

# Repeating beats: The return of rave, memories of joy and nostalgia between the afterglow and the hangover

Memory Studies

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## Abstract

The British rave scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s is widely remembered as a moment of elation and bliss. Contemporary cultural representations position the Second Summer of Love of 1989 – when thousands of young people attended illegal parties, experienced the hypnotic beats of house music and had their first brush with the drug ecstasy – as an object of nostalgia. I argue that rave nostalgia is suspended between two dispositions: the afterglow and the hangover. Whereas the former involves happiness, reversibility and continuity, the latter is defined by melancholia, irreversibility and discontinuity. On this basis, I consider two texts that creatively combine these dispositions in their evocation of rave: the music video for The Streets’s ‘Weak Become Heroes’ and Jeremy Deller’s documentary *Everybody in the Place*. Finally, I assess how the euphoria associated with rave nostalgia helps to augment and advance the recent turn to joy in memory studies.

## Keywords

memories of joy, music documentary, music video, nostalgia, popular music, rave

Carl Neville’s novel *Resolution Way* (2016) focuses on the aftermath of the rave scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s. We are introduced to a range of characters who are tied together by their shared memory of the joy of acid house, a British youth movement involving huge outdoor parties attended by thousands of people, iconic clubs such as Shoom in London and The Hacienda in Manchester, the futuristic beats proffered by new technologies such as the Roland TB-303, the loved-up atmosphere cultivated by the drug ecstasy, and a distinctive stylistic code of smiley faces and the baggy look. Yearning for a return to the golden age of dance music, the characters converge on a ‘retro-rave’ called ‘*Return to Dreamland*’ (Neville, 2016: 196). In the heat of the dancefloor, the ravers catch a glimpse of the original power of the scene: ‘Perhaps only in dancing can consciousness coalesce into a single point; perhaps only in dancing can we inhabit the same moment, the same world’ (Neville, 2016: 345). The embodied memory of the dance brings the participants back to 1989, popularly known as the Second Summer of Love, time folding in

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on itself to reveal a kernel of the joyful form of life experienced in the mass parties, light shows and repetitive beats of their youth.

The sense of nostalgia felt by these old ravers is not unique to the fictional world of *Resolution Way*. To use Jan Assmann's (2008) terms, since the late 1990s, when rave culture first moved from the communicative memory of its participants to the cultural memory of mediated representation, there has been a proliferation of texts positioning acid house as an object of longing. Histories of rave culture such as Matthew Collin's *Altered State* (1997) and Simon Reynolds's *Energy Flash* (1998), memoirs like Wayne Anthony's *Class of '88* (1998) and Sheryl Garratt's *Adventures in Wonderland* (1998), and historically oriented television documentaries including *The Chemical Generation* (2001) and *Summer of . . . Rave, 1989* (2006) emphasise the chaotic pleasure of the acid house movement. The remediation of rave culture, its representation across 'pluri-medial contexts', has steadily produced a stable and coherent understanding of rave as a moment of intense communal joy (Erll, 2008: 390). The 30th anniversary of the Second Summer of Love reinforced the identification of rave with euphoria. Director Brian Welsh's film *Beats* (2019) celebrated the free party scene in Scotland in the 1990s, artist Jeremy Deller's documentary *Everybody in the Place: An Incomplete History of Britain, 1984-1992* (2019) positioned acid house as a jubilant rejection of Thatcherite asceticism and Gary Clarke's stage show *Wasteland* (2019) recreated the distinctive dance routines of the original scene (Clark, 2019).

The return to the Second Summer of Love in these cultural productions attests to the continuing mnemonic power of acid house. Importantly, rave is framed as a *happy* event; it is defined in terms of the euphoria experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. It is unsurprising that, from the 'models of remembrance' available in contemporary culture, rave is often understood in nostalgic terms (Rigney, 2005: 22). The coming together of pastness and happiness in nostalgia means that it is suited to representing the intense joy associated with the acid house movement. However, saying that the memory of rave is nostalgic does not get us very far. As we have known since the interventions of Fred Davis (1979) and Svetlana Boym (2001), nostalgia is a 'protean' model of memory that can be articulated in a variety of different, and sometimes conflicting, ways (Chase and Shaw, 1989: 2). Furthermore, while nostalgia may appear to involve a simple return to past moments of joy, it is a complex affective formation, involving a bittersweet movement between happiness and melancholia. In this article, I examine the different forms of nostalgia at stake in the cultural memory of acid house. More specifically, the article considers how mnemonic images of rave culture ricochet between two opposing aspects of nostalgia: the afterglow and the hangover. Whereas the former involves a feeling of happiness, reversibility and continuity, whereby it becomes possible to reprise the original pleasure of the rave, the latter is defined by melancholia, irreversibility and discontinuity, such that rave is something irretrievably lost and all attempts to bring it into the present are destined to fail.

To make this argument, I focus on a range of cultural productions – including films, television programmes, music videos, songs and novels – that engage with the rave culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Methodologically speaking, following a long tradition in popular music studies, these artefacts are subject to textual analysis, with the article tracing the shared symbols and common narratives that cut across attempts to grapple with the memory of rave (Phillipov, 2013). The article is structured as follows. The first section considers the relationship between nostalgia, the turn to joy in memory studies and the surge of interest in popular music memory. In the second section, I turn back to rave culture, drawing out the particular affinity between the Sunday morning feelings of the afterglow and the hangover and the euphoric memory of acid house. On this basis, in the next two sections, I focus on texts that creatively combine the afterglow and the hangover in their articulations of rave nostalgia: the music video for The Streets's single 'Weak Become Heroes' and Deller's documentary *Everybody in the Place*. I then consider the utopian undercurrent to the

hangover disposition, drawing out how it heightens awareness for the lost futures contained in the original moment of acid house. By way of conclusion, the article returns to the emerging interest in joy in memory studies, reflecting on how rave nostalgia draws out the significance and complexity of remembering happy pasts.

## Memories of joy, nostalgia and popular music

Rave is remembered in the cultural consciousness as a short-lived moment of elation and bliss. As such, it sits uncomfortably in the field of memory studies. For many years, scholars have voiced concerns about the focus on past catastrophes in the field, the traumas caused by wars, genocides and massacres overshadowing the mnemonic trace left by moments of joy (Huyssen, 2005; Maier, 1993). Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner (2006) put this point particularly clearly: ‘Despite an impressive range of subject matter, memory studies have thrived on catastrophes and trauma, and the Holocaust is still the primary, archetypical topic in memory studies’ (p. 286). This does not mean that joyful events are entirely outside of memory studies; trauma and memory cannot be elided. Recent interventions have sought to account for the lingering presence of positive moments, drawing out the distinctive way in which memories of hope, contentedness and exhilaration are produced and circulated (Anderson and Ortner, 2019; Rigney, 2018). Nevertheless, as Ann Rigney (2018) notes, ‘we still have a very limited repertoire of tools to capture the transmission of positivity’, the field lacking the ‘critical concepts’ needed to ‘make visible the mechanisms by which positive attachments are transmitted across space and time’ (p. 370). The underdeveloped approach to joy in memory studies sidelines events such as acid house. New concepts and alternative methods are required to capture the positive energies associated with the proliferation of parties in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, we should be wary of reinventing the wheel; the turn to joy in memory studies is not without precedents. There are two areas of research that have flourished in recent years that offer resources for understanding phenomena such as rave. The first, as indicated above, is nostalgia. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (2020), in his overview of nostalgia studies, notes that it is ‘no longer regarded as outdated or irrelevant to take an interest in nostalgia’, with scholars from a range of disciplines studying how the longing for a happy past motivates individual desires and broad cultural trends (p. 2). Fred Davis’s *Yearning for Yesterday* (1979) and Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) are key here, opening up a research field in which nostalgia is understood as a significant yet complicated structure of feeling that pervades a range of cultural phenomena, including the drive to possess vintage material objects (Cross, 2015) and the popularity of period television programmes (Bevan, 2019). These examples, insofar that they present the past as a good place, speak to the relevance of nostalgia for thinking about memories of joy. Nostalgia takes up mnemonic phenomena and converts them into an object of longing, provoking a desire to return to a place of contentedness and utilise moments of past pleasure to construct new worlds. Now, as will become clear as this article proceeds, nostalgia is a complex feeling; it prompts regret and bitterness as well as happiness and pleasure. Nevertheless, the fact that the object of nostalgia is a positive one, even if the responses it solicits can be negative, suggests that it offers a model of remembrance through which happy pasts are filtered and organised.

There is a second field of research relevant to both memories of joy and rave culture: popular music memory, which has undergone a surge of interest in the last decade (for an overview, see Pickering, 2018). Importantly, for our purposes, popular music has become infused with cultural memory; past musical movements are constantly recuperated and revived in contemporary culture (Bennett, 2009). As Simon Reynolds notes in *Retromania* (2011), one of the key early studies of the cultural memory of popular music, there has been an explosion of ‘revivals, reissues, remakes,

*re-enactments*' since the turn of the millennium, including band reformations, tribute acts, album reissues, historical documentaries and retro scenes (p. xi, emphasis in original). The presence of the history of popular music in the cultural consciousness is evident across a range of phenomena, including museums such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (Burgoyne, 2003), the vogue for old technologies like vinyl records (Hayes, 2006) and the archiving of the ephemera of popular music (ticket stubs, posters, etc.) by heritage bodies and individual collectors (Baker, 2015). Rave culture has not been immune from the boom in popular music memory, with scholars tracing the personal memories of old ravers (Salkind, 2019; Wu, 2010), the archival qualities of the DJ set (Rietveld, 2011) and the real life retro-rave (Van Der Hoeven, 2014).

These two fields of research, nostalgia and popular music memory, are closely related. A range of studies have framed the return of popular music pasts in nostalgic terms (Dauncey and Tinker, 2014; Hayes, 2006; Mortensen and Madsen, 2015; Van Der Hoeven, 2018). There are a number of reasons why nostalgia offers a particularly productive framework for thinking about popular music memory. The memories associated with popular music are, for the most part, positive ones. The return to past music evokes the joy of the original scene; in listening to a classic song or gazing on a tattered ticket stub, a fragment of the rapturous events of old is recuperated. Relatedly, both popular music and nostalgia are strongly associated with youth, such that 'the music heard in one's youth very often forms the source material of musical nostalgia later in life' (Pickering, 2018: 193). For instance, the nostalgia for the classic rock of the 1970s that emerged in the 2000s was partly motivated by the greying of the baby boomer generation (Bennett, 2009; Weinstein, 2014). However, this association between nostalgia and youth is not only evident in the personal history of music fans but also in cultural memory more generally. Many people too young to have experienced the heyday of rock and roll in the 1950s or punk in the 1970s still feel nostalgia for these periods, with Estella Tincknell (2006) commenting that 'the primary "moments" for such nostalgia are the decades when youth culture was itself young' (p. 135). Past phases of popular music are posited as more authentic than those of the present; they are seen to represent a rebellious and vigorous youth culture apparently missing in the sterile contours of the contemporary world (Hayes, 2006; Kattari, 2014).

## **Rave nostalgias**

The longing for old popular music is not, however, a straightforward phenomenon. Popular music nostalgia is as complex as nostalgia itself; it takes a variety of different forms, each of which have a distinctive political and cultural valence. Svetlana Boym's (2001) distinction between restorative nostalgia, which 'attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home', and reflective nostalgia, which 'thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately', is useful here (p. xviii). For instance, Arno Van Der Hoeven (2014), in a study of nostalgia in the Dutch rave scene, contrasts the restorative approach of the early-parties, where participants attempt to recreate the original Hardcore music scene of the 1990s, and the reflective approach of the decade-parties, where ravers eschew the mimetic desire to copy the original scene and instead draw on its motifs in a playful and self-aware fashion. As this suggests, the return to the past can be both conservative and critical, representing an attempt to either preserve the pure core of a music scene, faithfully transposing it into the present, or to pastiche it, creatively retrieving and recombining elements from the past (Hutcheon, 2000). Popular music nostalgia, with the reflective disposition, starts to shade into the retro. As Reynolds (2011) suggests, the retro involves the use of history 'as an archive of materials from which to extract subcultural capital (hipness, in other words) through recycling and recombining: the bricolage of cultural bric-a-brac' (p. xxxi). While nostalgia involves a feeling of fidelity, that

there is something valuable in the past that should not be corrupted, retro dispositions are far less respectful, taking up and transforming old artefacts with little concern about disturbing the integrity and intactness of historical musical movements.

The return to rave in contemporary culture can be partially understood in terms of the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. For instance, the restorative impulse is evident in Neville's *Resolution Way*. At the retro-rave, the DJ declares that he will take the old ravers 'Back to the source' going 'Back to '93' then 'Back to '92' then, finally, 'Back to '89', the replaying of old tracks returning the dancers to the pristine, unpolluted origin of acid house (Neville, 2016: 345). Something similar is at stake in *Beats*, which culminates in a mass rave scene in the countryside outside Glasgow. For several minutes, the film, which is predominately shot in black and white, breaks out into colour, a moment of visual splendour centred on the sensorial pleasures of repetitive beats, intense dancing and psychedelic effects that is largely uninterrupted by dialogue and suspended from the broader narrative of the film. *Beats* relies on the 'accumulation of detail' to establish its representation of the period, closely recreating the style of the early rave scene – from Kappa tracksuits to light shows, the baggy look to classic tracks – at a visual and somatic level (Sobchack, 1990: 28). This is accompanied, however, by a more reflective approach, where the original moment of rave is taken as a resource for creative activity in the present. A good example of this is the new rave scene of the mid-2000s, centred on bands such as Klaxons and CSS, in which the late 1980s was revived but in an exaggerated fashion, with members of the scene sporting Day-Glo hoodies, waving glow sticks and wielding bleeping synths. Just as, in films such as *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Grease* (1978), the 1950s is identified with leather jackets, the curly bob and rock and roll, the new rave moment reduced the acid house scene to a series of superficial musical motifs and fashion styles (Jameson, 1991).

Rave nostalgia, like popular music nostalgia more generally, shuffles between restorative and reflective forms. However, there are other modes of rave nostalgia that are not captured by this dualism between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Think back to the discussion of *Resolution Way* in the opening paragraph. One response to the retro-rave is a feeling of happiness, a sense that it is possible to return to 1989 to retrieve some of its power. For the DJ, the revival of rave demonstrates that it is something that is still with us; there are fragments of the past that have survived (from songs and dance moves to flyers and posters) that allow the ravers to travel back to the pure core of acid house. In the replaying of old songs and the repetition of original dance moves, memory takes a corporeal form; the mimesis of auditory pleasures and bodily movements is a bridge across time (Connerton, 1989; Taylor, 2003). By contrast, Rob, another character in *Resolution Way*, has a different reaction to the retro-rave. The fleeting revival of the rave scene reminds him of how much has been lost since the 1980s: 'He's both angry and melancholy, their problem is, their blessing is, they have never known the ecstatic, they have never tasted real freedom, the wild depths of the mind, the bliss of communal transport and communion' (Neville, 2016: 110). Notice, Rob is not particularly concerned about the quality of the reproduction, whether the retro-rave takes the form of a serious revival of the original scene as in *Beats* or a more playful invocation of the late 1980s as in the new rave scene. Instead, for Rob, the nostalgic return to rave demonstrates a lack in the culture of the 2010s, highlighting the dearth of contemporary spaces where the euphoria and bliss of the original scene can be experienced.

If restorative and reflective nostalgia stage a struggle between seriousness and playfulness, then the tension between Rob and the DJ is about absence and presence. To approach the movement between absence and presence, we can turn to the distinctive affective register of nostalgia: bittersweetness. One of the ambiguities of nostalgia is that it combines, in one feeling, the positive and the negative. Edward S. Casey (1987), who offers a particularly extensive analysis of this tension, highlights nostalgia's 'proclivity for combining regret with longing, a vivid sense of missing

with an equally vivid sense of what is missed' (p. 361). On the one hand, the sweetness of nostalgia consists in its rebellion against the linear movement of time. If, on the dominant temporal consciousness of modernity, time is irreversible, then nostalgia suggests the possibility of reversal; the nostalgic asserts a continuity between past and present, upholding a back and forth movement between the two temporal realms (Landwehr, 2018). On the other hand, while nostalgia has sometimes 'caressed the scars of history', there 'can be no nostalgia without the sense of irreversibility' (Fritzsche, 2001: 1595). Hope for return is accompanied by a feeling that the longed-for object has been irrevocably lost from the world. The bitterness of nostalgia is prompted by the non-identity between the actual past and the trace of the past, such that the former does not go into the latter without a remainder. For the nostalgic, the confrontation with the past produces a painful awareness of its distance from the present, that the desire to return is 'unattainable insofar as no assortment of recollections [. . .] can recapture [the past] in its full plenitude' (Casey, 1987: 379).

The bittersweetness of nostalgia evokes the doubled movement between absence and presence described by Neville in *Resolution Way*. More than that, however, there are reasons for thinking that the bittersweet register of nostalgia has a particular affinity with what happens in the aftermath of intense experiences of joy, such as those associated with rave. Consider the resonance between bittersweetness and two terms that are often used in everyday life to describe the morning after a euphoric event: the afterglow and the hangover. These terms refer to something that follows an intense pleasurable experience, primarily sex in the case of the afterglow and drinking in the case of the hangover, thus resonating with the euphoria of the rave. At the same time, the metaphors of the afterglow and the hangover have very different valences. The afterglow, like the sweetness of nostalgia, implies a feeling of happiness and continuity; the joy of the past is written on the face of the individual, such that by gazing on it we can track a path backwards to the original moment of bliss. By contrast, in the hangover, in common with the bitterness of nostalgia, the past is only accessible through the pain of the present, with lingering headaches and dry mouths attesting to the fact that joy has happened, even if it is no longer extant. These two terms, in evoking the morning after the night before, bring together the ambiguous affective register of nostalgia and the intense pleasure associated with rave culture. Let me be clear, other understandings of nostalgia, as indicated by the discussion of restorative and reflective nostalgia above, are relevant to rave memory. Nevertheless, the conceptual dualism of the afterglow and the hangover has particular value in the case of rave. Whereas restorative and reflective nostalgia can involve a longing for various happy pasts (from the mundane to the euphoric), the afterglow and the hangover are particularly attuned to the elation, abandon and excess of social phenomena like acid house.

A couple of examples will help clarify this resonance. The three-part documentary series *Can You Feel It – How Dance Music Conquered the World* (2019), which focuses on the rise of dance music culture in the 1980s and 1990s, is a particularly good instance of the afterglow. The second episode, centred on the rise of the club, begins with 'the world's most in demand club' in the 2010s, called Elrow, and then goes backwards, demonstrating how the current club night has its origins in the rave culture of the 1980s. The episode includes a segment where DJ Paul Oakenfold revisits the site of The Project club in Streatham, South London, one of the venues where acid house was first played in Britain. The implication is that there is a continuity between Elrow and The Project; from the ecstatic expressions of twenty-first-century ravers, one can trace out the whole history of dance music. That is, clubbers today are living in the afterglow of acid house. If *Can You Feel It* highlights the continuity in dance music, then dubstep producer Burial, who first rose to prominence in the mid-2000s, produces a feeling of discontinuity. Burial's music borrows elements from different phases of dance music in the United Kingdom (recalling house, jungle and garage). Yet, these musical styles are fragmented in Burial's dub-influenced productions, the use of echo, delay and other effects creating skeletons of the original musical structures. As Mark Fisher (2014)

comments, the brokenness of Burial's music leaves a bitter aftertaste: 'It is like walking into the abandoned spaces once carnivalised by Raves and finding them returned to depopulated dereliction. Muted air horns are like the ghosts of Raves past' (p. 98). As in the hangover, the joy of the past is accessible only through the pain of the present; the ruins and shadows that punctuate the contemporary cultural landscape contain the echo of acid house's euphoric dancing and jubilant communalism, but nothing more.

## Smouldering memories: The Streets's 'Weak Become Heroes'

*Can You Feel It* and Burial represent the afterglow and the hangover in particularly stark terms, each channelling one or other of these dispositions without much reference to the other. However, some cultural representations of the rave era do not simplistically embody the afterglow or the hangover alone but, instead, combine them together, creating a complex ricocheting effect where the original moment of rave is simultaneously invoked and denied. The music video for The Streets's 'Weak Become Heroes', a song first released on the album *Original Pirate Material* (2002), is a particularly good example of the bittersweet movement of rave memory. The retrospective impulse of The Streets, a rap project led by vocalist Mike Skinner that emerged as part of the UK garage scene of the late 1990s and early 2000s, is evident across *Original Pirate Material*. For instance, as Paul Gilroy (2005) argues, the track 'Turn the Page' subtly interweaves references to the Second World War with the conviviality of contemporary British cities, with Skinner declaring: 'Memories fading, soldiers slaying, looks like geezers raving'. The song 'recasts the formative, traumatic memory of World War II as a rave', reinterpreting a pivotal event in British national identity through the image of love and togetherness evoked by acid house (Gilroy, 2005: 98).

The mnemonic focus of 'Turn the Page' takes a self-reflexive turn in 'Weak Become Heroes'. If the former is concerned with using the figure of the rave to rethink the broad contours of postwar British history, the latter focuses on the memory of dance music itself. In the lyrics, Skinner adopts a nostalgic disposition towards the original rave scene, assuming the persona of a man in his early 20s who is looking back on his experiences as a raver in his late teens. While Skinner, born in 1979, was too young to have participated in the rave scene, the character he adopts in 'Weak Become Heroes' is an original raver, at one point declaring his gratitude to the early pioneers of acid house in the 1980s: 'Out of respect for Johnny Walker, Paul Oakenfold, Nicky Holloway, Danny Rampling/and all the people who gave us these times'. Moreover, in common with many early ravers, the character declares his opposition to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994), which famously banned outdoor music parties involving 'the emission of a succession of repetitive beats'. Reflecting the broader narrative discussed above of rave culture as a time of togetherness, the song makes it clear that this was a magical moment of unity: 'Sea of people all equal, smiles in front and behind me'. Indeed, the experience of rave suggests an alternative way of living, promising a utopian world of love and peace: 'Yo, they could settle wars with this/If only they will, imagine the world's leaders on pills'. At first glance, then, 'Weak Become Heroes' embodies the afterglow disposition. When Skinner declares that the 'tune reminds me of my first E', it suggests little things in the contemporary world take him back to the golden days of rave, the chance replaying of an old song demonstrating the continuing hold of the past on the present.

Yet, this reading of the song in terms of the afterglow is complicated by the music video produced to promote the single. For much of the video, Skinner lip syncs the lyrics to the song in a nightclub. At times, the video closely mirrors the lyrics of the song. For instance, when Skinner recounts the comradely relations among ravers – 'I've known you all my life, I don't know your name' – he is shown embracing a stranger in the video. However, as is often the case in music videos, the visual image does not segue seamlessly with the lyrics and music, the disjuncture

between the two complicating and enriching the original song (Goodwin, 1992; Shaviro, 2017; Vernallis, 2004). To borrow Paul Grainge's (2000) terms, the nostalgic *mood* of Skinner's lyrics, with their evocation of the heady communalism of the rave scene, does not translate into a nostalgic *mode*, a set of stylistic motifs that recall a particular time, in the visual images of the music video. 'Weak Become Heroes' avoids the nostalgic sheen of the film *Beats* and the new rave scene of the 2000s, with Skinner and his fellow ravers appearing in clothing common to the club scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Whereas the lyrics declare that the 'corn fields sway lazily', evoking the mass outdoor parties of 1989, the viewer is offered an image of an urban club that is co-eval to the release of the song in 2002. In Boym's (2001) language, both restorative and reflective nostalgia are eschewed, the video making no attempt to evoke the late 1980s, in either a serious or a playful fashion, at the level of the visual detail on display.

The gap between mood and mode, the refusal of the video to respond to the nostalgic desires expressed in the lyrics, destabilises the afterglow disposition. While Skinner's character may still feel the presence of the late 1980s, there is a difficulty in transposing this moment into the present. As Skinner voices nostalgic desires in the song, the video refuses to respond, the insistent presentism of the visual images mocking the desire to move backwards. The hangover disposition thus comes to the fore, the movement between lyrics and video highlighting the absence of the past in the present. One particular scene in the video draws out the distinctive coming together of bitterness and pastness in the hangover. At the beginning of the video, Skinner is shown in a café with his head in his hands, where he raps the first lines of the song over mournful, synth-produced strings. A close-up of Skinner's face then quickly cuts to the club, which is the primary setting for the video. The movement from the harshly lit café to the dimness of the club suggests a contrast between the morning after and the night before. The inclusion of the café setting, which returns at various points in the video, particularly around the line 'Then the girl in the café taps me on the shoulder/I realise five years went by and I'm older', also undercuts the afterglow evoked by the lyrics.<sup>1</sup> The melancholia generated by Skinner's depressed disposition in the opening scene casts a shadow over the convivial atmosphere of the club. Pain is primary in the video, such that, like Skinner's character, we can only access the memory of euphoria in a context where it is absent and distant. Skinner's declaration that 'memories smoulder' sums up this doubled disposition, highlighting the slow-burning nature of rave culture: it stretches into the present but also threatens to catch fire, thus disappearing from the world altogether.

### **Back to the old school: Jeremy Deller's *Everybody in the Place***

The interweaving of absence and presence in The Streets's paean for rave culture finds an echo in artist Jeremy Deller's documentary *Everybody in the Place: An Incomplete History of Britain, 1984-1992*, which was first broadcast on BBC4 in 2019. The documentary, on the face of it, was a perfect fit for BBC4, its focus on the political and social importance of the rise of rave culture in the 1980s resonating with the channel's broader focus on programmes exploring the history of popular music (Long and Wall, 2010; Wall and Pillai, 2018). *Everybody in the Place* and *Can You Feel It*, which was also broadcast on BBC4 in 2019, built on previous outputs such as the Britannia (2005–2013) series of programmes – which focussed on the history of various music genres in Britain including folk, blues, jazz and metal – as well as standalone programmes on particular artists, such as *The Kate Bush Story: Running Up that Hill* (2014) and *Joan Armatrading: Me, Myself and I* (2019). Yet, Deller's documentary does not exactly align with the other music shows broadcast by BBC4. The BBC's music documentaries generally take a traditional form, with archive footage, interviews with key participants and an unseen narrator offering the viewer a linear history of a particular artist or genre (Bennett and Baker, 2010; Wall and Pillai, 2018). By contrast,



*Everybody in the Place* features Deller delivering a lecture on rave culture to a group of A-Level students, aged between 16 and 18, at a London college, with archive footage of the original moment of acid house interspersed with scenes from the classroom. To borrow terms from Bill Nichols's (2001) typology of documentaries, the monologism associated with the expository music documentaries standardly produced by the BBC is disturbed by moments of dialogism and reflexivity in *Everybody in the Place*. Deller's interactions with the students check and control his history of acid house, reminding the viewer of its partiality.<sup>2</sup>

The peculiar collaborative form of *Everybody in the Place* becomes particularly key in those moments when the students reenact scenes from the acid house movement. Deller's work has long used reenactment to engage with the political turmoil and cultural creativity of the 1980s. In his 1997 project *Acid Brass*, classic acid house tracks were reimagined by a brass band, while his 2001 work *The Battle of Orgreave* recreated the pitched struggle between striking workers and police at the Orgreave coking plant, a key moment in the 1984–1985 miners' strike in the United Kingdom. This interest in performing the past is also evident, in a more subtle fashion, in *Everybody in the Place*. Music production tools, including the Roland TB-303 bass synthesiser, that played a pivotal role in the emergence of the acid house sound in the 1980s are brought into the classroom. The students are invited to experiment with the equipment, the camera lingering on their glee as they reconstruct the sounds of the acid house moment, complete with the four-on-the-floor beat and air horn effects. Then, at the close of the documentary, the room is filled with a light show and booming music, the students given a glimpse of the euphoric experience of the original moment of rave. In other words, there is an attempt to bring the rave into the classroom, the archive footage of old raves that have been shown to the class by Deller transformed into living history.

The afterglow of rave culture is evident in these moments of reenactment. In the encounter between the original elements of acid house and the twenty-first-century students, the joyfulness of the old scene is revived; the technologies and tracks brought into the classroom provide a pathway back to the past and a means of excavating the affective impulses unleashed by rave. *Everybody in the Place* grants rave an eventual quality, indicating that the creative capacities of young people in the present are dependent on past innovations. In Reynolds's (2011) Badiouian language, 'rock reenactments resonate with a buried hunger within the music scene for a spasm like punk or rave that would turn the world upside down', paying homage to past irruptions of novelty that continue to shape popular music today (pp. 53–54). However, the particular nature of the reenactments in *Everybody in the Place* undercuts the afterglow effect. Unlike Deller's earlier *The Battle of Orgreave*, which carefully recreated the stylistic details of the original struggle (returning to the location at Orgreave, adorning miners with Cole Not Dole stickers and equipping police with period weapons), no similar attempt is made in *Everybody in the Place* (Kitamura, 2010). The students appear in the formal, office-style clothing that is mandated by their college; the period gloss associated with the nostalgia mode is missing. In a similar way to the 'Weak Become Heroes' video, Deller's documentary shuns the revival of acid house imagery (whether earnestly, as in restorative nostalgia, or ironically, as in reflective nostalgia), instead emphasising the gap between acid house and young people today; the bringing of vintage music equipment into the classroom does not quite take the students back to the old school. The reenactments in the documentary thus foreground their own impossibility, such that the desire to return to the past is accompanied by a sense that this effort must fail. Deller's refusal of visual nostalgia thus intensifies the 'awareness of the separation between the lost object and its reenactment' (Nichols, 2008: 80). The melancholia of reenactment speaks to the hangover disposition, with *Everybody in the Place*, highlighting its inability to fully evoke rave culture in positive terms.

If Deller's reenactments are, as Stella Bruzzi (2020) comments more generally, 'the documentary's ultimate tussle with the past', *Everybody in the Place* uses other techniques to stage the

struggle between the afterglow and the hangover (p. 50, emphasis in original). In particular, the dialogic mode of the documentary draws out the distance between Deller and the students. For instance, in Deller's lecture, he is keen to emphasise the continuing influence of rave on contemporary culture, at one point commenting that the archive footage of rave offers 'a glimpse of a digital future that we take for granted'. However, this statement is not backed up by the students, who consistently display a sense of bemusement and confusion towards the original rave moment. One student, looking at an original flyer promoting a rave, is unsure exactly what the event is, unable to fully decode the message of the promotional material. Others also comment on the strangeness of the parties, noting how the absence of current technologies (such as smartphones) make them appear very distant from youth culture today. As a consequence, *Everybody in the Place* presents a quiet confrontation between the students, bedecked in formal dress, and Deller, appearing in jeans and a stripy top, with the former emphasising the distance of rave from their own lives and the latter asserting its continuing power, their dialogue ricocheting between mnemonic emptiness and plenitude.

### The undischarged past

The preceding analysis has explored the multiple forms of nostalgia at stake in cultural memories of rave culture in twenty-first-century Britain. Representations of acid house valorise the original moment of rave, articulating a yearning for the glory days of the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the different representations of rave culture may affirm its special status as a moment of euphoria, they also engage in a scuffle over its status in the contemporary world. Certainly, as in the reverie fostered by Skinner's lyrics and the delighted expressions of Deller's students as they play with the Roland TB-303, the traces of rave culture in the present mean that we still live in its afterglow. Yet, the avoidance of visual nostalgia, whether of a restorative or reflective sort, in the 'Weak Become Heroes' video and *Everybody in the Place*, their refusal to don the masks of old and dress themselves in the Day-Glo stylings of the 1980s, reveals a caesura. There is a discontinuity between the current moment and the heady days of the rave scene; the sense of lack in the world today suggesting that something good happened in the past, even if this cannot be positively captured.

It might appear, then, that the afterglow approach to rave memory is optimistic and the hangover is pessimistic. The former suggests that acid house was a success, excavating the stubborn traces of the scene in the contemporary dance music world. By contrast, the latter suggests that it was a failure, the joyful experiences of the 1980s and 1990s now lost to history. In Paul Ricoeur's (2004) terms, the afterglow attests to 'the "having-been"', designating rave's "original and, in this sense, indestructible character", whereas the hangover attests to 'the "no longer"', which marks its character of being elapsed, abolished, superseded' (p. 498). The disappearance of rave from the world, however, cannot be completely elided with a pessimistic disposition. In fact, the hangover has a *utopian* undercurrent. Recall Skinner's suggestion in 'Weak Become Heroes' that rave promised a new mode of living. If the world's leaders could experience the loved-up togetherness of rave culture, he suggests, we would be living in a more joyful world. The fact that this hope remains unfulfilled – that Skinner's character, 5 years after the rave, is slumped in an austere café – does not cancel out the original desire. Instead, in the words of the great theorist of utopia Ernst Bloch (1991), the hangover positions the rave as an 'undischarged past', a moment that proffered a new, more liberated mode of existence that ultimately failed to come to fruition (p. 308). Or, as *Resolution Way*'s Rob asks: 'Can you mourn the death of a possible world and all the lives that could have thrived and flourished within it?' (Neville, 2016: 108).

To use Jacques Derrida's (1994) term, which has subsequently been taken up by writers on popular music memory, there is a hauntological quality to the hangover, such that the filtering of

the positive past through the pain of the present heightens awareness of the lost futures contained in the original moment of rave (Fisher, 2014; Reynolds, 2011). This sense that acid house has a surplus over the present is lost in the afterglow disposition. The latter positions rave as something exhausted; all of its original energy has been absorbed into the contemporary moment. When Deller reenacts the original encounter between young people and the music production technologies of acid house, rave culture becomes naturalised and normalised; it is part of the everyday fabric of our lives, containing nothing that disturbs the dominant contours of the world. In other words, as on the narrative of the documentary *Can You Feel It*, we already live in an acid house utopia. Rave culture, having given us the current dance music scene, has nothing more to give. So, rather than an optimistic afterglow confronting a pessimistic hangover, something more complex emerges: the afterglow combines serenity and stasis while the hangover combines pain and possibility. The hangover, then, greases the path for the recuperation of the full potential of acid house, drawing out a fragile, futural line of euphoric return.

### **Conclusion: why memories of joy?**

To bring this article to a close, it is worth returning to the place of joy in memory studies. As noted above, there has been a move to remedy the neglect of positive attachments to the past in the study of memory. However, the shift away from questions of trauma, catastrophe and violence poses some immediate challenges. Namely, there is a fear that, as compared to negative memories, ‘memories of joy may seem less important, more banal or ephemeral’, a frivolous topic that lacks the depth and pathos that has traditionally defined memory studies (Anderson and Ortnor, 2019: 7; see also Rigney, 2018). More specifically, two criticisms of memories of joy can be anticipated. First, that positive memories are less significant than negative memories, particularly with regard to questions of historical justice. While the refusal to forget past catastrophes is entwined with ethical obligations – something obvious in the close connection between Holocaust memory and the never again demand – it is unclear whether memories of joy fulfil a similar function. Second, happy events in the past might be seen to elicit less complex responses than disastrous events. Memory studies is enlivened by the difficulty of representing historical suffering; it highlights the tensions and ambiguities of keeping the past alive. However, it is not immediately obvious whether memories of joy foster similarly multifaceted emotional responses. The absence of trauma in positive memories could be seen to make the movement backwards far more straightforward, a simple matter of recalling the past and luxuriating in the warm feelings it fosters.

My account of rave nostalgia offers some preliminary responses to these concerns. First, in relation to the question of significance, responses to the rave movement reinforce Rigney’s (2018) suggestion that positive memories help to recharge hopeful desires in the present. Rave nostalgia provides utopian resources that, on the one hand, highlight what is inadequate about the contemporary world and, on the other, offer partial visions of what a better society would look like. That is to say, what would need to change for the intense feeling of communal euphoria experienced in the late 1980s to return in the present moment? The importance of memories of joy, then, resides in their capacity to pique a desire for alterity; things can be better and different, and happy moments in the past offer one way to foster this realisation. Second, concerning the complexity of positive memories, the preceding analysis of rave nostalgia suggests that no return to the past is ever simple. I have highlighted the knottiness of rave memory, demonstrating how contradictory forms of nostalgia strain against one another in contemporary responses to past parties. This suggests that the turn to joy need not limit the theoretical and empirical fecundity of memory studies. Instead, it opens up a range of questions, forcing us to consider what new concepts are needed, and how old concepts can be reformed, to approach the task of representing happy pasts. Between the afterglow

and the hangover, then, new horizons are staked out, both for society in general and the study of memory in particular.

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## Notes

1. In a similar fashion, Andrew Lison (2012) notes that the line about the café in ‘Weak Become Heroes’ reveals the original moment of rave as ‘euphoric, naïve, and, most importantly, relegated to the past’ (pp. 130–131).
2. In this way, *Everybody in the Place* is closer to Tony Palmer’s *All You Need Is Love* (1975), one of the first popular music documentaries, which is similarly polyphonic (Huber, 2011).

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