song] undoubtedly intended for disco managed to rise in the charts, the Love Unlimited's 'Love's Theme.'"⁷ Will Straw cites Hues Corporation's "Rock The Boat" and George McCrae's "Rock Your Baby," both released in 1974, as seminal also.⁸ And of course 1975 was the release of Giorgio Moroder's "Love To Love You Baby," which Starr and Waterman describe as an "archetypal early disco hit."⁹ This was also the year that Kraftwerk made their debut in the US, introducing the country to a fully electronic sound –later dubbed Euro-disco– that was unprecedented. The *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack was released in 1977, and remains one of the best-selling soundtracks of all time. Developments happened quickly for disco, and by the late seventies its music and culture had been decisively catapulted into the mainstream, "second only to organized sport as the U.S. leisure-time industry's most important revenue spinner."¹⁰

Despite its vast popularity however, disco was subjected to an unprecedented backlash from Rockist circles, a reaction arguably not duplicated since. Barker and Taylor describe disco as "one of the most widely reviled musical genres of the

⁷ Tawa, op. cit., 242.

⁸ Will Straw, "Dance Music" in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 166.

⁹ Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman. *American Popular Music: The Rock Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 224.

¹⁰ Radcliffe, op. cit., 11.

postwar period,”¹¹ and Starr and Waterman conclude that “few styles of popular music have inspired such passionate loyalty, or such utter revulsion, as disco music”.¹² ‘Disco Sucks’ became an almost national motto by the late seventies– the 1979 public burning of disco records at Chicago’s Comiskey Park, hosted by local radio personality Steve Dahl, is the well-referenced apotheosis of this disturbingly organized movement.¹³ Disco would come to be rock’s aesthetic and cultural nemesis. Never had an Other been quite so repellent to rock as disco. The binary of rock and pop had of course been in place since rock’s inception, but disco was pop writ large, crystallizing all its worst tendencies. It is almost as if the vast cultural reification of authenticity that Rockist ideology brought about needed an equally broad inauthenticity to define it, and disco fit the bill exceptionally well.

“Disco Sucks.” Why?

The ‘Disco Sucks’ movement is most often described as having been fueled by racism and homophobia. This was true, as disco culture had been a haven for Black, Latino, and gay men as early as the first mid-sixties disco scenes. Later on in the seventies, these segments of society (as well as many women) felt increasingly alienated by the predominantly male, white, and hetero-normative culture of rock at its hegemonic peak. Virtually all rock musicians were male, who, with the exception of the odd ballad, sang a decidedly masculine music revolving around what Walser describes as notions of “potency,” a paradigm in which Eddie Van Halen’s aptly-

¹¹ Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking It: The Quest For Authenticity In Popular Music* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 235.

¹² Starr and Waterman, op. cit., 226.

¹³ Radcliff, op. cit., 28.

titled "Eruption" can be read as a "metaphorical ejaculation."¹⁴ This kind of masturbatory display of technical prowess and control was simply not present in disco music, which was instead filled with other, more pluralistic sensibilities.

The gay connection was perhaps the strongest, and there was a sense that, despite its increased mainstream exposure in the seventies, disco was originally the soundtrack to a distinctly gay culture. In addition, many prominent performers of the genre were either overtly camp (the Village People), vocally effeminate (the high falsetto delivery of the Bee Gees), or women (the sultry Donna Summer). *Saturday Night Fever* countered this somewhat. Starr and Waterman write that the film "helped to link disco music to a traditional American cultural theme, that of upward mobility,"¹⁵ and Tony Manero, despite his flashy dancing, was also an ultra-masculine, white male; hardly a spokesman for the early disco scene. Hollywood could not completely re-write history however; by 1980, disco and homosexuality were so synonymous that someone could walk into a gay bar and remark that "the place was of course a disco as well."¹⁶ Interestingly, this linkage was not universal. Sarah Thornton points out that "in Britain, discotheques and disco music had a huge straight white working-class following, and were not... strongly identified with gay, black, and Hispanic minorities."¹⁷ This more ready receptiveness may help to explain how EDM is today perceived as distinctly European; but this is a matter for Chapter Four.

¹⁴ Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness In Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover [NH]: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 76.

¹⁵ Starr and Waterman, op. cit., 225.

¹⁶ Patricia Highsmith, *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 184.

¹⁷ Thornton, op. cit., 44.

There were other factors more related to our focus on authenticity that were also at play. The emphasis on dancing for instance, the retreat from authorship and identity, and the synthetic nature of disco sounds; these were all contentious as well. Dancing is a problem for authenticity. At first glance this seems at odds with popular music's history: had not the twist and all its predecessors been wildly popular? Did people not dance to rock 'n' roll, and rock as well? Of course they did. But while rock music could be (and was) danced to, its self-conscious seriousness precluded the notion that dancing was its main intent. Straw writes that "the development of rock music in the late 1960s took it in the direction of more intricate and extended forms which did not lend themselves easily to dancing."¹⁸ He proceeds to point out that it was at around this time that the notion of the rock 'concert' became prominent, a term borrowed from the world of classical symphony– a place where one sat and enjoyed the performance in a civilized stasis. Rock's artistic pretensions held that it was art before anything else. You *could* dance to it, but it was primarily created for mental, not physical response.

Aside from disco's general predilection towards dancing, there was also the problem of the actual nature of disco dancing itself. Disco dancing was composed of more effeminate movements than Rock dancing. Of course, such a statement carries with it generalizations about what constitutes male or female movement. Luckily, McClary points out that these assumptions have been with us for centuries. In her feminist reading of Bizet's *Carmen*, she makes a compelling musicological argument for the embeddedness of gender in certain tonal and rhythmic choices, setting up a

¹⁸ Straw, op. cit., 165.

dichotomy between Western, transcendental traditions of classical music — personified by the bland Micaela, whose “rhythms [are] innocent of physicality” — and the more sensual, exotic rhythms that inform the music and dance of the gypsy Carmen. McClary writes of the latter that “her rhythms indicate that she is very much aware of her body... her instrumental vamp suggests a pattern that engages the lower body, demanding hip swings in response.”¹⁹ I would argue that we can superimpose this reading of what Micaela and Carmen represent onto the dichotomy of rock and disco, with Rock representing sturdy Western European traditions of music as a transcendental art (a fittingly Rockist sentiment), and disco representing the ethnic and feminine Other via its black, gay, and —as I hope I have illustrated through McClary’s work— sensual dance culture. When McClary writes of Carmen that that “her erotic power, her ethnic exoticism and her pop culture songs are seen as grounded in the body... as feminine and *effeminizing*,”²⁰ she could just as easily be talking about disco as it was seen by Rock culture in the mid to late seventies.

Rock was meant to be appreciated as art first, and then —maybe— danced to. As Straw writes “historians of jazz or rock have often seen dance as a seductive force [like Carmen], luring these musical traditions from the path of artistic seriousness... and weaken[ing] critical faculties by encouraging us to respond to music in ways which involve neither contemplation or respect.”²¹ This linkage of mindlessness (i.e. body-focused and therefore feminine) with disco dancing bleeds into critiques of

¹⁹ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music Gender And Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

²¹ Straw, *op. cit.*, 159.

disco's aesthetics as well. Straw again: "Many... saw a logical connection between the seemingly mindless hedonism of disco dancing and the formula-driven qualities of disco music itself."²²

Physical responses were of course by no means uncommon in rock culture, but more often they took the form of appreciatory gestures or salutes to a performer's skill than the sort of immersive, full-body reactions common to disco dancing. Examples include the holding aloft of one's extended baby and index fingers (the so-called devil's horns), various fist-pumpings and head-noddings, and of course, air guitar, for which there are now world championships. Also worth mentioning is the tradition of raised lighters during the performance of ballads or slow sections, although today one is more likely to hold up their glowing cell-phone.

Another strike against disco was its seeming disregard of the notions of individuality and authorship. As we recall, authorship has been crucial to constructions of authenticity since its Romantic beginnings, and was a characteristic that rock mined for its artistic legitimization. And, despite rock's fragmentation during this period, authorship remained a universal factor. Whether you liked progressive rock, soft rock, hard rock, or punk rock, authorship mattered, and not only authorship but the identities to match. This is when towering names like Jimmi Page, Jimi Hendrix, Freddie Mercury, and David Bowie were at work. The simultaneous rise of the singer-songwriters brought authorship to the forefront even more.

²² Ibid., 159.

Disco on the other hand seemed to take extra steps to obfuscate the link between not only author and performer but author and audience as well. Both of these separations can be traced to the newfound prominence of the producer's role that disco brought about. Fans of rock-based musics were used to the notion of producers as technicians, men (and they almost all were) who received and then worked with the raw artistic talent of others; a capturer and shaper of sound, not a creator of it. This certainly did not diminish the importance of producers in the rock world, many of whom were highly regarded, but it set them apart from the role of artist. Disco reversed these roles, with producers writing the material and a new breed of performer –the DJs– performing it. Radcliffe writes that:

it had grown commonplace to for people to enquire about who the producer on a newly released disco record was, rather than be attracted to the performing artist... [and that] most disco artists emerged as an almost faceless extension of the tools of the producer's trade, while the producer, in turn, was shot into the spotlight usually reserved for the artist.²³

This reversal of roles shook up the Rockist paradigm of artistic praxis fundamentally. The performance element had been given up completely, handed over to people who simply played records– and even this was carried out from behind equipment, in a darkened booth rather than on a stage, and often with little or no attention paid.

²³ Radcliff, op. cit., 47. This perception continues today: in a recent *New York Times* article on *American Idol* that lists the competitors by their genre affiliations, the disco-channeling Pia Toscano is referred to uncharitably as an “anonymous disco diva.” John Caramanica, “Critic’s Notebook: The ‘Idol’ Season: Sharper, and More Stars” in *The New York Times*, 26th May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/27/arts/television/american-idol-completes-its-10th-season.html?_r=1&src=recg, (last accessed 20th Dec. 2011).

The loss of the performative is perhaps the most significant change disco proposed, and I will devote the entire next chapter to it. For now however, I merely wish to point out that, contrary to rock's model, "Disco... reinforce[d] the supremacy of the producer over songwriter and performer,"²⁴ a shift in power that Rockist constructions of authenticity could not assimilate. This should hardly come as a surprise, as the rise of the producer-as-artist is directly linked to the evolution of another Rockist antithesis: technology. But that is an issue for Chapter Three. Instead, let us turn now to the actual sounds of disco, the fruits of the producer's labors, as just as much of the genre's alleged inauthenticity lies within its music as without.

That Sucking Sound: Disco Music Itself

So far we have covered cultural issues like homophobia, as well as philosophical ones, like artistic seriousness (seen as lessened by disco's focus on dancing) and authorship (seen as obfuscated by the reversal that the rise of the producer brought about). At this point, let us discuss disco music itself. According to Radcliffe, much of the backlash against disco sounds "center[ed] on what is often described as Disco's formulated, restrictive, and predictable rhythms, [and] the absence of 'real' lyrical content."²⁵ Tawa weighs in as well:

As a rule, the music was recorded and featured a great deal of electronic instrumentation. Repetitive lyrics, usually of utmost simplicity, sometimes making little sense, were attached to a heavy, pulsating, rhythmic beat... The beat was emphasized above all else, including the

²⁴ Tawa, op. cit., 242.

²⁵ Radcliffe, op. cit., 23.

singer and the song. The resultant music was frequently mesmerizing but sometimes sterile and rigid. Systematically computerized beats could come to sound overly mechanical.²⁶

Even when not explicitly mentioning its electronic creation, the negative descriptors chosen allude to or connote technology as well. Words like mechanical, sterile, rigid, and repetitive are still the words of choice for EDM's detractors. Frith adds another metaphor to the mix when he describes disco music as 'cooked:' "The rationale is straightforward", he explains, "musicians can be seen to work on real instruments, there is a direct relationship between effort and sound."²⁷ Once again, the notion of performance is brought up in reference to a 'direct relationship between effort and sound.' Clearly technology was getting in the way somehow.

Interestingly, early disco music contained much that was organic. Its heavy soul influence bequeathed to it a penchant for woodwinds and lush orchestration. Later in the seventies, however, a distinctly synthetic sound began to emerge from Europe that featured prominently inorganic instrument sounds. Giorgio Moroder –the Italian producer behind seminal Donna Summer hits like "Love To Love You Baby" and "I Feel Love"– was especially influential in this respect, and "was one of the first to fully utilize the potential of electronics, replacing lush disco orchestration with the hypnotic precision of machines."²⁸

There were also revolutionary sounds coming out of Germany in the form of Kraftwerk, whose music "resonates in virtually every new development to impact

²⁶ Tawa, op. cit., 241.

²⁷ Simon Frith, *Facing The Music* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 120.

²⁸ Richard Vine, "A History of Dance Music: Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love'" in *The Gaurdian*, June 15th, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/jun/15/donna-summer-i-feel-love>, (last accessed March 2012).

the contemporary pop scene of the late- 20th century,"²⁹ a slight overstatement, but one that has nonetheless made it into print. Descendents of Germany's *Elektronische Musik* movement, they introduced the mainstream to an aural palette of fully synthetic sounds, and their performance on the popular BBC television program *Tomorrow's World* in 1975 was also one of the first times a mass audience was exposed to the successful performance of this supposedly mechanized music. Given its provenance, this more highly technologized strain of disco soon became known as Eurodisco, which "even American disco aficionados looked down on... as being the most plastic version of the sound."³⁰ It is arguably this specific variant of disco that would go on to form the blueprint of today's EDM, which unsurprisingly, emanates most prolifically from Europe. I will address this salient geographic aspect more fully in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

For a genre whose heyday was relatively brief, disco retains a surprisingly prominent place in the popular imagination. Similarly brief moments in popular music history –grunge music for instance– have not enjoyed this kind of robust shelf-life. I would argue that disco's longevity is due to its manifesting so perfectly everything that rock was not; for developing the perfect template of rock's Other. Its predominantly black and gay culture; its emphasis on dancing; its emphasis on creative anonymity instead of heroic individuals; and its embrace of technological

²⁹ Jason Ankeny, "Kraftwerk Biography," for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/artist/kraftwerk-p4706/biography>, (last accessed Dec. 2011).

³⁰ Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 256.

sounds: all these aspects made disco the nemesis rock set itself against during the 1970s.

And disco was beaten; it had all but faded from the mainstream by the end of the decade. However, as the 1980s began, it became clear that although it had receded, its technological legacy lived on, as popular music became increasingly oriented around synthesizers and other electronic instruments. In fact, one could argue that disco simply became pop in the 1980s, with many bands introducing disco elements to their music in order to stay current. Tawa actually cites this practice starting as early as 1974, with the Jackson 5's hit "Dancing Machine." One of the first disco-pop crossovers, "its sound forecast[ed] the electronic manipulations of '80s 'techno-pop."³¹ Even the Rolling Stones briefly rode this bandwagon, and Radcliffe declares triumphantly in 1980 that, "Disco has tempered even the violence of Rock into submission with the softer rock-disco sounds."³² Indeed, it should be made clear that although rock and disco existed at either end of a spectrum during this period, there was much interplay between the two, often via rock's adoption of explicitly electronic elements, as when the hard rock of the seventies suddenly morphed into the synth-heavy music of bands like Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, and Van Halen.

As the twentieth century came to a close, it was clear that technology would continue to play a major role in the creation of popular music, and disco, for better or worse, would be remembered as the genre that opened the floodgates. From a Rockist perspective it was something of a Pandora's Box; more than the polyglot culture, more than the effeminate, sensual dancing, and more than the cold-shoulder

³¹ Tawa, op. cit., 242.

³² Radcliffe, op. cit., 9.

directed at authorship, it was the performance-killing, sterile-sounding technological aspect that rankled most with rock fans. Disco arrived at a time when popular music (that is, rock), was just beginning to define its role in society as an art form to be taken seriously. Instead disco offered a completely opposite approach, both culturally and aesthetically. And although disco failed to last far into the 1980s, its aesthetic lived on, and can be heard on the radio every day in the ultra-glossy sounds of the West's current top forties. The story of disco was basically the story of popular music coming to terms with the potentials of technology, and while disco has faded, the debate it ignited has most certainly not. Even in EDM, disco's descendent, the debate over new technologies continues, and authenticity remains central.

Chapter 3

Authenticity and Performance

In the preceding chapter, I mentioned briefly Kraftwerk's seminal 1975 performance on the BBC television program *Tomorrow's World*. I would like to dwell on it at more length, as it symbolizes much of what I will explore in this chapter. The program was a slightly unusual showcase for an up-and-coming music group, as the its main fare normally consisted of live demonstrations of cutting-edge household and professional technology, like pocket calculators and the first ATMs. The live aspect of these demonstrations was highlighted: there was always the real potential for the product to malfunction or fail somehow. Inherently then, the program was a test, a challenge to technology. Certainly it celebrated it also, but with skepticism. It was a time before we took technology for granted, and people were genuinely interested in seeing how (and if) new technology did what it purported. In this context, Kraftwerk's performance was a test as well, but in their case it cut two ways. Within the usual framework of the show, it was the efficacy of the band's cutting-edge electronic instruments that was being tested. However, anyone could come to the conclusion that these instruments 'worked' simply by listening to a Kraftwerk album. I would argue that in addition to this purely technological framework, another test was occurring, whether acknowledged or not: that of Kraftwerk's authenticity.

Rockism enters the equation here. Rock was in its prime in 1975, and its accompanying ideology was a cultural commonplace. From a Rockist perspective,

the kind of live performance being tested on *Tomorrow's World* was authenticity in its purest form– when the honesty and sincerity, the instrumental and artistic prowess of an artist are on full display. At this point I would like to introduce a concept that will help us better understand the important link between live performance and authenticity. It is a link that becomes more fraught as we enter popular music's most technologically mediated age, one Kraftwerk helped inaugurate. This link is the concept of liveness.

Liveness

Liveness is an ideology that proscribes that live performance is the ideal site to observe the honesty, originality, and individuality of an artist. While on the surface there may seem nothing wrong with this assessment, it is in fact politically driven, and exclusionary towards other genres in which an emphasis on live performance is less of a factor. It was arguably rock culture that trumpeted this belief most loudly. Philip Auslander, on whom I will draw heavily in this chapter, couches his words in a subtle Romanticism when he explains that “rock music is imagined to be truly expressive of the artists’ souls and psyches,”¹ and Starr and Waterman add that “for most rock fans, the live show was the peak of musical experience– you hadn’t really heard Led Zeppelin, it was said, until you’d heard and seen them live.”² It is this combination of artistic intensity and communicatory power that makes live performance so important to rock. And Zeppelin was indeed especially instrumental

¹ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance In A Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 81

² Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman in *American Popular Music: The Rock Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183.

in making live performance such a powerful signifier: in *Houses of The Holy: Led Zeppelin and The Power of Rock Music*, Susan Fast quotes dozens of responses from her extensive fan interviews. Here are a few: “For us, they are the closest things to hymns that we have... It isn’t just hype. Those are songs to stir the soul... I have never been so engulfed in a band’s music as when I saw them... I’m only 18 and have never had sex before, but I don’t see how that can possibly compare to seeing Zep in concert.”³ This is the power of liveness.

The concept is older than rock however. Auslander explains that the originary concept stretches back to pre-war radio, when broadcasters needed a way to differentiate for audiences the segments that were pre-recorded from those occurring live in the studio.⁴ Later, as recorded music moved out of the radio studio and into the malt-shops and diners of 1950s America via jukeboxes, the need for live performance lessened. It was at this point that the concept took on a decidedly more ideological tone, articulated by those for whom liveness was also livelihood: musicians. Both the UK Musicians’ Union and the American Federation of Musicians reacted strongly to their increased marginalization through the popularity and financial attractiveness of recorded music– it was simply easier and cheaper to hire a ‘hop’ (the non-mixing precursor to today’s DJ) to play records than an entire live band.

³ Susan Fast, *In The Houses Of The Holy: Led Zeppelin and The Power of Rock Music*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 51, 57, 58.

⁴ Auslander, op. cit., 81.

At its core, the platform of these groups was strictly financial: jukeboxes and record hops⁵ were encroaching on their market. However, Thornton, whose *Club Cultures* explores the issue in depth, explains that the UK Musician's Union's public message was "a difficult combination of aesthetic, environmental, and trade union concerns," which at the same time as it lobbied for wage protection, tried to convince the public of "the social good [generated when] the public has more contact with the people who make music."⁶ The key word here is 'contact,' which simply seems like a more aseptic way of describing the 'souls and psyches' definition of authenticity suggested by Auslander. In reality, the union was using an appeal to our Romantic sensibilities to make its case seem more attractive.

From the start then, it was technology that threatened liveness, in the form of the jukebox, or the turntable and PA system employed by the professional record hop. Thornton points out that the term 'live' was not even popularly used until the 1950s when this technology became common; before that liveness was simply implied, taken for granted. It was only when threatened that it was forced to define itself.⁷

Kraftwerk were not record hops however. In fact, in many ways there were just like a rock band: four men who wrote and performed their own music, released albums, toured extensively. Their performance was different than anything mainstream audiences had seen however. Fast, describing Led Zeppelin performing in 1979, posits that "Page plays as if he might be a warrior offering his guitar up to

⁵ The precursor to the modern DJ, these individuals were hired to play records at social gatherings, although they did not mix them; this would come later.

⁶ Sarah Thornton *Club Cultures: Music, Media, And Subcultural Capital* (Hanover [NH]: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 42.

⁷ Ibid., 41.

the gods. He points the neck of the instrument straight upward and holds the body away from his own, turning it outward... the musical and physical gestures taken together are powerful symbols.”⁸ Compare this to Kraftwerk who, playing sequencers and synthesizers, stood “motionless on stage, doing nothing but twiddling knobs on their machines.”⁹ Although Kraftwerk toed much of the Rockist line, there was simply no way their performances could be as visceral and as visually stimulating as a Led Zeppelin show, as the nature of the band’s interactions with their instruments simply would not allow it. Frith describes this as “the systematic dismantling of the belief system that sustained rock ‘n’ roll, that idea that a recognizable person... made a specific noise.”¹⁰ When the physical manipulations of one’s instrument become so minute and precise that there is essentially nothing to see in terms of performance, this connection is broken, and some might begin to suspect that they might in fact be watching some kind of faker, a fraud who has not only violated Romantic laws of honest performance, but who has also made them pay to watch.

This suspicion, brought about by the disconnect between ‘person’ and ‘noise’ that technology allows, is an index into one of the underlying Romantic characteristics of authenticity: honesty. Few people knew exactly how Kraftwerk’s electronic instruments worked in 1975, and as a result could not know *for sure* that the sounds Kraftwerk created that night (or during any of their hundred performances since then) had not been programmed before-hand. In fact, without knowing exactly how

⁸ Fast, op. cit., 49.

⁹ Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking It: The Quest For Authenticity In Popular Music* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 241.

¹⁰ Simon Frith, *Facing The Music* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 124.

their instruments worked, one could theoretically look directly over the shoulders of Kraftwerk during a performance and still not be completely sure they were watching and hearing a live show. This is the ultimate conundrum of electronic music in a Romanticist paradigm of authenticity: honesty, one of its core concepts can never be assured, as the curtain of technology gets in the way during live performance, robbing the audience of the assurance that the sounds they are hearing are indeed being made by the artists before them.

Liveness and Technology

As studio technology progressed, the potential to create music that was impossible to perform live became very attractive to some musicians. From a perspective of liveness however, the very concept of music that was impossible to perform live was an oxymoron. Auslander cites the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" as an example of the incompatibility of technology and liveness.¹¹ The song, a pieced-together collage of numerous takes and retakes, was all but impossible to recreate live. Similarly, the Beatles' decision to embrace technology fully by becoming a studio-only band after 1966's *Rubber Soul* puzzled and confounded the expectations of their audience. They had forsaken liveness, implicitly placing more importance on the potentials of technology. Their famous follow-up, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*, was one of the first albums to make use of studio technology on a grand scale, and is widely held as one of popular music's early masterpieces;

¹¹ Auslander, op. cit., 80.

allmusic.com describes it as “the evolution of pop into art with a capital A.”¹² It is arguable then that an ideology of liveness gets in the way of ‘pop as art’ by closing to it the artistic avenues technology offers. This is not to say that technology is the *only* valid road to artistic achievement, but if aural and formal innovation is to have any place in a definition of artistic worth in popular music, then ideologies such as Rockism and liveness are faulty at an objective level. In any event, it was becoming clear that technology was perceived as getting in the way of liveness, marking off artists who used it too much as inauthentic.

One of the reasons that Kraftwerk was able to escape the label of inauthenticity was the fact that they played live often, fulfilling the expectations of Rockism. Highlighting again the linkage of liveness and Rockism with Romantic ideals, Auslander states that “only live performance can resolve the tension between rock’s romantic ideology and the listener’s knowledge that the music is produced in the studio.”¹³ Indeed, the fact that most music is created in the studio is an unpleasant reality for Rockism. In fact, as Theodore Gracyk points out, one of the great ironies of Rockism is the fact that although live performance is held up as the ultimate in authenticity, it makes up a very small percentage of the average music fan’s experiences with popular music.¹⁴ In other words, most of our popular music is enjoyed through speakers in our homes that reproduce studio recordings. This means that the liveness of rock, although central ideologically, is fairly peripheral in

¹² Richie Unterberger, “The Beatles; Biography” for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/artist/the-beatles-p3644>, (last accessed Dec. 2011).

¹³ Auslander, op. cit., 79.

¹⁴ Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), 74-75, as quoted by Auslander in *Liveness*, 63.

reality, and may be regarded as a misrepresentation of rock's norm. Auslander takes this argument a step further, suggesting that this misrepresentation exists even in rock *recordings*, which "are made to sound like live performances that could have taken place, even if they didn't (or couldn't)." ¹⁵ "Good Vibrations" and *Sgt. Pepper's* are fine examples. While Rockism embraces liveness, it downplays the fact that the genre has used technology heavily since at least the mid-sixties.

Rock's complex relationship with technology would continue, with many artists during the eighties and nineties treating studio technology "with suspicion, seeing it, at best, as something to be conquered and, at worst, as a distorting barrier that lay between them and the listener... the machinery was seen as a necessary tool, but not something to be celebrated in itself." ¹⁶ In this vein, bands like Rage Against The Machine assured their fans in the liner notes of their albums that their music was created only with guitar, bass, drums, and vocals ¹⁷– what Frith describes as 'real' instruments. ¹⁸ Another example is furnished by Slash, ¹⁹ who writes in his autobiography about the suspicion with which modern recording technology filled him in the early nineties:

At the first whiff of bullshit, I get wary. And what I walked into had me worried. There were rows and rows of Pro-tools servers and gear. Which was a clear indication that Axl [Rose] and I had very different ideas of

¹⁵ Auslander, op. cit., 64.

¹⁶ Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 248.

¹⁷ Rage Against The Machine, *The Battle of Los Angeles* (Epic Records, 1999), liner notes.

¹⁸ Frith, op. cit., 120.

¹⁹ Lead guitarist of prominent Rock band Guns 'n' Roses (1987-1996).

how to do this record. I was open to using Pro-Tools,²⁰ and trying new things– but [...].²¹

Slash trails off and never deals explicitly with the issues of technology beyond that, but one can discern in his apprehension the quintessential conundrum of Rockist ideology, which on the one hand promotes artistic creativity (in which technology can only aid), and on the other adheres to an ideology that demands technological austerity.

The disagreement between Slash and Rose is a perfect microcosm of rock's conflicted relationship with liveness, wherein the formula is supposed to be, as Frith says, "a plays to b and the less technology lies between them the better."²² One final quote from Dave Grohl will suffice here. Currently the frontman of the Foo Fighters, a band prominently carrying the rock torch into the twenty-first century, Grohl spoke out after his band's performance at the 2012 Grammys, explaining that "it's not about what goes on in a computer. It's about what goes on in here [pointing to his head] and it's about what goes on in here [pointing to his heart]."²³

Clearly, from a Rockist perspective, technology gets in the way of both liveness and the Romantic ideals for which it is the vehicle. This is why Kraftwerk had to prove themselves on *Tomorrow's World*. History has proven that the German quartet passed this test, despite the Rockist cards being stacked against them.

²⁰ Indie Rock forefather Stephen Malkmus –originally of Pavement (1992-1999)– is more direct, drawing a sloppy 'No Pro-Tools' logo in the liner notes of his solo albums. Pro-Tools is Apple's flagship music production suite, an industry standard.

²¹ Slash and Anthony Bozza, *Slash*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 386.

²² Simon Frith, "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case Of Popular Music," *Media Culture Society* 8 (1986): 267.

²³ Tim Molloy, "Grammys Honour Whitney Houston: We've Had a Death In Our Family," for *TheWrap.com*, <http://www.thewrap.com/tv/article/grammys-begin-houston-tribute-weve-had-death-our-family-35324?page=0,1>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

Perhaps it was because they were able to compensate by offering their own quirky brand of performance that confronted head-on their relationship with technology. The band would often have actual robots play their instruments on stage for instance, which they would manipulate remotely, and founding member Ralf Hütter once even mused about a tour headlined only by robots, with the band controlling them from the comfort of their studio in Dusseldorf.²⁴ Through stunts like these, not to mention heavy touring and steady releases (the traditional 'work' of a band), Kraftwerk was able to squeak by as a proper band during the rock years, despite their technologically mediated performance style.

Kraftwerk's performance in 1975 was a perfect manifestation of popular music's suspicion towards technology during a time when the force of technology was first making itself felt. Kraftwerk could have performed on a program devoted strictly to new music (as they went on to do), but instead chose as the site of one of their seminal performances (it was what broke them in the UK) a program essentially devoted to sniffing out imposters. Kraftwerk's test on *Tomorrow's World* was evidence that honesty could no longer be taken for granted in performance: it had to be proven. Kraftwerk's appearance on the program was as much an exoneration as it was a performance.

Liveness and EDM

At this point, let us leap ahead to EDM, the modern-day descendent of Kraftwerk and their disco brethren. It is worth noting that Kraftwerk was one of the earliest

²⁴ Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 242.

examples of the fairly distinct sub-genre of Eurodisco, which was by far the most 'electronic' sounding offshoot of the genre, introducing the world to many of the 'cold,' 'clinical' sounds that would later become the stock-in-trade of its critics. Radcliffe writes that "in the creation of the Euro-Disco sound the European contingent of producers... have used... the synthesizer either extensively... or exclusively."²⁵ This stood in stark contrast to the non-synthetic sound of American disco, which often featured strings, woodwinds, and horns. Natural sounds were not unheard of in Euro-disco, but they were the exception, not the rule.

This is a salient detail, as the majority of today's mainstream EDM is also European, and has arguably retained the "Europhile slickness"²⁶ of its predecessors. I will explore issues of nationality and race as it relates to authenticity in the next chapter, but for now I merely wish to point out that as a result of its Eurodisco lineage, most EDM today is almost exclusively composed of synthetic sounds, produced with electronic instruments and computer software, in the studio, and usually by one or two individuals as opposed to a band. It will never be played 'live' in the way that it was created, but instead played second-hand through the medium of the DJ and their equipment. EDM has also retained disco's revolving door industry, wherein vocalists move from producer to producer, and the market is driven by singles as opposed to 'proper' albums. Simon Reynolds writes that, "rock critics still tend to approach dance music [in this way]: they look for the auteur-geniuses who seem most promising in terms of long-term, album-based careers,

²⁵ Joe Radcliffe, *This Business of Disco* (New York: Billboard Books, 1980), 53.

²⁶ Andrew Harrison, "History of Dance Music: Kraftwerk Appear on Tomorrow's World" for *The Guardian*, June 15th, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/jun/15/kraftwerk-tomorrows-world>, (last accessed March 2012).

whereas in EDM there is “little brand loyalty to artists.”²⁷ For example, while some EDM producers release albums strictly of their own material called ‘artist albums,’ the main way EDM is consumed today is via ‘mix albums,’ which, as their name suggests, consist of a collection of tracks chosen and mixed seamlessly together by a DJ whose taste and skill is expected to unify the album. They are essentially collections of singles, and make up the bulk of EDM releases.

From a Rockist perspective, there is much in the above that is inauthentic: the synthetic sounds, the lack of a familiar model of authorship, the ephemera of singles as opposed to full albums, and, above all, the technologically mediated performance style wherein the manipulation of instruments is effectively hidden from the audience. Given all this, it might come as a surprise to learn that for a genre often derided as inauthentic for the reasons above, authenticity is just as important within EDM as it is in rock. In fact, as Thornton suggests, the “disparagement of the inauthentic... is prevalent amongst all kinds of club cultures. Interest in authenticity and distinction would seem to be the norm.”²⁸

Although most patrons of live DJ performances are focused on dancing rather than what is going on inside the DJ booth, this is not to say they are disinterested in said goings on in an ethical sense. As Ed Montano wonders, “how do I know he’s not playing Pac-man up there while he’s supposed to be DJing?”²⁹ The fact is, although explicit evidence of live performance is rarely on hand, notions of liveness itself are

²⁷ Simon Reynolds, *Genration Ecstasy: Into The World of Techno and Rave Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4.

²⁸ Thornton, op. cit., 4.

²⁹ Ed Montano, “How Do You Know He’s Not Playing Pac-Man, While He’s Supposed To Be DJing?”: Technology, Formats, and The Digital Future of DJ Culture.” *Popular Music* 29 (2010): 397.

still of great importance in EDM culture. However, due to the mediated nature of EDM performances, whether it is a DJ, electronic band, or production duo, the assumption of liveness seems to be largely based on the honour system– but when an artist dishonours their craft, fans are quick to respond.

Witness the ridicule directed at prominent DJ and producer Steve Angello for instance. Angello is one third of the DJ collective Swedish House Mafia, all three of whom “placed in the top 25 of DJ Mag’s top 100 DJs of 2009 list,”³⁰ so a fairly major player in the international EDM scene. In 2011, footage of him allegedly playing a pre-recorded DJ set at the Dance Valley festival in the Netherlands went viral and the scorn spread just as quickly. The videos, taken from somewhere to the right of the DJ booth, show Angello dancing and exhorting the crowd as he faces his DJ equipment, but more often than not he is simply talking with various individuals behind the booth and gulping bottled water.³¹ Fan reaction was notable enough for Angello to respond to his ‘haters’ online, and some of the issues his statements raise will be of interest to us. Angello explains that there was indeed a brief pre-recorded segment of his set included to help synchronize a lighting and fireworks finale that had to be timed perfectly, but the most interesting part of his answer comes in various reiterations of the ‘dues’ he has paid as a DJ:

I play 160 gigs a year, and have dj’d for 15 years... for all you ppl out there who wanna know how it’s done... lemme tell you... dj for five hours a day for ten years. When you have done that... start touring, playing 4-6 gigs a week for another five years... After that try play[ing] on the CDJ’s...

³⁰ Tim Sendra, “Review: Swedish House Mafia; *Until One*“ for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/album/until-one-r2021895/review>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

³¹ Most links bring you to this Youtube clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZCg_j7sq_k, although it has been removed more than once due to ‘copyright issues.’

When you work your ass off and ppl accuse you of being fake U get upset.³²

Two things concern us here. One is the notion of 'work' that Angello appeals to; the second is his reference to CDJ's, the CD-based turntables he and many other DJs use. I would like to unpack both of these excerpts via the work of Rebekah Farrugia and Thomas Swiss. With their help I will attempt to sketch the ways that rock's and EDM's constructions of performative authenticity are more similar than they are different.

Work Before The Club: Digging In The Crates

Farrugia and Swiss posit that the organizing principle of integrity within DJ practice is the concept of 'work.' As it suggests, this refers to the amount of effort that goes into a performance. Interestingly, this effort may or may not occur during an actual performance. For instance, much of the work of a DJ involves finding and selecting tracks, planning mixes ahead of time, and of course, simple practice. Then of course there is the work during performance, the act of actual live mixing.³³

First, before a performance even begins, DJs expend a large amount of time and mental energy on the matter of which tracks to feature in their set. Much of what makes a successful DJ is the ability to act not only as a performer but as a tastemaker as well, introducing audiences to music they otherwise might not have heard. This approach to the new can cut one of two ways: forward, seeking music

³² Steve Angello, "Statement," <http://steveangelo.wordpress.com/2010/03/02/steve-angelo-statement/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

³³ Rebekah Farrugia and Thomas Swiss, "Tracking The DJs: Vinyl Records, Work, and The Debate Over New Technologies," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17 (2005): 34.

that an audience has not heard yet, or backwards, into the world of the obscure. However, both directions require the familiarity of the DJ with the channels of sales and distribution, a certain amount of effort to find the tracks themselves, and a fair bit of luck. This specific aspect of pre-performance work, the acquiring of tracks, deserves some space of its own, as it was once where much of the authenticity of a DJ was forged. As a result, it has been highly Romanticized.

In the seventies and eighties, DJs spent countless hours in second-hand record shops, flipping and listening through anything that looked promising. Joseph G. Schloss describes this as “digging for beats,”³⁴ and Fikentscher echoes the phrase with “digging in the crates,”³⁵ referring to the milk-crates that vinyl was often kept in. Schloss’s interviewees from the world of Hip-Hop (the other major DJ-centric genre in today’s popular music) explain that these were the days of waking up early on new-release day to beat the crowds and competition; of attending random garage sales just in case; and of course of heavy milk-crates³⁶. On the front cover of DJ Shadow’s seminal 1996 album *Endtroducing*,³⁷ a blurry, a casually-taken photo of two men searching through the racks at a record store is the quintessence of this period. Also, the album’s liner notes consist of close-up shots of a DJ’s pre-performance ‘work’: scattered notes and vinyl jackets, written-out lyrics, beat-charts, and measure break-downs scrawled on lined paper. The traipsing from store to store, the hauling of records, the painstaking beat-matching; all these activities

³⁴ Joseph G. Schloss *Making Beats The Art of Sample-Based Hip Hop* (Conneticut: Wesleyan Universit Press, 2004), 92.

³⁵ Kai Fikentscher, *You Better Work!: Underground Dance Music in New York* (Conneticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

³⁶ Schloss, op. cit., 80.

³⁷ DJ Shadow, *Endtroducing* (Mo Wax Records, 1996).

constitute the pre-performance work of a DJ, and apply towards marking them as either authentic or not.

Then, as mixing with CDs became more prominent in the nineties, compilation discs of the most popular breaks and beats began to be released. These compilations represented hours, if not days of a DJ's work, all in a quick and easy to use format. In addition to being collected on one handy disc, the beats themselves were also isolated, with the songs they were attached to truncated in order to fit even more breaks —more work— onto the space of the disc. On the surface, these compilations were time-saving mechanisms. However, they were met with hostility from certain camps in Hip-Hop culture. To many, the hours spent digging in the crates for obscure records may have been arduous, but they were what being a DJ was all about: "The term carries with it a sense of valour and symbolizes an unending quest for the next record."³⁸ For those sympathetic to this view, things only got worse for DJ practice as the twentieth century finished and CDs were traded in for mp3s, a completely non-physical medium. Mp3s could be found and downloaded easily on the internet with a few clicks of a mouse; the days of crates seemed to be over.

Today, in both hip-hop and EDM culture, much of pre-performance DJ practice has been removed in favour of the convenience offered by the internet, and "the perception of the record store as central to the development of dance scenes is now something of an anachronism."³⁹ Not everyone has reacted positively to this development. Examining this reaction, Farrugia and Swiss analyzed comments from an internet listserv populated by DJs on the eve of the release of *Final Scratch*, a

³⁸ Schloss, *op. cit.*, 79.

³⁹ Montano, *op. cit.*, 401.

groundbreaking technology that controversially combines both vinyl and mp3 interfaces; it is an interesting window into the minds of working DJs. Farrugia and Swiss highlight the work of finding the right piece of vinyl, what they call “the labour of listening.”⁴⁰ This is in reference to the fact that many records have labels so plain that actually hearing its music is the only way to ascertain its use value. A participant of the listserv known simply as RD explains: “imagine the joy of finally finding that record you’ve been after for several years, and then compare it to downloading that track from the internet ... Nuff said I think.”⁴¹ This ‘nuff said’ speaks volumes about certain assumptions of what it means to be a DJ. Parallels can be drawn here to the MU and AFM, who in the 1950s worried that their skills were becoming similarly unneeded. Technology was the culprit in both these shifts. However, the real force of technology was felt in performance.

Work Inside The Club: The Importance of The Human Touch

So far we have been focusing on the pre-performance work of a DJ: the practicing, the planning, and the scavenging in record shops that were the mark of an authentic DJ. At this point, I would like to shift our focus to the way authenticity is constructed during a performance itself. Like rock-based musics, there is a great deal of importance placed on the amount of effort —of work— that a DJ expends during a performance. If this were not the case, Steve Angello and his allegedly pre-recorded set would not have figured so largely. As mentioned above, the performer that presses buttons and twiddles knobs instead of strumming chords presents a

⁴⁰ Farrugia and Swiss, op. cit., 35.

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

challenge to traditional models of performance. Because we cannot see exactly how the performance is carried out, we are robbed of the certainty that it is actually occurring at all. It also robs us of the pleasure of seeing an artist create music in front of us— the entire reason we attend concerts in the first place. Simply put, the nature of the average electronic music performance is perceived as less visceral than traditional rock-based performances. A review of a recent performance by French electronic duo Air states the case amusingly. The *Guardian's* Ian Gittins writes that he got to “spend the evening watching two self-absorbed technicians who appear largely oblivious to the presence of an audience”, and that “Dunckel [one half of Air] stare[d] at the ceiling from behind his bank of synths like a man calculating his tax return. In truth, it would be equally rewarding to listen to Air's music at home for an hour while staring intently at your iPod.”⁴²

Elsewhere in the *Guardian*, Paul Lester writes of a performance by Techno artist Gold Panda: “He just comes on with his hoodie up, hunches over his laptop at the front of the stage, presses a few keys, and the music starts”; he continues: “nobody came here expecting showmanship and rock theatrics, but ultimately this felt less like a gig, more like a playback of an album.”⁴³ Note the direct comparisons to Rockist notions of what liveness entails, and the use of the word ‘playback.’ The belief that technology stifles self-expression is borne out of comments like these. Frith recalls that “the argument that recurred in the pop press in the 1970s was that the production of electronic noises by synthesizers left no room for individual ‘feel’

⁴² Ian Gittins, “Air: Roundhouse, London” in *The Guardian*, Feb. 28th, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/feb/28/air-roundhouse-review>, (last accessed Dec. 2011).

⁴³ Paul Lester, “Gold Panda Concert Review: XOYO, London” in *The Guardian*, March 3rd, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/mar/03/gold-panda-review>, last accessed March. 2012).

or 'touch'... This was the context in which synthesizers were seen as 'soul-less.'"⁴⁴ Comments like Lester's and Gittins' make it clear that this perception persists today. And indeed, it is precisely this notion of 'feel' and 'touch' that is missing in the performances of Air and Gold Panda. Due to the imperfection of human movement, the exact same movements can never be repeated; every drumbeat, every guitar solo will be slightly different each time it is played. It is this singularity and potential for spontaneity that, as Thornton writes, elevates a performance from a commodity to a unique event.⁴⁵ On the other hand, all an electronic artist has to do is "write down the positions of his various switches."⁴⁶ It may come as a surprise then that feel and touch are perhaps the two most valued aspects of a DJ's technique, and, as DJ technology progresses, they are shifting in some very interesting ways. Below I will offer a technological history of these cherished skills.

Radcliffe cites Grasso in the mid 1960s as being the first DJ to introduce the concept of mixing the beginnings and ends of records seamlessly.⁴⁷ It is at this point, I think, that DJing went from being merely a service (as rendered by the record hops of the 1950s— the bane of the British Musician's Union), to an artistic form capable of stylistic evolution. It is also at this point that the tripartite system of two turntables and a mixer became the standard DJ setup— Paul Théberge suggests that "if there is any instrument that has achieved both the musical and the iconic status

⁴⁴ Frith, op. cit., in "Art Versus Technology," 265.

⁴⁵ Thornton, op. cit., 51.

⁴⁶ Frith, op. cit., in "Art Vs. Technology", 265.

⁴⁷ Radcliffe, op. cit., 17.

of the guitar in dance music, it is the phonograph turntable.”⁴⁸ These early turntables were belt-driven, meaning they functioned by mechanical means, essentially by two spindles –one attached to a motor, the other to the record platter– which were connected by a rubber belt. Given this arrangement, the act of mixing –which at its most basic is simply a matching of rhythms– was carried out by the manual manipulations of the spinning records themselves. This act of beat-matching is the foundational skill of any DJ, upon which all other skills are built. There were also certain idiosyncrasies (some would say imperfections) inherent in this technology, the foremost being the brief recoup time that any belt-driven turntable must be afforded after being stopped or slowed down manually. A record does not snap back up to perfect speed when you lift your thumb from it, and this had to be anticipated and planned for. For a long time it was this skill that made or broke a DJ, and it was all due to the shortcomings of the technology– specifically that the motor was at a remove from the spinning record platter, and therefore required a short period of time for its energy to be transferred through the belt. This was a matter of milliseconds, but it was enough to require working around.

The next step in turntable technology arrived in 1981 in the form of the Technics SL-10, which featured a direct-drive power system. This system, as its title suggests, did away with the indirect method of belt-driven power, and instead placed the motor directly under the record platter, minimizing much of the delay. However, it was still mechanically driven, which meant a slight delay still occurred when a record was released from manual pressure. In addition, higher-end direct-drive

⁴⁸ Paul Théberge, “‘Plugged In’: Technology And Popular Music” in *The Cambridge Companion To Pop and Rock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

turntables offered additional features like the ability to reverse the rotation of a record with the press of a button. For us, the importance of these early turntables was the fact that they would become a Romanticized ideal for the act of DJing, as they emphasized touch and feel: you still had to use your thumb to slow a record down to match its mate; you still had to sight the grooves of a record to find the right section of a track; and of course you still had to carry them around.

The major shift came in the mid 1980s with the introduction of CD turntables. This changed fundamentally the work of the DJ. With CD turntables one could match the BPMs (beats per minute) of two tracks perfectly with incremental turns of a dial, long before the actual overlap or slip-cue even needed to occur. The spinning CDs, the last visual link to the days of vinyl, were hidden inside the machine and could not be touched. Sighting the groove was obviously impossible, but it did not matter. Instead one could find the exact place they needed in a track to the millisecond without worry. This development created a divide amongst an older and younger guard of DJs who disagreed on just what constituted the work in their profession.

Today, mp3 technology does away with the need for a physically manipulated source altogether, replacing it simply with the music itself. There is also no need for physical turntables and mixers, as DJ software like Ableton and the abovementioned Traktor feature interactive visualizations of these old-fashioned arrangements right on your computer screen. The aforementioned Final Scratch system, however, is an interesting combination of the old and the new. While it takes as its source mp3s or any kind of downloadable music, it retains the physical interface of vinyl-based

mixing. Any turntables can be used, but the records spinning on them are “specially manufactured vinyl records,”⁴⁹ which are in turn connected to a computer, from which any downloaded song can be accessed.

In effect then, the vinyl in Final Scratch is an empty vessel that can be ‘filled’ with any mp3 or downloaded audio source of the DJ’s choice. This means that much of the performative aspects of a DJ’s authenticity is still possible; lost are the pre-performance tasks of digging in the crates— replaced now with sifting through the tracks on popular EDM download sites like Beatport. Similarly, software like Ableton, while bypassing actual physical turntables, retains on the computer screen an easy-to-recognize interface depicting two tracks on either side with a ‘mixer’ in between. This is noteworthy: although the physical aspect of the performative interface has changed, the abstract notion of two turntables and a mixer is clearly still necessary.

It is important to note that although these changes in DJ technology (from vinyl to CD and then on to digital sources like mp3s) were eventually adopted by the majority of DJs, the shifts were by no means instant, with many preferring to stick with older equipment they were familiar with rather than learn a new method. As Thornton explains regarding the views of some DJs regarding CD-based equipment: “DJs who had spent hours perfecting their touch, feeling the groove, sighting the track, were faced with a technology they could neither see nor touch.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Ferry Corsten, a current trance DJ of some renown, states that vinyl retains “the hands-on kind of feel that with a laptop you don’t really have. It’s too distant from

⁴⁹ Farrugia and Swiss, quoting the Final Scratch website directly, *op. cit.*, 32.

⁵⁰ Thornton, *op. cit.*, 63.

what the whole thing was with the vinyl at the time....” Despite this wistful tone, Corsten finishes by saying that “playing with vinyl is sort of like a dying kind of thing.”⁵¹ It is also expensive to keep on the cutting edge in an industry that is expensive to begin with, and the chore of upgrading all your material from one medium to the next can be an onerous one. Paul Van Dyk, one of the leaders of the nineties trance scene and general elder statesman of the genre, explains his live setup in an interview:

I have two laptops with me... They’re connected with each other and they can interact... It’s absolutely amazing what you can do, especially when you have the ability of a sequencer program re-editing the track while they are running and doing crazy stuff. As I said before, electronic music was always about breaking boundaries on all levels and using the latest technology as part of it.⁵²

Interestingly, this differs from the manner in which hip-hop DJs approach both technology and authenticity. As the other mainstream example of popular music that makes heavy use of a DJ’s skills, it is worth taking a brief detour here to appreciate these subtle differences, as it will give us a richer idea of how notions of authenticity interact with DJ technology. While most hip-hop DJs would agree with Van Dyk that using the latest technology can be a boon to their creativity, the uses they put that technology to are quite different. While EDM has consciously embraced newer technology as a means to achieve newer, more ‘electronic’

⁵¹ Ron Slomowicz, “Ferry Corsten Interview” for *ask.com*, http://dancemusic.about.com/od/remixersproducers/a/FerryCorstenInt_2.htm, (last accessed March. 2012).

⁵² Ron Slomowicz, “Paul Van Dyk Interview” for *ask.com*, http://dancemusic.about.com/od/remixersproducers/a/PaulVanDykInt_2.htm, (last accessed March 2012).

sounding tones, hip-hop, while still embracing technology as its means, is firmly rooted in the past aesthetically. The basic building blocks of Hip-Hop are samples, mostly from the sixties and seventies. Schloss explains that because of this, “they have distinct timbral qualities that distinguish them from more recent digital recordings... includ[ing] compression and distortion common to analog recording, which is often favourably contrasted with the crispness of digital.”⁵³

Crucially, Schloss sidesteps the canard that the authenticity of these samples lies in their cultural or ethnic backgrounds, focusing instead on what he sees as the real reason hip-hop producers choose certain samples, which is an adherence to “a sort of aesthetic purism: certain musical gestures are valued for aesthetic reasons, and one’s adherence to this aesthetic confers authenticity.”⁵⁴ ‘Newer’ sounding tones and production are to be avoided, the opposite approach of EDM. Even further beyond the pale from a Rockist perspective, live instrumentation is actually frowned upon and viewed as inauthentic in the hip-hop community. Sampling is perhaps the biggest bogeyman for a Rockist ideology, as it suggests achieving a sound without having to do any work to get it. However, Schloss points out that sampling is not “valued because it is convenient, but because it is beautiful.”⁵⁵

The above digression, in addition to further complicating the already knotty intersection of authenticity and technology, illustrates the slippery notion of just what constitutes electronic music, as many Hip-Hop DJs, although they use similar technology to their EDM counterparts, do not view themselves as electronic artists

⁵³ Schloss, *op. cit.*, 71.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

at all, since the sounds they use are taken from a largely pre-electronic era.

Although the shift to digital has been met with considerable disinterest from hip-hop DJs (the work-killing compilation records mentioned above; the cold, clinical sound that jars with the warmth of the analog recordings that is their stock and trade), it has been embraced wholeheartedly by EDM artists. American DJ/producer Brian Transeau (known in the industry as BT) explains that:

One of the most important things now, in making music that's done with technology, is exercising... control. Because you have so many possibilities, just an insane plethora of choices as to how you can manipulate sounds... You just don't have that in linear systems like tape [or, vinyl].

Transeau finishes by offering an important caveat however: that “you have to be careful that you don't go off the deep end.”⁵⁶ While Transeau and others view the advance of DJ technology in positive terms, for others, older, analog, and more hands-on DJ equipment, as well as older analog sounds (this is especially the case in hip-hop), are still the most authentic. For these individuals, “digital technologies are another marker in ...the elimination of human agency, including certain kinds of work, from the production of dance music.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

EDM, like disco before it, does not meet the expectations of Rockist authenticity given its highly mediated performance style. It is one of the main reasons why the genre, and electronic music in general, has typically been viewed as inauthentic. Its

⁵⁶ Unattributed BT Interview at <http://www.chaoscontrol.com/?article=bt>, (last accessed March 2012).

⁵⁷ Farrugia and Swiss, op. cit., 37.

instruments (turntables, synthesizers, laptops, sequencers), although familiar at a casual level, are still of a nature that do not allow for easy understanding of just where the work –where the effort to play the instrument– actually lies. Without the camera behind Steve Angello's turntables, his alleged pre-recorded set would likely have gone unnoticed. And indeed, his response to criticisms was not so much aimed at exonerating himself from the incident in question, but of painting a picture of himself as an authentic DJ who has put in the 'work' required to be allowed to perform it occasionally.

There is no way around the fact that pressing buttons and twiddling knobs can never be as visually dynamic as a guitar held to the sky during a dramatic solo. Perhaps it is because of this that much of a DJ's authenticity has been historically constructed through pre-performance activities like hunting for records and piecing together sets from its yield. But the internet has allowed for the bypassing of this Romanticized crate-digging.

However, Romantic constructions of authenticity certainly link the concept of liveness in Rockist ideology with the theory of work in DJ culture. Both value honesty, integrity, and self-expression in their musicians, and both cultures Romanticize their early days in a manner that casts technology as heralding a loss of innocence of some kind. In both instances, the convenience and creative potential it brings to the table is offset by its ethical questionability. The erosion of the human element in performance is also a commonality. Whether it is trigger drums and auto-tune in rock music or the replacement of hands-on mixing with mouse clicking and dial-turning in DJ performance, the human individual —the very foundation of

authenticity stretching as far back as Descartes— is seen as playing an increasingly minimized role in the performance of popular music. Here we are confronted with the potential inability of a Romantic paradigm to absorb current reality, as technology seems at odds with one of its key tenets. No replacements seem at hand however.

Chapter 4

Authenticity And Race

In the previous chapter, we examined how authenticity is constructed through performance in rock and EDM, coming to the conclusion that despite certain differences in conceptualization, both genres place a high value on live performance as a marker of authenticity. This chapter changes tack and approaches authenticity from a cultural perspective, focusing on the complex notion of race.

I examine how essentialized notions of blackness have become a staple of rock's mythology, despite the putative whiteness of its culture, and how these notions interact with later black forms of popular music, such as disco, and its immediate descendent techno. I also argue that certain choices the creators of techno made in de-emphasising their race may have inadvertantly aided in their music's co-optation by white European artists who effectively (re)introduced the sound to North American audiences; EDM has been essentially white ever since. Throughout this chapter I will be availing myself of Richard Peterson's theory of the misremembered past, Philip Tagg's thoughts on essentialism, and the notion of the Post Soul Aesthetic (PSA) as articulated by Bertram D. Ashe.

Brief History of Race in American Popular Music

If we are to take rock 'n' roll as the beginning of American popular music in the modern sense, some time needs to be spent examining its biracial roots. It is by now a historical commonplace that rock 'n' roll, regardless of who you choose as its first

official proponent, was the product of decades of cultural interaction between American blacks and whites, and their respective musical idioms— blues, R&B, and gospel, and country, or the ‘hillbilly’ music of Appalachia. The fact that black and white musics mixed in the first place, instead of remaining discrete cultural streams, is notable. Barker and Taylor suggest that since North American slaves were forbidden to own drums, they had to instead pick up white instruments like the fiddle and piano (inventing the banjo along the way); the result was that instead of pursuing a separate narrative, “the story of African music in America is one of incessant miscegenation.”⁵⁸ This blend ultimately evolved into “the music we now call American— a unique music that no longer bespoke any other continent.”⁵⁹ The blues, a black form originating in the slave communities of the Mississippi Delta and later moving north (especially to Chicago), is perhaps the most potent formative ingredient of rock ‘n’ roll however. Mark Vinet notes that, “Rock and Roll of the late 1950s relied heavily on 12-bar blues.”⁶⁰

The black contributing factors to rock ‘n’ roll have often been Romanticized through their connection to broader themes of pure artistic expression, and it is arguable that blackness and authenticity still form a powerful mythological nexus in popular music. Rousseau’s theory of the noble savage was certainly more than a few generations old in the 1950s, but I would argue that it may have still coloured the opinions of many Americans during this time; Robert Pattison, from whom I will be drawing extensively in this chapter, argues that “Rousseau dressed the primitive up

⁵⁸ Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking It: The Quest For Authenticity In Popular Music* (New York: W.W. Norton And Company, 2002), 39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁰ Mark Vinet, *Evolution of Modern Popular Music* (Quebec: Wadem Publishing, 2004), 138.

in the sentimental attire it has worn since.”⁶¹ Taking a position similar to this project, Pattison posits that “rock begins in the imposition of white Romantic myth on black Southern music,” and that Romanticism, “originally the province of an educated minority, is now by mutation the ideological currency of the Western masses.”⁶² He does not necessarily agree with this Romantic history, but nonetheless acknowledges its power: “What belief in the reincarnation of Jesus is to a Christian, devotion to this myth of black origins is to the rocker.”⁶³

The primitive is an important aspect of Herder’s philosophy as well. We can recall his idealized Lapp, a Germanic analogue to the dusty old bluesmen celebrated by rock ideology; Lomax’s singing cowboy is another example of the reverence paid to certain mythical and allegedly originary figures. These Romanticized myths of blackness and whiteness, and their connection to notions of authenticity in popular music are worth dwelling upon, as they form the first part of the story that techno would continue thirty years later. Let us take a quick and necessarily incomplete look at the early appearances of race in American popular music.

Perhaps the embodiment of rock ‘n’ roll and its multi-racial heritage, Elvis was a racial mystery people felt they had to solve. The confusion was understandable: his voice was an arresting mix of the vocalisms of both races. This statement has a ring of essentialism to us today, but the notion of innate vocal talents that could only be accessed by certain races was a widely held assumption in the 1950s. The combination of Elvis’s music and race was incredibly important, and his manager

⁶¹ Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarly: Rock Music in The Mirror of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 37.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 32.

Sam Phillips knew it. His infamous quote about making a million dollars if he could find a white boy to sing like his black counterpart is “the most famous remark ever made about rock, made before there was rock.”⁶⁴ This casual remark of white appropriation would prove highly prescient.

These early days of miscegenation would soon become unbalanced, however, with rock becoming whiter with time, even as it acknowledged its debt to the blues. Jimi Hendrix, one of the few black rockers of the era, found himself slighted by white audiences who felt he had abandoned his soul and R&B roots to instead play, as Bangs imagines him saying, “some kinda dirt-bike ride round the rings of Saturn.”⁶⁵ Instead, audiences wanted the blues. Bangs’s imaginary Hendrix on the blues: “... There are times when I strongly suspect, deep down inside, that *I hate the fuckin’ blues...* [but] I know all them ofays don’t think a music show by a black person is their money’s worth unless they get to hear some.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Pattison cites the cover of Springsteen’s *Born to Run*, on which Bruce appears with his black saxophonist Clarence Clemons as another example of mythic blackness: “Bruce leans on Clarence as the disciple whom Jesus loved must have reclined on his master’s breast.”⁶⁷

The above examples stem from essentialized notions of what it means to be black (or white) musically, assumptions Tagg debunks effectively by citing numerous

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁵ Lester Bangs, speaking as Hendrix in *Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, ed. John Morthland (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 300.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 301. That this and the above quote are entirely suppositious on Bangs’s part do not, I think, detract from their overall validity as statements on Hendrix’s career.

⁶⁷ Pattison, op. cit., 38. Clemons’ authenticating presence was most recently used on Lady Gaga’s 2011 album *Born This Way*, where he provides a wailing sax solo over Gaga’s best Springsteen impression. It was his final recording before his death.

examples of supposedly 'black' sounds (blue notes, call and response, syncopated rhythm, improvisation) in white music, and vice versa. In a colorful passage wherein he imagines himself as one of his (theoretically) slave-owning ancestors, Tagg transposes a system wherein white sexual guilt and repression is internalized and projected onto blacks into musical terms. In the mind of Tagg's imaginary ancestor, black people "did all the 'naughty' and 'dirty' things— both in labour and in sex."⁶⁸ And in music, as Tagg finishes his article by worrying that "there is a risk that a similar sort of projection process can come into play when terms like 'Afro-American music' and 'European music' are used without clear definition."⁶⁹ Interestingly, Pattison makes the same connection to the sexual, suggesting that "the myth of the origin of rock operates by the same machinery that generates the myth of white chastity violated by black lust," except "the values have been reversed"— the rape is desired, as "uptight whites are guilty of sterility and impotence in their cultural life."⁷⁰

Similarly, Eric Clapton's much anticipated all-blues album, 1994's *From The Cradle*, is reviewed favourably by allmusic.com until the singer opens his mouth: "At times, his over-emotive singing is painful; he doesn't have the strength to pull off Howlin' Wolf's growl or the confidence to replicate Muddy Waters' assured phrasing."⁷¹ Clapton lacks the 'strength' and 'confidence' of his black source material. White men just can't sing the blues apparently, a common enough

⁶⁸ Philip Tagg, "Open Letter About 'Black Music,' 'Afro American Music,' and 'European Music'", <http://www.tagg.org/articles/opelet.html>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

⁶⁹ Ibid., <http://www.tagg.org/articles/opelet.html>

⁷⁰ Pattison, op. cit., 41.

⁷¹ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Album Review: Eric Clapton; *From The Cradle*" for *allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/album/from-the-cradle-r203316>, (last accessed March 2012).

sentiment– just like they can’t jump in Ron Shelton’s 1992 film starring Woody Harrelson and Wesley Snipes entitled... “White Men Can’t Jump.” While at the time of writing these two examples are over ten years old, it is unlikely that preconceptions as old and entrenched as slavery (if we are to agree with Tagg) are going to fade so quickly, even if they are today manifested in the relatively remote sphere of popular music. White people are still expected to play rock, just as black people are still expected to rap or play the blues, and, because reality generally bears these expectations out, people reverse-engineer a cause-effect relationship that is erroneous. That essentialism is unfortunately still at play in popular music in some form or other should be acknowledged in any discussion of race and authenticity in popular music.

Authenticity and The Misremembered Past

Early twentieth-century ethnographer John Lomax was a hunter of the Romanticized blackness outlined above. When he turned his professional ear to black folk music in 1933, his desire was to find ‘negro music’ that was as untouched by white influence as possible– the primitive expressions of the noble savage. Barker and Taylor cite his autobiography on exactly what it was he was looking for: “the weird, almost uncanny suggestion of turgid, slow moving rivers in African jungles”, and the feeling of being “carried across to Africa... as if I were listening to the tom-toms of savage blacks.” For Lomax, “the music that was... the most authentic, the most black... was the most primitive.”⁷² Lomax soon found his perfect

⁷² Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 15.

subject in Huddie Ledbetter, more widely known as Lead Belly. Separated from white society by the segregation practices of the state prison systems where he was kept with only black inmates (the better to “slough off the white idiom”),⁷³ Lead Belly was a treasure trove of folk songs– many of which are currently housed in the Library of Congress’s Archive of American Folk Song, a fact that further bolsters their aura of originary authenticity within the fabric of American culture. Barker and Taylor explore the idea that Kurt Cobain, in his decision to cover Lead Belly’s “Where Did You Sleep Last Night” during a 1993 performance, was tapping into a reservoir of black authenticity: “what echoes of bygone quests for authenticity can we find in all this?” they wonder.⁷⁴

These bygone authenticities, when scrutinized closely, are seldom really what they seem. In his “Discovering Authenticity,” Rory Crutchfeld examines the ways in which *The Anthology of American Folk Music* claimed its music to be authentic. It was a collection of eighty-four folk recordings, made in the field during the 1920s and 1930s, and released in 1952, “introducing a new generation of young people to a music that seemed especially weird in comparison to the popular music of that period.”⁷⁵ Weird is an interesting word choice, and I doubt taken up by Crutchfeld by accident, as it appears often in the article, once in reference to Greil Marcus’s *Mystery Train* essay “The Old, Weird America.” I think both these men are using the term in its original, non-pejorative sense, in which it means not just strange or unusual but also “claiming preternatural power to control the fate or destiny of

⁷³ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁵ Rory Crutchfeld, “Discovering Authenticity: Harry Smith’s Anthology Of Folk Music,” *Popular Music History* 4 (2009): 6.

human beings.”⁷⁶ The significance of this specialized definition will become clear shortly.

Crutchfeld also cites anthropologist Richard Peterson’s theory of the misremembered past, in which history is misremembered through the inclusionary or exclusionary choices of individuals in the present who are in the business of cultural archivism– men like Harry Smith, compiler of the *American Anthology of Folk Music*, and John Lomax. Describing Lomax’s extensive archive of early twentieth century cowboy ballads, Crutchfeld states that “Lomax reaches back to an illusory past to enhance the authenticity of the present... and in this romanticized depiction of a cultural expression it is possible to see Peterson’s ‘misremembered past’ intruding quite prominently.”⁷⁷ I would argue that the history of black musical expression is shrouded in a similar ‘illusory past.’ Crutchfeld continues, describing the *Anthology’s* music as “ostensibly look[ing] backward to another era, but it is a backward look that is mediated by memory, manipulation, and personal misunderstanding and Romanticism, which invariably alters the image of the past.”⁷⁸ Like Pattison, Crutchfeld acknowledges the power of the myth at the same time as he notes its constructed nature.

The inclusionary and exclusionary choices of archivists like Smith and Lomax alter the way we view the cultures that the songs (allegedly) reflect. Secondly, I would take note of his concept of a Romanticized history, as it coheres with much of what we have said about authenticity. Auslander agrees: describing authenticity in

⁷⁶ William R. Trumble and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3608.

⁷⁷ Crutchfeld, op. cit., 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 9.

rock, he argues that “authenticity is often located in current music’s relationship to an earlier, ‘purer’ moment in a mythic history of the music.”⁷⁹ Pattison argues that this purer moment is not racially ambiguous: “blacks hold up to white civilization the image of purity it lost ‘in the dim, gray dawn of early times.’”⁸⁰ The problem is that entire groups get essentialized in this manner by having the details of their lifestyles and culture smoothed over in favour of a Romanticized view that is more in keeping with present desires than it is with an accurate depiction of the past. Lead Belly for instance, was a repository of white as well as black folk songs, but it is the latter that was highlighted. Other Romantic talking points are that he was a convicted murderer, conjuring up all sorts of ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ notions, and that he spent as a result much of his life in all-black sections of various state penitentiaries. In other words, he was a real, authentic black man kept in an all black environment due to his savage black ways. It is this kind of unsettling essentialism that unfortunately formed much of the cultural bedrock on which the musical histories of early popular music, both black and white, were built, and our Romantic conceptions of cultural authenticity rest on the same dubious foundations.

Essentialism in EDM: House vs. Techno

With all this in mind, let us look now at how race functions in EDM. As we know, its disco origins are thoroughly multi-racial, but mostly black and hispanic. This was of course before its late seventies resurgence through bands like the Bee Gees and movies like *Saturday Night Fever*, which pushed disco into mainstream (read: white)

⁷⁹ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance In A Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 71.

⁸⁰ Pattison, op. cit., 44.

culture, and before individuals like Moroder had introduced their sleeker European model to the world. This white appropriation of a black sound had of course been played out before, when rock 'n' roll ("imitation black rhythm on genuine white hips")⁸¹ returned in the form of Rock after being digested by whites in the U.K. And, as Hendrix can attest, it has remained thoroughly white ever since.

After its day in the sun in white mainstream America, disco returned underground, most notably to the dance scenes in Chicago and Detroit, where it would evolve into the twin styles of house and techno. These two early forms of EDM form the 'old school' of the genre, before it split into its myriad variations and sub-strains. And, like early disco, both styles were developed by non-whites. Frankie Knuckles, the resident DJ at a club called the Warehouse in the early eighties, is generally held to be the main originator of Chicago house, and Detroit Techno emerged out of the work of Kevin Saunderson and Juan Atkins. All three were urban, black males. Despite this commonality, the two strains of music, while perhaps indistinguishable to an outsider, were different in key ways, and where they diverged was in their interaction with black musical tradition. For instance, Chicago House originator Frankie Knuckles referred to the genre he helped create as "Disco's revenge," as the crowd was, again, "overwhelmingly black and gay,"⁸² and Moore calls it disco's "immediate descendent."⁸³ Much of early House music also incorporated disco samples into its very sound: a snatch of strings here, a wailing

⁸¹ Ibid., 33.

⁸² Dorian Lynskey, "History of Dance Music: Frankie Knuckles 'Invents' House Music", in *The Guardian*, June 15th, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/jun/15/frankie-knuckles-invents-house-music?INTCMP=SRCH>, (last accessed Dec. 2011).

⁸³ Allan F. Moore, *Analyzing Popular Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 82.

diva there. As a result, house music had an open dialogue with its (black) disco heritage.

Techno on the other hand took from disco only its white, European elements, the elements that had been added later, during disco's resurgence in the early to mid-seventies– the Kraftwerk futurism (Atkins and May were both avid fans of *Star Trek* and science fiction generally), the synthetic, otherworldly sounds. "The resultant genre," writes Reynolds, "moved at a slightly faster pace and emphasized experimental 'noisy' timbres rather than the remnants of Disco elegance still prominent in house."⁸⁴ Additionally, Juan Atkins and Derrick May (another black originator of Techno), are described by Starr and Waterman as being "obsessed with class mobility, Italian fashions, and European disco recordings, and they developed a form of electronic dance music that featured futuristic imagery, samples from European records, and a dry, minimalist sound, underlain by a subliminal funk pulse."⁸⁵ The 'subliminal' funk pulse is worth noting, an acknowledgement of the ultimate debt to black rhythms that even the most European strain of EDM owes.

One of the more famous, and debated, descriptions of techno came from Derrick May himself, who described the sound as "just like Detroit, a complete mistake. It's like George Clinton and Kraftwerk stuck in an elevator."⁸⁶ A skeptical Sean Albiez says that "this statement has come to be an opaque mantra that is invoked

⁸⁴ Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into The World Of Techno and Rave Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 51.

⁸⁵ Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: The Rock Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 290.

⁸⁶ Sean Albiez, "Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno," *European Journal of American Culture* 24 (2005): 139.

whenever techno history is told.”⁸⁷ Perhaps the reason techno historians prefer to keep things opaque is because once the statement is unpacked into a state of relative transparency, its essentialism is visible for all, as May is basically describing the genre as a misguided union of white and black musical forms.

Kraftwerk was white, and not only white but German, and not only German but players of music that embodied an organized, cold, calculated music, delivered in performance with stone-faced, robotic movements. George Clinton is a black funk icon, embodying Romantic notions of the innate sense of rhythm possessed by all blacks— the “‘natural rhythm’ generated by the world’s primal energy.”⁸⁸ May chooses two stereotypical extremes: on the one side we have a cluster of ideas that include black notions of ‘soul,’ ‘physicality,’ and ‘rhythm’ and on the other white stereotypes of ‘control,’ ‘restraint,’ ‘intellectualism,’ and ‘calculatedness.’ May is purposefully conjuring these essentialist notions here (as well as the idea of their ultimate incompatibility), but in a tongue-in-cheek manner, aware, like Pattison and Crutchfeld, of the power of a mythology, regardless of its incongruence with reality.

Techno and The Post Soul Aesthetic

The theory of the Post Soul Aesthetic (PSA) is a potential antidote to the kinds of essentialized notions of race outlined above. In “Theorizing The Post Soul Aesthetic: An Introduction,” Bertram D. Ashe locates the birth of the PSA in the mid eighties,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁸⁸ Pattison, op. cit., 39.

citing Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) as a "totemic post-soul anthem,"⁸⁹ and Trey Ellis's 1991 essay "The New Black Aesthetic" as its first "full-throated" articulation. This aesthetic can be used to describe the work of black artists who grew up after the Civil Rights movement, blacks for whom the struggles of that era are history, not memory. This is not to say that the past is ignored; one of the main focuses of the PSA is "the peculiar pains, pleasures, and problems of race in the post-Civil Rights movement United States," but the aesthetic also leaves room for an artistic break from black history and "the use of nontraditionally black cultural influences" which result in the "exploration of the boundaries of blackness."⁹⁰

In other words, the post-soul aesthetic (PSA) rejects the assumption that the narrative of black oppression is the only starting point for black art. Sean Albiez writes that before this, "in the soul era black musicians were expected to 'look within', to speak from the black African-American soul rather than entertain 'white' modernity."⁹¹ This is interesting, as to 'look within ' and 'speak from the soul' are also highly Romanticized notions, and keys to authenticity. Indeed, the notion of 'soul' has become the go-to term to describe a sort of universal inner essence that resides at the heart of music that is deemed authentic; to lack 'soul' is almost always a sign of inauthenticity. That 'soul' is seen as some kind of immanent quality of black expression is noteworthy, as it places one of the main avenues to authenticity solely within the province of black artists. The 'soul' era can thus be viewed as one friendly

⁸⁹ Bertram D. Ashe, "Theorizing The Post-Soul Aesthetic: An Introduction," *African American Review* 41 (2007), 609.

⁸⁹ Albiez, op. cit., 132.

⁹⁰ Ashe, op. cit., 611.

⁹¹ Albiez, op. cit., 138.

to essentialist notions of blackness, whereas the ambition of the PSA is to hopefully leave these assumptions behind. Techno is the perfect case study for the PSA. Sean Albiez writes that:

if techno is African American music that cast its eyes and ears elsewhere than the urban ghetto, the church, and the street for creative inspiration, favouring 'alien', 'white' European sonic futurism, then this music is arguably 'post-soul', and apparently occupies a cultural sphere removed from previous gospel- and blues-informed black popular 'musics.'⁹²

Class also had much to do with the aesthetic choices of techno's black progenitors. Saunderson and Atkins were both middle-class and suburban, far removed from the impoverished reality of most of the black Detroit population at the time. Albiez writes that "in the wider Detroit area by the late 1970s, the cultural capital most prized by the middle-class segment of the African American post-soul generation, whether in music or fashion, was European."⁹³ In a similar vein, Christoph Schaub quotes Derrick May on his "resentment of all this ghetto shit that's come out ... the whole myth is, to be urban it has to do with poor people ... [and] the ghetto, but techno was never like that ... it's not about the hard times ... It's about these middle-class kids who never starved..."⁹⁴ Clearly, although techno's creators were black, they were very much cut off from the mainstream realities of being black in Detroit at the time. This put them in a position to better adhere to a Post Soul Aesthetic, one that, instead of dipping into some imagined reservoir of black 'soul,' borrowed from other sources, in this case the genre of science fiction, a decidedly white genre of

⁹² Ibid., 132.

⁹³ Ibid., 135.

⁹⁴ Christoph Schaub, "Beyond The Hood?: Detroit Techno, Underground Resistance, and African American Metropolitan Identity Politics," *Journal of The International Association of Inter-American Studies*, 2 (2009), <http://www.interamerica.de/volume-2-2/schaub/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

literature.

It is worth pointing out at this time that there is a distinct philosophy called ‘Afro-futurism’ that should not be confused with Techno’s separate philosophy. Afro-futurism, which at this time had its major musical proponents in funk and electro, placed a distinct emphasis on afrocentricity in its futuristic aesthetic. As we shall see, this differs significantly from the Post Soul Aesthetic of techno, which, while certainly futuristic, treated the blackness of its creators as merely incidental—although not ignored. In this way, techno was not held hostage by its black origins as other ‘soul’ era forms of black music—like electro—arguably were. This is not to say that a black heritage is completely absent (the ‘subliminal funk pulse’), or that artists like May, Atkins, and Saunderson turned their back on what it means to be black; it simply means that whatever black roots the genre had were not placed front and center as the part of the genre’s *raison d’être*.

Instead, the mythos promulgated by early techno artists like Atkins—especially with fellow techno originator Rick Davis in their proto-techno Cybotron project—was a largely de-racialized paradigm, focusing more on class, and “probing the dystopian/utopian dichotomy of science fiction.”⁹⁵ Here we can see a distinct break from more Afro-centric electro artists. For instance, comparing Cybotron (1981-1985) to the more racially-charged music and politics of their electro contemporary, Zulu Nation leader Akfrikaa Bambaataa, Albiez writes that, “Cybotron, unlike much early Electro, did not want to ‘escape’ through a utopian black space program, but instead looked to the earth-bound urban future and the utopian/dystopian

⁹⁵ Albiez, *op. cit.*, 1.

dichotomy of 'Techno City'- a mythical Detroit based on the extreme class segregation of Lang's *Metropolis*."⁹⁶ Schaub cites Atkins as also alluding to the 'the grid,' the cybernetic city of the popular 1986 film *Tron*, as inspiration for their vision of Techno City. In this way, race can be liquidated through the neutrality of zeroes and ones: "Atkins suggests the key conceptual aim of Cybotron was supra-human transformation through 'interfacing the spirituality of human beings into the cybernetic matrix.'"⁹⁷

This perfectly understandable ambition to cut from a troubled past would have interesting effects. I would argue that as a result of this philosophy (which, while it did not go out of its way to eradicate all aspects of blackness nonetheless decentralized it), early techno aided in its white appropriation, for although techno remained a more or less underground phenomenon in the US, it was taken up by U.K. audiences with relish. The techno, house, and electro music that made it overseas, often known more simply as 'rave' music, morphed in the hands of its adherents into the distinctly British style of acid house, which during the 1980s was "the engine of youth culture in the U.K."⁹⁸

The perceived whiteness of British rave culture would go a long way to inform the perception of EDM once it made its way back to the US, as by the early nineties, what had been an underground scene in the US was suddenly a pop culture phenomenon- but as an overseas import. 'Electronica,' the label the media gave the first raft of British acts, was getting lots of hype. Groups like The Prodigy, the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁸ Joshua Clover, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This To Sing About* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 54.

Chemical Brothers, Orbital, and Fatboy Slim were heralded as the next big thing in North American popular music. Although the music of these artists was a long way from techno (it had been ten years after all), they were all clearly indebted to its arrival on British shores in the mid eighties as much as they were to their own native sources of Euro-techno. Neil Strauss sums things up succinctly: writing with considerable hindsight in 1999, he explains that “American youth had just begun to wake up to the electronic dance music —techno— that the British had appropriated from the Chicago and Detroit club scenes.”⁹⁹ There was no doubt that techno had both found a much larger audience in the U.K. than it ever enjoyed in the US, and had elements added to it that suddenly made it palatable to North American audiences once it was reintroduced. And so, “having started out as a musical practice with a foundation in both African-American audiences and musical traditions, techno was now most appreciated by white youth who perceived it as a European form of cultural expression.”¹⁰⁰ This sense of ur-European-ness is a quietly but generally-held assumption. However, to some it was not lost that “what was happening to techno on a regional, national and global level was perceived as just another exploitation of an African-American musical form.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, by the end of the nineties, the notion that EDM was a European music was taken for granted, often due to the simple fact that most of the main acts and DJs were indeed British, with a

⁹⁹ Neil Strauss, “The Pop Life; After ‘Go’, Moby Went” in *The New York Times*, June 9th, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/09/arts/the-pop-life-after-go-moby-went.html?scp=1&sq=moby%20play%20review&st=cse>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Schaub, op. cit., <http://www.interamerica.de/volume-2-2/schaub/>

¹⁰¹ Ibid., <http://www.interamerica.de/volume-2-2/schaub/>

smattering of other European countries, notably Germany and France.¹⁰²

This notion, that Europe is the birthplace of EDM, despite its black American roots, has been relatively enshrined. Ed Montano, in an article examining the EDM scene in Sydney, analyzes the ways in which Australia perpetuates a self-imposed opinion of itself as 'behind' other cities and countries —most notably Britain— in the EDM scene. He identifies "Britain as one 'authentic' source of origin for dance music culture."¹⁰³ One could simply view this being 'behind' as a matter of geography, but Montano makes the interesting point that with the advent of the internet, the notion of any kind of 'delay' in the transmission of culture is effectively removed— and yet the self-identification of EDM being 'behind' in Australia continues. It is at this point that the importance of myth becomes clear, as well as the glaring omission of Detroit or Chicago or any notion of blackness in the official history of EDM. It is the massive late eighties raves and warehouse parties of Manchester and Sheffield that form this history, for in Australia, Berlin, Ibiza, everywhere, not the black underground scenes of Chicago and Detroit. "Despite the fact that, in the mid 1980s, techno has been 'invented' by African American middle class youth in Detroit, it has been received by a US-American mass audience mostly as a White European musical genre."¹⁰⁴

Another complicating factor that seems to make it difficult for blackness to resonate in EDM is the interesting discrepancy between Romantic constructions of

¹⁰² Albiez makes a case elsewhere for France being the birthplace of Electronica.

¹⁰³ Ed Montano, "The Sydney Dance Music Scene and The Global Diffusion of Contemporary Club Culture," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 4 (2009), 48, <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/TfC/article/view/1059/1062>, (last accessed March. 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Schaub, op. cit., <http://www.interamerica.de/volume-2-2/schaub/>

authenticity, with its emphasis on artistic individuality, and soul-oriented notions of black authenticity, which turn instead on community and a sense of shared narrative and experience. Albiez suggests that techno's "solitary musical production [and] creative individualism... does not conform to the conventions of black musical expression."¹⁰⁵ Running with this idea, a theory could be advanced, perhaps, that turns on this seemingly profound impasse. Since the advent of rock 'n' roll blackness has been perhaps the most potent signifier of authenticity. We can observe this in the vaunted place that early folk singers like Lead Belly, Muddy Waters, or B.B. King have been granted by ethnomusicologists and the public alike. Pattison writes that "within ten years of Elvis's legendary recording session at Sun Records... the elderly bluesmen who had thought to live their days out in ragged obscurity suddenly found themselves objects of white veneration...," and that, "no rock history, however humble, would be complete without a confession of black obligation."¹⁰⁶ Aided by the deep-seated white assumptions alluded to by Tagg —themselves an extension of Rousseau's noble savage archetype— and given a nostalgic haze by Peterson's theory of the misremembered past, the black folk artist, through their access to some kind of ur-human 'soul,' is as close to a holy grail of authenticity as we are to find.

Atkins et al chose to look forward rather than backward however, working within a distinctly post-soul aesthetic. As a result, in addition to techno remaining underground in the US, its origins remained racially neutral, or more specifically, white by default. When electronic music suddenly 'arrived' on American shores in

¹⁰⁵ Albiez, op. cit., 144.

¹⁰⁶ Pattison, op. cit., 35.

the early nineties via white DJs like Paul Oakenfold and Paul Van Dyk and white acts like Orbital, Fatboy Slim, and the Chemical Brothers, the originary shade of EDM was effaced. From this perspective, the otherwise completely understandable decision of techno's originators to remain unfettered by their racial identities and work within a post-soul aesthetic, ended up costing them ownership of their genre in the popular imagination.

Conclusion

If techno is an example of white co-optation of a black sound, then it must be noted that given its status as a PSA music, its co-optation was less profound than, say, the blues and r&b that ended up forming the kernel of authenticity for white rock. Since techno was largely emptied of its racial signifiers to begin with, the shift in perception was easy. I will conclude this section with another example of white appropriation of black musics. In 1999, white musician Richard Melville Hall (known professionally as Moby) released his album *Play*, which skyrocketed him to the forefront of the post-techno electronica scene in North America after a number of its tracks appeared in various commercials and films. Aside from its canonical value, the album is also noteworthy for featuring genuine Lomax field recordings on a number of its 18 tracks, taken from the album *Sounds of the South: A Musical Journey From the Georgia Sea Islands to the Mississippi Delta*.¹⁰⁷ On the album, scratchy original recordings of Vera Hall, Bessie Jones, and Boy Blue —names all but forgotten save by blues academics and enthusiasts— are married to state-of-the-art

¹⁰⁷ Moby, *Play* (V2 Records), 1999.

electronics, tinkling new-age pianos, and ambient synth washes. It was well received by critics and fans. The album's use of black sounds as a means to gain "a cachet of authenticity entirely borrowed" was not overlooked, however.¹⁰⁸ Richard Lieby, a writer for the *Washington Post*, highlighted the irony of having Moby's track "Find My Baby" (which features a recording called "Joe Lee's Rock" by a black blues singer who went by the name of Boy Blue), play in an American Express commercial featuring black golf superstar Tiger Woods. Lieby focuses on the noteworthy fact that none of the singers from the recordings Moby samples have received royalties from the triple-platinum *Play*. However, he also notes that as the recordings can be accessed through the Library of Congress, they are technically in the public domain.¹⁰⁹ Either way, the specter of appropriation is clearly present in any discussion of this aspect of the album, and Moby's techniques at the very least raise all kinds of questions about his motives and the relationship between modern EDM and popular music's biracial history.

Barker and Taylor are immediately skeptical, pointing out that the samples are devoid of irony, and that as a result "the strong emotions evoked by the original recordings partially survived translation into a new environment– thus the songs have an impact that far exceeds what we would normally expect from the clinical production and straightforward songwriting evidenced elsewhere on the album."¹¹⁰ We can take from this quote that the authors view Moby's earnest referencing as a

¹⁰⁸ Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 320.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Lieby, "Moby's Remixes of The Blues Make The Ads While The Originals Don't Make The Cut" for *Bluesnews.com*, August 9th 2000, <http://www.blues.co.nz/news/article.php?id=341>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

¹¹⁰ Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 320.

crutch, a desperate grasp as opposed to an homage. The album's review on popular music site Pitchfork remarks similarly that "Moby's flaw is that he comes across as too genuine— too wholesome."¹¹¹ Barker and Taylor back up their assessment with an interview quote from Moby himself where he explains that "I would say in my defense... that I was quite genuine and naïve in my approach and am not being so presumptuous to lay claim to any aspect of the African-American experience."¹¹²

While Moby may not lay claim to the experiences of his sampled vocalists, there is no doubt that he is laying claim to their authenticity. 'Moby's success came about,' argue Barker and Taylor, "because he clothed dance music—which had been since the advent of disco the most transparently and gleefully inauthentic of musical genres—in the trappings of authenticity."¹¹³ Due to his lack of irony, Moby is implicit, however naïvely, in continuing the mythology outlined above by Pattison and Tagg.

¹¹¹ Brent Dicriszenzo, "Album Review: Moby; *Play*" for *pitchfork.com*, June 1st, 1999, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/5344-play/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

¹¹² Barker and Taylor, op. cit., 322.

¹¹³ Ibid., 322.

Final Conclusion

This project has been an attempt to gain a better understanding of a concept that has been foundational to our assessment of popular music for the last fifty years. Despite its familiarity, and the readiness we often display in invoking it, it remains a mysterious entity. Authenticity is versatile and multi-faceted, and we began this project with the assumption that understanding how it is constructed in a given situation is more important than chasing after some kind of universal definition against which artists should be judged. In short, authenticity is ideologically constructed in all its instances. And yet there is no shortage of those who argue fruitlessly over which artists are or are not authentic. I think part of the problem is that in its most basic form, the ideology that fuels authenticity is one that runs so deep we often take for granted that we are using it as a metric of worth at all: Romanticism. The touring rockstar/auteur is a reimagining of the Byronic hero; the expectations of sincerity and originality that we hold our artists up to are as old as Rousseau's *Confessions*; and the suspicion of technology has of course remained unbroken. Another reason our Romanticist assumptions remain in the background is that when they are invoked, they often go by different names: liveness, 'work,' and even unspoken racial essentialisms. One of the intentions of this project has been to draw these and other related threads together under the common banner of Romanticism, using as a case study one of the most allegedly inauthentic genres out there: EDM.

We started long before EDM however, with a look in Chapter One at the philosophical currents that contributed to today's conception of authenticity, long before it was explicitly articulated. Drawing from Descartes, Rousseau, and Byron, we pieced together

the main attributes of modern authenticity: honesty, sincerity, originality, and individuality. While it is spurious to attribute the birth of a concept as important as authenticity to a mere three men, I feel that the ideas put forward by them, especially Rousseau and Byron, are touchstones seminal enough to stand on their own. Perhaps the most important part of this chapter dealt with how this messy collection of idea(l)s coalesced into the ideology of Rockism sometime during the late 1960s. It is at this point that authenticity really becomes a matter of debate in popular music, and it also marks the explicit continuation of the Romantic tradition of the artist. Dylan's discovery of Rimbaud and Keats and subsequent shift to more self-expressive work; the notion of popular music as art rather than entertainment brought about by seminal recordings like *Sgt. Pepper's*; the enshrinement of live performance as the ultimate site of transmission of an artist's soul, psyche, vision, or essence: all of these essentially Romantic notions took root in the popular imagination, growing into the concept we know today as authenticity. Modern popular music's link to longer-standing artistic tradition is an integral piece of the puzzle, as it highlights authenticity's age, which in turn sheds light on why the concept is a term of such reverence, sometimes invoked in quasi-mystical ways.¹ In Rockism, the search for authenticity was rediscovered as an almost instinctual appetite for Romantic artistic ideals.

In Chapter Two we looked at disco, which provided popular music discourse with authenticity's nemesis. Among other detractions, disco was often described in terms of its 'dead' or 'lifeless' sounds, in striking contrast to the liveness of rock. And yet it became incredibly popular, with many a rock fan surely nurturing a closeted appreciation of the

¹ Susan Fast's Led Zeppelin fan interviews in *In The Houses of The Holy* provides fine examples of this.

odd disco track. Fear of what else might lurk in this proverbial closet was no doubt part of what led to disco's vilification in the eyes of male hetero-normative rock culture. The sentiment behind the Disco Sucks movement was the perfect crystallization of the aesthetic and social hang-ups of the US in the late twentieth century. By articulating so forcefully what was deemed inauthentic, the disco backlash of the late seventies helped to inversely define what was perceived as its opposite; reflected in the angry fires of the Comiskey Park disco destruction was the face of authenticity itself. As the most explicit manifestation of alleged inauthenticity in popular music history, as well as the not insignificant fact that it prefigured all subsequent EDM, disco and what it represented is important to any discussion of authenticity in popular music.

After establishing these two poles we looked in Chapter Three at a specific manifestation of authenticity: performance. And not simply performance either, but its ideological extension, liveness. As a fully mediated music, EDM's performative aspect differs greatly from traditional Rockist approaches. The visual aspect of performance, worshipped in Rockist circles, is assumed from the start in EDM culture, and not condemned to histrionic confirmation. While this does not mean fakery will be tolerated (as we saw in the case of Steve Angello, or the Pac-Man-players of Montano's imagination), it does mean that it is more easily perpetrated. However, regardless of how often it actually happens, the possibility of fakery looms large for Rockists, an overcompensation for the fact that rock is deeply enmeshed with technology as well. Additionally, the traditional visual vocabulary of rock performance does not apply to music created with non-mechanical, computer based instruments. Button pressing and knob twiddling do not make for a great or convincing performance. In EDM performance

is assumed, not demanded. This is from an audience perspective, however; DJs and other electronic artists are acutely aware of the amount of work that goes into a performance, and how it varies given the technology being used. The importance of visual human effort was for a long time the cornerstone of performative authenticity, and as the genre with perhaps the smallest allotment left of the ever-shrinking space for the human touch, EDM is a fascinating case study of authenticity. Equally fascinating are the similarities these allegedly opposing genres share.

Much of this common ground is found in Romanticism, and in Chapter Four we looked at another specific example of authenticity that is often clad in Romantic garb: race. To overstate things only slightly, the black man, for rock music, is the pinnacle of authenticity. Indeed, to be black is perhaps the oldest tributary of authenticity we know. This is through the Romantic essentializing of the black man that is as old as Rousseau's noble savage and as recent as Clarence Clemons' posthumous sax solos on the latest Lady Gaga release. This Romanticization of race is extremely powerful, and is arguably still with us today. For instance, we appreciated Tagg's in-depth debunking of the tendency, but were then forced to appreciate how successfully Kurt Cobain turned it to his advantage in his stirring cover of Lead Belly's famous "In The Pines." Our main point was that the black folk artists captured on tape earlier in the century came to be mythologized as primal, originary, and innocent—the last of which leads to a guarantee of sincerity and honesty; all crucial characteristics of authenticity. As a result, blackness has served as a reservoir of authenticity that rock artists have continually drawn from.

At this point we returned to the soul-derived sounds of early disco, and highlighted how its stars and audience became whiter as it gained mainstream popularity in the mid

to late seventies, and how its shift in sound and hue was aided by the originary template's adoption by Europeans— artists like Kraftwerk and Giorgio Moroder. Notably, the sounds of this new Eurodisco sound were derided as 'soulless,' even by disco fans, and at this point it became necessary for us to unpack the notion of soul, which we did through the theory of the Post Soul Aesthetic as laid out by Bertram D. Ashe. Using early techno as a case study we examined how race operated in the highly technologized and fully PSA setting of EDM, coming to the conclusion that there is a good chance the genre's reintroduction to North America as a cultural product of Europe —instead of the black urban center it actually sprang from— in the early nineties has much to do with its PSA origins.

Whether it is the gravelly-voiced delivery of a turn of the century bluesman or the expectations of liveness that rock musicians are beholden to, Romantic notions of honesty and sincerity are key to modern constructions of authenticity. In EDM, where technology is the basic mode of musical creation, the expectations of these Romantic ideals surprisingly figure no less. Although EDM artists often shroud themselves in anonymity, using obscure technological names and even masks while performing, their integrity as individual artists who are responsible for their creative output is just as important to their authenticity as it is for Rock musicians. DJs must still 'work,' must still interact with their instruments in a meaningful way, even if those interactions are largely —if not completely— hidden from view via technological mediation. And just as rock artists strive for authenticity, some DJs worry that the recent technological advances to their instruments are in danger of turning them into what their detractors have been

saying all along: button pressers, knob twiddlers, ‘artists’ who let their instruments do all the work. Insincerity, dishonesty; these are the bogeymen of both Rock and EDM. So whether you’re strumming an acoustic guitar in a local coffee house or mashing mp3s in a nightclub, expect to be caught up in the politics of authenticity.

It is likely that outside of academia, authenticity will continue to be viewed as an innate characteristic instead of the ideological construction it is. I have tried throughout this project to keep this in mind, even as I ultimately side with the current academic consensus. It is for this reason that I spent the first half of the project exploring the origins and development of the concept, as I feel its roots in Romanticism really is the foundation of what the average person means when they ascribe authenticity to a given artist. The germ of this project arose out of the countless references to EDM as inauthentic (or some variant thereof) that stud the popular debate. Initially I felt that EDM was just as authentic as rock-based musics purport themselves to be, just in a different way. And while I found the first part of this statement to be true, I also found that despite their seemingly insurmountable differences, the two genres share much in common regarding their constructions of the concept. That the linking factor has much to do with Romanticism is in one way unsurprising in that the notions that feed into it—honesty, sincerity, individuality—are the basis of what we consider good in society, and EDM and rock should be no exception. More surprising is the fact that Romantic ideals remain prominent in the former, a genre whose mode of creation and expression is so heavily indebted to technology— which, as we have seen, is viewed as potentially harmful to honesty and sincerity via its alienating mediation. That EDM takes technology on board as a given, yet retains an emphasis on these Romantic ideals is, I think, what makes

the genre such an interesting case study for an examination of authenticity in popular music.

In closing, it is worth remembering that the tension technology introduces into debates on authenticity highlights larger inconsistencies within Romanticism itself. As a philosophy articulated mainly by British, French, and German writers over a span of over one hundred years, expectations of total cohesion will obviously go unfulfilled. For us, this is nowhere more apparent than in the contradictory emphases that Romanticism places on individualism on the one hand (as espoused by Byron and Rousseau), and the collective, nationalistic interpretation of German philosophers like Herder on the other. Perhaps the rock band is the perfect compromise between the two, a collective that is also home to strong individual artistic personalities. Or perhaps not; what is clear, however, is that in our enthusiasm to embrace the Romantic heritage of our current debates on authenticity, certain tensions must be acknowledged. The reality is that Romanticism, taken in its entirety, is a multifaceted and amorphous body of philosophical thought, and I would like to leave the reader with the assurance that I do not view the ideas put forth in this project as the definitive interpretation of Romanticism, or authenticity for that matter; it is simply one version of events, one way of seeing things— a way that is, I think, valid at the very least. Herder comes as close as anyone I have discovered to hitting upon a unified theory of Romanticism. It revolves around the profundity of language itself, and I will leave the reader with his thoughts: “Language is as much the embodiment of a *Volk*’s ‘soul’ or character, as it

is the expression of an individual's unique personality."² This statement brings together the collective and the individual under the shared banner of language, and if we remove Herder's divisive nationalism, we are left, I think, with an elegant solution to Romanticism's tensions.

² Barnard, *op. cit.*, 58.

Bibliography

- Abrams, M.H. and Greenblatt, Stephen, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000.
- Adler, Hans and Koepke, Wulf eds. *A Companion To The Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*. Rochester [New York]: Camden House, 2009.
- Adorno, Theodor W. "On Popular Music." 437-470 in *Essays On Music*. Ed. Richard Leppert. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Albiez, Sean. "Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno." *European Journal Of American Culture*. 42 (2005), 131-152.
- Angello, Steve. "Statement." March. 2nd, 2010.
<http://steveangelo.wordpress.com/2010/03/02/steve-angelo-statement/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Ankeny, Jason. "Kraftwerk: Biography." *Allmusic.com*,
<http://allmusic.com/artist/kraftwerk-p4706/biography> (last accessed Dec. 2011).
- Ashe, Bertram D. "Theorizing The Post-Soul Aesthetic: An Introduction." *African American Review* 41 (2007): 609-623.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance In A Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Barker, Hugh and Taylor, Yuval. *Faking It: The Quest For Authenticity in Popular Music*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002.
- Barnard, F. M. *Herder's Social And Political Thought: From Enlightenment To Nationalism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Bozza, Anthony, and Slash. *Slash*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.
- Brackett, David. *The Pop Rock and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Caramanica, Jon. "Critic's Notebook: The 'Idol' Season: Sharper, and More Stars." *New York Times*, 26th May 2011:

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/27/arts/television/american-idol-completes-its-10th-season.html?_r=1&src=recg (last accessed Dec. 2011).

Chaos Control Digizine. "BT Interview." 2011,
<http://www.chaoscontrol.com/bt/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

Clover, Joshua. *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This To Sing About*.
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Cress, Donald A., ed. *Rene Descartes: Meditations On First Philosophy*.
Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Crutchfeld, Rory. "Discovering Authenticity: Harry Smith's Anthology of Folk Music." *Popular Music History* 4.1 (2009): 5-21.

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on The Method and Principles of Philosophy*,
4th Edition. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Dicriscenzo, Brent. "Moby; *Play*." *Pitchfork.com*, June 1st, 1999,
<http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/5344-play/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

Eder, Bruce, "Review: *Bob Dylan*," Allmusic.com:
<http://allmusic.com/album/bob-dylan-r2289590/review> (last accessed Dec. 2011).

Erlewine, Stephen Thomas, "Bob Dylan: Biography." Allmusic.com:
<http://allmusic.com/artist/bob-dylan-p4147/biography> (last accessed Dec. 2011).

Erlewine, Stephen Thomas. "Eric Clapton; *From The Cradle*." *Allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/album/from-the-cradle-r203316>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

Farrugia, Rebekah and Swiss, Thomas. "Tracking The DJs: Vinyl Records, Work, and The Debate Over New Technologies." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17 (2005): 30-44.

Fast, Susan. *In The Houses Of The Holy: Led Zeppelin and The Power of Rock Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Faulk, Barry J. *British Rock Modernism 1967-1977*. Burlington (VT): Ashgate, 2010.

- Fikentscher, Kai. *You Better Work!: Underground Dance Music in New York*. Conneticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000.
- Frith, Simon. *Facing The Music*. New York: Pantheon, 1988.
- Frith, Simon. "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music." *Media Culture Society* 8 (1986): 263-279.
- Frith, Simon et al. eds., *The Cambridge Companion To Pop and Rock*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Garofalo, Reebee. *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA*. Upper Saddle River [New Jersey]: Pearson Education Inc., 2002.
- Gittins, Ian. "Air: Roundhouse, London." *The Guardian*, Feb. 28th, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/feb/28/air-roundhouse-review>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Gracyk, Theodore. *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Greene, Paul D. and Procello, Thomas. eds. *Wired For Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*. Middletown [Conneticut]: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.
- Harrison, Andrew. "A History of Dance Music: 1975: Kraftwerk Appear on Tomorrow's World." *The Guardian*, June 15th, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/jun/15/kraftwerk-tomorrows-world> (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Highsmith, Patricia. *The Boy Who Followed Ripley*. New York: Penguin, 1980.
- Keightley, Keir. "Reconsidering Rock" 109-143 in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. eds. Simon Frith et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Lester, Paul. "Gold Panda: XOYO, London." *The Guardian*, March 3rd, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/mar/03/gold-panda-review>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Lieby, Richard. "Moby's Remixes of The Blues Make The Ads While The Originals Don't Make The Cut." *BluesNews.com*, August 9th, 2000, <http://www.blues.co.nz/news/article.php?id=341>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).

- Lindholm, Charles. *Culture And Authenticity*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Lynskey, Dorian. "A History of Dance Music: Frankie Knuckles 'Invents' House Music." *The Guardian*, June 15th, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/jun/15/frankie-knuckles-invents-house-music?INTCMP=SRCH>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music Gender And Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Molloy, Tim. "Grammys Honour Whitney Houston: We've Had a Death In Our Family," *TheWrap.com*, Feb. 12th, 2012, <http://www.thewrap.com/tv/article/grammys-begin-houston-tribute-weve-had-death-our-family-35324?page=0,1> (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Montano, Ed. "The Sydney Dance Music Scene and The Global Diffusion of Contemporary Club Culture." *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 4 (2009): 43-60, <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/TfC/article/view/1059/1062>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Montano, Ed. "'How Do You Know He's Not Playing Pac-Man, While He's Supposed To Be DJing?': Technology, Formats, and The Digital Future of DJ Culture." *Popular Music* 29 (2010): 397-416.
- Moore, Allan F., ed. *Analyzing Popular Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Morthland, John. ed. *Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*. New York: Anchor Books, 2003.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One is*. (London): Penguin, 1992.
- Pattison, Robert. *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in The Mirror of Romanticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Perone, James E. *Mods, Rockers, And The Music of The British Invasion*. Westport [Conn.]: Praeger, 2009.
- Radcliffe, Joe. *This Business Of Disco*. New York: Billboard Books, 1980.
- Peterson, Richard. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

- Rapp, Tobias. *Lost and Sound: Berlin, Techno, and The Easyjet Set*. Frankfurt: Innervisions, 2010.
- Reynolds, Simon. *Generation Ecstasy: Into The World of Techno and Rave Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. New York: Random House (The Modern Library of The World's Best Books).
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Collected Writings of Rousseau: Discourse on The Sciences and Arts and Polemics*. Lebanon [NH]: University Press of New England, 2006.
- Sanneh, Kelefa. "The Rap Against Rockism" in *The New York Times*, Oct. 31st, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/31/arts/music/31sann.html?_r=3&scp=7&sq=kelefa%20sanneh&st=cse (last accessed Jan. 2012).
- Schaub, Christoph. "Beyond The Hood?: Detroit Techno, Underground Resistance, and African American Metropolitan Identity Politics," *Journal of The International Association of Inter-American Studies* 2 (2009), <http://www.interamerica.de/volume-2-2/schaub/>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Schloss, Joseph, G. *Making Beats The Art of Sample-Based Hip Hop*. Conneticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.
- Sendra, Tim. "Review: Swedish House Mafia; *Until One*." *Allmusic.com*, <http://allmusic.com/album/until-one-r2021895/review>, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Shuker, Roy. *Understanding Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Slomowicz, Ron. "Ferry Corsten Interview." *About.com*, http://dancemusic.about.com/od/remixersproducers/a/FerryCorstenInt_2.htm, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Slomwicz, Ron. "Paul Van Dyk Interview." *About.com*, http://dancemusic.about.com/od/remixersproducers/a/PaulVanDykInt_2.htm, (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Starr, Larry, and Watermann, Christopher. *American Popular Music: The Rock Years*. London: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- Strauss, Neil. "The Pop Life; After 'Go', Moby Went." *The New York Times*, June 9th, 1999,
<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/09/arts/the-pop-life-after-go-moby-went.html?scp=18&sq=moby%20play%20review&st=cse>,
 (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Straw, Will. "Dance Music." 158-176 in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Tagg, Philip. "Open Letter About 'Black Music,' 'Afro American Music,' and 'European Music.'" <http://www.tagg.org/articles/opelet.html>,
 (last accessed Feb. 2012).
- Tawa, Nicholas. *Supremely American: Popular Song In The 20th Century*. Lanham [Maryland]: Scarecrow Press, 2005.
- Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Hanover [NH]: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.
- Trumble, William R., and Stevenson, Angus, eds. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Unterberger, Richie. "The Beatles: Biography." *Allmusic.com*,
<http://allmusic.com/artist/the-beatles-p3644> (last accessed Dec. 2011).
- Vine, Richard, "A History of Dance Music: Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love'" in *The Gaurdian*, June 15th, 2011,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/jun/15/donna-summer-i-feel-love>, (last accessed March 2012).
- Vinet, Mark. *Evolution of Modern Popular Music*. Quebec: Wadem Publishing, 2004.
- Walser, Robert. *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Hanover [NH]: Wesleyan University Press, 1993.
- Ward, Ed; Stokes, Geoffrey; and Tucker, Ken. *Rock Of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock & Roll*. New York: Rolling Stone Press/Summit Books, 1986.
- Wokler, Robert. *Rousseau: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Discography

Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are A ' Changin'* . Columbia, 1964.

The Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*. Capitol, 1966.

The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*. Apple Corps, 1967.

Bruce Springsteen, *Born To Run*. Sony Music Distribution, 1975.

Bee Gees, *Saturday Night Fever [Original Movie Soundtrack]*. Polydor, 1977.

DJ Shadow, *Endtroducing*. Mo Wax Records, 1996.

Moby, *Play*. V2 Records, 1999.

Rage Against The Machine, *The Battle of Los Angeles*. Epic Records, 1999.

Stephen Malkmus, *Stephen Malkmus*. Matador Records, 2001.