

University of Nevada, Reno

**Partying with Hello Kitty: How Electronic Dance Music and Rave Culture are transforming, commercializing, and globalizing youth culture in the twenty-first century**

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By

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## Abstract

This thesis will demonstrate how electronic dance music (EDM) has evolved from the musical underground during the second half of the twentieth century into the mainstream, commercial powerhouse it is now in the early twenty-first-century world. EDM at its core is a musical style characterized by the use of synthetic, electronic sounds. The combination of technological devices such as drum machines, repetitive bass lines, electronic builds and releases and inorganic noises in tandem with instrumental and vocal samples makes EDM an incredibly malleable style of dance music that has branched into a variety of forms over the course of its less than fifty year existence. Innovations in technology, like the tape reel, the Moog synthesizer, the vinyl mixer and the computer have led to new ways of contemplating and creating music. I argue that the innovative musical voices of late modernism and early postmodernism set the foundation for early EDM, who were not afraid to harness the new synthetic sounds at their disposal. Electronic dance music can trace its roots back to the repetitive, minimalist structures used since the 1960's by postmodern composers such as Philip Glass and the electronic instrumentation of artists like Terry Riley and John Cage. Owing to its flexibility, EDM has also been re-contextualized in different cultures. In Japan for instance, it has been stripped of its subversive association to drugs and raves and is now used as a motor to exaggerate the youthful vitality of young pop idols, whose “kawaii” (“cute”) image depends on the energy for which EDM is also famous today. Another consequence of the musical globalization of EDM is the corporatization and commercialization of the music, where electronic dance music producers and DJs are now paid millions of dollars to push

products and headline enormous international music festivals. EDM is now a mainstay of popular culture around urban centers of the world, and as such it is being used by different forces for creating art as well as for profit. This study aims to illuminate these forces by tracing EDM's path throughout history, using musical examples to show its evolution as well as the ways it is being re-contextualized as an increasingly globalized commodity.

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## Introduction

This study aims to investigate the enormity of the “electronic dance music” (EDM) experience in the early twenty-first-century world; what it means culturally, its globalization process, the ways it is being commoditized by legal and illegal forces and what sets it apart from other musical paradigms. Melding electronic, technology-produced sounds with organic vocals and instrumentation, EDM is the perfect form of postmodern musical expression. It draws influence from a variety of music traditions (classical, jazz, rock, reggae, hip-hop, punk, metal), it is often pieced together by anonymous persons, and it is fundamentally a product of technology and experimental attitudes. Using innovations like drum machines, synthesizers and computerized noises and blending them with samples of singers and instrumentalists, EDM displays a degree of flexibility not apparent in many musical genres. To illuminate the evolution of this dance music as it has expanded across the globe, an interdisciplinary approach taking musicological, historical and sociological perspectives in order to draw meaning from sources is critical to my research.

To trace the path of EDM to the present day would be a monumental task, thus I have chosen the establishment of postmodernism in Western music as a starting point. Postmodernism began as a reaction against the elitist nature of modern art forms, and embodied a more populist ideal. Music was seen by the postmodernists as something for everyone, to be performed, enjoyed and even created by anyone with the interest in doing so. Combined with an experimentalist attitude and a willingness to interact with the audience on a greater level, postmodernism embraced many ideas that would soon become essential to the world of electronic dance music EDM.

## Methodology and Sources

In Simon Reynolds' book *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture*, Reynolds traces the evolution of dance music culture from its early, postmodern-inspired minimalist incarnations to the mainstream radio hits of turn-of-the-century America and Europe. Creating an evolutionary web from which electronic dance music spread in a variety of directions, Reynolds shows that although the trajectory of this music has not been linear, the postmodern aesthetic permeates both EDM compositions and performances. Simultaneously, Reynolds explores phenomenon of the "rave" and the burgeoning popularity of the party drug "ecstasy" in the 1980s and 1990s, revealing an inextricable interconnectedness of this substance with electronic dance music. This connection has haunted EDM in the mainstream, where raves are construed by the media and popular conception as hedonistic, cult-like events fueled by drugs and uninhibited sexuality.<sup>1</sup> This notion is something Reynolds aimed to dispel, elaborating on his firsthand experience in the 1990's rave culture of England and how the love it promoted was a non-sexual, ecstatic feeling instead of lust.<sup>2</sup> Even today as EDM thrives in a mainstream role, ecstasy is still a prevalent force in the scene and thus rave culture is still condemned by the media. Reynolds' work is essential in my exploration of how postmodern minimalism molded early dance music; creating a framework from which I can discuss the musical, cultural and social changes occurring during the second half of the twentieth century that have set the foundation for EDM's current, popularized form.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 44.



In Yiu Fai Chow's book *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image*, Chow centers his research on "the always present, ongoing cultural circulation and flows...the lively ways cultural producers, products, venues and consumers engage with the music-cum-meaning-making process that travels between the city, the nation, or any specific understanding of locality."<sup>3</sup> Using these ideas, Chow delves into the complex ways Hong Kong pop music interacts within the East Asian sphere. Using this framework, I aim to investigate the transformations that have resulted from the globalization of electronic dance music. In chapter two, I will show how the EDM aesthetic is being culturally recast to fit within the specific cultural context of contemporary Japan, where it is sanitized and made cute for Asian popular consumption. In chapter three, I will use Chow's approach to show how western variations of EDM are being packaged as a global product and propagated via international music festivals, which occur all throughout the world and are only continuing to grow.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this topic, a variety of sources from musicology, sociology and history are important in my research. For instance, analytical transcriptions of pertinent musical scores such as Philip Glass' *Music in Contrary Motion* can help bring greater light upon the cultural shifts occurring in the world of music during the early years of postmodernism. In addition, music videos, television recordings of musical performances and recorded songs help reveal the cultural borrowing of auditory aesthetics, such as Japan's recasting of EDM in a "kawaii" light. Firsthand

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<sup>3</sup> Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet, *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image*. (Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013), 6.

experience at music festivals, concerts and as someone who has spent significant time in Asia also gives me insight into the area I am studying. As a result of this time abroad, I have had the opportunity to meet and interview other live-music participants and consumers about their experiences with popular music in both Japan and China. Using this knowledge in conjunction with newspaper and online articles, it becomes possible to paint a picture of the music and music festival scene in Asia, which can then be juxtaposed against Western variations. Academic journal publications that focus on rave culture, as well as government documents and television reports are also of use, and give a look into how media, politicians and academia perceive a world deemed by its detractors as shallow and ephemeral.

Also pertinent to this study is the use of images. EDM shows are much more than simply live music events. They are colorful, visually stimulating performances often comprised of strobe lights, glow sticks, lasers, LED lights and giant visual monitors; these used to create an intense sensory experience for the audience. A visual collaboration between the dancing audience and the disc jockey's light set-up (both performing in a strangely harmonized way) makes these concerts and festivals neon fantasy worlds; the perfect environment for people to indulge in sensory-heightening, empathogenic drugs like ecstasy. It is no surprise then, that the expansion of increasingly intricate visual experiences parallels the heightened use of complementary illicit substances. The images coming out of Japan are equally vibrant, but in different ways. Through the use of such physical portrayals, it is possible to elucidate how EDM and the Japanese reconstruction of electronic dance music are similar yet also diverge.

## **Chapter Outline**

## **Chapter One: Philip Glass to Skrillex: Postmodernism's Influence on the Evolution of EDM**

The way in which electronic dance music has evolved during the second half of the twentieth century to present day is emblematic of greater cultural shifts occurring throughout society, in particular, the emergence and movement toward postmodern ideals. The earliest machinations of electronics in Western music appeared as the modern art form was struggled against by proponents of postmodernism, with artists such as Terry Reilly, Pauline Oliveros, Philip Glass and John Cage creating and performing compositions in the 1960's with the intent of breaking from the exclusive world of modern music. Their efforts reflect a growing disenchantment with the elitist, Anglo-centric modern paradigm prevalent throughout mid-twentieth century America and Europe. As a reaction to modern art, postmodern artistic expression embodies everything that modern art is not. It is art for the people, it has no strict rules dictating its creation, and it exemplifies a flexibility and openness not seen in the modern world through its frequent use of electronics and world music aesthetics. Some of the earliest electronic music was created by postmodernists, and their use of such technology set the foundation for other artists to branch off and eventually delve into the use of electronic beats, early synthesizers and tape reels to make innovative dance music. EDM exemplifies the various elements of musical postmodernism. It is influenced by a variety of musical traditions, it can be created by amateurs and professionals alike, and it is about reformulating existing themes with available technologies in an attempt to arrange new yet familiar forms; all with the goal of getting an audience to dance. It is music for the people, created for everyone to participate in as well as celebrate.

Trends in the realms of theater and education also reflect the growing emphasis of audience and student participation. In the modern theater and classroom, the performer audience dichotomy is blurring. Just as the DJ (disc jockey) and his dance floor interact through the transmission of energy and music, these traditionally black and white roles are dissipating in favor of communal learning experiences. The group has become the focal point of artistic and intellectual dissemination, which is emblematic of the postmodern age. How electronic dance music has been molded by these greater cultural forces and evolved throughout the second half of the twentieth century will be the focal point of chapter one.

### **Chapter two: “Pamyu Pamyu Revolution!”: J-Pop, Neo-Kawaii and The Commodification of Electronic Dance Music through Cuteness in twenty-first-century Japan**

Over the past few years, electronic dance music has become a widely accessible commodity throughout much of the world, and its malleable nature is being used to the full extent in a variety of contexts. This is particularly apparent in Japan, where a music that was once almost exclusively associated with subversive, druggy culture has been “cutified” with the Japanese super-aesthetic “kawaii.” At a music festival in Taiwan this summer, I witnessed this musical style in person. Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, a 20 year old Japanese pop queen performing at the 2013 Formoz Music Festival, played one of the most energetic sets I have ever seen. Her music, composed of catchy, fast-paced electronic dance beats and her high-pitched effeminate singing voice, invokes the drive behind the “house” genre, yet at the same time strongly turns away from EDM by embracing a bubble-gum pop dynamic not present in the West. Also, instead of the symbiotic music/performer interaction representative of an EDM concert, the audience

focused primarily on her stage presence. Although the crowd danced at times, the overall experience feel more akin to a rock show, where people stand in awe of the musicians rather than physically react to the sounds emanating from the stage. Furthermore, the crowd appeared stone-cold sober. Raves and EDM shows are about communal partying and imbibing, whereas this event was much tamer. The EDM aesthetic was apparent in her music, but the culture behind it had been stripped bare and replaced with a pink sugary coating. It was all about Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, and it was strikingly innocent. In chapter two, I will explore how the globalization of EDM led to the creation of twenty-first century “J-pop,” giving Japanese pop-star producers the musical ammunition to fully express energetic, youthful “kawaii” in their music compositions.

### **Chapter three: “Has anyone seen Molly?” Drugs, Music Festivals and the Commercialization of EDM**

The combination of MDMA and dance music has steadily been growing in popularity throughout the world, but electronic dance music itself as a commodity has also become a force on its own. Huge brands such as Pepsi have invested in the EDM festival circuit because there is enormous capital to be harvested.<sup>4</sup> The music has even begun to appear on commercials, television shows and at sporting events. Although pirating music online has hurt the twenty-first-century music industry, today live music may be more popular than ever. Electronic dance music, with its strong ties to massive live events and concerts today, has financially flourished because of this; it is more than just hearing the music performed, it is about the total experience. The popular fascination

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Sisario and James C. McKinley, “Drug Deaths Threaten Rising Business of Electronic Music Fests.” *Nytimes.com*, September 9, 2013, accessed September 29, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/>

with big-scale, high-budget EDM shows and festivals is a result of consumers craving these visceral, wild experiences. An event like Miami's Ultra Music Festival portrays this growth worldwide. What began as a one day event in 1999 has now expanded to five different continents and numerous countries throughout the year, bringing huge electronic music events to a global audience.<sup>5</sup>

As more and more consumer money is invested in EDM, the demand for drugs associated with the music has increased, and this has turned the pressing of ecstasy pills and MDMA powder into a booming international business for underground operations. The criminal activity behind the creation of MDMA and the adulteration of the drug which has left numerous young people dead has brought this substance from the social periphery to the center of much negative attention. At the 2013 Electric Zoo Festival in New York, the event stopped a day early due to two drug related deaths.<sup>6</sup> One of the attendees was found to have methyldone in his system, which is a bath salt derivative often used as an MDMA substitute by drug manufacturers. Methyldone physiologically reacts differently with the body, and thus people are inadvertently overdosing.<sup>7</sup> Due to MDMA's classification as a Schedule I Drug in the U.S. and highly illegal status throughout the country, corners can be cut by those in the business because they are completely unregulated. In this way, the criminalization of such substances makes them much more hazardous. By putting the power of the ecstasy market in the hands of

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<sup>5</sup> "Ultra Worldwide: The World's Premier Electronic Music Festivals," accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.ultramusicfestival.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Ben Sisario and James C. McKinley, "Drug Deaths Threaten Rising Business of Electronic Music Fests." *Nytimes.com*, September 9, 2013, accessed September 29, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

underground organizations that follow no health regulations and only seek profit, the drug becomes an increasingly dangerous option for party-goers as the product grows in demand.

Ecstasy and EDM have emerged as global commodities during the twenty-first century, and their growing popularity has broadened the consumer drug market worldwide. In China for instance, the domestic market for ecstasy has evolved rapidly over the past two decades. From being a relatively unknown substance to the most used drug in the country behind only opiates in 2003, it has latched onto the youth as well and is now the most frequently used illicit drug amongst China's young people.<sup>8</sup> The connection of this drug to EDM and club music also heightens the appeal to the younger generation, who are more interested in partying until the sun rises than their parents and crave the energy of which this drug is renowned. In chapter three, I will analyze the ways in which legal and illegal entities have played a role in the growth and globalization of popular MDMA-EDM culture through drug sales, advertising and the expansion of the contemporary music festival.

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<sup>8</sup> Yu-xia Fang et. al, "Recent Trends in Drug Abuse in China." *Acta Pharmacologica Sinica*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (February, 2006), 140.

## Chapter One

### Philip Glass to Skrillex: Postmodernism's Influence on the Evolution of EDM

Music is an element of human culture that predates civilization. Today, it helps define who we are: it functions as a spiritual tool, a lynch pin that binds communities, an escape from the hectic existence of urban life, and so much more. It is intrinsically linked to the socialization of humanity. In the hyper-connected twenty-first-century world, sharing musical traditions and experiences is easier than it has been at any other point in history, with communication amongst the global community now as simple as pressing a button. As such, performers and producers of music have different, more flexible mentalities than their predecessors not even a century ago. Rather than shirk or look down upon other cultures and their musical forms as inferior, many today choose instead to borrow, draw from or refashion existing styles in order to create new and interesting music. Electronic dance music emerging from East Asia during the twenty-first century is one example of this plane in which music exists today. For instance, transnational artistic interactions between countries like Japan and England, the United States and China have yielded some very interesting results. From bubble-gum “Hello-Kitty” rave-influenced pop music to Sean Connery’s transformation into a Japanese man in the 1967 James Bond movie *You Only Live Twice*, it becomes clear that eccentric combinations of western and eastern art are fresh, and emblematic of the rapidly globalizing, contemporary world. Electronic dance music (EDM) in its many incarnations is representative of the postmodern landscape that pervades society today. Not only has technology granted producers access to an unlimited range of material from which to draw inspiration and sounds, but their very music functions to bring people together



through dancing. How this musical paradigm owes its very existence to early postmodern philosophies, such as musical minimalism, will be explored, as well as how the music has evolved and transformed from its obscure, underground beginnings into an above ground, mainstream art form.

**“All the notes are equal.”**

“It does not matter that not all composers are great composers; it matters that this activity be encouraged among all the population.”<sup>9</sup>These words, written down by the influential musician and experimental composer Pauline Oliveros in her foundational text *Software for People*, resonate clearly with adherents of postmodernism. The postmodern aesthetics that musicians such as Oliveros embrace are things such as the rejection of Anglo-centrism, the push away from the “professional performer, amateur listener” hierarchy prevalent in everything from Baroque music to rock-n-roll, and the idea that musical performances and experiences are for everyone, not just “artists.” Within postmodernism, anyone who wants to compose music not only can, but is encouraged, to do so. The shift towards postmodernism in music, which begins to take shape during the early 1960’s, is expressed through the works and musings of artists like Pauline Oliveros, as well as her contemporaries John Cage, Terry Riley, Philip Glass and others, whose collective contributions helped set the foundation for a new musical world as well as electronic dance music’s eventual twenty-first-century ascendance from obscurity to the mainstream.

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<sup>9</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Software for People: collected writings 1963-80* (Baltimore, MD: Smith Publications, 1984), 49.

Without modernism there would be no postmodernism. “Post” implies a reaction to its subject, in this case, the “modern.” What are postmodernists reacting to? Modernism’s notions of “conjunctive, closed” forms, design, hierarchy, distance, metaphysics and determinacy are countered by postmodernism’s values of “antiform,” chance, anarchy, participation, irony and “indeterminacy.”<sup>10</sup> The structured, regimented elements of modernism are besieged by postmodern chaos and disorder. Place these philosophical ideas within their historical context, and it becomes clear why this reactionary movement is occurring during the 1960’s. Modernism represents entrenched white power, postmodernism signifies equality and a chance to break down the established racial hierarchy. Postmodernists embrace the idea that art should be for everyone, and potentially created by anyone, which includes the disenfranchised voices of African Americans and non-white peoples worldwide. As a result of this transformation, western classical music is removed from its pedestal, and musical styles around the world are given more attention and appreciation throughout the west. The cultural oligarchy of the modern had begun to evolve into a postmodern cultural democracy by the 1960’s.

One example of this postmodern musical democratization can be seen in the work of Philip Glass. Glass, at present a 77 year old white composer/musician living in New York City, could have fit into the privileged world of modern music easily as a young man. Instead, he struggled to find his place and sound amongst his contemporaries, only becoming inspired after working with the renowned Indian classical sitarist phenom Ravi

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<sup>10</sup>Ihab Hassan, “The Question of Postmodernism,” *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1981), 34.

Shankar. Philip Glass, one of the most important figures of minimalist music, admits that his encounter with Indian music is what determined the direction of his entire compositional career. Indian music triggered an epiphany for Glass, whose work with both Shankar and tabla player Alla Rakha led him to latch onto the idea that “all the notes are equal.”<sup>11</sup> Measure lines and written notes, staples of the Western classical music tradition, are not a fixture in either Carnatic or Hindustani music (these being the two forms of Indian classical music). This entire musical world solely exists due to the dedication of generations and generations of master musicians who pass on their knowledge orally, and once Glass was able to perceive music in their way it dominated his imagination.<sup>12</sup> One example of Glass exercising his newfound musical influence can be seen in his 1969 piece “Music in Contrary Motion,” a flowing, trance-like work that is written without bar lines, thus supporting the fact that he now considered all notes to be truly equal.<sup>13</sup> The Indian idea of *tala*, which in modern practice “implies a steady pulse-beat” where “no fluctuation of [the] pulse is permitted,” resonates throughout this composition, creating a constantly moving mass of notes in A minor.<sup>14</sup> The true power behind “Music in Contrary Motion” though, is its blatantly anti-teleological nature. It retains the same tempo, volume and key signature throughout its entirety. The piece is a steady stream of eighth notes for over fifteen minutes and cuts off abruptly without any buildup. It does not even end on the tonic. The hypnotic, repetitive structures Glass uses,

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Glass and Robert T. Jones. *Music by Philip Glass* (Harper and Row, 1987), 18.

<sup>12</sup> L. Subramaniam, “Music of India – Part One: Music of South India,” Accessed April 3, 2014, <http://trumpet.sdsu.edu/>

<sup>13</sup> Philip Glass, *Music in Contrary Motion*. Dunvagen Music Publishers, 1969.

<sup>14</sup> D.R. Widdess, “Rhythm and Time-Measurement in South Asian Art-Music: Some Observations on 'tāla',” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 107 (1980 - 1981): Taylor and Francis, Ltd, 132.

which are clearly influenced by his forays into Indian classical music, foreshadow the work of early EDM producers such as Giorgio Moroder and Patrick Cowley. Glass's willingness to maneuver within a broad, worldly framework is representative of postmodernism, and such an openness to draw influence from various sources also parallels much of the work being produced in the realm of electronic dance music today.

**“Laughter is better than tears”**

Pushing a passive audience into an active role and making them more connected to the music they are listening to has been a goal of the early postmodernists since the 1960's. For instance, take John Cage's 1960 “I've Got a Secret” live television performance of his piece “Water Walk.” The first musical gesture Cage makes is to hit a metallic fish on top of the strings of a grand piano, and things only increase in absurdity as the composition progresses. As Cage gallivants across the stage, he sequentially explodes a party popper, places two ice cubes in a glass, takes an empty water pitcher and fills it with water from a bathtub and squeezes a rubber duck.<sup>15</sup> All of this is done in perfect timing with a tape player, making the sounds comically loud. When asked if he cared if the audience would laugh, he says “not at all, laughter is better than tears.”<sup>16</sup> By breaking away from musical conventions, Cage enraptures a studio audience with his antics, even encouraging laughter. Who couldn't make those every-day sounds themselves? In contrast, modern classical concerts adhere to formal audience etiquette and involve complicated, cerebral music difficult for the average listener to digest, and

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<sup>15</sup> “John Cage – Water Walk,” YouTube video, 9:22, television broadcast of John Cage's 1960 performance on “I've Got a Secret,” uploaded by “holotone,” May 4, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

focus on invoking feelings of awe. This completely different mindset is visible in Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg and his use of atonality and dodecaphonic techniques, as well as Igor Stravinsky and his use of intensely-complex meters and rhythms. For modernists, music is a form of high art that not everyone is supposed to understand, and this becomes clear when listening to the difficult passages and melodic tendencies of their works. Such reasoning has led to the culling of the casual listener. Prior to John Cage's live television performance, the host asks him if what he is about to do could be considered music, to which he calmly states "I consider music the production of sound, and since in the piece you will hear I produce sound, I would call it music."<sup>17</sup> Anyone can produce sound, thus anyone can produce music. This populist concept has since gained much traction throughout the United States, and is a present factor in the world of electronic dance music today.

Early postmodern concerts during the 1960's and 1970's were highly variable. Often drawing diverse crowds, these shows were frequently held in smaller venues like theaters and art museums. The length of these performances was up to the discretion of the artist, and some pieces, such as Philip Glass's four and a half hour uninterrupted opera "Einstein on the Beach" (1976) lasted so long that the audience members were not expected to stay seated the entire time.<sup>18</sup> This audience/artist dynamic is similar to a casual Carnatic Indian classical performance, in which the "members of the audience may count time with their hands, periodically converse with friends, or occasionally get

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<sup>17</sup> "John Cage – Water Walk," YouTube video, 9:22, television broadcast of John Cage's 1960 performance on "I've Got a Secret," uploaded by "holotone," May 4, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>18</sup> Arun Rath, "The Minds Behind 'Einstein on the Beach' Talk Shop," *Music Interviews* (blog), *NPR*, October 12, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/>

up and take a stroll or buy betel nuts or a soft drink at the refreshment stand.”<sup>19</sup> This degree of informality differs greatly from what is considered proper concert etiquette at a modern music recital. Whether it is listening to Pauline Oliveros perform long tones inside of an enormous water tank for five hours or dancing to trance music in an underground club, there is clearly not (and should not be) one concrete template for a concert.

From the very beginning, postmodernists strove to break from established artistic conventions, and this is especially apparent in the diversity of their musical compositions. One key example of this is Terry Riley’s famous piece *In C* (which he performed at the University of Nevada on February 15, 2013). In this work, Riley breaks from the typical conductor/orchestra dynamic and allows everyone to play short, composed musical phrases at their own pace. This grants a significant degree of agency to each performer on stage, who are no longer simply a tool of the conductor and his/her written work. In fact, a conductor is not even used for this particular piece. Allowing the musicians such freedom leads to non-replicable performances, and it also allows performers to gauge the reaction of the audience and play accordingly. This is similar to the relationship of the DJ and his audience. Accessing the mood of the group and using this knowledge to play in certain ways is an important element of not only early postmodern performances, but also present-day electronic dance music shows.

### **Tape Decks, Wire Spools**

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<sup>19</sup>David B. Reck, “India/South India,” in *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World’s Peoples*, 266.

Electronic dance music is a product of technological advancement, and it was pioneers such as John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, Terry Riley and others who first started using tape decks and electric frequencies to produce inorganic sounds for use in their music. Since postmodernists consider sound (or even lack thereof) the only pre-requisite for creating music, it seems reasonable that they would be the some of the first to experiment with the seemingly impractical noises generated through electricity-driven technology. Pauline Oliveros' old student Cory Angel describes the first time he met Pauline in 1999 at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where she walked into a class with a top-of-the-line laptop and "proceeded to tell us how she started working with electronic music when sounds were still recorded onto wire spools."<sup>20</sup> Oliveros has been at the forefront of incorporating non-human, mechanical sounds into music since the late 1950's and early 60's. Electronics are significant to her work, Oliveros placing value in "the human/machine relationship or interface—the power of technology to expand the mind."<sup>21</sup> She knew that new technologies had the potential to be powerful musical tools, and that this new territory had the prospective for rapid growth. While modernist compositions began to lose relevance, Oliveros was breaking ground in ways that would eventually consolidate her prominence amongst those who celebrate postmodern music.

John Cage's "Indeterminacy" is another significant work that reflects the postmodernist appreciation of electronic sounds. "Indeterminacy" is a fascinating experiment conducted in 1959 utilizing space, speech cadence and electronic frequencies

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<sup>20</sup>Cory Arcangel and Pauline Oliveros. "Pauline Oliveros." *Bomb*, no. 107 (Spring 2009): New Art Publications, 85.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

in something Cage coined “chance operation.”<sup>22</sup> In this project, Cage would read one minute stories in a small room by himself, and his accomplice David Tudor would make electronic sounds at random from his own private booth located in a different section of the studio. These were then juxtaposed on top of each other, thus generating a random, unique creation of electronic beeps and spoken word. To make the project even more bizarre, Cage would read the story in exactly one minute, whether it was a single sentence or a long elaboration on his love of collecting mushrooms. In one case, he slowly read the phrase, “standing in line, Max Jacob said, gives one the opportunity to practice patience.”<sup>23</sup> The inherent irony of this sentence (being read at an absurdly slow speed) reflects the unserious, ironic tone in the postmodern world of music, and the arbitrary beeps and screeches of Tudor’s machines reveal an elastic willingness to experiment indiscriminately. Postmodernists are not afraid to mock themselves or others, nor are they afraid to push forward new sounds and see what happens. They believe that music and art are for everyone, and that artistic expression should not be wielded as a form of cultural currency.

Also pushing ahead into the world of electronics during the 60’s was postmodern composer/musician Terry Riley, whose 1969 piece “A Rainbow in Curved Air” reveals the vast potential for electric instrumentation in music, as well as the postmodern willingness to draw from other cultural styles. Riley’s use of an electric organ and an electric harpsichord as melodic devices as well as a goblet drum and tambourine as

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<sup>22</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Ian Pepper, “John Cage, or Liberated Music.” *October* (The MIT Press), 50.

<sup>23</sup> John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 268.



percussive tools pegs the synthetic against the organic, yet they end up blending seamlessly.<sup>24</sup> This can partially be attributed to Riley's familiarity with Indian classical music. Using a repetitive bass line on the electric organ, Riley simulates the tambura drone ubiquitous to Hindustani and Carnatic ragas, and this gives room for the percussion instruments to breathe and freely move. Also, the organ music Riley is playing on his right hand invokes the sitar virtuosity of Ravi Shankar. With the repetitive tambura-esque drone being performed by the left hand and rapidly moving lines and quick grace notes being played on the right (the grace notes seemingly an approximation of sitar quarter tones), Riley uses electronic instruments to channel Indian musical aesthetics. At the same time, he was also creating new and interesting music reflective of the postmodern flexibility and drive to incorporate new technology into musical experience.

### **Kraftwerk and Krautrock**

One of the most influential bands in the history of electronic dance music is the German group Kraftwerk. Formed in 1970 and still touring as of 2014, their music is unquestionably tied to 'Glass'ian minimalism and the postmodern love for using electronic sounds. Keith Potter states that Glass's "impact on German groups" was one of the earliest "and in most respects the most significant" sources of inspiration for the early German electro-minimalists.<sup>25</sup> Electronic noises and instruments such as the Moog synthesizer, as well as lyrical repetition characterize much of early Kraftwerk. In their

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<sup>24</sup> "Terry Riley – A Rainbow in Curved Air (1969)," studio recording of Terry Riley's 1969 piece "A Rainbow in Curved Air," uploaded by "Qwfwq Melquiades," February 26, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>25</sup> Keith Potter. *Four Music Minimalists: Lamonte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass (Music in the twentieth Century)*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 340.

1977 song “The Robots,” the vocal phrase “We are the robots” is placed through a vocoder to create a distorted, robotic effect.<sup>26</sup> Robot imagery is constantly invoked by Kraftwerk and other Krautrock<sup>27</sup> groups. The minimal, repetitive structure present in “The Robots” is a prominent characteristic in Philip Glass’ work, whose compositions such as “Music in Twelve Parts” (a gradually shifting, constantly repeating musical saga written between 1971 and 1974) noticeably influence Kraftwerk’s style. Glass also uses devices such as “additive process” and other mathematical concepts; his functional use of math another element visible throughout the Kraftwerk discography.<sup>28</sup>

Glass’s invocation of Indian classical music sounds has also seemed to influence Kraftwerk. One example is visible in Kraftwerk’s hit song “Autobahn,” where they use a drone similar in timbre to ones produced by the Indian tambura. Where Kraftwerk significantly diverges from Glass is how they use repetition to create catchy, minimal dance music. Why did such mechanical, medium-tempo synth-pop resonate with many of the early EDM producers? Detroit DJ Carl Craig believes the key to Kraftwerk’s success has been that “they [are] so stiff, they [are] funky,” or as musicologist Simon Reynolds puts it, “they were so white, they were black.”<sup>29</sup> With technology as a primary source of

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<sup>26</sup> Kraftwerk – The Robots,” music video of Kraftwerk’s 1977 song “The Robots,” uploaded by “ApriliaRS125,” January 12, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>27</sup> “Krautrock” is defined by Oxford Dictionary as “an experimental style of rock music associated with German groups of the 1970s, characterized by improvisation and strong, hypnotic rhythms.”

<sup>28</sup> Richard Kostelanetz ed. *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1997), 43.

<sup>29</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 3.

inspiration, Kraftwerk proved electronics could be groovy – a fundamentally important idea in the now gargantuan world of EDM.

### **Disco, Northern Soul DJ's as "Prophets of Postmodernity"**

Walking into the Sahara Tent, the primary stage for electronic dance music at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is like stepping into another world. Lasers, deep bass, sweating dancers, color everywhere. Strangely enough, this world of hedonism and communal partying illustrates various postmodern aesthetics. A primary one is the group dynamic, where simply dancing makes you part of the performance. While the DJ on stage may be famous throughout the world, many people hardly look at him/her for more than a minute because they are busy dancing and reveling in the crowd's electricity. Musicologist Ben Neill describes the DJ as playing the role of "modern shaman," someone who directs the flows of audience energy and simultaneously both facilitates and elevates the party atmosphere.<sup>30</sup> These "modern shamans" are never truly the center of attention though; the entire experience is about everyone involved.

The origin of what we know as a "DJ," or "disc jockey," today has been a source of controversy amongst proponents of different music, with the term first appearing in the magazine *Variety* during the 1940's to describe radio "record jockeys."<sup>31</sup> Early "record jockeys," or radio DJ's, were influential figures; their musical selections responsible for largely directing public taste in music. This power eventually led to scandal, with major labels being caught trying to manipulate what was put on the airwaves through under-the-

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<sup>30</sup>Ben Neill, "Pleasure Beats: Rhythm and Aesthetics of Current Electronic Music." *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 12 (The MIT Press: 2002), 3.

<sup>31</sup>William Randle, "'Dis-Jockey,' 'Record-Jockey,' 1941," *American Speech*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Duke University Press: 1961), 151.

table compensation.<sup>32</sup> Radio DJ's of the decades prior to disco were clearly part of the corporate, modern-capitalist machine, whether they accepted bribes or not. Their role in mid-twentieth-century American culture was to promote sales for various record companies and push certain songs into the ears of the public, making them a key cog in the financial side of art production and proliferation.

Disco DJ's in America and the early Northern Soul spinners in England both represented an obverse side to radio disc jockeying, and each set a precedent for the future of global DJ'ing. These spinners were "rapidly establishing themselves as the prophets of postmodernity," in contrast to their capital-driven, radio counterparts.<sup>33</sup> Music in the context of a nightclub is about making people dance. There is no reason to push Top-40 radio swill if it does not inspire occupiers of the dance floor to move their bodies. In England during the same time frame as disco, the "Northern Soul" scene similarly encouraged vigorous dancing. Described by Frank Broughton and Bill Brewster as a precursor to late twentieth-century rave culture in the U.K., they state that Northern Soul parties were a chance for "working-class kids [to come] together in large numbers, across great distances, to obscure places, to take drugs and dance to music that no one else cared about."<sup>34</sup> The common thread between Northern Soul and Disco is thus a movement toward audience involvement, as well as a disregard for what is popular in the mainstream. By playing functional, often unknown music and putting the power in the

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<sup>32</sup>Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 39.

<sup>33</sup>Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 155.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 77.

hands of the dancing audience, Disco and Northern Soul helped set in motion a complete paradigm shift in the world of musical experience.

Disco's rise to fame set key foundations for the future of popular dance music. First, it broke from the sexualized "mating ritual"-like partner dancing that has dominated the annals of cultural history by placing an emphasis on group dancing (although partner dancing still has a role in disco). People could now express themselves as part of a collective whole, invoking a tribal togetherness also representative of the postmodern. In this way, both the dancing audience and music are liberated from the shackles of pre-existing musical culture, one which had established partner dancing as the only form of masculine expression on a dance floor. Disco DJ George La Torre states that "dancing simultaneously became a form of expression and release that required individuals to lose themselves in the crowd, relinquishing their ego to the wider group," and that "the dance was the purpose."<sup>35</sup> By giving up ego and merging energy with the crowd, dancers at a disco club experienced something more than their counterparts enjoying music elsewhere. This new way of experiencing live music resonated with a public ravenous for dance tunes and communal partying. Although disco as a musical style has not survived into the twenty-first century, its aesthetic imprint is easily visible in the world of music, particularly within the realm of EDM.

Disco came, conquered and collapsed, all within a ten year timespan. The trope "the bigger they are, the harder they fall" aptly fits the fall from grace of the disco scene experienced at the end of the 1970's. From an underground, non-heteronormative,

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<sup>35</sup> Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 191.

postmodern, subcultural world of gay nightclubs to the completely straight, middle-class, capitalistic, packaged world of The Bee Gees, *Saturday Night Fever* and the ubiquitous “disco” club – in less than a decade, the disco sound of MFSB and Kool and the Gang had been conquered by the corporate machine and made palatable for white America. Success and mainstreamification led to disco’s death: black people saw it as white-washed, white people saw it as black, conservatives saw it as hedonistic and the left saw it as representative of capitalist greed.<sup>36</sup> On July 12, 1979, the crowning achievement for detractors of disco played out to an audience of 70,000 at Chicago’s Comiskey Park. Officially titled “Disco Demolition Night” and organized by disgruntled radio DJ Steve Dahl, many of the attendees this particular evening were solely there to witness the conflagration of an enormous pile of disco vinyl during the intermission between the Cubs and the White Sox game.<sup>37</sup> The hatred for disco and what it stood for permeated American society, but people still wanted to dance.

### **Back underground: Chicago House and Detroit Techno**

The rigid yet groovy, robotic sound of Kraftwerk emerged from Germany near the beginning of America’s romance with disco, yet being contemporaneous did not have any visible implications on these two musical styles. Instead, Krautrock and disco went on to each influence the newest sounds on the block in their own particular ways, with Chicago “house” and Detroit techno” rising from the ashes of America’s “disco sucks” movement. Simon Reynolds describes early house as being characterized by a “machinic repetition”

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<sup>36</sup> Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 380.

<sup>37</sup> Joe Lapointe, “The Night Disco Went Up in Smoke,” *NY Times*, July 4, 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/05/sports/baseball/05disco.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/05/sports/baseball/05disco.html?_r=0)

as well as “the synthetic and electronic textures [and] rootlessness,” and believes that house’s use of “disregarded and degraded pop-culture detritus that the mainstream considered passé, disposable [and] un-American” makes it an ironic follow-up to disco, which was torn down for similar reasons.<sup>38</sup> Techno also embraces machine-like repetition, yet the drive to create “futuristic” sounds through synthesizers, minimalistic computer-modulated vocals and electro-grooves ties it much more to the likes of Kraftwerk and sets it apart from its counterpart in the Windy City. Although musically these two genres are quite different by the end of the 1980’s, the underlying principle of the democratic dance floor is present within each style, and both have played major roles in the evolution of electronic dance music.

The earliest incarnations of “house” music appeared in the night club scene of early 1980’s Chicago. With disco departments being purged from record companies, up-tempo dance recordings became less prevalent and down-tempo tunes dominated the market. This was not acceptable for DJs who desired to keep their audience dancing. Frankie Knuckles, resident disc jockey at Chicago’s “Warehouse” night club (from 1977-1982) and credited by many as being the first “house” DJ, noticed this happening and realized he “had to start changing certain things in order to keep feeding [his] dancefloor,” otherwise his club would go out of business.<sup>39</sup> How did house music, so similar to disco in many ways, escape disco’s tragic fate? Knuckles’ musical production and subsequently the sound of early Chicago house music has been described as a “combination of bare,

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<sup>38</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 296.

insistent drum machine pulse and an overlay of disco classics” used to keep people grooving, thus disco was clearly a present force in his work.<sup>40</sup> Adaptability and the flexible nature of house helped house DJ’s survive during a period that had just witnessed the crucifixion of a close musical relative. An example of house’s malleable nature can be seen in Knuckles’ Warehouse sets (“Warehouse” music colloquially being shortened to “house” music, inextricably linking Knuckles with house EDM), which were eclectic combinations of various sounds and genres. Drawing from the realms of R&B, Eurodisco, rock and others, his skills at getting the dance floor moving through his edits, cuts and remixes of unknown songs garnered him a widespread following and helped propagate the popularity of house.<sup>41</sup> Through diversification, Knuckles and other house DJ’s kept the dance floor democracy alive and strong, and set the foundation for electronic dance music to grow into the prominence it enjoys today.

Detroit’s cultural geography, a “posturban landscape” shaped greatly by the employment that auto industry behemoths Ford and GM provided, differed greatly from the “bustle” of its neighboring city Chicago during the early 1980’s, and this influenced the way music was being conceptualized.<sup>42</sup> The friend trio of Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson (*The Belleville Three*), who went on to pioneer early techno, were raised in the Detroit suburb of Belleville in middle class black families. Their parents were fairly well off due to the racial equality present in the world of automobile

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<sup>40</sup> Michelangelo Matos, “Frankie Knuckles, Godfather of ‘House Music,’ Dead at 59,” *Music (blog)*, *Rolling Stones*, April 1, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/>

<sup>41</sup> Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 408.

<sup>42</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 321.



manufacturing, yet discrimination still permeated the schools in the area; this led to the three gelling from the very beginning of junior high school.<sup>43</sup> When asked why European synth-pop resonated with him and his friends, Juan Atkins concedes that it was partly an attempt “to distance themselves from the kids that were coming up in the projects, in the ghetto.”<sup>44</sup> The social environment from which *The Belleville Three* emerged thus clearly played a role in their musical taste. Juan Atkins’ early project with Richard “3070” Davis, titled *CYBOTRON*, reflects the true degree of influence Kraftwerk and other European electro-minimalists had on the Detroit scene. One example is the group’s 1980 song “Alleys of Your Mind.” Defined by its mid-tempo, plodding pace, repetitive synthesizer lines and minimalist robotic vocals, it luxuriates in a world of dark, futuristic sounds.<sup>45</sup> Although not defined as “techno” at this point, the musical production coming out of the Detroit area had begun to set itself apart from other electronic styles through the works of Atkins and his contemporaries.

Another key difference between Detroit techno and its Chicago house counterpart is the varying needs from which each style was born. Frankie Knuckles first established himself as a DJ in the underground, non-heteronormative disco community of New York City, and his music in this context as well as the role he played in Chicago’s scene were each completely centered on keeping the audience dancing. His popular “Whistle Song” (1991) illustrates this focus. Using warm synth chords, moving flute lines as a substitute

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<sup>43</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 323.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 5.

<sup>45</sup> “CYBOTRON – ‘Alleys of Your Mind’ (Deep Space 1981),” 1981 studio recording, uploaded by “gresty1,” July 1, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/>

to a vocal melody, a deep synth bassline and drum machine hits (in particular, the sounds of the snare drum and hi-hat), Knuckles creates a positive and catchy, danceable tune emblematic of house.<sup>46</sup> The dominant forces in Detroit's cultural sphere, however, were not writing music to be used within a club setting. Instead, they focused on darker, futuristic, mechanical styles meant to fit within their hyper-industrialized world. The early Detroit sound as represented by the works of *The Belleville Three* was largely influenced by their listening sessions, where Derrick Mays and his friends would "sit back with the lights off and listen to records by Kraftwerk and Funkadelic and Parliament and Bootsy and Yellow Magic Orchestra, and try to actually understand what they were thinking about when they made it."<sup>47</sup> They put great weight in listening, seeing it as a chance to philosophize about the intricacies of music. Dancing did not play an important role during these formative years of techno. However, this begins to change by the late 1980's, and can be seen in the tune "Big Fun" (1988) by the group *Inner City*, considered by many as one of the first official "techno" songs. Equipped with soulful female vocals that often drive house music, "Big Fun" diverges from house by being completely mechanical in every other way, with synthesizer wobbles, electric piano notes and a forceful, repetitive drum machine rhythm that is both stiff and groovy.<sup>48</sup> "Big Fun" has a dark timbre as well, which reflects its Detroit roots. While both house and techno were

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<sup>46</sup> "Frankie Knuckles – The Whistle Song (Virgin Records 1991)," studio recording, uploaded by "skylineag4u2nv," November 6, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>47</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 4.

<sup>48</sup> "Inner City – Big Fun (1988)," music video, uploaded by "3Drives," May 18, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/>

born out of different needs, aesthetics and geographies, each have had a lasting impact on the expansion of EDM into the mainstream.

### **Hi-NRG: “Futuristic disco on speed”**

House may have been the most influential post-disco dance music to become popularized in the 1980’s, but it was not alone. San Francisco’s “Hi-NRG” emerged during this decade as well, and its blissful disco groove blended together with the hyper-sexuality of the Castro District makes it a valuable example of how new musical productions are often a combination of cultural geography and various popular musical aesthetics. Vivacious, unabashedly gay, up-tempo, dance tunes where vocal histrionics are just as functional as robotic lyrics and “house” minimalism is discarded for fuller, textured layers of sound, Hi-NRG flaunts sexual innuendo while simultaneously encouraging non-sexual group dancing. DJ Rob Kimbel, a prominent figure and performer at San Francisco’s nightclub *The Trocadero Transfer*, elaborates on the power of the asexual DJ-audience relationship, stating that the performance becomes “pure communication of joy and sharing of human love and the life experience” rather than an overtly erotic partner dancing ritual.<sup>49</sup> Sharing the “dance floor democracy” idea with its disco counterpart, Hi-NRG is essentially futuristic disco on speed.

With song titles like “Menergy” and “Do You Wanna Funk,” Hi-NRG embraces its roots in the San Francisco gay community and basks in an exaggerated, pulsing dance energy. One of the most visible stars in this musical realm, producer DJ Patrick Cowley, had a penchant for using flamboyant vocalists in his work, and “Do You Wanna Funk”

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<sup>49</sup>David Diebold, *Tribal Rites: The San Francisco Dance Music Phenomenon 1978-88*. (San Francisco: Time Warp Pub., 1988), 158.

was no exception. Sylvester, a bombastic black drag queen with an impressive vocal range defined by its power and unhinged intensity, collaborated with Cowley on multiple works including this particular club burner. The song commences with a drum machine and a repetitive cowbell pattern, but soon rapid synthesizer lines and a deep electronic bass groove enter the picture, and shortly thereafter Sylvester begins to sing in his characteristic gospel falsetto. By the time the chorus arrives, the lyrics “Do you wanna funk? Won’t you tell me now? If you wanna funk, lemme show you how. Do you wanna funk with me?” seem appropriately suggestive and over the top.<sup>50</sup> Replacing disco strings with flowing electric synth riffs, taking its rhythmic feel and injecting it with electro-funk bass lines and then cranking up the beats per minute (BPM), Hi-NRG and songs like “Do You Wanna Funk” are an amalgamation of disco, funky-soul, electronics and histrionics. Arguably the most representative song of the Hi-NRG aesthetic is Cowley’s tune “Menergy,” an unfettered tribute to San Francisco’s gay club scene. Starting off slowly with a tidal wave of synthesizers and electric chimes that build into an array of electro bell tones, the beginning of “Menergy” sounds like something from a sci-fi film, invoking the grandeur of outer space. Gradually the synth pitches bend downwards and the bass comes in, a bouncing eighth-note electro-motor that is made even campier through the use of a repetitive synth melody and a robotic voice singing “Menergy.” Later on, Sylvester’s vocal dynamism calls and responds with the robotic lyric “Menergy,” and a synthesizer solo references “The Snake Charmer Song” (“there’s a place in

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<sup>50</sup> “Do You Wanna Funk (club mix) - Sylvester 1982,” studio recording, uploaded by “muzikman,” April 19, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/>

France...”).<sup>51</sup> The fun, suggestive, unserious nature of Hi-NRG is driven by elements of disco and early electronic instrumentation, and represents the wide reach of disco’s influence throughout America.

### **Raving bodies**

Partying at a club, where dance music keeps going for hours and hours can make it easy to lose track of time, and fans of EDM in the 1980’s realized this. In a flash, last call has arrived, a saddening reality to face for dance-enthusiasts throughout the urban worlds of New York, London and elsewhere. What do you do if you still want to dance? After-hour dance parties at clubs, such as those set up by England’s DJ/producer Paul Oakenfold at Streatham’s Project Club in 1985, set the tone for the urban rave scene that began in England during the late 1980’s and eventually spread to the United States in the 1990’s.<sup>52</sup> Similar to the democracy of the dance floor visible in the nightclubs that played house, techno and even disco, these after hour parties took the intensity to another level; in particular, by using the drug colloquially termed “ecstasy,” dancing until the sun rose became commonplace. Ecstasy (MDMA, or 3,4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine) an empathogenic drug (typically a pill) that comes in various shapes and colors (Figure 1) and acts as a euphoric stimulant and minor psychedelic, first began to pervade the dance music scene around the time these after-hour clubs began popping up. Eventually, the club was ditched all together, in favor of warehouse parties and other illegal, underground venues of partying. “Acid house,” a variation on house music pioneered by

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<sup>51</sup> “Patrick Cowley Menergy,” studio recording, uploaded by “WarEagle 041,” March 22, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>52</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 37.

the Chicago-based group Phuture in 1987, crossed the Atlantic and became a significant fixture of this young and growing U.K. rave scene.<sup>53</sup> Taking the Roland TB 303 bassline machine and twisting knobs and dials in random ways, Phuture discovered a cyborg sound that would send ravers into uncontrolled frenzies of dancing. The alien noise of the Roland 303 was a complete departure from the organic elements prevalent in most “house” music. Phuture’s first piece using this technology, titled “Acid Tracks,” had a noticeable impact on the late-night, drug using crowd in Chicago according to American house DJ Ron Hardy, who claims that by four in the morning when he dropped the song the “people were going crazy, they started slamdancing, knocking people over and just going nuts.”<sup>54</sup> Music that affected drug users so powerfully understandably resonated within London’s druggy, hedonistic, subcultural rave world.

### **Trance and “The Mainstream”**

Raving to electronic dance music was popular in some circles during the 1990’s, but it was “trance” music that really lifted EDM into the mainstream. Trance, a musical style steeped in enormous builds and releases and constant pulsing bass, is a perfect complement to the party drug ecstasy. First coming to prominence in the early 1990’s rave scene of London and Manchester, trance truly exploded in popularity when Darude’s chart topper “Sandstorm” dropped in 1999. “Sandstorm” is a radio-friendly example of the trance aesthetic, with its uplifting, open synth chords and gradual build into a

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<sup>53</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 315.

<sup>54</sup><sup>54</sup> Ibid, 316.

pounding 4/4 bass, colloquially referred to as “the drop.”<sup>55</sup> These builds and releases are at the heart of trance. Whether its progressive trance like Sasha and Digweed who have incredibly long periods between drops, or the Euro-trance as embodied by the music of Tiesto or Paul Van Dyk that is more poppy and is constantly flowing up and down, trance is about creating musical waves of sound; waves that people especially love to ride when ecstasy is in their system.<sup>56</sup> With trance music raising the overall visibility of EDM globally, legal outlets for dance music’s burgeoning popularity became a necessity.

### **Chapter One Conclusion**

What does postmodern Cage’ian avant-gardism share in common with Darude’s mainstream hit “Sandstorm”? Postmodern pioneers set the precedent that music should be about bringing the audience into the performance, and also proved that electronic sounds are a valuable tool for musical creation. These notions are fundamental to the world of electronic dance music. As such ideas evolved over time and took a variety of forms, EDM’s popularity also began to spread across the globe. Illegal raves became so big in England during the 1990’s that police had no choice but to intervene and break them up. The demand for dancing space where people could lose themselves with drugs and good electronic music was apparent. Legal, contained venues for such activities could turn large profits, and enterprising minds saw this cultural movement in dollar signs. The globalization of EDM has multiple implications, and one is the proliferation of the twenty-first –century music festival. In true postmodern form, however, electronic dance

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<sup>55</sup> “Darude – Sandstorm,” music video, uploaded by “DarudeVEVO,” March 11, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>56</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 439.

music's global popularity has also led to its re-contextualization in different cultures. In particular, Japanese pop music's adoption of EDM aesthetics shows the impact this musical style has had throughout the world, and gives an example of how art can be rearticulated to appeal to cultural tastes.



## Chapter Two

### **“Pamyu Pamyu Revolution!”: J-Pop, Neo-Kawaii and The Commodification of Electronic Dance Music through Cuteness in twenty-first-century Japan**

Japan is the heartland of cute culture throughout the world. Wander through any of Japan’s urban centers and this will become increasingly clear. Since the 1950’s, everything from kitchenware to fashion, music to tourism, dining to television programming has been influenced by the ubiquitous ‘kawaii’ (“cute” in Japanese) aesthetic. Kawaii also comes in a plethora of forms, and is constantly being expressed in new and diverse ways. What happens when the increasingly globalized phenomenon of electronic dance music is placed within this prism of “cutification?” Using technology to create new soundscapes, producers of EDM are not only on the cutting edge of technology. They are at the forefront of musical exploration, with the sounds and musical forms of the world at their fingertips to manipulate, remold and patch together. One fascinating way this is playing out can be seen within the sociocultural context of contemporary Japan. “Electronic dance music” in the West is a term that conjures images of pulsating, visceral bass, synthetic melodies and flowing vocal passages, all pieced together with the intention of pushing an audience onto the dance floor. Even more significant though, is the subversive, druggy, hedonistic elements often associated with this musical culture. Within the framework of globalization, Japan has transformed and tamed this once threatening music and made it safe and drug-free through the use of kawaii, an aesthetic that strongly resonates with consumers of popular culture in East Asia. Yet there are darker undertones to this reconstructed music as well, particularly when cuteness performed by young girls becomes fetishized. By remolding EDM into cute bubble-gum pop to be sung by equally cute young idols, producers in Japan have

created an art form perfect for mass consumption within the geocultural context of Asia. This art is personified by Japanese pop stars such as Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, the girls of AKB48 and the pop-trio Perfume, each using different methods to achieve kawaii. It is possible that the rapid ascendance of bizarro-cute pop star Kyary Pamyu Pamyu is indicative of a paradigm shift in Japanese notions of cuteness today. Regardless, this is certain: electronic dance music has been commodified by kawaii in Japan.

### **AKB48 and the Ubiquity of the Japanese Pop Idol**

Months following the devastating 2011 tsunami that struck Japan and subsequently caused the second worst nuclear meltdown in history, Japanese idol group AKB48 had raised roughly ¥500 million yen (\$6 million U.S.D.) for disaster relief, eclipsing the ¥300 million (\$3.6 million U.S.D.) donated by both Sony and Nintendo.<sup>57</sup> By early 2012, that number had risen to ¥1.25 billion yen through a combination of song releases, charity concerts and a media blitz pushing their fans to donate to the Red Cross.<sup>58</sup> AKB48 is a well-known commodity in Asia, and its very existence is woven into the fabric of Japanese capitalism, consumerism and popular culture. Their contributions to Fukushima relief thus fit into their overall ubiquitous position in Japan. As such an entrenched pop-cultural production, their image similarly reflects major Japanese styles, fixations and aesthetic preferences; in particular, “kawaii”ness. AKB48 is a huge group composed of 48 girls ranging in age from 13 to the mid-20’s who sing and dance while wearing school-girl uniforms, and other times swimsuits or lingerie, to upbeat, catchy

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<sup>57</sup> Brian Ashcraft, “Postquake, Japan’s game companies put titles on hold,” *The Japan Times*, April 6, 2011, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/>

<sup>58</sup> “AKB48 charity efforts have raised 1.25 billion yen in donations,” *Tokyograph*, February 18, 2012, <http://www.tokyograph.com/news/>

tunes composed by producer/founder (and 55 year old male) Yasushi Akimoto. In many ways these idols have come to symbolize the Japanese fascination with cuteness. From their clothing to the timbre of their melodies, there is a distinct youthful radiance to the girls in AKB48. To maintain this image, they must publically present themselves not only as cute and attractive, but also as “clean, healthy, and energetic” and they must refrain from intimate relationships during their tenure as members.<sup>59</sup> How the public perceives these young girls is thus very controlled. Contractually obligated to abstain from having boyfriends or lovers, one girl even shaved her head and posted a public apology online after being photographed leaving the residence of her secret boyfriend.<sup>60</sup> Appearance is everything, especially when trying to maintain the fantasies of male fans. As such, single, cute, defenseless girls are the desired product of pop groups. Throughout Asia, there is a “high regard for cuteness and apparent vulnerability is effectively and imperceptibly inculcated in the individual by insignificant aspects of everyday life,” and because of this the teen idol groups in Japan and other East Asian countries follow a very particular formula.<sup>61</sup> Producers of these groups are clearly taking advantage of pre-existing cultural preferences. A combination of their young, free-spirited appearance and their availability make idols in AKB48 and similar ensembles perfect magnets of attention for lonely boys and men who consistently consume their products.

### **Musical personification of childish glee**

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<sup>59</sup>Patrick Galbraith and W. and Jason G. Karlin, *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 5.

<sup>60</sup>Sarah C. Nelson, “Minami Minegishi, Japanese AKB48 Popstar Weeps and Shaves Head After Breaking Band Rules and Having a Boyfriend,” *Huffington Post UK*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/>

<sup>61</sup>Tzu-I Chuang, “The Power of Cuteness: Female Infantilization in Urban Taiwan.” *Greater China*. (Summer 2005): 22.

Central to Japanese idol group's energetic appeal is the use of up-tempo dance music. Electronic dance music offers the desired energy in abundance. Using technology like drum machines, synthesizers, vocoders and voice modulators, as well as computerized sounds and electronics, J-pop ("Japanese popular music") producers are clearly using aesthetics of EDM to drive their musical compositions. From Morning Musume's "No One Can Replace You" (English translation) to AKB48's hit song "Baby! Baby! Baby!," the Euro-house feel is visible beneath bubbly, upper-octave female vocals. Constant drum beats, synths and numerous soaring female voices (sometimes in harmony, often in unison) pushed through computer systems characterize what these J-pop squads bring to the table, and the result is the musical personification of childish glee. Equipped with a repertoire of locomotive candy-pop tunes, AKB48 and other idol groups embrace every opportunity to play out the role of adolescents bursting with vitality, and the musical stylings of EDM are useful in accomplishing this dynamic. Yet as useful as their music is in displaying such youthful vigor, it is still only one facet of what makes these girls kawaii in the eyes of their followers. The significance of cuteness in Japan predates EDM's global presence, and its connection to modern Japanese capitalism is unavoidable.

### **Corporate Cute**

On a 2012 trip to Washington D.C. to commemorate the one hundredth year anniversary of Japan's gifting of cherry blossom trees to the U.S. capital, sixteen AKB48 members met with a group of elementary school students to field questions and discuss their lives on the other side of the world. One young girl asked thirteen year old AKB48 member Rina Hirata to draw her a picture, and immediately she conjured up a charming

image of Sanrio's global behemoth of cute, Hello Kitty.<sup>62</sup> AKB48 represents the entrenched regime of kawaii in Japan, one popularized and championed by world renowned "Hello Kitty" and further expressed through the machinations of this enormously popular girl group. It is a corporate cute, scientific in its construction and created with capital and broad audience appeal in mind. Brian McVeigh states that Hello Kitty's "efficacy, influence, and impact derive from her plainness, simplicity, and artlessness—a contagion of consumerism grounded in her looks of sincerity, openness, and innocence..."<sup>63</sup> AKB48 and Hello Kitty are similar in this way, both capitalizing on Japan's appetite (and an increasingly global appetite) for cuteness by creating a finely honed, innocent, simple product that triggers culturally indoctrinated inclinations toward such objects. Japan's government embraces the cultural capital of cuteness as well. For instance, in May 2008 the Japanese department of Transport and Tourism announced Hello Kitty as Japan's official ambassador of tourism to both China and Hong Kong, and in the following year, policy makers designated three young female models as "kawaii taishi," or "ambassadors of cute," who appear in an official capacity at global cultural events wearing "Lolita," "Harujuku" and school-girl uniforms.<sup>64</sup> (Figure 2) Each of these three particular styles represents "cute" within an infantile, adolescent framework. What happens when sexuality becomes inextricably linked to this cultural obsession?

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<sup>62</sup> Monica Hesse, "Japanese girl group AKB48 breezes through D.C. in whirlwind of cuteness," *Style* (blog), The Washington Post, March 27, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/>

<sup>63</sup> Brian McVeigh, "How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool and Camp: 'Consumutopia' versus 'Control in Japan.'" *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2000), 225.

<sup>64</sup> Christine Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as it Grabs Global Headlines," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (August 2009), 685.

### “Cute as innocent,” “Cute as sexy”

AKB48 constantly crosses the line between “cute as innocent” and “cute as sexy.” The hyper-fetishization of *kawaii* is an unavoidable, and encouraged, aspect of their male fandom, as well as a major element of what makes them popular in Japan. This is especially apparent in the group’s music videos and lyrical content, where bright, colorful imagery is mixed with some extremely suggestive material. One example of this dynamic can be seen in AKB48’s enormously popular hit “Heavy Rotation” (which has over 100 million YouTube views as of 3-10-14). In the opening sequence the camera covertly films through a keyhole into a room where a young Japanese girl, clad in lace lingerie, slowly takes off her shirt.<sup>65</sup> Before she completely disrobes, she notices the camera, and the video pans to the main group of girls who begin to dance and sing the first three lines in clear English: “I want you! I need you! I love you!”<sup>66</sup> Anyone could be looking through that keyhole—a neighbor, a younger brother, an old uncle, a father. It is incredibly voyeuristic. Throughout the remainder of the video, the juxtaposition between the young girls in lingerie acting coquettishly and the same girls innocently dancing in marching-band inspired outfits reveals a desire to appease both those interested in non-sexual “*kawaii*” and those who fetishize cuteness. In this way, producer Yosushi Akimoto succeeds in appealing to multiple demographics, drawing in younger girls with cute, and enticing young (and old) men with some unapologetically revealing attire. It is formulaic for maximum profit, and the entire enterprise is driven by the dance beats of electronica.

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<sup>65</sup> “【MV】ヘビーローテーション / AKB48 [公式] (Heavy Rotation)” YouTube video, 5:36, music video produced by Mika Ninagawa August 18, 2010, posted by “AKB48,” September 8, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

“Baby! Baby! Baby!,” another music video featuring the girls of AKB48, is an electronic, bubbly chart topper that is equally suggestive to “Heavy Rotation,” combining the innocent and burlesque in a tidal wave of colors. Initially the video is cast in a black and white tint, with the focus on a young girl who is slowly taking off her dress. An image of her falling (clothed) into a body of water, followed by the plunge of an apple, seems to allude to a departure from innocence, yet once the apple resurfaces the video shifts to vibrant color and the upbeat pop song begins.<sup>67</sup> Jumping back and forth between swim-suit clad girls playing with beach balls and applying sun-tan lotion to each other’s bodies to choreographed dances in 1960’s-inspired dresses and hats, the producer of this video strives to balance suggestion with fashion, sexy with style. At the heart of this video though, is unabashed cuteness in its various incarnations. Expressed through body language, pastel coloration, silly dance moves and childish notions of fun, it takes lyrics such as “smile at me with those lips that made me your slave” (in Japanese) to drive home the fact that this music is being marketed not only in cute yet explicit ways.<sup>68</sup>

### **AKB48 as Franchise: The McDonaldization of Pop Music**

Regardless of whether AKB48 excites or incites those who have experienced their controversial music, their very existence evokes strong emotions from people as the brand spreads across Asia. Many people accuse the group of being inappropriately sexualized in Japan, especially due to the fact that certain members are incredibly young, with some of their youngest in their early teens. In 2012, AKB48 creator and musical producer Yosushi Akimoto sat down with Anna Coren of CNN and addressed the

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<sup>67</sup> “Baby! Baby! Baby!” YouTube video, 5:41, music video by AKB48, posted by “natsumikikawaii,” September 17, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

accusations levied against him that he is taking advantage of adolescent girls by commodifying them as objects of sexual desire. When asked about these criticisms, Akimoto responded that “there are more direct sexual expressions that 13 or 14-year-olds could be exposed to, just generally, in society” and that his videos are “an expression of art” rather than obscene portrayals of young girls.<sup>69</sup> Yet, the question remains: how young is too young? Article 176 and 177 of the Japanese Penal Code make explicitly clear that 13 years is the age of consent, internationally deemed by many as too low.<sup>70</sup> This line is definitely flirted with by Akimoto’s brain-child AKB48. As of 2013, subgroups of AKB48 have spread to southern Japan (SKE48) and Malaysia (JKT48) with a Taiwan variation in the works, and as their presence grows throughout East Asia so too does their impact on Japan’s international image.<sup>71</sup> These “sister” groups are even officially licensed to use Akimoto’s music; for instance, in 2013 JKT48 appeared in a new music video where the girls perform AKB48’s popular hit “Heavy Rotation,” and although the song is sung in Malay, the lyrics, melody, harmony, rhythm and frantic energy are all the same.<sup>72</sup> The video though, is strikingly different from the Japanese incarnation, lacking the sexual elements that are the root of so much controversy. This reveals the malleability of these groups, which are formed to appeal to certain audiences with culturally different tastes. Just as McDonald’s has a slightly different menu

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<sup>69</sup> “Interview with Japanese Music Producer Yasushi Akimoto,” *Talk Asia* (blog), *CNN*, January 12, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/>

<sup>70</sup> “Chapter XXII, Crimes of Obscenity, Rape and Bigamy,” *PENAL CODE (Act No.45 of 1907)*, translated, March 2006 edition, <http://www.cas.go.jp/>

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> “Heavy Rotation,” YouTube video, 5:59, song written and produced by Yasushi Akimoto and performed by JKT48, posted by “Yurezsean,” February 18, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/>



depending on its geographic location, these groups are being slightly tweaked as well. What began as merely an ambitious idea in the mind of Yasushi Akimoto has evolved into a franchise; in essence, AKB48 represents the “McDonaldization” of Japanese popular music, a phenomenon that has moved beyond the food industry into the realm of popular culture.<sup>73</sup> A personal colleague of mine who has lived in Tokyo for the past three years experiences the proliferation of AKB48 throughout many facets of his everyday life; from billboards and television advertisements to radio play, they are deeply rooted within the foundation of contemporary Japanese society. I asked him if he saw this national fixation changing in the near future, and if any artist could potentially shift Japan’s attention away from the controversial construction of Akimoto. His response was “Kyary Pamyu Pamyu.”<sup>74</sup>

### **Kyary Pamyu Pamyu Revolution**

The combination of a pre-recorded, Disney-esque fantasy jingle and pixie dancers floating around the stage in pink and powder blue wigs and bright plastic facemasks was absurd, adorable and overwhelming. Afflicted by what the journalists Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers call “cute-overload,” my first encounter with Japanese pop icon Kyary Pamyu Pamyu at her performance during the 2013 Taipei Formoz Music Festival was unlike anything I have ever seen.<sup>75</sup> After this brief, energetic introduction, the fashionable pop-star happily bounced into view with an enormous, high-pitched “Yay! Kyary Pamyu Pamyu des!” (“I’m Kyary Pamyu Pamyu,” informal Japanese) to the delight of the

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<sup>73</sup> George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*. (SAGE Publications Ltd., 1993).

<sup>74</sup> Nolan Warner, personal communication, March 7, 2014

<sup>75</sup> Christine Yano, “Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as it Grabs Global Headlines,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (August 2009), 681.

audience. As I discovered later through online videos, this entire bit was how Pamyu Pamyu kicked off all of her 2013 shows, from the exuberant “yay!” to the comically exaggerated dance moves of her supporting cast. Her production team had effectively packaged cuteness, and she was the final, ultimate product. Innocent, unadulterated, sugary cute—this is not the suggestive kawaii that has made AKB48 girls internationally famous. Replace school girl uniforms with neon pink and green dresses and gigantic bows, swimsuits and suntan lotion with an anthropomorphized onion, and the lyrics “I want to take off my school uniform, I want to misbehave, you can do whatever you like, I want to experience adult pleasure”<sup>76</sup> (Japanese) with “candy, candy, candy candy candy, sweetie, sweetie, girls love... chewing, chewing, chewing chewing chewing, cutie, cutie, chewing love”<sup>77</sup> (English), and it quickly becomes apparent that Kyary Pamyu Pamyu vanguards a different paradigm of cute. Although “Hello-Kitty” cuteness is still an entrenched global commodity, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu’s emergence into the international lime light reveals a growing appreciation of the many faces of kawaii, which she proudly displays without flaunting sex and innuendo.

Kyary Pamyu Pamyu’s fame and hyper-marketability are no accident. From her super-bubbly up-tempo music to her bizarrely adorable fashion and quasi-insane music videos, people behind the scenes have played and continue to play a part in shaping the Kyary Pamyu Pamyu image (Figure 3). Although Pamyu Pamyu’s appearance is the source of enormous public attention (her rise to fame sprouted from her forays into the

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<sup>76</sup> “Interview with Japanese Music Producer Yasushi Akimoto,” *Talk Asia* (blog), *CNN*, January 12, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/>

<sup>77</sup> “CANDY CANDY,” YouTube video, 3:55, song written and produced by Yasutaka Nakata and performed by Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, posted by “warnermusicjapan,” March 13, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/>

Harujuku fashion world of Tokyo), her music is what separates her from other arbiters of style in Japan. Writer and producer of Pamyu Pamyu's quirky, catchy melodies, DJ/producer/musician Yasutaka Nakata's role in her current stardom cannot be underestimated. In 2011 the viral, sensational tune "Pon Pon Pon" erupted on YouTube, and its accompanying video combined with its delightfully strange lyrics and addictive melodic style made it an immediate success.<sup>78</sup> Bright colors, unicorns, eyeballs, a box of Kraft™ Macaroni and Cheese and rainbow flatulence—it is cute, crazy and unpredictable, just like Kyary herself.

### **Yasutaka Nakata's *Capsule* and the EDM Aesthetic**

Yasutaka Nakata has been in the business for almost two decades, and his ability to create Japanese electro-pop has been carefully honed through his first two artistic projects, Capsule and Perfume. Capsule is an EDM-duo comprised of Nakata and singer Toshiko Koshijima. Officially formed in 1997, Nakata's personal group has had some success in his home country, yet nothing akin to the Kyary Pamyu Pamyu revolution. With Nakata as DJ and Koshijima as the face/voice of the partnership, Capsule unapologetically embraces EDM and various elements of dance music and recasts it into fun and groovy J-pop. As a result of his talented, distinct style, Nakata has been cited by western artists Passion Pit and Grimes as being a major influence on their sound, and his music has often been compared to the French robo-funk duo Daft Punk.<sup>79</sup> Vocal elements and bass/synth lines used in Capsule invoke a Euro-house vibe, yet Toshiko's soaring

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<sup>78</sup> "PONPONPON" YouTube video, 4:13, song written and produced by Yasutaka Nakata and performed by Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, posted by "warnermusicjapan," July 16, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>79</sup> Patrick St. Michael, "Capsule: Caps Lock," *Pitchfork*, December 3, 2013, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/>

lyrics (usually in Japanese but sometimes in accented English) flowing through a voice modulator make it distinctly non-Western; not because of the language per se, but the flamboyantly cute, girlishly high-pitched way the words are performed mark it as a product of Japan.

Capsule's song "The Music" is illustrative of this mixture, revealing how various cultural aesthetics can be combined to create new, interesting compositions. Musicologist Roland Robertson describes such a process as representative of "glocalization."<sup>80</sup> "The Music" begins with a repeated 4/4 bass drum hit, which is soon followed by the entrance of the high-hat, thus musically revealing the dance nature of the tune. Yet quickly thereafter, Nakata establishes Koshijima's electronically mixed, harmonized voice as central to the overall sound of the piece. Using her girlish voice as an instrument, Nakata leads into the bass drop by repeating her lyrics "the music," as well as increasing the sound frequency and the speed of the snare hits.<sup>81</sup> This is one of the most common lead-ins to dance breaks in the world of popular EDM today. The big dance section in "The Music" is a repetitive, large synth melody that has an exotic timbre due to Nakata's use of the harmonic minor scale, and as a fun dance tune, it is incredibly effective. Such a trance-influenced song would resonate with the club-happy EDM consumers of the world, yet in Japan it has met lukewarm success. It is cute and fun, but it is not cute enough. As far as his personal group is concerned, Nakata does not seem to mind. His most recent album, titled *Caps Lock* (2013) plays with some very hip, unconventional themes, and

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<sup>80</sup>Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity." In *Global Modernities: 10th Anniversary Conference: Revised Papers*, edited by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, 25–44.

<sup>81</sup> Capsule, "The Music," produced by Yasutaka Nakata, released March 2010 on *Player*, Yamaha Music Communications.

half the songs avoid the kawaii of Koshijima's high-pitched voice altogether.<sup>82</sup> By shirking the use of Koshijima (and thus a strong conveyor of cuteness), Nakata seems to use Capsule as a sounding board for other artistic ideas, giving him an outlet where he can step away from the world of pop music and explore different musical sounds in any capacity. Ones that catch on can then be channeled through his pop constructions, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and Perfume, where he can then cutify the music and achieve mainstream success.

### **Perfume: Taking EDM in Asia to a Whole New *Level*3**

Lasers, choreographed dancing, groovy bass-lines and girly singing: Perfume is more representative of the kawaii dynamic adored in Japan, and their domestic popularity is proof. (Figure 4) Perfume is an Electro-pop girl trio that came together in early 2000, but it was not until 2003 when Nakata began producing their music that they became a hit in their home country. Their fame in Japan is substantial, going platinum multiple times, yet their global reach is still a work in progress.<sup>83</sup> With that said, they have begun to gain followings in certain cultural centers in Europe and have certainly eclipsed Nakata's Capsule in terms of international fame (in both record sales and touring). For instance, in London on their first world tour, the venue was shifted twice to meet the demand for tickets, and they also played to crowds in Cologne and Paris.<sup>84</sup> These shows were all smaller venues though, whereas earlier on the Asian leg of their tour they played to stadium-sized crowds. Musically, Perfume's sound has been described as an "addictive

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<sup>82</sup> Patrick St. Michael, "Capsule: Caps Lock," *Pitchfork*, December 3, 2013, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/>

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Robson, "Signature Scent: Japan's Perfume Does Pop Like No One Else," *MTV Iggy*, July 2, 2013, <http://www.mtviggy.com/>

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

multilayered concoction of J-pop with elements of electro-house, chiptune and Shibuya-kei<sup>85</sup>,” and their music exudes a contagiously joyous energy.<sup>86</sup> Their song “Polyrhythm” appeared in the 2011 *Cars 2* soundtrack, and although they still have not emerged as a globally dominant pop act, the use of their music in an animated Disney film is indicative of the cuteness Nakata has cultivated into mainstream power.

Perfume can largely be characterized by their up tempo dance sound, one that draws heavily from electronic dance music while simultaneously retaining a Japanese identity via melodic tendencies and instrumentation. Perfume’s range from glitch pop ballads to straightforward club tunes makes them not only a versatile group, but also a key case study on how electronic dance music is contextualized within Asia. One example of how EDM is refracted through a kawaii lens can be seen in the song “Point” off Perfume’s 2013 album *Level3*. From the very beginning, a heavy drum and bass feel is juxtaposed with warm synthesizer chords, flowing harp arpeggios and high electronic bell-tones. This amalgamation of sound at first seems contradictory. Drum and bass is a very specific genre of EDM characterized by rapid drum set hits and fast tempo, and it is renowned for its role in the late early 1990’s druggy rave scenes of England and the United States. In contrast, the splashes of chords on the synthesizer and overall harmonic timbre of “Point” invoke more of a jazz feel than a dance vibe. By the time the chorus arrives, the combination of Nakata’s instrumentation and rhythmic structure create an all-enveloping experience—one that could be danced to, appreciated for its expert mixture of

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<sup>85</sup> “90s-centric style of indie, almost always electronic, pop that centered around Tokyo’s Shibuya ward.” <http://www.laweekly.com/>

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Robson, “Will the world soon wake up to the scent of Perfume?” *The Japan Times*, May 18, 2012, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/>

western EDM rhythm and Japanese melody, or both. He took an originally western subgroup of electronic dance music with strong ties to drug use and made it resonate of happiness and innocence. Such an example reveals how EDM can be and often is cutified by J-pop.

Perfume's "Spending All My Time" is another powerful case for the apparent proliferation of electronic dance music into the world of Japanese pop. From the very beginning an upbeat house vibe is established with bright synthesizer chords, drawing from sounds prevalent in the western night club scene. Even the main lyrics, "spending all, spending, spending all my time, loving you, so loving you forever" are in English.<sup>87</sup> Where this tune really differentiates from western electro-pop is the way Nakata has the girls sing in lush yet mechanical harmony throughout certain sections of the piece. Their voices are not in the spotlight, but are instead used as an important layer on top of everything that is occurring during the music. More importantly though, the lyrics they are singing do not seem to have any relevance to the song. Although the girls are singing in English, the grammar is incorrect ("so loving you forever") and the words are instead manipulated in an instrumental way; the strength of the words "loving you" seemingly unimportant in contrast to the harmonization occurring with the vocals. Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, Taio Cruz and other American club fixtures are center stage of their respective musical repertoires, and although their lyrical content may be vapid, it is still central to their music. With the help of Nakata, Perfume achieves a very western style while also retaining a strong undercurrent of Japanese sound.

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<sup>87</sup> Perfume, "Spending All My Time," produced by Yasutaka Nakata, released October 2013, on *Level3*, Universal J.

### “Super Scooter Happy”: Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, Queen of “Neo-Kawaii”

While Nakata’s two pop-constructions, Capsule and Perfume, have earned accolades from critics and fans (primarily in Japan), they have largely been eclipsed by Kyary Pamyu Pamyu’s national and increasingly global reach. Why is this the case? In an interview with the young pop star, she made her worldview absolutely clear: “Everything can be kawaii...in fact, there’s no such thing to me as ‘not kawaii,’ even if you try to tell me so — because I can make anything kawaii.”<sup>88</sup> She may very well be right. Anything is fair game for the singing fashionista, both musically and visually. *The Wall Street Journal* blogger Jeff Yang boldly states that “Kawaii is dead. Long live Kyary. Long live Neo-Kawaii.”<sup>89</sup> “Neo-Kawaii” is the idea that cuteness can be found in anything, in the bizarre/macabre as well as within the pre-existing “cute” framework. Anything from shark hair bows to floating brains and dancing furry monsters prominently displayed in her music videos; everything is fair game for Pamyu Pamyu (Figure 5). Essentially, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu embraces a postmodern ideal of cuteness, and this has resonated with her rabid following. She is often trendily infantilized (Figure 6), her fashion sense is idolized by girls/young women around the world (especially in places where cuteness is a desired look), her music videos are a combination of cute and insane, and her actual music can best be described as absurdly cheerful bubble-gum synth pop. A combination of adorable and edgy, blissful and off-key, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu’s bizarre persona makes her appeal to a wider audience; she personifies cuteness while simultaneously revealing a quirky goofiness that makes her relatable to the common person. Kyary’s personality in

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<sup>88</sup>Jeff Yang, “Kyary Pamyu Pamyu Takes Pop Beyond Cute,” *Speakeasy* (blog), *The Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/>

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*



tandem with Nakata's cutification of her musical style is a potent pairing, one that may be representative of a shift in popular notions of what it means to be kawaii. Having experienced the weighty cultural capital of cuteness in places such as Taiwan and Japan firsthand, this transformation could have enormous implications on the future of popular culture throughout all of East Asia.

Drawing elements from a well-versed background in electronic dance music and mixing it together with cartoon-ish sounds, video game plinks and Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's adolescent girly voice, Nakata has created a brightly sparkling, intensely cute musical form perfect to accompany his young singer's over-the-top character. One example is the delightful, cruising song "Super Scooter Happy" (English), which is actually a cover from Nakata's group Capsule. Using a low rumbling bass, xylophone and muted trumpet counter melodies as well as various types of bells and whistles in accompaniment to a brisk melodic form, Nakata's writing invokes the feeling of driving around town on a sunny day.<sup>90</sup> Kyary's child-like voice is then used as a vehicle to establish the tune's youthful exuberance, cementing everything about the piece within the realm of kawaii. This is only one example of Nakata's creative flair, as well as Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's ability to make anything cute. Another song on her 2013 album *Nanda Collection* is titled "こんじゃりばんばん (*Ninja re Bang Bang*)," and in this instance she is reconstructing the sacred Japanese ninja through cutification. The accompanying music video draws imagery from this ubiquitous symbol of Japan, with Kyary dancing around on top of a Koi fish and striking slow-motion combat poses with a katana

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<sup>90</sup> Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, performance of "Super Scooter Happy!" by Yasutaka Nakata, released June 2013, on *Nanda Collection*, Warner Music Japan.

strapped to her back.<sup>91</sup> Musically centered upon everything Japanese, the use of a gong, a high-pitched reed flute, a shamisen,<sup>92</sup> wooden blocks and metallic sword effects are bolstered with energy from an electronic bass line and Kyary's pure, girlish soprano voice. Something serious, like the ninja, has been made adorable through Kyary Pamyu Pamyu; the black garb of the assassin replaced with radiant colors, and the use of throwing stars as well as sword strikes transformed into dance moves. Kyary Pamyu Pamyu has Japan's equivalent of the Midas touch: everything she touches turns to cute.

### **“Kawaii Evangelist”: Sebastian Masuda’s 6%DOKIDOKI**

French fashion icon Coco Chanel famously said, “In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different.”<sup>93</sup> If being different was a form of currency, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu would be endlessly wealthy. Originally noticed in Tokyo's fashionable Harajuku district and used as a model before her big break as a singer, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's style is an intrinsically important element of what makes her stand apart from other famous people in Japan, and one man, Sebastian Masuda, has had a disproportionate influence on this particular style. Another primary player in the creation of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's iconic image, Masuda is referred to by some as one of Japan's “top evangelists of kawaii culture,” and his brand 6%DOKIDOKI is on the cutting edge of fashion throughout East Asia.<sup>94</sup> Originally opening in 1995 in Harajuku, 6%DOKIDOKI embraces the concept of

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<sup>91</sup> “にんじやりばんばん, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu - Ninja Re Bang Bang” YouTube video, 4:24, song written and produced by Yasutaka Nakata and performed by Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, posted by “warnermusicjapan” March 11, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>92</sup> Japanese 3-stringed instrument

<sup>93</sup> Susanna Ramsdale, “The 50 Best Style Quotes of All Time,” *Marie Claire*, October 25, 2013, <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/>

<sup>94</sup> “Sebastian Masuda’s “Colorful Rebellion” Art Exhibition to Debut in New York,” *Tokyo Fashion*, January 30, 2014, <http://tokyofashion.com/>

“Sensational Lovely,” which “refers to things that take cuteness past the extreme.”<sup>95</sup> This becomes apparent when viewing Masuda’s newest incarnation of his brand, “Beyond the Kawaii,” which features brightly dressed female models posing next to a giant rat as well as an enormous hypodermic needle filled with an array of colorful orbs.<sup>96</sup> (Figure 7)

Anything can be made cute when contextualized in certain ways, and this is what Masuda expresses through his various projects, one being Kyary Pamyu Pamyu.

Kyary Pamyu Pamyu’s first music video, “Pon Pon Pon,” is an important example of Sebastian Masuda’s fashion aesthetic at work. At the heart of what makes this video so effective is the outrageously gaudy juxtaposition of colors and darkness, the cute with the borderline horrific, and this can be attributed to Masuda’s artistic mind. The insanity begins with Kyary Pamyu Pamyu standing in a vibrantly pink and yellow room, clad in a skirt covered in images of eyeballs. After pulling a candy-cane-esque microphone out of her ear, she begins singing and the strangeness increases exponentially. Floating brains, a faceless woman in a pink apron dancing wildly, ravens and eyeballs being expelled from Kyary’s disembodied head, an evil duck wearing a golden crown, a neon green donut, floating slices of bread and gallivanting cartoon images of dinosaurs, body parts and tanks all make appearances in this inanely brilliant piece of art.<sup>97</sup> So much is actually happening in the video that it is difficult to take in the immense amount of details on display. “Pon Pon Pon” is an overwhelming mishmash of color, images, catchy dance

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<sup>95</sup> “6%DOKIDOKI “Beyond the Kawaii” Evolution and Harajuku Shop,” *Tokyo Fashion*, November 19, 2013, <http://tokyofashion.com/>

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> “PONPONPON” YouTube video, 4:13, song written and produced by Yasutaka Nakata and performed by Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, posted by “warnermusicjapan,” July 16, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/>

moves and acid-laced frolicking. The exclamation point on the entire video is the closing sequence, which ends with Pamyu Pamyu's winking face cheekily sticking her tongue out inside a circular frame, which closes and pops out an orange-colored eye. Kyary Pamyu Pamyu is the perfect vehicle for Masuda's imagination to reach a greater audience, yet the relationship is certainly symbiotic. Her youthful energy permeates the video thus appealing to fans of Japan's idol culture, and the completely off-kilter nature of the song and visual hyper-stimulation makes it also resonate with people who may not normally consume Japanese pop music. The combination of Yasutaka Nakata's electronic, pulsing sound with Sebastian Masuda's fashionable "extreme cute" and disregard for conventionality has transformed the unknown Kiriko Takemura into Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, J-pop's queen of neo-kawaii.

## **Chapter Two Conclusion**

Turn on the television in the United States, and it quickly becomes clear that sexuality is an oft-used element of advertising, with corporations trying to appeal to the innate desires of the potential consumer. In Asia, however, cuteness is given more cultural weight, and this is exploited by not only companies but producers of popular culture. Drawing from a world of repetitive, pulsing dance beats and rebranding them in cute ways, writers of J-pop mold electronic dance music strategically in order to access the heart of the Asian market, one which places cuteness on a pedestal. This is done in a variety of manners, some of which are highly scrutinized by people around the world. The super-group AKB48 wields sexuality and cuteness hand in hand, their management disregarding the fact that there are members who have just hit their teenage years. In contrast, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's amalgamation of hyper-kawaii and the macabre/strange

sets herself apart from the “Hello-Kittyfied,” franchised AKB48. In both cases though, globalization is apparent. The use of EDM in J-Pop is an intrinsically important element of what makes these idols cute in the eyes of consumers – primarily, by helping establish them as energetic teens overflowing with youthful vigor. Whether consumers of kawaii prefer the innuendo of AKB48 or the random absurdity of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, it is clear that western notions of EDM have been dissected and restructured in Japan for use within the realm of twenty-first-century Japanese popular music. The market for electronic dance music is thus becoming realized across the globe.

### Chapter Three

#### **“Has anyone seen Molly?”: Drugs, Music Festivals and The Commercialization of EDM Worldwide**

Deep, visceral bass, sweating masses of manic-dancing humanity, psychedelic pulsating lights. Such a dynamic, originally found in the subversive underground rave scenes of 1980’s London, Detroit and New York, is now established cultural praxis in contemporary society. This transcultural form is witnessed most prominently in enormous international music festivals. These musical extravaganzas continue to grow in popularity as well. Consider *Ultra* as an illustrative case. *Ultra* started quietly in 1999 as a one day electronic dance music festival in downtown Miami. At present, the *Ultra* brand has expanded both domestically and across the globe: it is now a three day event in Miami, and has a presence in eight other cities on five continents.<sup>98</sup>

Thus far in the twenty-first century, American and European festivals still lead in terms of commercial profitability, yet other regions of the world have begun capitalizing on the booming music festival industry. East Asia is among the most dynamic expanding markets for these types of music festivals. South Korea’s first *Ultra Festival* in 2012 was a resounding success and Tokyo is set to host its first *Ultra* during the fall of 2014, Taipei just restarted the Formoz festival in 2013 after a hiatus and hosts an annual EDM beach festival during the heat of the summer, and events are beginning to expand all throughout China’s major cities in places such as Chengdu, Beijing and Shanghai. Paralleling the growth of music festivals and the rise of EDM is the burgeoning popularity of the drug ecstasy and its rebranded powdered form, “molly.” The ubiquity of music festivals and

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<sup>98</sup> “Ultra Worldwide: The World’s Premier Electronic Music Festivals,” accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.ultramusicfestival.com/>

party drugs today has been noticed by both illegal and legal capital-driven enterprises, and as these mega events continue to boom, so will the associated international drug market. Electronic dance music and its inextricable connection to MDMA (in its varying incarnations) raise many questions. As the music continues to grow in the mainstream, how will governments deal with the prevalence of illicit substances at EDM shows? Will society at large condemn and attempt to kill rave culture like they killed disco in 1979? Has festival culture peaked, or will it continue its upward trend? The globalization of EDM has large implications on twenty-first-century urban society, bringing governments, drugs and gangs, venture capitalists, party-loving youth and EDM artists together in a clash of economics, popular culture and governmental regulation.

### **Pill Popping, Party Rocking, and Penicillin for the Soul**

The chemical behind Ecstasy was first patented by the German pharmaceutical Merck in 1912.<sup>99</sup> Named for the happy, ecstatic euphoria it induces, it has been colloquially shortened to “MDMA.” However, it was not until American pharmacologist Dr. Alexander Shulgin began using MDMA as a therapeutic substance during the 1970’s that its popularity began to skyrocket, with many psychiatrists describing it as “penicillin for the soul.”<sup>100</sup> During the early 1980’s its recreational use began to spike in the club scene, and by 1985 the United States government established it as a “Schedule 1 Drug,” declaring MDMA completely illicit and of no medicinal value.<sup>101</sup> Its illegality did not deter many people from seeking out the empathogenic substance though, and an

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<sup>99</sup> “History of ecstasy,” New Zealand Drug Foundation, accessed April 8th, 2014, <http://www.drugfoundation.org.nz/>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> “Drug Scheduling.” *United States Drug Enforcement Administration*, accessed September 29, 2013. <http://www.justice.gov/>

increased availability overseas (primarily in the United Kingdom) during the late 1980's and early 1990's soon established it as the drug of choice for EDM enthusiasts and party-goers throughout Western Europe.

Electronic dance music's function as a "synergistic partner with drugs" became apparent during the late 1980's, where the duo of party-enhancers and repetitive dance beats together led to the birth of the "rave" in the West.<sup>102</sup> Simon Reynolds, a scholar of and participant in English rave culture during the early 1990's, describes MDMA as "a remarkable chemical, combining the sensory intensification and auditory enhancement of marijuana and low-dose LSD, the sleep-defying, energy-boosting effects of speed, and the uninhibited conviviality of alcohol," as well as "unique effects of empathy and insight."<sup>103</sup> The merger of such effects, most importantly, led to the lowering of physical boundaries amongst users; rather than territorial partner dancing, people could join in a communal, non-sexual orgy of dance and music. Essentially, it facilitated the creation of the "rave" today. One might query: could what we understand as the "rave" exist without MDMA. Yes, most likely, but this distinct cultural phenomenon would manifest in some related yet different way. An event all about positive tactile and sensory experiences, where "it wasn't just about telling your friends you loved them, it was about telling people who weren't your friends you loved them!"<sup>104</sup> The positive, open, lose-yourself nature of raving resonated with many, and soon raves and rave-inspired clubs began to take hold of not only England's imagination but the imagination of a global audience.

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<sup>102</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkeley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), xxi.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, xxiv.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 47.



## Ecstasy, Molly, Gangsters, Drug Cartels

Electronic dance music and the pleasure-seeking culture associated with it may originate in the West, yet the value of the party drug ecstasy has been noted by many people across the globe, as both a recreational item as well as one for potential profit. One major player in the consumption and production of MDMA is China. The domestic market for ecstasy in China has evolved rapidly over the past two decades. From being a relatively unknown substance to the most used drug in the country behind only opiates in 2003, it has latched onto the youth as well and is now the most frequently sought illicit drugs amongst China's young people, who typically use it as a supplement to bolster an evening at the club.<sup>105</sup> Where is this drug coming from? The creation of ecstasy requires a significant amount of safrole oil, and this particular material is easily found in Asia as a byproduct of oil extraction from camphor trees.<sup>106</sup> Camphor is native to both China and Japan. The black market for such high-demand precursor chemicals is enormous, and subversive organizations throughout China and Southeast Asia have positioned themselves well to take advantage. For instance, over the past decade China has been considered by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as a significant "source country for legitimately produced chemicals that are diverted for production of heroin and cocaine, as well as many amphetamine-type stimulants" outside of the country.<sup>107</sup> These precursors then make their way to places like Canada, where

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<sup>105</sup> Fang, Yu-xia et. al, "Recent Trends in Drug Abuse in China." *Acta Pharmacologica Sinica*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (February, 2006), 142.

<sup>106</sup> "Camphor Tree," *Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants: University of Florida, IFAS*, Accessed April 8, 2014, <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>

<sup>107</sup> "Drug Intelligence Brief, China: Country Brief," *Drug Enforcement Administration Intelligence Division*, (February 2004: <https://www.hsdl.org/>), 5.

production and subsequent distribution for a hungry American market is a more feasible enterprise. In control of a large percentage of these Canadian MDMA labs are Chinese Triads and Vietnamese gangsters, thus connecting chemicals, production and circulation to China.<sup>108</sup> Criminal organizations in Asia are not only outsourcing these chemicals for production in other countries but producing them in their own geographic backyard as well. An “increased demand for ecstasy and the ready availability of precursor chemicals from China and Vietnam” make these areas “increasingly vulnerable to becoming havens for large-scale MDMA manufacture,” with factories already being discovered in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia by 2004.<sup>109</sup> MDMA use is becoming more prevalent throughout the world, and Asian countries like China are involved on both ends of the consumption/production spectrum.

What makes ecstasy resonate with the younger generation? One recent study posits that there is “little evidence of people initiating ecstasy use after the age of thirty,” as well as “little evidence of former ecstasy users re-initiating use of the drug beyond thirty years of age.”<sup>110</sup> This substance clearly resonates with the younger generation while eluding the attention of older drug users. One reason for this resonance is clever marketing. Ecstasy pills are famous for their interesting shapes, colors and emblems; coming in any color of the rainbow and being stamped with imprints of animals, symbols

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<sup>108</sup> Madeline Scinto, “Inside the Lucrative World of Ecstasy Smuggling.” *Nypost.com*, January 27, 2013, <http://nypost.com/>

<sup>109</sup> Yu-xia Fang et. al, “Recent Trends in Drug Abuse in China.” *Acta Pharmacologica Sinica*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (February, 2006), 142.

<sup>110</sup> Rebecca Mcketin et. al, “Research to explain and respond to the ecstasy use situation in Australia: A birth cohort analysis of national ecstasy use trends,” *National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre*, NDARC Technical Report No. 313 (2010), Accessed April 12, 2014, <http://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/>

and different words.<sup>111</sup> From the famous Japanese Mitsubishi symbol to a green shamrock, the variation of these pills is immense. Referred colloquially by many as “candy,” e-pills have a youthful, non-threatening appearance. Today, these pills are less popular for a variety of reasons, one being the misconception that they are often cut with harmful substances like “rat poison, heroin and embalming fluid,” yet drug producers are adaptable.<sup>112</sup> By rebranding ecstasy as “molly,” shifting the packaging of MDMA from pill to powder form and then propagating the notion that powder is “more pure,” drug producers and dealers have created a renaissance of interest in the drug. With big name celebrities like Madonna, Miley Cyrus, Kanye West, Diplo and others making public references to the innocent sounding “molly,” the average consumer begins to see it as less harmful and more socially acceptable.<sup>113</sup> With figures of popular music culture latching onto this substance, many of whom make a living off of performing dance music to drug-fueled crowds, the abuse of MDMA is exacerbated by the very people who benefit from its popularity. Even if these celebrity endorsements are occasionally accidental or unintentional, they have helped create a cool, glamorous, non-threatening image of MDMA.

### **“Raving it up at the sex-and-drugs orgy”**

Whenever a form of musical culture pushes towards the mainstream, media scrutiny is sure to follow. In the case of England’s early 1990’s rave scene, its association

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<sup>111</sup> Brewster, Bill and Frank Broughton. *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 365.

<sup>112</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 49.

<sup>113</sup> Ben Sisario and James C. McKinley, “Drug Deaths Threaten Rising Business of Electronic Music Fests.” *Nytimes.com*, September 9, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/>

with the illegal drug ecstasy became a focal point of contention with the media and soon thereafter the public. Headlines seen in tabloids like *The Sun* that describe young people as “raving it up at the sex-and-drugs orgy” played on the average citizen’s trepidation of this until recently underground subculture.<sup>114</sup> With descriptions of Dionysian-esque depravity plastered on newspapers throughout England, people feared that the pill-popping raver may have a negative influence on their children, or at least the youth of the nation. Zygmunt Bauman describes these ravers as belonging to a “neo-tribe,” or a distinct group that follow similar patterns of social behavior (clothing, music, substances), and their presence in England was quickly tarnishing the idealized image of the country.<sup>115</sup> To deal with these subversive groups, police became increasingly involved in the breaking up of warehouse parties and raves, even once “using frogmen to assault a pleasure boat rave in Greenwich.”<sup>116</sup> England’s assault on rave culture was harsh, and representative of how media forces can create movements against musical forms and their associated lifestyles. Boldly printed tabloids shouting, “CRAZED ACID MOB ATTACK POLICE” and other panic inducing, inflammatory headlines, if ignored by ravers and young people, did catch the attention of the general public.<sup>117</sup> Disco faced a similar media blitz in 1979 for its association with illicit substances and its perceived out-of-control nature, where it was stereotyped that minorities and homosexuals did large amounts of

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<sup>114</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 50.

<sup>115</sup> Keith H. Halfacree, “Madchester Rave on’: Placing the Fragments of Popular Music,” *Area*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (The Royal Geographical Society: March 1996), 48.

<sup>116</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture (A Generation Ecstasy Extended Remix for the Twenty-First Century)*. (Berkley, CA: Softskull Press, 1998, 2012), 50.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

drugs and mindlessly partied for hours on end. In this case, the result: disco's total fall from grace.

The media's role in criticizing electronic dance music and its associated culture is still a dynamic occurring today, with some of the criticisms eerily similar to those levied against disco during the late 1970's. In the waning months of 2013, *Rolling Stones Italy* published an EDM doomsday video, harkening the inevitable destruction that electronic dance music faces. The first image to lodge itself in the viewer's memory is an ear with a bunch of worms crawling all over it, referencing the colloquially dubbed "ear worm," or a song that easily and annoyingly gets stuck in your head. In a voice dripping with fake stoicism, the narrator goes on a diatribe elaborating on how DJ's are "criminals with the right to shoot shit into our ear drums," and decries them as "low quality mp3 pushers, 3<sup>rd</sup> class whores" who produce "electronic noises [they] try and pass off as music."<sup>118</sup> He continues his attack on the hypothetical DJ, claiming that "the day will come when your vocoders explode and your CD's catch fire," and "in their place, we will see a return to guitar, bass and drums, bringing real music back to life...music with searing voices that touch your soul."<sup>119</sup> Referring to instrumental music as "real" was also a fallacy propagated by detractors of disco. Just as disco's influence was likened to a "killer disease" by vocal Chicago radio DJ Steve Dahl, this entire video alludes to EDM being something negative and in need of purging.<sup>120</sup> Another example of the extreme anxieties

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<sup>118</sup> "Rolling Stone Italy – Rocker vs. DJ," Rolling Stone video, uploaded by "Matteo Maggiore," October 31, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>119</sup> "Rolling Stone Italy – Rocker vs. DJ," Rolling Stone video, uploaded by "Matteo Maggiore," October 31, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>120</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton. *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 268.

some harbor against this music scene are visible in a 2012 video out of Norfolk Constabulary in England, where two police officers are taped taking turns smashing electronic equipment seized from an illegal rave.<sup>121</sup> Scare tactics from the media, as well as law enforcement, reveal a deep-rooted fear of rave culture. Creating a “weird musical snuff film” to attack raves reveals these apprehensions, held by people who are disturbed by the escapist nature of rave’s underground, dance floor democracy.<sup>122</sup> Its growing popularity, especially among young people, has only continued to grow, and this growth is seen by many as a threat to society.

### **Dubstep: “Elevate your style!”**

While the popularity of illegal raves has fluctuated over the past 25 years, the associated electronic dance music in its various incarnations has continued to slowly evolve into a more mainstream role, and now pervades twenty-first-century commercial and musical culture. One conspicuous example is how EDM is now frequently heard in television advertisements. Take, for example, a commercial for Motorola’s “Sol Republic” wireless audio device that uses Steve Aoki’s EDM in contrast to Lil John’s hip hop, a Pepsi commercial featuring international soccer stars and mega-DJ Calvin Harris, Martin Garrix’s “Animals” on the new Madden ’14 American football game trailer, as well as a Toyota Corolla ad that clearly alludes to EDM being the music of today by pairing musical time periods with older versions of the car and ending on a new 2014 Corolla while “dubstep” plays in the background and a narrator proclaims, “elevate your

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<sup>121</sup> Chase Hoffberger, “Police smash DJ gear with sledgehammers in anti-rave video,” *The Daily Dot*, December 14, 2012, <http://www.dailydot.com/>

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

style!”<sup>123</sup> EDM is thus used as a hip, fresh genre for the promotion of capitalism and consumerism. EDM is also becoming a more frequent element of movie soundtracks thanks to its often up-tempo, driving pace, and some electronic dance music producers have even been asked to completely arrange film scores. For instance, Daft Punk arranged the entirety of the 2010 *Tron: Legacy* soundtrack, and producer/DJ duo The Chemical Brothers created the critically acclaimed music for the 2011 movie *Hanna*. Furthermore, EDM producers are beginning to get increasing amounts of radio airtime with their songs and remixes. As of April 11, 2014, Zedd’s “Stay the Night,” Martin Garrix’s “Animals,” as well as both Avicii’s “Wake Me Up” and “Hey Brother” are on the U.S. top-40 chart.<sup>124</sup> The “top-40” was created as a way to play music the public listens to rather than what music studios want to make popular, thus the prevalence of DJ-produced dance music at the top of the charts reveals much about music preferences today.<sup>125</sup>

As festivals become more commercialized and embedded into mainstream international pop culture, an increasing number of people are attending these events that would never have done so before, specifically new fans of electronic dance music. How has the rave maneuvered from the underground to the spotlight, from obscurity to enormous popularity? In reality, what is perceived as electronic dance music in the mainstream obfuscates the enormity of the genre. Due to the rise of commercial trance, a

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<sup>123</sup> “‘Style Never Goes Out of Style’ – 2014 Toyota Corolla,” Toyota Corolla television commercial, uploaded by “Toyota USA,” September 3, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>124</sup> “USA Singles Top 40 (Sales + Airplay),” *Top40-Charts.com*, Accessed April 11, 2014, <http://top40-charts.com/>

<sup>125</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton. *Last night a dj saved my life: the history of the disc jockey* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 39.

large doorway has been opened, and beckons the uninitiated to enter the Dionysian realm of EDM. The top paid DJ/producers and their music are most responsible for bringing casual observers into the fold, where they invoke the rock-track aesthetic with typically three to five minute song lengths and soaring vocals, as well as a heavy dose of trance builds and drops.<sup>126</sup> Beatport.com's CEO Matt Addell likens this easy-to-comprehend EDM as akin to having an "interpreter" in a foreign country, and that "once you understand the language, then you can explore that territory [of other styles] on your own."<sup>127</sup> Just as the simple-yet-catchy Beatles aesthetic resonated with a global audience and cued a boom in rock and roll, the neatly packaged, catchy tunes written by top EDM producers promote the popularity of electronic dance music worldwide.

Electronic Dance Music has also moved from the rebellious, illegal rave to the club industry, where popular EDM songs are used to stir up the dance floor. By combining blaring electronic dance beats with the "ingestion of ecstasy," as well as "energetic dancing, and the management and organization of space," club owners and promoters have created a "calculated, highly sought-after shared experience and a temporary suspension of the rules and norms of everyday life."<sup>128</sup> The prevalence of nightclubs around the world attests to the general human desire for moments of escape, and these venues provide such a service. Bringing alcohol, ecstasy, dance music and well-dressed young people together is a formula that has made the club industry

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<sup>126</sup> Sami Yenigun, "Dance Music Looks Beyond EDM And Hopes The Crowd Will Follow," *National Public Radio*, October 29, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/>

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Christina Goulding et. al, "The Marketplace Management of Illicit Pleasure," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 35, No. 5 (The University Of Chicago Press: February 2009), 760.



enormous amounts of money. Music festivals aim to recreate this dynamic (with a bit more of a flexible dress code, see Figure 8), but on a much grander scale. Both the potential profit of these mega events, as well as the burgeoning popularity of electronic dance music, have not gone unnoticed on Wall Street.

In June 2012, SFX Entertainment, a media conglomerate ran by men who make no pretense about their desire to acquire as much of the EDM and its associated festival market as possible, was made public on the NASDAQ. At the head of this entertainment company is veteran businessman Robert FX Sillerman (Figure 9), whose experience with music promotion led to the eventual formation of Live Nation Entertainment in 2005, which is now set to be Sillerman's main rival in the dance market.<sup>129</sup> SFX Entertainment has already purchased numerous companies that put on enormous electronic festivals around the world, and even though they lost the bidding war over Insomniac and their "Electric Daisy Carnival" festival brand to Live Nation, Sillerman plans to keep seeking out acquisitions for his growing empire.<sup>130</sup> An example of how Sillerman is already using his company to tap into the enormous global EDM market can be seen in the expansion of Belgium's "Tomorrowland" festival, a world-renowned event which draws 180,000 dancing revelers annually. During September 2013 the first United States rendition of Tomorrowland as the rebranded "TomorrowWorld" took place in Chattahoochee Hills

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<sup>129</sup>Ryan Mac, "SFX Entertainment to Take Electronic Dance Music to Wall Street with IPO," *Tech* (blog), *Forbes*, June 28, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/>

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Georgia, where despite its inconvenient location and age restriction of 21+, drew roughly 140,000 EDM fans into the wilderness for three days of manic partying.<sup>131</sup>

SFX Entertainment currently controls a variety of mega-festival promoters, concert venues and nightclubs tied to the world of electronic dance music. But they also have made other important acquisitions over the course of their brief existence as a company. Paylogic, a European ticketing service associated with many of Sillerman's music festivals, was snatched up by SFX to make sure that "massive surges" of ticket purchasers could efficiently procure their festival passes.<sup>132</sup> With this purchase, Sillerman has further rooted SFX to the commercial side of the festival world, where his company now controls not only events but the ticketing to attend these events. Also, Beatport, one of the most popular sources of EDM downloads on the internet, was picked up by the conglomerate for \$50 million.<sup>133</sup> Bringing together live concert and festival experiences as well as digital downloading and ticketing, Sillerman's investments reveal how the once underground, disorganized chaos of the "rave experience" is becoming organized, streamlined and transformed into a popular, corporate form of cultural consumption.

### **Music Festivals: Commoditizing "licentious lyrics" and "barbaric rhythms"**

"Since the 1950's, images of teens, rock 'n' roll and out-of-control crowds have been intertwined."<sup>134</sup> In the press, "the dangers of violence, drink, drugs, sexual and

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<sup>131</sup> Kerri Mason, "TomorrowWorld: With The Odds Stacked Against it, the Festival Delivers," *Billboard*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.billboard.com/>

<sup>132</sup> Mitchell Peters, "SFX Enters Ticketing Business with \$16.2 million Acquisition of Europe's Paylogic," *Billboard*, December 3, 2013, <http://www.billboard.com/>

<sup>133</sup> Crosby Lawrence, "Beatport Sold to SFX Entertainment \$50 Million," *UIMusic* (blog), Accessed April 10, 2014, <http://uimusicblog.com/>

<sup>134</sup> Lisa A. Lewis ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 12.

racial mingling are connected to music popular with young people,” where the primary apprehensions are “the influences of the music’s supposedly licentious lyrics and barbaric rhythms.”<sup>135</sup> Enormous audiences, comprised largely of young adults who want to party, dance and enjoy their favorite music, may appear threatening to the more conservative elements of society, yet many others see these huge audiences in a different light. Although media moguls like Robert FX Sillerman and Live Nation Entertainment’s Michael Rapino are more notable players in the festival market, the demand for music festivals and the fantasy of festival profit margins have led to a global boom in the business, and this can be seen in urban centers throughout the world. Whether it is a giant EDM festival like Tomorrowland or a genre-defying event like the world famous Coachella in southern California or Glastonbury in the United Kingdom, the demand for large-scale live music experiences of all sorts has led to the domination of the twenty-first-century music festival as both a fixture of popular culture as well as an economic industry.

China and its music festival culture has embraced the popularization of electronic dance music, and while rock and pop music reign supreme in China for now, the festival explosion seems to suggest that the growth of EDM is imminent. Although not considered a notable destination for international festival-vacationers yet, China hosted over one hundred music festivals in 2013 alone, all of which cater to an array of musical tastes and preferences.<sup>136</sup> Sometimes the government is not fully supportive of these

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<sup>135</sup> Lisa A. Lewis ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 12.

<sup>136</sup> “2013 China Music Festival Guide – Rock Out this Sep and Oct!” *eChinaCities.com*, September 13, 2013, Accessed April 12, 2014, <http://www.echinacities.com/>

events, as seen during the 2009 “Modern Sky Festival” where foreign bands were barred from performing just days in advance of their scheduled show (most likely related to the sixtieth anniversary of the CCP celebration occurring in Beijing that same weekend).<sup>137</sup> Yet overall it seems that the Communist Party of China does not feel threatened by music festivals and accepts their promotion nationwide. The “Midi Music Festival,” put on by the Beijing Midi School of Music intermittently since 1997, illustrates how lucrative these big events can be when ran smoothly. Known by some as the “Woodstock of China,” the festival embraces rock primarily but ventures into the realm of DJ’s and electronica as well, with five stages spanning the venue to accommodate varying genres.<sup>138</sup> While profitable, the festival has been accused by some as being formulaic; with roughly the same headliners on each stage for the past five years.<sup>139</sup> Abiding by a working formula to appease investors and generate revenue is becoming a recurring theme in music festivals worldwide, where adventurous decisions are becoming less common in favor of the safest financial route.

Advertising and pushing brand names has also become another enormous element of the global music festival scene. At China’s Strawberry Music Festival, one attendee described his feeling at the festival’s main stage as “similar to going to a really down-at-heel Yinchuan mall” due to the number of ads everywhere, yet regardless of the rampant

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<sup>137</sup>Chris Parry, “Music Festival in peril as Chinese government bans foreign bands,” *Vancouver Sun*, September 30, 2009, Accessed February 12, 2014, <http://archive.is/0M3eE>

<sup>138</sup>Jonathan Schmig, “The Midi Music Festival makes its way south,” *ChinaStepOne*, Accessed April 9, 2014, <http://chinastepone.com/>

<sup>139</sup>“Midi and Strawberry Music Festivals 2013: An Audience Matures,” *China Music Radar*, Accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.chinamusicradar.com/>

commercialism tickets still sold out for the first day by the early afternoon.<sup>140</sup> People with the discretionary income to attend a music festival can likely afford various brand name products, and companies seek to take advantage. At festivals in the United States, hyper-brandism is also apparent. For instance, I associate both the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and the Treasure Island Music Festival in San Francisco, California with Heineken®, because for the past five years at Coachella Heineken was the exclusive beer product, and at Treasure Island only Heineken and New Castle are available (New Castle happening to be owned by Heineken anyways). Also, the only beer to be found at Taipei's 2013 Formoz Music Festival was Budweiser. Alcohol is the legal substance of choice for live music events, and the pervasive beer wars occurring at festivals around the world represents the corporate interests in the festival circuit. By becoming a product associated with a blissfully good time at a concert, something like Budweiser suddenly becomes more palatable to that particular consumer demographic (or so the CEO of Anheuser-Busch hopes).

Music festivals give the appearance of being a quick road to wealth, but such a mindset has led to major problems, and financial losses. Festivals present a variety of challenges for promoters. The global cash-grab occurring in the industry has resulted in some examples of substantial failure, typically because these challenges are not handled appropriately. In Chengdu, China, the fiasco of the 2012 "Big Love Festival" represents how corruption and greed have become more prominent in the realm of festival promotion. The sheer scale of "Big Love" (大爱成都音乐节) and the big name

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<sup>140</sup> "Midi and Strawberry Music Festivals 2013: An Audience Matures," *China Music Radar*, Accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.chinamusicradar.com/>

headliners they brought in, such as British alt rockers Suede and China's politically charged, world famous songwriter Cui Jian (崔健), represent the lofty goals set by the festival organizers. Yet disorganization and incompetence led to major problems. Hundreds of security personnel, for example, were staffed to assist with the event, yet this loosely managed "security" contributed to the chaos, by sneaking people inside the venue for a fraction of the ticket price.<sup>141</sup> These security employees never received payment for their services, so whatever money they made in this manner was their compensation for the weekend. Even worse, the organizers placed the artists in five star accommodations that were supposedly complementary, yet this was not the case; instead ditching out on a bill of 1.8 million RMB (roughly \$290,000 U.S.D.).<sup>142</sup>

Although Big Love was a financial disaster, the festival still managed to be successful in other ways, and its very existence represents the growing interest in the festival aesthetic throughout China's urban centers. Two University of Nevada students who were studying abroad in Chengdu at the time decided to attend Big Love, and their report has been a mixed bag of both positive and negative elements. One of them portrayed this dynamic clearly, stating that he "felt a kind of collective commitment from festival goers who stayed for the final day in the rain and the mud to drink and smoke heavily. People seemed to have adapted with the weather and embraced the dirty, unorganized chaos that the festival turned in to."<sup>143</sup> Although it was riddled with problems, people made the most out of the Big Love experience and ended up enjoying themselves.

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<sup>141</sup> DJ Just Charlie, "Review: Chengdu's Big Love Music Festival Turns to Big Scorn," June 27, 2012, Accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.chengduliving.com/>

<sup>142</sup> "Chengdu Big Love – The Aftermath," August 24, 2012, Accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.chinamusicradar.com/>

<sup>143</sup> Johnny Johnson, personal communication, April 8, 2014

The music diversity was also significant, and although Chinese “pop music was most present and tended to get the larger stages...rock was also present, along with electronic,” and there were numerous bands and DJs from Europe, as well as other parts of Asia.<sup>144</sup>

While such a large-scale experience was clearly out of the scope of these promoters, the will to create grand-scale music festivals akin to others throughout Asia and the West is present in Chengdu.

**“The scene is just starting to explode here”**

Music festivals are made in a variety of ways, with some like Chengdu’s “Big Love” aiming for a Western aesthetic and others like the “Midi Music Festival” pandering to a local, national audience. Over the past decade, brand-name music festivals have also emerged as an export, one significant example being the western “Ultra Music Festival” which has succeeded in Korea for the past two years and is branching off into Japan during the autumn of 2014. In 2013, an estimated 100,000 people attended the two day event held in Seoul’s Olympic Stadium, where revelers saw famous European DJ’s Carl Cox, Fedde Le Grand, Armin Van Buuren and others perform to a raucous audience.<sup>145</sup> In Ultra TV’s official recap of 2013 UMF Korea, Yasmin Yousaf of the EDM sister duo Krewella ecstatically described playing for a primarily Asian crowd as “so fresh and new, because the scene is just starting to explode” in places like Seoul.<sup>146</sup> UMF Korea also brought in some non-western acts that fit the electronic dance music

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<sup>144</sup> James Beggs, personal communication, February 12, 2014

<sup>145</sup> “Relive Ultra Korea 2013 (Official Aftermovie),” promotional video for UMF Korea, uploaded by “UMF TV,” October 30, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

billing, one being the dynamite girl trio from Japan, Perfume.<sup>147</sup> Although Perfume's live performance focuses on choreographed dance moves in conjunction with the actual singing in contrast to the tweaking-of-knobs, occasionally-fist-pumping persona of the DJ, their music draws enough from western notions of EDM to make it viable in the context of an all-electronic festival ran by Americans. Even though Perfume has a substantial following in Asia and their presence at Ultra may have simply been pandering to the Asian market, their music fit the festival perfectly regardless. The many similarities J-pop shares with the western world of electronic dance music are unavoidable.

### **Chapter Three Conclusion**

The corporatization of the music festival is, in one sense, testimony to the inescapable force of money on modern existence. Rarely can artistic expression exist in a realm wholly detached from market forces. EDM has largely been streamlined into the world of popular music, and a burgeoning class of young consumers who live for big, live electronic dance music experiences and are willing to pay for them has made this musical culture a target for businessmen like Robert FX Sillerman. While some may resent Sillerman for corporatizing rave culture, the fact that he saw EDM as worthy of investment reveals the musical climate of today: electronic dance music is rapidly becoming ubiquitous. As long as EDM continues to captivate a global audience at festivals, concerts and nightclubs, the drug ecstasy will continue to be a problem for governments and law enforcement. Although globalization broadens the demographic of people who consume the music, many of whom have no intention of taking illicit

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<sup>147</sup> Mirai, M, "Perfume to Perform at Ultra Music Festival in South Korea," *Japanverse*, April 3, 2013, <http://japanverse.com/2013/04/perfume-to-perform-at-ultra-music-festival-in-south-korea/>



substances while enjoying it, the market for the MDMA chemical in its various forms has expanded recently because popular culture seems to condone its use. The prevalence of electronic dance music and ecstasy consumption throughout urban centers of the world depicts a younger generation starved for carnal, physical, human experience. They desire a chance to escape the realities of the world, even if for only a moment, and festival promoters as well as drug pushers are there to keep feeding this desire.

### **Conclusion: EDM and Globalization**

This study analyzes how electronic dance music has been transformed from an underground, subversive musical style associated with drugs and orgiastic partying into a fixture of popular culture throughout the world today. The great diversity of EDM music is steadily being streamlined into a calculated and financially profitable formula, and this product is ravenously consumed by huge crowds around the globe. Neatly packaged musical material is created and then propagated by rock star DJ's, who expertly take advantage of catchy, previously-successful musical aesthetics to control their audience. The power of the twenty-first-century superstar DJ is too great to be contained in a club though, and thus elaborate, mammoth music festivals have expanded to sate their hungry fans. These events are viewed by many corporations as substantial economic opportunities, where brand-name recognition can be inculcated into a demographic of people who have the discretionary income to afford brand-name products. The festivals themselves have even become commoditized, with many major music festivals throughout the West expanding into South American and recently Asian markets.

EDM as party music is not an idea shared everywhere. As more people are exposed to electronic dance music, it has been re-conceptualized within different cultural contexts. In Japan, it serves as a vehicle for popular idol groups, where the music is often secondary to their presence in the media and public. The J-pop idol aesthetic, or "kawaii" as expressed through dress (typically school uniforms), youthful energy and childish innocence, benefits from the uplifting, driving force of electronic dance music. Using high-pitched, blended vocals in tandem with electronic effects and drum machines, J-pop producers have effectively created a musical style that helps exaggerate the physical

cuteness of the idols for whom they write. Although this paradigmatic change means EDM in this context is not associated with drug use, there are still subversive undertones to the world of Japanese popular music. Fetishization of young girls, many who are barely teenagers, casts a shadow on a culture that on the surface appears packaged for children. Businessmen and young adult males are significant consumers of this music, and groups like AKB48 pander to this clientele by appearing in music videos wearing lingerie, swimsuits and other risqué clothing while dancing around, flirting and sometimes even kissing each other (but done so in a way that makes it seem innocent and “cute”).

There are examples of EDM being used differently in China as well. In what musicologist Roland Robertson terms “glocalization,” popular musical forms around the globe “have been blended with particular Chinese styles” to create an interesting amalgamation of dance tunes and culture rooted exclusively to China.<sup>148</sup> One interesting example of this occurring was recorded by Dr. Mu Yang during his academic stay in China in 2008. In Shadi village just outside the Gangkou District in southern China, he witnessed a “breakdance performance by the legendary deity Jigong” performed by an actor in a funerary parade.<sup>149</sup> This performer, invoking Jigong through wearing his characteristic “patched garments...broken fan, and a shoe sized hat” would dance as “techno music was played from a commercial CD through a loudspeaker carried on a

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<sup>148</sup>Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity.” In *Global Modernities: 10th Anniversary Conference: Revised Papers*, edited by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, 25–44.

<sup>149</sup>Yang Mu, “Music and Dance for Interment Rituals in a Chinese Village,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (University of Illinois Press, 2012), 22. On Jigong, see Meir, Shahar, *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature* (Harvard – Yenching Institute Monograph) Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, Mass., 1998.

truck” as they entered each new village.<sup>150</sup> Electronic dance music’s malleability is being taken advantage of by people all around the world. It is a musical style that can be enjoyed in a variety of contexts, and it resonates strongly with people because of the universality of dancing.

What is it about EDM in particular that draws people to it in such volume today? Electronic dance music seems to have a strong physiological effect on the body. “Groove,” defined as “wanting to move some part of the body in relation to some aspect of the sound pattern,” is often felt similarly by people encountering the same music,<sup>151</sup> and there is something about EDM that can incite groups of people to dance together for hours at a time. Rhythmic instruments date back thousands of years, yet the synthetic creation of perfect tempos is a relatively new tool. With such technological devices at their disposal, DJ’s and producers orchestrate melodies, rhythms and harmonies with unprecedented precision. While a live band is fallible, EDM never misses a beat; pulsing through the dancer’s body in unbroken streams of treble and bass. This flow is what helps people get lost in the music. If there are no incidental breaks in the tempo and the song transitions are smooth, the audience has no time to relapse back into reality (such as during the period between songs at a rock concert). “Trance” is especially focused on this element, using repetitive, slowly building musical structures to make the audience lose track of time and place. Although the chemical MDMA is used by many to enhance their overall

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<sup>150</sup> Yang Mu, “Music and Dance for Interment Rituals in a Chinese Village,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (University of Illinois Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>151</sup> Guy Madison, “Experiencing Groove Induced by Music: Consistency and Phenomenology.” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (University of California Press: December 2006), 201.

experience when listening to trance and other types of EDM, the music alone seems to have the ability to strongly influence the mind.

Music's effect on the brain has become an area of academic investigation over the past decade as technical innovations enables this type of research. An experiment conducted by Stanford University's School of Medicine tested the effects of obscure classical music pieces on the brains of volunteers in a large test group. This study revealed that the listener's brain activity would gradually increase until finally peaking at the resolution point of the musical phrase.<sup>152</sup> This kind of mental stimulation resulting from musical build-ups is fundamental in electronic dance music, where bass drops are instrumental in generating audience excitement. Also, a 2001 study showed that music-induced chills lessen brain activity in areas associated with anxiety.<sup>153</sup> Experiencing music may thus have neurological merit, and EDM's natural inclination toward escapism can be seen as a chance to help individuals relieve stress. Other psychological studies depict the power of "temporal arts" like dance and music to "attract attention, sustain interest, and create and mold emotion."<sup>154</sup> By combining tribal-like group dancing with the repetitive, rhythmic power of electronic dance music, EDM culture helps people around the world fulfill innate human urges.

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<sup>152</sup> Mitzi Baker, "Music moves brain to pay attention, Stanford study finds," *Stanford School of Medicine*, August 1, 2007, <http://med.stanford.edu/>

<sup>153</sup> Anne J. Blood and Robert J. Zatorre, "Intensely pleasurable responses to music correspond with activity in brain regions implicated in reward and emotion," *Montreal Neurological Institute*, July 16, 2001, <http://www.zlab.mcgill.ca/>

<sup>154</sup> Ellen Dissanayake, "The Artification Hypothesis and Its Relevance to Cognitive Science and Evolutionary Aesthetics, and Neuroaesthetics," *Cognitive Semiotics*, Issue 5 (Fall 2009), 166.

Another factor in EDM's ascendance into the mainstream is how artists efficiently wield social media to reach a greater audience. Stevie Benanty, who works for a marketing company formed by Dutch superstar producer/DJ Tiesto, believes that from the very beginning EDM artists have "understood what social media meant...and really took the reigns on Twitter and fan engagement [and] speaking to fans."<sup>155</sup> Using these avenues of communication to stay close with their stalwarts, EDM producers can efficiently cultivate a loyal following. Furthermore, many electronic artists have broken from the 1990's rock business model that focuses on album sales to generate revenue, instead channeling their energy into getting name recognition by putting out free music, and then making money off of ticket sales and sponsorship.<sup>156</sup> Pirating music is easier now than at any other point during the brief history of the internet, and instead of complaining EDM producers have adjusted to the cultural and technological climate.

Electronic dance music's rise to fame has been fast. Key cultural aesthetics emerging in the 1960's by postmodern composers, such as audience/performer interaction and an overall adventurous attitude toward the creation of music, are still intrinsically important to EDM culture today. There are many reasons that this musical form has expanded so quickly. As an art-form centered on dancing, it resonates with people from all over the world. It is intended to be reshaped, remixed and used in whatever manner deemed fitting to the individual or culture, as seen in the case of Japanese popular music. Raves and EDM shows are a chance to step back from the worries of life and embrace innate, human urges to flail about wildly and be a part of a

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<sup>155</sup> Sami Yenigun, "Dance Music Looks Beyond EDM And Hopes The Crowd Will Follow," *National Public Radio*, October 29, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/>

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

living, physical community; away from the virtual reality of computers. EDM culture may seem strange and non-relatable to those on the outside, but there is something undeniably primal about the world of electronic dance music that enthusiasts relish. As cyber-friendships and human interactions are increasingly blurred, the hedonistic, visceral realm of EDM will perhaps help keep us grounded to our humanity.

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