

Said no one ever.

As long as the "mainstream", the popular, the homogenous has existed and permeated large parts of society, counter-culture, sub-cultures and other kind of elusive and phantasmagorical sociological entities have thrived in the fringes. They have shed light into the darkness of the peripheries, growing, multiplying and often reaching the epicentres of cultural production and sociological discourse. However, dance music, which started as a kind of liberating movement born out of Detroit techno and Chicago house, rapidly spreading through the US and UK as rave culture throughout the 1990s, has become increasingly gentrified, white-washed and removed from its originally diverse, multi-cultural and queer roots. The underground of dance music was once the place for the marginalised, the often abused and mistreated, the overlooked, the gloriously "unfitting" and uncompromising. Now, with the ever-increasing commercialisation of the dance music scene, the capitalisation (and subsequent closure) of venues across the UK and beyond, and the fetishisation of DJ culture, we have to ask, where do the "misfits" go?

If you took Larry Levan, once the head-honcho at NYC's Paradise Garage and all-around dance music muse, to your regular night out – the one you paid 15 quid for, the one attended by the "regulars", those heteronormative, white, middle-class, cis-gender, sneaker-sniffing, blurry figures clad in head-to-toe black so as to better "blend in" with that equally bland, void-like environment – not only would he be wanting to leave the second he heard the first much applauded and anticipated high-hat, but he would blatantly stand out as a bird of paradise in a cage of fucking pigeons. Levan, of the black and gay variety, would very much be within a tiny minority of attendees, those who, although perfectly tolerated and welcomed, make rare appearances on the dancefloor, and when they do, it's significantly noticeable. If you look at the people that organise these parties, the club owners, promoters and even the DJs themselves (for the most part), the story is much the same.

It seems that the roots of dance music, namely the working-class minorities sweating their arses off in a genuine warehouse (perhaps the same warehouse where they worked) who celebrated the transformative and liberating powers of a music that was truly their own rather than some melody to aspire to, have not only been forgotten, but effectively appropriated. Undoubtedly, the slow but steady move of dance music into global focus has relegated minorities into the background and replaced them with the general mainstream audience but, most importantly, these two factions are more segregated than ever. Despite the generally white, middle-class and heterosexual audience's obsession with the

collection, reproduction and display of queer, black/brown music of 30 years ago, only a small percentage of this audience would be aware of, let alone participate in, the openly queer dance nightlife still thriving in the capitals of the world. It is rather saddening that, for a scene that prides itself on its liberalism and likes to bask in the warm light of love and understanding, the reality is so different.

Adding to the dismal state of centrist cultural politics, Tom Glencross has deemed that "the neoliberal night out" is a concept that potentially contextualises the segregated social politics observed within dance music's "underground" nightlife. The neoliberal night out can be best exemplified by the 19-year-old metropolitan dweller pumped full of the most potent ecstasy in history, looking back at his/her friends while fist-pumping the saturated air of a huge, over-crowded black room. This particular individual doesn't know much about the music he/she is consuming, being more interested in the vigorous trembling of his/her jaw, while the surrounding crowd views itself as belonging to some sort of social elite, aligned with the politics of the art world. Both of these demographically similar crowds would have had to jump through a series of hegemonic hoops to get into the club, where they would succeed in perpetuating the quantifiable and unimaginative experience of neo-liberal thought. The transformative power of music has been reduced to a mere transaction, the emulation of many others in our lives, an exchange of goods branded as love and communication that perhaps are no more. Cultural knowledge is being used as a differentiation measure, further dividing dance music's audience and capitalising on pleasure and enjoyment. When stepping into the darkness of a smoky club room, I am emulating, reproducing, copying, perpetuating, further dividing and consuming, despite my best intentions.

Moreover, things take a rather frightening turn when analysed in the light of recent political and social events. From Russia's crack-down on gay rights to the ever-increasing populist, right-wing movements across the world, the "mainstream" is a dangerous place. The ever-present divisive rhetoric and hate-speech that permeate these ideologies should encounter opposition from the underground, the peripheral. However, this antidotal presence appears more dispersed than ever. With dance music's long history of counter-hegemonic, inclusive and diverse policies, far removed from utopian notions of peace and love forever, fighting the good fight should not only be possible but commendable. As such, we need to keep reminding ourselves where our underground culture comes from, in order to increase our agency in the production of its future, where truly diverse and inclusive people can enjoy the transfiguring effluxes of dance music. Not in eternal love, peace and sunshine, but imbued with real awareness, understanding and courage, we need to oppose those forces that aim to subjugate, belittle, homogenise, capitalise and mainstream underground culture even further.