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MIND USURPS PROGRAM

Virtuality and the "New Machine Aesthetic" of Electronic Dance Music

BENJAMIN HALLIGAN

METAL MACHINE MUSIC

THE beginnings of the idea of virtuality, with respect to popular music, seem to signal a break with the imaginings of genres of electronic dance music (EDM) in the decades prior.[1] It was as if the tension between the ideas of "electronic" and "music" dissipated once "music" is qualified as essentially "not really music" or "nonmusic" by dint of that pejorative term "virtual." Previously, the incremental introduction of—in the most general terms—"machines" (computers) into the otherwise "organic" (human) endeavor of popular rather than avant-garde music making in the 1970s had met with both critical hostility and fascination. Such distaste was tempered by circumspection: this jarring combination, for better of worse, made for the future, as already anticipated by authors such as J. G. Ballard and Anthony Burgess (whose use of the term *clockwork orange* indicated just such a flesh-and-metal entity). Positions were taken in what was perceived to be a cultural debate. The anti-disco backlash of the late 1970s, perhaps the first collective expression of such distaste, has been well documented.[2] And disco forms part of a dominant cultural narrative in the West in which disco first wrong-footed psychedelia and progressive rock (Prog) by appealing to lower common denominators, only to be righteously trounced by punk in turn, after disco's brief interregnum, which was given over to love songs and commerce. Articulations of the experiential and the angry, in Prog and punk respectively, are founded on a sense of a human presence, relating his or her interactions with the world. Artistry, in this respect, is found via an unfettered access to the music and musings of the individual. The drum machine, with its on-off switch, and the synthesizer, with its dashboard and plastic keys and cord and plug, seemed closer to kitchen appliances, utilitarian and soulless. Appliances, then, are associated with music

for those disinterested in instruments, and ignorant of culture and tradition. The dialectic is clear: automaton music for commerce (4/4 time signatures; love and sentiment; harmony and easy listening; background noise rather than foreground art), human music for artistry (complicated or collapsing time signatures; untrained singers and engulfing or offensive elements of noise in the listening experience, and this as the era of Prog and punk, demanding of or deserving one's full attention). This tension was even articulated in the very first broadcast minutes of MTV: "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the Buggles, in which the countercultures of the "Age of Aquarius" are now replaced by a "plastic age," where the fake and synthetic have overcome the authentic and organic.[3]

At the same time, disco's own radical prehistory in 1970s gay and multiethnic subcultures, and the seemingly paradoxical integration of the machine (the music-making computer) into an affective music of sexual desire, suggest that the "popular" element of this popular music was at first potentially progressive rather than just dumbly populist. Could it have been the resultant destabilization of dominant cultural narratives, in disco music and cultures—or, at least, its potentials—that inflamed, if not prompted, anti-disco ire? As I have argued elsewhere (2010), disco's boundary-crossing nature and non-heteronormativity became an enabler for the prolongation, or reprise, of the Summer of Love of 1967. This time the Summer lives on in the spread of free love into the urban hinterlands, and in the entrenchment of the pleasure society (as opposed to the militarized, drafted society of the Cold War and its proxy conflicts).

In this narrative, disco's heroes, Abba or the Bee Gees for example, become comparable to the Beatles or Pink Floyd and, as with idiosyncratic pioneers such as Kraftwerk and Giorgio Moroder, are belatedly hailed as innovators. But disco's denizens are active and dancing rather than, as with psychedelia and Prog, essentially inactive or—stoned—physically deactivated. So disco is the music of socialization and interaction, and sexual intercourse, sandwiched between musics of contemplation and daydreaming (psychedelia, Prog), and alienation and violence (punk, postpunk). Disco is the music of male grooming in contrast to the unkempt and unwashed of psychedelia, and the sweat-, spittle-, mucus-, and sometimes blood-soaked of punk.

But disco's rapid remaking into the pleasure culture of the milieus of high commerce, and in this the erasure of its radical prehistory and blunt curtailing of its sonic odyssey, would have damaged the case of those who perceived a revolutionary impulse in disco, related to the counterculture of the first Summer of Love. Indeed, what may once have been seen as a "temporary autonomous zone,"[4] and so allow revolutionary potential to germinate, would have been perceived as the very opposite once disco was lifted from the underground and reconstituted for hotel dance floors—from unique gay clubs such as the Anvil or the Mineshaft to the ubiquitous Holiday Inns.[5]

VIRTUAL MACHINE MUSIC

It is with EDM of the late 1980s, at the point of acid house, that the break with the imaginings of genres of electronic dance music in the decades prior occurs.[6] If this shift can be read in terms of technology, it is not so much in terms of technological advances but how technology is understood and used. To talk of "computers" is too vague, although the transition from analog proto-computer to digital computer is a useful timeline since the freedoms of the latter allow an abandonment of musician-centered music making. The more generic term *machine* encompasses this period of radical change in the methods of making popular music, moving from strings on instruments to switches on machines.

The machines used for EDM are not so much a minor concern within the sonic discourse, as akin to the roles of domestic appliances. Rather the machines, in remaking the music-making process, remade the music. Disco typically allowed the electronic to be a soundbed and beat for the human element of the music. What was human arose from singing and playing instruments, with the resultant music then "treated" and altered by the machine, rather than, as would now become the case via incorporation of the synthesizer into the computer (a move anticipated by machines such as the Synclavier), the computer alone generating the music. EDM foregrounds the machine, which then constitutes the *mise-en-scène* of the sound, with a space allowed for the human element. The metal machine, as it were, accomodates the sense of an ontology of authenticity: one can still imagine or picture the musicians playing. And the Bee Gees, Kraftwerk, Abba, and Moroder were hailed for innovative thinking, that ability to work with the future rather than in spite of or against it. The virtual machine is less suggestive: Where, materially, is this music coming from? The ontology is uncertain. In a popular cliché of the time, the garret-dwelling artist/musician is reimagined as the lone, anonymous teenager, building up tracks on the PC in his bedroom—a programmer, not a musician.

Such an ontological difference colors the imaginings of virtual music. EDM is often desexed music, and would seem to shun spectrums of sound and harmony that rendered all these previous genres (psychedelia, disco, punk) nuanced, and distinctive, and possessing and possessed of an emotive ambience that united groups of people as they reacted in unison. The camaraderie of the love-in (joint sharing, the orgy, the commune), the intellectual circles that identified with Prog (of a shared background of privilege according to many commentators, including Macan 1997, 144), the synchronized dancing of disco, and the boisterous mosh pits and pogo-ing of punk, all functioned to call and assemble disparate members of their tribes for a coming together and communion. A constituency emerges. EDM is more often a matter of isolation. And, despite the civil concerns and the politics that surrounded the legality of early raves, and the dangers and political education suddenly on offer for those participating in this subculture,[7] the music itself seemed disconcertingly apolitical.

In rave, the most retrogressive aspects of the above-mentioned analog music genres (to their detractors) seemed to be in operation: the apolitical "dropping out" of psychedelia, the navel gazing and fantasy of Prog, the unthinking hedonism of disco, the nihilism and anti-intellectualism of punk. Intimations of the political radicalism of EDM generally look to the anarchistic state of affairs of the events as they were organized and run. Massed ravers, as trespassers and drug fiends, are a priori detrimental to the running of civil society. But beyond such antisocial concerns, the question of affect comes

into play: a mindset is created that is somehow intrinsically against this civil society too … and then persists, with the "come down" stretching back into the office hours of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday … and almost taking the worker on to Friday, when it begins again. But no automatic radical import can be assumed. This constituency is fatally fragmented. Unlike the "classical" modern model of dropping out of society, associated with the first Summer of Love, the raver still seems to get to the office. The entrepreneurialism of early rave organizers (of a kind of grassroots, libertarian capitalism, presenting itself as in opposition to the petit-bourgeois moralism of the tabloids)[8] is often noted, and some of these figures have in turn become reactionary commentators and establishment figures. Rave's classlessness ensured that a segment of privileged tourist "weekenders" (a modern variant to those described by Miller 2001), who were clearly keen on a brief period of life-altering experiences, could be accommodated and returned to work intact. And this wariness about the politics of rave can be coupled with the still-limited thematic concerns of much of EDM, in stark contrast to the outspokenness of punk and postpunk, and even the anti-Thatcherite tone (and antiwar and antifascist positions) of so much pop music of the 1980s, institutionalized in Red Wedge. In short, before the general election of 1987, a Union activist may have attended a Red Wedge gig, and felt at home with the familiar sloganeering in the music. After that election, and defeat for Labour, a young Tory may well have relaxed at an all-night rave.[9]

In talking of the Happy Mondays, as foundational to the fledgling Manchester dance cultures of the late 1980s, Reynolds offers the assessment of a track that is "an immensely agreeable mantra for a state of mindlessness" (quoted in Nice 2011, 395). Agreeableness, however, is not without a radical political import, as Fringeli also notes in respect to Marx's anticipated "empire of freedom" (2011, 6, sect. 1), and even as the basis of Eagleton's discussion of the freedoms of communism (2010). Mindlessness, or oblivion seeking (to paraphrase Isabelle Eberhardt), in another strain in EDM subgenres, is reinterpreted in New Age terms: the Gaian mysticism of Spiral Tribe (Reynolds 2013) and, as Reynolds puts it, the "syncretic spirituality mishmashed from chunks of Tao, Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, hatha yoga, Mayan cosmology, and Wicca, then spliced with alien abduction theories and other renegade forms of parascience" of psytrance (2013, 551). But such aspirant quasi-theological positions are predicated on the idea of the merging of human ("hardware") and program ("software") and the resultant melding of machine and spirituality. For St. John, this makes for a second coming in "an assemblage of electronic, computer and audio-visual technologies that has descended amidst contemporary youth, [so that] techno-rave anticipates a posthumanity awakening" (2004, 22). One could speculate that this acceptance of technology was particular to a certain generation: those born circa 1970, who would then have been particularly receptive to the "home computer" revolution of the 1980s, and in turn would have seen information technology as entirely enabling and freeing, a cultural norm, and empowering for themselves and their contemporaries as they forged a new, computer-founded, culture.

There is no denying the TAZ potential of the rave in terms of its context. In its earliest days, to organize such an event was literally a case of finding and establishing just such a zone: a field or warehouse or (combining the two) a farm barn, far from the ambit of the police. To an extent, the music found an identity, if not necessarily a form, through this search for place and existence—where successful (those notable raves that have since passed into urban legend) or, as can be surmised by a track such as Kektex's 1998 "Hackney Council Are a Bunch of Cunts," otherwise. And to experience the zone fully, and to find oneself suddenly in receipt of the freedoms allowed, typically then translates into a "what on earth am I doing?" moment, during flashes of self-awareness, perhaps at the point of remembering tomorrow's career obligations (on the Monday that follows the Sunday morning into which this Saturday night extends).

HEAD MUSIC

Irrespective of the equivocation and uncertainty as to the seemingly radical or consciousness-raising import of the EDM event, its extant texts mostly seem circumscribed and curtailed within the usual and often trivial pop concerns. 808 State's "Pacific State" (1989), Nightcrawlers' "Push the Feeling On" (1992), and, closer to the late 1990s rave revival, Layo & Bushwacka!'s "Love Story [vs Finally]" (2002; the Tim DeLuxe mix), in the cold light of day, yield nothing that, in itself, can be read as countering cultural or societal norms. If anything, the songs seem complacent in their concerns—romantic or sentimental, or just vague and unintelligible. Of course, the missing element in this consideration is neurological: the results of a sound system that delivers bass into the body, and the reading of the music while cognitively incoherent from recreational drug use. Hence "dance drugs are body technologies" (Rietveld 2004, 54). But "in Techno," as D'Andrea notes of this foundational interpretative qualifier, "it is arguable whether drugs are mandatory for 'understanding' digital music or achieving group acceptance" (2004, 247).

The cold light of day is not the light that most appropriately illuminates the music since the music is a matter of the affective (and so prompts the finding of a methodology, in terms of critical writing, that can take this into account). Indeed, to fail to account for this affective context is to find that the music, and event, makes little sense.

In his writings (of the 1920s and 1930s) on his experiences under the influence of hashish, Walter Benjamin notes how the mind's processing of music seems to lose objectivity, even to the point that the music seems to operate directly on the brain. Benjamin talks of the "rush switches of jazz," and that "there were times when the intensity of acoustic impressions blotted out all others" (2006, 125). And, in addition then to space closing in, with a tunnel vision between sound and cognition, a linear experience of time seems to vanish too:

Allegorical dismemberment. The music to which one listens under the influence of hashish appears, in Baudelaire, as "the entire poem entering your brain, like a dictionary that has come alive." [from "The Poem of Hashish"] (138)

In this, what would seem to be how a narrative (words, in the dictionary here, but by extension, sung lyrics) unfolds in its own time is replaced by an instantaneous occurrence of all information. The perception of time is decoupled from the dissemination of information as a process that occupies tranches of that time. The addled dancer perceives, and acts on, a perception of time that is often unique to him or her. One thinks of the dancing of the lone, intoxicated reveler that can last, uninterrupted, for hours, and who sometimes dances in slow motion and often in a corner—but as if imagining being at the center of the attentions of admiring others. A phenomenological experience of time overrides those more standard responses to time. Reynolds notes that techno makes for "an immediacy machine, stretching time into a continuous present . . . 'where now lasts longer'" (Reynolds 2013, 469; author's italics). "When exactly," Rapp provocatively asks, "is Saturday?" (2010, 143) Saturday seems to spread across the nights and days of the entire weekend. Such temporal confusion is also something of a foundational myth of acid house music.

In these ways the extant texts cited above must be read as looking to achieve a sonic discourse that can only be properly untangled, and acted upon, on the dance floor, or in the field. But these tracks are not like free jazz. What is described as the usual in them, above, also applies to their standard 4/4 beat. Any phenomenological freedom that arises still adheres to this template, typical across pop musics, along with the ways in which the regimented is offset by the relatively free, and the anticipated with the surprising.

The standard in this respect is exemplified in "Love Story [vs Finally]": in common with the sonic patina of late 1980s dance tracks, a gutsy, even gospel-like, vocal tarries but does not tally with the restraint that is otherwise imposed by a pulsing, electronic beat. The voice then is presented as organic and human, as denoted by its lack of regimentation and its emotional inflections. The promo video, in a straightforward way, assembles this dialectical relationship too: a dancer freely moves in an autoerotic way while seemingly subject to the constant scan of a computer's laser as if under surveillance, or subject to experimentation. The scanning does not impede the dancing but rather allow a baroque interplay of light and shadow across limbs and head in constant motion (see Figs. 28.1–28.4).

Such a juxtaposition was also apparent in Moroder's disco work with Donna Summer, which provocatively combined the most biologically organic (the orgasmic groans of Summer, singing "Love to Love You Baby" and "I Feel Love," of 1975 and 1977 respectively) with the most electronically inorganic (synthetic sounds, suggesting computer processor chatter, drum machine beats, or looped drums and bass lines), establishing a *mise-en-scène* of human versus computer.

808 State and Nightcrawlers reverse this otherwise expected sonic organization. "Pacific State" assembles a busy, bustling beat as a soundbed for a jazzy alto saxophone solo. The solo is mixed so that it sounds as if it emanates from some distance away, even to the point of lagging behind the beat—as if from a beach party, heard in the distance, or even imagined, and hence the song's distinctive "Balearic dreaminess" (Stanley 2013, 626). What is typically denoted as human first flows through the machine; the solo sound
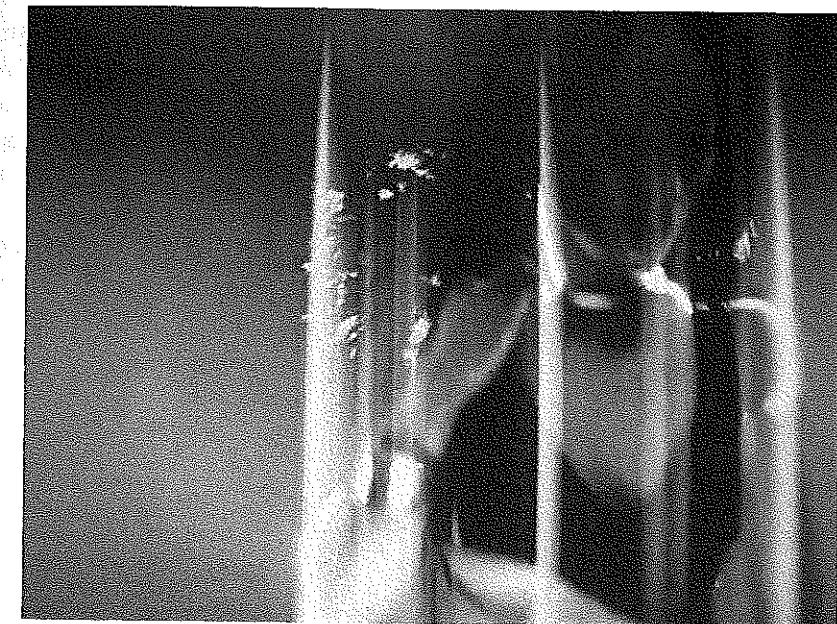
FIGURES 28.1–28.4 Beauty as in the (electronic) eye of the beholder: promo video for Layo & Bushwackal's "Love Story [vs Finally]" (2002)
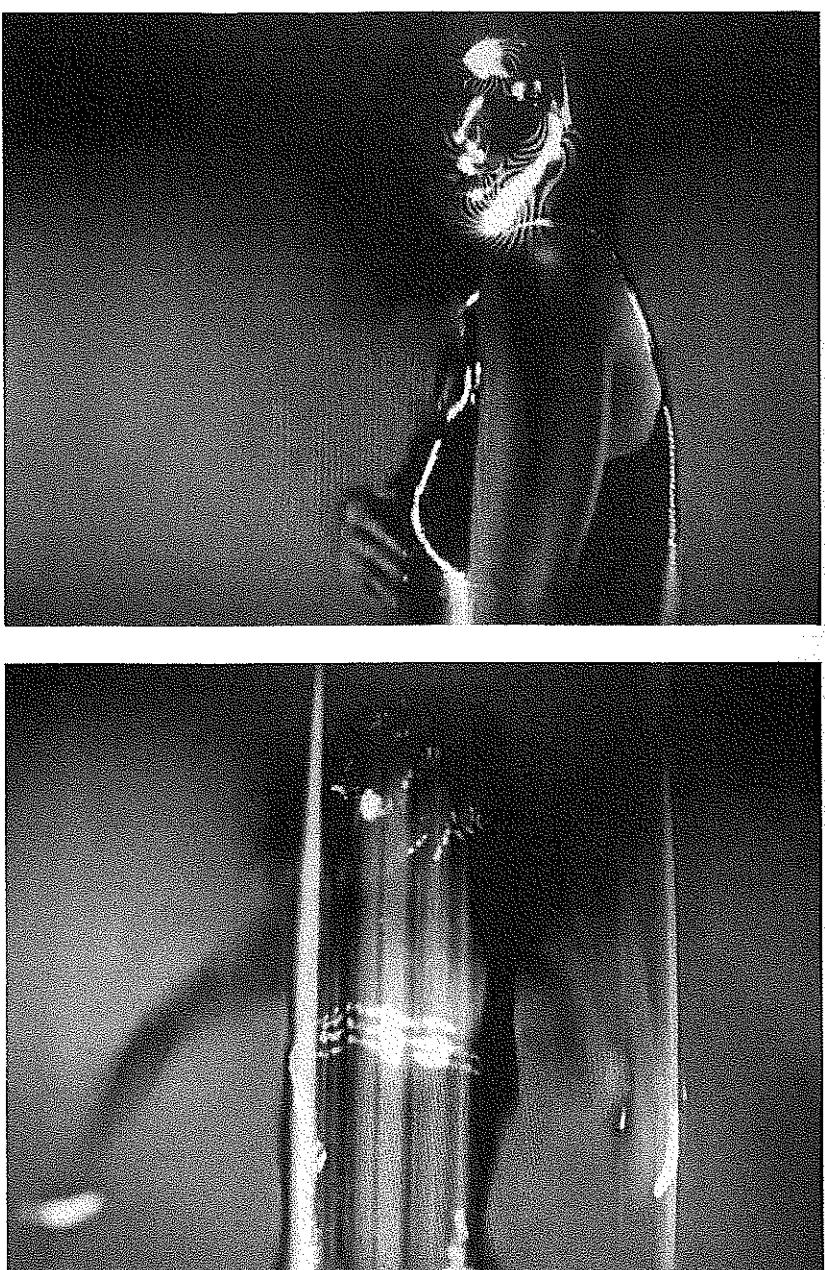
FIGURES 28.1–28.4 (Continued)

itself is treated, and could easily be taken for a synthesizer, so that an electronic resonance is now present in the timbre of a brass instrument. For "Push the Feeling On" the beat incorporates sampled vocals (where the lyrical content is ambiguous), and a synthesizer solo again freely wends across this nuanced soundscape. In the bluntest possible way, the tracks meld a "lower register" (the beat, repeated samples, the regimented and the expected: the matter of a computer program) with an "upper register" (the voice, the surprising, the freer: a creativity denoting the human mind).

How, then, experientially, such tracks come to function is another matter—and perhaps one with an overwhelming number of determinants when the live life of the track is considered, with alterations via mixing and remixing, in the sequencing of the track, in terms of a demographic, the sound and lighting systems, and so on. Anecdotally, very apparent differences in dancing indicate the profound differences between tracks: swaying and smiling for "Pacific State," maybe hands pointed in the air and freely mimicking conducting; the orbit of frenzied arms around the body for "Love Story [vs Finally]"; on-the-spot walking for "Push the Feeling On," with arms rarely moving higher than ninety degrees from the body. These differences also speak of the "moment," in the sense of the scheduling of blocks of time, of the dance event too. Such a curatorial organization acknowledges the "full on" response needed by Layo & Bushwacka! which then places the track at the point of the most energy to expend. And, as with "Not Over Yet" by Grace (1993–1995) or "The Weekend" by Michael Gray (2004), the track's chorus is an anthemic legend, perhaps akin to Benjamin's "rush switch," which momentarily unites individuals, potentially through a unification of dance gestures and movements, and singing along, at the point of the chorus. Reynolds refers to EDM's "E-motionalism" in this respect (2013, 544). "Push the Feeling On" is a relative easing off, and so found a few hours after, as energy wanes. And the "come down" ambience of "Pacific State," which, as with Robert Miles's "Children" (1995), is designed to slow down the body and chill out rather than rile up the sensibility (and so attempt to engender a safer passage home), means that the track is typically found at the very end, or as an outro, to the entire set.

In all these examples, the beat seeks to discipline the body in the alignments of the tempo of the dance and the movement of the body, and the dancer's breathing. And, as bolstered via neurological alteration, and in respect to the immense durations of the set, the beat becomes a locking in of the body, into the music and its event, and the regulation of the body to the segmentations of time in the event, and flows of intensity.

EDM's "Metal Guru"

However, the "upper register" of the track alleviates the monotony of such discipline. This is the path to freedom that is offered to the dancer, allowing the mind to wonder, irrespective of this locking in of the body. This register is freer, and empathetic, the strata of human articulation found above, or in the midst of, the computer-generated soundscape. And it is via the emotional "holding onto" this upper register, or mental alignment to this sonic compass point, that the drug experience can be negotiated. This register is akin then to Ariadne's thread, guiding the individual through the endless maze of the music, leading and shaping the trip. Whiteley has made this argument, in

a nascent form ([1992] 2004), in relation to unexpected chord changes in "Strawberry Fields Forever" by the Beatles (1967). In this, the Beatles are understood to signal their experience, and so guru status, to the listener—and thus offer their guidance ("Let me take you down . . .") for the aspirant acid user. This guru trope also occurs in the person of the actually existing singer: the crazed live performances of Arthur Brown, for example, who seems to combine, or "channel," the roles of orchestra conductor, dervish, pronouncing medical doctor, court jester and pre-Christian spiritual leader, or in Jim Morrison's stage persona, which, as Milton argues (2012) in respect to the "happening" nature of concerts by the Doors, drew directly from the Living Theater's quasi-ceremonial pageantries of madmen and seers. And, likewise, as I have argued elsewhere (Halligan 2010, 2013), the upper register of EDM also acts as guru and "drug buddy."

Rave cultures drew heavily on notions of a guru, seen or unseen, as the enlightener or shaman—the DJ, singer, mixer, performer—the "intelligence" behind, or through, the computer music, and with "the engineer as poet, as weaver-of-dreams" as Reynolds put it (2013, 466). Academic writing is particularly credulous in this respect, falling between anecdotal sociological observations and willful obscurantism. In the "shamanic resurgence" comes "mystical experiences accessible to the 'children of Babylon'" (Baldini, drawing on DJ Goa Gil's terminology, 2010, 171). For the "democratized shamanism characteristic of both cyber culture and the psytrance movement" (Ryan, 2010, 189), and "digital shamanism" (D'Andrea, 2004, 246) in general, the shaman figure "combines art, technology, and religion" (248) so that, for the raver, "the merging with technology becomes a cyborgian rite of passage" (Rietveld, 2004, 59). The results stretch to reported "telepathy, mystical visions, paranoia, ego dissolution, excruciating pleasures" and so forth (D'Andrea, 2004, 249). A typical sociological approach is to find in these phenomena a secular-age belief system, based on fun and the more exotic elements (to Western eyes) of world religions. Other writers find in the event a kind of psychic multiculturalism (and one that, despite its supernatural providence, still crudely differentiates along us-and-them lines). Hence "certain kinds of electronic music are attributed the capacity to induce trancelike states [. . .] evoking images of shamanic tribal rituals in South America, India, Africa and elsewhere" (Ryan 2010, 191), and allow "primordial communication" (quoted in Rietveld, 2004, 47). The musicians offer similarly Orientalist perspectives, Spiral Tribe saying "It's all voodoo pulses. From Africa [. . . w]e're not trying to get into the future, we're trying to get back to where we were before Western Civilization fucked it all up" (quoted in Reynolds, 2013, 175). The ravers are cast as disciples who are led, en masse, to shared feelings, a synchronicity of e-motionalism, shared experiences of the night, and shared resources too.

But rave cultures more typically diffuse this guru figure: she or he is no longer present, no longer the center of attention on a stage of performance, or just exists virtually—a sampled vocal from some long-retired or deceased singer. (For many writers, the introduction of globe-trotting superstar DJs thus realigned rave along standard consumer lines, with an EDM "pop star," to its detriment.) For EDM, the guru is software, running now independently of its first programmer: music from the virtual sphere. The guru is, more properly, the ghost (of the dead or absent human) in the machine. Or,

along the favored theological lines: this guru is the unseen Holy Spirit rather than a Christ-like divine and actual presence, electrifying and guiding the crowd.

In this case, and especially in house, acid house, and techno, this guru element, in the upper register (which can be termed "the guru register"), can be manifest as little more than a series of blips or bleeps, cutting across the groove, or the sonic patina, of the track. In trance, the guru register can be one sustained chord or sound, enveloping all other musical components, or blending them into itself. To appropriate Marc Bolan's term, this articulation is EDM's "metal guru." But at the same time the nature of this articulation, in the freer, upper register, allow a reading of EDM that moves beyond the seemingly limited and trivial imaginings of the extant music in favor of a concern with the imaginings of the raver.

THE IDEA OF VIRTUALITY

The introduction of the idea of virtuality allows EDM "before" (principally disco, but also Motorik and synthesizer pioneers of the 1970s such as Moroder, Wendy Carlos, and Jean-Michel Jarre—analog EDM)[10] to be considered in modernist terms, the integration of man and industrial machine, with the latter at the service of the former. EDM "proper"—that is, digital—is then postmodern, the integration of machine with machine, as a closed loop. The idea of virtuality—in its earliest understandings, in the sense of "virtually human" or "not quite human"—shifts the parameters of the debate on computer-generated music.

But more generally the idea of the changing relationship between man and computer was, in itself, a key ontological question of the postwar years, and a matter of existential struggle for Cold War warriors (computers programmed to autonomously enact "mutually assured destruction," and so on). During the time of civil crises of the late 1960s, the relationship took on a way of imagining the contested future. When Shaull, for example, addresses the "two prototypes of the new man who is emerging in our time: the revolutionary and the technocrat" (Oglesby and Shaull, 1967, 199), the indication is that technology will soon impose a new and absolute divide between those in and those outside the coming order. Even more apocalyptically, the computer—faceless and stateless, but rapidly becoming the face of and controller of the state—seemed to be on the verge of abandoning old strategies (enslaving and remaking man) in favor of simply replacing man altogether. Such "future shock" tension made for a theme of much 1970s popular culture.

In this context, the proto-virtual nature of disco comes in the unashamed replacement of musicians with computers—most clearly, drummer to drum machine. Disco music's distinctiveness is often found in its not-quite-human sonic glaze. And disco was not hesitant in presenting itself as the music of the future, in a number of ways. What was alarming to cultural commentators, then, in cultures associated with disco was how the computer regulated freed emotion, in leisure time and leisure spaces, in

addition to exerting ever more control over work practices and the workplace. Just as the computer controlled the speed of the conveyor belt in the Fordist model factory, the computer came to determine the rhythm of erotic activity in the discotheque—and, in this, held out the promise of free love, making good on the project of the "Summer of Love" of a decade or so before, or at least fulfilling the demands for sexual freedom. For moralists and science fiction naysayers, this development was characterized as a process in which the human is gradually stripped of his or her free will in order to access pleasure once entering this pact with the computer.

The virtualness of digital EDM does not creep into, and contaminate, real life in this disco and 1970s sci-fi way. Digital EDM already is "post-human," music that explores its own possibilities rather than offering a mimicking of received forms of music. Electronic drums, in analog EDM, were often still drums to be played by a drummer. The DJ, in contrast, confronts panels of switches and faders, and interacts with laptops and memory sticks, as he sequences and splices extant music. The DJ booth resembles a cockpit, with its rows of push buttons, ergonomically circular steering wheels, and screens. The music can even continue on autopilot if the DJ is absent (see Figs. 28.5–28.7).

As with a PC connected to the Internet, this bank of machines is a way of accessing, and so calling into existence, another realm of information, and one that becomes self-sustaining and infinitely mutable (see Fig. 28.8). The sense that data and information are already "out there" in the ether, and can be accessed and channeled via
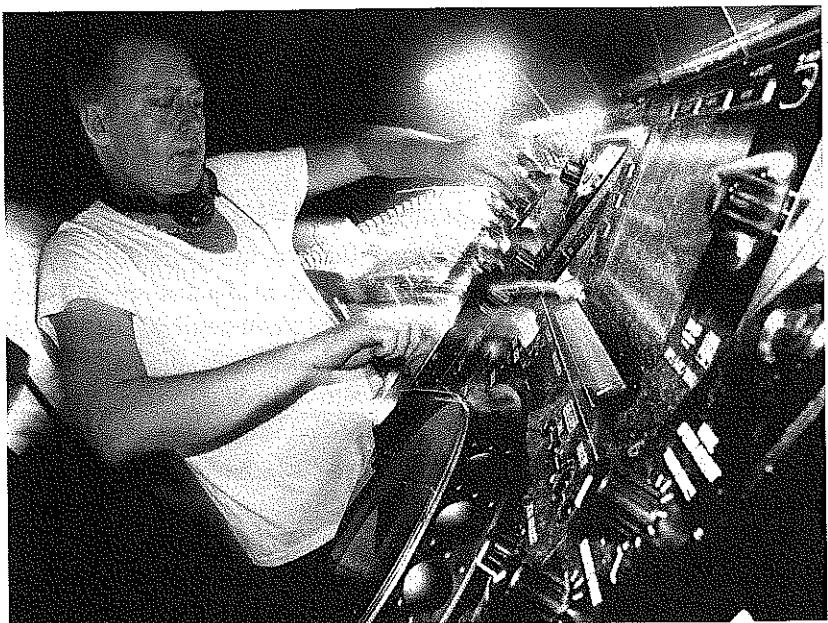
FIGURES 28.5–28.8 DJ as technician: K-Klass DJ at the Venus Club (Manchester, UK), Sept. 21, 2013

FIGURES 28.5–28.8 (Continued)

FIGURES 28.5–28.8 (Continued)

FIGURE 28.9 The loop in action: shout outs and shout backs, across the mixing desk. ("Revolution," Venus Club, Manchester, UK, Aug. 10, 2013)
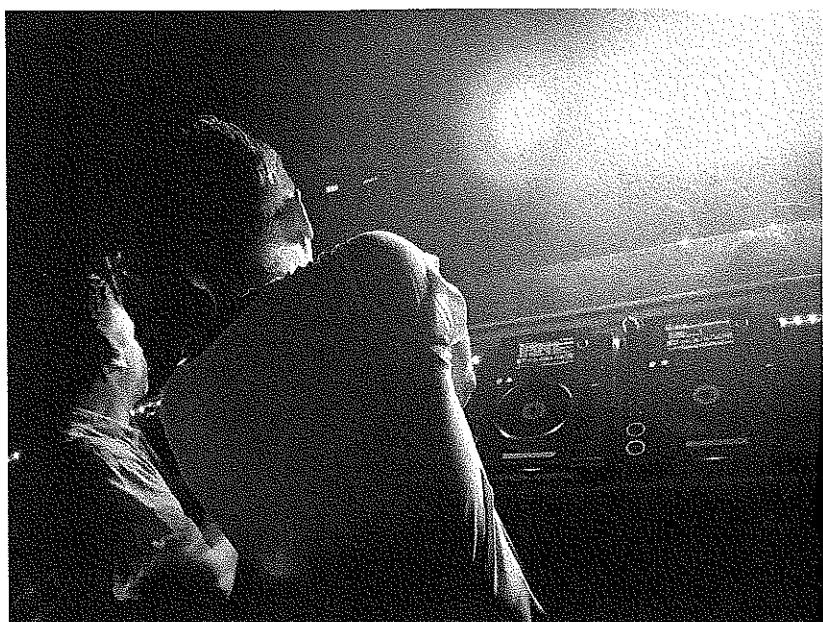
the computer, makes for a sense of virtuality that is spiritlike: unknowable, invisible, ever-present. The relationship between the DJ, virtuality, and dancers is one of interlocking interactivity, and the flow of communication is a loop that connects them all (see Fig. 28.9):

1. The virtual realm as supplier
2. DJ as accessor
3. The dancers as supplicants
4. Supplicants as requestors
5. DJ as requested
6. Requests to the virtual realm, return to 1

CALIFORNIAN IDEOLOGY

Whether this state of affairs is depoliticizing and stupefying or liberating and empowering remains, as noted above, a matter of debate. In classic modernist terms, this debate can be read in terms of aesthetics and politics, and Jameson offers (NLB 2007), for its leftist, Cold War–era manifestations, a polemic that arises from the positions of Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, and Lukács. The common ground, however, is clear: empowerment through art as a didactic and liberating engagement with the

proletariat. In postmodern terms, where such an ambiguity comes to be the defining characteristic of popular cultures, the entire field is problematized by virtuality.

For Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, writing in the mid-1990s, virtuality is read as the coming condition, and as imminent and radically transformative to popular cultures, politics, and aesthetics. What they anticipate has a postmodern ahistoricism too: countercultural, bohemian currents seem to mix and meld with neoliberal, antistate positions, in the understanding of an individual's agency, at the time of what they identify as the Californian Ideology. And agency for the individual, in an age of social media (which Barbrook and Cameron are able to discuss, in its very earliest stages, via the flirting that apparently occurred on the French proto-Internet Minitel network), is computer-facilitated. To put it in very crude terms, this agency is not the freedom granted to slaves, once their chains have been removed: freedom of movement, freedom of choice, freedom to work for, in part, their own financial gain. Rather, this agency is the freedom that is possible for those who remain enslaved or choose enslavement, that is, surrendering their lives to the computer-city. But the myth of such a killer computer-city can also be seen as a reprise of a Marxian notion of the uprising of the enslaved workers; the human ultimately revolts against the machines, and seeks to overthrow their central computer. But is the revolt itself enabled by the freedoms first granted by the computer? This is the fundamental question in terms of theorizing EDM, even to the extent that positions can be taken that find the culture depoliticizing *and* liberating, or stupefying *and* empowering, to find the terms employed above now reordered counterintuitively.

It is arresting that, in his response to Barbrook and Cameron, Bifo moves against their assumptions made about the "natural" inclinations of human agency, and so anticipates debates beyond the debate anticipated by *The Californian Ideology. Pace* Foucault, and Deleuze of *The Society of Control* (1990), Bifo argues that the human element becomes diluted in this process of entering, effectively, the computer-city. The disciplinary "code of behaviour is being imprinted directly onto the mind through models of cognition, of psychic interaction," and discipline is thus to be achieved "through the dissemination of techno-linguistic interfaces inducing a cognitive mutation" (Bifo, n.d.).

Toward the end of *The Californian Ideology*, Barbrook and Cameron touch on EDM as an art form for the coming virtual age: "Digital artisans can create a new machine aesthetic for the information age. For instance, musicians have used computers to develop purely digital forms of music, such as drum 'n' bass and techno" (1995). An endnote introduces one such figure, Goldie, whose music at that point (*Timeless* was released in 1995) was a kind of concept-album-sized psychedelic junglism, and who is quoted as noting that the EDM phase is a new beginning, with potential now to "push it and push it and push it" (where "it" is drum and bass; the "push" means to progress). For Barbrook and Cameron, this "new machine aesthetic" is a product or byproduct, or artifact, of "the information age," and makes for a revised rationale for how the artist functions in society: how, as they conclude, "the developers of hypermedia must reassert the possibility of rational and conscious control over the shape of the digital future." In this, they note a European–North American divide, with the latter elitist and of the Californian Ideology while the former is "inclusive and universal." This is the divide that critics of the Californian Ideology, such as Bifo, have noted as showing the limitations of the revolutionary imagination of the authors; national boundaries rather than class commonalities determine the battle for the coming digital future, bucking the idea of "[digital] workers of the world, unite!"

However, in the notion of the mind usurping the program, of the guru register, and of the coming together of the EDM event, there is an echo of the imagining of a Europeanized Californian Ideology: "rational and conscious control" in the figure of the DJ and mixer, and the "inclusive and universal" in the experience of the massed ravers, virtuality tamed and channeled for egalitarian, internationalist ends. In fact, taken as a whole in terms of this new music subculture, and understood to exert a centrifugal force over other youth cultures, EDM or the experience of EDM would seem to have in part prompted the reformist, "European" position of the Californian Ideology.

A sociological or ethnographic study of rave cultures would perhaps reveal how this imagining, of a Europeanized Californian Ideology in EDM, was or was not played out at the time (or even, via police records, a study of arrests and offenses, types of drugs found in possession, and class determinants of sentences then handed out). However, the connection between EDM and the idea of virtuality is perhaps more usefully considered with respect to the self-conception of EDM rather than the behaviors of denizens of raves. EDM seems to contain an imagining of its own constituency. That is, the EDM track projects the idea of its own enlightened listener, while the enlightened listener can seek to fulfill that role. The guru register can, after all, only operate

apostolically, preaching to the faithful, converting the nonbelievers to the cause; but it is first necessary for these apostles to verify the presence of the Messiah.

What then seems to occur is an exchange of fantasies—akin to a dysfunctional marriage, where each attempts to live up to the other's notion of the person he or she wanted to marry. In respect to questions of straight popularity, this idea of an exchange is easy to grasp: the audience really does make the track, in terms of both responsiveness and the properly democratic nature of popularity. A bad or badly placed track will empty the dance floor, and a DJ spinning unpopular tunes will be a financial liability to the owners, managers, and staff of a club. A good track will be played for decades, and will therefore effectively shore up the customer base. So it is a matter of the reception of the text, rather than authorial intentions (in keeping with structuralist thought, and Barthes's "death of the author"), that fully comes into play in this process. Fantastical projection (which still may, of course, be problematic) is more appropriately understood as a matter of the audience's use of the track. The alchemy of the effective DJ, in operation across the loop outlined above, seems to involve understanding the needs of the audience at certain points, and how and when a certain track dropped into the mix can fulfill those needs. There is even, in preemptive mixing (where a few bars or vocal snatches may be mixed into the previous track), a testing or teasing, or in Freud's term, a *fort/da* operation (where the child reenacts the loss and gain of a desired object repeatedly). The question is articulated in this operation: Will this desired track be given a full playing? And the audience response (a new wave of energy, affirmative cries from the dance floor, or indifference) ensures or derails that outcome respectively.

Unlike Prog or punk, such communication in or between the EDM soundscape and the dancer is not a matter of a wide-eyed mimicking of events or figures on stage or record sleeves—sartorial influence, shared attitudes to work, and so forth. For EDM there is often no central stage, no performer, no display of musical prowess, no clear beginning or definite end. (And even the superstar DJs mentioned above seem unglamorous and, appropriately for archivists of popular culture, middle-aged and scruffily academic in appearance.) Ontological questions arise in this circumstance. What is it that we are listening to? Where does it come from? (Since, via a good PA, the answer is all around: multidirectional rather than "from" the stage area.) And, with respect then to a lack of a narrative centered on performance (an appreciation of a concert, of musicianship, of a delivery of favorite songs, as seen live), why are we listening? Why are we here? And, in terms of where one stands, In what direction do we look? For Chris Cunningham and Aphex Twins DJ sets, there is virtually nothing "live" to look at—often just a bobbing head, glimpsed but mostly obscured by laptop screens. Such questions occur naturally in this circumstance since what is understood to be authentic in live music performances, and unique to a certain moment and space alone, is at best problematic in EDM and at worst altogether absent. Thus Reynolds identifies a conceptual far shore: mortal absence as typifying some dance musics ("zombie music"), via the voice and sounds of the since-departed, electrified and virtually brought back to life (2013, 456).

Svenonius connects the standard narrative of the live music event to the feudal-capitalist organization of entertainment: loudness used to exert dominion over the

performance area, preventing its "alternative" use (as a social space) by consumers, and where "elitism in their [DJs' and bands'] case is conveyed through their occupying a stage, which implies a relationship with management or ownership of said space and sense of importance" (2012, 236). Once this model is abandoned,[11] through the decentered nature of the delivery of the music, a void opens up. Without these standard narratives of live music, the guru register can come to the fore to occupy that void.

"Afro-Left"

Leftfield's 1995 single "Afro-Left" (on "The Afro-Left EP," and from their album *Leftism*, released the same year) could be said to mark fairly extreme uses of the tendencies that have been described above as the guru register and an imagined constituency. The majority of the track consists of an uninterrupted beat and synthesizers, on top of which a berimbau is played and a singer talks and intones at length (the track is seven and a half minutes) in a foreign language, one that sounds sub-Saharan African. The singer is mic'd closely, so as to create, in the vocal track, a sense of intimacy, the sound of being spoken to at close quarters, even of the mouth speaking directly into the ear. The vocal track is effective in riling the audience up into a frenzy, spurring on the dancing (and this was particularly so in live renditions of the album in 2010), and its unintelligible foreignness blocks all but an impressionistic response to the voice. What is being said? It is not clear. But the cadences of this voice across the substantial length of the track engender a trancelike state nonetheless. (Indeed one of the EP's B-sides, "Afro Ride," is a minimalist trance remix.)

The credited singer, Djum Djum, is in fact literally unintelligible: the vocal is a pastiche of a black African-sounding language. Djum Djum, who it may be surmised is behind the tribal mask on the cover of the single, which is credited to "Leftfield featuring Djum Djum," is reputedly the less exotically named Neil Cole. The track could be dismissed as a kind of EDM blackface variant since the pastiching of foreign languages is a mainstay of racist comedians. Even the name is vaguely racist: repetition as a necessity for semicivilized savages, as with Bamm-Bamm of *The Flintstones*. In addition, the track invokes colonial myths concerning Africans and rhythms and, in that the guru register is given over to a mythical African, the indigenous wisdom of those "closer to nature" or "purer" in state, able to cast powerful spells on those who have lost this "ancient knowledge," and so induce innocent Westerners into primitive practices. The inlay and CD itself contain blurry images of a black African; is the implication that Leftfield found him in a jungle or desert, and mixed him into British EDM, thus allowing access to the witch doctor for British ravers via "Afro-Left"? Is it Djum Djum himself who commandeers the mixing or field recording, and his voice, now didgeridooesque, self-Vocodered toward the end of the track? Or, that Leftfield remakes trance-inducing African rituals in an EDM context (as with the cover image, speakers

replace the eye holes of Djum Djum's mask), since the two cultural practices are clearly basically the same?

However, the idea of the guru register and an imagined constituency goes some way to placing the track outside such Orientalist critiques. The track, considered as virtual music, primarily becomes a matter of reception by its audience. And the addled listener, while perhaps still subscribing to these dominant Western narratives of the ethnic Other, could be said to be in a situation where diminished responsibility can be reasonably claimed. Djum Djum's authenticity is not so much the point; it is the perception of his authenticity, in respect to his sudden presence in the new machine aesthetic, that determines the track. In terms of the mass psychology of the dance floor, and the virtuality of EDM and its futurist aspirations, and the track and its guru register as a phenomenological matter, this Western looking to old but nonthreatening and nonsexualized stereotypes suggests a frisson of Afro-futurism. To participate in "Afro-Left" is to work the loci of wisdom that are Other and unintelligible—that are, in a crudely negative correlation, simply non-Western. "Afro-Left" imagines that just such a mindset occurs, and can be nurtured, and that this mind then overturns the given (Western) program. And Afro-futurism, even in the privileging of the "primitive" for the guru register, is not capitalist futurism. *Leftism* closes with "21st Century Poem," in which a number of questions that suggest a prerevolutionary situation on the part of the oppressed are asked: "How many dreams terrorised, til we rise? / [. . .] / How many homes set alight, til we fight?"

Recent critical work on the failure to imagine noncapitalist futures—the "Capitalist Realism" theorized by a number of left critics, and a central concern of Fisher's (2009)— reveals something of the progressive nature of this vaguely oppositional, non-Western imagining in the dominant, neoliberal political economy. In this context, "Afro-Left" functions as a multicultural "world party." Its imagined constituency comes to operate in a way to dissolve demarcations between Western and developing worlds, favoring the "Third" over the "First" in terms of the orientation of its subcultures. The efficacy of this aspiration is achieved via the virtual. As with the European variant of the Californian Ideology, revolution is bred within and through the circuits of the machine.

Notes

1. Though no one song or genre or artist seems to exist at this intersection, and speculative science fiction writing had grappled with notions of a coming computer-infiltrated subjectivity and computer-maintained state of existence for most decades of the last century, by the mid-1990s such thinking was increasingly becoming the norm in anticipation of vastly enhanced, and global, computer communication networks.
2. For a broader discussion, see Shapiro (2005, 194 and 226).
3. For a fuller discussion, see Edgar, Fairclough-Isaacs, and Halligan (2013, 1–3).
4. The "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ) is a mainstay of critical writing on music cultures but more generally denotes an area of free—i.e., unpoliced—activity, where, as TAZ theorist Bey puts it, "the universe wants to play" (2003, 22). This is in stark contrast to

what Deleuze, *pace* Foucault, described as the modern "society of control," something "equal to the harshest of confinements" (Deleuze 1990). Marxian theorists typically conceive of the TAZ as either the horizon of freedom, and pole of an emergent new society, or, drawing on Bakhtin, a temporary and prescribed or allowed relief from that society of control, and a relief that therefore only ultimately maintains the existence of that control.

5. For impressions and recollections of disco's radical gay prehistory, see White (1986).

6. This chapter focuses on the British experience of rave and EDM since, as Clover notes (2009), the coming together of disparate elements of subcultures occurred in a fairly unique way in the United Kingdom.

7. Particularly so for a subculture supposedly awash with recreational drugs, and a subculture that—in its earliest days, as Fringeli notes (2011, 7, sect. 6)—necessitated self-organization and collectivity.

8. See, for example, comments from Paul Staines (Anonymous 1989).

9. This was even seemingly the case for future Conservative leader David Cameron; see (Barkham 2009). The actual video can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5RLNdWQPps (accessed Aug. 2013).

10. Particularly, for Jarre, the albums *Oxygène* and *Equinoxe* of 1976 and 1978.

11. Noise theorist and activist Mattin offers a number of instructions to this end, in "eleven ways of SAYING NOTHING" (2011, unpaginated, in the section "Idioms and Idiots").

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PART SEVEN

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PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND FUNDRAISING

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OUR final three chapters explore the developing relationship between the Internet and funding, an issue that has surfaced across the *Handbook*. In a period of dwindling investments in music, and artists who have not yet reached a degree of popularity that guarantees, to any real certain extent, potential investors, "Music represents one of the primary sectors where fertile ground has been found for crowdfunding" (Chapter 30). Yet the relationship between the project initiator and potential funders is complex and often problematic, demanding both an investment in time and effective communication skills, while highlighting the importance of self-management. As such, Part Seven provides both a historical overview of crowdfunding and insights as to how best to develop that crucial relationship between producer and fan/funder.

For those readers who are less familiar with its practicalities, Mark Thorley's opening Chapter 29, "Virtual Music, Virtual Money: The Impact of Crowdfunding Models on Creativity, Authorship, and Identity," examines the pros and cons, bringing professional insight into how the Internet offers musicians the possibility of connecting directly with their fans and audience, who, as potential funders, form part of a "virtual alliance" with the producer, who also works virtually: "The project is pitched, fans coalesce around it, and it is funded and most probably sold—all virtually" (Chapter 29). But as Thorley reveals, "Although virtual facilitation is leading to an undeniable shift, the reality is unlikely to be as straightforward as the utopia that