How Can We Tell the Dancer from the DJ? Althusser and Jung on Participant Roles in a Nightclub Setting

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In this paper I investigate the labelling of the roles of, and the interaction between, DJ and dancer in a nightclub. I employ two established models of analysis: Althusser's theory of ideology, in particular the concepts of *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISA's) and *Interpellation*; and Jungian psychoanalytic theory. Althusser and Jung represent two very different approaches to analysing personal and social phenomena. Both seem to offer potentially fruitful lines of enquiry, and have not been employed to analyse the interpersonal relationships of the dance floor before.

To this end I analyse the *social practices* in a nightclub. The increasingly complex networks of organisers, performers, promoters, visitors and owners are deconstructed into their individual components so that relations and dependencies become more obvious.

I start by analysing the individual in Althusserian terms as a *subject* that is self-conscious of its existence and actions, and then look at the DJ's role as a superstar, using the history of the DJ to gain insight into the changing roles of such stars. Then I focus on the creative side of the performance, challenging the conception of the DJ being a shaman, Godlike figure or leader. The relation between DJ and clubber and their exchange of values and ideas and communication are also investigated. Finally, I explore the space that is created by these protagonists because the hybridity, security and quality of this music-dance-space are of equal importance.

The Jungian psychoanalytic tradition is used in this article to discuss the change of perspective - moving from an *extrovert* approach that places the individual within society to an *introvert* approach, which allows for individuals to define themselves by more personal or subjective measurements.

Overall, my aim in this paper is to examine the role changes between the DJ and the clubber based on a power play between them. The discussion concludes with a proposal combining two very different definitions of individuals who perceive and act and who are aware of their actions. This allows for another dimension of perception of oneself to be considered, and thus overcomes the limitations of a purely structural approach to the individual in society.

The Marxist structuralist Louis Althusser developed a theory that re-examined the power and function of ideology defining it as a series of practices in which all members of society participate. In opposition to the Frankfurt School he argued that an ideology is not imposed on people but is constantly recreated through systems of representation (Althusser 1984, 16-21). Althusser himself gave the example of a policeman addressing the individual. By feeling addressed and reacting, in this case, turning around, the individual subjects itself by accepting certain codes of behaviour and ways of thinking. When addressed by a policeman the individual is immediately caught up in this way of thinking: "What have I done wrong? Did I breach any laws?" In the light of postmodern pastiche and subjectivity, systems of representations can be reinterpreted (Jameson 1991, 16-19).Failing ideologies make way for new competing ideologies which results in the current pluralistic environment. Despite a criticism of the origin of such systems Althusser's concept of ideology can be witnessed in everyday life indeed, as in this case, in a nightclub. An individual identifies him- or herself by means of values generated by *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISA) such as the church, the school, TV companies and nightclubs. In order to understand the values and laws of such institutions one only has to look at their *practices*.

The nightclub is a venue that, in return for an entrance fee, offers you the concept of relaxation, fun, happiness and free choice. But as with all ISA's one would have to ask how free the choice is or if there is a free choice at all. From the paying participants' point of view, the nightclub is a place to meet and have fun. It is true; the choice of the nightclub is individual, although the media industry as another *Ideological State Apparatus* will have had a chance to impose values onto the individual. Receiving a flyer with the praise of a DJ, venue, theme night etc. can easily lead to the individual *subjecting* him- or herself to the values promoted on this flyer. Additionally, I argue that, by paying admission to the nightclub, people give away their free choice for the sake of homogeneity and the hope of enjoying an exciting but controlled atmosphere. Despite this control, the processes on the dance floor are of great interest because they offer freedom and individuality within the ISA. This is possible if a psychoanalytical approach is considered. The way this personal space can be reached and explored is by means of the DJ (Nieswandt 2002, 140-144).

Since the relation between a club owner or organiser and the DJ is professional and based on a working contract, the employee has to agree to certain terms and conditions. Although this could be seen as signing away or limiting the freedom to use creativity, today the DJ is very much the master of his or her own fate. The history of the DJ mirrors the shift of attention from the dancer to the DJ as a performer and back to the dancer. In the early days the DJ was the person introducing music or talking in between songs to deliver background information or adverts on the radio (Broughton and Brewster 1999, 28-30). Even if the names were known, the DJ's were invisible, their faces unknown. With the rise of the superstar DJ came the icon of personality. Suddenly the likings and dislikings of DJs became as much part of a promotional tour as clothing styles, favourite music and eating habits. Personal statements became slogans and the DJ booth came under the spotlight. Performing at the centre stage the DJ became an entertainer who was visible, positive and motivating (Garnier 2005, 191-197). The humanisation of the DJ was crucial for the development of a fan base. To favour a certain artist no longer meant to only favour the music or the DJ set. It became more a statement of where you stood in life and how and with whom or what you identified yourself (Haslam, 2001, X).

Using Althusser's theory of ideology, it could be asserted that the DJ turned into an Ideological State Apparatus himself. For the dancer it meant that the values promoted by the DJ were not a matter of choice. As soon as a venue was entered the dancers subjected themselves to the DJ. I do not say that this is no longer the case, but in recent years the figure of the DJ appears to be much more introverted again, becoming almost invisible. Some examples include the French duo Daft Punk or Damien Albarn's band Gorillaz.

Also, with the growing popularity of visuals and the iconisation of the VJ the performance stage experiences a readjustment of the space. With visuals in the foreground, the DJ becomes an invisible figure once again. However, the physical appearance of the star or even just the use of an established brand functions as a magnet.

The most important question to ask now is what happens to the dancer who, in this context, is not verbally approached, or, in Althusser's terms is not subject to *interpellation*? Althusser's interpellation works on the basis that individuals are hailed by being called certain names or terms. These are the synonyms for concepts that demand a specific way of thinking, which, if the individual accepts address, is then adopted. With regard to the nightclub, the individuals who have entered it have been hailed in similar ways and reacted, in that they go to a particular nightclub on a particular night. This does not necessarily mean that all individuals are going to react in the same way when they are on the dance floor. Each one of them is under the influence of various other ISA's and the combination of those, together with a different level of participation, results in individuals who see themselves as unique members of society. Yet there must be a common reaction in the clubbers that has united them on the dance floor.

Concentrating on DJ sets that do not include words apart from such universal words as love, freedom, universe etc., we find that the individual is not called anything. Despite an initial hailing by means of marketing and promotion, the clubber is thrown into a space that is not otherwise controlled by society. Of course, outside this hybrid space the dancer can immediately subject him- or herself again to the hailing of the institution or the authorities in the nightclub because the there will be names and terms in place to use. Merchandising is an effective tool for that. By giving a night a name or even a corporate identity, words, ideas and concepts start working and affecting the individual. But this fragile and permanently changing space on the dance floor provides an oasis for individuals wanting to forget about their responsibilities as *subjects*. It helps that music cannot be decoded on the dance floor as such but is felt unmediated. This opens up the opportunity to employ personal measurements and escape ideology (Jung 2002, 1-11).

An important factor to be considered when discussing the failure of ideology is the use and abuse of drugs. Although what Althusser terms *Repressive State Apparatuses* made drugs like Ecstasy, cocaine and ketamine illegal, I argue that the social practices of a nightclub include the use of drugs. I go even further and argue that the

nightclub as an ISA supports the use of illegal drugs to keep them controlled because as soon as drugs leave the nightclub they cannot be monitored at all (Home Office 2002).

The illegality of such actions is a challenge for both the *ISA* and the individual. Illegal drugs suggest disobedience in terms of the law and give the individual the illusion of being truly independent and free. However, all of this is controlled and prosecuted as soon as the safety of the dance floor is left, but only on the immediate borders. The further away from the nightclub the drugs are transported the more difficult is it to disturb or interfere with the production, distribution and consumption of drugs. Although the borders of such space are changing they do so only within the boundaries of the nightclub. In effect, the dance floor becomes an ideology-free zone in which the consumption of drugs is supported.

It is the contention of the author that this consumption of illegal and legal drugs, in combination with a disorientation of the conscious mind due to strobe lights/darkness, overwhelming noise and large visuals leads to the emergence of the Jungian *subject*. Where Althusser failed to acknowledge a universal, extemporal and yet individual precondition of the human psyche, Jung discusses the content, conditions and effects of the psycho-analytical *subject*.

A focus on the clubber forming the audience means that the clubber has been put in the spotlight. Critics might say that this is due to the short shelf life of acts today or, in this particular case, the decline in dance music. The Brit Awards, for example, no longer have a category for the Best Dance Act. The British Phonographic Industry does not regard dance music as profitable and as relevant as it used to be (Sherwin 2004). Instead, a new category for the Best Live Act shows the shift of attention to the new guitar-driven bands such as Muse (2005) and Kaiser Chiefs (2006). I argue that the dance movement, after being pushed into the mainstream (Best Dance Act in 2003 were Sugababes!), has gone back to its roots and become an underground scene again. The re-emergence of free raves and warehouse parties shows that dance is not dead. On such occasions the name of the DJ is as irrelevant as the location. It is the fact that only a certain group of people have access to the information and that the media do not cover such events that makes the party interesting. Althusser's idea of ideology does not allow for the structure to fail. However, the sole existence of free raves shows that not everybody is an Althusserian *subject* all the time and that there are means to avoid *interpellation*.

The above mentioned space within, the escape from responsibility and being an Althusserian *subject*, can be shaped to a large extent by the DJ. On the one hand, technical skills provide the means to form that space. On the other hand, the DJ has to be able to listen to and watch the dancers. I argue that the stardom of the DJ is not measured by common celebrity practices such as the extent of media coverage or news, interviews, promotions, and trendsetting activities. It is rather based on the DJ's ability to mirror the audience at any point (Broughton and Brewster 2002, 121-133). As simple as this might sound, it is a difficult job because there is a permanent nonverbal negotiation of space and power. Furthermore, I argue that part of the negotiation is about a definition of the *subject*. Although nobody is called anything (hailed) on the dance floor, information is exchanged.

In an earlier paper I investigated the shift of power between the dancer and the DJ with the result that the communication process is neither permanent nor controlled (Peter 2006). There are no rules and no boundaries as long as messages are understood. For the DJ, whose main aim is to get people dancing, it means reading the dancers and picking up their moods. The performativity of the actual dance as well as the reaction to specific techniques, sequences or mixes help the DJ to understand what the clubbers want. Once the DJ has managed to mirror sensibly the mood of the audience, feedback is immediate and unmediated. The communication process excludes the rational part of the psyche. Instead, it uses the emotional part of the brain to communicate. Sensation, feeling and intuition are the tools that are used to define the space created by the DJ and the dancer (Jacobi 1977, 20-27). The question that needs answering is whether we need to define the subject and the object in this situation.

Despite a two-dimensional dance floor with solid boundaries, which is the venue itself or a designated area within the venue, the DJ can create a multidimensional space within. In this space the DJ focuses on the atmosphere created by all participants at any given time. And yet, the journey of the particular dancer is individual. One might wonder how the DJ can possibly unite all those individuals and bring them onto a similar if not the same level. The answer lies in the unconsciousness - to be precise, in the *collective* unconscious.

The part of the psyche that is much deeper than any personal suppressed experience has, according to Jung, a universal content. The collective unconscious contains characteristics, which describe the psychic structure of the human. The collective unconscious is neutral and forms the base for the personal unconscious. Its content is only to become subjective when confronted with consciousness. Jung differentiates between the persona with an external focus and the shadow, which focuses on the internal content of the individual. In order to survive in society, the persona has to adapt to the social conditions that cannot be changed by the individual. What it represents is

a compromise between the individual and society. In a way it is a mask created to hide characteristics that would clash with the demands or requirements of society. The persona gives us security and the knowledge that there is something intimate and private in ourselves that cannot be manipulated or controlled easily. One could say that this intimate and unconscious side of us is the unsubjected part of the psyche that is not at all affected by the hailing of society. The persona represents our connection to the outside world; to external values, demands and ways of thinking (Jacobi 1977, 36-39).

The internal world of the individual is never as obvious and visible and partly unconscious. Dancing allows the subject to get in contact with this part of the psyche and explore the wholeness of oneself without judgement or regulations. Despite the self being partially positioned in the collective unconscious it is nevertheless present and we act according to it when not fully self-conscious. How we are defined by society does not reflect the personal definition of oneself. However, in an increasingly complex society approaching the individual with a variety of demands it becomes more difficult to reflect on the self and question positions, roles and judgements (Jung 1995, 29-33). Clubbing provides the opportunity to establish a healthy balance between the roles an individual plays in order to comply with postmodern life and find personal fulfilment. In other words, clubbing functions as a tool to establish contact with the part of oneself that is not otherwise revealed to society.

It has become evident that with the change of perspective and the shifting focus the clubber becomes the DJ and the DJ acts as a mere tool to translate into sound what is happening on the dance floor. This can only happen if the communication between both the DJ and the dancer is honest and intimate, unmediated and direct. In return, the DJ becomes the clubber who finds satisfaction in the music that is played, the energy that is received and vibe that is created on the dance floor. The DJ and the clubber merge until we cannot tell one from another.

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