

Exploring the club experience: Affective and bodily experiences of electronic dance music

Ragnhild Torvanger Solberg

Department of Popular Music, University of Agder, Norway
ragnhild.t.solberg@uia.no - <http://www.uia.no/en/kk/profil/ragnhits>

In: Jakubowski, K., Farrugia, N., Floridou, G.A., & Gagen, J. (Eds.)
Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus14)
London, UK, 18-20 September 2014, <http://www.musicmindbrain.com/#!sysmus-2014/cfmp>

Euphoric dance and intense affects are signature attributes of the club experience, and DJs use a range of production techniques with the explicit aim to synchronize the clubbing crowd's bodily and emotional engagement. This doctoral research investigates the correlations between musical features of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) and pleasurable affective and bodily experiences. But how and to what extent do structural and sonic features of EDM relate to clubbers' experiences? Particularly the EDM sections 'build-up' and 'drop' are filled with tension-building musical features with the purpose to peak the dance floor, and my claim is that certain features occurring in these sections, such as i) extensive use of sounds and effects with upward movements, ii) compression of rhythmical structures, iii) large changes in frequency spectrum and textural density, and iv) removal and reintroduction of bass and bass drum, can be associated with arousal in emotional responses and bodily movements. This PhD research examines these musical structures and how they are perceived in terms of motor activity, physiological responses and cognitive appraisal.

The project includes a two-part empirical study comprising a physiology study and a dance study. In the dance study 16 participants danced to a DJ mix in a club-like atmosphere created in a motion capture lab. The crowd's bodily movements were recorded and measured using an infrared marker-based motion capture system. A self-report questionnaire completed after dancing gathered information on pleasure, as well as bodily and cognitive appraisal of the music.

The results from the dance study indicate correlations between the participants' degree of movement, the self-reported intensity of their emotional experience and the above-mentioned musical features. The participants reported about the same musical features and moments as especially pleasurable and as causing arousal in their emotional and bodily engagement. This was further supported by the motion capture data, which showed a high level of synchronization at these moments and an increase in the degree of their body movements. Evidence from the qualitative data indicated that this experience was also consciously shared.

Keywords: electronic dance music; motor responses; dance; affective states; pleasure