

DJs, CLUBS AND VINYL

The Cultural Commodification and Operational Logics of Contemporary Commercial Dance Music in Sydney

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ABSTRACT

The development of contemporary, post-disco dance music and its associated culture, as representative of a (supposedly) underground, radical subculture, has been given extensive consideration within popular music studies. Significantly less attention has been given to the commercial, mainstream manifestations of this music. Furthermore, demonstrating the influence of subculture theory, existing studies of dance culture focus largely on youth-based audience participation, and as such, those who engage with dance music on a professional level have been somewhat overlooked. In an attempt to rectify these imbalances, this study examines the contemporary commercial dance music scene in Sydney, Australia, incorporating an analytical framework that revolves mainly around the work of DJs and the commercial scene they operate within.

An ethnographic methodological approach underpins the majority of this thesis, with interviews forming the main source of research material. Beginning with a discussion of the existing academic literature on dance culture and dance scenes, an historical context is subsequently established through a section that traces the development of dance culture from an underground phenomenon to a mainstream leisure activity, both within and outside Australia.

The ideas, opinions and interpretations of a selection of local DJs and other music industry practitioners who work in Sydney are central to the analysis of DJ culture herein. Issues discussed include the interaction and relationship between the DJ and their crowd, the technology and formats employed by DJs, and the DJ's multiple roles as entertainer, consumer and educator. The final part of the study gives consideration to the structure of the Sydney dance scene, in regard to the frequently used, but rarely critically analysed, terms 'underground' and 'mainstream'. The thesis concludes with a discussion that challenges the structural rigidity imposed by subcultural theory and scene-based analysis,

arguing instead for a greater degree of fluidity in the theoretical approaches taken towards the study of contemporary dance music scenes.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. The work herein is entirely my own, except where acknowledged.

Edward Montano

December 2006

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Those passionate, energetic, and crazy people who keep the Sydney dance scene alive, and without whom I would have had nothing to write about...

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PREFACE

In order to fully contextualise the observations and arguments I make throughout this study, and in order to support my claim that experience within a particular scene allows for a more complete and detailed ethnographic analysis and interpretation of that scene, it would be useful to briefly discuss my own personal involvement in club culture. Given the importance of incorporating a degree of self-reflection in the methodological approaches taken by researchers, relevant to any research project is the history of the researcher within their chosen field, and it is this history that contributes significantly to the arguments and interpretations that are made during the course of any study. While some projects may be undertaken because of the degree of strangeness and unfamiliarity they present to the researcher, it was my own knowledge of, and passion for, dance music and club culture that drove me to investigate the scene in Sydney.

Being from the UK originally, my initial involvement with the Sydney dance scene came about during the six months I spent living in the city as part of my twelve-month working holiday around Australia between the years 1999 and 2000. Both prior and subsequent to this holiday, I undertook some undergraduate and postgraduate study in Liverpool, the English city that gave the world the Beatles. Alongside its rich rock music heritage, the city gave rise during the 1990s to Cream nightclub, and Cream's subsequent development into a globally-recognised brand of club culture meant that Liverpool became a centre for all things dance music. It was this vibrant and increasingly commercial dance scene that I fell into when I commenced university life during the latter half of the 1990s, and indeed, so did many others, with one of the reasons that was often cited for Cream's success being the city's bustling student population. These first years at university, under the glare of the bright and startling lights of city life, were when my love of music shifted from a rock-based aesthetic into something more electronically-driven. I can admit now that I had prejudices against DJs, which

would have developed out of the various authenticity debates that typically surround the performance of live rock music and the skills necessary to successfully complete such performance, which then would have led to a dismissal on my part not only of DJs, but also of music that was seemingly electronically-generated. Hindsight proves this to be a highly unfair and biased perception, and thus I am grateful to the efforts of friends to take me on a night out to Cream in an attempt to shake me from my rock-based ignorance. My first visit to the club soon made me realise that there was much, much more to dance music than simply someone playing other people's records. At the risk of resorting to hyperbole and cliché, I recall being struck almost immediately by a realisation that here was an entire music, sound and culture open for exploration, all of which was entirely new to me and therefore excitingly offered the thrill of the unknown.

During subsequent months, I not only became an active clubber, but I also explored dance music as something to listen to at home. Alongside my dismissal of DJs, I had previously taken the blinkered view that dance music could not possibly be something that anyone could enjoy within the confines of their lounge or bedroom, but I soon realised not only that dance music could work within both the home and the club, but also that the term 'dance music' encompassed such a wide variety of styles that the dance music one may enjoy listening to while cleaning or cooking could differ quite significantly to the dance music one may enjoy while out on the town. Through both the advice of friends and my own personal research, which was made somewhat easier through my employment in music retail at the time, I ploughed through various different styles of dance music, initially latching on to trance as a favourite sound, a possible reason for this being the dominance of that particular style within UK clubs and on UK radio at the time. This interest, however, gradually waned, and I became fascinated with house music, which seemed to contain a soulfulness and emotional warmth that, at least to me, was missing from trance. To start with, this interest revolved largely around the more commercial house music sounds, due to the fact Cream

was the only club I visited regularly, which certainly catered for a commercial crowd, and the dance music compilations I regularly bought were the mass-marketed ones put out by Cream and the London-based club Ministry of Sound. As I became more familiar with the music and the culture, I began to explore house music that sat outside of the mainstream, that did not get regular airplay on the radio, and that did not feature on every dance compilation. That is not to say that I suddenly found a passion for underground, left-of-centre, abstract experimentation, but rather that I began to discover house music that retained the accessibility of commercial dance music, but that was not so prominently featured within the dance music media. While the various terms and descriptions that abound within dance culture make it difficult to lend any kind of universally understood definition to the many different styles that fall under the umbrella heading of 'dance music', I would describe the particular form of house music that I am passionate about as 'deep' and 'soulful' house music, with an emphasis on the music put out by producers and DJs such as Miguel Migs, Jay-J, Roger Sanchez, Andy Caldwell, Ben Watt, and others of that ilk. Alongside this, I have also found myself drawn on occasions to the darker, tribal sounds of people like Steve Lawler, Wally Lopez, and other DJs who have typically been lumped by the dance music media under the 'progressive' banner, for better or worse.

In the interest of balance, it is relevant to note the dance music that falls outside of my comfort zone, which would mainly be hard house, techno, breakbeat, drum 'n' bass, and anything else where the beats are either too fast or too fractured. This should not be taken as meaning that I do not appreciate these forms and cannot see their value, but rather that my interest in them does not extend to regular listening. Similarly, I have never had any great desire to go to clubs that play such forms of dance music, although inclement weather at a couple of dance music festivals I have attended in the past has forced me into the drum 'n' bass and breakbeat tents, experiences I never wish to repeat.

As an indication of the way a person's geographical location can have an effect on the development of their musical tastes, I can say unequivocally that since arriving in Sydney to commence the research for this thesis, I have been exposed to a wider variety of house music than I was in the UK, and as such, my interest in, and appreciation of, house music has been further developed. Part of this is no doubt related to my work in a specialist dance music store (see below), but I would also suggest that in comparison to cities in the UK such as Liverpool, Sydney has a far more popular and prominent house scene. I have certainly enjoyed experiencing the clubs in Sydney that offer such music through their DJ line-ups, venues such as Home, Tank, YU and The ArtHouse providing many memorable nights out during the course of this study. As such, my own passion for house music, combined with the centrality of this music to dance culture in Sydney, led to the focus of this study being placed on the commercial house music scene in the city. While the frequency and regularity of my clubbing experiences dipped somewhat towards the conclusion of this project (from a peak of once a week to something like once every eight weeks), due to changes in both my work commitments and methods of socialising, I still make a concerted effort to keep abreast of developments in the rapidly changing world of house music and club culture, while I still feel the same sense of excitement for new dance music as I did ten years ago back at Cream in Liverpool.

Being raised in Thatcher's 1980s Britain, and seeing the subsequent development of the commercial club culture in the UK during the 1990s that seemed to perfectly embody the former Prime Minister's capitalist, consumerist, and entrepreneurial political thought, certainly had an impact on my overall perception of dance music culture. While there is no place in this thesis for a discussion of my own political perspectives, I certainly see a link between the political background of my upbringing and my embracing of club culture at its most commercialised level. I never shared the sentiments of those who saw Cream and other similarly successful clubs as having somehow compromised the authenticity of dance music through blatant commercial exploitation. The

discourses and value judgements that circulate within rock and pop music culture in regard to 'selling out' also filtered through into dance music culture, and yet for all the criticism they received, these clubs drew many people into club culture, including myself. Without their existence, dance music, arguably, would not have penetrated the mainstream to the extent it did during the 1990s.

My analysis of the Sydney dance music scene is thus grounded in a commercial sensibility that is infused with an international perspective. Coming over from the UK meant getting to grips with the relatively unfamiliar terrain of Sydney's club culture in a rather short space of time, something that I initially perceived as a potential disadvantage, although I soon overcame this not only through the 'education' and 'insider's perspective' I received during my work at Central Station Records, one of Sydney's main dance music record stores (see below), but also with the realisation that a sense of detachment from, and unfamiliarity with, a research subject can serve to foster a degree of objectivity which enables the researcher to maintain a critical distance from their subject. At the same time, I would argue that my familiarity with dance music in the UK allowed me to engage more closely with the debates and issues surrounding transnationalism and the global appeal of contemporary dance music culture. I was able to compare and contrast dance music scenes of two different countries, and many of my conclusions regarding the place of the Sydney dance scene within global dance music culture are certainly informed by my experience of club culture outside of Australia. I am not suggesting that this experience somehow makes me more qualified to speak on this topic than someone who has only ever experienced dance music within the boundaries of Sydney, particularly given the media avenues that are now open to obtain information from the other side of the world in a matter of seconds, thus giving everyone access to an international perspective. Yet my knowledge and understanding of the UK dance scene, when placed alongside and in contrast to my exploration of the Sydney scene, most definitely granted me an increased sense of the fluidity and interaction between dance music scenes around the world.

The job I managed to secure at Central Station Records proved invaluable to the research for this thesis. This was a full-time position working behind the CD counter (during the time I worked there, the shop was divided into four distinct sections: the dance vinyl section, the CD section, the hip-hop vinyl and DJ equipment section, and the clothing section). Having only just arrived in Sydney from the UK to commence my research, I came across an advertisement for the job in the classifieds section of the local street-press (free) publication *3D World*, a Sydney-based paper dedicated specifically to dance music. I expected my unfamiliarity with the Sydney dance scene to work against my chances of obtaining the position, although given that I was ultimately successful, my previous experience in both music retail and dance culture in the UK must have been of more significance to my interviewer. Initially, I was unaware of the importance of the store to the history of dance music in Sydney, and also of the importance of the associated Central Station Records label to the history of dance music in Australia, but once I became familiar with the development of dance culture in the city and the nature of the city's contemporary dance scene, I realised just how fortunate I had been in obtaining the job, given the subject of the research project I had just undertaken. Having selected the Sydney dance scene as my focus, I now found myself immersed fully in one of the key sites of this very scene. While I only worked at the store for the first two of the four years during which this thesis was completed, the insights, perspectives, experiences and contacts I obtained through the job have all gone towards forming the very shape and content of this study.

Aside from the DJs who were regular customers of the store, who I got to know on a first-name basis, and who then subsequently became key participants in my research, my job at Central Station affected my exploration and investigation of Sydney dance culture in many different ways. Perhaps of most significance is the impact my employment had on the actual research trajectory of this project. Initially, I had planned to gather together a focus group of clubbers, and then

base my thesis around their understandings and experiences of the culture, but then, having conducted my literature review, it became obvious that clubbers had been given a significant amount of consideration in academic analyses of dance culture, and that missing from these studies was detailed consideration of the work of DJs and promoters within local dance scenes. With my job providing me with regular, daily contact with such people in the Sydney scene, I saw that I was in an ideal position in which to conduct a detailed ethnographic study of Sydney club culture through the eyes of some of its most passionate and devoted participants, or rather through those who work within the culture on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the job enabled me to gauge and measure the structure and shape of the Sydney dance scene, through such factors as CD sales, vinyl sales, and ticket sales for dance parties. In effect, the job took on a degree of schooling, in that I was constantly being educated about the styles of music that were popular with Sydney clubbers, the clubs and venues that were pulling in the biggest crowds, and the discourses and value judgements that circulated within the scene. Having a UK-based background in dance culture, I had to negotiate the unfamiliarity and strangeness of the Sydney dance scene upon arriving in the city, something which I was able to overcome rather rapidly through the educational value of the job. In addition, the industry-related benefits of working in the store also allowed me to further my research into Sydney's clubbing landscape, in that I took full advantage of the opportunities for free entry into most of the city's clubs that working alongside DJs provides. All those employed to work behind the store's vinyl counter were professional DJs, while dance party promoters would often drop into the store to leave flyers or posters for their events, typically offering guest-list places or free tickets for any staff. I was thus able to form a network of contacts that proved beneficial not only when seeking out interviewees, but also when seeking entry to clubs and events. While I was always careful not appear like I was exploiting a friendship for personal gain, I certainly enjoyed the benefits of being placed on a guest-list (not having to pay,

jumping to the front of the queue), and I certainly went out clubbing more often than I would have done if I had had to part with my hard-earned cash to gain entry.

Ultimately, the conclusions I have drawn about dance culture in Sydney throughout this thesis are rooted very firmly within the experiences and encounters I had while working at the store. Indeed, I am certain this study would have turned out very differently had I not worked at Central Station. The job afforded me an insight into the city's club culture that could not have come from any other source or method of investigation, and allowed for an intensity of participation within the scene that, I believe, acts as a solid foundation for the observations and interpretations I make throughout this thesis regarding the contemporary dance music scene in Sydney.

INTRODUCTION

Clubbing is a hugely significant social phenomenon... Clubbing is an overwhelmingly urban form of leisure and is now a major cultural industry. Few towns or cities are without at least a couple of clubs... Clubbing is now also an increasingly international leisure pastime... (Malbon, 1999: 6)

Club culture is an oral tradition whose critical issues (mixes, clubs, drugs, tempos, dance style...) are articulated in dance floor surges, face-to-face discussion and DJ practice rather than the written word. (Toynbee, 1993: 293)

Dance music, and its associated culture and lifestyle, have become significant aspects of contemporary society, particularly in respect to youth culture, and as such, any related study is of significance in aiding our understanding of this cultural phenomenon. Given the increasingly global and corporate nature of the dance music scene, there is a sense that the music and culture are becoming less 'local' and more 'international', with this global movement affecting the identity and development of local scenes, the understandings and practices of those who are involved with these scenes, and the very definition of a 'scene' itself.

Conducting and analysing research from a cultural studies perspective, assessing the relationship between the Sydney dance scene and the international dance scene, in the sense of local and global culture, and of local and global identity, my specific focus is on the 'commercial' area of the scene, by which I mean the clubs and venues that attract large numbers of 'clubbers'¹, that

¹ I have adopted Malbon's use of the terms 'clubbing' and 'clubber' in preference to 'night-clubbing' and 'night-clubber' – 'terms which clubbers very rarely use' (1998: 282).

have a particularly strong presence in the local media, and that typically employ DJs² from both Australia and overseas.

It is my intention to place the local scene in Sydney into some sort of wider cultural and global context. I use the term 'local' here as 'a means of conceptualising processes of popular music production and consumption in the context of specific urban and rural settings' (Bennett, 2000: 52), or rather as a way of referring to the clubs, music and events that exist within, come out of, and take place in the geographical locations in and around, in this case, the city of Sydney and the surrounding suburbs. I do not wish to 'attempt to identify distinctly national characteristics' (Hayward, 1992: 2), but rather to establish the workings of the local in relation to the global.

While I wish to avoid any suggestion that dance music is somehow becoming a global product of the music industry, there is certainly a degree of similarity between the scenes in Europe, America and Australia, if only in the sense of the music itself, and there is nothing intrinsic in the Sydney scene that specifically promotes Australian national identity. Indeed, with the global flow of the music, and the global touring of the DJs that play this music, there is a sense of the eradication of the diversity of local and national scenes and culture.

Despite the fact that dance music history can be traced through specific geographical locations, such as the development of house music in Chicago, techno in Detroit, acid house in Britain, trance in Goa, and the Ibiza scene, the existence of any contemporary dance scene is not reliant on specific local characteristics. Yet at the same time 'the globalisation of markets and establishment of products with international appeal cannot be said to have produced a homogenisation of global culture itself' (Hayward, 1992: 2). Connell and Gibson make reference to this issue when they state:

² Throughout this thesis, I favour the abbreviation 'DJ' rather than the complete title of 'disc jockey', for as Fikentscher notes, 'in spoken and written usage, "DJ" is as common as "disc jockey" is rare' (2000: 121).

Dance music and 'techno' musical forms in the 1990s have their own histories that tend to emphasise 'authentic' origins... Yet, experimental electronic music has been part of musical scenes across many continents, where the relatively anonymous repetitive beats and instrumental grooves of UK or American tracks are heard and enjoyed not as part of a 'passive' act of listening to overseas artists, but as the sounds and signifiers of a sub-culture that exists in distinct ways in each locality. (2003: 108)

Apart from the music itself being foreign in origin, much of the surrounding culture and fashion is also drawn from overseas, so that, as Murphie and Scheer suggest, 'house music in Australia is about constructing identities using borrowed or translated signifiers' (1992: 183). It is, however, not my intention to comment on a notion of 'Australian identity' as it relates to dance music itself, if only for the fact that such a thing is not made explicit in this music. Most of the music played in Sydney's clubs is not Australian in origin. Thus, when reference is made to Australian dance music and Australian dance culture, it is in the sense of 'Australian' for no other reason than 'simply because that is its geographical/cultural location' (Turner, 1992: 13). My focus is not on the music itself, but rather on the context in which this music is performed and consumed. As Turner states, 'focussing on such contexts helps us understand what pleasures are produced for consumers, and highlights the multiplicity of experiences produced by the music' (ibid.).

This fact that Australian dance culture has its origins in an imported version acts as the basis of any discussion of the contemporary dance scene in Sydney. As Luckman highlights, 'raving itself was initially imported into Australia explicitly as a subcultural practice rather than organically arising out of local music genres and wider consumer practice' (2001a: 51). This does not mean, however, that Australia's dance scene has no unique, specifically 'local' features, and that it

relies solely on overseas developments in dance culture, for as Thornton points out:

Although club culture is a global phenomenon, it is at the same time firmly rooted in the local. Dance records and club clothes may be easily imported and exported, but dance crowds tend to be municipal, regional and national. (1995: 3)

Yet it is impossible to ignore the influence that international dance culture has had on the formation and development of the Sydney dance scene, and it remains the case that,

... the wider popularisation in Australia of dance music and events in the early 1990s was fuelled, and hence participant's [sic] expectations and styles informed, in large part by the European, especially British, experience. Whether it was through fashion magazines, the growing celebrity status of overseas DJs, the accessibility at a recorded level of overseas material, or people's own travel abroad, the mythic ethos of the increasingly mainstream British scene loomed large over many Australian's [sic] consumer expectations. (Luckman, 2001a: 63-64)

Making reference to notions of 'global culture' and 'local culture' creates the impression that there exists a division between the two, whereas in fact, as Shuker notes, 'the global and the local cannot be considered binary categories, but exist in a complex interrelationship' (2001: 72). In discussing such an issue, the focus on the specifics of the Sydney scene is placed in a wider context, and given a relevance that goes beyond simply Australia. The global flow of dance music ensures every local scene does not exist in isolation, and as such, 'we need to be conscious of the danger of too easily dichotomising the local and the

global' (ibid: 81). Connell and Gibson highlight how more recent academic study has begun to question the basic division of 'local' and 'global':

The 'global' and 'local', oversimplified concepts for what are complex and multi-scaled actions, are replaced by new terms such as 'glocalisation' that attempt to indicate the simultaneous 'global' and 'local' elements of economic processes and cultural identifications. (2003: 16)

DJs

To fully understand and appreciate the nature of any contemporary dance scene, the role and the relevance of the DJs who perform at clubs must be given detailed consideration, in the sense that it is often the DJs alone who attract people to a specific club, in much the same way as a rock fan will go to see his or her favourite band perform in concert. The role of local DJs in developing and shaping the scene is crucial, while at the same time the role of international DJs in attracting clubbers to certain nights is of great significance. As Shuker observes:

The role of the DJ is vital to dance club culture. The club atmosphere, mood, or 'vibe' is created in the interaction between the DJ, the crowd, and the physical space which they share. The DJ's choice and sequencing of records, in a dialectic with the mood of the clubbers, is central to this interaction. (2002: 102)

The history and rise in popularity of the DJ, in relation to contemporary dance music and culture, has been well documented³, and thus needs little consideration. There has not been, however, any detailed academic analysis of

³ See Bidder (2001); Brewster & Broughton (2000); Haslam (2001); Poschardt (1998); Thornton (1995).

the role of the DJ in commercial club culture, and of how DJ practice affects, and is affected by, the development of local dance scenes.

Subcultures

Any discussion of a contemporary dance scene needs to draw on some subcultural theory, in the sense that dance culture is, primarily, a *youth* culture. Cultural studies and subcultural theory as associated with the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in England, and the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago, and developed in the writings of Howard Becker, Dick Hebdige, John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Paul Willis, Brian Roberts, and Stanley Cohen, continue to form the basis of discussions of developments in youth culture (Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1995). Their theories are most certainly relevant for a discussion of contemporary dance culture, yet one has to question the extent to which they are still valid, for they are theories grounded in rock values and rock culture. One needs to consider whether it is appropriate to articulate such a discussion through theoretical arguments used in relation to rock and pop music. As Redhead highlights:

The 'contexts' of rock and pop 'texts' are indeed crucial in understanding what pleasures are produced for consumers, what desires are satisfied. Consumers who listen to their purchases at home after, or during, reading about them in the media are part of a cultural experience different from consumers who listen to music while they are dancing in a club – even if it is the same record.
(1990: 100)

Furthermore, subcultural groupings such as mods, rockers and punks are defined in terms of their opposition to 'mainstream' society, whereas it would seem to be the case that dance music has become so firmly ingrained in contemporary life that it actually constitutes a significant part of this 'mainstream'. In his discussion of the history of the study of youth culture, Shuker emphasises

how 'by the 1990s, the preoccupation with subcultures was being strongly challenged' (2001: 197), while he makes reference to how Redhead's,

... detailed reading of post-punk events in the United Kingdom suggested that the very notion of 'subculture', and the emphasis on it as part of a tradition of rock 'authenticity' and opposition at the level of cultural politics required revision. (ibid.)

Through this analysis of Sydney's dance scene, with an emphasis on the commercialism and consumerism inherent within it, and on the work of the DJs who work within the scene, it is my intention to show how music exists as both 'culture' and 'commodity'. A constant tension is played out in all popular music between music as a product to be sold by an industry and music as a form of cultural expression, with arguments typically revolving around the idea that artistic expression is somehow compromised by the commercial concerns of the music industry. It is not my concern to show whether such a tension operates in the Sydney dance scene, but rather to make evident the connections that exist between the 'culture' of the scene and the 'commercial elements' of the scene, and how these, ultimately, help create a vibrant and diverse local scene. Connell and Gibson point out how:

Academic study of music has largely evaded complex connections between cultural and commercial trends, assuming either that music, as an immediately cultural expression, 'belongs' in cultural studies or cultural geography, or that questions of culture and identity are frivolous diversions, compared to the 'real' tasks of examining music's function as a nucleus of economic growth or a possible means of job creation. (2003: 6-7)

It is my aim, through an analysis of the Sydney scene at a 'local' level and how it relates to dance culture at a 'global' level, to go some way towards sketching some of these 'complex connections'.

If we were to look for a 'national character' in our popular music we might do this best by looking first at the contexts in which it is heard and played – that is, at its cultural function as performance and event. Australian popular music can lay claim to its distinctiveness as a component within a national popular culture. But its distinctiveness is not so much constituted through its musical discourses as through its functioning in specific sites and spaces, as a mode of production and consumption that is closely if ambiguously related to the institutions of everyday Australian life.
(Turner, 1992: 24; author's emphasis)

CHAPTER ONE – ‘BACK TO THIS SUBCULTURE THING’ – LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

... the hundreds of thousands of people worldwide who are involved in the multi-billion-dollar nightclub economy, and the millions of clubbers who dig into their pockets every week to hear the DJ play. (Brewster and Broughton, 2000: 13)

The dance revolution which started in Britain in 1988 and which has since spread almost globally, has had an undeniable social impact.
(ibid: 410)

Methodology

With my emphasis being on qualitative rather than quantitative data, and with a great deal of information coming from my own participation in, and observation of, the scene, this work is grounded in the theoretical tradition of ‘ethnography’. Patton suggests that, ‘Ethnographic research focuses on the question: “What is the culture of this group of people”... the idea of culture is central to ethnography’ (1990: 67), while Watts states that ethnography is a form of research that ‘uses direct observation of people in their social settings to understand the way those people interpret and make sense of their own experience’ (1993: 54). For popular music studies, ethnography has become a key research methodology in the investigation of the role of music in everyday life, and the way this music impacts on the construction of personal identities, local communities, and national and international scenes.

Popular music ethnographies that I have used and referred to in order to gain an understanding of the methods that are most appropriate for studying a specific scene in a particular cultural context, and that therefore inform my own study, include Bennett’s analysis of dance music in Newcastle (2000), Fikentscher’s text on the underground dance music scene in New York (2000), and Cohen’s study

of rock music in Liverpool (1991b). Shank's research into the rock scene in Austin, Texas (1994), and Finnegan's work on music-making in Milton Keynes (1989) have also been useful. Bennett observes that the works of Cohen and Finnegan represent two early attempts to focus more on the everyday workings of local music-making practices, and less on interpreting culture through the application of pre-existing theoretical structures. While their subject matters and geographical locations are far apart from mine, they make some general points that can be drawn out and applied to any popular music-based ethnography, for as Cohen explains:

A musical performance in an African village would certainly be very different from a rock gig in Liverpool, yet there will also be similarities, and both require knowledge of the specific social context in order to understand them. (1993: 125)

Russell makes reference to the specificity that arises from studies grounded in the local, suggesting that,

One of the great strengths of Finnegan's work, and indeed of the local study as a research exercise, is that, accepting the uniqueness of every local experience, the tight, manageable geographical boundaries of the small-scale study allow for the deployment of both the closest contextualisation and a micro-focus. (1993: 147)

I have made use of these studies because, other than Fikentscher's, Malbon's, and Rietveld's work, there is little in the way that relates directly to the ethnographic research of dance music and club cultures, Malbon highlighting how, 'ethnographies of clubbing are especially scarce' (1999: 180), although at the same time, I have remained aware of Kirschner's criticism that territorially-bound ethnographies, such as Cohen's, Finnegan's and Shank's, 'fail to link

intimate accounts of local practices to the bigger picture, reducing complex flows of popular culture to a sort of local determinism' (1998: 258), and thus I attempt to situate my study of the Sydney scene within a wider international context of global dance music and club culture, in order to show that there can be no such thing as a 'bounded local' in the media-saturated environment of contemporary popular culture.

Bennett's article (2002) on the necessity for self-reflection in the methodological techniques employed by researchers studying youth culture and popular music emphasises the extent to which researcher familiarity with the field can influence findings and subsequent theorisation. He summarises the absence of empirical research in early approaches to the study of youth culture, and suggests that the emphasis on theory in these approaches has resulted in a lack of concern for detailed ethnographic work, which has, in turn, generated a lack of engagement with 'methodological issues such as negotiating access to the field, management of field relations and ethical codes' (2002: 451). Bennett goes on to outline an approach to researching youth culture in which the researcher incorporates a degree of self-reflection in regard to their position in, and relation to, the culture under consideration. Qualitative research methodologies, Bennett argues, should display a critical analysis of the relationship the researcher has to the field being studied, so that emphasis is placed on empirically-based research procedures and resultant findings and observations, rather than theories and concepts drawn from previous studies of youth culture that have focused on class divisions and pre-existing structural formations.

Fikentscher's study of the underground dance music scene in New York provides a useful example of how a geographically-specific study of urban dance culture can be theorised, analysed, and interpreted, and placed into a wider social and cultural context. While his emphasis is very much on the 'underground' element, and thus contrasts to my own focus on the 'commercial' aspect, some of Fikentscher's central concerns inform the approach I took to my own research

and analysis, in particular his exploration of 'the cult and culture of the DJ'. Ethnographically-based (although conducted over a far longer period than my own work (2000: 17)), this study not only emphasises the cultural and social significance of dance culture in New York, detailing such relevant issues as its roots in disco and in African-American and gay subcultures, but also explores the more general issues that emanate from the scene, like the performance of dance in nightclubs and the relationship between the dancer and the DJ. Fikentscher is careful to establish definitions of the terms and concepts he uses, and thus his work has a coherency and developed appreciation that is often missing from analyses of urban dance culture.

Furthermore, while he admits to a long history of involvement and participation in the scene, Fikentscher avoids moving into overly subjective appraisal and manages to keep an informed critical distance from his chosen subject area. At times, however, he seems so concerned with emphasising the significance of the culture from both a musical perspective that emphasises DJs and dancers, and a cultural-context perspective that highlights the role of ethnic and sexual minorities, that he evades consideration of the industrial context in which dance culture operates, and thus his study seems peculiarly detached from the everyday workings of the music industry that sustain and promote contemporary dance music. There is little consideration of the market economy that shapes and determines the activities and practices of DJs and clubbers, and thus a sense of abstract theorisation pervades the work, as opposed to an involvement with the realities of dance music as a commodity of popular culture.

Rietveld's extensive work on dance music informs a large part of this thesis, particularly in respect of the focus she places on house music culture, in contrast to the explorations of rave that dominate other studies on dance music. Having participated extensively in dance culture as a musician and clubber (1998b: 261-264), Rietveld conducts her research very much as an 'insider', her studies being examples 'of how ethnography can work from the inside out' (1998b: 5). Her

discussions of DJ culture and of the logics of escapism that permeate club culture have proven particularly informative, discussions that are enhanced by her detailed and extensive knowledge of the historical development of house music. Rietveld augments and contextualises her arguments with quotes from house music DJs and producers, providing a useful interpretative framework for ethnographies of dance culture. Yet at times her work lacks a focus and specificity, particularly in her text that explores how 'house music has been developed and reinterpreted in three different social and cultural locations, Chicago in the USA, England and the Netherlands' (1998b: 4). While she attempts to explore the similarities and differences between house music culture as it is produced and consumed in these different geographical locations, there is a sense in which the ambitious and broad scope of her work actually limits the extent to which she can explore in finer detail the particularities and idiosyncrasies of local house music scenes. She notes the different social and cultural historical contexts that gave rise to dance music in the three countries, and from this draws out the different preferences for particular musical styles that define each location, yet she does not engage with the operational logics of dance culture at the local level. Her work is presented more as a general historical account, rather than as a time-specific ethnographic analysis, and thus it appears she never intended to draw out detailed and specific observations and theoretical interpretations. She focuses on big-name DJs, the most famous clubs, and the main cities in which dance culture has developed, but in doing so, she does not examine the realities of dance music as it is produced and consumed by DJs and clubbers in the working practices of day-to-day life.

A criticism of ethnography is, as Kirschner highlights, the way it is carried out within a 'bounded territory- the field- making it difficult for the ethnographer to connect his or her findings to wider global influences' (1998: 259). I intend, however, to challenge both this assumption, and Kirschner's further suggestion that, 'it is popular music's relentless movement across space that poses the biggest challenge to the ethnographer' (ibid.). It is my belief that ethnographic

study, rather than privileging the local as Kirschner argues, can be applied to a wider context, and can thus actually enhance our understanding of an industry that operates on a global scale. As dance culture, and popular music in general, continue to expand globally, it is necessary to adapt the methods used for studying this music, so that this is an ethnographic study that is rooted in the local, and at the same time is concerned with the global. In dealing with what is essentially a global culture, it is no longer appropriate to analyse local culture as separate and distinct from the rest of the world. The focus for any contemporary ethnographic study needs to be on more than just the specific site of research. One needs to show consideration for the global flow, exchange and transformation of popular music that occurs in today's society. No one place is isolated from, and unaffected by, developments in other corners of the world. Thus, to fully understand and contextualise the Sydney dance scene, consideration needs to be given not just to the thoughts and actions of those involved in the scene, but also to the global environment in which it operates.

There is a danger that in focusing on the 'local' and emphasising the specifics of the scene, one neglects the 'global', or rather the connections and relationships that exist between all the different local scenes around the world, and so 'local music scenes need to be understood in relation to broader trans-national processes' (Cohen, 1999: 244). Links are formed by such factors as people who come from overseas and participate in the scene, locals who travel overseas and bring back music and ideas, and the media that disseminate both the music itself and discussion about this music. In reference to Liverpool's contemporary dance music scene, Cohen describes how it,

... has a sense of affinity with scenes in other places and a cosmopolitan outlook that makes it attentive to music activity elsewhere. The successful nightclub Cream, for example, promotes Cream events abroad, attracts audiences from outside the region on a regular basis, and acts as an agency for an international group

of DJs... it thus describes itself as an international club that happens to be based in Liverpool. (ibid: 245)

This highlights the interrelatedness of scenes within dance culture. The written histories of dance music may emphasise the role of place in the music's development, as in Chicago and Detroit, but in contemporary dance culture there is a definite sense of things operating on a global scale, with no one city or region singled out as being synonymous with a particular style or sound, with certain DJs being able to attract as many clubbers in Sydney as they can in London, and with several dance tracks proving just as popular in Melbourne as they are in Ibiza. Rather than defining a scene as something fixed and bounded, the researcher conducting a contemporary ethnography must be aware of the global flow and exchange of culture that takes place, and of the shifting and fluid scenes this creates.

Thornton's text (1995) is useful for an analysis of contemporary dance culture. Not only is there a focus on the media, but also she details the extensive ethnographic research she conducted into British dance culture during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which she draws on for a discussion of the concept of the 'mainstream'. She describes how, in analyses of youth culture and subculture, academic writers 'have relied on binary oppositions typically generated by *us-versus-them* social maps and combined a loaded colloquialism like the 'mainstream' with academic arguments' (1995: 92; author's italics). Opposing the 'mainstream', in both academic arguments and clubbers' own discourse, is the 'underground'. These concepts form an intrinsic part of the way those who participate in the dance scene understand and make sense of the culture that surrounds it. Therefore, any analysis must give some consideration to the issue.

In researching and writing this thesis, I have remained conscious of Gilbert and Pearson's claim that, 'dance cultures are fluid, multifarious formations which will

always exceed any attempt to map them' (1999: vii), and Fikentscher's observation that,

The methods of ethnography that are generally based on data gathered in a relatively short time span (a few years at most) can do only so much to explain the state of affairs of a certain musical style or scene at a particular point in time. (2000: 17-18)

This does not mean that ethnographically-based sociological or anthropological accounts of dance music are in any way invalid and worthless, for they provide useful insights not only into the particularities of dance culture, but also into more general social, cultural, political and economic issues. Yet it is important to remember that this thesis represents merely a 'snapshot' of Sydney's dance music scene at a particular moment in time, and of how 'the sensibilities that inform this scene are infused with forms of local knowledge and experience shared by those individuals who participate in it' (Bennett, 2000: 74), and that the scene's ever-changing shape and definition immediately renders my writing historical, and thus as Fikentscher suggests, 'any sound ethnographic methodology should come to terms with the time dimension of its topic' (2000: 17). Indeed, it proved somewhat difficult to portray a set and defined Sydney dance scene, the fluidity and constantly shifting cultural terrain of dance music making itself evident in the way throughout the course of this study old clubs closed down, new clubs opened, old club nights ended, new club nights started, DJs left their residencies, and new DJs came on to the scene.

As with all popular music, dance and club culture have a significant role in everyday life. For this reason, an ethnographic methodology is an ideal way in which to study the local dance scene in Sydney, with an approach that 'emphasises music as social practice and process... and illuminates the important role it plays in everyday life and in society generally' (Cohen, 1993: 123-127). Through this method of study, the researcher becomes directly

involved with their chosen 'field', allowing for a level of observation and participation that cannot be achieved by 'the reading of secondary sources or armchair theorising' (ibid. 132).

At the same time, however, it is important to remember that the detail and information gained from ethnographic research does not, on its own, constitute a valid argument and analysis, and that such research needs to be interpreted with the appropriate theory. Ultimately, research findings dictate and shape the exact use of theory as research progresses, for as Cohen states:

Ethnography is meaningless in the absence of theory, but theoretical models are not simply imposed on field situations and data; rather they provide an orientation to the research which can be developed by the researcher over the course of analysing data... theory does not somehow arise naturally from the data, but is informed by it. (1993: 133)

Indeed, study is not just about taking one's research and using pre-existing theories to interpret it, but also about challenging such theories where they may not be appropriate or relevant for a contemporary context, and perhaps reshaping and reforming them in order to accommodate one's own findings and conclusions.

As with the majority of ethnographies, the aim is to draw out observed local practices and discourse into wider meanings and interpretations that can be applied to dance culture on a global scale, beyond the boundaries of Sydney and Australia. While any scene in a particular city has its own unique meanings and idiosyncrasies, analysis of a specific field can allow the ethnographer to make comments and arguments that can be used to interpret similar scenes in other parts of the world.

Ethnographic research and studies of local 'scenes' have demonstrated how popular music relates to the 'everyday', how this music is affected by, and indeed affects, social, cultural and economic issues, and how popular music 'scenes' and 'communities' impact significantly on local identity (Cohen, 1991b; Finnegan, 1989; Straw, 1991; Walser, 1993). Yet there are limits to this method of study, as Connell and Gibson highlight when they quote Cohen as stating:

Ethnography in the anthropological sense has its limitations. It is small-scale and face-to-face, and this raises the problem of typicality – whether the small part studied can represent the whole – and the problem of incorporating detailed description which may seem banal or tedious. (2003: 14)

The research I conducted for this thesis was grounded in qualitative methods of enquiry. My concern was with obtaining detailed perspectives and observations from the people involved in the commercial dance music scene in Sydney, primarily DJs, but also record store owners and workers, promoters, those involved in local dance media, and clubbers, as part of an attempt to map the terrain of the Sydney dance scene, or rather to explore 'the cultural significance of urban dance music in a local context' (Bennett, 2000: 70). During the time I devoted to my fieldwork, I chose not to conduct brief interviews with the greatest number of people possible, but rather to speak with central figures within the scene and conduct detailed interviews with them⁴. These interviews were semi-structured (Weber, 1999: 320), open-ended, and frequently in-depth, and like Malbon's, were 'very much 'conversational' in style' (1999: 33). I made contact with most of these DJs through my work at Central Station Records, either directly, in the sense that they were customers of the store and so I came into

⁴ While I did not have a specific set of criteria when assessing the suitability of potential interviewees, I based my decisions for selecting central figures within the scene on a number of factors, such as length of time involved in the scene in a professional capacity, and frequency and level of involvement in the scene at the time of writing. More specifically in regard to DJs, factors taken into consideration included clubs and events that the DJ had played at, in Sydney and elsewhere; international DJs that they had played on the same bill as, often as a 'support act'; and nights and events that they had headlined.

regular contact with them, or indirectly through networks of contacts I managed to establish during my work at the store. Other methods of making contact with potential interviewees included telephone and email (see table opposite for a full listing of interviewees, dates of interviews, and methods employed in recruiting these interviewees). All interviews were conducted 'one-on-one', as opposed to in groups, and took place in locations such as bars, coffee shops, and respondents' homes (Weber, 1999: 321).

The decision to focus on the location of Sydney was taken, to adapt Cohen's description of her choice to focus on Liverpool for her study of rock culture in a local context, because of Sydney's history of involvement and achievement in dance music (1991b: 4), and, to adapt Bennett's reasoning behind his decision to study dance music in Newcastle upon Tyne, because 'relatively scant attention' has been paid to commercial dance culture in Sydney (2000: 3). Furthermore, this focus was taken because of the way Sydney is generally perceived to be 'the dance capital of Australia' (Park and Northwood, 1996: 2), and more generally to show how, as Bennett notes, 'music and style-centred youth cultures are now familiar aspects of everyday life in a range of globally diffuse social settings' (2000: 1). While not having the same centrality to dance culture as American and European-based scenes, Australian dance culture exists in a unique cultural position of attempting to establish its own scene with specific local inflections, while at the same time drawing on imported music, styles and fashions, generating a certain tension between understandings of the relevance of both local and international developments.

The data for qualitative analysis, as Patton highlights, 'typically comes from fieldwork... during fieldwork the researcher spends time in the setting under study' (1990: 10), while Moores explains how established qualitative techniques include, 'the extended period of participant observation 'in the field' and the

TABLE OF INTERVIEWEES		
NAME	DATE OF INTERVIEW	METHOD OF RECRUITMENT
Adam Jesse	18/09/04	Personal contact
Alan Thompson	23/06/05	Email and phone
Alex Taylor	23/06/05	Personal contact
Andrew James	21/09/04	Personal contact
Cale	21/06/05	Personal contact
Con	20/06/05	Personal contact
Goodwill	08/09/04	Personal contact
Illya	22/10/04	Personal contact
John Devecchis	24/09/04	Personal contact
John Wall	16/09/05	Personal contact
Mark Alsop	25/08/05	Personal contact
Mark Murphy	23/06/05	Personal contact
Mike Bennett	27/06/05	Personal contact
Nat Nyk	27/09/05	Personal contact
Neil Ackland	26/08/05	Email
Paul Goodyear	11/05/05	Personal contact
Seb Chan	25/08/05	Email
Sonia Sharma	05/10/05	Email
Stephen Allkins	19/01/05	Personal contact
Trent Cooper	18/09/04	Personal contact
Trent Rackus	13/09/04 & 27/09/04	Personal contact

unstructured conversational interview with informants' (1993: 3)⁵, and Roberts describes how participant observation is 'carried out when the sociologist enters

⁵ See Negus (1999: 1-13) for a brief discussion of the issues and techniques involved in obtaining the required information from interviews, and in interpreting this information.

'the field' to observe at close hand 'how it works" (1976: 244)⁶. My own fieldwork involved the aforementioned job at Central Station Records, which allowed for direct, first-hand observation of the workings of one of the main sites at which dance music culture is experienced and consumed; interviewing people about their own experiences of, and involvement with, dance culture in Sydney; in-depth analysis of local street-press (free) publications, the most relevant example being *3D World*, and other local dance music media such as the website <http://www.inthemix.com.au>⁷; and visiting clubs, and dance music events and festivals. The findings generated from this fieldwork form the roots of this study, for as Patton states, 'the findings, understandings, and insights that emerge from fieldwork and subsequent analysis are the fruit of qualitative inquiry' (1990: 10).

*3D World*⁸ has been useful for a number of reasons, such as gauging the popularity of particular styles of dance music through how many club nights are on during any one week, gaining an awareness of the DJs playing around the city (locals and internationals), generating observations from the letters of readers and the opinions contained within them, and becoming familiar with the discourse employed by local journalists to describe the scene, particularly in regard to the distinct issue of the local/international divide. Also, *3D* has been useful in providing informative material from the interviews with local and international DJs contained regularly within its pages, *3D* journalists frequently questioning them as to their opinions regarding the distinctiveness of the local scene, as well gleaning their perspectives on the nature of dance culture on an international scale. From this detailed and specific use of *3D*, it has been possible to observe, as Thornton did through her analysis, how local media are essential in giving

⁶ See Butters (1976) for a detailed outline of the procedures and strategies involved in conducting participant observation and analysing resultant research findings and data.

⁷ <http://www.inthemix.com.au> is a website dedicated to dance music culture in Australia, with news, reviews, email forums, photo galleries, online ticket sales, and club listings all featured on the site, and with each state capital city within Australia (Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth) receiving focus, so that the site caters specifically for the scenes at the local urban level, as well as the national level. The site name is typically abbreviated by those within the scene to 'inthemix', and thus from hereon the site is referred to in this thesis as such.

⁸ *3D World* is typically abbreviated by those within the scene to *3D*, and thus hereafter it is referred to in this thesis as such.

shape and definition to a particular scene, as opposed to merely reporting on it. *3D* is, arguably, the most prominent form of dance music-related print media in Sydney, and it acts not just as a source of news about dance music and interviews with key figures within dance culture, but also as a listings guide, as *3D* editor, Sonia Sharma⁹, explains:

3D has been around for so long. It's referred to as 'the dance music bible', that's how it's commonly referred to by the dance music community. It's basically an essential tool for the industry, because if people don't pick it up, they don't really know what's going on in the scene, and so that's why it's referred to as that bible, because people need it to work out where to go on a weekend and work out what's happening. Essentially, its purpose is as a gig guide, and anything extra is a bonus. It's been part of the Australian music landscape for ten years. Everyone who participates in the scene knows what it is. (Interview, 2005)

Within Sydney, and Australia as a whole, the website *inthemix* provides a specific example of a media source that not only reflects the dance scene but also helps to establish its content and its borders, as the site's sales and marketing director, Neil Ackland, explains:

[inthemix] has always been very contributor-based, and I think the scene here has been encouraged by that. I think our website encourages a community and brings through people that are interested and passionate about it, and gives them a forum... I see [inthemix] as being some glue that holds [the scene] together. It's kind of like a network of like-minded people, and I think that it's just like a hub for the scene. It's very interactive. Everyone in the

⁹ References to interviewees are cited using full names, apart from in the case of certain DJs who have particular DJ names, and thus references to these DJs cite this DJ name only. See Appendix for biographical information concerning each interviewee.

industry uses inthemix as a resource, and it is one of the biggest resources on dance music I think you'll find anywhere in the world. It's continuously changing. If you look at the content of the forums, and how much feedback and response there is, and interaction, I think what it has also done for the scene is it has made it a little bit more transparent... you live by the sword a little bit more if you are working in the scene, if you are a promoter, particularly putting on events. You know that any issues or any problems with your event, the next day they are going to be on the forums, and I think it drives people to make sure that they are delivering value for money, and good music, and safe events, and good venues, and decent priced drinks. I think it's made people realise that the clubbers are really the most important thing, and if you don't take care of those people, then it can backfire on you, because there are a lot of people that could discuss it in the forum. It has its negatives as well. You get a lot of people just bitching and moaning, and people that spend their whole life on there just being very negative about things. (Interview, 2005)

In addition to this impact on the quality of dance music events, inthemix has also helped to form new patterns, relationships, and processes of interaction between participants in the scene, as Ackland goes on to explain:

I think the positives far outweigh the negatives. It's been helpful because the website is a community, it has actually brought together a lot of people who might otherwise have not been, sort of, welcomed into the scene or as involved in the scene, and it gives them a place to meet other people, and share their experiences. We've had couples that have got married and had babies that have met on the website, and different groups of friends that have met

through it, and social circles that have developed and networks that have developed. There's a lot of history there. I think people feel... it's more than just a screen with some web pages on it, they actually buy into it, they feel like they have some ownership over it and are a part of the direction of it because they are imputing into it everyday and are getting something back from it, and that transfers into the real world as well, so when we do our events, with our VIP programme and things like that, they all feel like they are a part of it, and we try to encourage that as much as possible, because that's a healthy thing for the community. (ibid.)

One of the central sources of information in this thesis consists of direct quotations from DJs involved in the Sydney dance scene. Rather than use my own writing to filter and present interview results, I have chosen to simply insert extensive quotations throughout, as I believe this presents my research findings to the reader in the most direct manner. It is in the words of those interviewed that the true nature of Sydney's dance culture can be observed and understood, for as Patton explains:

Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions. (1990: 24)

In his study of the underground dance music scene in New York, Fikentscher makes reference to ethnography as 'dialogue' (2000: 128), and this is how I view my own work, and such dialogue is most fully realised through letting 'informants speak for themselves' (ibid.). Direct quotations, however, are meaningless without any theoretical context, and thus it has been my concern to find a balance between the thoughts and feelings of those involved in the scene, and

the theories and writings of academics that I have used to interpret my research findings, for as Bennett highlights:

There is little to be gained from privileging empirical research over theory simply on the basis that it is somehow 'more in touch' with the object of study. (2002: 464)

At the same time, I have remained conscious of the fact that interview material does not in any way constitute a reflection of reality and of 'the way things really are'. Interviews are inherently personal, subjective interpretations of events, experiences and developments, and, when being interpreted, need to be situated within their 'organizational, historical, social and geographical contexts' (Negus, 1999: 11).

I have remained aware of Thornton's observation that complications can arise from fieldwork due to the fact that, 'the two methods that make up ethnography – participation and observation – are not necessarily complementary' (1995: 105), by which she acknowledges the conflict that can occur between the sense of subjectivity that is required to appreciate and understand the views of the culture's participants, and the objective opinion one attempts to maintain as a researching outsider, and the differences in observation that can arise from adopting and sharing the culture's world, understandings and discourses, and from pursuing 'a more objectivist line of inquiry' (ibid: 106). I have also kept in mind the question that Bennett poses during his discussion of the analysis of music consumption in relation to the context of the local, when he asks, 'how can the researcher ensure that the interpretation that he makes of consumption patterns is accurate and not simply a value judgement or fabrication?' (2000: 67).

In her work, Thornton seems overly concerned with emphasising her position as an objective researcher, which indirectly serves to detach her from her field of study, thus undermining the validity of her findings, for as Chan outlines,

Thornton conducts her research 'very much as an outsider' (1999: 70), while Rietveld describes Thornton as 'a self-proclaimed outsider of the rave/club scene' (1998a: 255), and thus she does not really get to the centre of dance culture to fully examine the 'contradictions of the relationship between mainstream and underground' (Chan, 1999: 70) that she professes to be her central concern and investigative subject. Furthermore, while Thornton's reflections on her status as a researcher emphasise the critical distance she managed to keep from her subject, the brevity with which she discusses her position reflects a reluctance to engage in more depth with the issue of field research, Bennett citing Thornton's initial acknowledgement of her outsider status and suggesting that what she then should have attempted to do is 'to follow this through with a more sustained account of how such differences between herself and the research subjects impacted upon the research' (2002: 458).

I share Martin's belief that a scene-specific study can be used for a wider interpretation of dance music, and so to paraphrase Martin, while my discussion is situated in an Australian context, I would tentatively propose that the wider implications of dance culture discussed in this thesis may very well be relevant for dance culture as a global phenomenon (1999: 96). Equally, however, I seek to emphasise the diversity and particularity of the Sydney dance scene, and indeed, taking an ethnographic approach dictates that observed practices and details will be of a specific and unique nature, for as Shuker explains, ethnography 'refers to the description and analysis of a way of life, or culture, and is based on direct observation of behaviour in particular social settings' (2002: 113). In this respect, it would be foolish to attempt to draw too many similarities and links between the scene in Sydney and scenes elsewhere in Australia and around the world, for as Thornton observes, 'participant observation is not equipped to establish whether a particular dance crowd is nationally dominant' (1995: 107), and thus by extension, internationally dominant.

Conducting research in a manner such as this allows for a certain degree of objectivity to be made evident in the thesis, and including detailed quotations and descriptions demonstrates that my work is grounded in empirical evidence and does not solely rely on my personal views as a researcher (Alasuutari, 1995: 48). While subjectivity is unavoidable, I hope that my writing makes explicit my concern with accurately portraying the thoughts and opinions of those interviewed, or rather, I consider 'the voices of my fieldwork participants as centrally significant to my analysis' (Bennett, 2000: 3), in contrast to Thornton's study in which, despite being ethnographically-based, there is very little direct quotation from interviewees, Bennett describing how,

In view of the time which Thornton invested gathering data in club settings one might reasonably expect that more of the raw data, for example, the expressed opinions of clubbers and observations of particular club behaviour, would have been used as a basis for the text's exploratory analysis of the cultural dimensions of contemporary dance club scenes. (2002: 458)

Subjective considerations and decisions have to some extent influenced the selection of the data and information contained within this thesis, and in turn this dictates that it is my 'authorial voice' that pervades the thesis, but I have attempted to ensure that this is balanced by the 'many voices' of my interviewees. As Alasuutari notes:

In sociological and cultural studies ethnographies the people being studied are increasingly often given voice in direct quotations... claims made about the truth are often authenticated by using quotations from the interviewees describing their personal life and experience. (1995: 57)

While I acknowledge my position as a 'fan' of dance music and as an active participant in dance culture, I do not believe that this has obscured or tainted the impartiality of my conclusions, but rather that my involvement with dance music has actually allowed me to pursue a more detailed and informed critical analysis. It would appear to me that there needs to be a new approach to the understanding of the relationship the researcher has with the culture as a fan, and that there needs to be less suspicion of the researcher being, or becoming, 'too familiar' with the field. As Bennett highlights in his article on the issues involved in conducting research on youth culture using 'insider' knowledge:

Given the new approaches which are beginning to inform ethnography, the use of insider knowledge in research on youth and music may point the way to a timely deconstruction of the researcher/fan position. (2002: 461)

In articulating and expressing my observations and thoughts on the Sydney dance scene, I have chosen to write in 'the present', as I believe this approach makes most evident the living, contemporary nature of dance culture, and while it is a culture that is in a constant process of change and renewal, its underlying practices and operational logics do not 'date' as quickly as its music and fashions. Therefore, I divert from, and indeed question the validity of, Cohen's description of the Liverpool rock scene during the time of her study that it represented a 'situation of such rapid change and fluctuation that to follow traditional anthropological practice of writing in 'the ethnographic present' would have been misleading' (1991b: 8). It is my suggestion that writing in 'the present' actually draws the reader into a deeper involvement with the subject matter, in that it avoids portraying the culture as no longer existing or as no longer relevant and as 'of the past', while also emphasising the continuous ideologies and structures that underpin dance culture.

Having conducted extensive fieldwork, I am of the opinion that it is impossible for the researcher to be *overly* familiar, or *too* familiar, with a particular culture and its setting, for new ideas, concepts, understandings, and interpretations continually present themselves. If one has some understanding of the culture prior to entering the field and commencing research, then the discourse employed by those within the field will seem less strange than it would if one was approaching the culture as an 'outsider', which thus allows for a more informed and coherent interpretation of research findings. I have attempted to analyse my chosen field of the Sydney commercial dance scene as both a 'detached' researcher and a 'participating' fan, and the resultant work represents a fusion of these two contrasting positions, which I hope goes some way towards supporting Bennett's observation that,

... there may be much to learn about the social significance of contemporary youth cultures and musics using an approach which combines critical reflexivity with an intimate knowledge of fan discourse. (2002: 462)

To summarise, I approached this study with an intended methodology grounded in ethnographic research. Through direct observation of, and participation in, Sydney's commercial dance scene, with specific focus on the two sites of the record store and the club, and on the key figure of the DJ, this is a detailed analysis that, while based in a particular city, transcends any geographical boundaries in that it is relevant for a contemporary understanding of dance music and club culture on a global scale. Drawing on literature and studies about subcultures, dance cultures, music scenes, and related topics, my study is informed by a number of different academic perspectives and a variety of theoretical viewpoints, which I have used to interpret my research findings. These findings have come from interviews, conversations, visits to clubs, work in a record store, and simple observation.

My chosen methodology emphasises the importance of incorporating the views and perspectives of the participants of any contemporary music scene. It is their decisions and actions that give shape and structure to the scene, and thus it should be their words and thoughts that inform any analysis. At the same time, I am conscious of the fact that these words alone do not constitute a detailed academic study, and that simple transcription of events is not sufficient. My work demonstrates the need to find a balance between describing ethnographic findings, and interpreting them with appropriate theory.

Studying dance scenes and studies of dance scenes

In comparison to popular music genres such as rock and pop, there are few academic texts that deal with contemporary commercial dance scenes in a detailed and comprehensive manner. Texts that have proved central to my analysis and research are Sarah Thornton's work on 'club cultures' (1995), Ben Malbon's text on the cultures and spaces of clubbing (1999), and Andy Bennett's analysis of popular music and youth culture (2000), all of which focus on contemporary dance music and culture.

Thornton makes reference to the history of cultural studies and 'subcultural' theory, and the tradition associated with the '1970s work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, England', arguing that her work 'does not adopt their theoretical definitions of 'subcultures'' (1995: 8) as she found them to be empirically unworkable. Instead, she describes how her text 'harks back to the studies of Chicago School sociologists whose concern for researching empirical social groups always took precedence over their elaboration of theory' (ibid.). Therefore, for research grounded in observation, participation, and experience, it is essential that findings be interpreted through the use of theory that complements such a methodology. Yet at the same time, one has to ensure the work does not become simply a lengthy description and transcription of events and interviews. One challenge with ethnographic research is in striking a balance between description and analysis.

Even though Thornton conducted extensive ethnographic research, there is very little in the way of direct quotation from those interviewed, which means that all findings are filtered through her 'writing voice', which can give the impression that the text lacks a certain focus and emphasis on the very people that are under consideration, or rather that there is an absence of interaction and involvement with the clubbers. As Malbon highlights, Thornton largely neglects the clubbing experience, suggesting she 'says very little about the imaginative-emotional constitution of clubbing for – and usually by – the clubbers' (1999: 17).

In Ben Malbon's text, one finds extensive quotations from the clubbers he interviewed for his research. This work has also proved very useful for my own study in its comprehensive analysis of the geographical and social aspects of contemporary clubbing, his research being based around extensive ethnographic fieldwork with a group of clubbers. Malbon does, however, in his desire to fully account for the total 'clubbing experience', neglect the industrial and commercial concerns that have a significant impact on the dissemination and consumption of dance music culture. While he does acknowledge the role of the 'clubber as consumer', there is very little reference to how this consumption is affected, encouraged and manipulated by forces other than the clubber and his or her friends. Malbon's text seems somewhat lacking in commercial context, so that his notion of clubbing rests on abstract arguments grounded in various idiosyncratic viewpoints that, while obviously valid and of worth in the way he actually uses the opinions of clubbers themselves, result in his work coming across as somewhat detached from the everyday workings of the dance music industry.

I realise that going to clubs is an essential part of any research into contemporary dance music culture, but I have avoided giving any kind of detailed consideration to, and description of, the night out itself, and related issues such as drug-taking. As such, you would not have found me during my research period in a corner of a club with a pen and a notebook, hurriedly scribbling observations and

interpretations. Malbon gives extensive consideration to these issues, and his analysis is of such a thorough nature that there remains little else that can be said concerning the significance of the night out and the use of Ecstasy¹⁰, without covering ground already explored by him. Furthermore, I wanted to avoid the almost tokenistic approach taken by Thornton in her text (1995: 87-92), in which she briefly describes a night she spent clubbing and taking drugs as an 'experiment in the name of thorough research' (1995: 89). It is difficult to ascertain the exact reason for the inclusion of this brief passage, given that Thornton gives no detailed consideration to an actual analysis of the night out, and as such, it merely reads like a rather strained and embarrassed attempt to demonstrate a degree of familiarity and involvement with club culture. Ultimately, it only proves the opposite, with Thornton's unfamiliarity with, and uncertainty about, the culture making themselves evident through her generalisations and unqualified judgements, such as when she describes the crowd¹¹ at a particular club, making guesses as to their possible occupations, and stating,

¹⁰ The use of 'Ecstasy' here is a reference to the recreational drug popular in dance culture, the chemical name of which is '3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamines', typically abbreviated to 'MDMA', or within dance culture referred to through a number of different names, such as 'Ecstasy', 'E', or 'pills'. The drug was first synthesised in 1912 by the German company Merck Pharmaceuticals, 'as part of a search to create a new 'stypic' medication that stops bleeding' (Feinmann, 2002: 54; see also Saunders and Doblin, 1996: 5; Wright, 1998: 229). As Thornton highlights, Ecstasy very rarely consists purely of MDMA, instead often being 'a cocktail of amphetamines and LSD' (1995: 21) and as Yates points out, many pills may even contain 'substances with no psychotropic effect' (2002: 9), such as 'food dye, starch, and talcum powder' (Deeson, 2002: 23). For a detailed research report concerning recreational MDMA use in Sydney, see Solowij, Hall and Lee (1992). For a discussion of the history of the drug and its role in, and relation to, dance culture see Lyttle and Montagne (1992); see also Bidder (2001); Luckman (2002: 68-76); Malbon (1999); Osborne (1999); Redhead (1993). For a detailed outline of the drug's impact on UK dance culture see Brewster and Broughton (2000), and Wright (1998). For information regarding the use of the drug in the clinical context of treating psychiatric problems see Feinmann (2002). Nicholas Saunders's text from 1995 (slightly reworked and modified with Rick Doblin for American publication in 1996) remains, arguably, the most detailed, informative and comprehensive UK-based work and source of information on Ecstasy to date, with its broad scope covering the history of Ecstasy, media attitudes and reactions to the drug, its effects, both physical and psychological, the law, and, perhaps most importantly, its relation to dance culture.

¹¹ I prefer the term 'crowd' for it is a concept understood and used by clubbers, and 'it is an appropriate term for it implies a congregation of limited time and unity, but leaves the exact structure open to further definition' (Thornton, 1995: 110). Malbon makes extensive use of the term in his own study and suggests that 'the crowd-based nature of the clubbing experience appears critical in any understanding of its constitutive practices and spacings' (1999: 71).

But it is often difficult to tell. Questions about work are taboo in this leisure environment. You could have a long conversation in the toilets with a woman who tells you she's taken two 'E's, just been jilted by her boyfriend and is sleeping with his best friend for revenge, but ask her what she does for a living and she may well stop in mid-sentence at this insulting breach of etiquette. (1995: 90-91)

Reading any work on dance music and club culture, I expect the author to have had a significant amount of clubbing experience, in order to make the work valid. It is my opinion that validity of analysis only arises from in-depth participation with, in this case, the particular culture. I do not see the point in recounting within this thesis the clubbing experiences I had while conducting my research. They should, I hope, become manifest through my interpretations of the scene and my engagement with the people I have interviewed. In addition, as the example from Thornton's text demonstrates, there are certain problems in attempting to incorporate personal drug-related experiences with valid theoretical interpretation, and thus my own approach has been to leave the issue of Ecstasy out of the research I conducted for this thesis. While I accept that this opens my work up to criticisms of not exploring one of the key elements of club culture, the consumption of drugs, in relation to dance music, is such a complex topic that entire studies, rather than mere chapters or sections, need to be devoted to it. It is perhaps also relevant to note that my own avoidance of the issue parallels much popular music research, which very rarely, if indeed at all, discusses the uses and psychological effects of alcohol.

Theoretical frameworks

The challenge that the analysis of contemporary commercial dance culture poses to the cultural theorist is how to interpret and explain it within a framework that does not overly emphasise and privilege previous writings, and allows for the possibility that such writings are no longer valid, rather than using them in an

almost canonical manner and not explicitly challenging and questioning them. Dance culture, rather than providing a site of subcultural resistance and subversion, may indeed indirectly maintain structures of control and authority through its position as generating a commercial leisure industry that is regulated. Huq questions the validity of perceptions that see dance music as an essentially 'underground' culture, suggesting that the commercial workings of the dance music industry need to be factored into any analyses of dance music scenes:

... the politics of pleasure in dance music cannot be considered in isolation from the wider leisure industry. Music cultures are inseparable from the business dimension that they operate in. Some traditional models of youth culture assume that movements begin with a moment of subcultural purity amongst the elite before incorporation into the mainstream follows. Underground thus inevitably becomes overground. However, rave was never underground for long – it began as a commercial form, and then was claimed by an underground. (2002: 95)

The notion of consumerism that permeates and underlies dance culture has seen dance music incorporated into wider society, so that now, 'club culture is mainstream youth culture' (Bidder, 2001: 244). This process of incorporation has seen dance music move from being the focus of a minority subculture that caused extreme media reaction, moral panic¹², public concern, and government legislation, to a hugely popular leisure pursuit with an associated sound that can be heard not only in clubs and bars, but also on television advertisements and film soundtracks.

¹² 'Moral panic' refers to the result of an often excessive and dramatic reaction by the media to a 'new' youth subculture that is perceived to represent a threat to the dominant order, or rather to 'the overall disposition of cultural power in society as a whole' (Clarke et al., 1976: 13; see also 72-74), articulated through 'exaggerated press reports and misleading headlines' (Collin, 1998: 90), or rather as Shuker explains, 'the popular media are seen to amplify and exaggerate episodes or phenomena out of proportion to their actual scale and significance' (2002: 192).

With this shift into the mainstream, the boundaries and divisions that previously separated dance scenes formed around particular styles have been broken down, making the rigidity of subcultural theory even less appropriate for the study of dance culture. For Seb Chan, the commercialism of contemporary dance culture, and the explicit marketing practices that promote it, have made concepts such as 'subculture' increasingly invalid for theoretical interpretation, although as he explains, such concepts remain in use as they help participants in a scene to make sense of their involvement:

[Terms like 'subcultures'] are valid within the cultures because they give people an identity to pin themselves to, but in terms of studying them from outside of the cultures, I think they are a bit of a myth, particularly now the amount of youth marketing that goes on is so massive. All those classic subcultural trademarks of clothing and fashion are now so mixed up that it becomes kind of old-school to think about it in that sort of way, but when you are inside it, I think the idea of a subculture binds you together. It's like people saying, "What is an Australian?". No one knows... it's pretty amorphous, but, using that metaphor, if you think back, and if all Australians wore exactly the same clothes, or wore a particular set of clothes, a hundred years ago or whatever, which they didn't, but if they did, you could see that as a subculture, and I think that's what people were responding to when they were writing... the visual cues. Certainly Hebdige and all those writers were defining punk around the visual cues. Nowadays, those visual cues are all mixed up. It's all marketing, and I don't mean marketing in an inherently negative sense. There has always been marketing, there will always be marketing, but I think the studying of this stuff... Sarah Thornton was a youth marketing person, she came out of a role working in ads. So what she had done with her book, which I guess in hindsight was really logical... she just revealed some of

the initial early 1990s marketing stuff that cultural studies people just didn't read. If you do cultural studies who does? Who reads marketing? Who reads economics? But that's the shit that drives so much of this now... Going back to this subculture thing... certainly, if you are a DJ, or you are wanting to be a DJ, going out to clubs becomes part of how you define yourself as a clubber. There's a difference between someone who goes to clubs socially and someone who defines themselves as a clubber, who goes regularly to clubs, but that's them defining themselves as part of a subculture, internally. (Interview, 2005)

Within the academic study of popular music, there is a significant lack of ethnographic work that focuses on dance music and club culture as spaces of cultural work, or as simultaneously commercial, capitalist markets and social/cultural formations. Furthermore, the Sydney commercial dance scene itself has not been extensively analysed, and thus, through this study, I hope to contribute to both these areas, providing a specific look at Sydney's scene, and, in turn, drawing out my findings and highlighting their significance for popular music studies in general. The history of dance music and club culture in the UK and the US is well documented¹³, but the history of the scene as it has developed in Sydney and Australia is, one could say, conspicuous by its absence from the dance music histories that have been written.

The concept of 'scene'

In regard to my use of the term 'scene', I see it as the most valid and appropriate description of the culture that exists around dance music in Sydney, for it is used regularly in the discourses and exchanges of information that occur, or rather the 'linguistic spaces created' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 206), between the culture's participants, such as DJs, clubbers, journalists, and promoters. 'Scene'

¹³ See Bidder (2001); Brewster and Broughton (2000); Collin (1998); Haslam (2001); Osborne (1999); Poschardt (1995).

as a concept, however, cannot be taken as unproblematic and as having a set definition, and as Olson observes, a great deal of cultural studies work on popular music 'takes the notion of a "scene" itself for granted' (1998: 270). I intend, through this study, to work through some of the issues relating to the application and use of the term in popular music studies, in part a response to Cohen's extensive writing on local popular music scenes, and her argument that 'scene' is a frequently used term in discussions of popular music, but that 'it has generally been used uncritically or interchangeably with terms like subculture or community' (1999: 247), something also acknowledged by Olson who suggests that, 'the term "scene" is usually deployed interchangeably with the notion of a music subculture (i.e., hip-hop culture = hip-hop scene)' (1998: 270). There needs to be a move away from the conflating of these concepts to a more rigorous interrogation of the unique and specific understandings and meanings associated with each one, and of both the advantages and limitations in their use.

In regard to the specificity of 'scene', I reject Olson's suggestion that a scene should be viewed as a 'singular place in its own right, possessor of its own effective logics, its own reality independent of, yet also affecting, the practices that traverse it' (1998: 271), and that we need to 'theorize scenes independent of these practices' (ibid.), for it is these very practices that go towards establishing, structuring, and maintaining a particular scene. In effect, a scene is a collection of practices, ideologies, principles, locations, institutions, politics, media, personnel, and participants, all linked to the production and consumption of a particular cultural activity, or rather as Shuker suggests, the use of 'scene' within popular music studies 'implies a range of activities, loosely centred around and aligned to a particular style of music and its associated performers' (2002: 179). To detach a scene from its very content renders it meaningless. In this sense, scenes are intrinsically linked to the practices that occur within them, rather than existing and functioning 'independently of the particular practices that traverse them' (Olson, 1998: 272).

This is not to suggest that all dance scenes operate according to similar and shared logics, for each scene has its own unique shape and infrastructure, the dance scene in Sydney contrasting somewhat with, for example, the dance scene in Liverpool (UK), or rather to use Olson's example, the popularity of grunge music 'in a particular scene does not necessarily mean that the scene can be said to possess the same logics and effectivities as the Seattle scene' (ibid.). Yet because of the intrinsically international nature of contemporary dance culture, geographically diverse scenes share certain operational practices and underlying ideologies that arise out of the global flows of dance music, and out of the networks established to serve and support these flows, although this is not to say that these networks impose on dance culture a single, global, homogenous identity. As Fairley notes in her chapter on world music, and the local and global networks that have been established to market, promote and support it, 'it is not possible to reduce such networks and their activities to easy generalisations about cultural imperialism, due to the complexity of the relationships...' between the different people involved (2001: 287).

In his discussion of scenes, Olson seeks to emphasise and explore the actual physical space occupied by a scene, as opposed to the social and cultural practices that give shape and definition to a scene. His concern is with the 'spatial' rather than the 'social' (1998: 275). There are, however, certain issues to be discussed in taking such an approach, as he acknowledges. While the use of 'scene' as a concept typically infers a particular geographical area, 'most commonly a city, but also a locality or region, a set of dance clubs, or even "the world"' (ibid.), it does not necessarily follow that the scene and its cultural and social impact is limited to, and contained within, the geographic boundaries of the place itself, so for example, in discussing the 'Sydney dance scene', there needs to be an explanation of how Sydney as a city, or rather 'a spatially bounded and geographically specific entity' (ibid.) relates to, and differs from, Sydney as a dance scene. I have not analysed dance culture as it exists within the entire

geographical reach of Sydney, simply because the scale of such a project would be beyond the scope of this study. My use of the term 'Sydney dance scene' is as a reference to the clubs that play commercial house music within the limited area of the inner city¹⁴ and surrounding suburbs, but it is not intended simply as a description of a physical area, but also of the people involved in dance culture in the city, and of their ideologies and practices, an approach that thus stands in direct contrast to Olson's, in that I seek to emphasise the concept of 'scene' from the perspective of the social, rather than the spatial.

Indeed, I would suggest that Olson, in arguing that scenes need to be understood spatially, fails to see the way scenes are intrinsically linked to the social, and cannot be analytically detached from the discourse and practices that structure scenes, and as Saldanha explains, 'space is constructed socially... it follows that the spatial is an articulation of social demarcations, relations of power, meanings, myths, histories, and practices' (1998: 6). Any one scene is essentially a combination of a number of different operational logics that are tied to geographical location in varying degrees, and thus scenic analysis demands that focus be placed on social interaction, not on the constituent elements of bordered physical space. In effect, it is this social interaction that generates scenes, and without it, a scene is non-existent.

I do, however, move beyond the physical limits and boundaries of the city's dance culture in making reference to 'the global dance scene'. I employ the term 'global' not as a reference to the entire world, but in regard to Rietveld's use of the concept, which she outlines when she states:

The term 'global' needs to be qualified to indicate mainly urbanised parts of Western Europe, the USA, parts of Latin America, South Africa, Australia and Japan, as well as parts of the world which

¹⁴ In much the same way as Fikentscher's participant-observation research took place 'in New York City, primarily in Manhattan' (2000: 17).

function as holiday resorts for the folks from the aforementioned areas. (1998b: 5)

Thus, in this case, my use of the term 'scene' is non-specific and non-geographic in relation to my particular field of research, my intention being to reference dance culture as it exists internationally and to highlight the shared sensibilities, ideologies and operational 'logic[s] of commodification' (Negus, 1999: 182) that permeate geographically separate scenes, tying them together into one wider, macro-level culture.

In his article on communities and scenes in popular music, Will Straw discusses some of the issues related to dance music as being both a specifically local culture and as operating on a global scale, comparing and contrasting North American rock and dance music cultures, situating 'local musical spaces within cosmopolitan networks of taste' (Middleton, 2001: 222). He imbues dance culture with a defined sense of localism, while at the same time he explores 'the manner in which people can have a strong sense of unity over vast geographical and social distances' (Thornton, 1997: 475), with dance music culture drawing on local music activity for the creation of its sounds and styles, which are then adopted and adapted by dance scenes elsewhere, with changes 'monitored closely by the international dance-music community as a whole' (Straw, 1991: 381), so that there are constant processes of cultural exchange at work between different local scenes, Gibson suggesting that Straw's concern in the article is with emphasising the 'extent to which musical subcultures and productive 'scenes' replicate themselves from place to place as part of a 'matrix' of niche markets found across locations' (2002a: 2). The specificity and individuality of these scenes is informed by the way in which 'specific combinations and inflections of styles drawn from an international repertoire' (Hayward, 1998: 20) are contextualised within the local setting. Thus, for Straw, the concept of a music 'scene' is not something geographically fixed and bounded, but something with a certain flexibility, and variety in shape and structure, with Straw

emphasising the 'fluid, loose, cosmopolitan, transitory, and geographically dispersed nature of local music activity' (Cohen, 1999: 245), while for Negus, Straw's theory establishes a 'framework for thinking about musical audiences that is looser and more fluid than theories of subculture' (1996: 23).

Yet Straw's article seems detached from the actual workings of the culture, in his attempts to comment upon 'scenes' in general, and its lack of place-specificity undermines the validity of his arguments as they are not tested empirically, as Thornton highlights when she describes how Straw, 'maps out two communities – the North American dance music and heavy metal scenes – with little reference to the people who inhabit or imagine them' (1995: 110), and as Fairley suggests, analyses of local music scenes within a global context need to be illustrated with ethnographic evidence and supported with 'empirical analysis of how local/global musical communication actually works' (2001: 275). There is an assumption in Straw's article that the development of local scenes comes solely from the absorption of national and global developments, which are transmitted through media representation, rather than also from the results of cultural mixing that occurs through the movement of people between geographical locations (Gibson, 2002a: 2), so that 'it is not clear how scenes emerge and what social processes might contribute to the establishment of audience alliances' (Negus, 1996: 23). Olson is critical of the way Straw fails to provide adequate theorisation of the practices that actually exist within, and give shape to, scenes, suggesting that Straw's scenes, 'are merely empty vessels within which certain practices interact, but these vessels themselves seemingly have no effect on those practices' (1998: 271), and furthermore, Thornton states that while Straw makes use of the term 'community', 'the communal is all but ignored' (1995: 110).

In a similar manner to Straw, Grossberg distinguishes between 'scenes' and the practices that occur within them, suggesting that scenes may continue to exist over time through transcending 'any particular musical content, thus allowing the scene to continue over time, even as the music changes' (1994: 46). He

interprets Straw's argument through a notion of 'logics of consumption', and describes how Straw's interpretation of the dance scene places each local scene as being 'a unique part of the whole rather than merely a repetition of the larger whole' (1994: 47), and thus, if we interpret the Sydney scene through such a theoretical lens, then we acknowledge its position within the wider framework of global dance culture, drawing on foreign records and international DJs, but at the same time having its own unique operational logics, politics and practices that give it shape and definition.

The concept of 'local'

It is not my intention to actually *define* 'local', given that it is something of a fluid and malleable term within popular music studies. Recent thought has explored the contrasts and divisions, and the links and connections, between 'local' and 'global', and highlighting the numerous different interpretations and meanings that have been imposed upon the terms, Fairley points out how, 'in straightforward analytic terms, as descriptions of networks and power relations, 'global' and 'local' are ill-defined terms, offering multiple vantage points' (2001: 272). This is not to suggest I use the term 'local' vaguely and generally, but rather simply that I am wary of attempting to establish a specific definition for a concept that has a constantly shifting meaning, a meaning that is dependent very much on the context in which the concept is used. For my own purposes, the term is intended to reference the particular urban context of Sydney, and thus contrasts to my descriptions of dance culture, in the sense of a global phenomenon, as 'international'. Drawing on Bennett's discussion of the dual interpretation and application of the term 'local' in popular music studies, I thus employ it as 'a means of conceptualising such processes of production and consumption in the context of specific urban and rural settings' (2000: 52), as opposed to using it in tandem with 'national', or rather as a way of 'denoting a focus upon national rather than international or 'global' aspects of popular music production and consumption' (ibid.). Admittedly, there are questions that spin out from my particular use of 'local', in the sense that, for example, do the occasional

performances of international guest DJs constitute 'local' or 'global' dance culture? Where do the boundaries of the 'local' Sydney dance scene begin and end? Does this scene operate within a 'fixed' geographical space, or is it something more fluid with a constantly changing and evolving shape? Do local DJs cease to be local DJs if they go to live and work abroad? Ultimately, however, the term 'local' acts as a way of distinguishing between what occurs in dance culture at the specific level of, in this case, the city of Sydney, and what occurs both elsewhere in Australia and overseas, and its use goes some way towards supporting Bennett's call for 'an analytical approach that is more sensitive to the role of locality in informing the cultural relationship between youth, music and style' (2000: 50).

The concept of 'transnational'

Local scenes make evident unique styles and fashions, but these are drawn from an international base that dictates any one scene does not operate in a bounded cultural space, but rather is part of a 'transnational' dance culture that circumvents and transcends the specificity of local cultures to attain global appeal, Weber observing how, 'while there will always be variation at the local, regional and national levels, some trends or styles now have international scope or influence' (1999: 318).

In regard to 'transnational', I have adopted the term and concept from Connell and Gibson's description of 'the increasingly transnational distribution of dance, punk and indie pop sub-cultures' (2003: 110), from Valentine, Skelton and Chambers's explanation of how 'youth styles are commercially appropriated and become part of transnational popular cultural youth forms' (1998: 24), from Shepherd's suggestion, made in reference to Straw's influential article on popular music scenes (1991), that 'the local can only be local in specific and concrete relations to transnational practices' (1991b: 26), and from Laing's article (1992) on national and transnational trends in European popular music. The use of 'transnational' does not, I believe, take focus away from the importance of the

local, or rather does not 'obscure fundamental features of the local' (Bennett, 2000: 196), but acknowledges and accommodates the interactive fluidity of dance culture at the contrasting, yet at the same time complimentary, levels of the local, national and international, and allows for a rethinking of 'the parameters of the collective appropriations and localised innovations that take place within a stream of globally available media products and information' (Bennett, 2000: 195-196), and for an understanding of 'the diffusion and interplay' (Kirschner, 1998: 251) between international dance culture and smaller, local manifestations and articulations.

As Bennett explains in regard to the work of Laing (1997), 'large transnational networks now exist for the production and marketing of dance music' (2001: 122), in the process creating what Frith, Straw and Street refer to as 'new cross-cultural alliances' (2001: 193). Local scenes both feed off and feed into this transnational culture, assimilating and incorporating stylistic developments from elsewhere, while at the same time actively contributing to the progression of the music and its associated culture on a global scale, so that 'musical scenes come to be constituted partially through practices and readings located elsewhere' (Shepherd, 1991a: 260). Even if a local scene is particularly self-sufficient, it will have some sort of link to a wider cultural context, no matter how small, for as Bennett highlights, it does not make sense to reference a local scene as bounded and that 'dominates social reality to such a degree that any other source of information concerning the social world is blocked' (2000: 196), and as Kirschner emphasises, 'it is misleading to talk about the music of particular locales apart from larger global processes' (1998: 251). As Seb Chan outlines, it is the development of technology, with its changes to the way music can be sourced and obtained, that has facilitated the growth of a dance culture that is international in its appeal:

[Dance culture now] is a lot more fluid. Music production-wise, a lot of people might record here, but press in Czechoslovakia, and then

be released in America, and they might not ever get released here. So it's a lot more fluid than perhaps it was. Certainly in the early days it was a tourist culture, it came on the back of tourism and new sounds came on the back of tourism. I remember being in record stores in the early 1990s, you'd be waiting for the latest shipment from Belgium to arrive, and everyone would mob it and rip it apart as soon as it came in because that was the only way of accessing those sort of releases. There was no Internet to order through, mail order was impossible, there were no catalogues. Record shops were like the doorways to all this. You had to be in the door to get anything. That's all changed now. (Interview, 2005)

Raves versus clubs, and Australian academic interpretations of dance culture

Australian theoretical approaches to the analysis of dance music have typically focused on the underground, counter-cultural aspects of its practice, on the 'alternative' party circuit (Rietveld, 1998a: 255), rather than the commercial, mainstream workings of the metropolitan club scenes. In the same way that British theorists have in the past seemed reluctant and wary to discuss the commodification of dance music, Australian writers such as Gibson, Luckman, and St. John did not examine the sizeable commercial dance scenes in the Australian capital cities. Given the significance of these scenes to the development of youth culture in the country, this seems a peculiar oversight, and one that needs rectifying.

Despite this lack of material concerning commercial scenes, several articles, chapters and papers have been written on issues relating to Sydney dance culture and Australian dance culture. Examples include articles and chapters by Chan (1998 and 1999), and Cole and Hannan (1997). Murphie and Scheer's (1992) chapter on Sydney's dance parties is relevant not just for its outlining of the historical development of dance culture in Sydney, but also for some of the

issues it raises in relation to the position of the Australian dance scene within global dance culture. Describing the dance scene in both cultural and economic terms, the chapter provides a background context which aides in understanding the contemporary scene. Reference is made to the role of Sydney's gay community in popularising dance music in the city and the way 'a lot of the values of gay dance were to follow through into inner city dance party cultures' (1992: 174), while the decline of Sydney's pub scene is noted as helping to further this popularisation of dance music. In sketching a brief history of Sydney's dance scene, and then discussing the tension between the 'local' and the 'global', and how 'in the broadest sense Sydney dance parties are simulated after a notion of Euro-American antecedents' (ibid: 180), the chapter stands as a model on which to base an ethnographic study of Sydney's club culture.

Murphie and Scheer do divert briefly from an emphasis on dance music as a site of political negotiation, suggesting that at the turn of the 1990s, Australian dance culture became more of a 'mainstream' concern, describing how '1990 was the year in which the market took over the last vestiges of lived cultural specificity in dance culture' (ibid: 177), with dance music beginning to filter into the commercial pop charts, and numerous clubs and record stores catering for an increased consumer demand. In turn, this cultural shift by the music into the 'mainstream' led, according to Murphie and Scheer, to an eradication of the 'dance parties' power to signify as *radical*, or even as *avant garde* fashion' (ibid: 178; authors' italics).

Gibson has conducted extensive research into Australian dance culture, focusing on its geographical and spatial practices, and on the use of technology as a means of creating and sustaining local dance scenes. He draws on a number of different theoretical frameworks to contextualise his discussions of rave as representing a site of radical potential for the activities of youth culture in challenging the politics of mainstream culture. For Gibson, this requires attention to be given to 'the discrete scenes of informal and irregular underground dance

parties... rather than other more commercially acceptable forms of dance music' (1999: 20). Seeking to outline a 'spatial politics of dance music', he analyses the geographical sites and linguistic discourses employed by ravers in their involvement with dance culture, and the way this helps to position dance music as outside of, and in opposition to, wider society. Referencing the Reclaim The Streets (RTS) movement¹⁵, Gibson marks out dance music as explicitly counter-cultural and as an 'instance of oppositional politics in popular music' (Shuker, 2002: 221), and in doing so, ignores issues of commercialism. The more mainstream, 'acceptable' side of dance culture is portrayed as a sanitized, and therefore compromised, manifestation of dance music's ideologies. The club scene becomes criticised for being part of,

... a highly capitalist music industry... [with] the growth of more regulated, controlled and, conversely, less radical environments for the broadcasting of dance/techno music to large audiences.

(Gibson, 1999: 27)

The club scene is, effectively, portrayed as suffering from the 'corrupting effects of capitalism' (Kirschner, 1998: 254). Yet simply because this part of the scene is more controlled and therefore lacking in radical, political potential, does not mark it out as unworthy of study. Indeed, it is precisely because of this constant dismissal of commercial dance scenes that this study has one as its focus, and as Gilbert and Pearson highlight, the fact that dance music is implicitly linked to capitalist practices does not make it 'bad' (1999: 161). It is my intention that this thesis goes some way towards proving that the study of commercial dance scenes is of value, for it does not necessarily follow that the commercial dance

¹⁵ The Reclaim The Streets movement, as a global concern, focuses on resistance and oppositional practices, and involves 'trans-continental political strategies' (Gibson and Pagan, 2000: 2; see also Osborne, 1999: 248-249), and reflects Straw's claim that dance culture has effected a shift in the focus of the politics of popular music away from the discussions of authenticity and commercialism that pervade discourses of rock culture towards 'more concrete battles over the right to occupy public or quasi-public spaces and congregate in large numbers' (2001: 174), and thus represents an example of 'popular music playing an overt political role' (Shuker, 2002: 223).

culture of urban clubs and spaces should be ignored simply because of its lack of engagement with rebellion, and as Fikentscher observes, many writers and theorists,

... continue to pursue an almost obsessive interest in the deviant elements of night life... but pay little attention to the creators and consumers of house music, the dancers, and the DJs. (2000: x)

This focus on the politics of Australian rave music can also be seen in the writings of Luckman, who suggests that, 'as a vehicle for oppositional political movements, raving has provided a locus for creative oppositional activism in the nineties and beyond' (2001b: 206; see also Luckman, 2002), reflecting Bennett's observation that 'popular music has become a key medium in the articulation of socio-political causes' (2000: 42). Having as her focus the protest actions of the RTS movement, Luckman, like Gibson, rejects the commercial practices of dance culture for her study. Approaching dance music in such a way lends it an explicit purpose and sense of worth, rather than 'dismissing' it in the escapist, pleasure-seeking terms favoured by Rietveld and Redhead, something Luckman acknowledges when she states:

Unlike Rietveld's ravers who seek to temporarily flee into hedonistic abandonment, those involved in reclaiming the streets as a militant practice... [partake in] an oppositional critique of global capitalism. (2001b: 207)

In discussing the oppositional practices of the RTS movement, Luckman adapts this theory and distinguishes between those who participate in dance culture as a way of 'escape' from everyday reality, and those who participate in dance culture through their involvement with RTS and therefore 'seek explicitly and deliberately to employ feelings of unfettered pleasure in the service of an oppositional critique of global capitalism' (2001a: 54). Thus, while her subject matter differs somewhat

from my own, the theoretical framing of her research demonstrates a method of studying dance culture for the ethnographic researcher.

Luckman raises an interesting point in the introduction to her article (2001a), a point that marks out my own research as being of significance. Drawing attention to the way studies grounded in a Birmingham-based theoretical approach see the analysed subculture as oppositional, she suggests that dance music studies in post-Thatcher Britain have instead favoured an approach that focuses more on the capitalist, consumer-based aspect of contemporary dance culture, with scholars taking 'a more 'audience-centred' approach to their analysis' (ibid: 51). It is in such a notion of consumerism that my own work is based, which is something absent from Australian research on dance culture, for as Luckman highlights:

In Australia the situation has been quite different with more concern being directed toward what may be termed the more 'credible' or 'alternative' ends of the scene's spectrum of practice. (ibid.)

Similarly, Brabazon (2002) discusses the political and social meaning of rave culture in Australia, although diverts from Luckman's perspective, declaring that the culture's potential for radical change has long ceased to exist, so that theoretical interpretations of dance culture as counter-cultural are actually involved in a process of historical analysis, writing 'for a moment and movement already lost' (2002: 20). Yet rather than outlining the causes and results of this lost sense of radicalism, as made evident in dance culture's increased commercialisation and its 'ascendancy into the popular mainstream' (Collin, 1998: 267), Brabazon explores the difficulties inherent in attempting both to write about the physical movement of dancing and to theoretically interpret dance culture, something acknowledged by Malbon during his detailed account of a night out spent clubbing, breaking his flowing description of the intense emotional interaction he witnessed between clubbers to ask, 'how can words – simple,

linear words on a page – evoke this delirious maelstrom of movement and elation?’ (1999: xii).

As such, Brabazon’s writing is bound up in suggestions and possibilities, rather than in concrete, case-specific investigation. She is critical of the tendency in writings on dance culture to misinterpret rave’s political significance as contemporary rather than historical, yet neglects to outline her interpretation of the contemporary relevance of dance culture, and thus, with its discussions of the drug Ecstasy and references to the ‘dance revolution’, her writing remains part of the theoretical narrative that positions dance culture as oppositional. There is a danger, however, that in focusing on dance culture as a cultural space in which oppositional tendencies and ideologies are articulated, an overly-simplistic division is created between a dominant order and a subordinate cultural grouping that, in this instance, positions dance culture as being in a constant struggle against the rules and regulations of authority, yet as Clarke et al. suggest, ‘the nature of this struggle over culture can never be reduced to a simple opposition’ (1976: 12), and as Shuker explains in regard to the necessity to revise subcultural theory for interpretations of contemporary youth cultures:

For many youthful consumers, the old ideological divides applied to popular music [have] little relevance, with their tastes determined by a more complex pattern of considerations than any ‘politically correct’ dichotomizing of genres. (2002: 317)

While such studies provide detailed comment on the political ideals of Australian youth culture, as well as contradicting Siokou’s claim that ‘there is a paucity of academic studies of raves’ (2002: 11), they ignore the everyday practices of those involved with dance culture on a less overtly counter-cultural, and more explicitly commercial, level, reflecting how studies of popular music culture often ‘valorise the transgressive or resistant possibilities of the entertainment itself and elide the profit-driven context from which these possibilities spring’ (Olson, 1998:

272), and which thus supports Valentine, Skelton and Chamber's observation of how the excessive concern of youth cultural research with 'resistance and spectacular forms of youth cultures has led to a neglect of the young people who conform in many ways to social expectations' (1998: 24).

Writings that have explored the more visible, acceptable side of club culture in Australia tend to discuss abstract notions of identity formation and construction, rather than the actual consumption¹⁶ of dance music on a commercial basis, seeing dance clubs as 'sites of collective ritual in which pre-existent communities come together in communal celebration' (Straw, 1993: 172). Siokou's study of the Melbourne rave scene, grounded in detailed ethnographic research and participant observation, lists figures and percentages for crowd age and gender balance at raves, discusses the venues and geographical spaces at which these raves are held, and draws extensively on interviews with ravers, to articulate a theory of the rave as generating a 'sense of collective identity' (2002: 18), and to show how club culture produces 'moments of collective celebration' (Straw, 1993: 176). While she correctly criticises the use of traditional theories of subcultures for analyses of dance music, her writing fails to acknowledge the commercial sensibilities that permeate the organisation of contemporary dance parties and raves, her concern being with 'theoretical issues to do with the construction of identity by the participants in raves' (2002: 11).

In its outlining of the history of the Sydney dance scene, and in its discussion of the internal politics and geographies of the scene, Chan's chapter (1999) has been particularly useful, and his approach of critiquing existing subcultural theory and outlining alternative approaches to analysing contemporary dance culture is

¹⁶ My use of 'consumption' here and elsewhere is in a broad, all-encompassing manner to refer to the ways in which participants in dance culture do not simply buy recorded dance music of a particular format, but also make use of media such as radio and print, go clubbing, take an interest in fashion, and maybe even involve themselves in production and promotion, all activities that go towards a 'consuming' of dance culture, and as such, I do not share Shuker's categorisation of clubbing and the music press as *secondary* levels of involvement with popular music consumption (2002: 65; my italics), for clubbing is the core focus of dance culture, and therefore represents the *primary* way in which dance music is consumed.

what I have built and expanded upon within this thesis. Rather than 'rave' or 'dance music', Chan prefers the term 'techno' for his discussion of dance music in Sydney, using the term to distinguish electronic music that is largely instrumental and has its roots in Detroit (as opposed to vocal-led house music that originated out of Chicago), and he details the 'standard' historical narrative of dance music's development from its origins in the US, and the rise of acid house in late-1980s Britain. Focusing on the specific context of Sydney, reference is made to the impact the gay community had on the initial stages of dance culture, Chan stating that, 'a strong inner-city gay community danced weekly in clubs to house music largely imported from America via a few specialist dance music shops' (1999: 66), reflecting the notion of Australian dance culture as something with its roots overseas that pervades most writings on dance scenes in the country.

Connell and Gibson's text on popular music, identity and place (2003), provides some commentary on the Australian dance scene, as well as more general theory on understanding music and place, which can be applied to my own study. While their emphasis is largely on places that have become synonymous with a particular style of music, for example, '... jazz in New Orleans... the grunge scene in Seattle... Goa techno' (2003: 90), and thus differs to my own research in that it is not my concern to establish a link between Sydney and a style of dance music, some relevant subject areas are touched upon. Making reference to recent ethnographic studies of music 'scenes', they suggest that, 'to understand how musical activities may be shaped by places it is necessary to explore local musical practices, institutions and behaviour' (ibid.). While not every city or town has an explicit link to a particular style of music, emphasising the local allows one to establish the role of place and environment in the development of culture.

A lack of an associated style of music does not mark a place as lacking in culture or as having less significance in the global music industry, for as Connell and

Gibson highlight, cities such as Paris, Tokyo, Seoul and Sydney have sizeable local music industries and significant domestic output,

... yet these centres have not been attributed a 'sound' in international mediascapes. Local cultures in these locations create a range of sounds, their internal diversity precludes any one given style... (ibid: 102)

Homan's article (1998) on the issues that arose as a consequence of the Ecstasy-related death of a Sydney clubber provides an example of research into dance culture on a local level. Homan considers the impact that Anna Wood's death had on the regulation of Sydney's clubs, looking at the media response, the decision by the authorities to close the club where she died, the ensuing court case, and the resultant effect on government policy. While not of specific relevance to my own study, this article highlights the issues that one needs to be aware of in undertaking an ethnographic study of Sydney's dance scene, with regard to the 'interplay of youth, media and political processes' (1998: 64). It also provides an historical context in which I can place my own research, for it describes how Sydney dance culture, in relation to the issue being discussed, has been perceived and portrayed in previous years, and enables one to more fully understand the way the contemporary scene is regulated.

Of further relevance is the way Homan, through his article, demonstrates how analysis of a specific case at the local level generates understandings that can be applied on a wider scale. Thus, applying this to my own analysis, ethnographic research has as its focus 'the field', yet this does not mean one is limited to making observations solely about the field. Homan draws out wider implications from his findings, in the way that his discussion of the local media's reaction to Anna Wood's death leads to a more general consideration of media representations of dance culture, his focus on the government's response to the case 'highlights the continuing problems in incorporating various music practices

within the surveillance of the state' (ibid: 77), and his study as a whole can be 'inserted within the ongoing (Australian) debates regarding the contexts and meanings of popular music studies' (ibid: 78).

One of the central tenets of Brookman's thesis (2001) is that the impact of commercial concerns on dance culture has lessened the oppositional nature of the rave scene, which in turn is leading to a change in perceptions of dance music at both the local and global levels. Writing from a background of cultural geography, Brookman looks at the actual spaces occupied by rave culture, and its appropriation of cultural signs and commodities, but rather than detailing the commercial workings and practices of the scene, as his focus on the commodity status of dance music would suggest, Brookman sustains the approach favoured by such writers as Bennett, Chan, Luckman, Redhead, and Rietveld, focusing on dance music as it relates to youth culture and notions of identity. In doing so, he situates his work within the existing theoretical framework used to interpret dance culture, so that the Sydney scene is marked out as operating according to the same principles and ideologies that underpin dance scenes elsewhere in the world, despite his suggestion that the commodification of dance culture generates specifically local meanings.

While Brookman does outline a history of the Sydney scene, it is a history that focuses on raves, rather than clubs, and therefore, despite stating a concern with the commodity status of dance culture, Brookman ignores the most explicitly commercial aspect of the Sydney dance scene. While he acknowledges that the increasing importance of clubs within dance scenes in recent years is 'indicative of both the process of consolidation of scenes into 'club cultures' in general, and a process of increasing commercialisation' (2001: 42), he places his concern with commercial practices in a wider context of subcultural theory, so that rather than moving forward and developing a detailed critique and theoretical interpretation of Sydney club culture, he works backwards and situates Sydney raves within the tradition of subcultural theory.

Furthermore, Brookman's suggestion that 'rave' actually represents one part of a wider concept of 'club cultures' actually serves to contradict his writing. In seeking to mark out and separate his rave culture from the more commercial, club-based scene, he initially sets up a binary distinction between the two, but then later in the thesis describes rave as existing within the wider framework of 'club cultures', which he uses as an 'umbrella' term to refer to all the different sub-scenes and sub-genres within contemporary dance music. This leads to a confused interpretation of rave culture, in that Brookman highlights how he is seeking to 'present a meaningful account of rave culture in Sydney, as existing within 'club cultures'' (ibid: 43), yet he actively marks out as distinct and separate the club-based scene and the rave scene, noting the different music that is played, the different fashions appropriated¹⁷, and the different crowds that participate in the scenes.

Brookman takes issue with the commercial practices of rave culture, and places them in contrast to the workings of club-based dance culture, yet then continues to use the label 'club cultures' as a catch-all term that includes the incorporation of raves. In addition, references to notions of 'mainstream' and 'underground' are made frequently throughout the thesis, yet no attempt is made to define their possible meanings, despite acknowledgement that they are used in the discourses that ravers and DJs employ to express their understandings of dance culture. The terms cannot be accepted uncritically, for as Thornton highlights, the meaning of 'mainstream' is not restricted to one specific definition, as she questions 'can the mainstream be a majority? What is its exact status? Is it a minority, a myth, neither or both?' (1995: 5), and Malbon also acknowledges the difficulty in ascertaining a specific definition of 'mainstream', suggesting that clubbers frequently employ the term as a point of discursive contrast when they

¹⁷ See Osborne (1999: 90-91) for an historical overview of the fashions of different dance music cultures, from the flares of disco, through the glamour of New Romantics, to the baggy clothing of rave.

make reference to what they perceive to be 'cool' or 'hip', but without any exact understanding of its meaning (1999: 58).

Thus, while Brookman's work acts as a useful analysis of the contemporary Sydney rave scene, and demonstrates a partial move away from traditional interpretations of dance culture in the way he focuses on commodification and consumption, the vague and abstract use of conflicting and opposing terms, such as 'underground', 'club culture', 'sub-genre', 'sub-scene', and 'mainstream', confuses and complicates his argument. In sustaining the concept of 'subculture' as an interpretative framework, Brookman actually forces us to further question its relevance, for the more contexts in which it is used, the more its meaning becomes imprecise, Bennett observing that its 'continuing currency as a grounding theoretical base deepens the questioning of the term's sociological validity as it is applied in increasingly contradictory ways' (1999: 604).

Exploring similar issues of counter-culture and consumption in an Australian context, Bowen's thesis (1998) incorporates some analysis of dance music within a wider discussion of Australian youth subcultures. Discussing and contrasting what he labels 'the rave subculture' alongside 'the gothic, feral and indie subcultures', Bowen looks at the absence of political activity within dance culture, and suggests that this marks it out as a subculture grounded in consumerism, and that rather than opposing authority in any way, those who invest and participate in 'the rave subculture' actually align themselves with the ideologies of mainstream society. Bowen details how the costs involved in participating in dance culture, such as the purchase of drugs and club entry fees, dictate that its social make-up will more likely consist of middle-class, rather than working-class, youths, suggesting that, 'the high costs of participation in the subculture's activities mitigates against anyone without a high disposable income becoming a member' (1998: 167). Similarly, Siokou, referencing Malbon's research, suggests that 'most current "ravers" are middle class' (2002: 12).

Drawing on ethnographic and textual research, Bowen focuses more on the activities and perceptions of 'ravers' rather than the commercial infrastructure that sustains dance music, looking at the level of involvement and degree of investment ravers make through participating in the rave subculture. As such, his work seems lacking in realistic observations of how the dance scene operates, and appears rather too reliant on unproven and abstract personal interpretations of the social and cultural significance and position of rave culture. Despite this, Bowen's central argument concerning rave culture is something that informs and underpins my own work on, and interpretation of, club culture in Sydney, in that he proposes that the logic of consumerism made evident in rave culture allows for the suggestion that 'ravers, rather than being in anyway disaffiliated from their host society, are in fact the model citizens of a post-ideological, repressively desublimated consumerist society' (1998: 177). This opposes the interpretation so prevalent in other writings on dance culture that position it as oppositional in relation to authority and wider society.

If we follow Bowen's argument, then dance music is actually very much a part of mainstream culture, and in no way involved in attempts to challenge and circumvent this culture, and thus 'in the end neither providing a fundamental challenge to, nor even breaking away from, dominant mainstream social space' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 109). Shuker observes simply that, while dance music may once have been regarded as 'outside of the mainstream', it has 'to a considerable extent actually become the mainstream' (2002: 230). As Sydney-based record store owner Cale highlights, dance music has become an intrinsic part of contemporary mainstream culture, as one can see from the way in which some of its components, signs, markers, and core figures have been adopted by the mainstream for purposes not necessarily related directly to dance culture itself:

At times I feel that dance music is too mainstream... you'll see TV commercials with DJs on them, DJs that have nothing to do with

shampoo and nothing to do with McDonalds. So DJing and dance music in general has become very, very commercialised. I suppose you could say that [dance music] nearly became the pop music of the millennium. (Interview, 2005)

Similarly, while her focus is on rave culture in Australia as a subculture situated outside of the mainstream, Luckman acknowledges how contemporary club culture has become firmly entrenched within the commercial arena, largely because of the central role it now plays in the economic framework of any urban location, and as she states:

Unquestionably, the scene's music, imagery and general subcultural lifestyle kudos are evoked not only in the marketing of directly related products and services, but they have also been conscripted in the service of promoting everything from tennis gear and 'smart' drinks to youth-oriented television networks and advertising training agencies. (2002: 279)

Where I attempt to move on and divert from Bowen's interpretation is in assessing the commercialism of club culture in a positive manner, rather than maintaining the dismissive and critical attitudes of Bowen and other writers (Brewster and Broughton, 2000; Garratt, 1999; Haslam, 2001; Reynolds, 1998) who have negatively described and 'consistently denigrated' (Straw, 2001a: 69) the commodification of dance music, an approach acknowledged by Shuker when he describes how, within popular music studies, the term 'commodification' is 'largely used in a negative sense, in critiques of the incorporation of initially rebellious genres... into the commercial mainstream of the music industry' (2002: 55). Contemporary dance culture has to be analysed in regard to its position as a commodity form, regardless of whether it displays an opportunity for youth to negotiate the supposed constraints of ruling authority. Bowen frames his argument so that dance culture is perceived as somehow lacking in relevance

and substance because of its refusal to engage with counter-cultural discourses, suggesting that ravers 'don't even express anti-status attitudes, let alone engage in any counter hegemonic activities... many ravers appear satisfied rather than just resigned to the status quo' (1998: 228-229). There needs to be an effort to counter this dismissive attitude, which devalues not only the culture itself, but the activities of those who participate in it.

While still maintaining the rave-based focus of much of the writing on Australian dance culture, which parallels the way British dance music historians and theorists have favoured an emphasis on rave culture and put forward arguments for its 'revolutionary impact' (Straw, 2001b: 173), Gibson and Pagan's article (2000) on the sites and spaces occupied by Sydney rave culture, and the culture's portrayal in media discourse, raises some relevant points for my own club-based work. Despite maintaining a perspective of rave culture as representing a threat and challenge to authority, and thus sustaining the binary division of 'mainstream' and 'subculture', or rather 'commercial' and 'underground', that pervades theories of dance culture, as well as the notion that dance music functions 'as a directive compelling young people to engage in socially deviant behaviour' (Hunter, 1999: 47), they give some consideration to the incorporation and acceptance of the Sydney dance scene into more mainstream culture.

Tracing the origins of the term 'rave' in Sydney mainstream print media coverage, with Chan observing how the term 'began to vanish from regular use as the media colonised the term' (1999: 71), they follow the established historical narrative and outline the initial development of dance culture in Australia as being influenced by British events and growing out of the Sydney gay scene, and then discuss the venues used in this development alongside a consideration of how the print media articulated the initial tensions between authority and ravers. This involves a focus on the concept of moral panic, and the way the media positioned dance culture as representing youth deviance, situating raves as outside of the

mainstream and therefore as requiring control and legislation, Siokou describing how, 'raves have been demonised by the authorities, particularly the media, which have associated them with potentially fatal drugs' (2002: 18). As Hunter argues, it is not the music of dance culture itself that is deviant, but rather 'it is the labels given to the music (by the media groups, legislative bodies and social institutions) that make it deviant' (1999: 47), an issue also highlighted by Shuker who explains how deviance is a social construct that arises in part from the way the 'mass media are a major source for the labelling process, as they transmit and legitimate such labels and contribute to the operation of social control' (2002: 193). In this respect, dance culture represents a continuation of the historical tradition of extreme media reaction to the development of 'new' youth subcultures, Hebdige outlining how the 'emergence of a spectacular subculture is invariably accompanied by a wave of hysteria in the press... it fluctuates between dread and fascination, outrage and amusement' (1979b: 93).

Government reactions to dance culture

The Government's response and consequent law reform following the Ecstasy-related death of Sydney clubber Anna Wood in 1995, and subsequent moral panic that was played out in the media¹⁸, resulted in what Gibson and Pagan describe as 'a shift towards containment rather than opposition' (2000: 20), which reflects how 'institutions, regulations and moral panics slow the processes of social and political change' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 220). Efforts were made, through the implementation of the New South Wales Code of Practice for Dance

¹⁸ Nova describes 'an apparent fear that seemed to envelope mainstream culture and media over the fear of raves and other parties' (quoted in *3D World*, #697, March 15 2004: 32), while Chan acknowledges how Anna Wood's death 'was the catalyst for an extensive and long-running moral panic' (1999: 71) that, ultimately, 'altered the nature of rave as a subculture, and its rave spaces within the public eye' (Gibson and Pagan, 2000: 14), and Siokou explains how, after the death, 'the media constructed a negative image of raves... raves were used as a scapegoat for the youth drug problem' (2002: 15). See also Desenberg (1997); Gibson and Pagan (2000); Homan (1998); Luckman (2002: 235-274). This closely mirrored the media coverage and response in the UK to the case of British teenager Leah Betts who died in the same year after taking Ecstasy at her eighteenth birthday party; see Collin (1998: 299-306) for a discussion of the Leah Betts case and the impact her death had socially and culturally, and Osborne (1999: 27) for a more brief outline of the case.

Parties (see Chan, 1997; Gibson and Pagan, 2000; Luckman, 2000)¹⁹, the code primarily involving the application of 'current health and safety codes to dance venues' (Gibson and Pagan, 2000: 21), to regulate and control the rave environment, and as happened in the UK with the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act (CJA)²⁰, Sydney dance culture moved towards being a primarily club-based culture, although this is not to suggest that the Code of Practice is in any way an Australian equivalent of the CJA, the latter concerned with prevention and outlawing (Osborne, 1999: 59-60) rather than the containment and incorporation of the former. Bowen highlights how 'there has been no Australian equivalent to the draconian British Criminal Justice Bill which aimed to severely restrain – and even obliterate – the Rave subculture' (1998: 237), and which, in turn, has perhaps meant that dance culture in Britain has been assessed to a greater degree than dance culture in Australia as anti-hegemonic and counter-cultural, and as representative of more of a threat to the established order, although as well as codes of practice for dance parties, 'such regulatory mechanisms as noise restrictions, environmental protection legislation, fire and safety laws and alcohol licensing regulations' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 205) have all been used to contain and suppress certain clubs and styles of music in Australia, the reactions of both British and Australian authorities to dance culture reflecting Street's general observation of how 'the local and national state establish rules and regulations that govern the consumption and performing of music' (2001: 253).

There is a degree of similarity, however, between the two countries and their respective dance cultures in the way the regulation in New South Wales allowed, again as occurred in British post-CJA dance culture, the flourishing of a more commercial sensibility, which in turn saw the assimilation of rave culture into the

¹⁹ The New South Wales government also published a document entitled 'Guidelines for dance parties', the aim of which is stated as being to 'provide detailed information for promoters on how to conduct safe and successful dance parties' (1998: 2).

²⁰ The CJA was legislation that made 'the convergence in public space of large numbers of people, and lengthy broadcasts of music with repetitive beats, punishable offences' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 205). For discussions of the CJA, see Bennett (2001: 124); Collin (1998); Gilbert and Pearson (1999: 150-152); Osborne (1999: 59-60); Saunders (1995: 102).

mainstream, 'through the growth of standardised club environments' (Gibson and Pagan, 2000: 20). Chan describes how, after the police and South Sydney council had succeeded in closing the raves that had been taking place on inner-city industrial estates, 'the scene eventually shifted back into the more geographically appropriate clubs of Darlinghurst' (1999: 70).

Superclubs and the development of commercial dance culture

Once the police and authorities began to control these illegal raves and gatherings, dance music was taken back indoors into the regulated and controlled environment of the club, the scene was 'brought under the regulatory controls of the state' (Chan, 1999: 71), and returned to 'the anonymity of the cities' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 204), which has generated the consumer-based club culture of today, or 'corporate clubbing' as Osborne describes it (1999: 283). In Australia, similar reactions by the authorities to the developing dance culture generated much the same result as occurred in Britain, as Andrew James explains:

A lot of the clubs in Sydney were dead ten or twelve years ago, and people used to go to raves and warehouse parties, they were hugely popular. As soon as the government clamped down on the warehouse parties, everyone was forced into clubs, and the same thing happened all around the world. That was a major factor on the current club explosion. (Interview, 2004)

The irony of the legislation and regulation that dance culture underwent is that, while it was intended to contain and restrict the growth of dance culture, it actually had the opposite effect of supporting its development, Collin noting how legislative acts like the CJA 'brought the dance-drug virus to a wider community of willing hosts by driving it towards the mainstream' (1998: 277). Many of the

commercial dance clubs in Sydney today, such as Home, Sublime²¹, Tank, Slip Inn, and Gas, were based, to a certain extent, on UK 'superclubs'²² such as Ministry of Sound, Renaissance, and Cream²³, employing extensive advertising campaigns, brand names and recognisable logos to promote their venues and nights. Hesmondhalgh, writing in 1998 in regard to the British dance music industry, notes how "super-clubs' with huge promotional budgets are beginning to dominate the dance scenes in particular regions' (1998: 250). Describing the early stages of his career as a promoter, John Wall makes reference to the significance Sublime had in helping the Sydney dance scene move from being solely an 'underground' culture to being part of a wider mainstream cultural phenomenon:

I'd gotten together with a friend called Ming, and he was into clubs and music, but he was sick of his day-job as well, and so we got together to start promoting. We just gradually built things up. We got the contract to do all the promotion for Sublime in Pitt Street, which was considered a little bit legendary. It was quite a good club. It had a capacity of about nine hundred... and because of that period of the late '90s, house music was, although it had been around for a long time, really starting to develop in terms of sophistication of the music, the scene, and the people that were into it and their knowledge about the music, and a lot of the DJs and acts that have become famous, and are still some of the top DJs today, started getting really popular then. So we started trying to bring people out and put them on, and the first ones we tried

²¹ Prior to moving to Home in Darling Harbour and becoming a club 'night', Sublime was actually a 'physical' club located on Pitt Street; Park and Northwood describe how it was 'the first club in Australia built for dance music' (1996: 6). The Pitt Street club closed in March 2000, and opened as a weekly Friday night event at Home on April 7 2000.

²² While not grammatically correct, the word 'superclubs', as opposed to 'super clubs', is typically employed in the discourse and language of club culture. The term was coined as a reference to the relatively large size of clubs such as Ministry of Sound and Cream.

²³ Cream's flagship club in Liverpool closed during the course of this study, yet 'the business is still a thriving global enterprise' (Patterson, quoted in *3D World*, #645, March 10 2003: 40), staging festivals, conducting global club tours, and releasing compilation albums.

were people like Roger Sanchez... it didn't manage to sell-out, it was about seven or eight hundred people, it was a decent night but it wasn't what you'd call huge... and then Erick Morillo, which did sort of okay... Armand van Helden, which did well... and a few other things like that. They were DJs who we considered to be really big names, but they still weren't that famous here because house music hadn't become mainstream the way it has now. It was very popular, and a lot of house tracks were making the charts, but somehow, most people still considered it underground to some degree, not deeply underground, but it wasn't what you heard in every shop, bar, or whatever, the way it is now. (Interview, 2005)

Trent Rackus acknowledges the impact the opening of Home had on the Sydney scene, in that the size of the club and the financial support behind it were on a scale far greater than anything else in Sydney's clubbing landscape:

The scene changed a lot when Home nightclub got up and running. These were overseas investors who had plenty of money, and they started offering big money to international DJs which made it a lot harder for [the smaller promoters] to compete. (Interview, 2004)

Discussing his own work as a promoter in the Sydney scene, and his efforts to increase the popularity of the dance music sub-genre of 'breaks'²⁴ within the scene, John Wall describes how the management techniques employed by those at Home were, for a promoter, restrictive:

We stuck with [Sublime] until that club closed, and the owner took over running Home, and put all the things that had been on three different nights at Sublime in Pitt Street on a Friday night at Home.

²⁴ 'Breaks' is an abbreviated form of the name 'breakbeat', a term used within contemporary dance culture to refer to a style of music that, as the name implies, has a broken, uneven beat behind it, in contrast to the continuous 4/4 beat that underpins most house music.

We ran that for about a year, and then we parted ways because Home, at that time, wanted promoters to only work for Home and not do anything else, whereas we wanted to do all kinds of different music and different parties and one-off events. Basically the manager of Home opened up 3D [World] one week and saw that we had Jeff Mills on at some place, and we had Krafty Kuts or some breaks thing on at the Metro, and something else, and he was like, "You guys are not loyal", and we were like, "Friday night's got three thousand people going every week, what are you worried about?"... So we started doing breaks parties on a slightly bigger scale at the Metro. They still lost money every time for the first year or so. People are often surprised. Everyone thinks it's easy to build up a style of music, and it can be quite difficult. There are a lot of different ways of doing it, and they probably don't all involve losing money, but a lot of them do! (Interview, 2005)

The aforementioned UK-based superclubs have become involved in 'global tours', which sees certain DJs tour various locations around the world under the banner of the club brand, and through this, establishing dance culture as something global in character, while also reflecting the dominance of the UK superclub brands within dance music. Garratt makes reference to the overseas tours undertaken by Renaissance and quotes the company's owner Geoff Oakes, who highlights the international sensibility that infuses contemporary club culture when he describes how Renaissance put on nights in 'places like Singapore, Russia, Italy, Australia and there's just this massive response to us because of all the marketing we've done in the UK' (1999: 295), while Connell and Gibson suggest that these tours are part of a global dance music tourist network, with the superclubs 'staging events in nightclubs in Australia each summer, alongside venues in London, Liverpool and Ibiza' (2003: 229), with tour operators catering for crowds seeking dance music-based holidays, and thus 'capitalising on the commercial success of dance music' (ibid.). Park and

Northwood acknowledge this concept of the dance club as being more than just a building, describing how the superclub is not only a large venue built specifically for dance music, but also is 'not restricted to its physical location' in that it is an entity which can 'tour' (1996: 6).

The establishment of specific, controlled sites where dance culture can be experienced represents an acceptance of the culture by wider society, so that rather than contesting and suppressing its existence, authority has sought to incorporate it into a structure of legitimised nightlife. The increased commercialisation of dance music that has occurred alongside this has generated a discourse of dance culture in which there is an apparent tension between the supposedly more oppositional, radical, counter-cultural rave events, and the accepted, legal spaces of the club (Gibson, 1997), participants in the former engaged in 'ongoing battles waged against commercialisation or stagnation' (Straw, 2001a: 69) with consumers of the latter, or in which dance culture is perceived to have had its radical potential suppressed and exploited, examples of this being Reynolds's suggestion that, 'the explosion of pent-up social energies that occurred in the late eighties has been channelled and corralled into a highly controlled and controlling leisure system' (1999: 382), Brookman's description of how 'as rave culture has gained popularity... its oppositional status has been challenged' (2001: 15), and Luckman's assessment that,

Rave-derived cultures can be mapped in terms of a trajectory running a gambit from resistant and exclusive subculture through redemption, entailing incorporation into the dominant culture by means of mass commercial exploitation. (1998: 48)

The 'underground' and the oppositional status of dance music culture

Describing the commercialised dance scene that has developed in the UK during the past decade, as made evident in the rise of the 'superclub', Garratt notes

that, 'the lines between mainstream and underground [have become] increasingly blurred' (1999: 304). Indeed, one has to question the very existence of an 'underground' in contemporary club culture, for if dance culture is now accepted on a wider mainstream level, then it is harder to sustain the culture's claims to being counter-cultural and oppositional, particularly when even the smaller, supposedly more 'experimental' clubs are bound up in commercial concerns (Garratt, 1999: 305), and as Straw suggests, the relevance of dance culture is not to be found in 'the transgressive or oppositional quality' of its practices (1991: 384), while Siokou observes that, 'many ravers do not fit into the earlier model of youth subcultures and would generally not be recognised as different/deviant by society' (2002: 17).

Gibson and Pagan move, albeit partially, towards an assessment of the relevance of the notion of the 'underground' for contemporary dance culture, questioning whether its incorporation into wider cultural practice by authorities through legislation and control signals 'the end of the underground?' (2000: 21), and whether 'the imagination and creative drive that has for a decade sustained youth subcultures' (ibid: 22) can be retained, although they fail to develop this discussion to any significant length, favouring instead notional predications as to how rave culture may maintain its subversive role in society. Rather than posit the suggestion that references to a distinct and divided 'underground' and 'mainstream', and to dance culture as a manifestation of radical and oppositional tendencies, seem increasingly irrelevant for a culture that operates within a legislative framework established by ruling authority and as a commercial industry, which for them would be the 'pessimistic' conclusion, Gibson and Pagan adopt what they see as an 'optimism' that 'many within the dance scene have articulated' (ibid.), describing how raves can still retain their subversive characteristics while operating within the 'bounds of the state' (ibid.), and how the space at which the rave takes place within represents the site of resistance, rather than the wider social and cultural context in which it occurs.

The conclusion that Brookman reaches seems to most adequately account for the commerciality of contemporary dance culture, and for the inappropriateness of referencing the culture as oppositional, in that he outlines how processes of commodification have impacted upon rave culture's politics and ideologies. He states that within rave culture, 'although resistance to incorporation can be noted, it is clear that there is a general acceptance of increased commercialism' and that ultimately, the existence of an 'underground' cannot be verified as a reality, as 'the notion that raves act as a forum for resistance through an 'underground' movement has given way for a more general appreciation of dance music' (2001: 62). While somewhat vague and lacking in context, as a conclusion it marks out the direction studies of contemporary dance culture need to take, with less attention needing to be given to abstract, unworkable notions of the structure of the dance scene, and more focus needing to be placed on the commercial practices of the club scene, in order to demonstrate how dance scenes function not as subcultures, but as 'commodified expressions of a communal appreciation of electronic music' (Brookman, 2001: 66), and to show how the 'rich detail of local music scenes and sounds cannot be divorced from the wider economic contexts within which music production, marketing and dissemination take place' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 116). As Kruse suggests, 'much research taking place on popular music cannot be separated from questions of the influence of market factors on musical practices' (1998: 187).

The term 'underground' does, however, continue to be used by those within clubbing scenes as a specific point of reference and as a way of lending shape and definition to these scenes, Thornton highlighting how clubbers apply the term to denote that which is 'more than fashionable or trendy', with 'underground' sounds and styles being 'authentic' and pitted against the mass-produced and mass-consumed' (1995: 117), and thus sustaining the distinction employed in popular music discourse 'to define the good and bad and to distinguish between the true and false' (Negus, 1996: 46). The term is thus more of an ideological construct than a valid definition of an existing sub-group of a culture, and while it

may be used extensively, this does not necessarily lend it a specific meaning. In fact, the varied application and use of the term often only serves to confuse its definition.

In attempting to prove the continued existence of a dance music 'underground', as well as proving that it remains a valid theoretical concept, there seems to be a tendency to position the more popular side of club culture as the reflection of dance culture as co-opted and sanitised by mainstream society, and as therefore somehow lacking in cultural credibility, which Luckman references when she describes how the commercialisation of club culture has given rise 'in part to well worn subcultural discourses regarding the loss of the perceived authenticity of the original [rave] experience' (1998: 46), which is made evident in Elwell-Sutton's suggestion that, 'dance music's corporate nature is stifling its original anarchic, punter-led atmosphere, leading to an element of stagnation' (2002: 22). Yet such a view disregards the relevance and significance commercial club culture has for those who actively participate in it as DJs, promoters, or clubbers, and as Collin highlights in reference to the commodification of dance culture that occurred during the 1990s and the conflicts between participants that arose out of it, 'the arguments over creeping commercialisation laid bare the central, often conflicting impulses – entrepreneurial, hedonistic and utopian – that both drove and divided the scene (1998: 276).

The perception of dance culture as counter-cultural is unsustainable in a contemporary, media-reliant society that adopts, incorporates, and assimilates all manner of cultural signs in order to sell its products, as is the suggestion that the culture's participants are members of a subculture that seeks to actively differentiate itself from wider society. As Bowen observes in relation to other contemporary youth subcultures in Australian society, 'it is the Rave subculturalists whose value systems and lifestyles are, leaving aside enthusiastic drug use, typically normative and no different from their non-subcultural peers' (1998: 265). Yet even such an adherence to subcultural theory seems somewhat

regressive. The concept of subculture and the theoretical leanings associated with it are no longer valid in an interpretation of contemporary commercial dance music, for as Brookman notes, 'rave culture appears to be less about a subcultural identity and more about a consumer choice to experience pulsating music and ecstatic dancing' (2001: 64), while Thornton highlights the lack of valid empirical evidence within subcultural theory, referencing the work of Clarke et al. from 1976 and stating, 'despite scholars' claims that subcultures are 'not simply ideological constructs', empirical social groups have often been elided' (1995: 110), and Shuker explains how, in academic analyses of youth cultures in recent years, 'the very value of the concept 'subcultures', and particularly its conflation with oppositional cultural politics', has been seriously questioned (2002: 317).

This chapter has explored the various different approaches that have been taken in studies of dance music culture and dance music scenes, and the issues raised by such approaches. An effort has been made to highlight some of the inadequacies of these approaches for studying commercially-orientated dance scenes, and to emphasise the need for a re-thinking of the methodological and theoretical approaches taken towards the study of such commercial scenes, as well as of the significance of dance music and club culture in contemporary everyday life. With this in mind, it has been the argument of this chapter that ethnographically-based methodologies are the most suitable for studies that are concerned with exploring the workings of popular music scenes, and with uncovering the ideologies and discourses that underpin particular cultural groupings within these scenes. Analysing a scene in a specific locality requires an intense level of participation on the part of the researcher, for it is my belief that simple observation does not generate a sufficient degree of understanding and appreciation of the structure and content of a scene, and thus it is only through such participation that empirically valid interpretations and conclusions can be made.

Furthermore, discussion in this chapter has been devoted to situating the Sydney dance scene within both its specific geographical locality and a wider global context of international dance culture. To place this discussion within a wider theoretical framework, an attempt was made to lend definition to certain terms that are employed extensively throughout this thesis, such terms as 'scene', 'local', and 'transnational' forming the core of the theoretical approach I have taken for analysing contemporary dance music culture in Sydney. Within the Sydney scene, an explicit tension exists between its origins and history as being based on an imported model of dance culture, and subsequent attempts by participants to impose upon the scene its own unique identity. As part of these attempts, the increased commerciality that dance music has undergone in recent years has had to be negotiated, and this shift by dance culture into the mainstream has generated a questioning of the validity of theoretical approaches that emphasise the oppositional status of dance culture and that make reference to its position as a subculture. Paralleling this shift in understanding has been a conceptual move within references to dance culture, with less emphasis being placed on raves and anti-authoritarian manifestations and applications of dance music, and more focus being directed towards club culture and the commodification of dance music. The regulation and legislation of dance culture initiated the development of highly commercial superclubs, to such an extent where one is now forced to question the very relevance and validity of previously accepted and unchallenged concepts such as 'underground'.

The next chapter moves on from these general observations and has a more specific focus, with attention being given to the style of dance music that is of most relevance to this thesis, and to the structure and shape of the Sydney dance scene itself. Having expressed my concern with giving emphasis to the thoughts and opinions of my interviewees, more space will be dedicated to direct quotations, in order to contextualise my own discussions within the everyday lives of these interviewees and within the realities of the operational logics of the commercial dance scene in Sydney. Through taking such an approach, it is my

aim to draw out the specificities of the Sydney scene and highlight how, while it operates within a global flow of dance music, this scene is very much a unique entity. In order to situate the scene within a wider interpretative framework, attention will also be given to the historical development of dance music culture in Australia, and how this has impacted upon current understandings and interpretations of the place of Australian dance music culture within the global dance music scene.

CHAPTER TWO – ‘THE CROWD WENT BERSERK’ – DANCE MUSIC AND CLUB CULTURE IN SYDNEY AND AUSTRALIA

In the same way that DJs attempt to mix and fuse different records and sounds from a number of different sources to create a seamless and complete sonic performance²⁵, I have used and drawn on a variety of different texts, arguments and theories to develop my own discussion of commercial dance music. In using the terms ‘dance music’ and ‘dance culture’, my definition of culture being drawn from the writings of Clarke et al. who interpret ‘culture’ as ‘the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted’ (1976: 11), I am referring to the ‘commercial’, DJ-played music that one can hear in such Sydney clubs as Home, YU, Gas, The ArtHouse, Slip Inn, and Tank, and at various bars, pubs, festivals and events within the city area.

Dance music has a central role not just in the culture of the city, but also socially and economically, and on a wider geographical scale. To paraphrase Hesmondhalgh, in Australia at the start of the twenty-first century, dance music is at the very centre of contemporary youth culture (1997: 167), although it is perhaps something of a misnomer to label dance culture as a ‘youth culture’, for this implies simply a focus on clubbers, or rather on the young people who frequent clubs and dance parties, and thus while dance culture is largely a ‘tightly-defined group distinguished by age and generation’ (Clarke et al., 1976: 14), those who earn a living through dance music, such as DJs, journalists and promoters, do not always fall comfortably under the banner of ‘youth’. I also share Malbon’s view that ‘the term ‘youth’ resonates with a slightly unsettling, de-humanising, patronising and ascribed quality’ (1999: 200).

²⁵ See Hadley (1993) for a detailed description and theoretical interpretation of the techniques and principles involved in mixing records together.

In employing the term 'dance music', I am referring to a particular culture and its associated music styles that have come to prominence during the last twenty years, and thus 'dance music' is a reference to a music that has far greater relevance than simply an association with the physical act of dancing. As Fikentscher explains in his New York-based study of dance culture:

Dance music is not simply music for dancing, as in the general sense of the word, which without any specific association of context or characteristics could refer to a Viennese waltz, a Renaissance saltarello, or a Cuban mambo. Throughout this account, however, dance music has a specific meaning. It is a historically defined musical term of the 1980s that was coined and has been used since by the music industry to replace the category of disco. (2000: 10-11)

In discussing the central issues and concerns of this thesis, and following the example of Gilbert and Pearson when they describe their own writing as 'a specific project with a specific agenda... there are many things which this book does not do' (1999: vii), it is perhaps also appropriate to highlight what this study *is not*. I have not made an attempt to provide an exhaustive account of the historical development of dance culture in Sydney, for such information can be found in the articles and chapters by Chan (1999), Murphie and Scheer (1992), and Park and Northwood (1996). I have referred to history where I have deemed it appropriate, often in the case of contextualizing a particular DJ, for as Clarke et al. suggest, 'it is vital, in any analysis of contemporary phenomena, to think historically' (1976: 17). While a truly comprehensive history of the development of Sydney's dance scene is missing from the literature on both Australian and global dance culture, and therefore needs to be written, it is beyond the scope of this study to detail such history, or rather to borrow the words of Negus, it is not my intention to begin developing one here (1992: 3).

Commercial House Music

I have chosen to focus on the 'commercial' dance scene, by which I mean the licensed clubs and events that attract the greatest number of people and advertise extensively in the local dance music street-press, the DJs that play at these clubs, and the style of 'commercial house music' that these DJs play, and to paraphrase Rietveld, in Sydney, house music and related musical forms have been embraced more on a wholesale basis than anywhere else in Australia (1998b: 265). There are a few exceptions to this, where I have spoken with DJs who play styles other than, or in addition to, house, or where I have spoken with DJs who work outside of the commercial scene, but for the majority of this thesis, my concern is with dance music and club culture on a commercial level²⁶. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all too often studies of contemporary dance music culture focus on the less commercial, supposedly more 'underground' areas, and thus this work is an attempt to go some way towards rectifying this lack of research into the commercial dance club scene. As Luckman notes in her thesis on rave culture in Australia as a subcultural phenomenon:

Clubbing and the 'above-ground' aspects of the Australian electronic music scene remain substantially under-examined... such an exploration would be so large as to be a dedicated research project in its own right. (2002: 67)

Furthermore, I see my study as having a similarity with Walser's analysis of the most popular examples of heavy metal music, and I share both his perception of 'the popular' as being 'an important site of social contestation and formation' (1993: xiv), and his observation that,

I find unconvincing the common assumption that culture that exists either at the margins of society or among a prestigious elite is

²⁶ My decision to focus on house music culture stems in part from Rietveld's study (1998) of the house music scenes in America, England and the Netherlands.

necessarily more important, interesting, complex, or profound than the culture of a popular mainstream. Popular culture is important because that is where most people get their “entertainment” and information. (ibid.)

As such, I do not look in detail at the notion of ‘raves’, a term that is something of an anachronism in the contemporary, club-based culture of dance music, for as Luckman highlights, “raving’ is considered a fairly passé term in many circles – both in Australia and elsewhere’ (2002: 24). Siokou describes how ‘raves originated in England in the 1980s with the appearance of the phenomenon known as Acid House’ (2002: 11), while as Hesmondhalgh and Negus note, the term ‘rave’ has often been used in popular music studies, particularly during the early 1990s, as a substitute for the more appropriate and relevant subject heading of ‘electronic dance music’ (2002: 87), and Huq describes how her writing ‘focuses on electronic dance music culture – formerly termed ‘rave’ and before that ‘acid house’ (2002: 90).

I do not look in detail at the various different sub-genres of dance music, such as hardcore, hard house, drum ‘n’ bass, and breakbeat, ‘genres that might themselves be further sub-classified’ (Malbon, 1999: 32), and all terms that ‘differentiate a panorama of musical sub-genres’ (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 206). As Hemment observes:

Whilst ‘house’ music used to be an eclectic fusion of many styles into a singular aesthetic, since roughly 1990 dance music has fragmented and shot off down numerous trajectories... This has resulted in proliferating folds of sonic involution, but also in a parallel multiplication of names, as artists and journalists stick a flag in a piece of sonic territory and call it home. Hi energy, electro, trip hop, garage, gabber, hardcore, happy hardcore, speedcore,

*breakbeat, drum 'n' bass, trance, techno, dream house, deep house, ambient... to name a few. (1997: 36)*²⁷

As can be observed from the number of clubs that cater for such a style of music, the number of DJs that play such a style, and the number of compilation albums that gather together tracks²⁸ in such a style, house music is one of the most popular sub-genres within dance culture. As Straw notes, 'it seems clear that the most significant event in the history of dance music since 1980 has been the rise of house music' (2001b: 171), while Reynolds suggests house music represents the 'mainstream' part of dance culture, being 'the music most clubbers dance and drug to' (1998: 417). It seems to be particularly popular with dance fans in Sydney, having a 'durability and expansiveness of appeal' (Straw, 1991: 383). Chan explains how this popularity stems from the way the Sydney scene is largely club-oriented, suggesting that '4/4 house music' is a sound 'best suited to the sonic range and environment of the club', in contrast to styles such as psychedelic trance that are 'best suited to outdoor venues and outdoor acoustics' (1999: 71)²⁹.

²⁷ See Osborne (1999) and Saunders (1995) for detailed definitions of the multiple sub-genres that exist, or have existed, within dance culture.

²⁸ In my use of the term 'tracks', I have followed the example of Hadley, who, while acknowledging that it is a term 'usually used in DJ culture to designate those pieces of music produced for club play only' (1993: 66), uses the term throughout his paper to describe 'any cut on a 12-inch, whatever the musical style' (ibid.). In this thesis, I use the term to refer to any piece of dance music, whatever the musical style, whatever the format, and whatever the intended purpose. Straw distinguishes between 'songs' and 'tracks' in his discussion of DJ working practices, suggesting that as house music developed, the former gave way to the latter, records of four to ten minutes duration in which the emphasis was on 'the relationship between a consistent rhythm and the wide variety of things which might be mixed over the top of it' (2001: 172), while Fikentscher explains how the development of digital technology during the 1980s effected a shift in the techniques of dance music production, 'from being song-oriented and with the use of performing musicians, to the "track" concept... [that relies heavily] on MIDI technology and computer-controlled instruments' (2000: 112).

²⁹ See Gibson (2002) for a discussion of how there are regional variations in preferences for particular styles of dance music within Australia, with dance music producers and consumers in Byron Bay supposedly favouring 'psy-trance, drum and bass and techno sub-genres' (ibid: 8).

An attempt at a definition of 'house music'

House music itself sub-divides into a number of different styles and sounds, Reynolds noting how an 'endless array of prefixes' such as 'hard', 'tribal', 'progressive', 'funky', and 'deep' have 'interposed themselves in front of the word in order to define precise stylistic strands' (1998: 417). For this particular study, my concern is largely, although not exclusively, with what is known simply as 'house', as this is the style that is most widely catered for by clubs in Sydney, due to its high degree of popularity with Sydney clubbers. The problem with this, however, is that exact definitions of dance music sub-genres can never be precise due to the variations in understandings of the terms, as well as the often short-term nature of many stylistic developments, Shuker explaining how 'genres are historically located; some endure, others spring briefly to prominence then fade' (2002: 148). In reference to the style of music he plays, Mark Alsop highlights how the specific genre terminology that permeates dance culture discourse has forced him to alter the terms he uses to describe the music he plays as a DJ:

I used to describe [the music I play] as 'disco house', but now I'm finding more and more on websites that 'disco house' is old-fashioned, '70s-sounding disco house, so now I describe my music more as 'uplifting vocal house'. I've dropped the 'disco' term. [My music] has got disco influences, but it's not full-on disco house where you go to dance to stuff that you would have in the '70s but it now sounds a little bit groovier. It's not that, it's just influenced by the disco era. (Interview, 2005)

As a way of negotiating and exploring the issue of defining dance music and its numerous sub-genres, the DJs interviewed for this thesis were asked to describe the style of music they regularly play. Most of them are a part of the commercial house music scene in Sydney, and this itself allows for a wide variety in the sound each DJ pushes during their performances, which generated a wide range

of descriptions, ranging from 'funky house' and 'deep house' to 'tech house' and 'soulful house'. This supports the rigid lines of division that permeate the descriptive discourse that surrounds dance culture, although at the same time, many of the DJs were keen to stress the limitations that such parameters impose on their work, and how they prefer to describe their style simply as 'music to dance to', or a similar derivative, as can be seen in the following quote from Stephen Allkins:

[People] have obviously lost the point of what dance music is. Dance music is anything you can dance to, whether it's Dusty Springfield, or The Temptations, or Cyndi Lauper, or Talking Heads, or Eric Prydz... Since when has Talking Heads not been dance music? 'Once In A Lifetime' is heavily sampled, I played it at a club last Sunday and [the crowd] went berserk. Since when is it not dance music?... The Ramones would be dance music... There is so much generic shit out there at the moment it really gives me the shits... If you look at the Paradise Garage's history, or any great club, it was full of left-of-centre [music]... People then had the freedom of mind to go, "Fuck, what is this?", whereas today in the dance community there is no "teach me something"... It's such a conservative scene out there [at the moment]. People are allowing everyone to tell them what dance music is. You are allowed to have some sort of opinion, and it's sad because I don't think the people going out are allowing themselves that... Dance music should be about differences and opinions, but now it's all so marketed... Dance people used to be really individual and smart!... Dance was for the people, by the people, but now it's all market, market, market. (Interview, 2005)

Discussing the various styles of music he plays while DJing, John Wall emphasises not only the cyclical nature of dance music, and indeed popular

music in general, but also how there are numerous different sub-genres and stylistic categorisations in dance culture:

I've always liked electronic music. The first record that I ever attempted to dance to was 'I Feel Love' by Donna Summer in 1977 or whatever it was! It doesn't matter to me whether it's hip-hop, breaks, electro, house, techno, or whatever. I kind of like a lot of all kinds of music. It doesn't mean that I'm indiscriminate, but I'm just not one of these people that goes, "This style of music is what I like, and forget everything else", and I'm surprised how many people do that. I think it's a weird concept to say "I just like techno", or "I just like house". So what I tend to play is what is interesting me at the time, plus what people want to hear and/or what works. What I try to do when I have an opportunity is just play a bit of a mixture, but lately the music I've been getting most into is electro stuff, because... I've always known that whatever was around twenty years ago always seems to come back. When I was a kid in the '70s there was '50s shit everywhere, and then in the '80s there was '60s shit everywhere, and I always knew that all the electro stuff that I was really into in the '80s would some day start coming back, and it has, big time, now. (Interview, 2005)

Wall clearly incorporates a broader musical perspective than most DJs into the approach he takes to DJing, and as he goes on to explain, his eclectic taste in music transfers into his DJing, and thus, the variety of music he incorporates into his DJ sets differentiates him from those DJs who typically confine themselves to playing one particular style or sound:

I play breaks, and even a bit of hip-hop sometimes if it's the right occasion. I've always been into house... I've got a short attention span. I want to keep playing new kinds of music, which is partly

why I've become bigger as a promoter than a DJ, because the DJs that are really successful mostly play one quite narrow style and stick to it forever, and people know exactly what they are going to get, and I'm not really like that when I play. (ibid.)

I acknowledge that my own attempts to focus on 'house music' in Sydney are open to misinterpretation or confusion, not simply because of the complexity in presenting a specific stylistic definition of the genre, but also because of temporal issues, in the way the stylistic boundaries of dance music are constantly shifting, something Rietveld highlights when she describes how,

As with most products in popular culture, the formal qualities of house music are recognisable, yet ephemeral and always changing, depending on who is producing and using it at what place and what time. One could, for instance, point out that house music has the format of a repetitive 4/4 beat, roughly between 120 and 140 bpm; that house music could be defined by the use of certain types of production and consumption technologies; that house music may be described as a functional type of dance music produced specifically for the use by DJs... However, as with most cultural productions, the format and the meaning of the genre of house music does change within various social and cultural contexts. There is not one 'real and true' form of house music... (1998b: 4)

With this in mind, it is possible that what constitutes house music in Sydney does not necessarily reflect house music elsewhere in the world. Yet given the inherently global understandings and appreciations that pervade dance music culture, I would suggest that house music, in a general sense, can be interpreted within the same set of descriptive parameters, and it is in this general sense, with an emphasis on recognisable formal qualities, that I employ the term within this

thesis, as a way of distinguishing that particular style of music from other dance sub-genres such as trance, breakbeat, and hardcore.

The Sydney dance scene and Australian dance music culture

... the life-force of the international dance music establishment, and that which is transparent in club and rave scenes – commodification... ‘corporate clubbing’ was easily assimilated into the British leisure industry and was exported to Australia... with a miasma of derivative soundscapes (from happy house, to drum ‘n’ bass, to trance), rave or club culture has become prominent in the ‘every-night life’ of a significant proportion of the Australian youth population. (St. John, 2001b: 10-11)

Park and Northwood provide a detailed exploration of the historical development of Sydney’s dance scene in their article on Australian dance culture. They initially question the relationship that the Australian scene has to dance scenes in other countries, asking whether it is simply an imitation of ‘those overseas, copying and borrowing their trends so we’re always one step behind? ...or is it a progressive scene with its own independent character?’ (1996: 1). As a recurrent theme in the existing literature on Australian dance music culture (see Chan, 1999; Gibson and Pagan, 2000; Luckman, 2001a & 2002; Murphie and Scheer, 1992), the issue of dance music as something ‘imported’ and ‘borrowed’ from elsewhere has informed a significant amount of discussion concerning the origins and roots of club culture in Australia, something Brookman acknowledges when he describes how much of what has been written on dance culture in Sydney ‘takes the perspective that the culture is merely the product of a displaced movement, namely that found in Europe and the United States’ (2001: 27), while Luckman notes how, ‘contemporary dance music culture in Australia has erupted out of the meeting of... international influences and sounds’ (2002: 11).

Indeed, such a notion has informed debates concerning the country's popular music in general, for as Hayward notes, 'whatever its achievements, Australian popular music has been principally derived from imported models' (1992: 6), while McGregor, when describing the development of Australian rock 'n' roll, states how, 'in terms of *activity* Australia had developed its own rock culture but it was, like so much other Australian culture, highly derivative' (1992: 91; author's italics). Morris describes Australian history as 'a compilation culture of borrowed fragments, stray reproductions, and alienated memories' (quoted in Park & Northwood, 1996: 1), providing evidence of what Straw refers to, in his assessment of how early rock 'n' roll subcultures outside of the Anglo-American axis simply imitated and mirrored their United States and British counterparts, as 'subservience to the centres of cultural power' (2001a: 70).

The Sydney scene exists around music imported from overseas, which is in part a result of the decline in vinyl production in Australia, a consequence of which is the 'reliance of the dance community on imported 12-inch singles' (Straw, 1991: 386; see also 2002: 174-175). Mark Murphy highlights how this reliance on imported vinyl serves as a hindrance to local producers attempting to establish themselves within the scene:

A lot of people are making music here [in Sydney], but no one is getting it out there as quickly as what the rest of the world are, obviously because they have pressing plants over in the UK... Most of the wax is coming from overseas... It's about getting the DJs in this town to actually push our local scene more, and unless everyone is playing CDs, and unless everyone making music is getting it on CD and distributing it to all the DJs, then it is always going to be imported. (Interview, 2005)

This vinyl comes largely from America and Britain, Murphie and Scheer's observation that 'the majority of dance music available to DJs is imported' (1992:

182) remaining valid today, while Straw makes reference to how vinyl pressing plants are becoming increasingly scarce around the world, and thus,

Reproduction of 12-inch singles is centralized within a few national economies, such as those of the US and UK – countries which remain at the center of influence and innovation within the dance music field. (2002: 175)

Yet this does not dictate that participants in the Sydney scene have a passive role as followers of trends and developments abroad, despite the fact that the 'global distribution of independent 12-inch dance singles is haphazard, unpredictable and slow' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 268), and thus sometimes means that the 'latest' imports are tracks that originated in the UK or America several months earlier, disrupting any sense of musical stability and similarity existing across internationally disparate scenes, Straw highlighting how, in dance culture, 'a comfortable, stable international diversity may rarely be observed' (1991: 381). It is rather the case that its participants acknowledge the centrality of these two geographical locations to the creation and continued existence of dance culture, and therefore position the music that comes out of them as of significant cultural value. Dance music is not dismissed or rejected for not being local in origin, but rather it is accepted simply as a representation of 'dance culture' as a complete whole. Concerns of 'localism' and 'internationalism' may make themselves evident in media discourse around the scene, but for the DJs and the clubbers, such concerns are an irrelevance during the ritual of the 'night out', for as Gibson and Pagan outline, while the music played in Sydney's clubs may be from England, America or Germany, 'there is a sense in which participants do not identify the music with an 'authentic' origin' (2000: 11). Obviously, the commercial availability, and indeed unavailability, of this music will impact upon the shape of the local scene, for as Straw highlights:

In any given cultural space, the provenance of punk singles, price of American alternative rock CDs, availability of 12-inch vinyl dance singles and access to information surrounding new musical commodities will shape the contours of regional/national musical cultures. Objects arrive at destinations bearing meanings which the distance of their travel and the manner of their acquisition have inscribed upon them. (2002: 165)

In this sense, it can be argued that the Sydney dance music scene is shaped and defined, in part, by the music that is imported into the city from abroad, and thus the decisions of record store owners and DJs in selecting this music have a direct impact upon the music that participants in the scene are exposed to. Straw seems to suggest that the very nature of these records as imported commodities directly affects the way in which these participants accept, understand and interpret them, and yet such a suggestion is undermined by the apparent lack of concern for the geographical origins of most dance music. While DJs and clubbers may be aware of these origins, they do not, on the whole, base their value judgements regarding the music on them. As such, the central tenets and ideologies of dance culture do not reside in notions of tensions between local product and imported product, but rather in unique and specifically local interpretations and articulations of a wider global dance culture. As Alan Thompson highlights, the influence of the UK scene is felt not just in Australia, but all over the globe, and as he explains, this is of no major concern for most clubbers because of the fact the very nature of contemporary dance music and club culture is inherently global:

I think the dance music scene as it is today is completely imported, all around the world, from the UK. I do really believe that. Having DJed since 1990 and travelled all over the world, I've seen various countries change over the years, and what is predominant in that change is that the clubs themselves are marketing themselves, and

their music policies, and the DJs, to what the UK does. You could stand in a club in Tokyo, in Montreal, in New York, or Singapore, or even Sydney, close your eyes and without knowing what is going on, you could be in a club in England. I do think that they do try to emulate what goes on in the UK, which is a good thing... The dance scene has a worldwide identity. I really believe that dance music is a world phenomenon, and we are all dancing to the same beat, but in different countries. (Interview, 2005)

The positioning of local dance culture as imported and borrowed has the rather negative effect of portraying the developments in the dance scene in Sydney as lacking in originality, and suggests that those involved in the scene do nothing more than look to other dance music cultures for ideas, while also implying that the scene is temporally 'behind', in the sense that music that originates in the UK or US is, by the time it is imported into Australia on vinyl through 'international networks of distribution' (Gibson, 2002a: 8), already a few months old, so that 'everything seems to happen here months later' (Park and Northwood, 1996: 2). Connell and Gibson suggest that in dance culture, there is a significant "time-lag" experienced between a release in one scene and its distribution to others across continents' (2003: 268), which creates an unbalanced and fractured international dance culture, with different scenes being at different phases in their development musically and stylistically, Straw highlighting how, 'coexisting regional and local styles within dance music are almost always at different stages within their cycles of rising and declining influence' (1991: 381). Yet as Sydney-based DJ and record store owner Mark Murphy explains, the perception of the Australian dance scene as being 'behind' is somewhat unsupportable, given the rapid facilities and channels that now exist for the worldwide distribution of music:

You can get everything so easily now when it comes to dance music. It's so readily available, whether it is downloading or whether it is getting vinyl. All the dance stores get exactly the same

stock, really... We are not that far behind. I've had a few customers come into our shop, and they've just been over to the UK, and what they've found, when they've come back the next week, is that we have everything that the UK has. (Interview, 2005)

It is in this sense that dance culture is becoming more 'international', with geographically disparate scenes being closer in their stages of musical development than ever before. With this shorter timeframe for accessing and obtaining music, it would seem Straw's suggestion that, 'the availability of vinyl has become one of the important ways in which national musical cultures remain differentiated' (2002: 175), is becoming less applicable for dance culture. As DJs rely less on the physical commodity of vinyl, and make increasing use of digital media, the international interconnectedness of dance culture will become even more developed. Seb Chan explains how certain practices intrinsic to DJ culture and the use of vinyl are being carried over into the use of digital forms, such as the notion of the 'dubplate'³⁰, in the process breaking down the stylistic boundaries and markers that used to divide scenes in different geographical locations:

I know lots and lots of DJs who are getting MP3 dubplates, effectively, via peer-to-peer, officially from artists, directly to play out at parties. It is totally bypassing borders, as such, because it is possible now. So it is hard to say now that these scenes have boundaries. They don't have national borders nowadays, but they certainly did before the ability to transmit music became so easy. (Interview, 2005)

This idea of a 'global network' of dance scenes is reinforced by the increasing use of the Internet, as opposed to the more traditional form of the retail record

³⁰ A 'dubplate' is a 'one-off', initial acetate pressing of a track. Clark describes how some leading DJs 'cut special one-off, 10-inch metal copies of tunes from DATs (digital audio tapes) or CDs, long before the track ever reaches the vinyl pressing plants' (2001: 6).

store, as the source from which most DJs purchase their music, as Paul Goodyear highlights:

I used to always buy records from the local Sydney shops, then I started buying records from places like Perfect Beat in L.A. and places in New York, and I get them sent over... In the last couple of weeks I've just started downloading stuff from websites such as beatport.com, where you pay US\$1.49 and you're able to access [a particular] track. This site [features] a lot of new producers who put their music up on the site, and it won't be released for probably a couple of months. So for less than two Australian dollars per track, you've got something that's way ahead of release, the quality is fantastic, and it's much cheaper than spending twenty bucks on a piece of vinyl. (Interview, 2005)

Similarly, Mark Alsop highlights how the Internet has not only further emphasised the degree to which dance culture can be perceived as a global phenomenon, but also how, as part of this global spread, participants in dance scenes have been exposed to a greater variety of music, in the way the music itself is more easily available, and as he explains, this increased availability subsequently impacts upon dance culture in a number of different ways:

Back when I first started [DJing], I used to go to three record stores, twice a week, and still not find a lot of the music that I knew was out there. Now, you can sit in the privacy of your house and listen to [web]sites with up to, what, fifty new record releases a day, and you can just sort through them. It has opened up... even the file-sharing networks have opened up a thousand tracks that you would not normally hear, and that influences your set, it influences your sound, it influences your style, because it is stuff that you normally, without the Internet, would never have sourced and would never

have known about. Therefore, you have affected your audience, and you have affected other DJs that have been there in the audience and have gone, "What's that?". Everything is so integrally interlocked that any change, ever so small, is going to affect the whole machine. (Interview, 2005)

Describing how he obtains his music, Alan Thompson also lends emphasis to this notion of a 'global network', explaining how the development of the Internet has made it easier to buy music from different countries and easier for music to be distributed around the world, although he expresses a certain amount of caution in regard to assessing the negative effect that the Internet is widely perceived to be having on physical, 'bricks and mortar' music retail outlets:

I use three avenues. I'm lucky enough that I still get a lot of music sent from the UK, from the record labels, so I get a lot sent to me in the post. After that, the Internet, I still shop at all my favourite record stores in the UK... then physically at the stores in Sydney, like Central Station and Spank... Of course, friends as well, other DJs and producers send me MP3s and stuff, and I'll burn them on to CD... DJs still like to go into a store, and they still like to buy music... I think people will always buy music. There's the huge debate about downloading, and whether it is killing music, but... last night I was at a friend's house, he was downloading, and as he said, I wouldn't necessarily listen to this music or go to buy it, but I'm interested to hear what it is, and I'm playing it in the background, and that might then encourage me to go to buy something from this artist... It's a long way to go before we know exactly what impact downloading has on music. (Interview, 2005)

Discussing the formats he uses when DJing, Alex Taylor also acknowledges the way technology has made it easier and cheaper to obtain the latest music from

around the globe, so that he now sources most of his music as downloads from the Internet, which he then puts on to CD, as opposed to purchasing vinyl from record shops in Sydney, while he also highlights how technology has made it easier for DJs and producers in different geographical locations to share and distribute music:

I use both [vinyl and CDs], although I'm using more CDs now than I used to, probably sixty-five to seventy percent CDs now. It's just so much easier and quicker. I'll get [music] from traxsource.com. It is US\$1.99 for a track, but you'd pay AUS\$17 or \$18 here for it. You get it straight away, and then I'm seeing it [in record shops here] three weeks later... A lot of those record companies [that sell their product on the Internet] actually still make slightly more money than they would have if they'd actually had to press it all up on vinyl. So they're making the same amount of money, but are able to sell it for less, so they're cutting out some middleman somewhere... I don't think vinyl will always be around. I never thought I would say that, and it's been around a lot longer than people said it would be, they said it was dead a long time ago, but so many people I talk to are just all about CDs. If you're a producer/DJ, you finish a track, and instead of bothering to put it out on to vinyl, you're just giving it out to all your mates on CD as a promo. It is so quick and easy. You can even share it with instant messaging now. They've done [a track] in London and can send it to you in Sydney straight away. You've got it that night. (Interview, 2005)

These changes in technology have brought about reconfigurations in the sources DJs purchase their music from, with several DJs relying less on the physical record store and more on Internet-based suppliers of music, these suppliers being either companies that ship physical product to the DJ, or websites that

provide music in the form of downloads, and as technology improves, so does the sound quality of downloaded music.

Rather than understanding the Australian dance scene to be a complete and direct imitation of the British scene, Park and Northwood (1996) prefer to see it as one part of a 'unified' global dance culture that transcends national boundaries and divisions. Yet there is a certain unrealistic idealism contained within such a perception, and also a demonstrative lack of understanding of the way locality and identity serve to create place-specific dance scenes that have unique operational practices and infrastructures, or rather as Thornton suggests, even if the music and fashions of club culture are marketed on a global scale, 'the crowds are local, segregated and subject to distinctions dependent on the smallest of cultural minutiae' (1995: 99). As Olson highlights in his discussion of the concept of 'scene', each scene has its own unique shape and structure, or rather, 'scenes do have identities independent of their relationships to or differences from other scenes' (1998: 279). British DJ Alan Thompson, who now lives and works in Sydney, suggests that one unique defining characteristic of the Sydney scene, albeit in a negative sense, involves the politics that underpin the relations between DJs and promoters, which can serve to reduce the regularity of DJ work available:

[The Sydney dance scene] is a very political scene backstage for DJs and promoters. Therefore, you are very limited to how often you can play in clubs and what clubs you can play at, because if you are playing in one club, that particular promoter might not necessarily want you to play at another. So you have to judge which is best for you and make a decision based on that, and the same goes for other cities around Australia. Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, they all have the same politics where they don't like you to play in other clubs, so it's very limited in a sense... The politics come from the promoters themselves. For instance, if a

promoter at club 'A' in Sydney wants to book you, he'll specify that he doesn't want you to play at any other club in Sydney four weeks before or four weeks after the event that you play. It used to be like that in the UK in the early '90s, but promoters realised that they can't dictate to DJs because what happens then is you don't get the DJ because that DJ will then think, "Sod you, I'll go elsewhere". At the end of the day, DJs are self-employed, so we are entitled to work where and whenever we want, but also understanding that we don't want to over-expose ourselves in certain cities because that is not good either. So you have to trust the DJ to know where he or she wants to play, and let them decide, but certainly, in Australia, they are a bit far behind in that concept at the moment. (Interview, 2005)

Describing local dance culture as simply imported does, in turn, provide an overly simplistic and narrow interpretation of the specifically local developments and progressions in Sydney's dance scene, or rather as Park and Northwood suggest when discussing the overseas influences on Australian culture in general, the effect of such an outlook is to 'discredit highly ingenious and innovative Australian art' (1996: 1), while Brookman suggests, in regard to Sydney rave culture, that 'it shares many key features with dance cultures around the world, and yet has moved from a state of being merely a phenomenon mimicking that found overseas' (2001: 69), and ultimately, dance culture in Sydney is bound up specifically with the local scenario (Bennett, 2000: 27). For Sydney-based DJ John Devecchis, it is the fusion of diverse and geographically disparate influences that lends the Sydney dance scene its unique character and shape:

Sydney is very different in the way it has got influences from Europe and America... Sydney has a mixture of many different things, so in itself is quite unique. (Interview, 2004)

Discussing what it is that makes the Sydney dance scene unique and different from other scenes elsewhere in Australia and around the world, Seb Chan suggests that it is not so much directly related to the preferences clubbers have for particular types of music, but rather the laws, geographical factors, and meteorological factors that shape the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants:

It is the geographic specificities of the city [that give the dance scene its unique shape]. Why is Sydney different to Melbourne? Licensing laws, geography, no beaches in Melbourne, shittier weather in Melbourne, or perceived shittier weather in Melbourne, venue spaces, people, demographics, cultural things... Why did a techno scene spring up in Melbourne and die out in Sydney? Why are there more art galleries in Melbourne than in Sydney? Why are there more beachside cafes in Sydney rather than Melbourne? Why does lemon gelato sell more in Sydney than in Melbourne? Sydney is different because it's got the beach and it's got the bush close by. People go out more to those kinds of things. They invest less of their time in indoor cultures, like music, art, and books. That would be my blanket statement, which is probably unfounded in many cases, but generally, I would say that Melbourne is an artier city, because there's not much else to do there. The weather is shit so you've got to go out in any case, and you'll go out when it's raining. You try putting a club on here and it's raining, no one comes. Just really simple things like that [make a scene unique]. (Interview, 2005)

Sydney-based DJ Goodwill suggests that the licensing laws in Sydney³¹ actually limit and restrict the growth and development of the scene, describing them as 'archaic' and suggesting that,

³¹ See Homan (2003) for a detailed analysis of the history of the live music scene in Sydney since the 1950s that explores the impact of policy and legislation. While Homan focuses mainly on rock

... they don't really lend themselves to the arts very well. In most other cities in Australia they have a lot more relaxed licensing laws, whereas in Sydney you can't just pop a DJ in a coffee shop... that's where a lot of the culture springs from in artistic communities like Melbourne and Adelaide, so Sydney is very limited in that way.
(Interview, 2004)

Similarly, while discussing the issue of the relatively small size of the Sydney dance scene in comparison to scenes overseas, and how this size possibly limits the scene's potential for expansion, Sydney-based DJ and record store owner Mike Bennett makes reference to the restrictions these licensing laws have imposed on the growth of Australian dance culture:

I think a lot of our licensing laws limit the growth of culture. It's so expensive to open a bar, whereas in other countries it's so cheap to set your business up and get rolling. I suppose that is why culture develops a lot bigger and quicker in other countries than it does down here. The scene is small, but it's pretty healthy. (Interview, 2005)

The international appeal of dance music

While there may be certain qualities and features that are unique to the Sydney dance scene, one has to argue that dance culture is very much a culture grounded in an 'international' sensibility, with scant regard shown for the geographical origins of particular tracks or DJs, whereas in rock music, place is often tied to the cultural authenticity and credibility of a particular artist or style of music, with, for example, Seattle and its association with early-1990s grunge, Liverpool and 1960s beat groups (Shuker, 2002: 177), and Manchester and late-

culture, he devotes a chapter to the Anna Wood case, and the subsequent impact the reactions to this case have had on the regulation of dance parties in the city (see Chapter One of this thesis).

1980s indie. As Mitchell suggests, 'historically, place-consciousness has been a vitally important source of popular musical identity, distinction and difference' (1997: 4), while Negus highlights how 'music has been constantly 'placed' as it has been produced, promoted and listened to' (1996: 181).

This is not to deny the importance and relevance of such places as Detroit, Chicago and Ibiza in the historical development of dance music, for as Hayward highlights, specific popular music styles are often associated with their point of origin, 'e.g. punk (late '70s Britain), House (mid '80s Chicago), Acid House (late '80s Britain)' (1992: 4), while in his analysis of the Toronto rave scene, Weber explains how rave culture evolved during the late 1980s in three separate places, 'Great Britain (e.g. London, Manchester), the USA (e.g. Chicago, Detroit and New York City) and the Spanish resort island of Ibiza' (1999: 318-319). Yet whereas certain bands that operate within, and certain styles that are a part of, rock music culture may be tied to a particular place, largely because of the way the 'rhetoric of the music press commonly makes reference to where, in the geographic sense, bands have come from' (Shuker, 2002: 178), dance music largely transcends national borders and the 'so called 'tyranny of distance'' (Murphie and Scheer, 1992: 175; see also Connell and Gibson, 2003: 110) to reach a broad, international listening base, Hemment noting in regard to the early development of dance culture in the UK that 'it was less that the music was an expression of an authentic regional identity than that the way it was played and received...' (1998: 211).

Discussing the extent to which Sydney's dance culture is imported from overseas, Seb Chan suggests that, with the advancements in technology that have made it easier for people to access and obtain music from different parts of the world, dance music has become increasingly 'international' in its content and shape, thus making it difficult to assess the extent to which the Sydney dance scene draws on overseas dance culture:

[Dance music] is global culture... it is a globalised culture [Chan's emphasis]... As much as particular sounds come out of particular places... particularly in the last five years or so, the transnational flows of this music, with the Internet and stuff... it's hard to say whether it is imported or not. We export as much as we import. The breaks scene is a good example of that. The whole breaks thing really broke here in Sydney, but it was all with British music, it just hadn't created a scene in Britain until it came here. It created a scene and that scene went back, and now there's a breaks scene in Britain. (Interview, 2005)

The Sydney dance scene and global dance music culture

As Straw suggests, 'dance music culture is highly polycentric, in that it is characterised by the simultaneous existence of large numbers of local or regional styles' (1991: 381). For the dance music created in Australia, however, there are no distinguishable features, structures or sonic textures that can be employed to form an association with the country's dance scene, and while this can perhaps in part be seen as the result of, until quite recently, the lack of a sizeable dance music industry infrastructure, it still, as Park and Northwood suggest, 'hails back to the 'global imitation' adage' (1996: 4), in the sense that Australian dance culture is largely involved in a process of adopting and assimilating the sounds and styles of overseas dance cultures. Yet this should not necessarily be seen in a negative and critical light, for as Connell and Gibson highlight, 'people make music within communities without creating (or wanting to create) a distinct 'local' sound' (2003: 115), and as Straw observes, while certain cities gain importance in dance music discourse through their association with the origination of a particular style or sound, other places, such as Sydney, New York or London, are significant, not as 'places of emergence of styles one could call indigenous, than because they occupy positions of centrality as sites for the reworking and transformation of styles' that originated elsewhere (1991: 381).

The influence of British dance culture on the Sydney scene

Local manifestations of global culture do not always resemble simply direct imitations, with changes in the culture's significance often occurring in translation, Murphie and Scheer writing in regard to Australia's adoption of dance music that, 'what may have functioned as sub-cultural 'noise' in Manchester or New York was often already reconstituted as mainstream 'signal' by the time' (1992: 172) it reached Australia, and thus Australian dance culture cannot be described purely as an imported, 'mirror image' model, and therefore Murphie and Scheer 'characterise this appropriation of subcultural meanings from the UK dance scene as aesthetic and affective' (Gibson and Pagan, 2000: 10). This can be seen in the example of the early dance parties that took place in Sydney and that developed out of the gay dance events held at the Hordern Pavilion³², in that they were based on UK models of the warehouse party, and as such, formed a connection with dance culture outside of Australia, although in their legal nature, 'the parties themselves were not the equivalent of the illegal English events they were supposed to be modelled on' (Murphie and Scheer, 1992: 175), in the same way that, as Richard and Kruger explain in their article on German rave culture, 'whereas in Britain raves were often held illegally, in Germany raves are more often commercially organized events' (1998: 165). Thus, as Park and Northwood describe, 'the rave scene as it existed even in its peak in Australia barely resembled the tribal gatherings [that occurred] in England in 1988' (1996: 1).

Chan describes how, when the gay scene dance parties experienced a decline in the number of people attending, due to such factors as increased venue hire costs and the impact of HIV/AIDS³³, there was a shift in the cultural formation of the dance scene, with 'a new breed of promoters, including British backpackers working in tandem with the local Sydney people' (1999: 67) establishing a scene that drew on the warehouse raves popular in the British acid house scene, in

³² Luckman notes that the Hordern is 'a large barn-like venue located within the agricultural showgrounds, not far from the city's CBD' (2002: 48). While there is still the occasional dance party at the Hordern, it most typically now acts as a venue for rock concerts.

³³ See Fikentscher (2000) for a discussion of the impact AIDS had on the underground dance scene in New York during the 1980s.

which music was used to change 'old abandoned warehouses into places of consumption and recreation' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 219). Gibson and Pagan also acknowledge this British influence, suggesting that the 'subcultural meanings associated with early rave culture' were adopted from the English dance scene, and that this cultural assimilation took place through 'the active participation of British backpackers in Sydney's embryonic dance music scene' (2000: 10). In much the same way, the development of the American rave scene was also influenced by British tourists and travellers, Silcott explaining how 'rave was brought to North America by expat Britons or people who had travelled to Europe and wanted to replicate what they had seen there' (1999: 12). Goodwill acknowledges the impact English dance culture had on the development of Australian dance culture, explaining how, 'English people used to have a massive influence on the Australian scene...they brought it here pretty much' (Interview, 2004), and Brookman suggests that 'dance party culture as we know it today essentially began with the Acid house movement in the UK during 1988' (2001: 42). This is not to say, however, that those within the Sydney scene simply imported and copied a 'foreign' culture, for as Collin explains, 'as the acid house formula was exported overseas, it began to assume local characteristics and cultural influences' (1998: 277). In this instance, parallels can be drawn with the development of house music culture in the Netherlands, Rietveld explaining how,

English people who attempted to escape draconian British legislation with regards to their leisure and cultural pursuits exiled themselves to Amsterdam and introduced the format of house parties in empty industrial spaces in the docklands at the end of the summer in 1988. (1998b: 8)

This influence of a 'foreign culture' as effected through migration lends support to Olson's assessment of music scenes, Cohen describing how he 'links scenes with migrancy and permanent motion in order to highlight musical mobility and

travel, musical “routes” as opposed to “roots” (1999: 247), and as Gibson observes, music scenes emerge ‘from particular demographic trends, as new residents [bring] with them urban subcultures and sounds’ (2002a: 11).

Warehouse parties and raves

As Gibson and Pagan highlight, Australian dance culture in the late 1980s adopted the British-based rave concept of staging large dance parties outside of the regulated environment of the club, describing how raves in the Australian capital cities were held within ‘spaces normally used for industrial and manufacturing production – old warehouses, factories, carpet showrooms’ (2000: 1), while Park and Northwood observe, somewhat less specifically, that ‘since the late 80’s the development of dance culture in Australia has evolved from and relied on changes occurring overseas’ (1996: 2). While outlining the history of his own involvement in the Sydney dance scene and what influenced this involvement, Seb Chan describes how the rave scene in Sydney took on similar anti-establishment features as the scene in the UK, and he makes a distinction between this free party scene and the more commercialised club scene that developed alongside it:

What really inspired us, after going out to parties and general raves, was the whole free party scene. That had come about because of the way Radio Skid Row’s anarchist punks, who all lived in Redfern and Newtown, got exposed to the acid techno, or the harder end of techno. Some of them got switched on to the idea that you could merge anarcho-punk politics with this new music that was sonically quite similar... In 1992 they started putting on parties in Sydney and we ended up playing at lots of those. We got inspired by that whole idea of free parties and parties that were more than just a commercial event or a pre-packaged event, which by 1995 or 1996 rave had certainly become... you knew what to expect and it moved back into clubs, which totally packaged it up,

whereas in those early days in Mascot where you rang up a phone number, and the promoters had broken into some warehouse to put it on, and someone had got a shipment of pills they wanted to move... it was all really edgy and loose. (Interview, 2005)

Rietveld suggests that this international spread of rave culture was shaped by the influence of the media, explaining how, 'due to the powerful position in pop journalism which the English had acquired on an international level, the format of raves was exported elsewhere...' (1998b: 8), and thus in this sense, the British version of rave culture becomes the authentic original, while developments in other countries are perceived of as imported extensions or imitations of this original. Seb Chan acknowledges the influence British rave culture had on the developing rave scene in Sydney, although he also highlights how there are always specifically local interpretations of culture that will be unique to a particular urban context:

[The free party scene was] very similar [to the scene in the UK]. There were some local variants on all of that, like anywhere there's always going to be local variations. The whole rave thing, I guess, moved from the Hordern party scene here to rave as a result of British tourism. A lot of those early rave DJs were expats [expatriates]. People who had come out here and then stayed on... Sugar Ray, Phil Smart, all those people... (Interview, 2005)

While rave culture in the UK made evident a certain degree of political activism³⁴, with Straw suggesting that Britain's place within the mythologies that surround dance music history is 'bound up with the ways in which the rave, as an event, has given dance culture the features of a genuinely revolutionary subculture'

³⁴ See McKay (ed.) (1998) for a collection of essays on the more anarchic, politically-charged side of dance culture, and Reynolds (1998) for a comprehensive history of rave music and dance culture.

(2001b: 173)³⁵, by the time the music had 'reached' Australia, the culture had been transformed into something less radical and threatening, a 'simulacra of a distant 'original', yet somewhat devoid of the radical, illegal, and vibrant intent of English warehouse raves' (Gibson and Pagan, 2000: 10). British dance culture, with its illegally organised events 'usually held in disused inner-city warehouses or remote rural areas' (Bennett, 2001: 5), was seen by those in the Australian scene as the authentic source of origin, and Straw suggests that as a result of this focus on what was happening in other locations, 'subcultural styles from elsewhere almost always enter these countries [such as Australia] through the mediating influence of cosmopolitan, well-informed middle class consumers' (2001a: 70-71), and thus the extent to which, in this case, Australian dance culture can be said to have articulated and expressed the original aims and ideologies of the subculture is questionable, although so is the extent to which British dance culture can be said to have successfully articulated and expressed its supposedly political aims and ideologies, with ultimately the main ideological stance taken by dance culture as a whole being nothing more, or indeed nothing less, than the right to party (Hunter, 1999: 49).

As Negus outlines, this is the problem in interpreting the global movement of subcultures, when the sounds and fashions of a particular style move from their point of origin and are adopted by other countries (1996: 24-25). If an adopted subculture is de-contextualised and stripped of its original subversive ideologies, then it would seem that there is nothing more at work than a simple process of 'imitation and commercial exploitation', with the original subculture being an 'authentic example of cultural expression', and any subsequent imitations turning the subculture into a 'commodified fashion' (ibid.).

Given that contemporary dance culture is very much a global concern, and operates within a 'global context' (Rietveld, 1998b: 9), I would question the validity of Bennett's statement that, with the development and promotion of new

³⁵ See Rietveld (1998) for a detailed UK-based discussion of political activism and dance music.

dance music styles in different cities and regions, there has been a 'fragmentation of the original dance music scene into smaller, more localised scenes' (2000: 73), and suggest alternatively that, while there remains a number of disparate and contrasting styles and genres under the collective term 'dance music', there has actually been a formation of global networks of cultural information flow and exchange that have connected and drawn together local scenes into a larger, more international scene that operates according to certain shared principles and ideologies, so that participants in dance culture interact in a truly global sense, Laing suggesting that:

In contrast to the more monumental concept of 'formation', it seems more apt to speak of 'networks' in describing such musical phenomena as the European dance movement, particularly in discussing the flow of affinities across national and continental borders. (1997: 130)

To adapt Olson's discussion of scenes, it can be seen how urban dance scenes, while physically separated by significant distances, 'are all in close proximity to each other in terms of scenic geography' (1998: 279), in the sense that shared musical sensibilities and operational practices allow fans to "travel" between them with relative ease' (ibid.). In other words, through a sharing of internationally disseminated media and associated discourse, a clubber in Sydney can explore the dance music of Detroit without leaving their home city, or, through the benefits of Internet technology, a producer in London can create a track for a DJ in Sydney to include in their set on the same day, and it is in this sense that 'dance music is now truly international, and internationalist' (Brewster and Broughton, 2000: 439). Dance scenes, as part of a 'transnational cultural form' (Manuel, 1995: 238), do not operate within the confines of a singular bounded territory, but rather are drawn into an operative framework that is global in its breadth and scope, and that transcends the specificity of geographical location, for as Olson observes, 'scenes intermingle, producing relations of

mobility' (1998: 279), and as Weber notes in regard to the ravers in Toronto he studied, but that also applies to dance scenes everywhere else, the uniqueness of the local scene is created by its participants and derives 'from both local, national and international influences' (1999: 333).

Locality and musical preference

Although the actual 'sound' of dance music may not tie it to a particular region or locality, 'local music practices, venues, recording studios, record labels and music retail and media outlets are crucially important in providing indicators of local music scenes' (Mitchell, 1997: 4), while 'local appropriations of musical and stylistic resources involve inscriptions of meaning that are inextricably bound up with local experience' (Bennett, 2000: 1)³⁶.

A further indicator of a local scene may be preference for a particular style of dance music, forming a link between geographical location and musical preference, and thus acting as 'a representation of 'localness' in increasingly global music distribution networks' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 116). The participants in a specific scene may display preferential tendencies for a certain sub-genre, which in turn may be used as a point of discursive differentiation in comparisons and contrasts between scenes, while also reflecting the fracturing and segmentation that has occurred within dance culture as different styles have emerged. Sydney DJ Goodwill acknowledges the division and split in preferences for particular styles of dance music between cities in Australia, suggesting that the exact nature of these preferences changes over time:

Sydney used to be a big trance town, and then it became a big breaks town, now I think house music's back...Melbourne used to be a big techno town, now it's a big house town and a big breaks town...and Brisbane used to be into trance and rave, now they're

³⁶ See also Shuker (2002: 149-150).

just into house and hip hop...so it changes in every city. (Interview, 2004)

Discussing how he moved from DJing to promoting, and subsequently establishing his company Fuzzy, John Wall³⁷ references how the popularity of house music in Sydney was always an influencing factor when he initially started putting on events and selecting DJs for these events, which thus prevented him from pushing completely the breaks sound he was interested in:

In early '96, I decided it was time to take [my DJing career] a bit further, and there were quite a few good events going on, but I felt like there were a lot of gaps in the market. Very few people were doing breaks, which was something that I was really into, and I thought that, particularly given that there were things coming out like the Chemical Brothers, that sound ought to be much more popular than it was, and I didn't quite understand why there weren't any parties of more than a couple of hundred people for breaks. So I just started promoting. I actually didn't do breaks first because I thought we needed to do something that would get a decent number of people, otherwise we'd be out of business in a week. So our first party was seventy-percent house, and then thirty-percent breaks and trip-hop and whatever else was around at the time. That was in August '96, and it went really well and sold out, so it was a pretty good start. That was all locals. We hadn't even dreamed of having international DJs at that point. It was really small-time for us. (Interview, 2005)

³⁷ Through the parties he has staged with his company Fuzzy, Wall is considered to have been one of the key influencing figures in helping to popularise the dance music sub-genre 'breaks' within Sydney.

For Wall, the level of popularity that breaks has achieved within Sydney dance culture has helped to give the dance scene in the city a unique shape and identity in comparison to other dance scenes around Australia and overseas:

I think breaks is a thing that has ended up influencing what Sydney is like, because it has become bigger in Sydney than most places in the world. I think it is music that really suits Sydney because... all the Finger Lickin' sound³⁸ and all that sort of stuff... it is happy music, and Sydney is a pretty cheerful, sunny kind of place. Particularly in summer, that music just seems to make sense here, it seems to fit with people's character and vibe in Sydney. I think that, combined with the fact that, basically, I decided ten years ago that breaks needed to be popular and we focused everything we did on trying to make that happen... I'm not trying to take sole credit for it, but we did just decide we are going to see if we can make breaks bigger, and we just kept going and kept going and kept going until it was. So I think it's a combination... I'm sure just about every city in the world is unique in its combination of what makes up the types of music that people dance to and go out to and get into, and I think in Sydney, sunshine, outdoor parties, and breaks have a big influence on that, even if they are not necessarily the biggest thing, they still influence the overall feeling. (ibid.)

DJs interviewed for this thesis that had played at clubs interstate or overseas were asked whether they perceived any noticeable differences between the Sydney scene and scenes elsewhere, and what these differences may be. One recurring example in responses concerned the way audiences in different cities have preferences for different strains of house music, which means that those DJs that do travel regularly have to change and reshape their sets in order to cater for this geographical diversity in musical taste. Yet as Paul Goodyear

³⁸ Finger Lickin' Records is a UK-based independent dance music label that focuses on breaks.

explains, while it is necessary to shape a set according to the tastes of the crowd in the city you are playing, there are other, more universally applicable approaches a DJ can take should any part of the set not work for the crowd:

When you do travel around to cities, I suppose you 'investigate' what sort of music the crowds are into, and I suppose you always go prepared, you always have some stuff in your box to fall back on. You can go in and do what you do, but if you see that it's not working, I think you've always got to have a backup plan and be able to switch at any moment. A backup plan would be having some universal classics in your box that everyone one knows, whether you're a hardcore clubber or a commercial clubber. The likes of 'Where Love Lives', 'Passion', 'Plastic Dreams', any of those tracks... they relate to all different scenes, and that's what I would tend to do. If I was caught in a trap, I would actually pull out some of those [tracks] to play and you'd be able to get through easily. They were all global hits, absolutely huge. (Interview, 2005)

Moving beyond localised subcultures and into transnational scenes

From the research I have conducted into contemporary dance culture in Sydney, it is my argument that the concept of subculture does not provide an accurate and appropriate theoretical framework with which to analyse particular cultural groupings and formations that are centred around specifically dance music, and more generally popular music, an argument that Huq emphasises when she suggests,

Dance music culture does not display the traditional characteristics of subcultures. It is not a tightly bonded, fringe delinquent working-class group. Nor is it entirely clear that it is a youth culture. (2002: 91)

Indeed, as an actual framework, it imposes boundaries and limitations on the field of study, seeing it in a specifically narrow and defined manner, rather than accommodating the fluid and transitory nature of contemporary music scenes. As Bennett and Peterson explain in regard to their preference for the term 'scene' over the concept of 'subculture':

We avoid "subculture" because it presumes that all of a participant's actions are governed by subcultural standards, while the scene perspective does not make this presumption. To be sure, a few at the core of the scene may live that life entirely, but, in keeping with a late-modern context in which identities are increasingly fluid and interchangeable, most participants regularly put on and take off the scene identity. (2004: 3)

Seb Chan acknowledges the existence of this notion of fluidity within contemporary club culture, suggesting that, as the culture has become increasingly commercialised, the Sydney dance scene has become characterised by a set of disparate smaller scenes that each focus on a particular style of dance music, with there being typically some degree of overlap between these scenes, with participants moving freely in accordance with their musical and leisure preferences, which thus further undermines the rigidity imposed by subcultural theory:

[The Sydney dance scene now] is very fragmented. It's mass culture. Not that it wasn't in the early days, it was just a different kind of emerging thing... There was always that mass culture element to rave. It wasn't like in the UK with the whole working-class thing, but it was sort of a semi-modelling of that in some ways. Now, it's a packaged leisure experience, but that's what people generally want. I've got out of my whole mode of thinking that that was inherently a bad thing and I've just accepted that

that's just the way it is, and that's ok, we'll just do our own thing and we'll co-exist, and people will flow between the scenes. I've certainly noticed with Frigid [Chan's weekly electronic music night currently held in the Sydney suburb of Newtown] that we do get a lot of cross-pollination, and that the borders of these scenes are pretty loose and fluid, and that people might go to a cheesy party for one reason, and then go to another party for another reason. One might be to meet some friends who are going out to Utopia, so you go there because your friends are going, but if you had a choice you might go to another party because you were going for musical reasons. (Interview, 2005)

Thus, for Chan, the contemporary dance scene in Sydney consists of a number of different sub-scenes which participants move between with relative ease, using a variety of criteria to select clubs and events. As such, the theoretical divisions of subcultures become empirically invalid. Those people that would previously have been defined as belonging to a particular youth subculture now spend their leisure time in a way that makes it difficult to interpret their actions through a specific theoretical structure and framework. Drawing comparisons between other leisure activities, Chan goes on to suggest that the diversity of clubbing crowds makes it difficult to theorise about dance culture in terms of it being a youth subculture:

The distinctions of taste are not so clearly defined in party choices, because they are just leisure choices. It's like, "Do I want to go to the zoo, or a museum, or a film?". They are not 'either or' things, you can do them all if you want, and I think in terms of musical events now, because dance party culture is now mainstream culture, those taste borders that used to exist around "those are risky, dangerous places where people use drugs and freaks go", is totally gone now. You've got forty year-olds going, you've got fifteen

year-olds going. There's not that stigma that means that [dance parties] are not mass culture, so they've just become another leisure choice. (ibid.)

Discussing the history of his involvement in the Sydney dance scene as both a promoter and a DJ, John Wall explains how the scene itself has, over the past decade, undergone a transformation from being a culture that was perceived of as being largely the concern of a minority, and therefore as residing in the 'underground', to being a leisure activity that is now broadly mainstream with an appeal that draws a variety of different people for a number of different reasons:

When we started promoting, [the Sydney dance scene] was small. There weren't that many venues that people could use for dance things... I'm talking about [the] mid-'90s. There was Underground Café, which is currently Candy's Apartment, and they had a regular deep house night every Friday which did alright, and people like Derrick Carter and Mark Farina had their first Sydney gigs there, and then there were lots of small one-offs and things... Then over the last few years of the '90s, up to about 2002, it stayed similar, but we were growing, and a couple of the other promoters got sick of it and lost interest a bit. It was still the thing where there was a fairly obvious division between the dance crowd and the mainstream, where even dance music that I wouldn't consider even remotely underground at all, like Groove Armada or something, was still not fully mainstream, and if you went to some mainstream bar or pub or club, that would be Top Forty [music] and it would be different kind of people and a different kind of vibe, and everyone in the dance scene would look kind of scruffy, nobody would be wearing high-heels, and it had a very different vibe. Now, I don't think there's any clear division at all, it's much more spread, there's a lot more middle ground. What goes on week-to-week, there aren't

that many underground nights where it's just all about the music... there aren't that many regular nights where everyone is there for the music and not for the fashion. (Interview, 2005)

With this shift away from an identifiable underground, it is Wall's argument that the increased commercialism of dance culture has resulted in people becoming involved in the scene who are less focused on the music and the DJs, and more concerned with simply engaging in social interaction, which has thus significantly altered the constitution of clubbing crowds, as he goes on to explain:

People are going out... they like the music, they are into music, but it's not really that much about the specific songs, the specific DJs, and there are a lot of people who are just going to bars [or] clubs where there's funky house music playing and everyone is dressed up. Five years ago there was very little of that. It was either 'underground scruffy' or 'commercial clueless', and now there's this huge middle ground of fairly commercial, house music-y people who are not total music-heads and they don't look like what we would have considered clubbers ten years ago at all. They are out there and they are going to the same places every week, and behaving like clubbers, but it's just a bit more commercial. It's changed. (ibid.)

The transnational Sydney dance scene

The term 'scene' itself is the concept most widely used by the participants in dance culture in Sydney, and for this reason it seems to me to be the most accurate and relevant description of the geographical context which frames their cultural activity. While 'subculture' is very much a concept rooted in academic interpretation, 'scene' is grounded more in the everyday workings of culture, and thus, by extension, is more firmly tied to reality. Furthermore, 'scene' is also employed as a reference that transcends a sole geographical specificity, in that it

is used in more than one particular way. Within dance culture, there are three distinct and separate, while also interrelated and interlinked, understandings of 'scene'. At the first, and most specific level, 'scene' is used in relation to Sydney and the popularity of house music, so that the 'Sydney house music scene' is an acknowledged entity. Extending from this is the slightly more general, yet still geographically specific, understanding of the 'Sydney dance music scene', which acknowledges the multiplicity of styles within dance culture, in that it acts as an all-encompassing descriptive heading of the different sub-genres of dance music that have some degree of popularity within Sydney. The third application of 'scene' extends beyond any local or national boundaries and acts as a reference to the international sensibility that infuses contemporary club culture, so that the use of 'dance scene' acts as a way of distinguishing this culture from other cultures of popular music such as rock and pop. Thus, the 'Sydney house music scene' is one part of the 'Sydney dance music scene', which is itself one part of the 'dance scene'.

As this 'dance scene' is understood as international in character, being slightly modified and adapted to fit the local context, then this three-way application of 'scene' needs to be placed within the global flows of information that promote and sustain club culture, and it is in this sense that the term 'transnational' most accurately conveys this idea of dance culture as not being contained within specifically local articulations. The description of a 'transnational dance scene' accommodates the fluidity of club culture, with its constantly changing and shifting shape and formation (Rietveld, 1998b: 276), and 'transnational' acknowledges both the lack of specific boundaries and divisions between geographically separate dance scenes, and the cultural interaction that takes place between these scenes. I would suggest that such an interpretation can be made of dance scenes in any particular locality. Dance culture is very much a culture that is understood, articulated and explored on an international level, and thus every scene is part of the international flow of information and music, yet at the same time, a scene such as the one in Sydney can be said to be less self-

reliant and less self-sustaining than, for example, the dance scene in London, in that Sydney relies much more on the international traffic of DJs and music to give shape and definition to its dance scene, due to its relative marginality in the production of dance music. There is a definite sense, and acceptance on the part of DJs, that the Sydney scene is very much an imported version of dance culture in the UK, the US and Europe, Trent Rackus explaining how the scene in Sydney,

... is completely influenced by other territories. It's all because we don't have enough people producing music down here to create individual sounds. You don't hear of Australian trance or Australian garage or Australian breaks... there are Australian artists making breakbeat music, but it is music that's heavily influenced from other territories... anything that gets spat from a producer's studio from Australia, all the elements and the ingredients are imported from overseas. (Interview, 2004)

This lack of producers thus dictates that the scene relies heavily on imported music, although as Andrew James points out, this has not constrained the growth of the scene in the city. Discussing the possible reasons as to why comparatively few people become involved in dance music production in Sydney, James goes on to cite the city's climate as an explanation:

Sydney has a huge house music scene, absolutely huge, but traditionally we've lagged behind in setting the standards for production, we just don't have enough producers... I think this is because there's so much to do in Sydney. Places overseas... a lot of production is done in Germany, all over England, in America... they're not living right on the beach with the beautiful weather and climate we have got here, so people do different things. The kids here all have skateboards and surfboards, whereas if you grew up

in a snowy town in Germany you'd probably be more into making electronic music at home because the climate is so different. I really think that has a lot to do with it, because Melbourne doesn't have the beach and the climate we've got, and they've miraculously got about forty or fifty times the producers. A lot more comes out of Melbourne than what comes out of Sydney. Brisbane is pretty much the same as Sydney. There are a couple of good producers, but not many. I think there's just so much to do [in Sydney] that people just don't get into it... they find other things to do... outdoors. (Interview, 2004)

Yet despite such factors that have impacted upon the production of local dance music, the Sydney scene should not be viewed as in any way unique because of its reliance on overseas developments in dance culture, for as James goes on to explain:

The thing is, inevitably, you go anywhere in the world and the music is imported from everywhere else. Even in London, where they have their own strong producers and they export music all over the world, American music and German music is still huge over there. Every single corner of the world imports parts of a culture from everywhere else, and the dance scene is no different... It draws influences from overseas no doubt. London and Great Britain obviously has a heavy influence because fashion comes from there, everything comes from there... and a large amount of English people descended on Sydney fifteen, twenty years ago, and a lot of them knew what was going on back in the homeland and they just tried to get it happening here, and that's how the first parties started... You're never going to get away from the fact that a lot [of the dance scene] is brought in... the ideas for parties are ripped off from overseas... we add our own touch and style to

everything... we've got longer operating hours, in a lot of other places in the world they kick them out at 3 o'clock, or if you're lucky 5 o'clock. In Sydney the parties go until 9 or 10 the next morning, so I think that's a unique feature... (ibid.)

For Stephen Allkins, Sydney definitely has its own unique dance scene, and as he explains, the way the city was isolated from British and American dance scenes, at least during the initial stages of the development of dance music, actually served to enhance this uniqueness as the scene progressed and developed:

Every city in the world has a distinct scene. Even if I travelled from Sydney to Brisbane or Sydney to Melbourne, let alone to an international city, it's different, because every city in the world has a personality, and I don't think music is any different. Yes, definitely, Sydney has a personality, but so does London, and so does Paris, and they are not the same. As far as us adopting and all that sort of bullshit, we were... Infusion, Itch-E and Scratch-E, Robert Racic... we were doing stuff in the 1980s. We didn't wave flags, and just got on and did it, and it was incredibly ahead of its time. If you listen to early Itch-E and Scratch-E albums now, producers weren't doing it in England, they were still doing piano-based house, whereas in Australia, because we were so isolated, we didn't need references... I lived in New York in 1988. Nobody could mix records, and I'd been mixing records for eight years. Being kept in the 'back' doesn't mean that we're sort of the poor cousin. (Interview, 2005)

For John Wall, the unique qualities of the Sydney dance scene are to be found in the dance parties and events that are staged, and he suggests that the number of these that are held outdoors helps to give the scene a different shape to

scenes overseas, although as he also highlights, it is ultimately difficult to assess what it is exactly that makes the Sydney scene unique simply because of the fact that lack of sustained involvement in, and experience of, other scenes makes it hard to draw comparisons, and to identify similarities and differences:

I guess I can only speak mainly for Sydney because that is what I know about... it's definitely developed very much its own flavour in terms of the kind of vibe of things, particularly with a lot of daytime, outdoor events, which we didn't used to have that many of, even though our climate seems pretty appropriate for it. I know there are outdoor events all over the world, but we are getting to have quite a lot of them now, and they feel different to things that I've been to overseas. So in terms of [what makes the Sydney scene] unique, it's always hard to say, because when you go overseas, you're in a city for three days maybe or a week... I go on overseas club crawls every now and then, [but] it's very hard to tell. You can get a bit of the flavour. I was in Berlin last year, and it was pretty obvious that there was a really, really strong tech-house, techno, electro kind of scene there, where there were a lot of clubs that would be playing some form of technological music, and it had a definite flavour, and it definitely didn't feel anything like Sydney. It didn't feel like a whole lot of people out in the sunshine in the middle of the day listening to breaks! (Interview, 2005)

Despite such features that lend the dance scene in Sydney its unique character, it remains my argument that the concept of 'transnational' most adequately accommodates the exchange and flow of music, styles and fashions that occurs between different dance scenes around the world. Clearly there are certain distinguishing features of dance culture in Sydney, yet these features arise out of a fusion of local understandings and interpretations with global culture and ideologies. The current global pervasiveness of club culture makes it difficult to

theorise scenes as bounded entities that have their own unique set of practices, and thus, the operational logics that underpin contemporary dance culture need to be analysed from an international perspective, rather than from the confines of a specific geographical context.

Within this chapter, focus has been placed on assessing and discussing the structure and shape of the Sydney commercial house music scene, drawing on earlier discussions of certain terms and concepts. It has been my concern to emphasise the interconnectedness of, and the fluidity between, these terms, rather than employing them in a detached and exclusive manner. As such, references to 'scene', 'local', and 'transnational' are not intended to highlight contrasts and differences between dance culture as it exists within the specific urban context of the city of Sydney and dance culture as it operates in other countries, but rather to make apparent the global flows of dance music that tie together geographically disparate scenes into an internationally consumed and experienced culture. It is obvious from the increasing use of digital technology by DJs that the issues of time and distance can no longer be seen as influencing factors in the formation of differences and contrasts between scenes, and with this immediate global availability of dance music comes a sense that local scenes are perhaps becoming less unique and more homogenised.

Yet such a simplistic argument fails to take account not only of the complex, multi-directional flows of culture between countries that occur through migration and travel, but also of the way local scenes assimilate and interpret this culture in unique and specific ways. Tracing the historical development of the Sydney dance scene from gay culture, through rave culture, and on to club culture, it becomes apparent that, while the influence of British dance culture has played, and continues to play, a significant role in this development, it is through the work of DJs and promoters that the Sydney scene has taken on its own identity. While contemporary dance music culture is most certainly a global culture, it does not follow that it is consumed and experienced in a globally shared manner. The

Sydney scene, and indeed Australian dance culture as a whole, has traditionally struggled with its apparent secondary position below the dance scenes of the UK, Europe and America, in part a result of its reliance on imported vinyl, and the lack of a sizeable and supportive dance music industry infrastructure. Dance music and DJs from the northern hemisphere still exert a certain influence over the Sydney scene, yet rather than impose on the scene a sense that it suffers from a degree of cultural imperialism, this influence would seem to be simply a part of the intrinsically global nature of contemporary dance culture. As such, with its preferences for specific sub-genres, its DJs, its media, and its clubs, all counterbalanced by international DJs, international music, and international club tours, the dance scene in Sydney would seem to be most accurately described through the concept of 'transnational'. Indeed, if we are to suggest that dance music transcends national boundaries and is truly international in its appeal, then 'transnational' describes not only the scene in Sydney, but also scenes elsewhere in the world.

As this chapter has made evident, contemporary dance music scenes do not exist in complete geographical isolation, nor do they operate solely on borrowed and imported sounds, styles and practices. There are intricate processes of cultural assimilation at work, in which international culture is absorbed, and subsequently transformed and reshaped into specifically local manifestations. The dance music scene in Sydney, or more specifically the commercial house music scene, demonstrates this to a significant extent, and with other scenes elsewhere in Australia and around the world, which further study could investigate, one could suggest that they operate, in regard to local interpretations of international culture, in a similar way to the scene studied here.

At the very centre of these transnational dance music scenes stands the figure of the DJ, who, through selecting, purchasing and playing the music that underpins these scenes, is the key tastemaker, consumer and performer in dance music culture. In the following chapter, the role of the DJ is discussed in detail, for while

clubbers, or ravers, have received detailed and extensive consideration in academic analyses of dance culture, the DJ, as a cultural figurehead, has rarely been subject to in-depth analysis. Issues explored as part of this analysis include the relationship between the DJ and the crowd, the skills involved in DJing, and the multiple roles of the DJ. While these issues alone do not relate specifically to the Sydney dance scene, the very fact that they are discussed by DJs who are part of this scene determines the significance and value of the issues as giving insights and perspectives into DJ culture as it exists in Sydney. Furthermore, such discussions provide a background context for an analysis of the significance of international DJs to the Sydney scene, and as should become clear, this is an issue that is of particular relevance to dance culture in Sydney, and is one of the key concerns of the media discourse that reports on, and gives shape to, the Sydney scene. As in this chapter, the following analysis has an emphasis on the thoughts and opinions of interviewees, with extensive direct quotations forming the main source of analysed research material, and the basis of subsequent theorisation and discussion.

CHAPTER THREE – ‘ONCE YOU FIND A GROOVE YOU’VE GOT TO KEEP IT LOCKED’ – THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DJ

Most DJs don't feel the slightest need for intellectual mediation. Anyone who wants to understand them has to go the club. The truth about DJs has to be experienced by watching them at work and dancing to their music. (Poschardt, 1995: 17)

In this chapter, and indeed in this thesis as a whole, it is my intention to explore the practice of clubbing, and the significance of club culture, from the perspective of the DJ, rather than delve into the complex psychological workings of clubbers in search of reasons and explanations for why they go clubbing. Not only has the DJ been largely ignored in academic analyses of club culture, Fikentscher making reference to ‘the slow response of the musical academy to [the DJ’s] gradual rise in the hierarchy of various musical cultures’ (2000: 108), but as the central figure around which dance music revolves, s/he³⁹ has a relevance and

³⁹ When referencing the figure of the DJ, Brewster and Broughton use ‘he’ because, to paraphrase, ninety-eight percent of DJs are male (2000: 3), while Fikentscher references the DJ as male, and in his study of the New York dance scene estimates that ‘male DJs by far outnumber female DJs (by a ratio greater than 10:1)’ (2000: 124). This is a fact recognised by Richard and Kruger, who describe how, ‘there are very few female DJs and producers... young women are less likely to be found in record shops listening to and buying new records’ (1998: 169-170), and by Weber, who explains how, having conducted extensive study into the Toronto rave scene, he ‘observed ‘traditional’ relationships among those working in or controlling the rave scene; DJs, promoters and retailers were predominantly males’ (1999: 332). Despite this, there are several women who have managed to establish themselves as key DJs in this male-dominated world, such as Lisa Lashes, Anne Savage, Sandra Collins, Lisa Pin-Up, Sister Bliss, Lottie, Smokin’ Jo, and specifically in the Sydney scene, Amber Savage, Bexta and Kate Monroe. See also Pini’s essay (1997) on women and the early British rave scene for a discussion, based on ethnographic research, of how, while women may be marginalised in the production, organisation and promotion practices of club culture, dance music ‘represents an undoing of the traditional cultural associations between dancing, drugged, ‘dressed-up’ woman and sexual invitation’ (1997: 154); Bradby’s article (1993) on the relationship between gender and technology in dance music; and Luckman (2002: 114-125) for a discussion of the role of women in Australian rave culture. I fully acknowledge the gender bias within this thesis, but this has been dictated by circumstance rather than choice. The Sydney house music scene is no different to dance scenes elsewhere in the world, in the sense that there is a noticeable absence of female DJs. I have avoided any detailed discussion of this, simply for the fact that the issue itself warrants an entire thesis, and is thus beyond the scope of this research project. Indeed, the lack of discussion and analysis of gender in relation to DJ practice suggests that there is plenty of scope for future research to explore this issue. Questions that need exploring and answering include whether there is actually anything preventing women from becoming DJs, such as a male DJ hierarchy, or

importance that requires and warrants further investigation. Thus, in the same way that Gibson and Zagora acknowledge how, 'as with many other youth musical subcultures, the voices and concerns of ravers are rarely heard in academic texts' (quoted in Malbon, 1999: 16), the working practices and opinions of DJs have rarely been given detailed consideration. This lack of attention perhaps stems in part from the position the DJ occupies in popular music culture in relation to such figures as the guitar player or the songwriter, in that s/he is perceived as being less skilful or musical, Fikentscher suggesting that,

From the perspective of the general public, the technique of spinning appears too similar to playing records to be considered anything but fairly straightforward. This may be one of the reasons why deejaying is sometimes not viewed as a very prestigious activity or profession: it is not readily associated with the specific musical skills or technique traditional musicians must acquire.

(2000: 37)

As Fikentscher goes on to explain, this perspective soon changes when one understands the skills and knowledge needed to correctly operate the standard DJ equipment of two turntables and a mixer, 'that have to be operated simultaneously as well as synchronously in order to allow the art of spinning to emerge' (ibid.)⁴⁰. Through detailed observation and assessment of the working practices of DJs in the Sydney scene, of the language and terminology employed by DJs to refer to their work and culture around it, and of the role of the DJ in the wider flows of information exchange that occur throughout global dance culture, it is my aim to 'offer some picture of the social environment that supports club culture' (Ross, 1995: 68), and I hope to place the DJ in a theoretical context that

whether it is simply the male-centred nature of DJ culture that puts women off from trying to enter the field. The lack of discussion on this subject of gender and dance culture is acknowledged by Bradby when she explains how, within the literature on dance music, 'it is striking that its textual ideologies have been written about far more in the popular music area than have its sexual ones' (1993: 164).

⁴⁰ See Klasco and Michael (1992) for detailed descriptions of the practices and techniques involved in DJ mixing.

accurately summarises and accounts for his/her position as one of the leading musical exponents of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in an attempt, to paraphrase Malbon, to provide an understanding of DJing as an *experience* (1999: 18).

Langlois's essay on DJs and house music culture in the UK, while pre-dating the phenomenon of the 'superstar DJ' by a couple of years, establishes and provides comprehensive theoretical and methodological frameworks for an analysis of the role of the DJ in contemporary dance culture, particularly in its attempt to link the activities of the DJ with the 'structure and ethos of the [dance party] event itself' (1992: 229), and it is such frameworks that form the basis of this thesis. Yet despite being ethnographically-based, with Langlois drawing on research he did into the 'work of disk [sic] jockeys involved in the 'House' club scene in London, Manchester and Belfast' (ibid.), there is no use or detailing of direct quotations from any of the DJs Langlois consulted. Thus, as with Thornton's study (1995), the work comes across as a collection of findings filtered through the authorial voice, which in turn undermines the empirical validity of the findings, in that 'the research subjects themselves play only a relatively minor role in the text' (Bennett, 2002: 458). Langlois simply makes reference to 'the DJs I spoke to' (1992: 234), to how 'one DJ told me' (ibid: 233), and to 'most of the DJs I interviewed' (ibid: 234), as opposed to placing central focus on the voices of his primary source material, which would have added weight and support to his arguments.

While I acknowledge the centrality of clubbers themselves to any theoretical interpretation of dance culture, in the past too much emphasis has been placed on them and their understandings, at the expense of any detailed investigation into the work and role of the DJ. Malbon accurately observes that, 'clubbing is very much a social phenomenon at the heart of which is the clubbing crowd' (1999: 70), yet at the same time, this crowd has no purpose or focus without the central figure of the DJ. Thus, clubbing is also very much a *cultural* phenomenon

at the heart of which is the DJ, Langlois noting that 'the key role in the House scene is that of the DJ' (1992: 230), and as Thornton observes, 'DJs have had a decisive role in conducting the energies and rearranging the authenticities of the dancefloor'⁴¹ (1995: 58). If we are to attempt to arrive at a theory of DJing, we need to understand the job, and the skills it requires, Straw describing the work of the DJ and suggesting that,

For the figure of the dance club DJ to be invested with enigmatic authority, an easily cultivated, spatialized knowledge (a sense of the present musical field) must appear secondary to another, more elusive skill (the ability to follow one song with another which seems its inevitable successor). (1993: 174)

The interaction and relationship between the DJ and the crowd

Bennett emphasises the importance of the DJ to the creation of a good event or night, highlighting how the DJ has to be able to relate to the mood of the crowd, to both connect with this mood and feed off it, so that, 'if the DJ fails to read his audience correctly, the point of the whole event is essentially lost' (2000: 89), thus emphasising the centrality of the DJ to the success of club culture. The importance of the DJ responding to the reactions of the crowd, through the selection of specific music, for the success of a night is highlighted by Hadley when he describes how,

The DJ works by feeling, trying to keep a vibe going, judging which tracks will fit with others and with the mood according to each moment. During the party, the DJ follows the mood of the dance floor, adapting choices in material to the responses of the crowd. (1993: 64)

⁴¹ While not grammatically correct, the word 'dancefloor', as opposed to 'dance floor', is typically employed in the discourse and language of club culture, and thus, following on from Thornton, I have used it throughout this thesis.

As Shuker highlights, the DJ has a central role in contemporary club culture as a star figure 'whose skill is to judge the mood on the dancefloor, both reflecting and leading it, all the while blending tracks into a seamless whole' (2002: 54), while as Langlois explains, the performance aspect of DJing involves responding to the crowd, so that DJs 'seek to direct the mood of the event, ideally leading up to a frantic crescendo for the last hour or so' (1992: 236).

For Thornton, there is a balanced interaction between crowd and DJ, and it is this that creates and enhances, or indeed destroys, the atmosphere and mood in a club, by means of the way 'DJs respond to the crowd through their choice and sequence of records, seek to direct their energies and build up the tension until the event 'climaxes'' (1995: 65), something also highlighted by Saldanha, who describes how 'interaction between DJ and crowd and within the crowd is quintessential' (1998: 4), and by Rietveld, who suggests that, by feeling the audience's mood and 'finding out what makes them tick', the DJ combines this information with his choice of records on the night to establish a relationship between himself and his clubbing crowd (1998b: 112). As part of his detailed theorisation of DJ practice, Hadley gives consideration to the process of mixing, and describes how the ultimate aim of this process arises from a set of various interactions between the music, the DJ and the crowd:

The tracks interact with each other; the DJ works with the turntables, and then, through the sound system, with the crowd; the crowd, with their voices and with their bodies, respond to the DJ, to the music and to each other. Chasing the elusive "vibe" which unites all these activities, the DJ acts as a conduit for all of this energy. (1993: 63-64)

Discussing what it is that makes someone a good DJ, Andrew James emphasises this idea of interaction:

Years ago I used to think it was all about mixing. Sharp mixers go a long way, but then I started seeing people that weren't that sharp at mixing going a long way, and that's because they were great, fun-loving people with a lot of energy. They showered their energy on to the crowd and they always looked like they were enjoying themselves. People want to see someone that's really getting into it, and that helps them to let go... I think [what makes someone a good DJ] is a combination of so many different factors, you couldn't even say it is five things. I'd like to be able to say it's mixing, it's the music you play, the order you play it, and little tricks and effects, but there are probably fifty points, and if you've just got five or ten of them, then you can probably get away with being a good DJ.

(Interview, 2004)

Similarly, Illya believes that being a good DJ involves possessing a number of different skills:

[Good DJing] is reading the crowd... and a good DJ has to beat-mix, and know structure of music. Structure of music is a real important thing, because you can't just drop a record anywhere. To me, personally, beat-mixing is important. Technically you have to be good. I put on parties and I don't really want to have anyone that's not technically up to it. Mind you, there are DJs everywhere that have their technical bits right, but they may not beat-mix so spot on, so they are doing run of the mill mixes, straight in, straight out. That's what a DJ does. If he's still making the crowd move, that's a good thing... I think beat-mixing is pretty important, but I don't think it matters as far as the dancefloor is concerned.

(Interview, 2004)

For Alan Thompson, a good DJ has to be able to sequence music in such a way as to generate a positive reaction from the crowd, and to be able to respond to this reaction in the appropriate way for the duration of the set, and thus he sees technical skills, such as ability to mix smoothly, as of less importance:

For me, a sign of a good DJ is someone who knows how to program, and to look at the dancefloor and know how to react. Something I have said for many, many years, is that I would rather hear a DJ play a set that's not necessarily technically good, doesn't necessarily beat-mix very well, but plays the right records, and the crowd are jumping and screaming, rather than I hear a DJ that plays dub records finely mixed together so you wouldn't notice, and the crowd are just standing going, "What the hell's going on?". For me, beat-mixing is a technical skill, what's important is the music that you play, absolutely, one hundred percent, no doubt about that at all. (Interview, 2005)

Thornton suggests that what differentiates dance culture from live music cultures such as rock and pop is 'the buzz or energy which results from the interaction of records, DJ and crowd' (1995: 29). For Alan Thompson, establishing this connection and level of interaction is important for creating enjoyment not just for the crowd, but also for himself:

If I play a record and all of a sudden [the crowd] have gone ballistic, and I love the record too, then I'm going to jump up and down as well. For me, the best crowd is facing the DJ booth and just cheering me on, like, "Come on then, what have you got? Give it to us", and I'm flicking through my records going, "I'm going to get you, I'm going to get you". I thrive off that... I never play records that I don't like myself. I love house music. I always think, when I'm playing, if I was on the dancefloor, what would I want to hear right

now? Where would I want the music to go? You have to remember the state of mind that most people are in on the dancefloor. Even if you are completely straight, you have to remember that they are probably on a different level to you. (Interview, 2005)

While DJs do not receive the same degree of avid concentration that rock and pop performers command from their audiences at concerts, with there being more crowd interaction on the dancefloor than in the concert hall, which for Langlois lends house music culture an 'event-centred ethos' (1992: 235), they represent the main point of focus and centre of attraction for the dance crowd, Hemment suggesting that 'the cult of the DJ reintroduced passive fixation into the dance experience' (1998: 215). This is not to suggest, however, that no dancing takes place at rock concerts and that rock audiences stand motionless for the entire duration of a show, as Thornton observes when she writes, 'the meta-genre, 'dance music', does not have an exclusive claim on dancing' (1995: 71).

DJs as 'performers'

The focus in dance culture on the DJ has allowed some DJs to project an element of their own personality through their work by approaching their sets as a 'performance', so that there are now contrasts between DJs whose only movement during the entire duration of their set will involve mixing records and adjusting their headphones, and DJs who are more active, in that they will often dance, move to their music, and interact with the crowd through physical movement and gestures. Goodwill admits that when he is DJing, it is not a performance, and he distinguishes between DJs like himself and those DJs that 'exude a charisma', and that consequently,

... have a presence behind the turntables... I definitely don't think I have that, and it's something I would like to be able to do a bit more... there are those sorts of people that have a certain

charisma, and I definitely don't have that... I think that is a large part of DJing. (Interview, 2004)

Similarly, Mark Murphy highlights how, while there are DJs that do incorporate a certain degree of performance into their sets, the type of music he plays does not really necessitate any kind of outward performance-based persona:

Some DJs see [playing] as a performance, it probably has to be, but I'm not one to perform. I'm not one to get the crowd gee-d up because I'm not sure that's the music I play. I let the music do the talking, in a way, and the mixing do the talking. It's not a big hands-in-the-air type of sound. Good on them if they do and that's the way they do it, but I certainly don't do that. I'm actually quite boring to watch! I've got too much to do. I don't just mix a track into a track. There's a lot more to do behind the decks than just mix one track into another. (Interview, 2005)

Alex Taylor also acknowledges how, while he does not really engage in an obvious sense of performance as a DJ himself, there are DJs who will project their extrovert personalities through their work and come across as performers themselves, although he is suspicious of DJs who may attempt to present a vibrant performance-based persona behind the decks, but who do not display a similar personality outside of their work:

I'm probably not the type of DJ that jumps around... Obviously people like to see you having fun... I just don't believe in jumping around like a madman, if it's not what you do as a person. The way you come across might be more subtle, but other people might like that... If you're going to be like, "Come on, let's have it!", if every DJ did that, to me it's just boring, it's just the same, everyone is trying to do the same thing and trying to outdo each other, and I think it

looks stupid sometimes! Don't you think it looks silly? If that's what they do, that's cool... (Interview, 2005)

It can be argued, therefore, that while DJs today are often labelled as 'stars', there are those that perhaps project more of a star persona, and that can be said to have more of a 'stage presence', than others, incorporating an element of performance into their sets, Mike Bennett interpreting his DJing as a performance and suggesting that, 'that is how people remember you, isn't it?' (Interview, 2005). Dance music has become increasingly central to popular culture, to the extent that it can now be classed as a form of pop music, and thus it requires some kind of identifiable pop star, as Mark Murphy highlights:

There's probably an over-emphasis on the DJ as pop star, but if that's what the kids want, that's what the kids want. If you are going to have dance music as pop music, then you've got to have pop stars. That's alright, I don't mind that. Dance music is dance music, and it is part of pop culture, so you've got to have your stars, it's inevitable. But I don't put myself in there at all. (Interview, 2005)

The job, craft, and art of DJing

While the most rudimentary understanding of a DJ would be that he or she plays the records of other people, in house music this playing has become something more than simply placing records on turntables, and has developed into something creative and challenging, something that is perceived of as an 'art form' (Hilker, 1996: 20), something 'closer to improvising on a musical instrument...as this element of "play" has gotten even more re-creative, the DJ has come to be considered an artist' (Reynolds, 1999: 271), so that 'the DJ's job has changed dramatically since the Second World War, moving from unskilled worker through craftsman to artist' (Thornton, 1995: 60). Rietveld suggests that 'one may claim that... the DJ is not only a researcher and a curator, as well as a technician, but also an author/artist' (1998b: 112), and for Hilker, the DJ is the

“conductor” of their “orchestra” of two turntables and a mixer... the orchestra’s “instruments” are the slabs of vinyl that carry the basic grooves and melodies’ (1996: 20). Typically placed between the two turntables, the ‘mixer’ is a,

... small mixing console... [that] controls the relative volume of each [turntable]; it allows music to be faded in and out of the ‘mix’, also for two records to be superimposed upon one another.

(Langlois, 1992: 231)

While a key aspect of the DJ’s role is still to introduce new music to an audience, in the club environment there is an emphasis on the manipulation of sounds, and the creation of a coherent and seamless DJ ‘set’, Rietveld suggesting that, ‘when a rather complex style of ‘DJing’ (British word) or ‘spinning’ (American equivalent) is employed, one is more likely to speak of a ‘set’ (1995: 3). Shannon’s definition of ‘set’ is most accurate and applicable for this study, which he states as:

Multiple number of records that are placed in an effective sequence, with a definite purpose or intention, to maximize the interest and excitement levels of the audience. (1985: 354)

With the technology that exists today for DJs, such as pitch control, it is fairly easy to ‘beat match’ two records, that is to overlap the ending of one record with the beginning of a second so that their drum-beats are synchronised, or as Broughton and Brewster state, ‘beatmatching’ is about ‘getting two records to play at the same tempo... it’s about hearing which track is faster than the other and adjusting them until they match’ (2002: 48).

Mixing different tracks together into a non-stop sonic flow is a skill that most club DJs are expected to possess⁴², and as Reynolds describes, ‘synchronizing and

⁴² See Hadley (1993) for a theoretical consideration of DJ practice as it relates to mixing.

seamlessly segueing tracks of different speeds is called “beat-mixing”, and it’s the basic DJ skill’ (1999: 271). Hadley notes:

The practice of beat synchronization is one of the most fundamental of DJ tools. While there are events and types of clubs where it isn’t necessary, and even though there are ways around it, such as creating a sudden interruption by spinning the original record backwards before throwing in the new one, it still represents what is most fluid about DJ practices. (1993: 60)

Brewster and Broughton favour a description of the work of the DJ that emphasises claims of DJing being an art rather than a mere job, elevating it to something that is almost religious in its practice:

DJing is not just about choosing a few tunes. It is about generating shared moods; it’s about understanding the feelings of a group of people and directing them to a better place. In the hands of a master, records become the tools for rituals of spiritual communion... (2000: 11)

For Haslam, DJing is ‘evangelism; a desire to share songs’ (1997: 169), while Hilker believes that ‘at a rave, the DJ is a shaman, a priest, a channeller of energy’ (1996: 20). During his discussion of the development of dance culture in America during the 1970s and the clubs that opened in New York that were to have a huge influence on contemporary club culture, Bidder makes reference to ‘the shamanic power of the DJs who held sway there’ (2001: 15), and similarly, Collin describes how, in acid house culture, ‘a favourite scene conviction held that DJs were contemporary shamans, leading their intoxicated congregations on a trip into the unknown’ (1998: 268).

There is a danger that in attempting to interpret the role of the DJ theoretically, the significance and relevance of this role is over-emphasised, for ultimately, at the most basic level of understanding, a DJ merely does nothing more than play other people's records. Goodwill contrasts this relative lack of direct creativity on the part of the DJ with what he sees as the more creative role of the rock musician, and suggests that this is one of the reasons why dance music has a faster temporal logic than rock culture:

DJ culture is pretty much based on playing other people's music. It sounds negative, but the fact is that, when you listen to a Led Zeppelin album or an old Rolling Stones album, you're hearing musicians that have created their own piece... a DJ set is very much of the moment, it's not timeless in anyway. If I play a set in the middle of the night it's about everyone having fun, and I might do it well, but in a few weeks time, people aren't going to remember the music I played, they'll just remember they had a good night, whereas with rock 'n' roll, it takes a lot of people to come together to make a good piece of rock or a good piece of jazz. That's why I think dance music doesn't rely too much on the past because how much can you really remember about Danny Tenaglia's set at Twilo in 1991? (Interview, 2004)

Alan Thompson also makes reference to the differences between the intended purposes of dance music and rock music, and the different creative processes involved in the two genres, when discussing the disposable nature of contemporary dance music, although as he highlights, not all dance music is disposable, while not all rock music can be considered as having classic status:

You can think of Pink Floyd or Led Zeppelin's 'Stairway to Heaven', but how many records of that genre were released around that time that nobody ever remembers? There are only a handful of punk

records that are classic records, yet there are hundreds of classic house records already... In artist music, i.e. Madonna, Elton John, Sting, they are formulated songs, chorus, verses, bridges, melodies and everything, whereas dance music is four-four, seven minutes, straight in and straight out, breakdown, finished. There's a very different style and a very different arrangement of music. This music is specifically made for playing in a nightclub, whereas album artists have spent years putting the album together and writing.
(Interview, 2005)

While similarly making reference to rock music culture, or rather 'rock stars', Andrew James suggests that the cultural significance of the DJ has been somewhat exaggerated:

I try to avoid getting into this big, famous DJ thing. DJs just play other people's music... most of them. The crowds seem to think the DJs are pretty cool... as people have been saying, DJs are the rock stars of the twenty-first century, but I don't really subscribe to that theory... [In dance culture] the talent is in writing the music, combining it into sets is the DJ's talent. [DJing] is a taught thing, it's a learnt thing. I could probably teach ninety percent of the population to DJ if I had the time, and I think if you were a top producer you'd find it hard teaching ninety percent of the population to write good music... the producer is the one that deserves a lot of the credit, and misses out on it. (Interview, 2004)

Paul Goodyear also stresses how the significance of DJs has been over-emphasised, and how there is a little too much focus on the figure behind the turntables:

[DJs] are there just to do a job, we are not gods. As much as the song says "God is a DJ", we're not really. We're just playing music to entertain people. You've got great DJs and you've got really bad DJs, it's as simple as that. (Interview, 2005)

Yet as Alan Thompson explains, playing other people's music does not reduce the significance and importance of the DJ's role:

Of course the DJ only plays somebody else's music, I would never deny that, but if it wasn't for that DJ, that other person's music wouldn't be exposed... That's a thing that has always got me! Of course I play other people's music, but it's how I play it, where I play it, and if I want to play it. DJs have been slated for that for years and years and years, but if the DJ doesn't play it, who else is going to play it? (Interview, 2005)

Similarly, Alex Taylor describes how the importance of the DJ in popular culture has increased in recent years, and how with the development of technology, the DJ has now become so much more than merely someone who plays other people's music:

When I started DJing, the DJ was in the corner and in the dark, and not made a show of, and that was all I kind of knew, and then halfway through it started to become the thing that it is now. I think it is definitely a part of culture, especially for young people now, it's great... To some people I am just someone who plays other people's records, and to other people I'm not... You're not just playing other people's records now because there's so much more you can do to manipulate that and to change the fact that you could just be playing one record after another. You can take the technology now, or your technical prowess, and completely change

[the record] *and make it sound different... like editing and adding acapellas*⁴³, *all that sort of stuff.* (Interview, 2005)

While a certain level of technical skill is required to be able to operate equipment such as turntables and sound mixers, and to actually 'mix' two records together, contemporary dance music DJs are required to do more than simply place one record on after another, for as Langlois notes, the object of mixing 'is to maintain the musical momentum, and so also the atmosphere of the club' (1992: 230). Good DJs are not defined solely on their ability to mix two records together seamlessly, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the order in which they sequence and play these records, Fikentscher explaining how 'a DJ's technical skill is thus at best equal to his choices in repertoire' (2000: 38), while Rietveld defines the role of the house music DJ as 'to provide a sound track for the dance night and to put the right tunes in the right place at the right time' (1998b: 9). Within the discourse that surrounds dance culture, the issue of a DJ's skills and capabilities is often assessed in reference to their ability to mix together seamlessly two particular records, and this obscures somewhat the fact that DJing is just as much about 'sequencing', or 'programming', and playing records in a particular order, as it is about any kind of technical ability to mix. Goodwill acknowledges this when he states:

Some of the best DJs I've ever seen can't mix... sometimes mixing can be an exciting thing, and I focus on technical ability, but some of the best DJing you'll ever see is all about programming and dropping the tune at the right time, and for me, if you can do that, you don't need to be able to do anything else really... If your mixing is diabolical you're not going to get anywhere, but you don't need to do fifteen-minute mixes to be a good DJ. (Interview, 2004)

⁴³ In this context, 'acapella' refers simply to the main vocal line from a track, so, for example, a track's acapella may be placed over the top of the instrumental content of another track to create a completely new piece of music; see Fikentscher (2000: 52 and 135).

For Paul Goodyear, track selection, sequencing, and being able to assess and judge the mood of the crowd, are far more valuable skills for a DJ than the ability to mix smoothly:

For me, with a good DJ, it doesn't matter about their mixing skills. Personally, I would rather go out and listen to a DJ that is entertaining and plays a variety of different styles, and moves a crowd, and is maybe not so good technically, rather than going out and hearing someone that is absolutely seamless [in their mixing] and the music just stays on the same wavelength, and it never peaks and it never comes down, it just stays stagnant. I hate that. I think a good DJ is just someone who can entertain, really, is a good entertainer. (Interview, 2005)

As a live electronic music performer, rather than a DJ, Nat Nyk makes a distinction between the two roles, suggesting that there is a difference between what makes a good DJ and what makes a good electronic music performer:

All a good DJ really has to be is a good reader of where they are... what venue they are in and what music they are supposed to be playing, and if they are smart enough they've brought the right records for that particular occasion. As long as that DJ can beat-mix, and if they can't beat-mix they shouldn't be there in the first place... the fifty to hundred to thousand people in front of you, you know what they want to listen to, what style, you know what hits they want to hear during that set, that's all you need to know as a good DJ... when to put on 'Born Slippy'⁴⁴! That's all you need to know! I don't have any disrespect for DJs at all, but it's not the most

⁴⁴ 'Born Slippy' is the name of a track by electronic music act Underworld, a track that is, arguably, seen by most people within dance culture as a 'classic', having originally been released in 1995, and as Nyk hints at here, there would almost certainly be a positive reaction from any dance crowd if a DJ was to play it during a set. The track can be found on the CD Underworld – 1992-2002 – JBO – JBO1024692.

hardest of professions in the world... As far as artists go, you need a hit, and you need one as quickly as possible, because then everyone knows who you are, so your name's on the bill and people go, "I know them because they did that funky tune that I dance to every Saturday night"... DJing is very anonymous, the DJ just gets up and plays some records, and occasionally puts his fist up or waves. As an artist, I think you should be putting on a show... I want to put on a show as an artist, and most of the artists do. They do put on a bit more of a show than your average DJ.
(Interview, 2005)

John Devecchis believes that a good DJ needs a variety of skills, and that you cannot narrow the definition of a good DJ down to one particular aspect:

The programming of a set is important because you can give two different people the same box of records and one of them will make the records sound ten times better than the other one. That is said of Danny Tenaglia, you can give him the same box of records as anyone else and he will make it sound better, given time to listen to the tracks. Track selection is obviously important because if the crowd don't like a track they're going to stop dancing; technical ability, not as much so. You need to be the full package, and you need to be a nice guy as well, you need to give off an aura to the crowd, certainly in Sydney where it's a small scene and the venues are generally small. You need to be everything now. (Interview, 2004)

For Trent Rackus, technical ability is important, as it allows the DJ to provide a continuous flow of music, although he also acknowledges how some of the most respected DJs in the world do not actually have great mixing skills, and how the emphasis on mixing ability varies from sub-genre to sub-genre:

Norman Jay is a perfect example. He isn't a great technical DJ, but it's all about the records that he throws down... but if you heard Sasha do a mix like Norman Jay... all these people that are so driven by someone's technical ability can't really apply their ways of thinking to someone like Norman Jay because it's all about records. I don't think it is entirely technical ability; it is important in certain genres, but I also think that your flow and your programming of your track selection are very important too. People can be very good at one and not the other. (Interview, 2004)

Citing a specific example of a particular DJ's performance, John Wall highlights how clubbing crowds often judge and assess the success of a DJ's performance in regard to music selection and sequencing, rather than technical ability and mixing skills:

The first time Lee Rous from the Plump DJs came out, despite not being a technically genius DJ or whatever, he played music that everybody really loved, and put it together and structured his set really well. It was a very successful set from him, and he played great music. He wasn't doing three-deck wizardry, but it was a pretty sound programming of music, and he didn't fuck up a lot of mixes or anything. (Interview, 2005)

As Fikentscher observes when emphasising the importance of a DJ's programming ability over their technical and mixing skills, 'someone who has mastered the operation of two, or even three turntables and a mixer is not necessarily a good DJ' (2000: 38). DJs, through their selection of records and the order in which they play them, possess the ability to control the atmosphere within a club, as it emanates from the crowd, through a close, studied reading of the crowd's reactions to each record played, using their records as 'building

blocks for an authentic soundscape (Rietveld, 1995: 4)⁴⁵, and as Fikentscher explains, records and 'how they are employed are the ultimate indications of a DJ's quality, skill, and style' (2000: 38). For Stephen Allkins, mixing skills and technical ability are largely irrelevant in assessing whether someone is a good DJ, as he believes passion for the music is of the utmost importance:

Passion makes someone a good DJ. Love of what they do, that's what makes them good. You can hear it. Some people can have amazing taste and not mix two records together. If you go back to the very roots of dance music, isn't it about dancing? Do you really need one record to go into the other to have a good night? It's not bad that you can have that, and it's not bad that it is there, but a monkey can mix two records together... The passion is in the choice of music, and then if you have a great selection of music and you do wacky things with it. Mixing two records together, like I say, any monkey can be taught that, but you get the basis of being able to do that, and then you put 'Funky Town' over Kraftwerk, or you do these things that shouldn't go together that do, and make people think, and make people listen, and make people go, "Oooh". These seamless mixes, that's why records are made with these two minute intros and two minute outros, and a 7-inch version in the middle, so dickheads and idiots can mix in and out, and the same crowd that isn't listening anyway can go, "Oh that was flawless"... that's monkey stuff. (Interview, 2005)

Local DJs versus international DJs

An analysis of some of the interviews with DJs and promoters within 3D reveals that the position of the scene in relation to developments abroad is a central concern for contemporary understandings of dance culture in Sydney, and makes evident some of the key discourses that give shape and definition to the

⁴⁵ See also Langlois's detailed analysis of the aesthetics of DJ performance (1992: 235-237).

scene. One key recurring issue is the value and significance of international DJs to the local scene, which is frequently discussed through pejorative terminology, with these international DJs being described as overrated and overpaid, yet paradoxically, they are also deemed as necessary for the continued existence of club culture in the city.

The suggestion that international DJs threaten the existence of a unique local scene, and ultimately take work away from local DJs, fails to acknowledge the two-way exchange and flow of cultural information that the combining of international and local experiences generates. It is an issue that attracts a great deal of comment and argument, and is by no means unique to Sydney, for one of the issues Weber observed during interviews he conducted with participants in the Toronto rave scene was that,

Famous DJs from Europe and the USA were appreciated but it was felt that many local entertainers were cheaper and equally talented. While the need to feel affiliated with the international rave scene is important, these individuals also felt that the Torontonians should be supporting their local artists. (1999: 333)

Rather than highlighting inadequacies and deficiencies in dance culture at the local level, the involvement of international DJs allows the scene to place itself positively within a wider global framework, and makes evident the sense of internationalism that informs contemporary club culture, and ultimately, as Haslam points out, 'now that house music is a worldwide phenomenon, the DJ circuit is international' (2001: x).

International DJs have a central role in the Sydney scene, perhaps more so than in the dance music centres of the UK and the US⁴⁶, their very status as ‘visitors’ seemingly being one of the main attractions for clubbers. As Trent Rackus explains:

The international DJs carry an expectation that they’re going to offer new music and a different sound, and it’s quite often the case, but obviously there are DJs who aren’t worth the money that they’re charging to perform over here... it’s all about the fact that they’ve played at Pacha in Ibiza or somewhere like that, and people love that, because your commercial audience have all these commercial club names, such as Godskitchen, that they attach to DJs...

(Interview, 2004)

Similarly, Seb Chan highlights how, within different dance scenes, there are different perceptions as to who the central exponents of particular styles are, so that certain figures are positioned as being of certain significance to the development of that scene, and thus they achieve a degree of recognition and fame, which lends them increased appeal as touring DJs:

There are certain mythologies within each scene. Each scene has its own myths, and so it has its own canon and it has its own ideas on who are the leaders of particular sounds, and [clubbers] want to see those, and people are disappointed generally. The locals [clubbers] are disappointed generally with touring acts because they quickly realise that the locals [DJs] are pretty good. (Interview, 2005)

⁴⁶ Indeed, this would be an interesting topic for future research projects to explore in greater detail, although the logistics of conducting a project of such huge geographical scope could prove somewhat complex.

Adam Jesse emphasises how while international DJs may not be any better at their job than their Sydney counterparts, they are important for the promotion of club nights and dance music events in the city:

It's more of a marketing thing. Promoters who are putting on parties will want someone from the UK with that big hype that international DJs have behind them. It's more about the promotional side of things, what will draw the people to your party, rather than the talent side of things. (Interview, 2004)

Similarly, Alex Taylor acknowledges the way the appearances of international DJs are of benefit from a promotional perspective, while he believes that the emphasis on these internationals is a result of the way the Sydney dance scene has always relied and drawn on developments in dance scenes overseas:

There is an emphasis on international DJs. I think it stems from how we always used to look to overseas... we always used to assume that if it was from England it was going to be better... It just sells tickets as well. There is that hype it creates. (Interview, 2005)

Alan Thompson also emphasises how promoters will use the appearances of international DJs to give significance to their events and nights, although he sees this in a negative sense, drawing on his experience of being in the position of both an international DJ and a local DJ, and the tension this creates:

The international DJ here is put on a pedestal beyond anywhere else in the world I've ever seen. Having been on both sides of that coin, i.e. being an international DJ brought into Australia for the last nine years and being treated very well, I'm now considered to be a local DJ purely because of the fact that I live here... Certain promoters, for instance, want to pay me a fee that's equivalent to

someone who has just started DJing in a local bar because I live in Australia and [they] consider me to be an Australian DJ. But, on the other hand, when the flyer comes out, my name is in big writing with "Direct from the UK". So it's a catch-22 for me because I can't win. On one side I'm considered to be an Australian DJ because I live here, and on the other side they market me as an international. I do think that, and I hear from many Australian home-grown DJs that, promoters here look down towards home-grown DJs and really do emphasise, certainly in the summer gigs, international names being brought in to pluck up their gigs. I actually think it is awful and that all Australian DJs should get together and do something about it. I think it's horrendous the way Australian DJs are treated. (Interview, 2005)

Thus, Thompson believes that the emphasis placed on international DJs serves to work against the local DJs, and as he goes on to explain, this emphasis seems to be an unavoidable consequence of the way clubbing audiences in Sydney use international media to obtain information about dance culture, which reflects the way the media contribute towards the structure and content of music scenes, rather than merely reporting on them:

The audiences make more of an international coming here because they read their names in all the UK magazines. Australia doesn't have that many music magazines, so the exposure for Australian DJs is very small, so the music magazines [the audiences] tend to read are imported magazines such as DJ Magazine, Mixmag... and no Australian DJs really get mentioned in these magazines because we're so far away from everything... I'm being very, very honest with you, and without naming names, and friends of mine too, some international DJs have played in Australia and have ruined a club night, have ruined events, but nevertheless a

promoter is still happy to book them, purely on the fact that they are an international DJ... which is a sad affair really, but it happens here. (ibid.)

The Field Day factor

Over the past decade, as dance culture has become an increasingly commercial enterprise, there has been the development of a party circuit that focuses on large, annual, festival-like events, as opposed to the weekly nights of club culture, with these events being staged away from the traditional environment of the club, at locations such as parks and other open public spaces, and being held during the day, rather than the more traditional night-time and early-morning hours when club culture is most typically experienced. Examples of such parties that are specific to the Sydney scene include the one-day dance music events put on by Fuzzy during the spring and summer months, such as Field Day⁴⁷, Parklife⁴⁸, and Harbourlife⁴⁹, that have become increasingly popular over the past five years, and that have, in part, initiated a shift away from night-time clubbing and more towards daytime dancing, with extensive DJ line-ups, and the more popular international DJs promoted as headline acts over numerous local DJs, in much the same way as popular bands headline rock festivals. For Illya, it is these events that have put international DJs at the forefront of the Sydney scene, while at the same time having a negative effect on the city's club culture:

The appeal of international DJs is more brought on from the big parties, like Field Day, Parklife, and Harbourlife. I think that those parties themselves make Sydney infatuated with internationals... although most of the time people are not really going there for the internationals anyway, most of the time it's a social event more than

⁴⁷ Field Day is an annual dance music event held in Sydney's Domain park area on New Year's Day, and is one of the key events in the Sydney dance music calendar, with a capacity of 20,000.

⁴⁸ Parklife is an annual dance music event held over one day in Sydney's Moore Park. In 2005, it took place on Sunday October 2.

⁴⁹ Harbourlife is an annual dance music event held over one day in Sydney's Fleet Steps area, adjacent to the Royal Botanic Gardens. In 2005, it took place on Saturday November 26.

a dance party. Yes, people are dancing, but I can guarantee that half of them don't know who is playing or the track that's playing. They are there to see their friends or to be seen. That's what I think is wrong with Sydney. These big parties are taking away from club life, and I think that is sort of losing it for the clubs, because everyone is saving up to go to these big parties, and so they can't afford to go out every weekend or every second weekend... especially New Year, that's been ruined. It's all about twelve o'clock, being with your mates, the countdown, that's what New Year's is about, to me, not the next day. Yes, it's about kicking on afterwards and having a party the next day, but not making the day the main focus... Clubs are lost now on New Year's because of that... and I think that sort of shows for the rest of the year round too. (Interview, 2004)

While discussing his work as a promoter, Mark Murphy also acknowledges the effect Field Day has had on Sydney's New Year's Eve club culture, explaining how, with the success of the event, the focus for clubbers has shifted from night-time celebrations to daytime partying, to the extent that it has become difficult to make a dance party on New Year's Eve financially viable:

I'll never do another New Year's Eve party. It's not worth it in Sydney, especially when parties like Field Day are happening, because everyone goes to Field Day now. Field Day is a party that has actually killed New Year's Eve in Sydney, and that's not a bad or a good thing, because I played at Field Day this year and it was a great fucking day, and I had a great time. But no one goes out on New Year's Eve anymore, because everyone saves themselves for Field Day... So to put on a New Year's Eve event you really have to think hard... People go to the fireworks, go home to bed, and then go to Field Day... I'm not sure it's fully about the music, it's more

about Field Day being Field Day, and getting out in the sun, and getting out of it during the day with your friends. It's just a New Year's Eve during the day. (Interview, 2005)

Despite this acknowledgment that Field Day has had a less than positive effect on club culture in Sydney on New Year's Eve, Murphy sees the event as a significant part of the local dance scene, highlighting how the sheer number of people it attracts alone makes it hugely important:

I'd never experienced Field Day before this year because it wasn't my thing. It was very much based on breaks, and I don't play breaks, but when I got asked to play this year, and they had an electro stage on there, I fully understood what Field Day was, I fully got the whole thing, because to see twenty thousand people dancing towards one stage... just seeing that... I've never seen anything like it in my life. I used to go to Mardi Gras every year, but this was something totally different. Just amazing... and so well organised and so well run... It's now an institution. (ibid.)

With his company Fuzzy, John Wall is responsible for staging Field Day, and as he explains, the event itself, as well as the other large dance parties he now stages, were the culmination of several years of promotional work and putting on parties that often attracted less than capacity crowds, and that therefore had limited financial success:

We did an outdoor party in Centennial Park called Parklife, which was disastrous. The capacity was two thousand and we sold seven hundred tickets, lost about forty thousand dollars, it pissed down with rain the entire time. However, because we had sold so few tickets, we had a tent and everyone that went easily fitted in the tent, so it didn't matter that it was raining, they had a great time! So

it wasn't a dead loss, because the next year did alright, started making back the money and improving the whole thing, and now Parklife has been getting bigger every year. This year looks like being fifteen thousand people. The first one was in 2000, so that's five years of gradually growing. Then, because we had done Parklife and managed to impress Centennial Park, we'd been hassling the Botanic Gardens to let us do parties there for years, and they'd said, "No, no, no". But then after we did Parklife, and we hassled them even harder, finally they said, "Alright", to our proposal for a New Year's Day party, which became Field Day, and that did much better than we expected. (Interview, 2005)

As Wall highlights, Field Day has become one of the biggest dance music events in Sydney, if not *the* biggest, and as he goes on to explain while describing his reasons for why he decided to stage parties on such a large scale, he was inspired, in part, by the now seminal Hordern dance parties:

I've always liked big parties... going through the late '80s, particularly around 1988 when house music had really taken off and acid house... all these big parties at the Hordern, there was one nearly every week, and most of them managed to get over four thousand people... I quite like that slightly anonymous, yet friendly, vibe in the middle of a big dancefloor at a party where you're just part of this big crowd. You don't know anyone necessarily, but everyone's friendly, and it's just all about the music. So I was really happy when we managed to actually do some big parties... We've mostly just tried to get other people to like music that we like on as big a scale as possible. (ibid.)

The educational value of international DJs

While there is a certain amount of negativity in the opinions some people have regarding the performances in Sydney by DJs from overseas, it can be argued that the value of international DJs is to be found in the new music that they often bring with them to play during their sets, thus fulfilling the DJ's role as an educator, in that s/he introduces new music to clubbing crowds. In turn, this helps the local dance scene develop and progress, and prevents it from developing in an insular and bounded way, as John Devecchis explains:

You have to bring internationals here. A lot of them technically aren't that good... [but they] bring all this new and different music. What I don't like is when promoters bring out DJs and they've not researched them, and these DJs come out and play all the same tracks that we've got here... The promoters have to be clever about who they pick, but I think internationals are very important to Sydney. Sydney can go very 'in itself', and not expand, and think "we're the best"... If any Sydney-sider went to Ibiza this year and saw what goes on there, they would be in shock... People were dancing to techno, and girls were dancing to tech-house, which just doesn't happen in this city. People need to open their minds a bit and realise there are things outside. I think Australians can be a bit too proud sometimes about what they've got. (Interview, 2004)

Similarly, John Wall highlights the educational value of international DJs, describing how they help to further the knowledge and understandings clubbers have of dance culture as a global phenomenon, while he also acknowledges the appeal for clubbers that is inherent within the irregularity of international DJ performances:

Some people say that they like to see an international DJ purely for the reason that they know they are not going to see them for a

year, so they get really excited about that DJ, as opposed to a local DJ. They might really like the local DJ, but they can see him any time... At the same time, a lot of people think that if a DJ is from somewhere else they are better, and they don't even think about it logically. There have been discussions, like on inthemix or whatever, where people have just said, "Well obviously international DJs are better", and things like, "Well that's why Fuzzy put on international DJs at their parties, because they are better", and I've gone on there and said, "Well it's not as simple as that". A lot of them are big names because they have produced some kind of music. A lot of them may represent some kind of scene which is bigger somewhere else than it is here. If you get some techno DJ from Detroit, they are representing something that comes from a certain place, and so there's a real reason to have them come here. Maybe not now, but when that kind of music was not as well distributed around the world. There are areas that develop a particular sound, [so] it makes a lot of sense to bring somebody who people have heard of, that associates with that sound, and bring us their version of how they play that kind of music where they come from, and there's a lot of value in that because it expands your idea of what's going on in the world. (Interview, 2005)

At the same time, however, despite placing this value on international DJs, Wall also explains how he in no way subscribes to the opinion that international DJs are in some way better than local Sydney DJs, and he describes how such an opinion is an erroneous judgement held most typically by clubbers:

I really completely reject the idea that DJs from other countries are better than DJs from Australia, and on aforementioned discussions on inthemix, I said you've got to understand that a lot of these international DJs come out here and are really impressed by the

standard of the DJing in Sydney... and the reply to that on inthemix was, "It just shows that you're bringing out crap internationals", and it doesn't even matter if that's true. The fact is, they are totally ignoring the possibility that a DJ who's a big deal from overseas could think that our local DJs are good. Not everybody is like that, and plenty of people have got ears, and can hear and understand that it's not just about overseas equals better, but I'm sure since you got to Australia you would have heard people talk about cultural cringe, and it's very real. It's not as bad as it was when I was young, but nevertheless, because we are a long way away, and because most people going out to clubs are eighteen to twenty-five, haven't necessarily had the opportunity to go overseas, live there for a couple of years and really get involved in a similar scene, so they kind of assume that it's probably better, or bigger, or more sophisticated, or whatever, and that therefore the DJs are more skilful, it's more competitive, more music is available there, and so on and so on and so on... It's always a bit hard to get people to really give local acts and DJs the credit they deserve, and every now and then somebody makes it, like Kid Kenobi has. (ibid.)

Yet as Wall goes on to explain, the disparity between the respect and admiration shown for international DJs, and the respect and admiration shown for local DJs, cannot solely be explained through reference to the mistaken perceptions of clubbers, and thus, he references how some international DJs have established themselves in the scene not through actual DJing, but through music production, and he emphasises how this impacts not only on the appeal they have as performers for clubbing audiences, but also on the extent to which they can be classed as 'better DJs':

It's hard for somebody here to be considered as big a deal [as an international]. I think, to be honest, it's not only because of a

cultural cringe, it's also because very few local DJs are people who've produced music that is widely regarded as really good. The reason why people want to go to see the Plump DJs when they come out is because there are ten, twenty, thirty things they have produced, which, to the people who like that sound, are really great. If they like that kind of music, they go, "Plump DJs do it really well, and therefore I want to go to see them perform". People are attracted to fame, and people consider that if somebody makes good music, then that means something, and yes, sure, producing is a very different activity to DJing, and the two have less in common than you would naturally think, because DJing is very of the moment and quite reactive, and you've got a crowd in front of you, and it's grabbing music which is usually other people's music and putting it together in a live situation, whereas producing is building something up, that you've dreamt up in your head, from scratch. It's almost the opposite thing, but I guess people want to see people that have got a claim to fame, and it is generally the case that if somebody is more famous, more people want to see them. (ibid.)

As Sonia Sharma explains, the emphasis on international DJs in the Sydney scene is largely perpetuated by the local media, providing another example of how the media directly affect the shape and content of music scenes, and she highlights how, despite the popularity of events that have extensive international DJ line-ups, this emphasis is not always shared by the clubbers themselves:

I think there is [an over-emphasis on international DJs] by, perhaps wrongly, the media, which does include the publication I work for, and by promoters. The interesting thing is, we actually ran a signing area at Parklife and at a few other events. It's something we've just started doing, and what it involves is having the international DJs

come down, and meet and greet with the public, and the amazing thing that we found was so many punters coming up saying, "Why don't you have local DJs signing?", and I think, for the punters, they realise... We continually get reviews that state, "'X' international came out to play, but 'Y' local support put on a much better set". I think the product in Australia, the DJing, is probably on par with an international level, but the emphasis is still on those big names.
(Interview, 2005)

In contrast to this referencing of local clubbers, Seb Chan suggests that the emphasis on international DJs within the Sydney dance scene can be linked to the tourists that make up a sizeable part of Sydney's clubbing audience, in the sense that international DJs are used by promoters to make their events more appealing to those clubbers who may not be familiar with the local DJs, while tourists are also perceived as having more time than the locals to go clubbing, thus making them a specific focus of the marketing techniques employed by promoters:

Sydney is a big tourist city... we get more tourists than any other city in Australia. The Sydney scene, by that measure, will have more people coming from other countries than, say, Perth or Melbourne... If you are putting on a club night, you basically need an audience to come. Now, if your audience is people who won't go out and party, a large portion of your audience in that party scene will be tourists, because who are the people who are in a place to party? Generally backpackers and tourists. Your general workers go out maybe once a month, twice a month, unless they are particular ages. So the core part of your audience that, perhaps in the early 1990s, pre-Olympics, wasn't there... the Olympics made us much more [of] a tourist city, and I think subsequent to the Olympics, we've had a lot more focus on [how] your core audience

is going to be maybe thirty percent, forty percent tourists. So what are tourists going to know? They know the big names from back home. That's my general vibe... The tourists aren't here enough to realise necessarily that the local [DJs] are as good or better...
(Interview, 2005)

As well as making this specific reference to Sydney, Chan goes on to highlight how the issue of tourism and how it affects dance music scenes in different locations could provide an interesting research topic for further studies into club culture:

That whole tourism thing, I think, is an untapped [area]. I don't know if there's much literature written about that, but that is a big effect. There probably is literature written about Ibiza, and the impact of tourism in Ibiza on selections and taste there. Tourists are a very different demographic because, by their nature, they are freed up from the restrictions or rules of their other life back home, so as a tourist you do things you wouldn't otherwise do, and that's the lifeblood of commercial clubs for sure. (ibid.)

While the extent to which international DJs can provide a more musically rewarding and pleasurable clubbing experience than their local counterparts is questionable, and is a subject that creates an enormous amount of discussion and tension in the discourse that surrounds the scene, their position as 'internationals' would appear to lend them an authenticity and value which informs the judgements and opinions of clubbers in the scene. Goodwill highlights this tension when he explains that international DJs are often perceived, by clubbers within the scene, as being superior to their local counterparts, and that this is a problematic issue that arises from the 'detached' position the Sydney scene has from the dance music centres of Britain and America:

One thing that annoys me these days, and that is constantly reminding me that [being detached] is maybe a little bit of a problem, is how much people look up to international DJs. Quite often it will take an international DJ to come out here and play a record for kids to think it's good...they'll play a big tune that I've been playing for three months and everyone will go, "Oh, what's that?". The other thing is the changing of technology... I've been playing CDs for ages and copping a bit of flak for it at regional gigs, but then Erick Morillo will come out and play all CDs, and no one will say anything. It's just because they're from overseas people automatically assume that it's a good thing...although at the same time they pack out dancefloors and turn people on to music, so there's pros and cons to it. (Interview, 2004)

'International DJs' or 'international producers'?

Within contemporary dance culture, the emphasis that is placed on fame and the 'star DJ' concept has resulted in a process where successful dance music producers can transfer on to the international DJ circuit simply because they have been able to establish their name, through the popularity of their music, at the forefront of global dance culture. It would appear that, with the success of dance parties that have such DJs on their line-ups, dance music audiences equate good production skills with good DJing skills, although as many of my interviewees were keen to stress, this is not always the case, with several of these talented producers displaying rudimentary DJing skills at best. Illya references this issue when outlining his belief that international DJs receive too much attention and focus, acknowledging how some dance music producers often move into DJing after they have produced a successful track, despite the fact that they may have no extensive DJ history:

All of the international DJs are overrated. I can name several DJs in Sydney that are better than most of them... although there are some really good international DJs and producers that don't make it here because there's no hype about them, no one knows about them... You don't hear about them because they don't have that 'big' name, so when they come over here, [most] people don't go to see them, only the deep house heads or the progressive heads, or whatever the genre is... There's all this hype about shit DJs really. It's usually because they've made one standout track, and most producers who start off as producers are really bad DJs. (Interview, 2004)

Similarly, while discussing different dance music producers and DJs, Alex Taylor acknowledges that there are producers who will establish themselves through releasing music, and then go on to DJ at big events without any extensive DJing experience, their name simply being enough to attract clubbing crowds, and he explains how this lack of experience can result in a DJing style that lacks spontaneity and uniqueness, with some of these 'DJs' playing sets with similar content on different occasions:

There are heaps [of producers who DJ]. I could tell from the other week when Paul Harris was playing after Deep Dish, and he's not a DJ. He was just mixing the outro and intro of tracks, and just keeping a beat going, and not getting it so that it actually flowed. That is so much what happens though. Producers suddenly become DJs. Look at Mylo. He's a perfect example of that. Everyone was like, "Mylo! Mylo!", and he could hardly DJ to save his life. Did you hear him? It was the same set he played everywhere, basically. He would have just been doing that around the world, and obviously as he went by he probably would have changed it a bit... so there are a lot [of producers who DJ]... I've

seen [international DJs playing the same set everywhere they go] a couple of times... I guess there must be mixes you probably might like to do, and you might do them a few times, but maybe not the whole set... I guess after a while some people can become bored, though, and they don't realise they are doing it... maybe...
(Interview, 2005)

Yet despite this, as Mike Bennett highlights, regardless of DJ skills, it is track production that helps to establish a name within dance culture, and he sees this factor as a cause of the emphasis on international DJs that exists within the Sydney scene, and also as a cause of the lack of Australian DJs who have a significant presence within international dance culture:

There's an over-emphasis on international DJs... You don't see many Australian DJs DJing in America, but that's also because we don't tend to produce anything down here, we don't do much. We've got the talent to do it, and there's only a handful of Australians who have actually gone out there and done it. So I guess there are just more Americans and British doing it, and they're getting their music down here. We've got to get our music up there... You get records on the shelves, and you're on a plane flying to do DJ gigs, that's the bottom line. You're very rarely going to get someone just to come out as a DJ. (Interview, 2005)

Trent Rackus believes that the lack of Australian dance music producers who are recognised internationally is a result of the absence of a supportive dance music industry infrastructure, explaining how when an Australian producer does make an impact on a global scale,

... people know about it because it is rare. There's Infusion, and Luke Chable has started to do it in the progressive-breaks arena,

but [apart from that] there's no one. It's a lot harder for someone to go out and make a record, and then go out and DJ off the back of the success of that record and make a name for themselves as a DJ, which is what happens over in the UK or in Europe... guys like Sander Kleinenberg and Timo Maas who have made records, and then go out and start DJing, and make a name for themselves as a DJ off the back of the success of their records. It can happen out here, but it's only going to happen on a national scale. (Interview, 2004)

As an artist who composes, produces and performs his own dance tracks, Nat Nyk is acutely aware of the way the operational logics of dance culture dictate that a producer or a DJ needs a successful track to establish themselves at the forefront of the scene, and as he explains, the comparatively small size of the Australian dance scene limits the opportunities for attempting to make a track successful, in that there are less avenues for track promotion and exposure:

As far as my live stuff goes, I haven't had, really, any releases that have done stuff, so I'm still fairly anonymous, but there's not many artists in Australia that are doing really well in the live [electronic music] scene... It's quite hard to get a break as a live act in Australia, I reckon. You'd almost be better off just going overseas, which I have thought about, quite a lot... I really should go overseas, there's absolutely no doubt about it. [There are] way more opportunities... the scene is so small here it's very hard to break through as an artist. I really need a record that people know. I really need for people to start playing one of my records. I give my CDs to a few DJs and they play them every now and then, but I just haven't been in the right place at the right time for it to happen yet, that's just the way it goes... Also, the opportunities overseas would be... the scenes are just so much bigger in Europe and the UK.

You start going to a few clubs and meeting a few people, and there's a lot more people to meet, whereas the scene here is, as I said before, still very small... it's in its own little bubble... very isolated, I reckon. (Interview, 2005)

Discussing the issue of international DJs and their role in the Sydney dance scene, Nyk emphasises the notion of club branding that has come to dominate the contemporary scene, suggesting that clubbers are attracted to an event not necessarily because of a specific DJ who may be playing, but rather because of the event itself as a whole, and he explains how certain events in Sydney have been established as prominent, regular parties with names that, essentially, act as brands, in the sense of being signifiers of a particular style of music, of a particular crowd, and of a particular level of quality:

I've always wondered if half the people going even know who the international DJ is... Okay, we're not talking Carl Cox or your bigwigs here, but you see [advertised] "John Brown from the UK" and you go, "Who the fuck's he?", but a few people have heard of him, and so word kind of filters out he plays this kind of music, and maybe he's had a record out on a label that people know, like the Nukleuz label or the Frantic label, or something like that. So a few people know about him, and therefore the gig gets a reputation. I think it's more driven by nights. You've got Gas who bring people out, and so they might bring someone out and you don't know who it is, but it's on at Gas, so you kind of trust that it's someone worthy. It's the same with the bigger parties. You could almost argue that Utopia would still get five thousand people if they had hardly any international DJs. (ibid.)

Yet despite placing this emphasis on the naming and branding of clubs and dance music events, Nyk goes on to acknowledge that international DJs do, to a

certain extent, help to attract clubbing audiences, although at the same time, he questions the extent to which these DJs can be said to provide a better clubbing experience than local DJs:

To a certain extent, the international DJs are important, but to me, they're almost a placebo importance [sic]. I don't think they really make any difference. They pretty much play the same music as the Australian DJs, and if Carl... well, maybe not Carl Cox because he's pretty distinctive... but if someone turned up at a five-thousand people gig and just played some records, they wouldn't know whether it was him or not. In that sense, it's probably important just to give certain gigs a certain amount of credibility, but as far as whether they are really contributing... they're probably just getting bums on seats, really. That's their only importance as far as I'm concerned, is just getting people out of the house. I wouldn't say they are better or worse. Some of them obviously are, but DJing is just DJing! (ibid.)

It is clear from the many different responses outlined throughout this chapter that those involved in the Sydney dance scene have varied and contrasting opinions regarding the role of the DJ in dance culture in a general sense, and more specifically, regarding the role and significance of international DJs in Sydney club culture. Consideration has been given to the skills and understandings involved in the act of DJing in an attempt to situate the work of the Sydney DJs who participated in this thesis within a broader interpretative framework. While the Sydney dance scene is very much the focus of my study, DJing is a global profession that crosses national borders, and translates into other cultures, with an obvious ease. By discussing the part played by international DJs in the local scene, it has been my aim to emphasise the global flow of dance music that is generated through the performances of these DJs in different parts of the world.

Within this chapter, I have explored the role and significance of the DJ, as part of my aim to compensate for the lack of attention the DJ has been given in academic studies of dance music and its surrounding culture. Clubbers have been granted a great deal of focus by theorists seeking to establish the significance dance culture has for its participants, but this approach has been taken at the expense of neglecting the DJ, who essentially acts as the core focus around which dance culture operates, albeit a focus that some believe has been over-emphasised. Through understanding the skills and requirements of DJing, one can begin to work towards not only an appreciation of the DJ's role, but also a theoretical interpretation of this role, at both the level of the local scene and the level of dance culture as it exists globally. It is my argument that such appreciation and interpretation is most accurately reached through an engagement with the thoughts and opinions of DJs themselves, and thus, detailed and extensive direct quotations have been at the centre of this particular chapter, and indeed, will be at the centre of following chapters.

While the emphasis and importance that is placed on the possession of technical skills, such as beat-mixing, varies from DJ to DJ, the one constant and essential requirement for any DJ to be successful is an ability to select and sequence music in such a way that excites and interests the crowd. At the very centre of any DJ set is the interaction that occurs between the DJ and the clubbers on the dancefloor, and the success of a dance event depends ultimately on the extent to which the DJ is able to develop and sustain this interaction. At the same time, however, on the few occasions when DJs have been subject to theoretical interpretation, there has been a tendency to over-emphasise the role of the DJ, through describing this role with quasi-religious terminology, resulting in a one-sided portrayal of club culture which subsequently obscures the idea that a balanced interaction occurs between the DJ and the crowd. While a DJ presides over a dancefloor, selecting the music and steering the flow of the event, this selection is determined by the reactions of the crowd, and a non-responsive crowd suggests a lack of engagement with the DJ's choice of music.

An issue of obvious tension in the Sydney dance scene involves the performances of international DJs, and how these performances impact upon the scene as a local entity. It is clear that developments in the structure of the dance party scene in Sydney, with the establishment of large, annual parties such as Field Day and Parklife, have had an impact on the way clubbers perceive the relevance of international DJs. From a marketing perspective, these DJs serve to draw and attract people to the parties, and this has been interpreted by those within the scene in two contrasting ways. One is in a positive sense, in that these DJs help to educate the scene with new music and to broaden the global perspective of the scene's participants, while in contrast to this, there is the negative argument that suggests these DJs, and the emphasis that clubbers place on them, create a DJ hierarchy of skill and ability, with the local DJs being consigned to the lower reaches of this hierarchy. It is an obvious fallacy to suggest that all international DJs are more skilful and more capable DJs than their local counterparts, and yet this is a perspective that is deeply imbedded within the very fabric of the Sydney scene. This stems, I would suggest, from the way the Sydney dance scene has its roots in an imported culture, in that, with an emphasis on imported vinyl, on imported music, on imported sounds, and on imported styles, comes an emphasis on imported DJs. With the centrality of the British, European, and American scenes to global dance culture, it follows that the key DJs from these scenes will be elevated to a position of significance by clubbers around the world. The commercial success of dance music, as it has moved increasingly into the mainstream, has, in part, been facilitated by the creation of a 'star system' of DJs, in the sense that the dance music industry has used identifiable figures to sell and market its products and clubs.

To lend such emphasis to DJs from outside of the scene does, however, obscure the important role the local DJs have in shaping and sustaining local dance culture. While the very term and concept of 'international DJs' emphasises the way dance culture exists on a global scale, it is important to note that it is the

workings, happenings and events at the local level that give shape and structure to global dance culture. For this reason, the following chapter will explore in greater detail the way local Sydney DJs interpret their profession, and will work through some of the issues that shape and define the DJ's role. Specific focus will be placed on the local DJs who have contributed to this study, and what they perceive their responsibilities to be as a DJ, and continuing on from this chapter, there will be further discussion of the multiple roles of the DJ. Consideration will be given to the way DJs approach their sets, to the differences between being a 'resident DJ' and a 'guest DJ', to the tension that exists between the commercial concerns of the club and the artistic concerns of the DJ, and related to this, to the tension that exists between the DJ's role as an entertainer and the DJ's role as an educator. As should become clear, discussion of such issues is often articulated through a discourse that uncritically employs such problematic terms as 'underground' and 'non-mainstream', and thus, the following chapter is intended to go some way towards an interrogation and re-theorisation of both the language that is used to shape and define dance music scenes in general, and the language that is used to describe the structure and content of club culture in Sydney.

CHAPTER FOUR – ‘THERE’S A GREAT MYTH ABOUT THAT’ – DJ CULTURE IN SYDNEY

The commercial house music scene in Sydney has certain particularities and features that give it a unique shape and structure, while at the same time it is part of a wider international flow of dance culture that transcends any locality and dictates that the scene is, to a certain extent, an imported and copied version of scenes elsewhere in the world. This imported nature manifests itself mainly in regard to the music, with Sydney DJs playing sets largely consisting of music from the UK, the US and Europe. This is acknowledged by the DJs as a result of both the lack of producers within the scene and, rather more contentiously, the inferior ‘quality’ of the music that is made in Australia compared to that from overseas. Yet this is not necessarily due to a lack of talent, but rather because of the absence of a supportive infrastructure for the dance scene, which is linked to its comparatively small size. The size and popularity of dance culture in the UK, Europe and America, as well as the larger populations of these countries, means not only are there far more avenues and channels by which one can produce and promote one’s music, but also that it is far easier to earn a living from DJing and producing. In this sense, therefore, the size of the Sydney house music scene restricts and limits its potential growth and expansion.

Referencing his extensive DJing history in the UK and Europe, Alan Thompson explains how the Sydney scene, and indeed Australian dance culture as whole, is limited by the relatively small size of the population in Australia, in comparison to the UK and the US⁵⁰, which ultimately affects the regularity and frequency of DJ work:

Even though Australia is a very large country, population to land-size is very, very small, mostly concentrated of course on the

⁵⁰ Population of Australia – 20.2 million (<http://www.abs.gov.au>, 12/11/04); population of the UK – 59.6 million (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>, 12/11/04); population of the US – 294.7 million (<http://www.census.gov>, 12/11/04)

coastline in five major cities. I find that the club scene here, compared to the size of the country, is very, very small. As a DJ that has come from London, with the accessibility of going to Europe to DJ a lot, I find it quite difficult to maintain the number of gigs that I used to get in the UK, now living in Australia, purely because, even in Sydney, it's a very small city... So the scope for the work is not as much as it is in the UK certainly, because the dance scene itself is pretty small. (Interview, 2005)

It is important, however, not to over-emphasise the issue of the size of the Sydney scene, for it is obvious simply from participating in the scene that dance culture in the city has reached a significant level of popularity, and thus, to refer to the scene as 'small' imposes a degree of unqualified negativity upon the scene, and ignores the possibility that those clubbers in Sydney who have no knowledge or experience of other scenes may actually view the scene in the city as being of a sizeable nature. As Neil Ackland observes, while the size of the Sydney dance scene, and its potential for growth, may be limited by the comparatively small population of the city in relation to cities in Europe and America⁵¹, the fact that there are always young people wanting to explore different music cultures when they reach the legal drinking age (eighteen in Australia) means that the scene should have a constant stream of participants:

The population here is always going to be a factor. If you're Fuzzy and you are putting on an event on New Year's Day, and you want twenty thousand people to be there, that's a certain snippet of the entire population of Sydney that you are asking to turn up on one day... There's got to be a ceiling to that, and [at inthemix] we think about that a lot with our audience. Every month we look at our web traffic, and it goes up and up and up, and we think, "Wow!", but it's

⁵¹ Population of Sydney – 4.2 million (<http://www.abs.gov.au>, 21/12/2005); population of London – 7.4 million (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>, 21/12/2005); population of New York city – 8.1 million (<http://factfinder.census.gov>, 21/12/2005)

got to stop eventually, it just can't keep going like that forever, but it's still surpassed all the points at which we thought it would stop. There's got to be a point where it becomes saturated... but everyday people are turning eighteen, and when they are eighteen they are ready to go, they are raring to go, they want to go straight to a club and have a big party, so there's always going to be that turnover. (Interview, 2005)

This turnover ensures the continued existence of club culture in the city, and while, as with all other popular music genres, the popularity of dance music is cyclical, the shift of this music into the mainstream has led to dance culture becoming firmly ingrained within the nightlife of Sydney. Having begun his DJing career in New Zealand, Alex Taylor acknowledges how, to him, at least initially before he travelled as a DJ overseas, the Sydney scene appeared comparatively big, and as he explains, discussion of the issue of the size of a particular dance scene should not be considered in any way unique to Sydney:

I came from somewhere smaller, so at first I thought [the Australian dance scene] was better, but as time goes by, you start to see the limits of what a scene has. Sydney is small, but it's not that small compared to other places around Australia. I think the bigger you go you are always going to complain about that. I go to other places and people are complaining about the same things. (Interview, 2005)

While most of the music may be sourced from overseas, there is a sense, however, that the imported nature of the scene actually generates specifically local and unique characteristics, in that the Sydney scene embraces dance music from all around the world, and interprets this in a specific way. This broader outlook generates a vibrant cultural diversity and, arguably, makes the Sydney house music scene more 'open' to new sounds and styles. These are

then combined and fused into a unique cultural whole, so that the Sydney scene can be said to be markedly different to scenes elsewhere within the country, as well as overseas. As Stephen Allkins highlights, the Sydney dance scene should not be seen as simply a copied and imported version of overseas dance culture, for there is a unique history to the scene, in that the city was one of the first major urban locations to adopt and popularise the concept of the dance party:

Who started the big dance parties of the world? We did! We were doing Mardi Gras parties in 1979 when England didn't technically have a dance scene... and the English only copied the Americans anyway. (Interview, 2005)

The DJ set

While the Sydney dance scene may be comparatively small, and may rely heavily on music from overseas, there is a diverse element to the city's club culture, which in part stems from the many different DJs that work within the scene, and the different music that these DJs play during their sets. An issue worth noting in discussing the role of the DJ is the concern DJs give to the progression of an entire night, as opposed to solely their own set, in that a DJ will select their tracks in regard to their place within the night's DJ line-up and the time at which they are playing. Certain tracks suit certain points in the night, and as the comments of DJs show, in structuring their performances consideration is given not just to the content of their own sets, but also to the other DJs that will be playing on the same line-up. Thus, for example, a DJ who is scheduled to play at the beginning of the night has the role and responsibility to 'warm up' the dancefloor, which will be achieved through a balanced set of tracks that, on occasions, may send dancers into some degree of joyous frenzy, but on the whole, this particular role is about setting and establishing the mood.

As the term infers, 'warming up' involves exactly that, in the sense that it is the job of the first one or two DJs to draw people on to the dancefloor and warm

them up for the headlining DJ. As a result, the 'warm-up DJ' has to, at least in theory, restrain themselves from playing too many 'anthems' or 'big tracks', the task of which is usually performed by the main DJ, whose responsibility it is to 'peak' the night, to create a sense of excitement, and 'to prompt as strong as possible a response from the floor at least once during the evening' (Fikentscher, 2000: 41). This is an issue acknowledged by Trent Rackus when he states:

Programming is very important to me in a night; you've got to have it so each DJ compliments the next... the vibe of the night should be built around each DJ working towards the next one and giving it that flow, and creating the energy via that. (Interview, 2004)

Discussing how he approaches the planning and structuring of a set, John Devecchis explains how, to maintain the flow and momentum of a night, it is important that the DJ is familiar with the styles of music that the DJs either side of them in the line-up will be playing:

If I don't know what a DJ before me or after me plays, I find out. I played in Brisbane recently at Family nightclub, and I phoned the promoter and asked him what the guy before me played. He basically told me that he played a little bit more pumped-up than I do, so I was like, right, the first thing I need to do when I get there is ask this guy if he'll pitch it down for his last three tracks, and I did, and it worked. For the guy after me, I was told he played quite vocal, so I made sure towards the end of my set I played three vocal tracks. You can mess a night up by changing the pitch or the style in one record, you can lose the floor, just like that. (Interview, 2004)

Thus, to ensure the success of a club night or dance event, the DJ has to familiarise themselves with the styles of the other DJs that will be working around

them. The logics of dance culture dictate that coherency, flow and momentum must be maintained, and any rupture in this flow can serve to negatively affect the atmosphere within the club.

Big tunes and little tunes

Within club culture, a certain tension exists between the extent to which DJs are expected to play popular, well-known tracks, which typically generates an excited response from the dancefloor, and the extent to which DJs should pursue a more challenging, and less explicitly commercial, path by playing tracks that are less familiar to clubbers. In discussing their opinions regarding the extent to which popular, 'anthem' tracks should be played during the course of a set, DJs raise such variable and subjectively interpreted notions as 'selling out' and 'compromise of artistic integrity', making it difficult to draw out a common and shared approach to this aspect of DJ culture. The playing of too many 'big tunes' in close sequence or throughout the course of one's set, what Rietveld refers to as 'resorting to a kind of populism' (1998b: 114), invites criticisms not only of a lack of experimentation, but also of a selfishness to promote one's own set at the expense of the following DJ's, in that if the warm-up DJ peaks the night too early, through playing a selection of some of the most popular tracks of the moment, there is nowhere else for the following DJ to 'take' the night, which can disrupt the 'flow' and 'progression' of the night as a whole.

Within the commercial house music scene, there would certainly be a degree of expectation amongst clubbers that, during the course of a night out, they will hear some of the most popular dance tracks, yet given that DJs hear these tracks several times a week just by playing them in their sets, it is understandable why some DJs try to impose a more unique and personal sound upon their performances. Alex Taylor acknowledges that there are tensions between the kind of music that the crowd wants to hear and the kind of music that he wants to play as a DJ, and as he explains, there are certain points during a set at which these tensions can be resolved:

I actually find in some places that as the night gets later and later, you can have a certain time when you can be a little bit more... play what you want, kind of thing, once you get everyone 'there'. Arq is a good example of that. I work there on a Thursday night, and the first part of the night is very much geared towards playing what people want to hear, and as the night wears on and they settle in, you can start to take them away from what they expect, to a point...
(Interview, 2005)

Given that the playing of popular tracks typically creates a sense of excitement within a crowd, to play such tracks during the initial stages of a night contradicts the ideologies of DJ practice that dictate that a crowd should not be peaked too soon. Citing a specific example, John Devecchis describes the difference between the role of the warm-up DJ and the role of the main DJ in playing certain tracks, and the way the warm-up DJ should, ideally, sacrifice the playing of certain tracks to avoid peaking the night too early:

You know the track 'So Much Love To Give'?⁵² I saw one of the warm-up DJs at Home nightclub once, I won't mention his name, about two years ago when the track was massive, he warmed up for an international, and he was doing a good job, and as his last track before the international came in, he played 'So Much Love To Give'. I've never in my life questioned a DJ doing something before as much as I did that. He played the biggest tune of the moment as the very last track before an international came on. He peaked the crowd to the biggest they were going to get peaked all night, just as this poor international was coming on to play. It was the most unprofessional thing I've ever seen in my life... it was stupid.

⁵² 'So Much Love To Give' was a hugely popular track in the Sydney dance scene during 2002 and 2003. Credited to Together, it was composed by the two French producers DJ Falcon and Thomas Bangalter, and was initially released on the label Roule Records in 2002.

What's the point of booking an international if your warm-up DJ is going to outdo him? The job of a warm-up DJ is to get the crowd warmed up, get a groove, and get people on the dancefloor. The ones who try to steal the limelight shouldn't be warming up for internationals, basically. (Interview, 2004)

The exact content of a DJ's set is thus determined not only by their own personal taste in music, but also by the time at which they are scheduled to play during the course of a night. While the way in which this is interpreted will vary from DJ to DJ, discussion of the issue reflects how there are certain unwritten rules of DJing, rules that may be ignored on occasions, but on the whole, rules that help to maintain the musical flow and progression of a night.

Club music policies

An issue that relates to the content of DJ sets is the extent to which DJs in commercial house clubs are free to play whatever they want, in that there may be guidelines or rules put forward by promoters or club managers regarding the style of music that should be played, with the purpose of attracting the highest possible crowd and attempting to ensure that this crowd returns to the club again. The music policy of a particular club is essentially what makes it attractive and appealing to a particular group of clubbers. If you want to listen to a certain style of music, you will go to a club in which DJs who play this style can be heard⁵³. Goodwill makes reference to the tension that exists between DJs and promoters in regard to this issue when he explains how he 'fights' for the option to be able to choose and determine the styles and records he will play during a set, and while he believes he is free to play what he wants, he admits that,

⁵³ Obviously this is not always the case, for some clubs simply act as venues to stage nights, with different promoters putting on different nights. For example, during the course of this thesis, there was a change of ownership at Sydney's Home nightclub, which resulted in the weekly Saturday house music night being scrapped, which was run by the same promoter every week, and replaced with a policy of staging different events by different promoters. Thus, one Saturday night at Home now may be a hip-hop event, while the following week may be a hard house event, the club essentially being a 'space' for promoters to hire.

To a certain degree, I have a lot of promoters sit me down and say I have to change my tune... but I always just smile and nod and tell them I'm going to do it, and then just keep on going about my way! I appreciate people's opinions, but most of the time they're saying it because I've cleared a dancefloor, and I learned a lesson from that myself, I don't really need to be told it again. (Interview, 2004)

Clearing a dancefloor is an occurrence that any self-respecting DJ wishes to avoid, and while DJs are largely trusted to play the necessary tracks to get people dancing, and indeed would not wish to be tainted with a reputation for playing to empty dancefloors, clubs may present DJs that they employ with a particular music policy that has to be adhered to, as a way of attempting to create a certain musical image for the club, as well as a way of attempting to ensure their dancefloors do not empty out. Yet given that these policies are often formulated and initiated by club management, rather than the DJs themselves, their appropriateness has to be questioned. Discussing the issue of club music policies, Alex Taylor highlights how such policies can negatively affect the consistency and variety of music on offer at a particular venue:

Occasionally you get people that try to tell you what to do. You can take it on the chin or get pissed off! Sometimes you work in a place, and even though they don't say anything to you, you can just feel what they want from the way that other DJs play, and I think it sucks when they do that. They'll get a lot of new DJs that are coming in wanting to play and that are willing to do what they want, and then you just end up with that same music over and over and over, and it just doesn't move away from that. (Interview, 2005)

Understandably, such policies often provoke negative reactions from the DJs themselves, in the sense that they are essentially being told how to conduct and perform their job. Paul Goodyear acknowledges the tension that can exist

between the requirements of club policies and the musical preferences of DJs when he explains how the commercial concerns that typically underpin these policies are often unrealistic and impossible to adhere to:

With the club, the first thing [club managers] think of is the dollar sign. The problem is that because they don't actually DJ, they tend to think that you can have eight hours of 'hands in the air' anthems, but you can't. You need to give the crowd an education and you need to play new music. You've got to take it through different moods. You can't just bang out eight hours of hits because, after two or three hours, [the crowd] are going to be worn out, and they'll want to go home... and after a while, the anthems no longer sound like an anthem. That's why I play one [track] they know, two they don't, because the next time that I do play something that they know, it's like, "Oh wow!", it does sound like a big record, it sounds like an anthem, and they'll go crazy to it. But after an hour of just hearing anthem after anthem, they don't sound like anthems any more. (Interview, 2005)

For a DJ such as Mark Murphy, who plays in less commercial venues, there is a greater degree of freedom in regard to the music he can play, and while his concern is still with getting as many people on to the dancefloor as possible, he sees clubs with music policies as completely detached from his style of DJing:

I don't think I'd play at something where there was a club music policy because that's not what I'm about. I have to play what I like to play, not what a club wants me to play. I don't think I'd do that, because that's a different form of DJing really. (Interview, 2005)

Yet as Paul Goodyear explains, despite this freedom that most DJs have in selecting their music, music policies are becoming an increasingly central part of club management practices:

This is a very interesting issue. [During] the last three or four years, it has been getting worse. Club owners and managers are now starting to enforce their own personal taste on the DJs, which is something that is really pissing me off. They started doing that to me at Arq. They wanted more commercial [tracks], more anthems, and that made me a very, very unhappy person, because when I do a nine to ten hour set I like to try to play something for everybody. I guess the way club owners and managers are at the moment, they just want to see their bars ticking over, the dollar signs... This new residency that I've just started at Phoenix, last Friday was the first night in probably three or four years where I've walked in, done an eight hour set, and played truly what I wanted to play. I kept the crowd there, we had four hundred people through, which is fantastic for Phoenix, it's only a small venue. I kept them there until 6am, and that's the first time that I've actually walked out and been totally satisfied with what I'd done and what I'd played. (Interview, 2005)

As Mark Alsop highlights, the type of music DJs play will always be governed by certain factors, such as audience demands, regardless of whether a club has a specific music policy or not, and he also explains how, while creating a particular style and niche can benefit a DJ in regard to establishing their name and image, as well as the name and image of the club they play at, at the same time it can have the negative effect of narrowing these audience demands, so that it becomes harder for the DJ to move outside of that particular style:

Club music policies are in place whether people think they are or not, whether they say they are or not. They are in place, and we are to abide by them. We can go outside the circle now and again, or the square, but we've basically got to work within the boundaries. They are set by the club, they are set by the punters, they are set by the advertising, and they are set by the other DJs. So, no matter how we might think we can walk into a club and play whatever we want, you can't. Paul [Goodyear] would have told you this with Arq. I said to him one night, "You must so enjoy this", and he was like, "Mark, it's really getting to me". I said, "Why? You can play anything", and he said to me, "No I can't, I have to play what they want". But he had created this. He had created this sound, this feeling, this whole thing, with the management pressing him, and when he tried to go a little bit outside the box, the audience wasn't as responsive as you'd hoped... (Interview, 2005)

Therefore, while a club may not have a specific music policy as such, the work of the DJs themselves can serve to create certain stylistic boundaries, or rather certain expectations within clubbing crowds as to the music they will hear at a particular club or from a particular DJ. Thus, Alsop believes that a DJ has to maintain a certain degree of variety in the sound that they play in order to prevent this stylistic narrowing from happening:

You've got to be dynamic, otherwise if you squash yourself in a box, people expect that, and you go outside the box, and they don't want to hear it, and you'll clear a dancefloor. So the more dynamic you can [be] in your sound, and the variety of music that you can play, people often have a little bit more time for you, because they know it's more of an experience than just a rehash. (ibid.)

Planning versus spontaneity

The DJ 'set' typically lasts for between one to four hours, although as Fikentscher observes, a DJ's allotted time can 'vary from "guest spots" which can be as short as one or two hours, to marathon shifts that can last in excess of twelve hours' (2000: 84). During this set, through a specific selection of music, the DJ constantly alters the mood of their crowd, creating peaks and troughs, Spring describing how, 'typically, a set begins softly and builds to an intense peak, then mellows out to bring the dancers down and signal the set's end' (2004: 50). These 'peaks' represent moments when the DJ works up a particular intensity in their crowd through the playing of certain tracks, which may incorporate some adjustment of sound through, for example, a cutting out, and then a reintroduction, of a bass line or a vocal line. In reference to these dancefloor peaks, Fikentscher notes how 'both DJs and dancers are aware of the significance of the moments, as the ultimate manifestation of the communication linking the booth with the floor' (2000: 41).

It is through this work of the DJ that the records played transcend their commodity status as simply purchased recordings, in the sense that, as Langlois explains, 'they are actively 'performed' by the DJ himself, allowing spontaneity, surprise and creativity' (1992: 236), while Brookman describes the centrality of the DJ set to the clubbing experience and to the consumption of music that occurs within the clubbing environment, with the DJ producing a 'continuous flow of music, often feeding off the response of the audience in choosing the tracks to play' (2001: 19). Klasco and Michael explain how,

It is a deejay's job to provide a continuous flow of music, so they always are exploring new ways to move from one record to another. The "seamless segue" was brought to the level of an art by early deejays, who went on to develop a whole repertoire of effects created by manipulation and interaction of turntables. (1992: 61)

In reference to the skills required for mixing, Thornton labels DJs 'turntable musicians', suggesting that they fashion entirely new music out of their 'raw material' of records (1995: 63). Theberge transfers this notion of musicality on to the equipment and technology used by DJs, suggesting that the skills and techniques developed by DJs have 'transformed the turntable, a quintessentially reproductive device, into a *productive* one; a musical instrument of the first order' (2001: 15; author's italics)⁵⁴.

In responding to the mood of the crowd (Langlois, 1992: 236), DJs need to be able to improvise and work spontaneously, and it is in this sense that DJ sets become performances, perhaps even more so than rock and pop concerts. A band or singer will often follow the structure of a set list, but it is extremely rare for a DJ to approach a set with a predetermined playing order, and indeed, such practice is frowned upon within DJ culture, and seen as contradicting the very notion of spontaneity that underpins DJing. As Goodwill explains in regard to his own DJing:

None of it is predetermined. There's probably [been] twice in the ten years I've been DJing [when] I've specifically mixed two records together because it sounded good the night before. I hate that stuff. There are DJs out there who play [like that], especially international DJs that play the same set everywhere they DJ. I've noticed it lots of times where I've been travelling and I've seen the same international [DJ] playing three cities in a week, and they play the same set... that's just cheating, it's like sending your twin brother into work for you. (Interview, 2004)

DJing is thus predicated on the immediacy of responding to the various different reactions of clubbers when they hear particular tracks. This dictates that a dance

⁵⁴ See Fikentscher (2000: 35-42) and Langlois (1992) for detailed descriptions of the technical and practical skills involved in DJing and mixing.

music event is a unique and unrepeatable happening, grounded very much in the moment in which it occurs, although as Goodwill highlights above, not all DJs work according to this principle.

The inherent spontaneity of a dance music event dictates that any degree of pre-planning is ultimately a pointless exercise, in that a DJ cannot predict exactly how a crowd will react to a particular track. This is not to say, however, that a DJ goes to perform a set without giving some prior consideration to the records they will play, for as John Devecchis explains, the exact style one chooses to focus on during a set is determined by the styles played by the other DJs on the line-up, and the venue at which one is playing:

[For example] I played at Sounds On Sunday⁵⁵ and warmed up for Jim Baron from Crazy Penis. Now I know that Jim Baron plays quite slow because I've seen him before, so I thought obviously I'm not going to play any big tunes, I'm warming up for an international, and I don't want to pump it too hard. I knew it was going to be a hard set because he plays with the pitch really far down... so I had to plan my set. I practised for four hours, I pulled out every track that I thought I wanted to play, put them in my box, along with a few tracks I knew worked at Sounds [On Sunday] from playing there... Now I've got an idea of what I'm going to play, but you don't always stick to it, you don't have an idea what you're going to play track for track, you just know these tracks are all kind of similar, and these next tracks all kind of lead on to them so I can put them together, and the next tracks lead on to them, and maybe pick out one every four or one every five and play them. That's how I generally structure my set, but it depends on who I'm playing before or

⁵⁵ Sounds On Sunday is a weekly dance event held at the Greenwood Hotel in North Sydney, and typically runs from 2pm until 10pm.

after... You have to have an idea, but you can't plan. (Interview, 2004)

Every DJ has to ensure there is a flow and coherency to the set, and thus, a DJ will, through the music played, vary the mood at several different points throughout the set, as Paul Goodyear highlights when he describes his own approach to DJing:

For my sets, I always warm up, I never go in and 'bang it', I always kind of start off at a mellower pace, pick it up to a peak, maybe drop it back down a little bit... [It depends] on the gig where I'm working at, but that's predominantly how I work... You have to cater for the crowd where you are playing. I always walk in and gauge the crowd. (Interview, 2005)

In addition to this, Goodyear explains how a certain degree of pre-planning enables him to impose a sense of musical flow and consistency upon his set through the concept of 'key mixing', lending his performances an audible coherency:

I tend to mix my records in key, not through the entire set, but I'll group up three or four tracks that might be in A minor, and it'll go maybe A minor to D minor to G minor, so I'll have three or four tracks that work really well harmonically, and are just like they're made for each other. I'll do really fantastic mixes like that, but if I feel on the night that that's not going to work, then I'll change it and I won't go down that path, but if I can, then I'll pick out different tracks and put them together, practise the mixes at home, and maybe practise some acapellas over the top of instrumentals and stuff like that, before I walk into a club. (ibid.)

Thus, most DJ sets can be described as spontaneous creations that are very much tied to the moment in which they are experienced, despite the fact that some degree of pre-planning is most likely to have been put into them. It is important, however, not to over-emphasise this notion of spontaneity, for a set is predetermined simply by the fact that a DJ can only take so much music to a particular performance. As Alan Thompson highlights, all DJs predetermine their sets through the music that they decide to take with them to a gig, while he also describes the processes that can determine what music he takes with him and what music he plays:

There's a great myth about that. Many DJs will say to you, "No, I don't know what I'm going to play before I go into a club". Yes, you don't know what you're going to play, but you've got a hundred records in your box, so you've already decided what you are going to play... I might not necessarily know what order I'm going to play them in, but I've already obviously predetermined what I'm going to play by putting those one hundred records in the box, and how that works is, for me anyway, from front to back, my newest record is at the front, my oldest record is at the back, and then every week I might add one or two records, or I'll think, "I've been playing that for ages now, I'll take that out", and that's how my box works. Any DJ that says, "I have no idea what I'm going to do" is an absolute liar... it's in what order you are going to play them [that you don't know]... If I've played on a Friday night, and I've mixed three records together and they've worked really, really, really well, I'll play those three records in that row the next night, there's no reason why I can't do that at another club. (Interview, 2005)

In contrast to this, Mark Alsop explains how complete spontaneity governs the approach he takes towards DJing, and he rejects the suggestion that a DJ predetermines their set through the music they take with them, arguing that he

has such an extensive collection of music that it makes it unnecessary to perform the same mix more than once:

[My set is] one hundred percent spontaneous. The only predetermined idea I take into a set with me is never to play a mix that I've done before, especially in your residencies. I mean, why do people want to hear the same stuff? I have thousands of tracks, and each week I add another twenty to twenty-five, so it's... an over-abundance of music, because I'm sourcing the world. It's the whole world I'm looking at on the Internet, so there are packages arriving daily at my house. If I remember a track worked really well together [with another track], I will not play it again until I do a major party, and then it will be performed there, because I know that it's something that is special, but to churn it out night after night, week after week, at my clubs, no. So that's the only way I approach work – one hundred percent spontaneity. (Interview, 2005)

The job of DJing

In seeking to establish a theory of the DJ, I have drawn on comments made by Brewster and Broughton in their discussion of the craft of the DJ, and the way they look at notions of consumption and production, and performance and promotion (2000: 21-22). I do believe, however, that it is easy to over-emphasise the importance and significance of the role of the DJ. Describing a DJ set as a 'performance' or a 'work of art', and the DJ as an 'artist', places the work of the DJ in an abstract interpretative framework, as opposed to exploring the realities of the role as an everyday job. As with any other job, DJing can have its less interesting, more mundane moments, and can quite easily become a matter of routine, rather than any kind of great artistic expression. This is most evident in the following quote from Goodwill, who, having been questioned in regard to whether, as a DJ who plays in commercial clubs, he gains more satisfaction from

playing to a greater number of people than DJs in the 'underground' who play to generally smaller crowds, describes how, while he does get more satisfaction,

... once you've [been DJing to large crowds] for a while, it doesn't make a difference... I remember playing at the Big Day Out⁵⁶ in front of about six thousand people, I was one of the earlier acts in the Boiler Room, and I only played for an hour, and forty minutes into my set I was bored... I was actually looking at my watch thinking "when's this thing over?"... I do think of it as a job, but at the same time I'm not working in a bank. (Interview, 2004)

The DJ as consumer

In purchasing music in much the same way as listeners and general consumers do, the role of the DJ involves the notion of consumption, but at the same time, in then presenting that music to an audience, there is a process of production at work, the DJ is 'making a product – the performance of the music contained in that record' (Brewster and Broughton, 2000: 21), or rather as Malbon prefers to see it, 'while the music is usually produced elsewhere, the DJs reproduce it through the use of technology' (1999: 82; author's italics).

Brookman notes that the role of the DJ as consumer is of relevance, 'since they are ultimately responsible for the purchase of music which is later consumed collectively by clubbers' (2001: 20), and thus, the DJ acts as a 'cultural gatekeeper', or 'cultural broker' (Fikentscher, 2000: 12), selecting music made by other DJs and producers, and presenting it to the wider clubbing public. Theberge suggests that we can 'consider the art of the deejay as founded, initially, upon a type of consumer knowledge – a knowledge of musical style based in judgement and connoisseurship' (2001: 15), while Negus describes how DJs are 'key taste makers and consumers' (1996: 63).

⁵⁶ The Big Day Out is an annual music festival held in Sydney towards the end of January that has a focus on contemporary popular music.

As such, clubbers actually experience 'consumption' as practised for them, or rather the process of consuming the records as a buyer is done for them, so that the consumption of the music for the DJ differs to the form of consumption that the clubbing crowd partake in, and is 'indicative of the experiential component of consumption for participants in dance cultures' (Brookman, 2001: 20).

The DJ as educator versus the DJ as entertainer

Alongside this consumption/production axis, the DJ also acts as both a performer, in that it is their responsibility to entertain the crowd in the club, and a promoter, playing new records when no one in the crowd may have heard them before (Frith, 2001: 41), a dual role acknowledged by Brewster and Broughton when they describe how, in their work, a DJ is 'entertaining an audience and at the same time urging [this audience] to go out and buy something – the records that [the DJ] uses for [their] performance' (2000: 21), while as Haslam suggests, a key skill of DJing is,

... obviously not just to drop the popular, well-known songs at the right part of the night, but to pick the right new releases, track down the obscurer tunes and newest imports, get hold of next month's big tune this month. (1997: 169)⁵⁷

When discussing how he perceives the role of the DJ, Goodwill acknowledges the balance that has to be achieved in the work of the commercial house music DJ between the playing of popular tracks and the playing of more obscure, lesser known tracks:

⁵⁷ While the DJ may have a responsibility to play new music to audiences as a way of encouraging them to purchase this music, finding out what the DJ is actually playing can be difficult. Asking the DJ for the title and artist of a particular track is not always as simple as it sounds, not only because of the high noise levels in clubs, but also because some DJs may not wish to be disturbed while playing. Other options include asking another clubber, or waiting until the next day and heading down to the local record store, which often leads to those dreaded words that are guaranteed to unnerve any record store worker, "Excuse me, I'm looking for that track that goes..."

The DJ is definitely there to entertain, that's my whole job... I feel a little bit of my role is to expose more of an interesting side to what's out there, I always try mix records together that people won't think I'll put together, and that's how I've gotten a bit of a name for myself, I think, is for not sticking to one style in a set... I think my role is to entertain, like any DJ, but I definitely put a large focus, personally, on breaking a new sound every time I DJ, or a new style, or a record that's a bit different and challenging the listener a little bit. (Interview, 2004)

Trent Rackus takes a similar approach towards his DJing, describing a specific example of a club at which he used to play to highlight the balance he believes a DJ should try to attain between entertaining and educating:

I'd go to Gas thinking I'm going to play [certain records] tonight, and I'm really going to try to stick to the programme, but I'd get there, and the DJ before me had been playing big records, so you try [to] pull it back and play something less commercial, and you start to lose the crowd, and you don't want to be playing to no one. At the end of the day, you're employed by these venues to entertain the audience, and I think you've got a duty to them, when you're charging them good money, to put on a performance, but it also comes down to what you can withstand yourself... there are certain records I could never, ever play, and I cringe when I hear other DJs play them. (Interview, 2004)

As Rackus goes on to explain, those DJs that choose to pursue a commercial path can serve to undermine the educational approach that some DJs try to take with their music:

I was playing at Homebar on Saturday night and I finished up at 1.30am, and I was listening to what they were playing in the main room [at Home], and it was diabolical. I heard three tracks in a row – Lee-Cabrera’s ‘Shake It’, Starsailor’s ‘Four To The Floor’, and Freestylers’ ‘Push Up’ – these are three of the most commercial records that I’d be almost embarrassed to play in a two-hour set, yet these people were just belting them out one after another. This is why people don’t become educated, and you find it harder to then go into a club and play cool music because people just don’t get it... not every other DJ that is playing alongside of you, that’s not their goal to educate people. (ibid.)

For Paul Goodyear, maintaining a balance between entertaining and educating is a central part of the process of establishing, and maintaining, a connection with the crowd on the dancefloor, as he explains while discussing the role of the DJ:

For me it’s always been a two-way street. I like to educate, but I also love to play for the crowd too. I’m not one of these snobby DJs that won’t play a Madonna track or a Kylie track. If that’s going to help my night work much better... if I give them something, then they’re going to be a lot more, I guess, open-minded, and let me be able to play brand new, cutting-edge stuff, and if it means playing a Madonna track, or whatever, to actually achieve that, then I’m very happy to do that. (Interview, 2005)

Through the responses outlined above, it can be seen how certain approaches to DJing have been ascribed a particular relevance and purpose. Educating a crowd has become linked to the playing of new music and to the musical tastes of the DJ, while entertaining is associated more with catering to the desires of a crowd and subsequent compromise on the part of the DJ. In his response to the

question of how he perceives the role of the DJ, Andrew James puts forward an emphasis on entertaining:

Five years ago I used to think that we've got to educate, but I'm over that now. What is educating? People go to school to get educated. Educating [by DJs] traditionally was trying to play deep, dark, emotional music that supposedly was going to help people have a great night, and not be so obvious... the music wasn't supposed to be so obvious. It was supposed to be an emotional journey, but you're not educating people by playing music like that. I think to say that you are trying to educate people as a DJ is wrong. You're there to play music to entertain the people that are in front of you, and if you're not playing what they like, then you're probably not doing your job well. (Interview, 2004)

Contrasting somewhat to this is the emphasis Paul Goodyear places on the actual concept of taking his crowd on a 'journey' during his DJ sets, and he defines, and describes what is involved in, this process when he states:

To me, a journey is going through all the different styles of music and the different emotions. There's nothing like being able to peak a crowd, and also make them feel kind of sad, and also make the mood dark and dirty, sleazy, sexy... I guess I try to put all those different emotions into the music. There's nothing worse than going out, I think, and hearing just a set of music that's all happy and that's all 'hands in air', or that's all dark and moody and doesn't go anywhere. Music is something that makes you feel something, and as a DJ I think it's my job to actually try to move people emotionally. So that's how I would sort of consider a journey to be, not only through the different styles, but [also] going through the different emotions. (Interview, 2005)

With its quick turnover of music, fashions and styles, dance music culture is very much based on contemporary happenings, with constant attention being given to new music, and with a 'strong emphasis upon the 'here and now'' (Malbon, 1999: 182). It is the job of the DJ to actively seek out this new music, and to 'educate' their audience with it, although the extent to which a DJ may be free to do this may be limited or constrained by the music policy of the club in which they play, as well as by the demands and expectations of their crowd, particularly if these are of a more commercial nature and orientation. The 'underground' is generally seen as a place in which new music can be given greater exposure and in which this music can be presented to a compliant audience, whereas commercially-minded audiences are seen as comparatively less adventurous and less experimental in their choice of venue and music, and demand, on the whole, music that is familiar and recognisable. As Goodwill explains, while one part of the DJ's role is to educate their crowd with new music and new styles, playing in mainstream clubs can restrict the extent to which a DJ is free to do this:

I think that because I play at such overground venues, I probably teach a little bit less than people in the underground do... but then there's this whole other argument that I always think about... because I do get guilty about playing in big clubs, I think to myself "is this cheap and easy?", and then I do kind of calm myself down by thinking that what I do is teach people that are just learning about dance music something more, whereas I think a lot of the underground has to do with preaching to the converted. Everyone has a role and a responsibility to educate a little bit, it's just a matter of where you decide to do it. (Interview, 2004)

Mike Bennett believes that his role as a DJ primarily is to educate, and he acknowledges how this perspective is perhaps a result of his extensive DJing

experience, and suggests that his emphasis on educating actually provides a more entertaining and rewarding clubbing experience:

I'm there to educate, but I've been DJing for fifteen years, whereas if you had asked me that maybe ten years ago, I would have been an entertainer, but I feel now that I'm an educator... and always doing something different in my sets. I just think it's really important for the DJ to do that because the punters aren't going to find out any other way, unless the DJs give them something different, [otherwise] they just get bombarded with the same old crap week in, week out. It's not very entertaining, is it? (Interview, 2005)

Contrasting to this perspective is Alan Thompson's belief that his role as a DJ primarily involves entertaining, and as he highlights, there is a skewed perception within DJ culture of the value of taking such an approach, a perception which he himself dismisses:

I tend to play the more uplifting, vocal-end of house music. I'm not afraid to play big tunes. A lot of DJs are a bit fussy about that, [but] I'm not. I believe a good record is a good record no matter what. My job as a DJ is to entertain, and therefore I try to do that with my music... Educating is a small part of what I do. If it was a pie, it would probably be about twenty percent... At the end of the day, these people have paid up to fifty bucks to come into a club, all they want to do is have fun, and my job is to make sure that they have fun. I educate them in a certain way, of course, by introducing new music, and that's how the music gets popular. So the first time you are playing a record to anybody, that is education... There are a certain amount of DJs that won't play records that are necessarily big at the time or they would consider to be cheesy because they are popular, and therefore would only play totally underground, and

they call that educating. I call that being up your own arse, to be honest! It's a fine balance. (Interview, 2005)

We can identify multiple roles for the DJ, such as promoter, educator and consumer of new music, but these are all subsumed under the DJ's main role as entertainer. While such an explanation is perhaps not as interesting for the purposes of theorisation, the underlying principle that informs the everyday work of all DJs is to entertain, and thus I am led to conclude that interpretations that emphasise 'shamanic' or 'tribal' tendencies in relation to DJ practice are actually over-mythologising the role of the DJ, and in the process elevate it to a higher theoretical plane that only diverts attention away from the notion of entertainment. Emphasising this notion, Illya acknowledges how, as a paid job, his DJing involves a certain degree of compromise in regard to the kind of music he can play for a crowd, and how, although he can try to educate, his role is primarily to entertain this crowd, while he also makes reference to how some DJs make a specific choice to take more of an educational approach in their work, which can often serve to reduce their popularity with clubbers:

I think [DJing is] a bit of both, it's about compromise. I'm paid to entertain a crowd. I'm paid to make people dance. It's also important to educate them at the same time. It's your job... compromise, that's what it's all about... People like Simon Caldwell and Ken Cloud [Sydney DJs], mad DJs... Simon used to play everywhere, a lot of US house, girly vocals... he plays funk and tech-house now... I think that because they have gone down that road, even though it was probably personal choice... that is just sort of narrowing yourself and your options. It's a cool thing to do, but I like to entertain people, so I'll compromise. I love to see people having fun, dancing, and enjoying the music I'm playing. (Interview, 2004)

It is clear that quasi-spiritual references to the DJ as 'shaman' must be rejected in favour of an understanding that is more firmly rooted in the realities of everyday life, and more specifically, in the market economy nature of contemporary dance music culture. The DJ is paid to do a job, this job being to entertain a crowd, an essential part of which is playing the right type of music to actually attract this crowd into the club in the first place. If a DJ fails to draw a crowd, then they are failing in their role to entertain. Most DJs in the Sydney scene agree that there is a certain level of compromise involved in their work, and they mark a distinction between the local DJs who are there essentially to entertain, and therefore have to structure their sets in order to cater for commercial crowds, and the international DJs who attract clubbers purely through their status within dance culture, and who, while also having a responsibility to entertain, can incorporate more of an 'educational' sensibility into their DJing through the playing of new and unfamiliar music. Adam Jesse explains how, for local DJs like himself, the emphasis is on entertaining the crowd, and that it is only the internationally-known DJs who really have the opportunity to educate their audience, while he also acknowledges a difference between the underground and the commercial scenes that he perceives as existing:

With DJs like us, we're doing what we can to get the gigs, whereas if you're at the level like Sasha, John Digweed or Paul Oakenfold, then you're educating. We need to push what sound works so we get more work... If you're booked to play a commercial nightclub, you can't go in there and try to educate people playing what you want to play, because the people that go to those clubs haven't gone there for that sort of reason. They've gone to the club to socialise. You have to keep it exciting and familiar, and play what people know, but you go to an underground club where people have gone to that club specifically to hear underground house music, you turn around and play a cheesy commercial set, it's

wrong, they won't want to hear that, they've gone there for a specific reason. (Interview, 2004)

Similarly, in reply to having been asked about how he perceives the role of the DJ and the extent to which a DJ can attempt to educate a crowd, Con makes a distinction between underground dance culture and the commercial dance scene, acknowledging how, with his DJing, he is paid to do a job and not to push his own ideas of what the crowd should be listening to:

You can ask this question [about the role of the DJ] to a hundred DJs and probably get a different answer. I'm a little bit older, and I'd say I'm there to do the job that I'm getting paid to do. I could say I'm there to educate the crowd, but a lot of the clubs that I work at are commercial venues, and if you look at some of the big clubs like Tank and Home, they've all gone commercial as well. So how can you say you are there to educate the crowd? DJing would be fantastic if we could play at these small little venues and play what we want to play and get paid. That would be great, but it just doesn't happen, at all. We're there to do a job for the venue. It's a catch-22, we've got to try to stay on that border of mainstream and underground, to play the odd new track and also throw in that commercial track as well, just to actually keep the floor going. (Interview, 2005)

The demands of a mainstream crowd thus dictate that, to maintain a full dancefloor, a DJ has to incorporate a commercial sound within their style of DJing, which subsequently places limitations on the extent to which the DJ can engage in education. Yet linking this idea of education and gaining knowledge of new dance music solely to the role of the DJ ignores the knowledge that clubbers themselves acquire and possess, for as Con goes on to explain, the whole idea

of a DJ being able to educate is, in the contemporary dance scene, with its rapid filtering of music between media and consumers, largely idealistic:

These days, people are just as educated as we are with music because they've got access to it, even before we do. Radio stations play music before we even get it these days, whereas five or ten years ago it was different, the DJ used to play it out first and then the radio station would pick it up, but now it has actually turned around. (ibid.)

Residencies and guest-spots

Within dance culture, there are two specific ways in which DJs can be employed at clubs and dance events, and thus a distinction can be made between two types of DJs, one being the 'resident DJ', which refers to a DJ who will play regularly at a particular club, and the other being the 'guest DJ', which, as the name implies, refers to a DJ making an appearance at a club or an event they do not usually play at. As local dance scenes have become infused with an increased global perspective, the concept of guest DJs has become more prominent, with those DJs who are recognised as the culture's main exponents able to travel to various countries and draw sizeable crowds, in much the same way as rock bands engage in world tours. Yet this increased emphasis on guest DJs has brought about a lessening in the significance of resident DJs, and for a scene such as the one in Sydney that places such a heavy emphasis on imported dance culture, this has had a negative effect on the local DJs and their attempts to establish residencies at particular clubs in the city. All the pioneering DJs of dance culture came to prominence through their residencies, and such performances are seen as the most musically valuable, in that DJs can establish a certain relationship with a regular crowd, allowing for a more varied and intense exploration of dance music. While there is a certain idealism inherent within such a view, the erosion of the relevance of residencies within the perceptions of clubbers, and their subsequent preferences for seeing guest DJs, brings about

significant alterations to the interaction that occurs between DJs and crowds, and thus also to the experiences that these crowds have of dance culture.

The differences between these two types of DJing were a key concern of the interviews conducted for this thesis, with most DJs describing how being a resident allows one to establish a rapport with the crowd, which can allow for a more adventurous approach in the styles that one may incorporate into a set, with the crowd being more willing to accept experimentation, and the crowd ultimately forming an affinity with the DJ if they hear them play regularly. Such terms as 'trust', 'familiarity' and 'taste' were employed by the DJs when discussing this issue. In contrast to this, guest-spots demand that the DJ has to prove themselves at that very moment in time, to a crowd that will often have high expectations, and so a more 'safe', more commercial, and less experimental set will often be performed. This is an issue highlighted by Paul Goodyear when he outlines his own preference for residencies over guest-spots:

These days, most of the gigs that I do are regular gigs, so I know the crowd from the moment that I walk in... Residencies have always been very important to me. I've had a number of residencies over the years. A residency gives you the ability to build a night and take it on a journey, whereas [with] a guest-spot you're kind of in [for] two or three hours, the promoter expects you to bang out the hits, and you can't be incredibly adventurous, people just want to hear the hits basically. So I don't really like doing guest-spots, I prefer to have a residency... I love the idea of taking people on a journey. I had a residency that went for five and a half years at Arq, every Saturday night, where I'd play anywhere between nine and twelve hours a night. That was taking them on a journey, it was great, and unfortunately those residencies are pretty hard to come by now. (Interview, 2005)

For John Devecchis, it is familiarity with the clubbing crowd that makes residencies more appealing than guest-spots, in that there is less of a risk involved in playing to a crowd who are familiar with your particular style of DJing:

I prefer being a resident... I'd rather have a solid residency, because you know your crowd, you know what works, you know what tracks can get you out of jail if you're having a bad night. If you're an international or a guest DJ, you play in front of a different crowd each time you play, and you don't really know how the night is going to go before[hand]... If I go to play a guest-spot somewhere else, I don't know what crowd we are going to have, I don't know if they've ever heard me play before, and it's a lot harder. I'd rather have the stability of a residency than be a jet-setter who plays all different gigs, especially with the music I play, which isn't quite as accessible as a lot of DJs who play guest-spots. I find that, unless you're an international with a good reputation in an underground scene, if you play guest sets, you've got to be willing to play quite commercial, because you never know what you're going to have to do to get the people dancing. (Interview, 2004)

As there are different demands and expectations involved in these two types of DJing, it follows that a different set of skills is required for each. As Goodwill explains, the skill and knowledge required of a resident DJ differ markedly from the skill and knowledge required of a guest DJ, in that the two roles necessitate contrasting approaches and techniques:

Residencies are much more difficult gigs to do, all the top guest DJs will always say that as well. I'm a much better resident than I am a guest DJ. I've been resident at Onelove [sic] in Melbourne for two years now and I believe that I've only just started getting good

in the last six months... I feel like a resident now. It's a different sensibility. It's easier to be a guest DJ – you turn up to the club, everyone's got high expectations of you, and you smash it out, it's definitely easier, whereas as a resident, you have to know the room, and you have to know what the kid in the red shirt asked for last week. If you're a guest DJ, there's a lot more 'rock star' mentality to it. Residents have to work harder, and I much more enjoy being a resident DJ than I do a guest one. (Interview, 2004)

In his assessment of the techniques of performance employed in DJ culture, Langlois notes how, 'DJs try to balance new material with better known records to keep the audience in a familiar but still novel musical environment' (1992: 233). In reference to the differences between residencies and guest-spots, Con highlights the issue of crowd expectations and musical familiarity, explaining how guest-spots can provide DJs with an opportunity to play different material to what they may usually play at their residencies, and also how the immediacy of guest-spots often places more focus and pressure on the DJ:

Being a resident, obviously you've got to stick to a particular formula that you might have for that venue, because it's a week in, week out thing. If you're a guest somewhere else, and you might DJ for a couple of hours, you can play what you want, because you might only be a guest once every few months, and you can actually play more underground stuff if you're a guest, rather than the mainstream stuff that you might play at your residency. That's what the difference is... As a guest, obviously there's a little bit more focus because they are usually only short sets, rather than a four or five hour slog at a club. It might be a one or two hour set, so obviously you've got to make an impact from the time you start to the time you finish. (Interview, 2005)

This description makes evident the contrasts that exist between the opinions of DJs regarding residences and guest-spots, in that while some DJs regard the latter as requiring a greater degree of musical commerciality, Con suggests that these same guest-spots actually provide the DJ with a greater amount of artistic freedom, and so, at least for Con, limitations are to be found in residencies. Alan Thompson also references the increased focus that guest-spots can typically place on a DJ because of the immediate expectations of the crowd, and in addition, he also highlights the rapport that can be established with a crowd through residencies, and the different atmosphere this can create:

With a residency, of course, you've built up your own sound within that club. You build up your own following... with Trade and DTPM, I was at both of them for over ten years, and you build a loyal crowd who come to see you week in, week out. They get to know the records that you play, much more than a guest-slot. It's much more of a friendlier thing, and when I buy records I think to myself, "Well this'll go down well at so-and-so because I'm a resident and they will love it", but it might not necessarily work at a guest-slot... With the guest-slot, normally you're headlining, I certainly do when I'm the guest DJ. Therefore, not necessarily the pressure, but the emphasis on you more is to be bigger than life, whereas in my residencies I can sort of lay back a little bit from that pressure and get on with the job in hand. (Interview, 2005)

As well as these different approaches to DJing that residencies and guest-spots demand, the two categories can also affect the remuneration a DJ receives, as Trent Cooper explains:

You get paid more when you are a guest DJ, as opposed to a resident, because you are getting more work being a resident. The definition of a resident is three or more shifts in a month. You have

to play three out of four weeks to be a resident. A lot of residents in Sydney aren't residents, they just say they are. Two shifts a month isn't a residency, that's a guest-spot, so technically you should be getting paid more, but the clubs like to brand people as residents because they get out of paying more money. (Interview, 2004)

DJs as star figures and DJs as marketing tools

Along with the development of the concept of guest-spots has come the concept of the 'superstar DJ'. An initial problem for record companies in marketing and selling dance music was the lack of any 'star' figure that could be linked to the music and used to sell it as a product, but by placing the DJ at the forefront of the culture, this problem was successfully negotiated, and the DJ became the new star of popular music culture. As Bidder observes, 'global icons, DJs are now house music's lavishly marketed figureheads' (2001: 238). Thus, dance culture has actually incorporated the 'star system' of rock and pop culture into its promotional techniques, rather than providing a radical break from the rock tradition as is often suggested, Park and Northwood believing, somewhat idealistically, that 'the facelessness of techno has destroyed the idol-worshipping syndrome of the overblown rock personality... the reason for purchasing [dance music] is less image-driven' (1996: 2). Similarly, Martin misinterprets dance culture as signifying a rejection of the star performer/audience division inherent within rock and pop culture, suggesting that 'techno decenters the subject, refusing the pop star or the cultural icon as the glorified subject' (1999: 93), and Tagg makes a misjudgement through his observation that, in rave culture, 'there is no guitar hero or rock star or corresponding musical-structural figures to identify with' (1994: 219).

Contradicting all these observations and suggestions is the way dance music has actually sustained the notion of the 'star system', as Reynolds highlights when he states, 'far from dismantling the rock star system in favour of a radically

democratic anonymity, dance culture has shifted the impulse to worship onto the DJ-as-virtuoso' (1999: 275), while Bennett explains how,

... rather than discarding the conventions of rock performance, dance music simply reworks such conventions with the DJ assuming something of the status, prestige and critical acclaim once reserved for rock artists. (2001: 121)

Of late, the club environment has edged ever more closely to a 'rock concert' layout, with the DJ positioned on a raised platform and the crowd facing towards them, Garratt describing how in recent years, 'more and more clubbers began to dance facing the DJ, watching the show' (1999: 303), which contrasts to Langlois's observation from seven years earlier that describes how 'performing DJs are usually barely visible... the mixing booth is often out of sight' (1992: 233). Siokou, in her article on rave culture, describes how she observed that 'the ravers all dance facing the DJ' (2002: 13), and in his study of rave culture, Weber observes that 'Toronto ravers generally face the DJ in parallel rows while they are dancing' (1999: 333). In making the DJ the focus of the dance event, Haslam believes that dance culture 'has made the same mistakes as rock music; it's become bloated with self-important stars, the DJ superstars... it wasn't meant to be this way' (2001: 209), while Brewster and Broughton suggest that club culture 'was founded on the idea that the clubbers are the stars, not the guy who fiddles with the record player' (2000: 437). As Stephen Allkins explains, the focus on the DJ as a performer or a star has only developed in recent years, and he believes that this has resulted in clubbing crowds failing to appreciate the significance of themselves, their interaction, and their own experiences with each other, during the practice of dancing:

I don't see DJing as a performance. I'm working. The focus on the DJ, with everyone facing the DJ, is ridiculous. At the Paradise Garage, do you really think that they all stood there looking at the

DJ? He'd have been insulted if they had done that. You are supposed to be dancing. So you think if you don't look at him he's going to fall over and die? Is he going to miss the next mix? Is he going to be offended? Worshipping is when two people actually face each other and dance because the music you are playing has made them do that. What does [focusing on the DJ] do? You are not dancing. You are looking straight at a DJ. You are supposed to be dancing. It's just stupid... but how exciting can the music be if you are just looking at somebody? (Interview, 2005)

There has always been an underlying ideology in dance culture that emphasises the importance of the crowd rather than a single figure or group, and as such, it is this ideology that differentiates dance culture from rock culture, although this ideology has been somewhat overlooked in recent years with the development of the 'superstar DJ' concept. Like Allkins, Paul Goodyear makes reference to the history of club culture to explain how he believes the current emphasis and focus on the DJ is somewhat extreme and unnecessary:

People used to just dance amongst themselves. Personally, I can't stand all that facing the DJ and worshipping the DJ. [In] the scene that I grew up in, people would just go out and dance by themselves. There would be guys out on the floor that would go out there for six, seven or eight hours at a time, and not even really have a dancing partner. They would be out there in their own world, having an absolute hoot, and so into the music. I suppose whenever I go along to a club and I see everyone's attention on the DJ... I've been there myself, where I've had everyone staring at me while I'm spinning, and I actually find it really uncomfortable. It's like, "Turn around, dance amongst yourselves would you?". So the whole worshipping the DJ thing, I really don't like. (Interview, 2005)

Yet not all DJs perceive their role as having been misinterpreted in such a way, and indeed, given that the relationship between a DJ and a crowd is one of the most important factors in any dance event, it would seem logical to suggest that the crowd need to direct some attention towards the DJ. While he admits that there may be a slight over-emphasis on the DJ, Alan Thompson believes that clubbing audiences have to focus on the DJ in order to establish the connection and interaction between crowd and DJ that are so essential to the success of a night:

If you want that interaction with the DJ then you've got to be looking at them, you can't have your back to them... It's a fine balance of not seeing it as a pop concert rather than a DJ set. You do see it at festivals for instance, [where] the whole crowd will just face the DJ, and they're not necessarily getting into the music, but that's probably what I would call premier league DJing, where you could probably play a Tom and Jerry tune, and they would scream and shout because of who you are and where you are. In a club environment, I just think that if you've got the front maybe fifty people facing the booth, who happen to be into their music and the DJ, then cool, and I think the rest of the club will feed off that.

(Interview, 2005)

Yet despite this necessary element of focus, perceptions of 'superstar DJs' only serve to establish hierarchical notions of cultural value and worth, that also have their roots in rock and pop culture, with artists and bands being placed in varying positions of cultural credibility, through discourses that emphasise musical achievement in relation to works by both the artist in question and other artists of a similar style. Yet with dance culture's lack of established bodies of work by particular artists that are used as continual reference points, its emphasis on progression, and the way it values 'the redirective and the novel over the stable and canonical' (Straw, 1991: 385), the inappropriateness of these hierarchical

divisions becomes apparent. In the same way that subculture theory does not accommodate the fluid and shifting nature of dance music scenes, the application of methods of 'star construction' from rock and pop culture devalue both dance music, and its creators and performers. The emphasis shifts from a concern with the music and the atmosphere created through the DJ's performance of this music, to a focus on the DJ as a brand, or rather as a signifier of a particular style of music, in that a DJ will typically play one particular style or sub-genre of dance music, and thus, becomes 'linked' or 'aligned' to one specific sound, which in turn acts as a marketing tool in attracting clubbers to a night or an event.

As Hesmondhalgh notes in his discussion of the operational logics of the British dance music industry, the development of a star system has allowed dance culture to be integrated within the popular music industry as a whole, in that 'groups and artists act as brand names for music' (1998: 247). Yet despite the prevalence of this 'process of categorisation' within contemporary dance culture whereby a DJ becomes linked to, and associated with, a particular style of dance music, some DJs make an effort to avoid such categorisation so as not to be limited and restricted in the kind of music and kind of venues they can play. Stephen Allkins is one such DJ, as he explains:

I don't fit into any [particular] scene because I don't play one style of music. I play lots of styles. I like lots of different things. I think DJing needs a sense of humour and a sense of irony that most people don't have, so I don't fit into 'a' scene. I am a gay DJ who plays straight venues. I play rock records in the middle of my sets. I don't fit into one 'thing'. I'm what a real DJ should be... I have a very distinct sense of my own musical style I guess, which is crossing-over whatever you want and then making it your own.
(Interview, 2005)

Similarly, John Wall approaches his DJing with an emphasis on musical variety, and during his career he has played sets of various different styles, and as he highlights, such variety often goes against the expectations of clubbing audiences that DJs only play one particular style of music:

For a long time I was doing my house set and my breaks set, like from '96 onwards when we started doing specialised breaks nights, which I felt we needed to do rather than just including it amongst other things, because we needed to push that sound, so I'd be doing a breaks set one night and then a house set another night, and even after I'd been doing that for seven years, every time I was playing breaks at least one person would come up to me and say, "Shit, have you started playing breaks instead of house?", and I was like, "No, no. I've always played both", and then every time I was playing house, it was, "Oh, when did you start playing house? You're a breaks DJ". You wouldn't think it would be that hard, but people get confused because they think you should just be doing one thing. (Interview, 2005)

This chapter has explored DJ culture in Sydney through detailed consideration of the thoughts and perspectives of some of the DJs involved in the scene regarding their work and practices. While the issues discussed relate to DJ culture in a general sense, the responses outlined above situate these issues firmly within the specific context of the Sydney dance scene. This has provided a detailed picture of the work that underpins dance culture in the city, and more generally, goes some way towards compensating for the lack of attention the DJ has been given in studies of dance music scenes and dance music culture.

It has been my aim to sketch an image of the city's dance scene through the words of the DJs involved in it. This dictates that some of the observations and interpretations are contextually specific, yet at the same time, the global nature of

DJing, and indeed dance culture itself, means that these observations and interpretations can be drawn out and applied on a wider geographical scale, and thus, it is in this sense that this study transcends its specific focus on Sydney and can be seen as relevant to dance scenes elsewhere in the world. Club music policies, residencies and guest-spots, and the tension between the role of the DJ as an educator and the role of the DJ as an entertainer, are all issues that, when discussed by DJs who work within the Sydney scene, shed light on the workings that underpin dance culture in the city, yet they are also issues that inform dance scenes anywhere in the world.

The DJs in Sydney work within a scene that is constrained and limited by the comparatively small population of the city. This not only affects regularity of work, but it also dictates that dance culture in the city itself, and in Australia as a whole, lacks the industry infrastructure that has allowed scenes in Europe and America to develop as key sites of development and progression in dance music. This has subsequently meant that dance culture in Australia has developed with a reliance on the music, DJs, media and fashions of dance scenes overseas, and thus, DJs in Sydney play with music that is most typically foreign in origin. As a comparatively small scene, with a dependence on imported music, it can be argued that DJs in Sydney are more constrained by market demands, in that in order to maintain a level of popularity that generates sustained employment, they have to cater more to crowd expectations than DJs in other territories where there are more expansive and diverse dance scenes, and where it is financially possible to engage in experimentation. This is not to say that Sydney does not have a varied dance scene, but rather that the commercial concerns that are central to the scene and its continued existence do not accommodate the development of radical and experimental sub-scenes, and thus prevent the Sydney scene from developing in the same way as dance scenes in places such as Detroit, Chicago and Manchester have developed.

With these commercial concerns comes a lessening of the DJ's role as an educator, and more of a focus on the DJ as an entertainer. If large clubbing crowds are gained through the playing of particular, or rather popular, tracks, then it follows that DJs who play such tracks will be employed by clubs to cater to such crowds. If clubs wish to pursue such a commercial path even further, then club music policies will often be employed, which disrupts and constrains the freedom of choice a DJ may have in selecting their music. Yet it is largely idealistic to suggest that all DJs are free to play whatever music they want, and that all DJs can approach their work with the sole aim of educating a crowd with new and unfamiliar music. All DJs, regardless of their fame and stature within dance culture, have to keep in mind the expectations of their crowd during any one set.

As dance culture has developed into a mainstream phenomenon, the development of the concept of the superstar DJ has helped to position the DJ at the forefront of the culture, and it can be argued that this has had a direct impact on the Sydney dance scene, negatively affecting the role and significance of the local DJs. As DJs from Europe and America have been granted a degree of significance by those within global dance culture, DJs in Sydney have been reduced to a supporting role. As such, it is the international DJs who are permitted, by clubbing crowds in the city, a greater degree of freedom in the music that they play, and can thus take an approach that focuses more on new music, so that international DJs become ascribed a certain educational value by clubbers in the Sydney scene, often at the expense of the local DJs, who are subsequently seen more as entertainers, and less as promoters of new music.

Yet to reduce the workings of DJ culture in Sydney to such a simple dichotomy dismisses the very diversity that gives shape to the city's dance scene. As the different responses outlined in this chapter suggest, there are many distinct and divergent understandings of the nature of DJing work, dictating that it would be inappropriate to attempt to arrive at one defined and specific interpretation of DJ

practice as it relates to the Sydney dance scene. Whether in regard to preferences for residencies or guest-spots, or understandings of educating and entertaining, or approaches in planning a DJ set, every DJ has a different interpretation of the issues that shape and define their job. Thus, in interpreting and theorising DJ culture, a certain degree of fluidity has to be incorporated into the arguments and judgements that are subsequently formed. The approach each DJ takes to their work is defined by a number of factors, and these include the geographical location in which they are playing, the type of club at which they are playing, the type of crowd which they are playing to, the style of music they generally play, and their status and popularity within the scene in which they are playing.

Understanding the work of particular DJs in a particular scene helps to generate a more informed and detailed understanding of that scene itself. Through exploring the ways in which certain DJs in Sydney interpret their work, we can see how these DJs interpret their role within the city's dance scene, and the way they perceive and understand this scene. Some DJs see their work as part of the mainstream, and have no qualms about describing themselves as such, while other DJs are more dubious and cynical of this mainstream, preferring to see their style of DJing as more 'underground' in nature. With this comes a disparity in the understanding these DJs have of educating and entertaining their audiences, and thus it would seem that DJs who are comfortable working within the mainstream are also comfortable defining their role as 'entertainers', while those DJs who see their work as taking place outside of the mainstream identify more readily with 'educating'. To reduce these DJs and their work to such a simplistic binary categorisation, however, fails to acknowledge the degree of crossover that occurs in all levels of professional DJing. A DJ who plays in mainstream clubs can still incorporate a degree of education into their sets, while a DJ who plays at venues deemed as 'underground' still has to ensure they hold the attention of their audience through playing accessible music.

With this in mind, we should be wary of uncritically using terms such as 'mainstream' and 'underground', and acknowledge that in using these terms to define specific categories, we are only causing further problems for the definition and description of dance music scenes. In any one scene, the mainstream and the underground do not exist in isolation, but rather they feed off and into each other, with both dependent on new and obscure music, and both dependent on commercial success, albeit to varying degrees. The crossover that occurs between the two makes it impossible to ascribe specific boundaries and definitions to them, and thus, while they are frequently used terms within the discourse of dance scenes, we need to begin working towards an interrogation of their validity for contemporary dance culture.

The following chapter will pursue this questioning of the language of dance culture, and will continue to explore club culture in Sydney from the perspective of the DJ, but will move on from the focus on the role and work of the DJ to explore the exact nature of dance music and dance scenes, looking specifically at the short-term logic that dominates dance culture, with its quick turnover of music and fashions. Discussion of this issue will generate a more informed understanding of the way dance culture operates both locally and globally, and of the way DJs shape the content of their sets in order to accommodate this quick turnover of music, while it will also help to situate contemporary dance culture within a wider historical framework. As a form of popular music that is heavily reliant on technology for its creation, production and consumption, it follows that dance music will always be intrinsically linked to progression and development, and this has impacted upon the speed at which particular dance tracks become popular. Indeed, the trajectory of popularity that these tracks are typically described as following, as in moving from the 'underground' to the 'mainstream', raises again the issue of language and definition.

As well as this focus on the music, attention will also be given to the technology DJs utilise to play this music during their sets. Paralleling the quick turnover of

music are the continual technological developments that shape and define dance culture, with DJs and dance music producers employing the latest machines and formats, and in the process altering the fundamental skills required for their craft. The past five years have seen DJs shift away from the use of vinyl as the preferred format on which to play music during their sets, with increasing use being made of CDs, as well as laptop computers. Given that vinyl was, and to a certain extent still is, such an ingrained part of dance culture, there have been certain authenticity issues that DJs have had to overcome as part of this technological change. The fundamental skills of DJing were established through the use of vinyl, and thus, if there is a change to the use of a format other than vinyl, then there are also changes to these fundamental skills. As should become clear during the next chapter, there are contrasting opinions within DJ culture as to the value of these changes and the effect these changes are having on the definition of DJing, with some DJs looking to the future and advocating the use of modern technology, and other DJs adhering to the tradition of their craft and remaining very much in favour of vinyl.

Working through these issues will help to construct a more informed and detailed interpretation of contemporary dance culture as it relates to DJ practice. If a basic understanding and appreciation of the role of the DJ is established, then one can begin to work towards formulating an interpretative framework that can be applied to dance scenes in any location, a framework that goes beyond the traditional focus on clubbing audiences, and shifts focus on to the key cultural figure of dance music. At the same time, this discussion can be situated within the specific context of Sydney, in that analysing the opinions of those DJs who work within the Sydney scene allows for a deeper understanding of the practices that create and shape dance culture in the city.

In regard to the use of technology, local DJs have had to negotiate the emphasis that is placed on international DJs, in that these internationals are positioned as the leaders in their field, and thus, any attempts by local DJs to incorporate a

degree of radicalism into their sets, either through the music played or the format on which this music is played, are often dismissed until they have been validated by the actions of an international DJ. As such, for those in the Sydney scene, international DJs become the bearers of dance culture's authenticities, and so, while some of the local DJs may have been some of the first DJs in the world to incorporate the use of CDs into their sets, it would have taken the use of CDs by several internationals to authenticate such practice within the perceptions of clubbers in Sydney.

CHAPTER FIVE – ‘YOU’RE NOT A REAL DJ UNLESS YOU PLAY VINYL’ – TECHNOLOGY AND FORMATS – THE PROGRESSION OF DANCE MUSIC AND DJ CULTURE

As a form of popular music that is heavily reliant on technology for its production, dance music is tied very much to the period of its creation, and an oft cited reason for the quick turnover of dance music is that some of it dates rather rapidly. Certain technological advancements facilitated the birth of house music, with producers making use of sequencers, samplers, drum machines and synthesizers, Osborne describing how samplers ‘revolutionised record production, allowing producers to turn out releasable records from their bedrooms’ (1999: 258), while Hemment acknowledges how ‘increased access to cheap technology and a pervading ethos of do-it-yourself have given birth to a new generation of sonic artists’ (1997: 37)⁵⁸. Kempster makes a wider historical comparison, noting how,

Just as the birth of rock ‘n’ roll was inextricably linked with the arrival of the electric guitar, house music would have never happened without the emergence of affordable electronic instruments. The synthesizer, drum machine and sequencer were the tools with which house and techno musicians fashioned a new genre of music, and the experimentation which these tools encouraged resulted in a fresh and new type of sound experience.
(1996: 155)

⁵⁸ Some of the machines that have become acknowledged as central to the development of dance music include the Roland TR-808 drum unit and the Roland TB-303 bass unit. See Reynolds (1998: 24-27) for a discussion of the centrality of the TB-303 to dance culture; Kempster (1996: 155-205) for descriptive outlines of several of the machines that have been important in the production of dance music; and Osborne (1999: 3-4) for an outline of the different and contrasting stories, which have since become part of dance culture mythology, concerning the way in which the TB-303 came to be linked to acid house music, and (ibid: 253-254) for a description of the Roland machines.

The importance of these machines to the development and progression of dance culture acts as a reflection of how, as Shuker explains, 'new recording technologies have opened up new creative possibilities, and underpinned the emergence of new genres' (2002: 281), and as Barr notes, 'the story of house music is, in many ways, inseparable of that of the technology which gave birth to it' (quoted in Kempster, 1996: 7)⁵⁹.

The turntable

Despite the prevalence of machines such as samplers and drum machines within dance music (or rather the prevalence of their *sounds*, for the machines themselves are no longer in production, dance music producers today using software versions instead (Osborne, 1999: 254)), it is the turntable that has become the central 'tool' of the DJ and that has achieved a wide degree of cultural recognition, in much the same way as the electric guitar is perceived as being integral to rock music culture. Theberge explains how, 'if there is any instrument that has achieved both the musical and the iconic status of the guitar in dance music, it is the turntable' (2001: 15), while Brewster and Broughton describe the DJ as 'the guitar hero for the end of the century' (2000: 423). The turntable of choice for most, if not all, DJs is the Technics SL-1200, which, as Osborne notes, has achieved seminal status within dance culture, 'largely because of the unfussy functionalism of its design' (1999: 289), while in his study of New York dance culture, Fikentscher observes how most of the city's clubs and DJ record stores have 1200s installed, describing how they have become 'an industry standard since their introduction in the early 1980s' (2000: 36). There are other turntables on the market, but the Technics model (and variations on it) has achieved such dominance that it is widely regarded as the 'industry standard', which is reflected in the way Broughton and Brewster, in their text on how to DJ, devote a couple of paragraphs to explaining why any self-respecting DJ should have a pair of Technics turntables, noting that,

⁵⁹ See Tagg (1994: 214) who outlines the importance the sampler has for producers of dance music; and Theberge (1999: 218-221) for a discussion of some of the aesthetic and theoretical issues and debates raised by the practice of sampling.

A concert pianist expects a Steinway; a DJ expects Technics. Despite valiant competition, Technics SL1200 turntables remain the undisputed industry standard. Introduced in 1972, they are simple, elegant machines that just get on with the job... almost every decent club worldwide uses Technics... (2002: 27)

Klasco and Michael describe the features of the SL-1200 that made it so radical and innovative when it was first produced, explaining how,

Technics' direct-drive turntable, with its fast run-up speed (stable rpm within one rotation of the disc) and high motor torque, was a major innovation. The patented design included a motor strong enough to withstand constant slip-cueing... the platter and other components are made of non-resonant materials, the head shell and needle are configured to make sighting a cue "drop" easy, and the finger lift is high enough to make handling the tone arm simpler. (1992: 59-60)

Yet just as the music itself is continually evolving and changing, the technology that DJs use to perform their job is also undergoing a degree of change, and despite this dominance of the turntable, and the level of authenticity that is ascribed to its use, DJs in recent years have begun to embrace other platforms on which to play their music. In itself, this is an issue that generates impassioned and varied responses, making it an ideal topic for discussion.

The future of DJing and the continued relevance of vinyl

Paralleling, and indeed amplifying, the 'ephemeral nature' of dance culture (Brewster and Broughton, 2000: 432), the continuous progression and development of technology shapes and defines the dance scene, with new technologies affecting and informing the production of music and the practice of

the DJ. In this respect, it is difficult to predict the future of DJing, although when questioned as to their opinions on this subject, those DJs interviewed put forward a variety of possible directions for the profession, all rooted in technological progression. One common theme seemed to be the eventual demise of vinyl, something Andrew James highlights in his prediction for the future of DJing:

Eventually vinyl will be on the decline. Whilst it's definitely going to be around for another ten [years], there's no doubt about that, with the current Internet downloading and soundfile-swapping, and just being able to store a lot more information on smaller discs like CDs, I think the days of heavy records are probably over. [Records] still have some advantages, [for example] the real-time sound characteristics of them, but there is equipment that can do the same thing with MP3 files, CDs, and MiniDiscs. We will probably see another format. I know CDs and DVDs have taken a pretty good hold around the world, but I wouldn't be surprised if another format came out within the next ten years. Probably a small chip, kind of like what is in cameras at the moment, memory cards... something like that, which, I'd estimate, would hold a gigabyte of information, and that's thousands of songs... so that will definitely have an impact on vinyl... Even though I don't want to see records go, within ten years you'll probably see a big decline. (Interview, 2004)

It would appear that the continual advancement of technology will lead to a reduction in the amount of DJs who use vinyl, which could eventually mean that the dance music record store, in its present form, will cease to exist. As owner of the Sydney record store Spank Records, Mark Murphy is concerned with the current technological developments that are providing consumers with different sources for obtaining music, and while he acknowledges the changes that are occurring, he doubts whether vinyl will ever disappear completely:

I don't download anything, and I get all my music from Spank Records. Being a co-owner of a record store, [the future of DJing and vinyl] is something you have to think about, because you are in the business of selling vinyl. We only sell vinyl and hardware, we don't sell CDs. You've really got to look at, and keep an eye on, where dance music is going, or if you don't you'll just get swallowed up. We were one of the first dance music stores in Sydney to have an online store... and a weekly newsletter that goes out with sound samples... I think we are one of the most progressive, as in thinking, dance stores in Sydney. But vinyl in the future... who knows? People were saying vinyl is dead ten years ago, and it is still very strong, but if I knew what was going to happen, I'd be a millionaire. People have got to look at downloading, the way people are mixing, on what format... you'd be stupid not to. (Interview, 2005)

Similarly, Mike Bennett, owner of Sydney's Acetate Record Bar, acknowledges how, despite having an online version of the store, the Internet has had a negative impact on sales of vinyl, although he also explains how the focus he takes in regard to the styles of music he stocks may prevent this impact from being too severe on his own store:

We do have an online store, which does quite well for us, but the thing that is cutting back on our sales is the Internet download of stuff. I suppose we're not going to be as affected as some other stores because a lot of our stuff is going to be pretty hard to find to download anyway. (Interview, 2005)

Yet despite this potential negative impact of the Internet on the continued existence of record stores, there are other factors that could help to sustain this

existence. While he acknowledges the central role that new technology, such as the Internet, has in the methods he uses to source music, Alan Thompson explains how the record store is still central to dance culture, not only in a sense of providing music to consumers, but also as providing a site for social interaction:

From a DJ's point of view, one of the parts of my job that I absolutely love is going to a record shop and listening to music, and buying the music. So I certainly won't stop buying it, and I don't think a lot of other DJs will. Going record shopping on a Thursday or a Friday can be a social thing. You'll see other DJs there... well not so much in Sydney, but in London for instance, you'd bump into producers and they would pass on their new tune, so it's much more of a social gathering for DJs as well. It's a meeting point. We only get to see each other on a very rare occasion that we might be playing at the same club, whereas on a Friday afternoon at Black Market in London, you can guarantee that most of the top DJs in London will be in there at some point in the day. (Interview, 2005)

As a record store owner, Mark Murphy likes to believe that vinyl and record stores will always be in existence, and he sees them as vital to the continued existence of dance culture, not only highlighting the way stores provide DJs with an environment for socialising, but also acknowledging the role stores have in promoting and sustaining local scenes:

I hope record stores will still be around in future... either that or I've sold it for a fortune! People do still like the contact and the feeling of coming into a store, and listening to vinyl, and getting good customer service. I think people still enjoy that... I'd like to think that [the record store] is very important [to dance culture], just for the fact that I co-own one. It is a very social factor... you sort of

promote the local scene more when you have a store, because it becomes a focal point... you're selling tickets to parties... I think it is very important. I think it would be sad if there was no dance music store and everyone was buying off the Internet. It brings the local scene a little bit more together. (Interview, 2005)

Yet perhaps the perception of the record store as central to the development of dance scenes is now something of an anachronism, and with the numerous advantages provided by the Internet, in regard to sourcing and purchasing music, it seems largely idealistic to suggest that people will continue to use stores because of the degree of social interaction that they generate. If a DJ can obtain music earlier, cheaper and quicker by using the Internet, then they are most likely to make use of their local record store far less frequently, if at all. Highlighting how the continued existence of physical, 'bricks and mortar' record stores is by no means guaranteed, Mark Alsop explains how he is increasingly using the Internet as the source from which he buys most of his music, and thus as a result, he is making less use of local record stores:

Most of my vinyl comes from London, and I do an order per week of that... [I order the vinyl] over the Internet... I went to a record shop, in Sydney, a month ago, for the first time in five months, and I used to go in at least once a week. Now, I sit at home every single day and listen to all the new releases [on the Internet], put it aside and buy it at the end of the week. Not good for local business is it? (Interview, 2005)

Creating music, not just playing music

While many DJs still use vinyl within their sets, there is an increasing move towards the use of CDs, often for reasons of practicality. On a handful of CDs, a DJ can take to a club a lot more tracks than a box full of vinyl will allow for. Furthermore, the development of computer software now allows DJs to mix

directly from their laptop computers, thus negating the need for any kind of tangible sound-carrying format. In turn, all of this generates new understandings and interpretations of DJ practice, in the sense that different operational skills are required. This progression of technology could also, as Goodwill suggests, both effect and affect an increasing diversification of sub-genres and clubbing crowds within the dance scene, through the way that,

... technology allows you to do something so different now. You used to be able to just get up and play a record, and it would go for seven minutes, and there's not much you could do with it. But now with a CD player I can loop sections of it, and add bits to it before I go out, and I can get rid of the breakdown if I don't like it. As technology becomes more palatable and it all goes towards laptops that you've already put the music into, you're going to be able to have so much influence on the music you're playing, so I think that the genres will become more stylised in that way. (Interview, 2004)

In the future, it would seem that DJs will rely less on vinyl, and make greater use of CDs and computers to perform their sets. Many DJs in the Sydney house scene admit that they are making increasing use of CDs during their sets, rejecting vinyl in favour of a digital format that has a far greater degree of convenience. Goodwill estimates that ninety-five percent of his set is played from CDs, and explains how after he has been record shopping, he will go straight home and record all the tracks onto his computer, edit them, and then 'burn' them onto CD for his sets, so that now, he takes 'about ten pieces of vinyl to a gig' (ibid.). In addition, he states:

I still buy records... I never stop doing that... I'll just put a track onto CD, do edits of it, and master it a bit better, and add acapellas and stuff to it. (ibid.)

In this example, it is clear how the development of technology has enhanced the work of the DJ, so that tracks can be altered and reshaped in order to fit the specific requirements of the DJ. Vocals can be added, and tracks can be extended or shortened, allowing the DJ to have more control over the actual 'sound' of their set, which increases the extent to which they can impose their own personal, unique 'musical' identity upon it. DJs will often, having purchased a particular track, record it on to their computer, and re-edit and re-shape it to their liking, perhaps taking out vocal lines or adding drum patterns. This allows the DJ to make personal mixes or edits of tracks, stripping out parts of the track that they may not like or that may not be appropriate for their set, while also allowing the DJ to indulge in a certain degree of artistic expression. As Trent Rackus explains in regard to his own use of CDs for DJing and of the available technology:

You can buy a record, go home, and if you hate the vocal, pull it out, put some effects on it, alter it, do your own re-edit, and take it out that night and play it... the doors are just wide open as far as possibilities go. (Interview, 2004)

Paul Goodyear also uses such re-editing technology, which in turn has led him to use CDs instead of vinyl, and which allows him to impose a personal interpretation upon the music he plays during his sets, as he explains when he describes how he makes use of both vinyl and CDs, and the processes involved in preparing the music so it can be incorporated into his sets:

I buy everything on vinyl... well most things anyway [because] sometimes you can't find a track on vinyl so you might need to buy the CD single, but most of the time I'm able to track everything down I want on vinyl. I bring [the track] back to my house, I put it into my computer, I normally re-edit the track, I take out the parts that I don't like, I might combine the vocal version with the

instrumental or the dub, I might also combine the acapella, and I'll make my own exclusive re-edits to play, and then I'll burn them on to a CD, and then I'll play the CD in the club. So pretty much most of what I play in the clubs has the Paul Goodyear touch on it. [The tracks] are either re-edited, or sometimes I'll take the acapella and I'll go and re-produce it, and I'll actually do a full new production for it, and I'll play it as the Paul Goodyear remix. (Interview, 2005)

CDs versus vinyl

There are, understandably, contrasting opinions regarding the extent to which technological developments will alter the role of the DJ, and more specifically, the talent, skill and ability needed to be a DJ. From one perspective, the increasing use of digital technology such as CDs, and CD mixers such as the Pioneer CDJ-1000 which is becoming the digital equivalent of the Technics SL-1200 turntable, means it is easier to DJ, in that these machines have such a wide variety of features (pitch control and tempo control, looping facilities, reverse play, scratching facilities) that can be initiated at the flick of a switch that there becomes less of an emphasis on skill, and more of an emphasis on being able to operate the machines properly. In contrast to this, there is the argument that such machines extend the boundaries of mixing and DJing, in that there are greater opportunities to manipulate and alter sounds, Trent Rackus believing that the Pioneer CDJ-1000 machines are 'amazing, they're better than turntables' (Interview, 2004).

Extending from this is the fact that, through using CDs, the DJ is presented with the option to increase the amount of music they can take with them to a particular performance. This is of significant advantage if the DJ is travelling around the world, in that a DJ can, with a handful of CDs, take all their required music on board an aeroplane, or alternatively, take a box full of vinyl that they have to store in the cargo hold and that they risk losing in transit. As CDs allow a DJ to take more music to a performance, then there exists the potential for a set to be

generated that has a greater diversity and variety than a performance based solely on the playing of vinyl. As Rackus goes on to explain:

I would love for an opportunity to arise where I could just get all my vinyl put on to CDs. I still carry a crate of records with me, but CDs are definitely the way forward. It's digital, you can do more with it than you can with vinyl, you don't have records jumping, you don't have records warping, you don't have the wear and tear, you don't have the weight to carry. You can jump on a plane and play in another country, and sit on the plane with your twenty-four hours worth of music in your lap, whereas before you'd put all your twelve-inches in a metal box, put them on to the belt as you go on the plane and watch them go down the conveyor [belt] and think, "I hope I see you on the other side". (ibid.)

While Alex Taylor acknowledges the convenience of CDs and the increased musical possibilities that the use of CDs grants the DJ, and also explains how he is using them more and more for DJing, he does highlight how CDs can actually serve to complicate the process of DJing, in the sense that it can be easier to use and manipulate vinyl during track selection and mixing because of the speed with which one can access tracks and points within those tracks, while he also suggests that using vinyl can be better from an aesthetic point of view as well:

It's a convenience thing. I used to be quite anti-CDs, but I've become more used to it, and actually better at using them... It's a lot more accepted now, and you can just do so much more with it. I've got [the track] straight away on CD, and if I want to edit it, I can do it really quickly... I still buy things on vinyl, occasionally, because I still find that if I've got like three books of CDs, and it's just so much stuff... that it's just too much. When you've got records, you're actually putting them on a plate, you kind of feed

them [through] and they are there, whereas if you've got five or ten new CD tracks, you have to quickly listen to them... So I buy certain things on vinyl... I am a lot quicker with vinyl. Obviously I've done it for a lot longer. The flair of it is a bit nicer, and the spinning it round, and it looks nicer than just sort of pushing a button... I still buy records... there's still a lot of stuff [in record stores], but I'm getting probably a lot more stuff from the Internet. (Interview, 2005)

While most DJs seem to be gradually making more use of CDs and less use of vinyl, Mark Murphy has taken the opposite approach, moving from CDs to vinyl, and he explains how, as one of the first dance music DJs in Sydney to actually use CDs, he initially encountered a certain amount of cynicism and suspicion, as well as a lack of suitable equipment, thus demonstrating the authenticity issues that surround the use of vinyl in dance culture, issues that are only now being successfully negotiated through the way some of the world's most prominent DJs are making extensive use of the CD format during their sets:

It's funny. I think I was one of the first DJs in Sydney to actually mix with CDs specifically, and I had to carry my CD decks around with me to clubs back in '96, and there was such an attitude against CD DJs, because vinyl was so precious to people, and all the downloading boom had not happened yet, so most of the good stuff was on vinyl. So it was hard for me to get a lot of the good dance stuff on CD, and I had to take my CD players around with me to every gig, and as soon as I started switching to vinyl, and I did it gradually, I got so much more respect and so many more gigs. It was just bizarre. There was such an attitude towards people playing CDs back then. But now, every man and his dog are playing CDs, and it's easy to get music from the Internet, and it's easier to write a track, burn it on to CD and play it out that night. So times have changed a hell of a lot in a short space of time. I only

play vinyl now, I don't play CDs, and I find it hard to mix on CD... I've gone totally the other way, which is probably wrong, if you look at how dance music is progressing! (Interview, 2005)

Yet despite this acceptance of technology on the part of several DJs, and their excitement at the possibilities this technology opens up for the future of their profession, other DJs demonstrate more of a reluctance to consign vinyl to the history of dance culture. While he acknowledges the travelling advantages of CDs, Alan Thompson believes that carrying records around is an intrinsic part of DJing, and is not something that he is in any immediate hurry to stop doing merely for the sake of convenience, as he explains when, in reference to the use of CDs by DJs, he states:

I'm all for a better sound and all that sort of stuff, but the actual software of what you are using to mix records, or the format of mixing, I personally wouldn't want it to change too much... I could probably DJ my whole set with CDs, but I don't want to. I want my vinyl, I want to put that 12-inch piece of plastic on the decks. Carrying records is part of the job. I would never change my whole box just to make it lighter to travel with. I know a lot of DJs do, they find it much easier to travel around the world with... For me, the whole reason why I DJ is what is happening in that two hours I'm DJing, not whether I have to carry a box of records or not, that's irrelevant. (Interview, 2005)

The changes to DJ practice that the use of CDs and computers has brought about have necessitated a shift in the understandings of this practice, and essentially have altered the skills of DJing. For some DJs, this is a negative development, in that it has lowered the skill levels required to successfully mix and sequence music together. Illya takes a cynical view towards DJing as it relates to the progression of the technology that is changing the very nature of

his profession, highlighting how the use of new technology requires a re-definition of the role of the DJ:

I use vinyl. I take two record boxes with me everywhere, and I get other DJs telling me that I should lighten my load, but I never know what I'm going to play, so I need a lot to choose from. I love my vinyl. I much prefer to put a record on than place a CD in a machine, even one of those CDJ-1000s... saying that, I take two CD bags with me as well, so I pretty much use both... I think that vinyl will eventually go, unfortunately... Playing off laptops is rubbish... I don't think it changes the idea of DJing, because you are still playing music to an audience, but it just doesn't sit with me... I don't like it. I don't know enough about [playing music off laptops] to give it any good points, but from where I'm sitting, it's shit. There doesn't seem to be much skill or effort in it, it's all loaded and simulated... Would you know if the DJ is actually doing anything, or just hitting a button? It's computerised, the tracks can be made to be the same speed, there's no skill involved. Is the DJ listening to them, and timing them, and getting them at the right speed? I'm sure on the computer program they would have been smart enough to think of pitch control, that's just logical. So therefore, isn't that you're getting paid to do nothing? (Interview, 2004)

The use of computers to carry out the act of DJing has thus been defined by some DJs in comparative terms, so that vinyl and the use of turntables are established as authenticating DJ practice, while computers, for the apparent lack of skill that is required to operate them in comparison to using vinyl, are dismissed as non-representative of authentic DJ culture. Yet taking such a view denies the possibility that computers actually enhance the DJing profession and allow for greater creative expression, while also ignoring the fact that in some

respects, using computers requires the DJ to be just as skilful and thoughtful as when they are using turntables. Simply because the skills change, it does not necessarily follow that the act of DJing is made any easier. Despite this, to a large extent using vinyl serves to validate the skills of a particular DJ with a clubbing crowd, while for DJs such as Alan Thompson, the use of vinyl is an essential part of DJing and of the effort that goes into it, and he explains how, at least for him, it will always remain the central format on which he plays the music for his DJ sets:

I use vinyl and CDs. It took me a long while to get into the CD thing, because I'm an old-school DJ and I love my vinyl. I don't want DJing to get too technological to be honest with you, because it stops me from being interactive with the vinyl or the music... Of course, a big part of DJing is choosing the music, but also it's putting it on the deck, and spinning it, and playing it and cueing it up. When you've got a computer doing that for you... anybody could then come up, they could take it in turns from the dancefloor... press a button and it's playing... I like to see my groove, I don't want to see LCD lights going up and down, I want to see a groove in the record... Obviously, for other people it doesn't matter what platform it is, but for me, I don't want to be having a screen in front of me, and pressing buttons. That's not DJing to me... I don't think that people on the dancefloor know any different. You're still hearing the music mixed, it's still being chosen by the DJ, but certainly, from a platform point of view, I'm three decks and a mixer. (Interview, 2005)

As Thompson hints at here, despite the authenticity issues that surround the use of vinyl in dance culture, one has to question the extent to which a DJ's choice of format is actually relevant, for DJing is ultimately about the selection and sequencing of music rather than the use of specific technology. Furthermore, as

this technology progresses, and more and more DJs embrace the use of CDs, this 'hurdle of authenticity' seems easier to negotiate. Indeed, for a culture grounded so much in a constant search for new and fresh music, it seems somewhat peculiar that it should have such an ingrained attachment to what is for most of the world an obsolete format. As Paul Goodyear explains, the attitude of those within dance culture to the use of CDs will change as more of the well-known and well-established DJs begin to use and incorporate them into their sets:

Years ago the attitude was very much that you're not a real DJ unless you play vinyl. I think that's changing now. When people see the likes of Roger Sanchez and Danny Tenaglia, they play vinyl but they also play CDs as well, they play their own remixes. So that is definitely changing, but there was that whole snobbery in the beginning about not being a real DJ unless you play vinyl. It's like, "Hello, what's the difference?", you've still got to mix them, they are both tracks, you've still got to be able to get them in time and be able to play with them. (Interview, 2005)

As Kempster highlights, the progression of house music culture has been, and will continue to be, rooted in technology, stating that, 'if house music developed out of the invention of the synthesizer, then it follows that its continued development will be bound to further technological advances' (1996: 202). For Trent Rackus, the Pioneer CDJ-1000 players have changed the whole practice of DJing significantly:

You can scratch with them, you've got the multi-media card where you can store cue points, you can loop, you can sample... you can play to minus or plus one hundred percent pitch, whereas on a [Technics] 1200 turntable you can go plus eight or minus eight percent. I love my vinyl but I also like being in a position where I

can take things to another level. It's a refreshing part of DJing, for me, to be able to go into a gig and know that if things get a little bit tough on the dancefloor with the vinyl that you've got, you've got this back catalogue of CDs with [hypothetically] twelve tracks on every CD. You see guys like Erick Morillo playing a four-hour set and not using any vinyl. (Interview, 2004)

Yet despite such positive assessments of the creative opportunities that the use of CDs present, technology that eradicates the need for any tangible format is treated somewhat more suspiciously by certain DJs, in that the lack of involvement and interaction that such technology seems to require and produce makes the act of DJing itself seemingly less interesting. For John Devecchis, the advancement of technology, while saving DJs the trouble and pain of having to carry heavy record boxes, is not necessarily good for the practice of DJing, and he acknowledges how with changes in this technology come changes with the concept of DJing itself and the skills required for the job:

I reckon vinyl will be around for the next five years, and then sadly, because I love vinyl, although I use CDs as well, we'll see the end of vinyl... As technology improves, the CDJ-1000s will become 2000s, and they will be even better than they are now, and everyone will use CDs... That's going to help, certainly travelling internationally. A lot of DJs are going to do laptop sets, but I personally hope that that doesn't go off. CDs I can handle, but playing through a laptop, how do you know the DJ is even playing? How do you know he's not playing a pre-recorded set? How do you know he's not playing Pacman whilst he's supposed to be DJing? I want to see the DJ doing something. I don't want to see him stood pressing buttons on a laptop... If it goes further than CDs, it's not DJing anymore... If they're mixing through laptops, you don't know what technology they're using to beat-mix. By then they'll be able to

change the key of tracks, so they'll be able to key mix without even picking the records to do it... It's almost like the art of DJing has changed to engineering, and you'll be like an engineer DJing, and that, for me, is not using your ear to pick the tracks to play, that's using your technical brain skills to be able to change the key and the drum patterns while you're playing the tracks, and that's not DJing, it's engineering to a crowd. (Interview, 2004)

Mark Murphy is also suspicious of the use of laptop computers by DJs, highlighting how the changes such use brings about for the practice of DJing raise issues concerning the performance and activity a DJ engages in during a set, although as he acknowledges, such suspicions and similarly negative views of the technology may simply be a result of the way laptops are a relatively new addition to the array of tools a DJ uses, and therefore are being utilised in a largely experimental manner at the moment:

Personally, using a laptop changes the whole notion of DJing. When he played out here, Sasha played on a program called Ableton⁶⁰, and there were comments that he was very boring to watch because all he was doing was... there was no performance. Mixing isn't performance-based, but at least you are doing something. He looked like he was checking his emails for God's sake! As perfect as it was, Ableton is a very, very good program, and it can be used so much better than what he did. Apparently he

⁶⁰ 'Ableton Live' is a piece of music software that has been adopted by DJs as a sequencer and mixer, and it allows for more complex mixes to be performed, with users able to mix several different sounds at once, essentially re-arranging and re-structuring tracks in the live performance environment. Certain DJs are now using laptop computers to play their sets, using programs, such as Ableton, that allow them to reshape and restructure individual tracks, taking out vocals, adding bass lines, dropping in other vocals, and thus, at least in theory, making the whole practice of DJing more inventive and varied. The issue that this raises is whether this use of new technology changes the notion of a DJ, making the job more like the work of a computer engineer, while the features that this technology has introduced have impacted upon the exact skills needed to be a DJ, with mixing now being easier through beat-matching facilities on computer programs.

just mixed track to track...I think he did other things, I'm not sure... but it is in its infancy, that sort of stuff, so we are at the beginning of something new. But it does take away from mixing on vinyl, just by what you are seeing, because you're not doing much at all... it goes back to DJs as performers... (Interview, 2005)

Ultimately, despite all these changes in technology and the issues raised, the main concern for any DJ should be with affecting the mood of a crowd through the music played, regardless of format, for as Klasco and Michael note, 'no matter how sophisticated the setup, a deejay must be most concerned with building energy and changing the mood on the dance floor' (1992: 62). While technology may alter the exact definition of a DJ, each clubbing crowd is unique, and thus, with the responses and reactions of these crowds, each DJ-set has to be unique. Although DJs may become more like engineers, they will always need the ability to be able to read and gauge a crowd's reactions, and to respond to these reactions in the appropriate manner. The constant factor that will always remain at the very core of DJing is the ability to entertain through a selection and sequencing of tracks, regardless of the technology used to generate this.

The transient nature of dance music

Dance music often has a very limited 'lifespan' in comparison to rock music. With the latter, there has been the gradual development of a 'rock canon', in which certain songs and albums are elevated to 'classic status' by fans and journalists, and used as a yardstick by which to assess new releases and new bands, Straw making reference to rock music's 'preoccupation with a historical past' (1988: 260). In contrast to this, dance music, while having its fair share of 'classic tunes', rests largely on notions of progression and development, with scant regard given to music once it has been around for a certain period of time. The contrasting temporal logics of dance culture and rock culture can be attributed, in part, to the relative lack of emphasis placed on the concept of authorship, and on rock notions of authorial sincerity and integrity, within dance culture, there being

instead a preference for other values such as immediacy and sensuality (Hesmondhalgh, 1998: 238). Today's 'big tune' can quickly become tomorrow's 'embarrassment', or rather, a record that proves to be extremely popular at one point in time can, after a few months, become the focus of much derision and criticism, although as Trent Rackus highlights, the extent to which a record may be perceived to be 'embarrassing' depends largely on the opinion of the DJ:

There are certain DJs out there, commercial DJs, who will flog a record to death because it's an easy way to satisfy an entry level crowd... the DJing industry revolves around new production... it's an industry where things come and go... From working in a record shop, I know that when you give something to someone, they turn their nose up at it if they know it's been around for a while or if they heard it on the radio. (Interview, 2004)

Straw makes reference to this short-term sensibility, suggesting that the 12-inch dance single 'is the most disposable and ephemeral of textual forms in that its value depends entirely on the emergence of consensus' (1993: 173), and even if this consensus initially defines the track as of value, there can just as quickly be a change in opinion, so that the single becomes culturally worthless and obsolete, it is 'dumped on the market as one of the most genuinely abject forms of cultural refuse' (ibid.), and as such, 'the life cycle of dance records is notoriously short-lived, as deejays and club patrons tire of them and demand novelty' (Straw, 2001b: 169). This is an issue highlighted by Thornton when she describes how, 'dance sounds are distinguished by a quick turnover of records, styles and subgenres' (1995: 69), and by Hadley, who refers to 'the speed with which songs come and go in club culture' (1993: 60), and thus, dance styles achieve both popularity and subsequent rejection with a typically urgent rapidity. Trent Rackus suggests that this quick turnover of records is grounded in the desire of DJs to remain 'fresh' in the music that they play, and in expressing this, he references the idea that new dance music originates within the 'underground':

In dance music there's always that underground root where everything is about being fresh... People have the opportunity to stay completely fresh with their music, and if you are doing five or six gigs a weekend, that is an important thing, because while you're doing a dream job, you don't want it to get boring, you want to remain fresh... DJs aren't as willing to continually look at the same records in their box. They have that opportunity to go out every week and hear new records from the four corners of the world... there's a constant turnover of new music, there's always new stuff.
(Interview, 2004)

This rapid turnover in dance music is perhaps grounded more in DJ practice rather than in anything related to clubbing audiences, for as Rackus goes on to highlight, a DJ will grow tired of a particular track far more quickly than a clubber, simply because of the nature of the job:

[As a DJ] you might listen to a record two or three times before you buy it, and you might do five gigs in one night and play that record three times, and by the time you get to the last gig... give it three weeks and you're over the record, but in that three weeks, someone in the audience may have only heard that every week, three times, so that's when their familiarity comes into play, and then they want to hear it because they like it, but you've played it twelve times in three weeks and are completely over it. (ibid.)

An area given specific focus in the interviews conducted for this thesis was the short-term sensibility that dance culture is grounded in. I was interested in the opinions of DJs regarding this issue and their possible explanations for its existence. While some were quick to acknowledge that there are a number of classic dance tracks, most agreed that there is a significantly high turnover of

music in dance culture, explaining how it has always been a genre that emphasises the new and the original, or rather a genre that is continually pushing forward, which in turn means that a lot of the music can date rather rapidly. Mark Murphy highlights how this sense of continual progression often provides part of the appeal of dance music for those involved in it:

The best thing about dance music, I think, is the fact that it actually grows, and it actually takes from other genres and other forms of pop culture, and just moulds it into one, and forms something different and something new. That's why I love dance music, because it changes every year, and it's exciting, whereas rock music hasn't really changed, there are only so many chords on a guitar. (Interview, 2005)

Negus, referencing Straw's contrasting of the alternative rock and dance music scenes in North America, describes how the latter has 'a faster temporal logic, organized more usually around single tracks rather than albums' (1996: 22), while Olson, also referencing Straw's article, suggests that 'a scene defined in part by the predominance of classic rock may be said to contain a different temporality than a techno scene' (1998: 276). Goodwill distinguishes between the temporal logics that exist within dance culture and those that exist within rock culture, suggesting that rock fans acknowledge the importance of the history of the genre and of bands that have made a significant contribution to this history, whereas 'because dance music progresses so quickly, there doesn't seem to be this ideology of 'old-school' DJs... dance music doesn't look back' (Interview, 2004). In contrast to this, Illya argues against the idea that most dance music is only appreciated in the short-term, and suggests that dance music can, if it is of a high quality, be appealing for a crowd several years after it was made:

A lot of what's in my record box now is old disco house and jackin' Chicago house. It's not cheesy, and people can get into it now...

although it is only five or ten years old... I think the good dance music has longevity. The not so good, the rubbish, doesn't... I don't own the record, but 'So Much Love To Give' was a pretty big track, but if I played it now... would you get booed? I don't think that track in thirty years will be the same as Elvis or the Beatles. (Interview, 2004)

Similarly, while discussing the temporal logics that underpin dance culture, Sonia Sharma also makes a distinction between contemporary dance music and rock music, suggesting that most dance music fails to achieve the classic status that is often accorded to rock music, and thus she questions the extent to which dance tracks will be remembered in future years:

There's definitely a shorter lifespan [in dance culture]. A rock track could be legendary, like Guns N' Roses or something like that, you'll hear that track and identify with it, and maybe that's less so to dance music... There are DJs who will only play tracks that they know the audience will know, because that's how they're going to get a response, it'll be like, "If I drop this track, [for example] Mylo's 'Drop The Pressure'⁶¹, then everyone's going to have their hands in the air", but I don't know if we're all going to remember Mylo's 'Drop The Pressure' in twenty years time. So it is definitely a shorter lifespan, but it'll stick around for a few years, but then will we remember that track in twenty years time? Probably, but not to the same degree that we remember Guns N' Roses. (Interview, 2005)

While it is obviously valid to make such a distinction between rock music culture and dance music culture, it is important not to place too much emphasis on the concept of dance music as being inherently ephemeral, for as listening to any

⁶¹ 'Drop The Pressure', by Scottish producer and DJ Mylo, was a hugely popular track in the Sydney dance scene during 2004 and 2005.

number of DJ sets proves, there are several dance tracks that have come to be defined as 'classics', particularly now that the culture has been in existence, in its contemporary, non-disco form, for nearly two decades. Capitalising on the history that such a length of time creates, in the past couple of years record labels have identified a nostalgia market for dance music, releasing a flood of 'dance classics' compilations. Discussing the disposable nature of much contemporary dance music, Alan Thompson makes reference to how the amount of music that is produced today makes it harder to distinguish 'classic' tracks:

Most dance tracks, for me, probably their life is about three or four months, others can be a bit longer because they are still pretty good records... A track like 'Strings of Life', which has just been re-released again, and was [originally] out in 1990, is a classic track. There are many classic house records... I think it is because of the amount [of music] that is released. In the 1960s and 1970s certainly there wasn't such a prolific amount of releases, whereas now, in dance music, there are hundreds a week, so obviously that has to be sifted out, so there are very few that make it to that classic status. (Interview, 2005)

Despite these classics, it is obvious from the degree of rejection that some tracks experience after they have achieved popularity that there are more explicit transitory logics within dance culture than there are in rock culture. It seems rational to suggest that the technology used to create dance music can tie the music, sonically, to its time, but this cannot be taken as the sole explanation for the speed with which some dance music can become unfashionable or obsolete.

While it may, in part, be idealistic, one explanation that dominates the discourse of dance culture is that 'commercial' music is intrinsically more transient and disposable than 'underground' music, and this is typically linked to the (over-) exposure that commercial tracks receive. Linking this issue of the short-term

nature of most dance music to the concepts of the 'underground' and the 'mainstream', John Devecchis suggests that it is the culture's emphasis on fashion and glamour that generates the quick turnover of music and trends:

The difference between underground and commercial is that underground tracks stay 'good' for a long time, because they don't just have this commercial accessibility that lasts for a few weeks and then people say, "Oh I'm sick of that track". With underground music, you get bored of it when you first listen to it and you don't know it, but the more you listen to an underground track, the more it grows on you, the exact opposite of commercial music... There are trends in the scene from fashions... It's not just the dance music industry, any industry that involves anything to do with glamour and fashion, there's a turnover of everything. (Interview, 2004)

In making a distinction between underground music and commercial music, Devecchis establishes a division between the two areas of dance culture, and his definition of underground would seem to relate to music that is less accessible and less immediate than the music that gets played in mainstream clubs. Such a perception maintains the ideal of dance culture that equates the underground with music of a certain quality, and the mainstream with music of a lesser quality, and yet given the subjective basis of making such a judgement, such a definition cannot be taken as fact. It is simply not valid to judge the quality of a particular track on the level of its commercial accessibility, and thus, we are again confronted with the problem that occurs in employing uncritically terms like 'underground' and 'commercial'. Furthermore, Devecchis's division between the two types of music contradicts, in part, the commonly held perception in dance culture that most music originates in the underground, and, through gradually gaining popularity, eventually shifts into the mainstream, making it harder to make a distinction between separate types of music. The problem with this, however, is in identifying the point at which this shift occurs. Making reference to

the commercial, mainstream sphere of dance culture to explain why there is a quick turnover of music within dance scenes, Con goes some way towards identifying this point, suggesting that the over-exposure that certain media forms often give to some tracks shortens the length of time for which these tracks will be accepted by clubbing audiences:

Everyone gets sick of the same music... It's just like anything. Everyone gets sick of the same songs. We [the DJs] do too, we get sick of playing the same songs, so we've got to buy new music to inspire ourselves as well, and I'm sure the crowd is the same. Once a track actually hits the radio and gets a little bit commercial, you don't really want to play it anymore in a club. It doesn't matter how good the track is, there is still that element of just stop playing it. You might actually pull it out six months down the line, and play it every once in a while after that, [but] you wouldn't play it week in, week out, because I'm sure the punters are sick of it as well.
(Interview, 2005)

Thus, regardless of the actual musical value or quality of a track, its acceptance by commercial media can serve to render it culturally worthless. This acceptance can lead to a greater degree of exposure for the track, ensuring it finds an audience beyond that of its origins in club culture. Yet rather than welcoming such exposure and the attention it subsequently places on dance music, clubbers and DJs often perceive such mainstream acceptance as signalling the end of a track's lifespan within the clubbing environment, although obviously this end would occur at a different point within the underground than it would within mainstream club culture. Acknowledging that this over-exposure does occur, and subsequently does affect the length of time for which dance tracks remain popular, Mark Alsop also highlights how the exact length of this time is typically determined by the type of scene, in the sense that certain tracks may remain popular for a longer period of time with a more mainstream audience, because of

what he sees as a requirement on the part of the audience for music that they are familiar with:

Some records stay in my collection for eight months, which could shock some DJs, but working in commercial clubs, that's what's expected of you... where they want to hear stuff that doesn't alienate them, it stays in your collection for quite some months, and before you know it, it could be eight months before you take it out... and like you say, it can work in the opposite [direction]. After a while, when you start playing this commercial sound, this one song, people could go, "Oh my God! I don't believe he's still playing that", because all of a sudden, what people thought was classy, they now see as cheesy or so last year, so you need to also think of that concept... [It gets over-exposed], they hear it in every club, every bar, everywhere they go they hear it, hear it, hear it... (Interview, 2005)

Thus, music that may not necessarily be immediately classified as 'mainstream' or 'commercial' may, through continued playing in DJ sets, become popular with audiences that frequent mainstream clubs. In this sense, DJs are partially responsible for the over-exposure of certain tracks. While playing a popular record can help a DJ to generate a positive atmosphere on the dancefloor, conversely it can also serve to undermine the DJ's cultural credibility. Discussing the short shelf life of most contemporary dance music, Mark Murphy makes reference to a similar idea of over-exposure, while suggesting that this quick turnover of tracks also comes about through both the large amount of dance music that is produced and the continual efforts by DJs to discover the latest and freshest sounds, giving a particular example to illustrate his point:

There can be so many people playing the one track once it becomes big, so everyone gets sick of it, and then they're on to the

next one... I just think there is so much out there, and every DJ is looking for the next big thing, and so many people are writing [dance music]. When one track does get over-exposed, everyone starts playing it... It's like Field Day last year and Mylo's 'Drop the Pressure'. I heard it about five or six times during the day, and that is one track that got so over-exposed. But in the beginning, it was massive in the underground and everyone was talking about it, but then it just crept up and up and up, and everyone grabbed hold of it... [The track has] become cheesy, whereas when it first came out it was never cheesy... [Dance music] does get over-exposed. A lot of people will play a track, and once it starts bubbling and people listen, everyone jumps on it. (Interview, 2005)

In the same way that there are contrasting temporal logics between rock scenes and dance scenes, there can also be contrasting temporal logics between culturally disparate dance scenes, and not just in the sense of 'mainstream' and 'underground'. Different clubbing audiences may engage with particular tracks at different points in time, demonstrating how, even in the same geographical location, the way in which, and the speed with which, music filters through to these audiences can vary markedly. Discussing the large amount of dance music that gets released and the over-exposure that a lot of contemporary dance music suffers from, and the subsequent impact these two factors have on reducing the length of time for which a track will remain popular within dance culture, Alex Taylor references his experiences of playing within both the gay and straight dance scenes, explaining the differences between the two scenes and the way the scenes can be at different points in regard to musical development:

There is so much stuff. A lot of stuff does get overlooked... Sometimes there are those tracks that just endure. They stay there for ages, because they are popular, but yes, there is a quick turnaround... Tracks definitely get over-exposed. Like 'So Much

Love To Give', I remember when that track came out, I was playing it in straight clubs and it was massive, and then about two or three months later, it became really popular in the gay scene, and they all started asking for it, and you feel like you've really been there and done that, and no one is actually playing it anymore. People do get sick of tracks very quickly, especially those novelty tracks, they don't really stand the test of time. They are great for five minutes, and then most people don't want to hear them again. (Interview, 2005)

Certain tracks, like the one mentioned by Taylor above, can achieve a startling degree of popularity within a very short space of time, although their obsolescence typically occurs just as quickly. The appeal of these tracks can be ascribed to their distinct sound, as Taylor suggests, yet instead of this sound becoming acknowledged as forward thinking and original, it will become dated to such an extent that mere mention of the track incurs an array of negative value judgements. Referencing such music, Stephen Allkins outlines his belief that it is only dance music from recent years that has a short shelf life, and he suggests that this ephemeral nature stems from the way dance culture has become increasingly commercial over the past decade, and in the process has become more about following fashions and trends than the quality of the music itself:

It's not actually true that dance music has a short shelf life. I just gave you a list of records from twenty-five years ago that you actually knew... 'We Are Family', 'I Will Survive'... They are dance music, but that just shows you the difference between dance music of twenty-five years ago and dance music now... In the last three to five years, you are lucky if it has a six-month shelf life. If anybody remembers Eric Prydz's 'Call On Me' in five years, you'll be surprised, let alone me... It's not just music [that has this short shelf life], and it's only in the last ten years. With the explosion in dance

music ten years ago it became very commercial... It brings a whole new crowd of people in that not necessarily need to be going to clubs. Maybe they should be going to bars, but with the whole clubbing explosion, they go to clubs. So why shouldn't the music become a lot more of its time? If clubs were still what they were, people wouldn't put up with a lot of the shit that comes out now, because it was about purists, and just loving the music, forgetting about the fashion, forgetting about getting through the door, forgetting all that bullshit... In the old days you loved those big tracks, and I still do... all those tracks in there [points to a room in which all the walls are lined with shelves full of vinyl]... I haven't got rid of them because they are good, but a lot of the stuff I have got now, if I never heard it again I wouldn't really give a fuck. (Interview, 2005)

Similarly, Nat Nyk suggests that it is the dance music of recent years that has been more disposable and ephemeral, believing that the current popularity for dance remakes of old pop and rock songs is emphasising this disposability, and in turn negatively affecting dance culture:

These days, across the board, the cultures we live in are such pop-cultures, the way we live our lives these days is so 'throwaway culture', I think that music has suffered because of that. No one wants to hear classics anymore, people just want to hear a song they can go 'la-di-da' to, and then next week hear another song they can go 'la-di-da' to. That's why we're hearing so many remakes of old songs these days, really bad dance remakes of old songs too. That's the bane of the dance industry, that's what's killing dance music at the moment. All these remixes by total fucking nobody producers of dodgy '70s or '80s or '90s songs that we didn't like in the first place, and suddenly they're number one for

ten minutes, and they're not a classic to anyone. That's giving dance music a bad name. (Interview, 2005)

Inherent within the above perceptions of Allkins and Nyk is the belief that it is the lack of quality in contemporary dance music that is heightening the temporal logics of dance culture. Yet these are subjective value judgements that deny the possibility that for some clubbers, particularly those whose involvement has only just begun, it is the music of today that should be granted 'classic' status. Indeed, Allkins's passion for older music most certainly stems from his extensive history of involvement in club culture. Thus, rather than dismissing the music for a supposed lack of quality, and citing this as the reason for the way the music rapidly becomes unfashionable, it is perhaps more reasonable to suggest that this rapidity is a result of similarly rapid shifts in the musical tastes of clubbing audiences, which arises from the relatively short amount of time for which most clubbers actively participate in dance culture. Referencing the continual developments in technology as one of the main reasons for the quick turnover of music that is inherent to contemporary dance culture, Seb Chan also suggests that this ephemeral characteristic can be linked to the rapidity with which people move through club culture, in the sense that there is a constantly shifting and changing dance music audience, which in turn dictates that musical tastes in dance music are constantly shifting and changing too, resulting in a short-term lifespan for most contemporary dance music:

[There is a quick turnover of music] because of the amount of production and the amount of technology, and technological change, behind that production... Things cycle quickly, tastes change... but also, if you think about the average length of time that a person goes to clubs for. You might go to clubs for a year or two years of your life. You grow out of it pretty fast, generally. There will be fanatics, DJs particularly, who hang on to their youth for as long as possible, but generally there are the party years, and you might

go out for a year or two. I'd be really curious... to maybe do a study of, say, Sublime. Follow everyone who goes into Sublime for a year, how many people return, how long does the general person stay... That's why the turnover is fast, because the subcultural knowledge is only kept through other means, not through the punters themselves. There are core punters, who are the DJs I guess, who become these knowledge holders who cross all the generations of clubbers. (Interview, 2005)

One probability is that the DJ will always have a role in club culture, for the uniqueness and spontaneity of a night out is created by the work of the DJ and the relationship they establish with the dancers on the floor in front of their DJ box. The uncertainty lies in the methods and equipment the DJ will use in the future to carry out this work and create this relationship. As is the case with the ephemeral nature of the music and the constantly shifting terrain in which dance culture is played out, it is difficult to theorise about DJ practice because of its continual progression, and thus DJ culture, as with the dance scene, needs to be understood as a fluid and evolving element of club culture. We can ascribe to the DJ a variety of different roles, and we can lend different degrees of emphasis to these roles, but it becomes difficult to define specifically the role of the DJ because of this variety. Different DJs work within different scenes, and thus different requirements and demands are made of them. A DJ who works in the commercial scene will be expected to cater for a more commercially-minded clubbing audience, which will involve playing tracks that are more popular and well-known. The problem for such DJs is in knowing at what point to stop playing these tracks, in order to avoid appearing like they are 'out of touch' with the contemporary scene. As part of the DJ's role involves educating an audience with new music, then it is essential that the DJ keeps ahead of this audience by continually sourcing new tracks.

The DJs who work within the commercial house scene in Sydney have to deal with certain tensions, ideologies and authenticities that are imposed upon their work by clubbing audiences. International DJs are typically perceived as being at the forefront of dance culture, and thus local audiences are more accepting of the music they play and the technology they use to play it. The problem for local DJs is that their educational status is placed secondary to that of the international DJs, thus making it more difficult for the local DJs to play unfamiliar sounds and to use unfamiliar technology. Even if certain local DJs have been giving heavy rotation to a particular track during their sets, or have been using new technology to play their music, it may take the appearance of an international playing the same track and using the same technology to raise the awareness and acceptance of local clubbers.

Discussing the high turnover of dance music, as well as the changes in technology that are gradually reshaping the work of the DJ, serves to create a more detailed understanding and appreciation of DJ culture. While these issues are relevant to DJs in any dance scene, by gathering together the thoughts and observations of DJs who work within Sydney, one can draw out observations regarding the way DJs negotiate the ideologies and expectations of dance culture in a specific local context. It is clear that DJs who work within the commercial scene have to compromise their personal selection of music with an approach that accommodates the desires and demands of a commercial audience, whereas those DJs who work at less commercially-driven venues prefer to see their work as less governed by audience expectations and more centred around their own musical taste. It is in this sense that we can argue that the music that is played in commercial venues is more likely to suffer from the over-exposure that gives contemporary dance music its ephemeral quality. Music that reaches a commercial level is, by its very nature, music that has been given a certain amount of focus and attention, whereas in contrast, music that is less commercial, or less accessible, or less popular, has not been given the same degree of exposure, thus making it less familiar to clubbing audiences, and less

likely to be over-exposed. From this stems the idealistic perspective that it is the underground where one can hear rare and unfamiliar music of a supposed quality, while the mainstream becomes defined as the place to hear frequently played music of a supposed lesser quality.

Yet if most dance music originates outside of the gaze of the mainstream clubs, and filters up to the mainstream after having its popularity proven within the underground, then making a division between these two 'areas' of dance culture seems inappropriate. Instead, it would seem more logical to suggest that there is a degree of fluidity between them, and that there are certain shared logics, and that they are perhaps not quite so divided and separated as previously thought. While references will frequently be made by those within dance culture to separate and distinct 'underground music' and 'mainstream music', there are also times when particular tracks will gain in popularity, and will subsequently be described as moving from the underground to the mainstream. Thus, there are two contrasting perceptions of the relationship between the two areas, one being that they are divided and exclusive, and the other being that they are related and interdependent. The problem, again, lies in the use of these terms and what they are intended to describe. If one is to suggest that tracks shift between an underground and a mainstream, then one needs to define a point at which this shift occurs, and by extension, to define the boundaries of this underground and this mainstream.

It is obvious that to attempt such definitions would be an ultimately futile process, for any boundaries and distinguishing points would be in a constant state of flux. Dance culture is continually changing and altering, and thus it becomes impossible to fix any specific definitions to its content and shape. As such, the language that is used to describe this content and shape needs to be similarly malleable, and with this in mind, the following chapter explores in detail the relevance of terms such as 'underground' and 'mainstream' to the contemporary Sydney dance scene. Specific consideration is given to how these terms are

understood by DJs who work in the scene, as well as to how these DJs interpret the significance dance culture has for its participants, and it is through such consideration that we can work towards an understanding of the language and discourse that shapes not just the dance scene in the city, but also dance culture in general. The degree of commercialism that underpins dance culture in Sydney, with DJs having to negotiate the tensions between their own performances and performances by international DJs, and the tensions that arise from attempting to maintain a level of popularity alongside a level of credibility, forces us to question the ideological divisions that demarcate the city's dance scene, in that it is not that easy to identify an 'underground' scene as such. This, in turn, dictates that we have to query whether an 'underground' scene actually exists in Sydney, and furthermore, whether the term 'underground' itself is relevant for understandings of contemporary dance culture.

CHAPTER SIX – ‘WHAT IS ‘UNDERGROUND’ REALLY?’ – DEFINING THE STRUCTURE, SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING OF DANCE CULTURE

I share the suggestions of Melechi, Redhead, and Rietveld, that contemporary dance culture represents a form of ‘hedonistic *escape* from reality’ (my italics), or rather as Richard and Kruger believe, ‘an *escape* from the isolation and problems often experienced by Western youth’ (1998: 163; my italics). The actual absence of any explicit counter-cultural motivation, or rather ‘a manifest ideological stance’ (Langlois, 1992: 229), defines club culture as not only distinct and separate from previous youth groupings that have been classified in the form of subcultures, but also as bound up in the commercial practices of contemporary consumer society, the emphasis that its participants place on the ‘contemporary’ and the ‘now’ reflecting a temporal sensibility that is situated firmly within the present and disregards any ‘overt rebellion against norms’ (Hunter, 1999: 49). Discussing the shortcomings of subcultural theory for analysing and interpreting contemporary dance culture, in that the theory places an emphasis on working-class youth and their supposed opposition to authority, Huq suggests that,

Club culture, like acid house and rave before it, has always been more about having a good time than challenging the dominant order... Dance music’s dalliance with politics around the CJA-enthused left-liberal commentators from academia and media alike conjured up images of a new version of the subcultural idea of youth as agents of radical social change but this was ultimately short-lived and only applied to a minority of those involved in dance culture. (2002: 96)

Dance music is part of a consumer-based culture that is expressed through articulations of style and image, and that operates on notions of hedonism, Richard and Kruger suggesting that the culture of dance music is ‘defined as hedonistic rather than political, self-indulgent rather than agentic’ (1998: 171),

while Langlois refers to house music culture and a '... somewhat hedonistic aesthetic' (1992: 237).

Linked to this notion of hedonism is the idea that the significance that dance culture holds for its participants involves an element of escape, in the sense of the clubbing experience allowing for a temporary suspension of the realities of everyday life. Trent Rackus outlines such an understanding when he states:

I've always thought [dance culture] is an escape. It's an opportunity for a lot of people to express a different side of themselves... for a lot of people there is that detachment factor from reality, and obviously drugs are very involved in the dance music industry, so with the combination of those two things, it points all towards it being an outlet, an escape. I think ninety-five percent of the attraction to the whole culture is that semi-detachment from reality.
(Interview, 2004)

As Rackus highlights, for some clubbers this act of escape is further developed through the use of drugs and/or alcohol, and thus, due to the immediate after-effects associated with such use, clubbing has become an activity that takes place mainly towards the end of the typical working week of Monday to Friday, with dance scenes revolving around weekend, as opposed to midweek, activity.

Yet to argue that dance culture and its participants are markedly different from those groups previously defined as subcultures, simply because of this inherent escapism, ignores the same escapist principles that have always underpinned popular music as it has been adopted by young people, and therefore, we need to situate contemporary club culture in a broader popular music perspective, and view it in a less unique manner. Situating dance culture within a wider historical framework of teenage appropriation of popular music for pleasure-seeking purposes, Alan Thompson highlights his belief that a notion of hedonistic

escapism forms the root of the appeal that dance culture has for its many participants:

I think clubbing is an escape for most people... Since teenage culture began in the '60s, it has been an output for hedonism. When people work all week, all they want to do at the weekend is go out and forget about their life at the office or forget about their life at the retail store. It's all about having fun and going out with your friends, whether that is at the pub or a nightclub. I think that it is escapism, it's a way of making friends, and it's a way of releasing energy that has built up throughout the week, and frustration and stress... and then back to work on Monday. I think that is its great appeal, is that it's time to go out and have fun with friends. It's a release, it's your play time, and it's your party time. It has just changed and evolved over the years. In the '60s it was rock 'n' roll, in the '70s it was punk, then it was disco, and now it's house music. (Interview, 2005)

Yet not all clubbers may interpret their activities as escapist, and indeed, to reduce the significance of club culture to such an understanding is to simplify what is a far more complex issue, for as Alex Taylor highlights, a person's involvement with dance culture may generate a heightened sense of significance that goes beyond mere escapism:

As people go out more and more, they start to become more educated about it, and it's probably not necessarily so much escapism as almost like... not a hobby, but something you go and do. People start to become so into it that it becomes their world. You get people who go to a club and they will get to know all their friends there. It becomes something that their weekend revolves around. (Interview, 2005)

Interpreting the significance of dance culture merely in terms of escapism would seem to ignore the many different ways in which people engage with contemporary dance music, and would seem to devalue the activities of those people who use dance music in more of a politically explicit manner. It is thus necessary to make a distinction between dance music as it is experienced within club culture, and dance music as it is utilised in other environments and locations. The concern of this thesis is with club culture, and as such, if we take a broader perspective of the progression of dance music, we can see just how central escapist principles have always been for those involved as clubbers. Referencing the history of dance culture, John Wall acknowledges how a significant part of the appeal of dance music and clubs lies in escapist notions:

Obviously there is a strong dimension of escapism, or some kind of thing that is very different from the everyday. House music and disco were the types of music, in recent times, which have been most obviously escapist, being that it was originally relatively poor, gay, largely black people in America who were in a, relatively speaking, downtrodden situation compared to a lot of society, who found that... they could go somewhere on a Saturday night or whatever, and really be separated from their daily reality in an obvious way, like somewhere dark with really loud music, possibly on drugs. It's a pretty thorough escape from the mundane existence of doing a shit job or whatever, and I think, even for people whose job is decent, getting really involved in something which is an experience that kind of overwhelms you, is a really nice thing to do, to just forget about whatever is on your mind and enjoy something... So I think [the appeal of dance culture is]... an escape thing. (Interview, 2005)

While there may be this element to club culture of seeking out an experience that is detached from everyday reality, there is also a sense that the scenes that go towards shaping dance culture, and the subsequent taste groups that form within these scenes, serve to establish an intense degree of human interaction, thus lending club culture further significance. Sonia Sharma emphasises the opportunities for social interaction that dance culture provides, suggesting not only that it can be seen as escapist, but also that it draws participants into a community of shared identity and taste:

The thing with dance music is that it definitely has a sense of community, so, for example, Parklife... fifteen thousand people at one event who look very similar to you, they affirm your identity, you share a common interest, you share a common ground, you all look and dress similar... On the flipside, I think dance music, more than any other music, is very much based on escapism... a forty-minute rock concert, it's engaging, you have to pay attention, you have to concentrate, and then it's over, whereas dance music, you could spend six hours on the dancefloor, and everyone says you go on a journey at some point, and that's still very much the case. That's why I think it's so popular with the mainstream, because people working in office jobs, people working in mundane day jobs, it's something to look forward to at the weekend, definitely... and Sydney's a very accessible scene... You see the same faces [in clubs], and it's quite a tight-knit community. I think each scene has its community, which is a nice thing. (Interview, 2005)

The 'mainstream' and the 'underground'

Typically within the discourse that surrounds dance music culture, the 'mainstream' club scene is positioned as an over-exposed and musically non-inventive element of this culture, and as consisting of a stagnant, uncreative and unchanging 'mass' (Thornton, 1995: 94), while the 'underground' scene is

described as providing a 'fertile breeding ground for new house music's diversification and regeneration' (Bidder, 2001: 245), and thus, the invention and progression of dance music is situated as occurring out of the view of most of its participants, all of which reflects Collin's observation that, 'there is constant friction between two competing ideologies within any culture: the elitist versus the populist, the avant-garde against the mass' (1998: 4). Goodwill believes that there is an identifiable divide between underground and mainstream dance culture, and makes reference to how 'there is a large amount of cynicism from the underground criticising the overground DJs who will play anything' (Interview, 2004), and as Trent Rackus suggests in regard to the negative views and attitudes that exist towards commercial dance culture, 'no one wants to be mainstream, do they?' (Interview, 2004).

It is generally assumed that the mainstream draws its musical and stylistic content from the underground, giving wider exposure to that which has a degree of proven popularity. Inherent within such a view are the beliefs that 'powerful new sounds emerge from the margins and challenge existing musical conventions' (Negus, 1996: 28), and that 'where commercial interests are involved, a sense of the innovative in music scenes is lost' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 102). Such arguments, however, not only privilege the musical activity of a minority, thus sustaining one of the premises of subcultural theory, but also assume that existing musical styles cannot be challenged by the very people that operate within them, in that those who work within the mainstream are assumed simply to absorb the trends and styles initiated by the underground, rather than actually creating and initiating anything themselves.

Furthermore, such perspectives mark out dance culture as having been compromised in some way by its gradual increase in popularity, and also posit the suggestion that prior to this commercialisation, it was somehow a 'pure', 'original', and non-commodified art form, Collin suggesting, in a rather abstract manner, that as dance culture 'became part of the pop mainstream, some of its

unique mystery – the special secret – had been lost forever as it entered the public domain’ (1998: 276). Haslam suggests that the dance music infrastructure of superclubs, media, promoters and trade fairs that underpins contemporary club culture ‘is as much about money-making opportunities as anything else... once money moved in, dance culture became compromised’ (2001: 205). For Stephen Allkins, the development of superclubs has contradicted the intimacy and familiarity that he believes are essential requirements for any club night to succeed:

Superclubs don't work. Clubbing isn't about 'mega'. It's about intimate. It's about going to a room with three hundred people, and you know a lot of the people there. You know the DJ, and it's not some guest every week that just generically walks in and out, and doesn't give a fuck who you are. That is where most of my club nights have come from. I do regular nights, and I know the people there and they know what I play. That is why they come back, not because they read about it in some magazine. (Interview, 2005)

This anti-commercial ideology is an intrinsic part of the discourse used by participants in dance culture as a way of describing what they perceive to be a negative process of commodification, an issue echoed by Weber's ravers who 'felt that parties were becoming too commercial or mainstream' (1999: 329). Yet to a certain extent, dance culture has always been bound up in commercial concerns, whether the aim is to get as many people as possible through the door of a superclub to generate profit, or merely to get enough people through the door of an underground venue simply to cover costs.

There is the notion that those involved at a more obscure, underground level have the ability to be more cultural daring and adventurous in their musical experimentation as they have no explicitly commercial concerns, and therefore do not need to engage in practices that generate and sustain a high degree of

popularity. In this perspective, the mainstream is positioned as feeding off and absorbing these radical, underground developments, 'expropriating' and 'incorporating' them (Clarke et al., 1976: 16), so that there is a filtering process at work. Highlighting this process, Trent Rackus explains how almost all underground culture eventually achieves some degree of commercial acceptance:

I always find that the underground, seventy percent of the time, in two years time becomes commercial... [For example] Freestylers' 'Push Up', that was eighteen months old before it became a hit... Starsailor's 'Four To The Floor', the Thin White Duke remix, when I first heard that record there's no way I would have thought that was going to be in the Top 40 and would have a film clip... the way the evolution of dance music seems to work, what was underground two years ago ends up becoming commercial through a particular track breaking open the desire for the commercial listeners to hear this sort of music, it's fresh to them, so anything that follows in its wake will have the same effect, and that's where these cultures build from. (Interview, 2004)

There remains, however, the possibility that popular club culture can actually generate shifts in musical styles and trends, and thus bring about change in the clubbing scene, for as Goodwill explains in reference to the divide that exists between the underground and the mainstream in dance music culture, as well as in popular music culture in general:

I think there's much more cutting-edge stuff happening in the overground than there is in the underground. I hear as much cutting-edge production on a Justin Timberlake record as I do on an underground Moodymann house record. (Interview, 2004)

Pushing dance music into Sydney's mainstream

While dance music may now thoroughly be a part of mainstream cultural activity, it is only really within the past decade that club culture has shifted from being perceived solely as an underground phenomenon. Obviously the extent to which this shift has occurred in different geographical locations varies enormously, and thus, music that may be underground and relatively unknown in one city can be mainstream and hugely popular in another. The progression of Sydney's dance culture into the mainstream has been facilitated by a number of different factors, including DJs, industry support, legislation, and media. In contrast to the suggestions outlined in Chapter Two that Sydney's licensing laws have contained and restricted the growth of the dance scene, John Wall cites changes to licensing laws in the city as one of the most influential factors in directing dance music towards a wider commercial audience:

I think the thing that has pushed into the mainstream the most in the last few years has been bar culture, where the licensing laws changed, and all of a sudden you could open a bar in Sydney, because there were fuck all bars until five years ago. You had to have millions of dollars to open a pub because the licence itself would be a quarter of a million dollars, if you could get one, which you usually couldn't because all the other pubs would gang up to stop it. So it was very difficult to have a licensed premises where you could have music and dancing, whereas they've relaxed the licensing laws, which is how you can go up Kings Cross and you've got World Bar, Candy's Apartment, and Le Panic... all of those places. There are so many places that, relatively speaking, are not the multi-million dollar investment that they used to have to be in order to kind of function... All those places have music, and then inevitably a lot of that turns into dancing, even though it's not a full-on dancefloor, [and] is more suited to more commercial music because it's not a sweaty, dark underground place where you have

to be really into the music to go there. I think that has made dance music mainstream in a huge way. (Interview, 2005)

Thus, by generating an increase in the amount of bars around the city, changes to licensing laws have facilitated the spread and growth of mainstream dance music, with these bars having less of an emphasis on promoting a certain type of music, as is the case with most clubs, and instead taking a more general, commercially-driven musical approach. Yet these bars are not the sole reason for dance music progressing into the mainstream, for as Wall goes on to acknowledge, the large dance parties he has put on in Sydney have, in part, been responsible for furthering this progression of the city's dance scene:

Yes, to an extent [the Fuzzy parties have helped to push dance music into the mainstream]... I think you can't deny us doing a party as big as Field Day [has had an effect]. The first year it was all dance crowd [sic], but inevitably other people are going to notice it because it's so conspicuous. So that kind of thing would be making some difference. You get all these DJs who once upon a time would have been considered pretty underground, playing in front of people who are not necessarily underground, and I think it's good to expand people's horizons in that way, even if it does make a scene more commercial. (ibid.)

Yet as Wall suggests through reference to these large dance parties, dance music may now be firmly located within the mainstream, but because of the associations dance culture has with illegal drug-taking, there remains something intrinsically rebellious about it, while these associations also prevent dance culture from being completely accepted by the mainstream:

What we've done with our big parties and stuff is a very, very slow process of managing to convince the authorities, in the broader

sense of the word, meaning people who are in control of big outdoor parks, and also police, councils, and all sorts of people, that we can do dance music without it being some kind of a threat to society. So it looks as if it is fully mainstream and whatever, but you wait and see what happens if one person overdoses at Field Day or something. If somebody dies at the footy, it's not like they are going to say, "Oh, maybe we shouldn't have football", but dance music is still... there's no question it has become mainstream... but there still is a lot of suspicion amongst the wider public about dance music, mostly because they perceive that dance music is all about drugs, and drugs are illegal, and that doesn't look like it is changing in any great hurry. I think as long as people associate a certain kind of music with something illegal, then just by definition it has to be rebellious, and there's always a fight to keep it going. (ibid.)

Despite the frequency with which terms such as 'underground' and 'mainstream' are used, their meanings are somewhat unclear and non-specific, and indeed, it is perhaps this very frequency that has led to the terms becoming employed in widely varying contexts. Referencing the value-laden and inherently subjective nature of the terms, Seb Chan suggests that the naming and categorising of particular dance music scenes is a part of industry marketing processes, and thus he questions the empirical validity of such terms, while using the example of early rave culture in Sydney to illustrate his argument:

['Underground' and 'mainstream'] are marketing terms now, they've always been marketing terms. Marketers define them as existing because they are marketing terms. If I look back at the free party scene, what they were doing was clever marketing, but they didn't see it as marketing because they were anarchist punks, so they don't think marketing. They created a look, or a brand, that was similar across all their flyers and that was different to the other

brands that were on the market at the time. They were competing for consumers. There was no money changing hands, but they were taking money away from other parties. There were some amazing events. We used to play at these parties put on by this DJ that came from Thailand, called DJ Quang, and he was in Sydney maybe for two years. He had this feud with Tribal Productions, who used to put on a lot of really large raves. So every time Tribal would put on a party, he would put on a free party within a kilometre of the Tribal party, to try to compete with them. Not to compete money-wise, but just to screw them, effectively. There was obviously going to be, in the background, drug dealings going on, so it was about competing for a different market. It was a pill market, probably, but the public face of it was, here are two brands competing for the same geographic market space. (Interview, 2005)

Yet despite these marketing techniques that have been inherent within dance culture since its very beginnings, the overt sense of rebellion that characterised early rave culture had the effect of disguising such techniques. As dance scenes have become more professional and business-oriented, these techniques have not only become more explicit, but also are argued to have suppressed the idea of the culture as inherently rebellious. Dance culture has been assimilated into the capitalist operational logics of contemporary society, or rather, drawing on Shuker's definition of 'commodification', dance music is a genre that, while initially having been 'couched in the language of rebellion', has now 'metamorphosed into the language of the cash register' (2002: 55), which is part of the more general cultural shift in popular music that Bradby acknowledges when she refers to 'the loss of any sense of political oppositionality in rock's successor musics' (1993: 163), while Straw explains how there has been a shift 'away from the disruptive tensions seen by many as central to the politics of popular music' (1988: 264). For John Wall, the parties he puts on partially represent legal versions of warehouse parties, and as he explains, despite the

way dance culture has become increasingly mainstream over the past decade, convincing the relevant authorities to allow these dance parties to be staged required a certain level of perseverance:

I think what we're doing is attempting to still make it feel to the people at the parties like... you are the people who are doing something that other people don't understand, while simultaneously going to all the police and everybody, and trying to make them understand it in a way that will let them allow it to happen. Although there's something heroic about doing a warehouse party and having a shutdown by the authorities, it's a real downer at 2am when your party's over and the cops are standing there and searching everybody! It's really difficult, [but] we're attempting to keep that spirit of what the music is about without the party getting shut down... We went to Sydney Council, the Botanic Gardens, and everyone else that could possibly be involved, and we wrote a thirty-page little thesis about this kind of music and how culturally significant it is, and we basically said this is the most important kind of music at the current time and that it's important that people have access to it, and that in Australia we haven't had sufficient access to it because the venues haven't been available, and that would be as if jazz hadn't been available in America in the '30s, or whatever... it means you wouldn't have that musical legacy, and we really pushed the angle that it is so culturally important that never mind the fact that people might be taking drugs, we will have all these safety plans, and we'll have doctors on site, just the way they do at any large thing... and they actually agreed! (Interview, 2005)

As Wall goes on to explain, arguing his case for staging a dance party in Sydney involved drawing parallels with other forms of music and culture that are granted

their own festivals around the city, in turn emphasising the cultural and social significance of contemporary dance music in Australia:

We put in this big proposal for Field Day... and that has been the biggest stretch, having a big fucking dance party with twenty thousand people in the middle of the city in land owned by the Botanic Gardens... We said to them, "Look, you've got a jazz event, you've got an opera event, you've got a symphony event, you've got a rock event, there's a film festival. Dance music is more significant than opera to this generation. You really need to cover your eighteen to thirty-five age group", and they were like, "Yeah, you're right". (ibid.)

Defining the 'underground' in Sydney

Focusing specifically on dance culture and the failings of subcultural theory, Huq suggests that there is a certain futility in attempting to define something as complex as dance culture in singular terms:

Perhaps the only way to describe multifaceted youth cultures such as dance music culture is with multidimensional models. No single term can capture the complexity of contemporary youth styles.
(2002: 96-97)

While they do not create such similarly limited theoretical constraints, terms such as 'mainstream' and 'underground' still impose a conceptual division upon dance culture that ignores the diversity and crossover within the culture. The use of these terms creates borders and boundaries that are ideological rather than realistic, and that are impossible to verify empirically, and as Poschardt admits, 'the meaning of underground within the dancefloor movement varies enormously' (1998: 29), although throughout his text he continues to use the term as a means of contextualising developments within dance culture, despite also suggesting

that 'perhaps the idea of the underground resistance is only a stale idea' (ibid: 406). Furthermore, Bennett suggests that, 'the precise meaning of 'underground' will depend very much upon the nature of the particular social context in which it is articulated' (2000: 85), although Fikentscher makes a bold attempt at a general definition of 'underground' in the glossary that accompanies his study of the underground dance scene in New York:

In the dance music industry, a term contrasted either with mainstream or commercial. Refers to a relatively small, geographically bounded, subcultural scene, with its own revered leaders (DJs), mechanisms of communication (language, clothing, dancing), and institutions (home studios, private or semiprivate clubs, independent record companies, specialty retail stores). Marked by a pride in cutting-edge ideology, and an insistence on separation from mass mediation via television, radio, or press.
(2000: 139)

While one of the main aims of this thesis is to highlight the degree of commercialism that runs throughout dance culture in Sydney, this is not meant as a denial of the existence of an underground dance scene in the city. It can be argued that this commercialism makes it increasingly difficult to identify and define an underground, in that the distinguishing factors of the underground have been gradually eroded by the move of dance music into the commercial sphere, yet many of those involved in dance culture in the city acknowledge an identifiable underground dance scene. Mike Bennett argues that there is an underground dance scene in Sydney, a perspective that is certainly informed by his own DJing at an underground event he puts on, while he also explains how his definition and understanding of the term 'underground' relates to a particular style of music:

We do an underground night called Ground-Under, which is once a month at Candy's Apartment and that has just been fantastic. We are getting six hundred people there every night we do it, but it's purely underground house, and there's not anything commercial played... We classify it as being underground because we are not playing any mainstream club hits and we're not... obviously as DJs we are going out there to rock the crowd, but we're not going to compromise by playing something that they might know just for the hell of making some people sing along, we're going to give them an underground house night. That's exactly what we set out to do, and that's what we are doing, so it's working really well for us.

(Interview, 2005)

While the dance parties that he puts on can most certainly be defined as 'mainstream', if only because of the numbers of people that go to them, with attendances well into the thousands for events like Field Day and Parklife, John Wall believes that there is definitely an underground dance scene in Sydney, although he highlights how this scene consists of one-off, irregular parties rather than weekly events, and as such, the underground dance scene in Sydney is perhaps not quite as significant as it was prior to the development of commercial club culture in the city:

I think there's a big underground... well, big as in there are a lot of underground events going on. I guess the difference to five or ten years ago is underground is a bit more underground, in that there are a lot of very small events that are happening once every month or two, at all kinds of venues all over the place, and it's not as concentrated, it's not all right in the city, like High-Jinks at the Sly Fox in Enmore, which is a few guys that are just really into electro, tech-house and techno, so they stick on a party there to have fun, and there's a shit load of stuff like that, like Glitch, Beef, and all

these sort of things... There's an absence of just regular nights where you can rock [turn] up and feel like there's any degree of underground kind of vibe. I can't think of many at all, in terms of regular things. (Interview, 2005)

Thus, while there may be dance parties and events that can be defined as underground, whether in regard to their size, location, or musical style, the irregularity of these parties forces one to question the extent to which they can be said to constitute an entire scene. Understandings and interpretations of terms such as 'underground' and 'mainstream' differ markedly, indicating that they are subjectively applied concepts that cannot be given set and defined meanings.

Questioning the 'underground' in Sydney

While some people perceive there to be an underground dance scene in Sydney, and go some way towards defining this scene, there are other people who question whether an underground scene exists at all in Sydney, Trent Rackus believing that the underground is 'almost non-existent' (Interview, 2004). Drawing on his own experiences of DJing in the UK, Alan Thompson suggests that the dance scene in Sydney is not of sufficient size for there to exist a clear and marked division between the underground and the mainstream, and he explains how thus in Sydney, the boundaries between the two are somewhat unclear:

Sydney has an underground dance scene which is very, very, very small. I don't think it is so defined here as it is in the UK. There are certain clubs here, like Bang Gang for instance, which is a much more electro-orientated club... that could be considered underground. Then you'd have a club like Kink on a Saturday night, but then the music there is not necessarily commercial, but it's classed as a commercial club. So it's a very fine line between, whereas in the UK it's much more defined. You'd have your Ritz nightclub and then you'd have Plastic, which is completely

underground, and which doesn't even advertise. I just think the scene is much smaller here and the population doesn't lend itself to have too much underground. (Interview, 2005)

Population size can be seen to be a central factor in the development of a particular dance scene, and it would seem to be the case in Sydney that the commerciality of the scene is driven by the limitations that a smaller clubbing audience places on the options of promoters and DJs to explore a variety of sounds. In a larger city, with a higher population, there will be a greater diversity of musical taste, and thus it will be easier, in a financial sense, for a variety of different clubs to co-exist, and it is from such a situation that less popular sounds and scenes are defined as 'underground'. If such diversity is absent, as a result of a smaller population, it becomes harder to define and distinguish underground elements of a scene. Traditionally, the underground has been interpreted as representing something different to the mainstream, but if there is no recognisable difference, then a particular scene appears as existing on one specific level, with no marked divisions. Illya questions the existence of an underground scene in Sydney dance culture, as well as questioning the very definition of the term itself, and thereby demonstrating just how vague and non-specific terms such as 'underground' really are. He also suggests that rather than there being a specific division between an underground and a mainstream in Sydney, there is actually a certain degree of crossover between the two areas, in the sense that playing commercial music does not necessarily alienate, to the extent that is often perceived by people within club culture, those clubbers who define themselves as liking underground music:

I don't think there's any real big underground scene, as such, that's really thriving in Sydney... I think [the dance scene] is pretty much mixed. I look at the people that come to Cheeky or the Terrace, and we have got the deep house dudes coming in there. Although [we play] some tracks they may not get into, because they are big

tracks or something, they are still coming down, they are still getting into most of it, so I think commercial and non-commercial are intertwined, as much as they'd like to think it's not... There's a lot of pressure on deep house DJs, from all these little trainspotting kids that are standing around, not to play a cheesy tune... [In reference to Sydney DJs Simon Caldwell and Phil Smart] they may be underground, but if they're underground, then they are underground DJs playing in... I wouldn't say 'commercial' clubs, but Good Vibrations on a Saturday night is not exactly underground. So are they really underground, or is the style of music they are playing more suited for the underground? You can say that about the breakbeat side room at Home. Is that really underground?... What the fuck is underground? I don't know... is underground [particular] music, or the actual underground? If it's the music, then they're playing underground music in a commercial club. (Interview, 2004)

Rather than attempting to give any specific definition of an underground dance scene as it exists in Sydney, Alex Taylor acknowledges the difficulty in ascribing a meaning to the term, explaining how, while it may be a regular part of the discourse used by those who participate within the scene, ultimately it is understood on a purely subjective level, which thus dictates that the exact meaning and understanding of 'underground' will vary from person to person:

I see all these people on inthemix going on about the underground scene and everything, but most of them don't have a clue what they are talking about. From a DJ point of view, what is 'underground' really? You could go on about it forever, as you know! It's up to the individual really, what they think is underground, and everyone is at a different point in their musical education, or whatever, and they might consider something commercial as underground, and then in another twelve months it'll be like, "I can't believe I was listening to

that cheese". It can just go on and on and on... There is a certain amount of underground scene in Sydney... or there are people that think it is [underground]... doesn't necessarily mean it is [underground]! [The Mad Racket parties] have managed to stay relatively underground, where you know about them but they're not completely pushed in your face, and it hasn't changed from what it was... I don't know what defines the underground. It is up to the individual. (Interview, 2005)

While defining the exact nature of the underground may be problematic, it is largely taken as a given within dance culture that underground equates to a lack of explicit commerciality. In this sense, the 'mainstream' and the 'underground' are defined by the different set of commercial parameters that surround them, with the latter being driven less by commercial concerns and more by musical concerns than the former, however idealistic this may be.

Dance music and the mainstream

During the period of 'acid house', dance music may have demonstrated a potential for subverting 'dominant cultural patterns' (Martin, 1999: 89), but because of the way it has impacted upon, and become ingrained within, mainstream cultural practice since that period, this is no longer a sustainable interpretation of dance culture. More accurately, rather than having any relevance for processes of subversion, with Malbon suggesting that, 'clubbing seems to be much less about rather rigid conceptions of 'resistance' and notions of authority that must be tirelessly battled and fought' (1999: 182), and Collin explaining how, with the commodification of dance culture that the superclubs generated during the 1990s, house music 'was no longer considered in any way subversive or extraordinary' (1998: 271), dance culture actually supports and maintains the existing capitalist system through its emphasis on the commodity status of the music (Frith, 2001), which has in turn informed and generated the branding of clubs and DJs. This is not intended as a criticism, and indeed does

not dictate that dance music has no cultural and social relevance if it fails to provide any challenge to the status quo, but rather it is meant simply as an observation of the point at which dance culture has now arrived in its development as a primarily youth-based leisure activity (Brewster and Broughton, 2000: 426).

In the same way that the concept of the underground is often aligned with a less commercial approach, the current mainstream popularity of dance music is often perceived as having negatively affected the quality and cultural value of this music. Indeed, the ideals and authenticities that surround popular music culture as a whole typically equate increased commercial success with decreased artistic worth. For Stephen Allkins, the branding and hype that contemporary dance music has been promoted through, and the resultant commercialisation, have negatively affected the significance and relevance of dance culture as a whole:

The club scene is cyclic, and to me, it's at a really bad stage at the moment, where it is very commercial... Everybody is in clubs for the booze, the chicks, the drugs, and maybe a dance if they can't get anything else. That's not an underground ethic, and there is a lot more of that than the pure love of dance, at the moment. I think once the whole logo, Ministry of Sound compilation thing finally dies then we'll go back to a real underground, because people will make the choice of going back to dinner parties or going to a club. They will actually make a choice, instead of it having to be what you do on a Saturday. (Interview, 2005)

Drawing on his extensive involvement in dance culture, Allkins goes on to reference some history, contrasting the initial development of contemporary dance culture with the scene in the present day, and suggesting that the scene today is characterised by corporate hype and an inferior quality of music:

Thirty years ago we didn't have mix CDs, we didn't have Paradise Garage CDs, nobody knew what the hell it was, because it was happening, it was there, it was exploding... I'm not saying dance music shouldn't be part of the mainstream. It should be naturally a part of the mainstream. Disco was naturally a part of the mainstream. It wasn't pushed, it wasn't hyped. People just happened to love that music so much they embraced it, but now you have record companies spending millions of dollars publicising records and giving them to all the 'right' DJs to play... Now it is all just hype. [Disco] tracks like 'We Are Family' and 'I Will Survive' were loved so much by people who bothered going out that they crossed over. I don't think Eric Prydz's 'Call On Me' is loved by anybody I know, and it's being pushed by the radio stations. (ibid.)

Yet despite such perceptions, the very fact that dance music is consumed on a mainstream scale dictates that it has an inherent value and worth for a significant number of people, and dismissing the music and the culture for their commerciality devalues the time and effort which these people invest in participating in the dance scene. Contemporary club culture is a mainstream business, not a minority subculture, and as Malbon highlights, what can be said without question or doubt is that, 'twenty years after disco's popularity and only ten years after the 'acid house' revolution, clubbing is now an immensely big business and remains extraordinarily popular' (1999: 10). Acknowledging the centrality of the mainstream to dance music culture, Trent Rackus explains how the commercial viability of the culture depends very much on those audiences who want to hear the popular tracks, tracks that have become popular because of their exposure through mainstream media:

You have to be accepting of the fact that the mainstream takes up the biggest part of your audience. These are people that are

affected by what's played on the radio and what's shown on the video clip on the television. In a club, these people are there to hear music, and you will always see the response you get from playing a big record. (Interview, 2004)

The popularity of dance music does not lessen its cultural value and reduce its significance for understandings of contemporary youth culture, and simply because dance culture now seems to operate more than ever before within the structures of capitalism does not mean it should be ignored and dismissed. Pursuits of 'frantic hedonism' (Harris, 2003: 11), however basic and directionless, may not threaten to overturn authorities or governments, but are tremendously important commercially and industrially, as can be seen in the networks and infrastructures of businesses and media that support and maintain the Sydney dance scene.

Studying commercial dance music scenes

Through the comments, observations, interpretations and understandings of DJs who work regularly within the local scene, some of the defining characteristics of the commercial dance scene in Sydney have been identified and drawn out during the course of this study. The scene itself in Sydney constitutes an example of a 'commercial transnational scene', and is based around the cultural incorporation and commodification of dance music that is effected through and affected by DJ practice. In turn, this commercialism has impacted upon notions of the 'underground', and by pushing dance culture into the mainstream in Sydney it has made the concept of the 'underground' seemingly less relevant and applicable, as has been discussed in this chapter. This is not to say that there is no underground dance scene in Sydney, but rather that such a scene is now less easily identifiable, and indeed, less crucial to the development of the dance scene as a whole. While underground scenes have traditionally been understood as providing the sounds, styles and fashions for the mainstream, it would seem that now there is a greater degree of independence within the mainstream, and

that radical and forward-thinking musical developments can occur just as easily within the mainstream as they can within the underground.

There is definitely some form of 'underground'/'mainstream' split within the Sydney dance scene, although the boundaries of each seem particularly unclear and difficult to define. The music and culture of the mainstream is widely acknowledged as originating in the underground, but the exact point at which something ceases to be 'underground' is open to interpretation. Does a record lose its 'underground' status when it begins to get played by 'commercial' DJs in 'commercial' clubs? Does the 'underground', by definition, have only a limited popularity? Are the 'underground' and 'mainstream' actually complimentary and mutually reliant, rather than contrasting and opposing, subdivisions of the same cultural whole? In reference to the underground and mainstream cultures of the Sydney dance scene, Goodwill states:

I don't know where the underground starts and ends, but I definitely think there's an argument to be said that as long as it's cutting edge it doesn't matter if it's underground, it just means that it's pushing things forward... what it's about for me, and what dance culture needs to aspire to, is about progression, as opposed to what's right or wrong to do. (Interview, 2004)

While in the past, terms such as 'subculture' and 'counter-culture' may have been appropriate descriptions for dance music culture as a relatively non-mainstream cultural phenomenon, its current commercial success, and resultant development into a mainstream cultural leisure activity, dictates that we need to re-theorise the culture's significance, meaning and categorisation, with a shift towards an understanding of what I have labelled 'commercial transnational scenes', and it is for this reason that further studies of dance scenes need to move away from the constraints and limitations imposed by subcultural theory and similar minority-focused interpretations.

It has been my concern in this thesis to explore DJ culture within the context of the commercial house music scene in Sydney, and thus my work lacks the concern with politically-charged ideologies and activities that pervades other studies of dance culture. As a commercial scene, it lacks the direct and explicit political sensibilities that infuse such protest-based movements as Reclaim The Streets, and as Seb Chan highlights when discussing what it is that clubbers find appealing about dance culture, there is nothing inherently rebellious about the contemporary dance scene:

[Clubs] are a place to meet other people, pick up, have fun at... I don't think there's anything beyond that... Nowadays there's no risk involved... I think that has also changed because drug consumption patterns have changed too. Things like 'E' [Ecstasy] are a lot more mainstream now, too. (Interview, 2005)

Yet this does not dictate that the contemporary dance scene does not provide a rich and detailed field of study for the academic researcher, and furthermore, does not mean there is an absence of politics at work in commercial dance culture. There is, therefore, a need to differentiate the ways in which dance culture can be understood as 'political', and to define the manner in which one makes reference to 'politics'. In contrast to the aforementioned RTS groups that use dance music as a part of wider protest concerns against governments and authorities, the politics involved in commercial dance culture are markedly less explicit. There are no protests against capitalism or rejections of authoritarian control within club culture, and indeed, the manner in which clubs operate as businesses as part of a wider dance music *industry* reflects the way in which dance culture has been assimilated into capitalist processes. I would argue that it is a pursuit of hedonism that gives dance culture its social and cultural relevance. It provides a platform for an escape from society, and while this escape is only

temporary, it is this brief rejection of the wider world that gives dance culture its politics.

There needs to be a move away from the tendency to impose on cultural groupings some notion of counter-mainstream politics as a means of exploring their significance, although obviously there needs to be an awareness of the hedonistic politics that dance culture involves, Hesmondhalgh and Negus noting how writers have, 'over-invested rave with political meaning, in the traditional sense of intervention in public policy, and downplayed the politics of its pleasures' (2002: 88). As rave culture, and the threat it seemed to pose to authorities, becomes an increasingly distant point in the wider historical development of dance culture, and as the culture becomes ever more integrated into the mainstream, it seems increasingly inappropriate to discuss the culture, in its most accepted and commercial manifestation, not only in terms of political rebellion and social confrontation, but also in terms of youth culture, for as Huq observes:

... by the beginning of the new millennium there was a generation of dance music fans who had been participating in club culture for a decade: a market segment termed 'middle youth'. (2002: 91)

Studies of dance culture that have used concepts of tribes and subcultures to interpret findings have been restricted by the very limitations that pre-existing theoretical frameworks impose. Authors of such studies have concerned themselves solely with attempting to make the culture fit the theory, in the process neglecting other interpretive possibilities and explanations. In regard to my own study, I accept that my use of 'scene' involves the application of a pre-existing concept, but rather than work from an original starting point that has 'scene' as its focus, I have drawn the relevance and appropriateness of the term from my research findings. Its widespread use by DJs, promoters, media people and clubbers dictates its accurateness as a description of the activities, practices,

sites, and logics of operation that give shape and definition to dance culture in Sydney. Concepts such as 'tribe' and 'subculture' are conspicuous by their absence in the discourse that surrounds Sydney club culture, which in turn dictates that we have to question their validity as theoretical explanations. To analyse a culture in terms not used or understood by its participants and consumers seems particularly dismissive of their understandings and interpretations, and thus research needs to incorporate an approach that is sympathetic towards 'a more pragmatic and balanced assessment of the role of music in the lives of people' (Hesmondhalgh and Negus, 2002: 88).

Terms and concepts such as 'underground' and 'mainstream' are frequently used in relation to dance culture, not just within the discourse of the culture itself, but also by theorists who proclaim a position of objective detachment from the culture. The inherent problem in applying the terms is their lack of precise meaning, for while they are extensively used, there would appear to be no set, defined, specific, and commonly held understanding of each particular concept, making it somewhat problematic and difficult to prove their empirical existence. One of my original aims in conducting my research for this thesis was to explore the understandings held by DJs of these terms, and to work out some form of specific meaning for each, although this was to prove ultimately futile, for not only does every DJ seem to hold different definitions, but some question whether the 'underground' exists at all in the landscape of contemporary club culture. One common interpretation is that the 'underground' involves less of an emphasis on commerciality, and provides a platform for the playing of less well-known, more obscure music, so that the role of the underground DJ is perhaps more as an educator, in contrast to the commercial DJ who is first and foremost an entertainer. There is, however, a degree to which these divisions are idealistic rather than realistic, for underground clubs are just as much businesses as commercial clubs are. The main concern for all clubs is with getting the highest number of people through their doors, and this will often involve a specific music policy, as Andrew James explains:

What people seem to forget is that most clubs are a business, they are there to make money, and they are there to get as many people through the door paying money, and as many people to the bar paying money, as possible. Like any business they have to do it any way they possibly can, so you can't really expect that they are going to be pushing all this quality, deeper, underground music that's just not in the interests of the broad population. (Interview, 2004)

CONCLUSION – ‘WHERE ARE THEY GOING TO GO NEXT?’ – SHIFTING THE FOCUS OF DANCE MUSIC STUDIES

This thesis has questioned the existence of an underground dance scene in Sydney, and subsequently, the validity of the term ‘underground’ for contemporary dance culture. Yet simply because it is difficult to identify such a scene in Sydney, it does not necessarily follow that the term itself is no longer relevant. It would be foolish to attempt to argue against the usefulness of one of the most frequently used words in dance music discourse, and even though its exact meaning is by no means clear, it remains very much a part of the way participants in dance culture interpret and make sense of the scenes they are involved in. Precisely because of this unclear meaning, it is crucial that further studies of dance scenes work through the issue of defining the term, and give greater consideration to an interrogation of the linguistic discourse that frames and shapes these scenes. This is not a call for a redefinition of the term ‘underground’, but rather simply a suggestion that researchers need to be more aware of the variations in meaning that such terms have, and the subsequent effect this has not only on their empirical use, but also on the way in which they are employed within academic discourse.

Furthermore, such critical awareness needs to be applied to the use of the term ‘subculture’. While it is my suggestion that the concept has become increasingly inappropriate for interpreting popular music based youth cultures, particularly with dance music as it has moved further into the mainstream and further away from its origins as a counter-cultural activity, this is not to say that it is irrelevant for further studies. Indeed, to suggest that ‘subculture’ is an invalid concept simply because it is not used within the specific culture under consideration is to perhaps neglect the fact that it has never really been extensively employed outside of the academic world. As Luckman explains in regard to what she sees as the continued validity of the term ‘subculture’:

... it is rarely participants who use the term. Rather those with an institutional investment in the idea of 'credibility' and 'difference', namely promoters and academics, are the people with a particular penchant for this terminology. (2002: 320)

Yet while the term may be relevant for interpreting those elements of dance culture that are situated at the more politically-charged end of the dance music spectrum, it does not remain a convenient catch-all concept for understanding all aspects of popular music culture that have a large degree of youth involvement. As such, scenes that are firmly located within the mainstream need to be interpreted through an alternative theoretical lens, and having participated in, observed, and interpreted house music culture in Sydney, it is my argument that the term 'scene' most adequately acts as a reference for the practices, ideologies, and language that go towards shaping dance music culture, not just in Sydney, but also around the world.

The term 'scene' on its own, however, lacks specific meaning and relevance, and, to tie it more firmly to contemporary dance culture, I would suggest that employing it in tandem with 'transnational' goes some way towards describing the way in which dance music circulates around the world, and the way in which contemporary dance scenes absorb material from all over the globe, making these scenes interconnected and interrelated, and dictating that there are very few cultural barriers between geographically disparate scenes. While the use of a term such as 'scene' serves to demarcate and distinguish a particular area and a particular set of practices, in the process creating a division between the scene and everything else outside it, it does not invoke the same degree of division and separation as implied by the use of 'subculture'. If 'scene' is then subsequently used with 'transnational', then any sense of division becomes replaced with a degree of fluidity.

Studying commercial dance scenes through DJ culture

This thesis has gone some way towards correcting the lack of attention that has been given to commercial dance scenes in academic writings on dance culture, and demonstrated that it is not only the counter-cultural and explicitly political manifestations of this culture that provide worthy and informative sites of research and analysis. It has been my intention to situate the working practices of house music DJs of the Sydney dance scene in a theoretical framework as a way of interpreting the social and cultural significance of the DJ. Certainly s/he is a figure who has remained, on the whole, outside of the gaze of academic researchers, who have attempted to explain dance culture through a focus on the audience. While such an approach often provides informative and illuminating conclusions, the significance of house music culture cannot be found solely in the clubbing crowd. As this thesis has made apparent, theorising the role of the DJ deepens our understanding of the operational logics of dance music. The DJ is a central figure of contemporary popular music, and has an important role in bringing together clubbing crowds according to shared tastes and sensibilities. In this respect, future studies of music scenes need to incorporate a methodological approach that combines an awareness of the role of the audience with an acknowledgement of the centrality of those whose involvement is more pronounced.

The Sydney dance scene has provided the contextual social framework for this particular analysis of DJ culture, while this analysis has in turn led to observations and interpretations concerning the operation of the dance scene itself. It has been my argument that local DJs work through the tensions created by the dichotomous relationship that exists between the scene as a local manifestation and articulation of contemporary dance culture, and its place within a wider international frame of dance culture. Through their work, and their understandings and interpretations of this work, these DJs make evident the tensions of the scene, its commodification, and its operational logics. They seek to position themselves within an international frame of dance culture on an

essentially local level, purchasing music as part of a commodification process that involves the transference of musical preference and desirability on to the audience, which subsequently leads on to the creation of particular taste groups.

Within the local Sydney scene, DJs negotiate various different ideological issues, media discourses, and commercial concerns. The tension between local DJs, whose regular performances ensure the continued existence of the scene, and international DJs, whose performances draw large crowds, is particularly acute. The centrality of this issue to the scene is unique, and almost certainly arises from Australia's geographical distance from the perceived cultural centres of dance music, the US and the UK. With this in mind, further research could build on some of the ideas contained within this thesis and perhaps explore in more detail the degree to which local scenes are constructed, shaped and determined by music and people from outside of the scene. Whereas this study has focused on those local DJs who play within the scene regularly, other projects could move beyond the scope of my own work and analyse more closely the role of the international DJ who is only an occasional visitor and whose participation within the scene is therefore only temporary. While local DJs provide more detailed understandings and interpretations of the local scenes that they are a part of, research into the international circuit of performing DJs would uncover further insights into the global flow of dance culture, situating it within a wider geographical context. The views of these international DJs regarding how they approach their performances in different localities would be particularly informative and insightful, contributing to an understanding of how dance music is accommodated within specific cultural frameworks. Furthermore, it would demonstrate the DJ's central role as the disseminator of dance music, travelling the world and introducing new records to different audiences.

Studying commercial dance scenes through ethnography

The commercial dance scene in Sydney has provided a rich and fertile site for study, with its features, ideologies and structures raising issues, observations

and interpretations that can be adopted and applied to further studies of local dance scenes. The most informed and detailed research findings for popular music culture stem from analytical approaches that focus on specific local settings, and it is through such approaches that the relationships and understandings that shape human interaction are made most evident, and thus building upon and furthering such research will ultimately provide us with a better understanding of ourselves as individuals and of the relationships we establish with those around us.

The intention of my ethnographic work into the Sydney scene has been to draw out observations and arguments that can be used to enhance our understanding of dance music as a significant cultural form. Contemporary dance culture is border/less, both geographically and theoretically, and approaches to studying it need to commence directly within the culture, rather than from an outside standpoint, working through its diverse and complex cultural terrain by means of observation and participation; it is only then that theory can begin to be formulated.

The most informative, detailed and valid analysis arises from a significant amount of time spent within the field, and it is such a concern with empirical methodology that I believe should underpin all future research into contemporary, 'living' dance scenes. Specific geographical contexts are rich in ethnographic detail, and it is these, rather than secondary written accounts, that provide us with the reality of the workings of dance culture. Those who participate in and involve themselves with a particular culture on a regular basis are in the best position to explore and assess the workings and operational logics of that culture, although at the same time, such insider status can serve to create highly subjective and biased agendas. Discussing what the aims and intentions should be of ethnographic studies of dance culture, Seb Chan emphasises the importance of uncovering the local particularities of any one scene that serve to distinguish it from scenes elsewhere. He also goes on to suggest that the commercial structure that

underpins the contemporary dance scene makes the scene itself a more detailed and complex, although at the same time a more easily accessible, field of study than it was a decade ago when he was researching a thesis on dance culture:

I think any research on this sort of culture needs to reveal the local specificities that make things happen here rather than somewhere else. That's always what I've been excited about. I've always been curious as to why does 'this sound' work in Sydney, but not work 'there'. Why is that? Why is my audience generally 'this' age and not 'that' age? What is it about the music? Is it about the music? Is it about the marketing? Is it about a combination of the two? I think it's become really complicated now that it is much more... there's a lot more capital involved, and so you get the flow of things like marketing impacting upon it in a big way, and perhaps you didn't before. You get companies buying up clubs, like the Merivale Group, Justin Hemmes⁶² and all these people, who have very particular strategies, and they have teams of marketers working with them to make sure that 'this' venue feeds people to 'this other' venue, that you track people across time, when they grow out of one club, like Sublime, where are they going to go next? It's a lot more grand-scale than it was ten years ago when I was writing about it. I was writing about those formative stages... I think now, it's probably a bit easier to write because you can look at those grand plans, and you can speak to those people... [Now] it's both more complicated, but more accessible too. (Interview, 2005)

⁶² Justin Hemmes is head of the Merivale Group, a Sydney-based hospitality company that operates various bars, clubs and restaurants around the city, such as Establishment, Slip Inn, and Tank, as well as staging the annual Good Vibrations festival. I made contact with the company on five separate occasions to request an interview with Hemmes, and after having been re-directed to several different people, no replies to these requests were forthcoming. I probably would have been more successful had I posed as a journalist from an ultra-chic style magazine.

Moving beyond youth subcultures

Attempting to draw out and articulate defined structures and bounded social settings only devalues the essential vibrancy and diversity of dance music, and in this respect, future work needs to be conducted with an understanding of the inappropriateness of working towards specific conclusions, and acknowledge the variety of interpretations of dance culture that can arise from specific social settings. This fluidity makes the failings of subculture theory even more apparent, and demonstrates that culture cannot be interpreted and explained through pre-existing theoretical frameworks, such an approach and methodology imposing what Rietveld refers to as 'a theoretical 'straight jacket' upon an object of study' (1998b: 5).

As a piece of ethnographic work on popular music culture, this thesis has demonstrated the advantages of prolonged immersion on the part of the researcher in the culture selected for study. 'Participant observation', the methodological basis of ethnography, can take many forms and degrees of involvement, from simple observation of a practice or an event, to more involved participation in the everyday workings of the culture. It is my argument that the most valid and informed arguments come out of the latter, and while I appreciate that not all researchers are in the position of being able to attain the intensity of involvement that I was able to achieve, all future analyses of local dance scenes should be conducted with a view to being grounded in the highest attainable degree of participation. Dance culture has its own unique discourses, ideologies and practices that, while they can be observed by the outsider, can only be fully understood if they are experienced first-hand, or rather from within the culture.

Yet if further studies of dance scenes are to make a worthy contribution to the critical thought that surrounds contemporary dance culture, then there needs to be much more than simply this incorporation of a more involved ethnographic approach. As I have sought to emphasise throughout this thesis, the concern that previous studies have had for dance culture as a youth-based phenomenon has

served to hide the extent to which those who fall outside of the category of 'youth' are involved in the culture, whether this be as active clubbers or working professionals. Researchers seemed to have been constrained by academic tradition that has defined the use of popular music culture by young people as of most interest for theoretical interrogation. Certainly, there is an argument to be said that people engage most intensely, on a social level, with popular music during the first three decades of their lives, yet this does not subsequently dictate that their continued involvement with the music and its associated culture after these decades becomes any less significant and relevant.

As such, we need to direct our attention away from the almost clichéd assumption that dance music is only enjoyed by a young audience. Taking a broader perspective of dance music audiences will serve not only to steer studies away from the supposition of youth involvement, but also to deepen our understandings of the many different ways in which dance music is consumed. While clubbing crowds are essentially dominated by people who can be easily classified as 'youth', it would be an erroneous assumption to suggest that a person's involvement with dance music ends at the same time as they reach the conclusion of their active clubbing life. Through focusing on the work of DJs, I have attempted to go some way towards circumventing the typical academic concentration on audience participation, but at the same time, my focus on club culture has dictated that this study is partially grounded in the activities of young people. Indeed, in much the same way as it is difficult to theorise about music scenes without making reference to subcultural theory, it is hard to discuss dance music without commenting on clubbing and clubbing audiences, and thus to a certain extent, the approach I have taken towards this thesis has ultimately served to contain my observations and interpretations within a tradition of youth-based studies.

With this in mind, it is my suggestion that further theorisation of dance culture would be best served by focusing less on young audiences. It would seem more

appropriate to argue that there is more to be gained from pushing the focus of dance culture studies not only on to those who engage with the culture on a professional level, but also on to those who constitute an identifiable dance music audience, but who cannot be classified as youth. Such an approach would make more apparent the changes in the ways in which people actively consume dance music outside of the typical environment of the club, in the sense that they move beyond the intensity of the clubbing experience as they engage in alternative methods of socialising.

Moving through club culture

As Chan highlights in the previous quote, the movements of people within dance culture between different venues is of concern for those who operate these venues, and indeed is perhaps more central to the operational logics of dance culture today than ten or fifteen years ago, in the sense that, as Chan also highlights, clubs now exist within a more commercial framework. Tracing such movements would not only be useful for the management teams that run these clubs, but would also provide the researcher with insights into the decisions clubbers themselves make regarding their own preferences for music and venues. Changes in these preferences would become apparent, which in turn would create a fuller picture of the individual's overall clubbing life, contrasting to the 'snapshot' focuses that are typical of most studies of club culture (this one included), with analysis being devoted solely to one particular style or scene. Furthermore, such an approach would prove the effectiveness of the marketing strategies that Chan references, demonstrating the extent to which club management teams are successful at directing their patrons through particular venues.

Obviously the scale of such a project could prove to be something of a logistical headache, but this does not dictate that elements of the approach cannot be injected into other studies, building upon and moving beyond the specific scene focuses of my own work and other existing accounts. An awareness of the ways

in which clubbers move between different venues, different styles of dance music, and thus different scenes, needs to be maintained throughout any analysis of contemporary club culture, and as such, explorations of the behaviour of participants of any one particular scene need to be understood in terms of multiple transitory taste formations. This is not to suggest that there are no clubbers who remain solely within one particular scene for the entire duration of their engagement with club culture, but rather that we need to understand contemporary dance culture less as something consisting of defined taste borders, and more as representative of fluidity in musical preference.

Despite the inherent difficulty in conducting a research assignment that traces the movement of clubbers between venues as their tastes change, the idea need not be dismissed as fanciful. A relatively small-scale project could engage with the thoughts and perspectives clubbers themselves have in regard to the way their tastes have affected the decisions they have made when selecting particular clubs to visit, and the way changes in these tastes have effected their movement between these clubs. This, I believe, would provide us with a more detailed and informative picture of club culture than the sketches generated by approaches that concentrate merely on one particular moment in a clubber's life or on one particular scene and its associated style. While there are numerous insights to be gained from concentrating on a specific scene and its participants, as indeed this study has made apparent, it would seem that more can be gained from paralleling the inherent fluidity of contemporary club culture with a similarly fluid analytical approach that crosses different scenes and taste groupings. Indeed, as I discovered while researching this thesis, although adhering to a specific focus may, in theory, be the most beneficial approach for obtaining detailed information, in practice it is actually much harder to maintain this focus when analysing something as multi-dimensional as contemporary dance culture. The crossover that exists between scenes, and the resultant crossover that DJs engage in between these scenes, makes it difficult to categorise these DJs and their activity, while much the same can be said for clubbers as well. Certainly,

approaching the study of a dance scene from the viewpoint of a particular stylistic category, in this case the Sydney scene and house music, forces one into a process of selection whereby certain DJs and clubs are identified as representative of this category, instead of the more organic approach of allowing these DJs and clubs to point in the direction of the most appropriate category, if indeed such categorisation is at all valid. As such, it is a process that is riddled with problems and flaws, the very least of which is that it does not permit the researcher a degree of flexibility in the terminology they use to describe their findings. While arguing for a degree of fluidity in the approaches taken towards studying dance scenes, I still found myself constrained by my own use of terms such as 'house music scene' and 'mainstream dance culture' during the course of this thesis.

Categorising and defining music scenes through particular linguistic discourse is an inherent part of the way in which we make sense of the culture that surrounds us, and thus, while the argument that this discourse itself places limitations on the understandings and interpretations we formulate from analysing such culture is valid, to undercut the significance and relevance of the terminology that is employed to demarcate the numerous different scenes within dance culture would be dismissive of the everyday vocabulary utilised by the culture's participants. As such, it is my argument that any further study into dance scenes needs to combine a focus on the flow and movement of clubbers with a broader and more inclusive set of descriptive terms and categories. For example, rather than discussing the dance scene solely in terms of clubs and parties, more consideration needs to be given to the role of bars, and the way they have created almost an entirely new sub-scene within dance culture. Indeed, rather than theorising about club culture and covering ground already given extensive consideration, it is perhaps now time to begin exploring the consumption of dance music from the perspective of bar culture. As clubbing crowds move and shift into new territories and locations, so too should the analytical approaches used to interpret the behaviour of these crowds.

Approaching the study of dance music through a focus on bar culture would enable us to trace the changes that clubbers go through in selecting venues for socialising. To return to Chan's quote, we could track people across time, analysing the behaviour of clubbers as their tastes change and they move on to different clubs or bars. While bars rarely allow for the same intensity of engagement with music that clubs facilitate, they represent a central element of contemporary dance culture. The development of bar culture remains an under-researched area, at least as it relates specifically to dance music. As suggested by John Wall in Chapter Six of this thesis, bar culture in Sydney has served to push dance music into the mainstream in the city, in the way that these bars typically employ DJs in much the same way as clubs, permitting dancing despite the fact that there may not be a dedicated dancefloor as such. It is Wall's supposition that the crowds that these bars attract are less focused on wanting to hear a specific style of music than a typical clubbing crowd, and as such, a more mainstream, less confrontational musical approach is generally taken by these bars. Only further research beyond the scope of this thesis could prove the validity of such a claim, and indeed, the effect of bar culture on the Sydney dance music scene would provide an interesting research topic in itself, building upon and extending some of the ideas I have outlined in this work concerning the commerciality and accessibility of contemporary dance music. It is perhaps important to note here that my suggestion that we need to focus on bar culture is not meant as a rejection of club culture. Rather, it is my argument that researchers would be better served by approaching analyses of dance music culture in such a way that accommodates the different paths that those involved in the culture follow when they combine dance music and socialising.

The feelings and emotions that are generated during the experience of listening to a DJ perform in a club lend dance music its significance, and yet as identifiable as these feelings and emotions are, they remain somewhat intangible and difficult to articulate through language. Again, we are confronted by the very

limitations of our everyday language. Yet this does not mean that we cannot go some way towards painting a picture of the culture that surrounds the clubbing experience, but if we are to indulge in such illustration, then the monochrome prints of previous studies need to be replaced with more vibrant and multi-coloured representations. We can do this by approaching dance culture with an awareness of its very diversity and of the way this diversity spills over into the tastes of those who consume dance music. This same diversity needs then to be applied to the analytical approaches and methodologies we use to interpret the culture, so that rather than pushing observations and findings through one specific theoretical lens, these findings and observations should push the researcher towards the most appropriate interpretative framework/s. Similarly, rather than selecting one particular scene or field for study, the researcher should shift between scenes, matching the fluid movement of clubbers themselves as they pass through different clubbing phases and taste groups. In the same way that this movement has seemingly eradicated many of the boundaries and divisions of dance culture, it is the movement and work of researchers that can break down the theoretical divisions of academic discourse.

At the risk of employing a well-worn cliché of dance culture discourse, dance music, at its best, is continually pushing forward, moving the stylistic boundaries and shifting the sonic goalposts, with the resultant musical achievements confronting, twisting and warping the listener's expectations. If a similarly radical approach can be infused into the study of dance culture and dance music scenes, then similarly spectacular theoretical results should ensue.

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APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILES OF KEY INTERVIEWEES

In an attempt to establish a background context of the people interviewed for this thesis, and thereby give the reader a fuller picture of the degree of involvement these people have had in dance culture in Sydney and elsewhere, I have devoted this section of the thesis to detailing some biographical information regarding each of my interviewees. It is my intention to provide the reader with an impression of the motivations and passions that drive these people and their involvement in, and engagement with, dance music.

The idea for these profiles stems from Malbon's 'biographical snapshots' of the clubbers he interviewed for his research, that he includes as an appendix at the end of his text (1999: 191-198), and thus, his acknowledgment that 'these biographical sketches were accurate at the time of the interviews' (ibid: 209) is also applicable here. DJs are referred to by their DJing name. In some cases, this is the same as their full legal name. In other cases, they are pseudonyms, nicknames, or variations on their legal name.

A concluding question of most of my interviews discussed the idea of favourite DJs, and the responses of interviewees are included here to give an idea not only of the different ways people replied to the question, but also of the variations and differences in the admiration and respect DJs have for their peers. While something of a 'casual' question with which to conclude the interviews in a light-hearted manner, it provided some illuminating and intriguing responses.

Adam Jesse – Adam has residencies at various clubs and bars around the city, while he also works at Central Station Records. Beginning his DJ career on Australia's Gold Coast, he moved to Sydney for its vibrant house music scene, although this meant that he had to re-establish himself as a DJ, as he explains:

I found that, moving down to Sydney, I pretty much had to start all over again. I moved down with the expectation of starting off where I left on the Gold Coast, which was not true, it didn't happen like that. It's taken me about three years to get to where I am now.
(Interview, 2004)

Adam's favourite DJ is Pete Tong, a UK-based, internationally-known house DJ, and referencing Tong he states:

I respect how he has a family, three kids, and yet still manages to balance being the number one sought after club DJ. It's nothing to do with his actual DJing, each DJ is as good as the next one, that side of things doesn't bother me, it's how he manages being able to be at that level and still have the lifestyle, family and everything.
(ibid.)

Alan Thompson – (See <http://www.djalthompson.com>) British-born, Alan has been DJing professionally since 1991, having been inspired by the house music that was being exported from America in the late 1980s. Having previously lived and worked mainly in England, playing and holding residencies at some of the most well-respected and prestigious clubs in London, such as Trade, DTPM, Ministry of Sound, Pacha, and The End, Alan moved to Sydney in 2004. Describing his move between countries, he highlights the processes he had to go through to establish his presence in the Sydney scene:

I made the decision to move to the other side of the world, mostly for a lifestyle choice, but having been to Australia for the past eight or nine years touring, I fell in love with the country, I love the dance scene in Sydney especially. I made the decision in late 2003 to move to Sydney, and moved here in March 2004. On arrival I made

contact with several DJ agencies and management companies, and various clubs throughout Sydney, trying to build up my DJ work. It came to a point where I got in touch with Tank and Jam Recordings, and they now represent me as a DJ throughout Australia, New Zealand and Asia, they are my agency/management. (Interview, 2005)

Alan currently holds residencies at various clubs and bars around the city, and he regularly plays guest-spots at various clubs and events. While he cites Smokin' Jo and Danny Tenaglia as his two favourite DJs, Alan explains how discovering DJs that he admires is made difficult through the way the very nature of DJing work essentially prevents him from going to see other DJs perform:

Smokin' Jo was probably my inspiration to be a DJ. The first time I saw Jo playing, in about 1989 in London, the fact she was a woman with a bald head caught my attention, and the style of music that she played, and the way she plays to people, you'll probably hear in my sets a very similar way of DJing... and Danny Tenaglia, purely because the way that he takes the crowd on a journey, and it really is a journey, of ten hours! The way he takes things up and down, the way he's not afraid to play anything, and from my point of view as a clubber, I just love the way I can be on a dancefloor for eight or nine hours and just have a great time. I don't get to hear that many DJs because I'm a DJ. It's a busman's holiday. When I go out in Sydney, I love to go to Bang Gang, because it's very different to what I do. I don't necessarily want to go out and hear another house DJ. I try not to let other house DJs influence what I do, and then when I'm guest DJing somewhere, it's normally in, DJ, and out, so I don't really get a chance to hear that many DJs... Danny [Tenaglia] is a fantastic DJ... The best time clubbing I've ever, ever

had in my life was him playing at the inside of Space for twelve hours in 2000 in Ibiza, absolutely amazing. (ibid.)

Alex Taylor – (See <http://www.alextylor.com.au>) Alex has residencies at various clubs and bars around the city, and he regularly plays guest-spots at various clubs and events. Alex has been involved in Sydney dance culture for a number of years, DJing in both the straight and gay scenes. Starting out as a DJ in New Zealand in 1991, Alex moved to Sydney in 1992 with the aim of furthering his DJing career. The type of music he plays centres mainly around house, Alex describing how he focuses on two styles, making a distinction between ‘soulful house and a lot of big room stuff... chunky, uplifting, funky sort of stuff’ (Interview, 2005). Discussing the issue of favourite DJs, Alex explains that there is not one particular person he can single out, but rather he explains how he currently enjoys listening to deep and soulful house music, and thus he lists a selection of DJs and producers who work within that sound:

I don't know who my favourite DJ is! That's a really hard question! Back in the early days it used to be David Morales and Frankie Knuckles, but now, as time has gone by, it's probably more producers, or a sound, that I like... One DJ that I've always loved is Brian Tappert. I've really liked him for a long time. One time we went to London for a holiday, and I'd never been to Ministry of Sound, and ever since I'd heard about it I'd always wanted to go and just have a look. So we went on this Saturday and he happened to be playing that night. It was so good. I really liked the way he kept it at a certain level. That music is not really big room sort of stuff, but because of the fact that it was on a certain level, when there were peaks they seemed a lot bigger than what they actually would come across as being if I was playing them in a normal set... Most of the DJs that I actually like, and that I would go out and dance to, probably more in the past now, are people like

Jay-J and Brian Tappert, I love all those soulful house DJs... and Miguel Migs... I like all those DJs, and they're probably the DJs I'd go to see more now... I still love Sasha... I love Kaskade and his sound... (ibid.)

Andrew James – Andrew plays at various clubs around the city. His involvement with music began when he started buying records at his local record store, at the age of 'fourteen or fifteen' (Interview, 2004), by artists such as Michael Jackson and the Beach Boys, and then, as he explains,

... straight away [I] got into the first electronic music that came out, like Diana Ross's 'Chain Reaction', the Pet Shop Boys' 'West End Girls', all that sort of stuff, around 1985, 1986... and then straight away [I] discovered all this whole new kind of music, the UK and US stuff, like Todd Terry, about 1988, 1989. I was heavily into all that stuff, buying heaps of vinyl, not DJing, but just collecting records and loving music. Then one day I just heard this Detroit track, Inner City's 'Big Fun', and that just blew me away, and then I just had to buy everything – techno from America, all the Inner City stuff, and a few other people at the time... After I had this huge record collection, I started going out partying in about 1990, 1991, and then I saw the DJs playing the music that I was buying. So basically I just went up there and had a look what was going on with the records... At the time I was a full-time carpenter... one day I decided to buy some decks, and within six months, around the end of 1991, 1992, I was out and about playing at birthday parties and stuff. It started small, just as a hobby, and then took off from there. One gig led to another gig led to another gig led to another gig, and now, another thirteen years later, I'm still doing it three nights a week. (ibid.)

Andrew avoids giving a definite answer when questioned in regard to his favourite DJ, preferring a less specific response:

I used to like Sasha and John Digweed, I thought they were great, but even though someone can be very good technically, there's a lot more to it, like musical influences... I think there are probably a lot of DJs now who would be able to impress me more than what Sasha and Digweed would be able to now... too many to mention.
(ibid.)

Cale – Cale owns and manages Martin's Records in Sydney. Outlining his favourite DJs, Cale makes reference to a varied selection of both local and international DJs:

DJs that have most impressed me [include] Jazzy Jeff... For house music, the DJ that has probably impressed me the most, technically, would have to be Derrick Carter. Sydney DJs that I've seen... probably Illya for his technical skills, probably John Devecchis for his tune selection... (Interview, 2005)

Con, a.k.a. Nobby Grooves – With twenty years DJing experience in the Sydney scene, playing, as he describes, 'various styles from '80s funk, to hip house, to house, to RnB, to hip-hop... a broad style of music, I haven't focused on one style' (Interview, 2005), Con has witnessed the scene pass through numerous different phases, from its beginnings as an essentially underground culture to its current mainstream status. Con plays regularly around the city at various bars and clubs, focusing more on the commercial side of dance music in his sets, while he also works at Martin's Records. Con believes that the importance of the DJ has been over-emphasised somewhat, interpreting his work simply as a 'job', and it is perhaps this rational perspective that informs Con's non-specific response to the question of who his favourite DJ is:

Who's my favourite DJ? No comment... Over the years I guess I've seen many DJs, so I can't say that there's been one DJ that's a standout. They're only DJs for God's sake! There have been some shockers and there have been some good DJs, but I can't actually say that there is a standout DJ that inspires me. (ibid.)

Goodwill – Will is one of Australia's most prominent house music DJs, with club residencies in Sydney and Melbourne, while he also regularly travels to other states to DJ. He has mixed, or co-mixed, a variety of house music compilations that have been released commercially within Australia, and which all reflect Will's eclectic approach to DJing⁶³, and in 2004 he released his first single 'Happenis'⁶⁴ (*sic*). Will initially became involved with dance music at the age of fourteen, going to raves while telling his parents he was staying at a friend's house. He describes how he became 'obsessed with dance music' (Interview, 2004), listening to shows on local radio station 2SER by Sydney DJs Sugar Ray and Nik Fish. He then started promoting his own parties, and then decided to teach himself how to DJ. He subsequently gave up promoting in 1999 to focus on his DJ career. Will's favourite DJ is fellow Sydney DJ Simon Caldwell, and referencing Caldwell he states:

He's the DJ I most respect, he just had this incredible influence on me, he's probably one of the best DJs in the world, and one of the most unknown as well... he's big in Sydney and Melbourne, but outside of that I can't really see so many people overseas who would know who he is. He's always gone on his own path... he knows how to structure a set around putting music together that all makes sense... he teaches you something as opposed to just

⁶³ These compilations include *Alfresco Soiree* – Hussle – HUSSYCOMP4 – 2003; *Dusk at Bondi Beach* – BMG – 82876617892 – 2004; *Onelove* – Sony – 5172502000 – 2004

⁶⁴ 'Happenis' – Hussle – HUSSYCD5042

thinking “What does everyone want to hear?”, he definitely teaches you something every time you hear him play. (ibid.)

Illya – Illya has residencies at various clubs around the city, and he regularly plays guest-spots at various clubs and events. Like most DJs, he discovered a passion for music at an early age, as he explains:

I’ve pretty much loved dance music, or electronic music, or rave music, since I was fourteen. I used to go to raves when I was young, although I didn’t start taking up mixing until I was about nineteen. I got a pair of decks for my twentieth birthday... I got a gig at the Globe in 1999... I started playing at Icebox, doing it for free, just playing and promoting the night... I really like deep house, but I play all house. I play a broad spectrum of house music, nothing too big, no real big tunes like ‘So Much Love To Give’ or anything like that, more of a jackin’ style of house I suppose, funky, sort of in the middle of Mark Farina and Derrick Carter... where I play, I play different stuff. Up on the Terrace at Home I play more of a funky, deep house style, whereas if I was to play downstairs at Home [in the main room] then I’d have to pump it up a bit more, whereas if I’m at YU I’m sort of pumping it up then bringing it down... (Interview, 2004)

Illya’s favourite DJs include Mark Farina and Derrick Carter, two American deep house DJs who have a significant presence in international dance culture, although as he explains, he no longer holds them in particularly high esteem:

Mark Farina pretty much got me in to deep house. I heard his Mushroom Jazz CD, and it was pretty good... I was already listening to house, but it was the more commercial stuff... Derrick Carter as well I suppose... I’m starting to get critical of a lot of DJs.

I think they are getting real lazy, and too set in their ways. Every time Derrick Carter comes out here now he plays rubbish sets... he used to come out here, like in 1997 or 1998, and both he and Farina would be on three decks, with no mistakes. Now, Farina especially just seems to have gone down hill... I think they've got too comfortable in where they're sitting... I'm such a harsh critic!
(ibid.)

John Devecchis – John has residencies at various clubs and bars around the city, and he regularly plays guest-spots at various clubs and events. Originally from the UK, John came to Sydney towards the end of 2000, 'just as the Olympics were finishing' (Interview, 2004), prior to which he had been a promoter and DJ in the UK, putting on nights in Leeds and Sheffield. Travelling to Australia with his records, he managed to 'blag a gig at Homebar' (ibid.), and after a year, he began playing on the Terrace in Home's main club. He has also played warm-up sets for international DJs such as Roger Sanchez, Basement Jaxx, DJ Sneak, and Miguel Migs. John's favourite DJs include local DJ Illya and UK-based DJ Ralph Lawson, as he explains:

Technically, Illya, he's one of the best DJs I've ever seen in my life. Ralph Lawson, from Back to Basics in Leeds, is one of the first DJs I ever listened to, and every time I've heard him since, the guy rocks the fuck out of it, he's amazing. (ibid.)

John Wall – (See <http://www.fuzzy.com.au>) As well as DJing around Sydney at various clubs and events, John owns and operates Fuzzy, one of Sydney's largest dance party promotions companies that puts on annual events such as Parklife, Harbourlife, Winter Breaks, and, arguably the most significant and popular event in Sydney's dance music calendar, Field Day, which is held on New Year's Day in the Domain in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Fuzzy also stages one-off parties, tours various international DJs, and releases CDs. Establishing

the company in 1996, John was well placed to capitalise on the commercial boom in dance culture that occurred with the development of the superclubs and the superstar DJ phenomenon. As John explains, his involvement in the Sydney scene stretches back over twenty years:

I started DJing while I was at uni in '84, and I'd always been into clubs and music and stuff, going to under-eighteen nights when I was twelve, and then from when I was about sixteen or something I managed to scam my way into over-eighteen clubs. When I got to uni it was that kind of thing where you need part-time work, and everyone else was doing bar work or whatever, and I really liked music and I was always the kind of guy that ended up at a party changing the music, partly because I was into it and partly because I was socially inept. So I did some mobile DJ work for about a year or so, until I couldn't handle it anymore, and then I started taking demos around to clubs in the usual kind of fashion and started DJing. I got my first decent gigs around 1986... '85, '86, '87... and then the scene was exploding... people were doing the huge dance parties at the Hordern all the time, so it was quite a good time to be setting up, because also it was before every single person was a DJ. I just kept DJing and finished my degree, which was in I.T., got a job as a programmer, did that for a couple of years, all the while DJing a couple of nights a week, and the DJing just started to take over, and I wasn't that into the I.T. job. So in about 1990 I just went, "No, I've got to quit the day job and try to make it just doing music", so I did that and just kept DJing, doing a lot more of it. (Interview, 2005)

Mark Alsop – (See <http://www.markalsop.com>) Mark plays mainly within the gay scene, playing at various clubs, bars and events around Sydney, as well as overseas. He has been active, as a DJ and producer, within Sydney dance

culture since 1984, starting out in what he describes as an 'underground' club because, 'we used to shut the doors and turn the music down when the police turned up' (Interview, 2005). Since then he has worked at various places along Oxford Street (Sydney's main 'gay strip'), and at parties such as Bacchanalia, Sweatbox, Pride, and Sleaze Ball, as well as within the straight scene. Initially working as a waiter, Mark's entry into DJing came courtesy of a mix-tape he handed to a DJ, as he explains:

I used to be a waiter, serving food at tables, gueridon service [cooking at the table] and stuff, and then I went into the clubs... At Club 45 [I] gave them a demo cassette, and he [the manager] was quite impressed, and that's where it started. I put that together on two belt-driven turntables, and I had to put pitch controls on them, but every time you touched the platter it went "wheerrrulll" [Mark makes a whirring noise like the one that occurs when the speed of a record is increased and decreased manually by hand]. (ibid.)

While Mark acknowledges that there are certain DJs who he enjoys listening to and going to see perform, he explains how there is not one particular DJ who has been an influence on him, preferring instead to see himself as the only person who has shaped and defined his DJ career:

You're going to hate this answer – no one [is my favourite DJ]. I've been my own influence my whole life, and I've never had a favourite. I've never had someone I would regularly turn up and listen to, and I've never travelled interstate to purposely listen to anyone. I've gone to some parties, like when Victor Calderone or whoever it was... see, I don't even know... came out. I'd go to listen to them, fantastic... I do like Frankie Knuckles, but he's not my god. So, a lot of the guys are interesting to listen to, but no one is someone that I admire... (ibid.)

Mark Murphy – DJ, promoter, and owner of Spank Records in Sydney, Mark has been active in the Sydney dance scene as a DJ since 1996, initially playing in the ‘gay underground scene’, and then gradually moving into the ‘straight scene’ playing techno (Interview, 2005). He describes his current style as ‘electro, tech-house’, and he holds various residencies, while he has played at clubs and events such as Home, the Big Day Out, Mardi Gras, Sleaze, We Love Sydney, and as he states, ‘I’ve played at nearly every club in Sydney... everywhere really’ (ibid.). Like many other DJs, Mark is also a promoter, one of his most successful nights being Strudel, and he believes that, through the musical approach he has taken with this night and other parties, he now plays a style of music that is more underground, as he explains:

Strudel was sort of the first party that started really branding itself as an electro party... I think we were one of the first. It’s been going for three years. So I play more electro now, more tech-house, a bit of the acid house that is coming out of Germany... I play more in the underground scene. I have been doing that for the last eight or so years. (ibid.)

While Mark acknowledges that he admires and respects many different DJs, he finds it difficult to name his favourite DJ, stating:

Oh that question! You know what, I don’t think I have one... I don’t think if I can say one DJ that has just blown my mind. There probably has been, but I can’t think of one, and I’ve seen Jeff Mills, I’ve seen Carl Cox, all those... I wish I could say that just one DJ has totally blown my mind, but... I don’t know if I can or not... (ibid.)

Mike Bennett, a.k.a. Mike Acetate – Owner and manager of Acetate Record Bar in Sydney, Mike is also an active DJ within the Sydney dance scene, playing

house music at various clubs around the city. Mike's favourite DJ is Carl Cox, who he admires for his continually innovative approach to DJing and production (Interview, 2005).

Nat Nyk – (See <http://www.astronat.com>) While Nat does not consider himself a DJ, preferring instead to promote his 'Astronat' performance persona as an electronic live act, he acknowledges that large parts of his performances involve DJing. Where he differs to most of the other DJs interviewed for this thesis, and indeed most other DJs in general, is that this DJing involves all of his own material. This material will be played either from CD or directly from computer. He plays largely within the hard house and trance scenes, and so while these fall outside of my focus, he does play at some of the more commercial clubs within those scenes, and thus is well positioned to comment on most of the issues that are of concern in this thesis. Nat has extensive experience of the Sydney music scene as a whole, coming from a rock background and originally playing drums in the popular Australian punk band Frenzal Rhomb. He became involved in the dance music scene around the year 2000, making a specific choice not to be a DJ, but rather to write and produce his own material, and play this material out at clubs as a live electronic act, utilising computers, synthesisers, samplers, and drum machines, and as he explains:

I play live, I don't DJ, as you know, and I've played everywhere from your little raves to a few of the bigger raves, to little clubs, to Big Day Outs, Transmissions... big gigs and little gigs... I've done some things at Gas and Plastic, those kinds of things... I do a bunch of different stuff, but mainly I do hard house, trance stuff, but I also have other projects... trip-hop, sort of downbeat, Portishead, Massive Attack stuff, and also I've got a bit more commercial stuff as well... when I say commercial I probably mean more... maybe Fatboy [Slim], Moby type commercial... singing but with funky beats. (Interview, 2005)

Neil Ackland – (See <http://www.inthemix.com.au>) British-born, Neil initially came over to Australia in 1998 as a backpacker, and then upon settling in Sydney, took an active interest in the dance scene, describing how he, ‘found [the scene] quite different to the UK’ (Interview, 2005). Neil is currently the sales and marketing director for Sound Alliance, the company that operates the Australian-based dance music website <http://www.inthemix.com.au>. As Neil explains, the website has grown significantly since its inception in 2000, to the point that it is now a major national operation that includes music reviews, email forums, and ticket sales, so that essentially, it is now a dance music ‘lifestyle’ website:

The idea I had was to set up a website to sell tickets online, for dance events, because there wasn't anything doing that at the time. So I started surfing around the web, trying to see if there was anything else out there, and I came across the website inthemix, and at that stage inthemix was about seven months old. It was a good site, it was the best one around, but it was still in its infancy, really. I just got in touch with Andre [Lackmann, founder of inthemix], and said I'd be very interested to get involved, and he said "sure, come along". That was one of the great things about inthemix... it has always been very contributor-based... I just became a contributor to the site, and I had lots of ideas about the marketing and the sales side of the business, and just where to take it, and eventually I became one of the partners in the business, and we started working on it full-time in Andre's spare bedroom. It took us two years to get out of there, and it just kind of steamrolled from there really... Andre is into taking photos at events, and he had a massive library of all these pictures he had been taking at parties, and wanted to put them up on the Web, and that's how inthemix started really. So we were just normal clubbers that had a lucky break, or decided that we'd try to get into as many clubs as

we could for free, and have a good time and maybe get paid for it at the same time. One of the main priorities at that stage was just to have some fun... we never envisaged we'd be in a big office like this with fifteen staff working away. It's great. We've been very lucky, and the scene has gone from strength to strength in those five years, in terms of its professionalism and the way it is structured, and we have benefited from that. (ibid.)

Selecting a favourite DJ, Neil focuses on the local Sydney scene, stating:

My favourite DJ is Ajax, because he's just the most interesting DJ to listen to and watch. I love the fact that he's from Sydney and he's been doing his thing for a really long time, and he doesn't limit himself to any one genre. He just plays really fucking good music, and every time I see him play, without fail he always gets people on to the dancefloor, and that's a really challenging thing to do. I like the fact that he pioneers new sounds, and I see him as kind of leading the way in Sydney, to a certain extent, in what's going on out there. He's not a follower, he's a genuine innovator in music, and he's just as good as all the internationals I've seen as well. (ibid.)

Paul Goodyear – (See <http://www.paulgoodyear.com>) One of the most prominent DJs within the Sydney gay scene, Paul has been DJing since 1985. He has played at most of the major clubs in Sydney, as well as most of the major gay clubs in Melbourne, and a few venues in Brisbane during a nine-month period he spent living there. He has DJed at numerous Mardi Gras parties and Sleaze Ball parties (two major events in the Sydney gay dance music calendar), while he was also a key figure in the now seminal gay dance parties that took place at Sydney's Hordern Pavilion during the 1980s. As Paul himself explains, 'I've pretty much played everywhere around Australia, really' (Interview, 2005).

He has also played at various clubs overseas, in locations such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Singapore, and New Zealand. Paul acknowledges the central role dance music has played in his life from a very early age, stating:

It's always been my way of life, ever since I was nine and I heard Sylvester for the first time. I was completely infatuated with disco and I wanted to be a DJ, and that's going back to 1979. That's what I wanted to do. Around about 1980, 1981, I heard about how DJs were segueing records together, mixing, and that was just a very underground thing. I just had to go out, and I had to get a couple of turntables and try it myself. I've always wanted to be a clubber and be involved in that world, and [I] never want to be anywhere else... DJing for me is my life. It's my passion and my love. I guess the day that I have to give it up is going to be really, really hard. I don't know if I ever will give it up entirely, actually. I don't think I'll be out there as a seventy year old man still DJing, but I'm going to do it as long as I possibly can, even if it's just one night a week or one night a month, or whatever. I hope, in twenty years time, I can still be kind of hip and buy the latest records, and still be involved in it to some extent. (ibid.)

Paul finds it difficult to narrow his selection of a favourite DJ down to one particular choice, explaining how there are a few DJs he admires and respects for different reasons:

I've got several favourite DJs... my favourite DJ died in 1986. He was the one that I don't think anyone has ever come close to, that I've ever heard. His name was Stephen Cribb, and he DJed at the Midnight Shift from 1981 until late 1985. He was just the most incredible DJ ever. His way of playing, music selection, the journey he created, he was just amazing, absolutely amazing. He was

cutting-edge, he was as good as what they were doing over in New York at the Saint and the Paradise Garage, if not better, and it was such a sad loss that he died... But right now, I love Stephen Allkins. I don't like a lot of what he plays, but I respect him a great deal and I love the way he plays it... I guess there are lots of DJs that I like, but those are the main ones which have actually moved me, definitely. (ibid.)

Seb Chan – (See <http://www.snarl.org>) Seb has been actively involved in Sydney's electronic music scene for the past fifteen years, on several different levels, initially presenting a show on community radio station Radio Skid Row in 1990. Around this time, the rave scene in Sydney was beginning to take shape, and in 1991 Seb formed Sub Bass Snarl with Luke Dearnley, under which they DJ and perform various forms of electronic music. As Seb's website states:

Starting out in 1991 at the onset of rave in Sydney, Sub Bass Snarl was pioneering a "deck 'n' effects" setup from the beginning. Relinquishing vinyl and using CDs as early as 1992, Sub Bass Snarl have evolved into a diverse and dynamic outfit. They have performed at over 1,000 events including 5 Big Day Out festivals, Vibes On A Summer's Day, and events from underground parties and clubs to galleries and corporate spaces. Overseas, Sub Bass Snarl has performed in Tokyo, as well as shows in San Francisco, London and New Zealand... Their sounds range from jungle and dub to minimal techno... (<http://www.snarl.org/sbs/sbsbio>)

Seb has written extensively about the scene, including academic articles and regular columns in *3D World*, and he has his own publication, *Cyclic Defrost*, of which he is editor-in-chief, and for the past decade, he has staged and promoted Frigid, Australia's longest running weekly independent electronic music night, as well as various other festivals and events in Australia and around the world.

Describing how all of this involvement came about, Seb acknowledges the influence that his radio work had on the shaping of his dance music tastes:

The whole rave scene blew up in about 1991, it really crossed over from the Hordern scene to being more like warehouse parties in Mascot, and Radio Skid Row [2RSR] was one of the stations that people tuned in to, to find out on Saturday nights where parties were on. There was a long running dance music show on Saturday nights that served a similar function to what pirate radio does in the UK now, with shout-outs... it built a community around this show. My show, initially, followed that show, and then it moved, and I did a show that followed the anarchist punk show, and then we did a breakfast show. Our musical tastes just got exposed to lots of things... Through doing community radio I got exposed to a lot of other music, and the rave scene was emerging and I got caught up in that. (Interview, 2005)

While the area of music that Seb is involved in falls largely outside the commercial scene that constitutes the focus of my study, Seb's contributions, both written and verbal, have proved invaluable to this thesis, and have demonstrated that just because someone operates within a different 'scene', it does not necessarily follow that their comments and observations cannot be applied on a wider scale, and indeed that, despite the rigid lines of division that appear to demarcate the different dance music scenes in Sydney, in regard to styles and sounds, it is equally valid to speak of 'the dance scene' in the singular sense when discussing the history and development of dance culture. The following descriptive paragraph, taken from the website for Seb's *Cyclic Defrost* magazine, perhaps most accurately summarises his overall approach to the music he both writes about and performs:

Cyclic Defrost is Australia's only specialist electronic music magazine. We cover independent electronic music, avant-rock, experimental sound art and leftfield hip hop. We have no truck with fashion spreads, alcohol or clothing advertising... We are purposefully different. (<http://www.cyclicdefrost.com>)

Sonia Sharma – (See <http://www.threedworld.com.au>) As editor of *3D World*, Sonia has a key role in the media representation of dance music culture in Sydney, and, having conducted and edited several interviews with local and international DJs, she is well-placed to comment on the significance of DJ culture within the Sydney scene, and on the position of the scene within the wider flow of international dance culture. Prior to taking up her current position, Sonia worked in community radio, and thus, throughout her career, she has been able to combine her passion for music journalism with her passion for dance music.

Stephen Allkins – Stephen is, arguably, the most experienced DJ to have made a contribution to this thesis, in that he has been involved in the Sydney dance scene for almost three decades, as he explains:

I'm forty-four. I've been going out [clubbing] since I was fifteen. I've been DJing since I was seventeen, and that's been my rent-payer, it hasn't been a hobby, it hasn't been a sideline, it has been my job. I've been through every major dance style... I was around just before disco, because disco came in early 1977, pretty much... so I've DJed through every major dance style there's ever been.
(Interview, 2005)

In reply to being asked who his favourite DJ is, Stephen comments that providing an answer to such a question is somewhat difficult:

It's hard. I couldn't say one, because different DJs have influenced me heavily, different DJs have blown me away. It's sort of like saying, "What's your favourite record?". It's very hard. (ibid.)

Trent Rackus – Trent plays regularly at Homebar at Sydney's Darling Harbour, and at various other clubs and bars around the city. He also works at Central Station Records and for the dance music record label Ministry of Sound Australia. Trent started DJing in 1995 at commercial bars and clubs, despite being more interested in the underground, for as he states, 'when you start out DJing, you'll take on any work opportunity' (Interview, 2004). He has played support slots for international DJs such as Judge Jules, Sonique, Norman Jay, Danny Howells, and Sister Bliss, and has been a resident at Home and Gas, two of Sydney's main clubs. Trent's favourite DJ is Danny Tenaglia, who he admires because,

He is someone who plays all night... He's called a 'DJ's DJ', and it is understandable why. It's impossible for you not to be a tune-spotter when you're a DJ, you're always listening out, you try to associate with what a DJ is playing, you're trying to relate... it is a language that DJs understand, and quite often, when you go to hear Danny Tenaglia play, he will be playing a record, a re-edit that he's done, and you'll hear a vocal coming in and you'll think, "I know this tune", and then the record takes all these sharp turns, and you think, "this is the only time I'm ever going to hear this", it's like that all night... I remember how tormented I was the first few times I ever saw him, and in the end I just embraced the whole fact that I'm just going to be put on this journey, all night, of hearing music that I'm going to recognise momentarily, and then it's going to be different... He's made bad records sound great. He takes you through different styles, there's an element of darkness about it, yet there's that funky element. He's a man that will preach the words

that once you find a groove you've got to keep it locked and that's what will keep the dancefloor on their feet. [When you hear him play] you just don't want to leave the dancefloor because you know that, if you leave, you're going to miss something. (ibid.)

Trent Cooper – Trent plays at various clubs and bars around the city. His contributions to this thesis were made while he sat in on my interview with Adam Jesse, and thus, the absence of any biographical detail is simply because I neglected to ask him about the history of his career as a DJ.