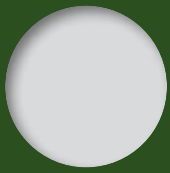CORD HENNING LABUHN

DJ CULTURE AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

SYNOPSIS

CORD HENNING LABUHN

DJ CULTURE AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

SYNOPSIS

This publication is concerned with the question of how the introduction of computer and network technology has transformed DJ culture in practical terms as a craft, as well as in the sphere of media and communications.

The analysis proceeds from the thesis that technological progress has spurred the development of a digital culture within an increasingly tradition-bound cultural practice, and that this in turn has produced altered forms of communication, consumption and informational exchange. Some of the classical practices and formal techniques of DJing, which influenced its evolution through their mutual interplay, are now being transformed and placed in question by digital technology. The culture's grounding in the analogue vinyl format and the possibility of replacing this with non-physical digital media epitomises the types of conflict which arise from digitalisation. The eventual result has been a diversification of the working methods of DJs, and an ever-growing distance from their original designation as 'record players'.

Given the lack of quantitative research in this field, the "DJ SURVEY" panel study [preliminary research 2006 and 2008: Labuhn 2009] represents an attempt to produce an appropriate research plan capable of producing empirical statements regarding these developments. The sociological frames of reference include both the sociology of music, which regards the DJ as an important mediator and producer of popular music, and also the sociology of technology, which emphasises the interaction between society and technological development. An analysis of the history of DJing in terms of media and technology takes into account not only the technical background, but also the cultural significance of emerging media and hardware.

On one hand, this analysis provides further explanation of why the analogue medium of vinyl is so closely connected with DJ culture as to result in cultural conflicts over its possible demise at the hands of digital technology. Above all, it also shows that the DJ plays a vital role as an agent of musical consumption and - in embodying originality and charisma - possesses the power of determining which media are perceived as authentic. In the same way that the vinyl format's relationship to the phenomenon of dance entertainment progressed from enculturalisation to authentification in a process involving numerous participants, we now find ourselves in the middle of a similar progression involving ephemeral digital media and computer technology.

The use of digital technology (generally laptops) does not lend itself well to subcultural distinctions due to its widespread adoption in society at large, and it can be assumed that this has encouraged the adoption of a vinyl cult within the ever-decreasing minority who advocate analogue DJing. In the world of digital DJing, subcultural capital now consists primarily of information and the ability to work with it, rather than partially objectified subcultural resources such as the possession of a record collection. As the tools of DJing have diversified into combinations of computers, technological equipment and software, and as ever fewer DJs employ their own unique working practices, it has become increasingly difficult for audiences to discern where the unique skills and accomplishments of a DJ actually lie.

This text does not aim to 'demystify' a fascinating artform through academic analysis. The aim is instead to help promote better comprehension and to bring the term into the digital era, as the time when every DJ ('disc jockey') was spinning discs is now long past. The lines of conflict within DJ culture are apparent in the polarisations between analogue versus digital, as well as between tradition and innovation. These divisions also influence numerous other agents within the music industry, including consumers, traders, musicians and producers, record labels, distributors and manufacturers of equipment.

The "DJ SURVEY" delivers a solid set of fundamental data upon which further investigations into developments and trends within DJ culture can be based. While a continuation of this study for economic or scientific ends is feasible, further theoretical engagement with this pioneering study is explicitly desired.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cord Henning Labuhn was born in Lüdenscheid, Germany in 1984, became acquainted with various musical instruments during childhood, then began DJing in clubs and on the radio and later released his own music as records, MP3s and CDs in genres including hip hop, house and techno. As a student of sociology and musicology at Berlin's Humboldt University he worked on projects researching not only the practical but also the theoretical aspects of topics such as groove, hip hop and DJ culture.

Being recommended by DJ and author Hans Nieswandt (representative of Goethe Institut) in 2010 a scientific article on the digital future of DJing was published in renowned „Fink Verlag". (intercool 3.0 – Jugend Bild Medien / ed. Birgit Richard)

Since 2006 he has brought open-minded electronic dance music to an international audience through numerous releases and countless performances as one half of the Berlin-based production and DJ duo "ROBOSONIC" (www.robosonic.cc). Since 2009 they built and curated the podcast platform „Berlin Kreuzberg Institut" (www.berlin-kreuzberg-institut.com).

Together with the company "WHITE LABEL - music for corporate affairs and private pleasure" he has supplied and advised professional clients on general musical matters.
Cords own firm "PUNCHI PUNCHI" markets a multifunctional towelling scarf as an in innovative product for sport, music and fashion.

Under his forename "CORD" he has applied himself in further artistic and musical directions.

For more information and content please get in touch with the author.
Academic or journalistic articles may be available for publishing.

cordhenninglabuhn@googlemail.com
www.cordlabuhn.com
www.facebook.com/cord.labuhn

English translation by Stephen Hedley (crane.thecrane@gmail.com)

DJ—CULTURE AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION