

# TEMPORAL DISJUNCTION AT THE ENDLESS RAVE

Viewed through the lens of hauntology - an interpretative philosophical concept that explicitly brings into play the question of time - contemporary culture can be viewed as 'haunted' by the lost futures of modernity. Through an exploration of the neoliberal attack on collectivity, rave culture can be positioned as an alternative, a continued opportunity for rediscovering utopian ideals, where communal gatherings are heralded not just as hedonistic activity, but as a form of resistance.

Using a collected photographic archive covering 1988-2018 as a starting point for debate, key guests from the London nightlife scene were interviewed about the dance music industries past, present and future.

Presented as an 'In Conversation', the following script features selected abstracts taken from these interviews.

*Set in present day London, three guest speakers meet in an empty warehouse space. Behind them three large screens display a cycle of images, each screen depicting a different decade of rave cultures history, starting from the birth of Acid House in 1988, up to the summer of 2018. Ticking like a digital clock, the images change at varying speeds, a metaphor that illustrates the change in pace of society and the increasing levels of photographic documentation of each era.*

*Lead by the ACADEMIC, the guest CURATOR (DJ/Promoter), OBSERVER (photographer) and PARTICIPANT (raver) discuss aspects of rave cultures 30 year history.*

## **ACT 1 - THE PAST**

**ACADEMIC:** Good evening and thank you for joining me in this conversation about rave culture. I'd like to begin by setting up the premise that the term hauntology - an interpretative philosophical concept that explicitly brings into play the question of time - can be used to describe the lack of cultural progression in the postmodern era. With the rapid development of technology and near constant access to online information and social media opinion, our sense of linear time has become jumbled up, leading to increased levels of nostalgia commodification and political ennui. As an enduring cultural movement 'rave' can be seen as a case study for continued collective forms of resistance.

This conversation is intended as a starting point to draw out some of these themes through personal anecdotal experiences.

So lets start with an interpretation of rave.

- PARTICIPANT:** I think raving is about bringing people together, it's meant to be peaceful and playful. It's why rave culture is still so popular, different ages and communities coming together for the music.
- OBSERVER:** In the early days it was clear that rave clubs were really going to change things. I knew straight away that this was going to spread fast. It had all the right ingredients, the new music, the new clothes and of course the new drugs. People had found a connection and it was all about 'that feeling'.
- PARTICIPANT:** Yeah it really is about 'that feeling', the way that our bodies and minds interpret it. There's something in the way this music moves us, it's just tribal. The repetitive beat and that bass, I don't know, it just like gets me really excited and hyped up. When you're at that point, you know, when the DJ is just about to drop the tune and everyone's in this communal moment. That's so powerful, that shared feeling.
- ACADEMIC:** Do you think it's a nostalgia for 'that feeling' that makes rave culture timeless?
- CURATOR:** The dance music scene is very cyclical in terms of styles and trends. Its origins in the 80s promoted diversity and collective spaces. The 90s was the super club era when lots of money started creeping in and the whole thing started to become really commercial. Through the 00s there was a reaction against that, it became more off location, more DIY again. Now these two extremes exist together side by side. We're seeing a real nostalgia for the original ideals in recent years though.
- OBSERVER:** This thing isn't just historical, the spirit of rave is definitely still alive and to some degree, the freedom that it represents is still out there.
- PARTICIPANT:** It's funny because younger generations are looking back at the 90s now, at the fashion, music, flyers and stuff, and it's obvious that people are very nostalgic for that old school rave look. We always look back at the good stuff though, never the bad stuff. I guess its always a filtered version.
- OBSERVER:** I'm a bit ambivalent about nostalgia, it wasn't all halcyon days, because of course, you know, there were often dodgy gangsters running the events. There were drug dealers who didn't have your best interests at heart. There were the police steaming in at times. And so you know, it wasn't all this perfect Eden of partying that some like to make it out as.
- CURATOR:** There are many ways in which rave has been repackaged and commodified through vicarious nostalgia. Obviously, there's the fashion. People are wearing bucket hats, dunagarees, shellsuits and *Kickers* again. But mainly its the music, there's a lot of recycling of the past. Young producers are sampling the music we made in the 90s, which was itself sampled from the 70s and 80s. We've turned music culture into a melting pot of inspiration, but people often lack an acknowledgment of sources. It's so easy to just sample stuff and lose the original meaning.

**PARTICIPANT:** I am blissfully unaware how the music is made, or by who.. Just happy to be a raver on the dancefloor. I do feel nostalgic for the 90s, even though I was only born towards the end of the decade. I guess I see it and hear about it everywhere so I want to live those times. It seems more idyllic, or the representation of it is anyway.

**ACADEMIC:** I'm interested in the documentation of these cultural events for future posterity. What are your thoughts on photography at nightclubs?

**OBSERVER:** It's incredibly important to document these events. But of course I would say that. Its hard to capture 'that feeling' we discussed earlier though. And it's rare for a single photo to define an event. Of course, it does happen, but just photograph what's in front of you, and capture it, and just hope that what you capture resonates with people now and in the future. Everyone who takes pictures knows that there is a kind of instant nostalgia to it. You know, as soon as you take a picture, that moment has passed.

**CURATOR:** In the late 00s, having an event photographer was really important and to be able to share those photographs of who attended on social media was an important marketing tool. Now not so much. Those shots of cool kids and groups of friends aren't really useful anymore. They may get likes and shares on socials but it's not going to sell tickets like the shots of big crowds and amazing production does.

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't want to be photographed in a club. One of the big reasons I'm there is because I want to be in a space where I don't think anyone's giving a shit about what I look like. I mean, I definitely don't want a camera flash on me. Most of the time I'm not in the right state to be photographed anyway.

**OBSERVER:** In the 00s, people became much more aware of the camera and started performing and dressing up for it. It's almost like people have eyes in the back of their heads now and they can see the camera coming, so they pose or hide, its two extremes. People have quality camera phones now as well, so if they want a photo of their friends, they can just take it themselves.

*The guests all move to a nearby table with two Technics 1210 record players and a mixer. They leaf through a classic vinyl collection, each pulling out a different record, admiring the cover and reading the inlay sleeve. They take turns to play there chosen record and discuss its meaning and significance to each other. The act of playing the vinyl creates a shared connection between them, an acknowledgment of the physicality and importance of musical artefacts.*

## **ACT 2 - THE PRESENT**

**ACADEMIC:** Do you think technology has changed the 'rave' experience?

**CURATOR:** The front row at parties has changed so much. It used to be everyone just completely losing their mind. Now people seem to think that capturing these moments on their phone is more important than experiencing them.

**PARTICIPANT:** Nothing bugs me more than people who go on a night out and just spend half the time Instagramming the DJ or whatever. It really makes me question why they're really there. It kind of ruins the experience for everyone else as well.

**OBSERVER:** It's really important to encourage younger generations to actually let go and enjoy themselves. When you take away the technology and the cameras, suddenly they're disarmed and they can really lose their shit like we did when we were young.

**CURATOR:** Aside from phones, the main change was obviously the advent of the internet. With digital marketing and social media so prominent now, the traditional print format for promoting events has all but disappeared. I remember me and my friends collected flyers and had them all over our bedroom walls. When I started going out to parties in the early 90s, through to when I started putting on my own parties in the late 90s, the style of promotion didn't really change. The format was the same, it was simple hand to hand flyers distributed in the same way. I miss that physicality and interaction.

**PARTICIPANT:** I do follow a lot of DJ's online and through social media. I get all my information that way. I'll be aware of a night because a specific DJ or promoter has posted about it, that's just how I find out about parties. All of our lives have been digital though and I do feel this great sense of wanting to know what life was like without all this crap. Sometimes it seems like such a burden and I just want to take a break from that.

**CURATOR:** I guess vinyl culture is a big part of rejecting digital media, it's a nostalgic experience that you can spend time with, and younger people seem to be really embracing that again.

**PARTICIPANT:** For sure, I own a record player, and I own records, but it's all my dad's records that he's given to me. I take pictures on film as well. It's way more expensive than taking pictures on my phone, but I don't know, like you said, there's just something about it being physical and analogue that I really like. When I first got interested in vinyl I'd just spend so much time in the record shop. It was like, just being able to connect with people and talk about these records was amazing.

**OBSERVER:** I've actually just acquired a second hand record player myself, as well as vintage speakers and a vintage amp, so that I can just play records from start to finish like I used to. That for me is a really nice experience, and yes it's a nostalgic thing, but more record shops are opening up all the time because people are getting back into vinyl. I'm really glad that hasn't been completely destroyed by digital streaming.

**PARTICIPANT:** Me and all my mates play and collect vinyl. It's just better I think.

**CURATOR:** In the early days of rave culture there were so many genres of music emerging and evolving. For a younger generation there is just so much musical history to access and be inspired by now, sometimes an overwhelming amount. There are also some great new producers making modern dance music, but there's not many that are really doing something new enough to be different or exciting.

**ACADEMIC:** What type of parties are you currently drawn too and why?

**PARTICIPANT:** I like it when the crowds are more mixed and diverse. I find it more interesting when there's a mix of people, rather than everyone being just like me. I like clubs that aren't too large. Small, dark and intimate is best. I like the lasers and disco balls and stuff like that, but sometimes it's nice to just immerse yourself in the music and feel it.

**CURATOR:** That's one of the nicest things at our parties. There's always a real mixed crowd, the older crew are really welcoming to the younger generation and vice versa.

**PARTICIPANT:** I love festivals. You get all your friends together and the atmosphere is just different, everyone's just so much happier when your outside partying. I went to this really small festival this summer. It's basically held in kind of, like a stately home, and so it feels like a massive house party. It was just incredible because it's so small, a real community aspect, they made it such a key part of there ethos to create a safe space as well.

**OBSERVER:** It's the more unknown experiences I enjoy now, but they are much more rare. The potential for spontaneous happenings was there before the Criminal Justice Bill in 1994 made it almost impossible for people to run parties without the risk of losing everything. That's why the whole superclub thing happened, it made it safe but also more homogenized. That is one aspect of why those early times feels special in retrospect. There are still free parties happening, in forests, on beaches and in valleys, places where there's hardly any police, you know, it's still possible to do this stuff around the country in order to find that feeling. You just have to work a lot harder to find them.

**CURATOR:** There are huge pressures on London night life, and space as a whole because of rents and licenses. Spaces for people to congregate for social and cultural activities are massively threatened because of commercial pressures. I think the scene now is getting to a point where it's massively unsustainable, in terms of the size of the business and the market. The number of people going out is obviously quite a lot, but the number of players who are trying to get a chunk of the market is huge. And there's some really big players from big corporate worlds, which were not around even four or five years ago. This is having a detrimental effect on the scene and it's making it difficult for small parties to keep going. There has always been a real community behind the electronic music scene, but increasingly there's a lot of people that are just in it for the money.

**OBSERVER:** Yeah I agree. In the last few years things have changed quite drastically. I don't know if it's changed for the better though, because of this surge of big daytime parties. They're taking over, not just London, you've got them all over the country now. All owned by the same people. And it's like this sort of next level commodification and monopolisation of dance music, with way more expensive tickets and the same massive DJs. Because people are going to these bigger daytime events, it's affecting all the smaller more exciting clubs and they're all struggling.

**CURATOR:** There's definitely too many similar events and line ups now too. Some nights you just look through all the listings and there's seven shows on, all of the same genre of music. They're obviously all going to struggle because they're competing with each other.

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't think young people are just randomly going out at the weekends anymore, they're looking for something bigger and more considered, to save money for. That's why these huge line ups and day clubs are appealing, you get to see lots of different DJs in one go and you even get too bed early.

**OBSERVER:** It's very much a cost thing as well, you know, younger people have got far more cost pressures than a lot of us used to have.

**PARTICIPANT:** I would be out so much more if it wasn't for money, and being in London its insane, it's so expensive. All my mates do little parties and it's just no frills. I mean, it's about this idea of decent music in a space with all your friends, no big line ups and huge production costs, and that's it. Then everyone can afford to go.

*The guests sit in front of a set of computers, each with Spotify, Discogs and Resident Advisor open in tabs. They browse through the catalogue of digital music, videos, listings and articles, discussing their favourite places to party while reminiscing over past adventures in club land.*

### ACT 3 - THE FUTURE

**ACADEMIC:** What do you see as the future of clubbing and rave culture?

**OBSERVER:** In the late 80s and early 90s there were a lot of disenchanted youth coming together in a really positive light and that was amazing. In some ways the political climate is quite similar now and maybe that's also why we're seeing this kind of rave revival, people want change.

**PARTICIPANT:** Rave culture is a form of escapism from all the craziness. Now with Brexit and climate crisis and stuff like that, I think everyone's just so worried and stressed out, so we look backwards to a time that seemed simpler. It's hard to look forward positively with all that happening.

**OBSERVER:** Maybe it's just that I'm getting older and becoming more pessimistic, I certainly hope not, but I think the general feeling back in the day was that things would get better and should get better, that culture would advance. Now with the level of control in social media and what can be done with it, I really worry that people are much more easily manipulated. I wonder how the hell we're going to get beyond that, because of course, that's not going to go away.

**PARTICIPANT:** I honestly have no idea what the future holds. I feel like the weight of the past kind of bears down on us so much that there's this hindrance on creating new stuff. I can't really imagine how anything could be culturally ground breaking now. I don't know how our generation get out of that.

**OBSERVER:** The big worry is that people are looking forward to so many negative things, where as when we were young we were looking forward to positive changes, or at least what we thought were going to be positive things anyway. At the end of the 80s we were feeling kind of liberated by the possibility of the future, a future that now just seems like a past imagination.

**CURATOR:** Where it's going to go now is interesting. You could argue we're talking about the end of subculture as we know it, because what makes people different now? We just regurgitate the past in new ways. There's a real degree of the unknown about, in all aspects of life. In terms of clubbing, I strongly believe its about creating more communal spaces. Places for people to come together and feel a sense of freedom away from the pressures of the world. Increasingly we are uniting against the political elite and we want change, and the only way to move forward is together. You know, there's more that unites us than divides us, and we have to fight for that. Rave culture, dance music, whatever you want to call it, its always had a rebellious nature. We dance as a form of resistance, we dance to keep 'that feeling' alive..

*The guests embrace, thanking each other for the shared experiences,  
acknowledging the collective spirit of rave that unites them.*