

“You might stop the party but you can't stop the future”

(Tribe 1992)

Introduction

Rave culture started as a successful utopian pursuit, then descended into attacks on it that came from a dystopian quarter, only to eventually rediscover that utopia again.

Contemporary rave cultures often look back to a “golden age” of raves.

“Yearning for a return to the golden age of dance music, the characters converge on a ‘retro-rave’ called ‘Return to Dreamland’” (Repeating Beats 2023)

This completely misses the point. Rave culture is a radical counterpoint to one of colonialisms presiding ideologies. The idea of linear history. Rave culture and its music operates outside of the time-stream as we know it. Its radical nature is a usurpation of the imposition of the idea of progress and time itself. The nostalgia emerged after the Criminal Justice Act of the early 1990's initiated a process of the colonisation of forms of resistance that threatened an establishment that had emerged out of a history of colonisation. However the end of the Cold War marked the end of a 500 to 600 year period that started with colonialism's “age of discovery”. Colonialism had had its time, it was dying. Rave culture, and its music and dancers, had originally rediscovered paradise. Then it was lost. But this time the historical sweep of the phenomenon of rave culture had dominance and paradise was about to be rediscovered again.

Discussion

“Now that machines have become such a dominant part of our environment...we are beginning to become aware of the need for rediscovering our bodies, which have become atrophied by dependence on machines and from which machines have alienated us” (Young 2002:42)

Alexis and others dismiss dance music culture as a “youth cult” (Alexis 2003) (Petridis 2003), a tendency that has dogged the phenomenon since its inception. Yet the genre's roots and influences go much deeper than some flash in the pan youth “phase”. From the late 1980's, up until around 2006, new forms of music quickly evolved into sophisticated forms. The modern forms of ancient dance arose as the Cold War ended. This shifting of the ages was reflected in a futuristic sound that was enthusiastic about the future after what had been a dark time. As a sample in an early rave track opined.

“Let's just say its the end of an age, Time to start building a new one” (Source unknown)

Yet rave culture was fated to encounter a problem that had dogged humanity since the time of Cortés. Colonialism.

A Dying Colonialism is a 1959 book by Frantz Fanon that provides an account of how, during the Algerian Revolution, the people of Algeria changed centuries-old cultural patterns and embraced certain ancient cultural practices long derided by their colonialist oppressors as “primitive,” in order to destroy those oppressors. This is what happened with rave culture, if the dancers knew it or not. Rave began to resurrect ancient tribal practices. People were getting more in contact with their bodies, nature and spirituality.

“I'd imagine a lot of early tribal ceremonies involved a beat not too similar to a constant four-four and various polyrhythms and things like that [...] I suppose it's the same as a shaman getting energy from the people he's dealing with or a priest channeling that communal energy. Something like that ... [but] it's just a fucking disco, in 'it !?” (Weatherall 2020)

Australian ravers were drawn towards practices more akin to Aboriginal Dreamtime or Walkabout (Luckman 2003). Paradise was being rediscovered again. Paradise was being wrestled out of the clutches of a dying colonialism.

“I think there's a sense of the spirit of the land. This land we now call Australia has a real spirit to being stomped. And if you've ever watched Aboriginal dance, it's very much about stomping the earth ... if you watch techno ... it's very much about stomping the earth ... [it] brings energy into the body, Earth energy into the body.” (Haebich & Taylor 2011)

Where previously tribal and indigenous people's had been rejected by colonialism, now descendants of the former perpetrators of that colonialism were bonding with them.

“Dance in this instance, typified by Earthdream, presents an active and participatory form of engagement with Aboriginal people and provides a space – both physically (via dance) and virtually (via internet dialogue) – where protest is staged and difference is celebrated.” (Haebich & Taylor 2011)

The music of the time bought in ingenious influences such as dance orientated remixes of tracks recorded by Yothu Yindi (Yindi 1992) who were a band made up of Australian Aborigines.

As rave culture became more prominent through the 1990's there was an increasing reaction from this dying colonialism. A colonialism that had actually colonised its own people and land before going out and colonising Africa and the Americas.

“Recent critical theorists place emphasis on how society appropriates subversive groups through inclusion, turning resistance against itself, pointing out that forms of control are far less visible due to operating on a cultural level. Domination, they argue, occurs through indirect cultural colonization masking its true origins making it harder to see.” (Conner 2020)

Rave culture was a reaction and counterpoint to the more sinister types of colonisation that people in “western” countries have been subjected to. Far from being isolated to the America's and Africa, as reflected in the work of writers such as Franz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, some more hidden and controversial aspects

of western culture, such as so called Ritual Abuse, as well as the “Mental Health System” exhibit qualities remarkably similar to what African and America’s people were subjected to; such as the use of force to attempt to change belief systems.

“She felt to me like an occupied person, her mind and body colonized by violent and terrifying others” (Badouk Epstein 2018)

“Fanon rebelled against the dual condemnation that affected the patients held in mental asylums, as mental patients and as colonized people, with a dual expropriation of rights. He ended up leaving the psychiatric hospital and joined the National Liberation Front of Algeria. For Basaglia, Fanon became “the model for an anti-institutional career of psychiatry, meaning its self-destruction as a subject of knowledge and its reconstruction as witness to the excluded, oppressed, and colonized state of the mental patient.” (Serapioni 2019)

So this rave revolution initiated a reaction from the kind of culture and society that had originally spawned the entire colonial era. The Criminal Justice Act. The only piece of legislation to detail the nature of a piece of music with its “repetitive beats” definitions.

“‘music’ includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats.” (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994)

The act was widely seen as an infringement of civil liberties (Goodman 1995). It was also seen as an attack on indigenous religious and spiritual practices (Green 2010), as well as an attempt to suppress spiritual healing practices and realisations that might weaken the status quo. Resistance music was produced (see Figure 1 & 2).



Fig 1: Autechre. *Anti EP* [recording]

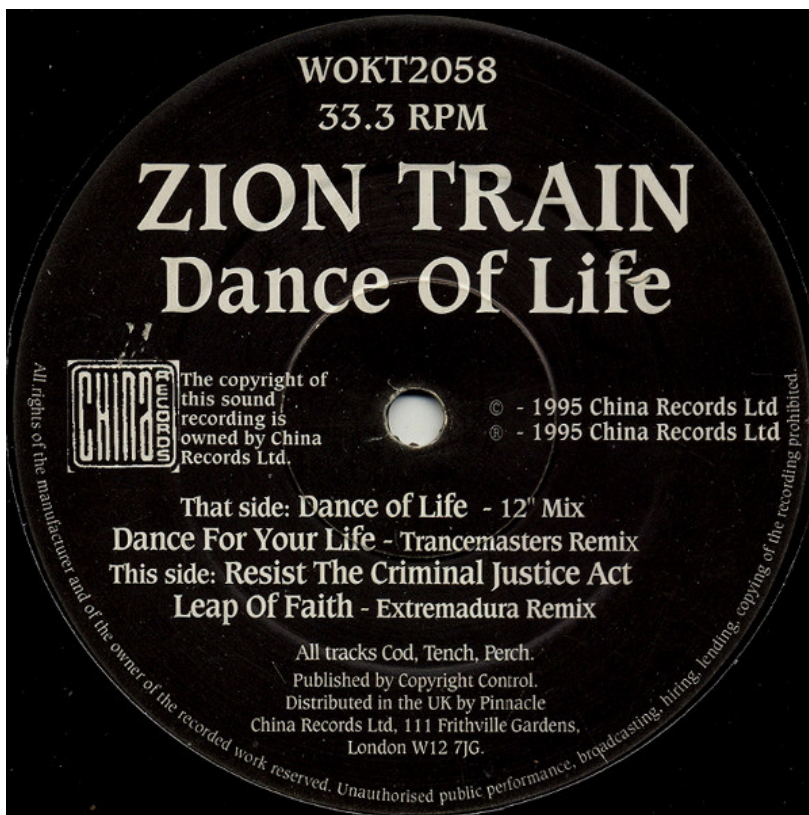


Fig 2: Zion Train. *Dance of Life* [recording]

In this case the status quo was a colonialism, not in Africa or America, but right here at home in Britain. But the shift had already started. The legacy of violence of a colonial era had begun to break down and heal.

“Those inner barriers which defined ‘me’ as a separate identity from ‘that’ - my environment - had dissolved.” (Green 2010)

The dance remained at centre stage in this process of liberation. The mode of action of dancing as an action of resistance is reflected in the work of African intellectuals such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o.

“(Colonial Alienation) is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies” (Thiong’o 1986)

At a free party or rave, minds are reconnected to bodies through a musical language and the linguistics of the rhythm.

“Dance is free from the restrictions of spoken language. Its multi-sensorial and kinaesthetic powers allow for a communicative freedom that a verbal exchange of ideas cannot provide.” (Haebich and Taylor 2011)

Thiong’o argued that Africans had been robbed of their language, famously questioning why the works of African writers at an African literary conference were all written in English (Thiong’o 1986: 6). Meanwhile, in the “mother” country, supposedly civilised civilians were tripping out at raves. They were starting to talk and move in a different language. One of nature, tribalism and paganism. These ravers, formerly “ordinary” citizens, were getting back to the earth and their true identity. An identity that did not match up with the purely materialistic concerns of contemporary science and economics.

“But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland.” (Thiong’o 1986)

These developments were not unique to Britain. Rave culture can be found in very oppressive and dystopian places such as the Palestine (Withers 2021).

Another example of dystopian influences aimed at rave culture in Britain were responses to rave like festivals in Cornwall, organised for the 1999 eclipse.

*“When we were driving down to Cornwall listening to Radio 1, the BBC reports were saying that all the roads were blocked and it was taking hours to enter and drive through Cornwall. **Which was a big fat lie** as all the roads were clear and nearly empty.” [My emphasis] (Trehwela 2021)*

Neo-colonialism was attempting to prevent people getting in touch with themselves, nature, the land, and powerful spiritual phenomena like the eclipse. The 1999 eclipse festivals were also some of the first to use innovative internet technologies that could have blasted a powerful event to millions.

In the present day, the latest environmental research is recognising the rich harmonic, music like, harmony that is at the centre of nature. Processes that also emerge in the collective music and dancing at a rave.

“Maybe there's another way to describe the elegantly complex interweaving of natural processes that comprise an ecosystem: harmony. In music, harmony arises when different notes sound at the same time in such a way that an emergent, more complex and pleasing sound is produced. The notes aren't competing or cooperating with each other, but the way in which their differences act upon each other creates a blended experience that is richer, and more beautiful, than any of them alone. Could it be that the best description of how nature works is, in fact, a harmonic meshwork of life?” (Lent 2021)

Rave had reconnected with human practices formerly considered as “primitive”. Harking back to a Garden of Eden before the fall.

The Internet

After the fall of rave culture due to the Criminal Justice Act, the internet was rapidly rising in popularity. We were encouraged to embrace virtual online identities, therefore dissociating bodies from minds. This was the very thing that rave culture had originally started healing by challenging colonialism. Now the colonisation of communities was starting to happen via the internet.

“The platforms locked us into their systems and made us easy pickings, ripe for extraction. Twitter, Facebook and other Big Tech platforms hard to leave by design. They hold hostage the people we love, the communities that matter to us, the audiences and customers we rely on. The impossibility of staying connected to these people after you delete your account has nothing to do with technological limitations: it's a business strategy in service to commodifying your personal life and relationships.” (Doctorow 2023)

The internet was becoming a thing of separation rather than unity. As I quoted above, Thiong'o pointed out that colonialism operates by “*separating the mind from the body*” (Thiong'o 1986).

“Historically, cyber discourses have been characterized by a desire to transcend the perceived limits of materiality, which inevitably means transcending the body. Whether utopian or dystopian, cyber fantasies, often couched as predictions of an imminent future, share the idea that 'cyber' technologies will finally allow human beings to become 'pure' intelligence, no longer hindered by the needs and demands of the body.” (Brians 2011)

Yet rave culture had reached a peak of ecstasy fuelled re-unification *with the body*, powered by music tooled with hijacked technological devices from “the machine” of colonialism and capitalism. For example the Roland 303 was originally marketed as a play along bass guitar synthesiser but was retooled into a sonic psychedelic experience enhancer by rave culture. As discussed above, rave culture freed people from contemporary enslavement to the rat race, careering headlong “back” to practices seen as “primitive” by a dominant, colonising culture.

However after the Criminal Justice Act, the approach left to ravers was to dote nostalgically over some “lost” golden age of rave. This was, ironically, often expressed on the World Wide Web.

Return to Paradise Lost

One of the prevalent features of rave culture is the use of MDMA (Saunders 1997). This controversial drug was one of the defining features of the way the establishment dismissed its use, as well as rave culture itself, as reckless “hedonism”. However, today, increasing numbers of countries are running trials in the use of MDMA for therapy. The author has witnessed many spontaneous healing events of people on MDMA at raves.

“Reich believed that muscular tensions go hand in hand with emotional tensions or neuroses, and the test for being free of the latter is the ability to move in an 'orgasmic' way with spontaneous undulations flowing smoothly from head to toe, a form of movement that often occurs spontaneously on MDMA. It could be that the drug temporarily removes both neuroses and the associated body armour. Ecstasy is unlike most other drugs in that it increases awareness of touch and sound, an effect that has been observed in laboratory rats. The drug has also been described as allowing the life force, or Chi, to flow freely. Traumatic memories, suppressed for years because they are too painful to face, may emerge and be looked at without terror. Insights into what is really happening in life can also occur. Pain may be reduced, especially if it is based on fear, such as the fear of death.” (Saunders 1993: 13)

It has been recognised that dance, along with entheogen use, can have healing effects (Samiy 2012). A powerful physiological response known as “frisson” has been recognised as the “rush” effect that is amplified by MDMA, but can be experienced from listening to the music alone (Gilberg 2023) (Bannister 2019). MDMA for treating PTSD was recently given a research passport by the British Government (Price 2022) as well as emerging as an approach in the USA (US Could Soon Approve MDMA Therapy 2023).

So the iconic “rave drug”, that was initially derided, along with the rave culture that created it, has been accepted as a “proper” medical treatment.

Conclusion

These utopian and futuristic themes of powerful healing, joy and ecstasy, were marred by the increasingly meddling intervention of the authorities. Now we are in a situation where we are told that “rave is dead”. That EDM (Electronic Dance Music) has taken over with crass commercialism. This seems unfair, as such accusations are rarely aimed at the Rock & Roll music industry which exhibits a common problem of a system of materialism that veers into making money for profits sake. However, again, Thiong’o can rescue us from this abyss; “[colonialism] *makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland.*” (Thiong’o 1986). Colonialism just wants the achievements of rave to go away, as if it never happened. Yet the millions profoundly affected by experiences at raves still live on and “E” is being recognised as a genuinely useful healing approach. The cycle has not yet moved to a full blown rave renaissance, but I think I have shown the powerful forces that have been at work in rave culture, and that in fact the paradise, the utopia, that rave rediscovered,

harking back to the practices of ancient and contemporary indigenous peoples, is being won back.

List of Figures

Figure 1. AUTECHRE. 1994. *Anti EP* [sound recording: Vinyl]. Warp Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/157-Autechre-Anti-EP> [accessed 3rd March 2024].

Figure 2. TRAIN, Zion. 1995. *Dance of Life* [sound recording: Vinyl]. China Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/129452-Zion-Train-Dance-Of-Life> [accessed 3rd March 2024].

Bibliography

BADOUK EPSTEIN, Orit. 2018. *Ritual Abuse and Mind Control: The Manipulation of Attachment Needs*. First edition. Boca Raton, FL: Routledge.

BANNISTER, Scott. 2019. "Distinct Varieties of Aesthetic Chills in Response to Multimedia." *PloS one* 14(11), e0224974–e0224974.

BRIANS, Ella. 2011. "The 'Virtual' Body and the Strange Persistence of the Flesh: Deleuze, Cyberspace and the Posthuman." In *Deleuze and the Body*. United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 117–43.

CELARENT, Barbara. 2011. "A Dying Colonialism . By Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove Press, 1965. Pp. 181." *The American journal of sociology* 116(6), 2062–8.

GILBERG, Sam. 2023. 'This 715-Song Playlist Is Scientifically Verified to Give You the Chills, Thanks to "Frisson"'. *Big Think* [online]. Available at: <https://bigthink.com/neuropsych/frisson-song-playlist/>.

CONNER, Christopher T. and Nathan KATZ. 2020. 'Electronic Dance Music: From Spectacular Subculture to Culture Industry'. *Young (Stockholm, Sweden)* 28(5), 445–64.

'Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994'. 2020. Legislation.gov.uk [online]. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/33/section/63>.

DOCTOROW, Cory. 2023. *The Internet Con*. Verso Books.

GOODMAN, Anthony H. 1995. "The Criminal Justice Public Order Act 1994." *Capital & class* 56(56), 9–14.

GREEN, David. 2010. "TRANCEGRESSION: TECHNOSHAMANISM, CONSERVATISM AND PAGAN POLITICS." *Politikologija religije* 4(2), 201–20.

HAEBICH, Anna and Jodie TAYLOR. 2011. 'Modern Primitives Leaping and Stomping the Earth: From Ballet to Bush Doofs'. *Aboriginal history* 31.

LENT, Jeremy. 2021. 'It's Time to Consign the "Selfish Gene" to the History Books'. *Salon* [online]. Available at: <https://www.salon.com/2021/05/30/its-time-to-consign-the-selfish-gene-to-the-history-books/> [accessed 25 Feb 2024].

LUCKMAN, SUSAN. 2003. 'Going Bush and Finding One's "Tribe": Raving, Escape and the Bush Doof'. *Continuum (Mount Lawley, W.A.)* 17(3), 315–30.

PETRIDIS, Alexis. 2003. 'Cynical, Exploitative and Banking on Ecstasy to Mask the Rip-Off'. *The Guardian*, 21 Aug [online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/aug/21/rock.pop> [accessed 7 Feb 2024].

PRICE, Stephanie. 2022. 'MDMA Therapy for PTSD Granted Innovation Passport by UK'. *Psychedelic Health* [online]. Available at: <https://psychedelichealth.co.uk/2022/01/27/mdma-therapy-ptsd-innovation-passport-uk/>.

“Repeating Beats: The Return of Rave, Memories of Joy and Nostalgia between the Afterglow and the Hangover.” 2023. *Memory studies*.

SAMIY, Tara. 2012. ‘The Healing Power of Dance: A Phenomenological Study of “Being Moved” Facilitated by the Use of Entheogens’. In *The Healing Power of Dance: A Phenomenological Study of ‘Being Moved’ Facilitated by the Use of Entheogens*. ProQuest LLC.

SAUNDERS, Nicholas and Alexander SHULGIN. 1997. *Ecstasy Reconsidered*. London: Nicholas Saunders.

SAUNDERS, Nicholas and Liz HERON. 1993. *E for Ecstasy*. London: N. Saunders.

SERAPIONI, Mauro. 2019. “Franco Basaglia: Biography of a Revolutionary.” *História, ciências, saúde--Manguinhos* 26(4), 1169-.

SHEPHERD, John and David HORN. 2012. *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World. Volumes VIII-XIII, Genres. Volume VIII, Genres North America*. New York: Continuum.

TRIBE, Spiral. 1992. *Spiral Tribe E.P. - Forward The Revolution* [sound recording: Vinyl]. Big Life Records. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/55637-Spiral-Tribe-Spiral-Tribe-EP-Forward-The-Revolution> [accessed 3rd March 2024].

TREWHELA, Lee. 2021. ‘Disastrous Eclipse Festivals Don’t Bode Well for Cornish G7 Economy’. *Cornwall Live* [online]. Available at: <https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/disastrous-1999-eclipse-festivals-dont-4933986> [accessed 2 Mar 2024].

THIONG'O, Ngũgĩ Wa. 1986. *Decolonising the Mind : The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey ; Portsmouth, N.H.

“US Could Soon Approve MDMA Therapy — Opening an Era of Psychedelic Medicine.” 2023. *Nature (London)*.

WEATHERALL, Andrew [@CrackMagazine]. 2020. Yesterday we lost the legendary Andrew Weatherall. He played a party for us last year and we asked him about his job. [X post]: Available at: <https://twitter.com/CrackMagazine/status/1229717305422237697> [accessed 2nd March 2024]

WITHERS, Polly. 2021. ‘Ramallah Ravers and Haifa Hipsters: Gender, Class, and Nation in Palestinian Popular Culture’. *British journal of Middle Eastern studies* 48(1), 94–113.

YINDI, Yothu. 1992. *Yothu Yindi – Treaty (Remixes)* [sound recording: Vinyl]. Australian Mushroom Music. Available at: <https://www.discogs.com/release/153895-Yothu-Yindi-Treaty-Remixes> [accessed 2nd March 2024].