

This was an interview conducted with Jeremy for *Dancedelux* magazine in 2005, to mark the Spanish language publication of *Discographies*. Supposedly it was for a special issue of the magazine published for that year's *Sonar* festival.

. The title of your book has been translated into Spanish as *Culture and Politics of Dance Music*, are you aware of this? Do you agree with this change?

Yes, I was aware of that, although I wasn't consulted on it. I don't have any problem with it. It's a reasonable enough title!

. What is the difference between dance and rock music?

Well, that's an interesting question, because of course there are plenty of people who dance to rock music ! If by dance music we essentially mean House and its various descendents, then I guess I would still say that rock music tends to be the music of the dominant groups in western cultures -white, straight, middle-class men -and that it offers an affective experience which is most congruent with the normal corporeal experience of being such a person. If you're a straight white man and you're happy with that then listening to rock - with its strong but undemanding rhythms and its clear melodies and song structures and clearly meaningful lyrics - will help you enjoy that status and will help to reaffirm your physical sense of being a straight white man. The closer you are to being able to feel that way, the more likely you are to enjoy rock music, which is why the audience for rock music now includes large numbers of young women from the professional classes, women who today find that most of the traditional privileges of masculinity are available to them. By contrast 'Dance' music – with its more insistent and often more complex rhythms and its emphasis on the physicality of music rather than its capacity to signify - still bears the traces of the bodily histories of various more marginal groups, and tends to be more easily accessible to people who don't belong to the category of straight white men or who don't find inhabiting that hegemonic category to be unproblematically pleasurable: in reality the biggest audience for dance music is probably straight white middle-class men who want to find a pleasurable way of subtly destabilising their identities as such.

That doesn't mean that rock music is inherently reactionary or macho, or that dance music is inherently subversive, or that all rock music and all dance music are the same. Indeed,

the most 'macho' rock music (say, for example, the music of the Stooges) can contain moments of excess and extremity which work to destabilise normative identities, and there have always been many people working within the rock tradition to problematise the hegemonic forms of masculinity which most rock music perpetuates, while there is plenty of utterly conservative dance music (a lot of trance music, for example, sounds more purely 'white' and funkless than even the most masculinist of rock) but it does mean that on the whole people who experience themselves as belonging to these hegemonic groups are more comfortable with rock music - its simple yet undemanding rhythms and its focus on the voice and the guitar - than they are with any kind of dance music, and vice versa.

. How is the music scene in the United Kingdom at this moment?

Well, it would be hard to talk about a single UK music scene today, because the culture is so fragmented. Probably the most musically innovative sounds are coming from the 'Grime' scene (see [www.hyperdub.com](http://www.hyperdub.com)), as represented by artists such as Dizzee Rascal, although this music really has a very small audience even in the metropolitan centres. There's a widespread perception amongst young people that Hip-Hop is enormously popular in the UK, which in fact is entirely erroneous: if you look at the sales figures hip-hop accounts for about 5% of UK sales, and less than 15% of US sales, so something very strange is going on whereby the public is being told that black American music is culturally hegemonic, whereas statistically this turns out to be completely untrue. In terms of sales the most successful forms of music are still old fashioned rock and pop, and it remains the case that the most prestigious media, such as the broadsheet newspapers, regard white guitar rock as represented by bands like Franz Ferdinand or Coldplay (bands which rock critics think of as radically different, but to the rest of the human race sound pretty similar) as the 'norm' of popular music. There's plenty of interesting music around – for example the accessibly exploratory beats of Four Tet, and of course the electro-house experiments of Ewan Pearson – but it all tends to appeal to small niche audiences rather than a broad public. I think that's probably the way things are going to stay, and it's probably no bad thing. The depressing thing about UK music culture is not the music but the state of journalism – there are virtually no good music journalists publishing regularly in the UK now. In fact there are virtually no music journalists working in the UK now who actually know anything about music, or want to. On the other hand the internet, and especially the excellent BBC web-sites and sites like [www.milkfactory.com](http://www.milkfactory.com) are making new music

available to new audiences in quite unprecedented ways which simply bypass the role of traditional critics, which is very exciting.

. Do you think that dance music can become a political force? In which senses?

Well yes, although I would point out that in theory almost anything can become a political force. There have been instances of dance culture becoming explicitly linked to specific political movements, such as the campaign against the far right in Austria in the 1990s and during the early days of Reclaim the Streets in London. Dancing is an activity which brings people together in a pleasurable way, whereas contemporary culture works to make most of our experiences of being in large groups uncomfortable and unpleasant, and in this it can obviously be a useful political practice, whether connected to some wider specific movement or simply as an end in itself: in neo-liberal times, when we are encouraged to compete with each other in every sphere of life, simply being with other people and enjoying it can itself be a radical act.

In the UK I think that the most important political effect of dance culture has been to enable a large cohort of young men to come to terms with the fact that their relationships with women were going to have to be very different from those of their fathers and grandfathers. For a lot of straight men the gender revolution of our times has been traumatic and distressing, but post-rave dance culture creates a context in which young men can enjoy the experience of behaving in a way which is very different from that of traditional, uptight, aggressive men. Clearly women and gay men have benefited from the subtle changes which this has made possible, but it was really the behaviour of straight men which changed. Of course, this did not affect all or even most men, and dance culture was not the only cause of these changes, but it has created a context in which a sizable minority of straight young men can enjoy, rather than despair at, the loss of their hegemonic and normative status.

That's not to say that the political effects of dance culture are all necessarily progressive. There's a real danger that the intense but ephemeral experience of community which dance culture offers to people can become a therapeutic substitute for real community. Lots of people enjoy the weekend feeling of love and togetherness at a rave or club, but never speak to their neighbours. When the bulldozers come to knock down their house to make way for a road, when they lose their jobs, their pension rights, or their access to public services, then all those smiling people that they chatted to on ecstasy probably won't be there to help them: they'll need a real community.

. Why did you decide to write this book on dance music?

To be honest the main motivation for me was that my students - many of whom were interested in this topic – needed a good book on the subject but there wasn't one for me to give them. But of course, for both Ewan and myself it was important to try to make sense of what had been, and remains, a hugely important force in our own lives and in the lives of many of our friends. Dance culture was really the key cultural event for our generation of British youth, so to some extent making sense of it was imperative for understanding the whole historical experience of the times which we are living through.

. Why did you take a critical theory perspective and use postmodernist thinkers? Who are the critics and the ideas that interest you at the moment?

In part this was simply a product of our own intellectual training. We had both studied these approaches, largely because we both felt that they were the most powerful ones available to us for understanding contemporary culture, so these were the intellectual tools which we were going to use. If one of us had been trained in phenomenological sociology, then no doubt that perspective would have been important to us too. There was a wider political point, however, in that despite widespread misconceptions on this subject, very little work published in English actually uses post-structuralist and postmodernist theory to think about elements of popular culture, especially music. Studies of popular culture tend to be quite untheoretical, and theoretical work tends to concern itself with literature, fine art or art cinema. We wanted to continue the Cultural Studies project of bringing contemporary theory to bear on 'popular' culture, to keep working against this 'high/low' divide which persists despite the apparent success of cultural studies.

In terms of my current theoretical interests: The work of Derrida and Laclau remains central for me, but I suppose that like many other people working in English at the moment I'm becoming very interested in Deleuze and Guattari: most of the work I've done recently has engaged with them, as well as with those less well known writers who are trying and have tried to think of ways out of the effective hegemony of individualistic modes of thought (Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Miguel Benasayag). Unlike most people reading Deleuze in contemporary cultural studies, I don't want to reject the intellectual tradition of the British New Left (writers such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, both deeply indebted to Gramsci). In this I'm very close to the American scholar Lawrence Grossberg. We would

have made a lot more use of Deleuze and Guattari in the book, but we thought that there were going to be a dozen other books using D&G to theorise rave (we were wrong, sadly)!

. Are you (and Ewan) interested in politics and issues such as the war in Irak or the globalisation of capitalism?

Yes of course! I don't think Ewan's ever been involved in formal politics or active campaigning, as the career of a producer and DJ is very demanding, but for myself, I'm probably at least as concerned with those issues on a daily basis as I am with music. I've always been involved with the signs of the times group ([www.signsofthetimes.org.uk](http://www.signsofthetimes.org.uk)) although we're pretty inactive at the moment, I've written for UK left publications like Soundings and Red Pepper, and I was one of the organisers of the 'Radical Theory Forum' at the European Social Forum in Paris last year, which hopefully will organise at the London ESF this year also. I think the social forums are a very exciting development, although I don't think they will take off in the UK as they have done in some other countries, sadly. The issue which most disturbs me at the present time is privatisation of public services: the GATS treaty and the efforts of various governments (including our own) to hand over large chunks of the public sector to private interests are part of a massive process whereby the public sector is being more-or-less disassembled, but in this country at least this is going virtually unreported by the press and virtually unopposed by the unions and the left (who are much more preoccupied with the war). The British left is pretty useless, I'm afraid, and remains, as it always has been, both anti-intellectual and plagued by appalling taste in music...

. What is the relation between dance music and technology? Can technology become a liberating tool or is too embedded in the capitalist system? Is it a tool, a framework, a media?

Broadly speaking I think that technology is a neutral tool whose effects are wholly dependent on the power relations at stake in the context in which it is used. However, this apparently simple situation becomes much more complicated when we consider that power relations determine what technologies come into being in the first place, and that to some extent power thereby becomes invested *in technologies themselves*, so I think we do have to take account of the fact that technologies can become 'actors' in their own right, as Latour would have it. I think that dance music is a good example of what happens when people try to make creative and unexpected use of new technologies, but it would be

naïve to overlook the fact that certain tendencies in dance music are the product of technological limitations which are themselves the product of the limitations imposed by particular forms of technological research and development. For example, the tendency for dance music to be produced by lonely individuals in front of computer screens, using digital recording formats – rather odd, when you consider that dance music is supposed to be consumed collectively and is almost always played back on vinyl– can be understood as a product of the computer industry’s focus on using digital technology to turn us all into highly isolated, highly productive, individualised workers. One can imagine an alternative history in which much more emphasis was placed on making analogue recording equipment cheaper and better, encouraging people to go on making dance music in a more collective way, using live instruments, producing a less polished, more organic, more *social* descendent of Disco than those which emerged with house and techno. We and others have tended to celebrate the empowering effects of digital technology and to denigrate humanist critiques of digital culture, but it would be possible to argue that this was at least partly naïve.

What do you think about the copyright issue and the use of samplers and remixes? Do you agree with downloading music from the net?

Well, on this matter I am in principle a fairly predictable leftist. I think that we need to find ways of allowing artists to support themselves, or be supported by their audience and their community - but I don’t think that any defence of existing ideas of property (intellectual or otherwise) is the way to do it. So yes – sample, remix, download. Property is theft. Anti-copyright. Etc. etc. However, the reality is that many artists are struggling to survive in a context not of their own choosing: the market economy. So I think there is a problem if relatively underpaid artists lose income because of downloading and MP3 trading, and in that context it also isn’t okay just to use other people’s ideas without giving them any credit, or to avoid paying artists for samples of their music which really re-use an idea which was unique to that artist. However, it seems to me that the people defending existing copyright law are not musicians but the corporations, for whom I have no affection, and we really need to be exploring new ways of using the net to distribute music which bypass the corporations without starving the artists of income. The classic MP3.com model, whereby CDs supplied by artists were produced to order for customers at a rate which allowed artists to choose the price and keep 50% of all revenues, while MP3 files were largely used

to advertise the music, was a very interesting model, and it's a shame that it has been abandoned.

To be perfectly honest I think it's a real shame that MP3 has established itself as a playback format as the sound quality is very poor, especially in the low range, and I think there is a strong relationship between western culture's privileging of a cerebral mode of consuming music and its favouring of technologies which only enable forms of listening which are at once highly individualised and highly cerebral – located entirely in the upper end of the frequency spectrum. The transistor radio, the walkman, the ipod: it's all about listening to music that you don't share with anyone else and that you hear only with your ears, not with your whole body. Again, one can imagine an alternative history in which it's the aesthetic of the dub sound systems and David Mancuso's Loft, rather than transistor radios, which becomes normalised amongst Western consumers, and by now we would all have fantastic hi-fi systems which were cheap and durable, and vast collections of dub plates!

. Are we living the very end of the author?

No, I don't think so – not in the world outside of critical theory, anyway. In fact, if anything the idea of authorship – the idea of creativity as a highly individual act – is stronger than ever in our culture. The idea of 'the author' has to be counterposed to an idea of creativity as fundamentally social in character – as the productive work of the multitude, Hardt & Negri would say – and today I think that in the wider world the idea of the author as an individual rather than as a node in a network of influences and energies is actually stronger than ever. Consider that the great classical 'authors' of the past - Dickens, Balzac, Beethoven, etc. – were at least thought of as public figures, somehow speaking for and to a wider public who gave their work meaning. Today the artist, writer, or musician is instead encouraged to sell themselves as a unique brand, a 'personality', a commodity. The processes which produces the bourgeois idea of the author, the general process of individualisation and the commodification of the arts, are today still intensifying rather than abating. Of course, we radical theorists may have realised that 'the author is dead', but no-one has told the rest of Western culture yet!

I think the view promoted in the 1980s by certain theorists, that postmodernity entails a 'fragmentation' of the individual bourgeois subject, and hence a real 'death of the author', is quite mistaken. What has happened is that the break-up of certain sites of *collective*

identification which used to ground people's identities –the nation, the class, the political party, even the family – has created a certain sense of destabilisation, but the idea of the individual as the solitary, fundamentally isolated, basic unit of human experience is today stronger than ever. The idea of the 'death of the author' was in part based on the assumption that the Western bourgeois subject of whom 'the author' was the embodiment was breaking up. In fact, while everything else may be breaking up around him, the bourgeois subject is lonelier and more in-dividual than ever before. It's not the author that's died, it's the public. While public culture fragments, the individualised 'author', like the 'celebrity' and the 'star', is almost all that is left.

Of course, both avant-garde and popular practices constantly challenge these processes and assumptions. Many visual and conceptual artists are concerned to work against them, and the ideas of Bourriard are obviously relevant here. In music culture, dance culture still manifests the strongest resistance to the imperatives of this hegemony of individualism. It's here that we still see the strongest efforts to resist the creation of 'stars' and the emphasis on the energy of the crowd and the creativity of the network which connects the crowd, the artist, the producer, the remixer and the DJ, at the expense of any notion of individual authorship. Of course, these efforts are not always successful, and 'stars' and producer-Dj 'authors' do emerge, but so far dance culture has been much more able to resist this pressure than, say, hip-hop, which once was very focussed on the collective – the posse, the crew – but is now almost entirely concerned with the imaginary biographies of individualist heroes.

. Which styles of music, musicians and record companies interest you at the moment? Can you give some examples? Why do they interest you?

Well, here I guess one always has to distinguish between musics which are interesting personally and musics which seem objectively 'important'. In terms of buying music, going out, organising parties, the music I'm most involved with is deep house in the classical 'underground' disco tradition, and I do think that this music still retains a unique capacity to involve a wide range of people from different backgrounds in an experience of dance which is less limited than that offered by forms which are more formally restricted (eg trance) and less exclusionary than forms which are more complex and experimental (drum'n'bass, for example). Here the 'critical theorist' has to exercise a little humility,

however. Bourdieu would say that of course I like deep house, with its subtle but unthreatening borrowings from Africa, Brazil etc, because as a cosmopolitan metropolitan intellectual it's the perfect soundtrack to my affluent mid-Atlantic lifestyle! (Of course I'm not wealthy, but by global standards I'm pretty privileged, as is anyone who can afford to buy a lot of records). So while I really love the music of people like MAW, Dubtribe Sound System, Joe Clausell and Martin Solveig, I wouldn't say that it was hugely important. The same might be said of British post-rock bands like Pram and Fridge, whom I love largely because they produce music for people like me. Conversely I think that in formal terms the music that's emerging from the London 2-step, garage, broken-beat and grime scenes is very interesting, but I'm quite conscious that I'm not the audience for this music, although I'm not sure who is. Perhaps this is a music which is largely heard through pirate radio stations (which is where I hear it) and web-sites like hyperdub, a ghostly audience that I belong to more than I realise. Maybe a more interesting answer is to tell you that shortly after we wrote the book I became very interested in North Indian classical music, not just because I'm an embarrassing hippy but because it occurred to me that in its way this was a music even more at odds with the dominant Western European musical aesthetic than contemporary dance music, but for similar reasons (I've written about this in a book on Deleuze and music, to be published by Edinburgh university press): I really love the work of musicians like Vishwa Mohan Batt. I've become interested in the ways in which the kind of energy generated by the interaction between a dancing crowd and a DJ is actually quite close to the energy created by music which, like North Indian music and jazz, relies on group improvisation. The same might be said of my favourite record of last year, which is 'Great Aviaries' by Supernumeri, a band from Liverpool who record for Ninja Tune and produce a kind of post-jazz improvised music which is quite unique, but related to the work of American improvising groups like Pelt and Town & Country, all of which I like very much.

. What is the connection between drugs and dance music?

'Drugs' have always been part of the technological assemblage within which dance musics have been produced and consumed, and this goes back longer than most people realise. The earliest 'disco' scene was fuelled by LSD see <http://www.jahsonic.com/LStD.html>), which has really been the key drug of the dance music tradition for most of its history. Obviously the popularization of dance music and the popularisation of ecstasy in the 1990s are completely inseparable, although I'm not sure that ecstasy and dance

music have always been good for each other! I think that E actually tends to make most people's musical responses quite predictable and narrow, which is why so much dance music has become predictable and narrow, while dance music' promise of an endless, goalless journey has tended to encourage people to use far too much of the drug far too often.

. What do you think about drug? Are you in favour of legalising them? Are you interested in them? Have you tried them?

From a libertarian perspective, AND from a pragmatic perspective, I think that it's no longer even a matter of being positively in favour of legalisation: it's a matter of there being no legitimate reason for the continuation of prohibition. The prohibition of 'drugs' causes many problems and solves none.

Have I tried them? Well, as a responsible professional person I of course condemn all drugs, but when I was younger I may have experimented purely in the name of research.... Seriously, Ewan and I could not have written a book about dance music without some experience in that field.

I do think that the question of the relationship between drugs and music is very interesting: I think that one has to understand 'drugs' as a technology which, like any technology, make a range of different things possible, but one can never predict in advance which of them will actually happen. Recently in the UK shops have started selling magic mushrooms, as there is an old loophole in UK law according to which mushrooms are not illegal if they are sold absolutely fresh (drying or freezing them is illegal, as it constitutes a 'preparation' of psilocybin, but fresh mushrooms do not). It will be interesting to see whether this has any effect on music culture. If it does then I fear it may only lead to an increased interest in psychedelic trance, as that's the music which UK dance crowds associate with psychedelics (in the USA the story would be quite different: house music is still often associated with LSD by fans who know their history, or can simply remember it) . I have nothing against this music, and the scene around it is quite beautiful in its way, but sonically it's very limited.

I've been living in London for many years and I did have the feeling that the mainstream media and culture utterly ignored the incredibly richness and plurality of the dance music

scene. They used to concentrate on pop music and anything closer to traditional English values. I was very excited when I read your reflections on these topics. Are the media still as blind and conservative as they used to be?

If anything, the situation is worse. What annoys me even more than the 'pop' media, which are really only aimed at children, is the narrowness of the attitudes of the middle-class press. Recently they've all become terribly excited by Frantz Ferdinand, a punk-pop band who sound like they've stepped straight out of 1979. Really, British music journalists have never got over The Beatles and punk, and I don't think they ever will. At the same time the dance press barely even reviews records any more, being largely concerned with fashion, lifestyle, and fantasies of casual sex. Even the exciting critics like Simon Reynolds hardly appear in the British media any more, and the avant-garde is completely isolated from the rest of the culture. On the positive side, as I mentioned earlier, the web is really making all of this irrelevant, and the BBC is actually doing very good things. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/>.

. What is the connection between dance music and multiculturalism?

Well, in the UK 'dance' musics have certainly been the most genuinely hybrid forms of music over the past 20 years. Drum'n'Bass / Jungle remains the shining example of a music which really emerged from uniquely British, wholly multicultural environments and which fused the sonic properties of musics from the US, UK and Jamaica. It's the intermixing of these different cultures which has produced the most exciting sounds. On a milder level, house music in London still provides a fairly unique meeting point for people from different cultural-musical trajectories. The crowds at nights like Underdog and City Loud are probably the most multi-ethnic in the city, and I think the music really does offer a corporeal, physical experience which can be shared by people from a range of cultural backgrounds, which is one way of helping to create a genuinely non-racist culture. On the other hand, dance music can also become a site at which the multicultural histories of musics are erased. In the UK, when house first became popular, few people realised that it was originally a black / Hispanic gay form, and it quickly evolved so as to lose most of the sonic traces of that history. UK 'rave' and trance music, as I said earlier, have been examples of incredibly 'white'-sounding, European musics, which left behind their multicultural pasts. So it can work both ways.

. How do you feel about the future of popular music? Are you optimistic? Which will be the most exciting territories?

From a purely musical point of view I am very optimistic. Let's be honest – capitalism may be bad for people and their planet, but it's great for music! It promotes diversity, innovation, and plurality and makes the means of producing music cheaper and cheaper each year. Adorno and his followers are completely wrong to see capitalism as tending towards standardisation (mistaking the tendencies of one moment in the history of capitalism – the 1930s – for a general trend): as Marx, Deleuze and Negri would all point out, capitalism is always moving, creating (as well as destroying), and making possible new forms of creativity for 'the multitude'. Of course, I align myself wholly with the global movement against neo-liberalism and, ultimately, against capitalism, but those of us who share this view have to be honest with ourselves: liberal free-market technocapitalism makes possible some damned funky sounds! Of course, as Negri might say, creative music is always to some extent being produced *against* capital, against its drive to monopolise and to concentrate power. Like Negri I don't think that this drive against capital, the creative power of the multitude, can ever be fully contained, so I don't think that music is in any danger. That's not to say that other things are not in danger: we all are. We need to work against capitalism while appropriating its power, and music is one way to do that.

What kinds of music will be interesting? It's a good question. One thing to bear in mind, I think, is that electronic music is really in its infancy and is still very limited in many ways, compared to the range of sounds which a musician can produce with an analogue instrument. I think that musics combining elements of electronic, programmed, digital musics with 'live', performed sounds have a lot of scope to be explored in the next few years. On a purely mundane level, it's only just become the case that ordinary computers are powerful enough to record audio signals as well as MIDI signals to any great extent, so it's only just become the case that a band who are not very wealthy can record their music onto a computer and then play around with it in the way that digital music producers have been able to for years. That will produce some exciting new departures, I'm sure. I also think that the legacy of jazz will continue to prove more enduring than many people realise: its improvisatory energy continues to inform many strands of music (house and drum'n'bass, the 'post-jazz' of the Cinematic Orchestra, etc.) and it's only really just

becoming possible to combine improvised music with digital technology in a wide range of ways.

. Are you working on a new essay on music or on any other topic?

I'm working on a couple of book projects: one on anti-capitalism and cultural theory, one on post-structuralist ideas of sociality. I write chapters for books on music occasionally, and I guess I will collect them into another volume on music, but not for a few years yet.