FreeNRG people subscribe to an economy of mutual-aid and co-operation, are committed to the non-commodification of art and embrace freedoms of experience and expression. Artists and activists, their cultural output is a product of novel mixtures of pleasure and politics. Technicians and esotericists, they pirate technologies in the pursuit of re-enchantment and liberated space.

The book is unique in its coverage of issues (drugs, activism, party as protest) it's thorough assessment of the diversity of music/dance events, and the profiling of significant musical and visual artists such as LabRats. Ohms not Bombs, Ray Castle and Robin Cooke – just to name a few.

The anthology examines Do It Yourself or ‘Free NRG’ culture, a networked youth movement committed to voluntarism, ecological sustainability, social justice and human rights.

An impressive array of contributors (artists, activists, academics and music makers) document the history of Do It Yourself culture, doffs and technomadic activism in Australia analysing and free-wheeling around specific technotribes, locales, events, technics

"Culture and critique, utopia and hedonism, secret history and public protest; all are dancing between - across - bursting out of! - the pages of FreeNRG" 
George McKay, Department of Cultural Studies, University of Central Lancashire

"Finally, the electronic underground is getting the attention it deserves as a genuine and articulate cultural movement. Extending from the dance floor and into politics, economics, environmentalism and spirituality, the rave movement deserves the multi-dimensional analysis only possible in an anthology like this one." 
Douglas Rushkoff, author, Ecstasy Club, Cybereia: Playing the Future, Bull

"Dance cultures are a fundamentally important area for people working on popular culture from a range of disciplinary locations – cultural studies, media studies, sociology, and popular music studies. FreeNRG is the first local book to analyse and document these practices and their cultural politics. It is written by a group of exciting young writers, well-informed about their subject and in many cases, closely connected with the various industries which make it work. This will be an extremely valuable book, eagerly sought by students and academics working in these disciplinary areas and addressing a major gap in the Australian literature of popular and media cultures." 
Graeme Turner, Director, Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland
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www.ozauthors.com.au
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

RAY CASTLE

http://www.dromo.com/fusionanomaly/raycastle.html
Born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1955, Ray (aka Masaray, Mantaray, Metaray) is a new media and occult sciences artist. He was visual arts and sound curator/director of ‘Closet Artists Gallery’ during the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, and wrote and performed rock, punk, funk and industrial music during this period. He was awarded an Arts Council Travel grant in 1983 to travel to America and Europe. He wrote and performed rap and hip hop during the mid ‘80s, and DJ’d at ‘psychedelic’ disco/techno parties in Goa, India, Tokyo, Europe and Australia from 1986. Ray self-identifies as a techno shamanic ‘trancetheologian’ and has produced material released on various labels (including Psy-Harmonics, Green Ant, Matsuri, Edgecore).

ROBIN COOKE

Robin was Born in Tangiers, Morocco, in 1952. He was educated at Worth Abbey and Hadlow College of Agriculture in London, drove tractors in Hyde Park, after which he became a self employed engineer/mechanic. He co-founded Mutoid Waste Co in London on 1983-84 with a five year series of squat warehouse parties, traveled Europe in 1989-90, and first came to Australia in 1991. In that year, he built a car-henge at ConFest and having seeded the Earthdream idea, convened Earthdream I. After returning to Berlin he arrived back in Australia in 1995 to continue the Earthdream (www.beam.to/earthdream) project.
EUGENE ENRG
Krusty@greenant.com

After completing BSc and BA degrees and working in public relations and marketing for a community organisation, from 1990 Eugene (aka DJ Krusty) produced a varied and multi-disciplined body of work which has included dance, performance art, gallery exhibition, installation, composition, DJ and live music, poetry, film and television. All work has been of an independent nature, centering on the emerging techno culture. In 1996, awarded a New Image research grant from the Australian Film Commission, he produced TEK<KNOW>BUTOH, an attempt at creating a visual trance dance narrative experience. Since 1993, he has created many doofs (such as those at ConFest, Earthcore, Earthdance, Every Picture, Reclaim the Streets, Earthdream, Transelements and Urban Forest Odyssey) all with the primary goal of creating a psychedelic spiritual space for people to enter trance, and evolve their consciousness in a supportive and positive way. With his Green Ant label, collaborating with Aboriginal and other musicians, he is currently composing new music and installation concepts to create a more integrated and profound trance dance experience.

CHRIS GIBSON
cgibson@unsw.edu.au

Chris is lecturer in urban economic geography, University of New South Wales. His PhD thesis examined the politics of the Australian music industry and regional music production, and he has published a number of articles about music, space and politics. He has worked in record stores, community radio and played in numerous musical outfits (including current projects Coco Don’t and Sonic Wallpaper). He is co-author of Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place (due out through Routledge in 2001).

KURT IVESON
Kurt.Iveson@durham.ac.uk

Kurt Iveson is a lecturer in cultural and social geography at the University of Durham. He recently completed a PhD thesis about conflicts over public space in Australian cities. He is subscriptions manager for Youth, Sound and Space (www.snarl.org/youth/index.htm), an electronic discussion group for those who have common interests in youth cultures that involve musical practices and the construction of social space.
**LABRATS**

http://lab-rats.tripod.com

Evolving out of the Jabiluka protest in 1998, Labrats is an alternative energy sound/cinema system operated by Izzy Brown and ‘Monkey’ Marc Peckham. Street performer, rapper, cartoonist, MC Izzy has been involved in various activist campaigns including the Humps not Dumps (http://www.green.net.au/humpsnotdumps) anti-uranium industry trek in 1999, and has manifested various techno fund raisers. Initially trained as a geologist, Marc sung and played in several bands before DJing funk, reggae and dub and becoming a target for police harassment. The Labrats mobilised in support of Arabunna elder Kevin Buzzacott, having become involved with the Keepers of Lake Eyre (http://www.lakeeyre.green.net.au) camp. With a regular presence at Reclaim the Streets actions and other events like Earthdream, the Labrats vehicle runs on vegetable oil and bears a solar and wind powered system.

**SUSAN LUCKMAN**

s.luckman@mailbox.uq.edu.au

Susan teaches in media and cultural studies at the University of Queensland, and is the author of various articles on cyberfeminism, the internet, anti-capitalist protests, and (other) contemporary youth cultural practices. She is currently writing up her doctoral dissertation on contemporary Australian dance music cultures, and maintains a personal (as well as professional) involvement in movements which problematise the skewed priorities of contemporary global capitalism.

**ENDA MURRAY**

enda@cat.org.au

Enda is an Irish writer and media cowboy. He studied at Trinity College in Dublin and then, more productively, at the university of life in London squatland in the ‘80s. He has an MA from St. Martin’s School of Art in London and has spent 15 years making programs and teaching media to youth groups and to people with learning disabilities. He has recently produced and directed programs for SBS TV, ABC Radio National and for Sydney Indymedia Centre on the world wide web (www.sydney.indymedia.org). He lives in Sydney.

**RAK RAZAM**

shazaman@netspace.net.au

Rak downloaded into being on a football field in the Otways during a shamanic ritual/initiation ceremony at Transelements 2, an outdoor doof in 1997, when the whole universe unwound and deconstructed like an orange peel round a campfire with shooting stars and Elvis singing Edge of Reality mixed in with dub samples from the chill area and massive amounts of inphomation flooding the neo-cortex as the programming code of the GAME became suddenly apparent. A year and a half stint as writer and Assistant Editor followed at Tekno Renegade Magazine, where his Psyence Fiction column popularized rave culture for a larger mainstream audience whilst mad monkey shenanigans livened up the party circuit. He has also written a graphic novel script, numerous short stories and can be found phreaking out the narrow bandwith of reality with the Barrelfull of Monkeys (barrelfullofmonkeys@yahoogroups.com), somewhere over the horizon...

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Peter Strong

ohmsnotbombs@microsuxx.com

Peter (aka DJ Morphism) was born in 1967 in the UK, arrived in Australia in 1987 and attended City Art Institute in Paddington where he gained a BA in 1991 majoring in painting and screenprinting. He started running a small hi-fi at parties in Sydney, formed a sound system called the Sounds Anti System, and met up with the Jellyheads anarchist collective in Lewisham and Newtown Sydney. He joined the band Mahatma Propagandi which morphed into Non Bossy Posse as Vibe Tribe was born. Peter went on to work with the community on protest festivals and parties throughout the nineties co-establishing the Ohms Not Bombs (www.omsnotbombs.org) vehicle in 1995.

Des Tramacchi
d.tramacchi@mailbox.uq.edu.au

Des’ research interests include psychedelic and entheogenic movements, neo-shamanism, trance, ecstasy, and alternate states of consciousness. He has recently completed an Honours thesis in the department of Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland examining the social and symbolic aspects of substance use in the context of psychedelic dance-parties. He has been socially involved in raving/clubbing since the mid-eighties. As an unobtrusive participant-observer, in May 1998 he attended Stomping Monster Doof#3 which took place on a cow field bordering forest in Dayboro, Qld. This research resulted in an article: ‘Field-Tripping: Psychedelic communitas and Ritual in the Australian Bush’ (2000, Journal of Contemporary Religion). He has subsequently researched several other doofs.

Sean Scalmer

sean.scalmer@mq.edu.au

Sean Scalmer is a research fellow in the Department of Politics, Macquarie University. He is currently researching collective action and the media, and is the author of Dissent Events: protest, the media and the political gimmick in Australia, UNSW Press, 2001. He is a Sydney Editorial correspondent for the radical cultural magazine Overland.

Graham St John

graham@wild.net.au

Graham holds a PhD for his thesis on Australia’s historic FreeNRG event, ConFest: Alternative Cultural Heterotopia: ConFest as Australia’s Marginal Centre (www.come.to/confest). He taught anthropology at La Trobe and Deakin Universities for several years and has published various articles on liminality, authenticity and ferality in Australian youth culture. He is currently researching an ethnography of the Earthdream nomadic carnival.

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Kathleen Williamson
bigk@disinfo.net

Kathleen is an information junky zine maker inspired by DiY tekno culture. She has lived for the past 15 years in Brisbane, and has been involved in DiY theatre (as director and production manager) and photography (as exhibitor and documenter). In 1993-94, she co-curated and organised the Glare Film Festival for Brisbane’s annual Livid Festival. Since the mid-1990s, she has been dedicated to the underground tekno culture helping co-create magical spaces for community and personal transformation, as well as producing a zine exploring magic/psychedelics/techno called Octarine. In 1999, she coordinated and curated the zine/comics/underground publications section of the National Young Writer’s Festival in Newcastle, NSW, and in 2000, took the Abominable Knowledge Emporium on the Earthdream desert pilgrimage.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While this collection negotiates the edges of Australian techno dance culture, readers seeking to find a history of electronic music in Australia or elsewhere will be disappointed. The collection does not venture such a history nor does it cover genre developments. Also, while there is gender imbalance in the contributor line up, this does not reflect my efforts to solicit writing from various women working within the culture. A point on terminology: ‘techno’ and ‘tekno’ are used interchangeably throughout the anthology.

There are quite a few people who I would like to thank here. First of all, the contributors for inspiring me to compile FreeNRG. They are to be particularly thanked for enduring my incessant haranguing for text. Kath Williamson, Robin Cooke, Pete Strong and Eugene ENRG are all legendary and have been an inspiration. Kevin Buzzacott and the Keepers of Lake Eyre, and many participants of Earthdream2000 (too many to name here) were likewise inspirational. John Jacobs, Kol Dimond, Karl Fitzgerald, Alan Bamford, Joe Stojsic, Scott Art, Jon Holdsworth, Jilly Magee, Minna Graham, Wave Beach and John Morton were all helpful in different, though important, ways. Saskia Folk, Brent Tanian and Kath Wheatley have contributed a range of wonderful images (as have Pete Strong and Robin Cooke). The technical assistance and existential troubleshooting provided by Richard Martin and Kurt Svendsen was, as always, most appreciated. And a big shout out to my intensive assistance provider.

Mark Brooks did an excellent job with the cover design. As did Ken Gelder with the foreword. Libby Jeffery from OzAuthors and IPR Systems has also been helpful and supportive. And Colin Hood from Feelergauge (www.feelergauge.net) deserves special mention: for seeing the merit in this project from the beginning, for providing crucial production advice, for copy and html editing, and for encouraging and assisting the project’s electronic dimensions. I’m sure that, without Colin, this project would still be lurking in the shadows!
The new Australian counter culture’s aim is essentially one of re-enchantment. I know, of course, about the recent book with this title by the Jungian New Age commentator, David Tacey—someone with little time for Cultural Studies, as some readers may be aware. But FreeNRG counter culture is different again to the sort of middlebrow, middle-aged dreamings of the New Age. For one thing, it advocates political action—something quite foreign to New Age writing, which cheerily ‘transcends’ the turbulent world of politics for some higher, calmer set of theological values. For another, it builds the experience of pleasure (ecstasy, rapture, sexual pleasure) into its program for cultural therapy. But most important, it reconfigures the realm of Nature—so often turned into a fetish (‘the landscape’) by the New Age—by fissuring it with the sounds and visions of digital technology.

FreeNRG culture gives us techno-Nature, turning the Australian landscape into a sound system (with its ‘doof-doof-doof’ pulse beats) and a dance floor: the outback as stomping ground with the DJ as ‘channeller’. Rave culture was imported into Australia some time ago, mostly from British and European metropolitan centres; now, its ‘Australianisation’ is complete, locked locally into the ground and the underground. So this book is partly about those people who made the Australianisation of rave and post-punk dance culture possible. You will hear about Vibe Tribe and Ohms Not Bombs and Labrats, with their solar powered sound system and a van that runs on vegetable oil. You will hear about Desert Trekno and Clan Analogue, the ‘recycledelic’ Mutoid Waste Co., and Earthdream 2000. This culture is wildly neologistic, inventing ingenious new designations to express its techno-Nature
hybridity, loading up its cultural products with puns and punk citations (like the ‘Filthy Jabilucre’ CD). In one essay, the techno-landscape becomes ‘elechthonic’, a wonderfully evocative word for ascribing electronic frequencies to Nature. Everything is hybridised and hyphenated: these are future-primitives, techno-shamans producing eco-rapture.

Through their commitment to environmental politics and Aboriginal causes, these folk are also postcolonial. But this is postcolonialism at its most utopian and mystical, giving us heady new expressions of settler identity—far removed from the secular, culturally pessimistic postcolonialism expressed in so much conservative commentary these days, the kind, for example, that worries about Aboriginal ‘difference’ in the nation. The counter culture in this book relishes difference and is drawn ineluctably towards it. In a sense, FreeNRG stands at the front line of reconciliation, making contact and forging intercultural alignments and affiliations: working always in sympathy, even empathy, with Aboriginal and ecological paradigms. We see broadly comparable empathies underwriting some mainstream narratives along these lines in Australia these days, too: as in the work of Tim Flannery or Peter Read. The overwhelming urge for these utopian postcolonials is to belong: to produce affiliations of such density and intensity that a proper sense of settler belonging to this country automatically (or ‘magickly’) follows.

So this Australian counter culture launches itself into the outback as a way of re-inhabiting country, drawing together the kind of ethical and spiritual imperatives that follow consequentially from the failure of government and ‘ordinary people’ to address in any fulfilling way the still-traumatising legacies of colonialism. Their counter cultural narrative sees colonisation as the means of dispossessing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike: turning the latter away from country (which then becomes, for city dwellers, something akin to another country, a place from which they remain perpetually alienated) and sealing them off from intercultural contact; while decimating the former’s sacred sites through mining, development, mass tourism. To be in this postcolonial counter culture is thus to transform the country itself into something sacred. The post-rave experience takes on a kind of Aboriginal aura here, described in typically neologistic, hyphenated terms as a neo-corroboree, or a ‘psycorroboree’: Australianisation here in effect means ‘aboriginalisation’ with a small ‘a’: FreeNRG is all about the ritualistic production of an ethically correct sense of settler occupation of this country. I can think of worse ways to live your life.

This is therefore both a selfless and (not untypically for young folk) a self-indulgent counter culture, fusing social critique with abandonment and escape (to the dance beat, to pleasure). FreeNRG commentators are also emergent public intellectuals, articulate technicians, producers of treatises and manifestos (through zines and e-zines, ‘activist tekno media’) as well as CDs and other electronic paraphernalia. Their work and activity is a source of renewal and hope for a youth so often imagined as ‘without politics’, as well as for those of us who have long regarded mainstream political representation in Australia (on the Left as well as the Right) as bereft of vision and ethically vacuous. It is a privilege to write the Foreword to this book, a wonderful archive of counter cultural ideas and activities in Australia in recent times.

Ken Gelder
English with Cultural Studies
University of Melbourne
INTRODUCTION —
TECHNO INFERNO

GRAHAM ST JOHN

MUTOID WASTE SPINNING DNA RINGS AT EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY, NOV 97
(Photo. Saskia FoToFolk)
The moon set in the early morning as the eastern sky began to glimmer with the approaching day. Fire-twirlers moved onto the dancing ground, ignited their staffs and performed their spinning, incandescent art. There was a profound sense of ritual meaning here, as if these fire-magicians were emissaries between Dionysian nocturnal powers and Apollonian sensibilities of the coming day; a contract negotiated between Chaos and reason … The music and the cycles of fire-twirling seemed to draw out the moments of sunrise, golden beams dragging their way through the branches of the rainforest trees. The music complemented the sense of a single sacred moment being replayed again and again, eternity on display. Finally the acrid flares of the pyrotechnic acrobats were extinguished and the day commenced.¹

Free nrg must have its day, the negative feedback loop of energy consumption and earth destruction can’t be sustained, for much longer. Free nrg is about tuning technology with ecology, DJing our soul force into the amazing biorhythms of nature… we can do it. Australia has of late become the focus of international attention and a melting pot for crews who believe that mass transformation is possible. Let our people power positive revolution be a shining precedent for the whole planet. A rush and a push, and some CO-CREATED MAGIC and this land is returned to the ancient and magical indigenous chain of wisdom. If we unite our purpose a massive healing can be set in motion… Help institute a sound system for all, join the Earthdream, support Aboriginal sovereignty, and help dance up the country in rave-o-lution.²

New Year 1996/97, the banks of the Murray River west of Moama, New South Wales. Electronic musicians and a host of lighting, sculpture and décor artists converge upon common ground just inside the perimeter of the biannual alternative cultural event ConFest. Conspiring to facilitate an outdoor dance odyssey, this arcane host united their talents to form ‘the Tek Know village’. It was the turn of the year and an electronic voour voourr voouurr propagated across the flats. Fluro fabrics lined the approach, guiding enthusiasts down into ground zero. Just before midnight, the dance floor was heaving, with well over one thousand trance habitues gesticulating wildly before a giant praying mantice with a Volkswagen Beetle for a body, and a huge twelve hour clock suspended from the top centre of a high scaffold tower. An enormous Aboriginal flag draped from the tower and bore a smiley face on its sun. Several didjeriduists played at the base of the scaffold and flag. Near midnight, the rhythm became wilder as a carnival of jugglers and fire-stick twirlers raised the tempo of their manipulations at the base of the scaffold, and two performers swirled ignited catherine wheels at opposite ends of the tower. At this point, a figure in orange overalls appeared wielding a flame thrower. It was Robin ‘Mutoid’ Cooke, who succeeded in setting the clock alight at midnight. But, as propane balloons suddenly backfired, an unanticipated conflagration illuminated the amazed faces of hundreds of revelers as the flag itself was consumed by the flames.

² Ohms not Bombs: http://www.omsnotbombs.org
Falsely regarding the flag’s obliteration as a scheduled event, many were oblivious to the shock experienced by some of the crew as a result of this incident, especially as Stan, an Aboriginal didjeriduist, played underneath the flag at the time. Yet Robin refused to be pessimistic. It was New Year’s Eve, nobody was injured and ‘something very strong had happened’. The next day, Robin met Stan and gave him a belt buckle with a rendering of the Aboriginal flag in enamel. ‘That should have been the end of the conversation’, he later told me.

I should have said “thank you Stan”, and this pesky little voice came up inside of me and I said “Stan, you don’t need to wear that”. And he said “yeah, right”. I looked him in the eye again and I said “that was total fucking anarchy last night wasn’t it, just total fucking anarchy”. And he said “yeah mate”. And I said “and we don’t need a flag do we”. And he said “no mate ... we’re all one peoples, and we don’t need no flag”. And that I think is what happened there. To me that was the truth of those moments. And he honoured it and I honoured it, and we actually destroyed between us the last vestige of separation that may exist between the whites and the Koorieys ... So that felt very very very powerful to me actually. And I’ve seen Stan since, and we’re good mates and give him a hug and we carry on.

A cataclysm heralding disastrous intercultural relations? An accidental sacrifice activating the annihilation of difference? Unanticipated ‘special effects’ triggering an incommunicable epiphany for anyone biting 250mg of LSD? All were likely in a festival which, during the mid nineties, was a kaleidoscopic core of potential, a counterspatial hotspot. Over the course of a few years, esoteric engineers, itinerant psychonauts and post-rave posses like the Mutoid Waste Co, Space Between the Gaps, the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre Company, Clan Analogue and sculpture artists FutuRelic gravitated to collaborate in nocturnal productions at this protean enclave on the edge of Australian culture. While ConFest wasn’t the first time or place for such collaborations in Australia, it constituted my first encounter with doof culture. At ConFest techno villages I encountered village architect and ‘techno-shaman’ Eugene (Krusty) ENRG, the Pt’chang peace keepers, the barefoot spindoctor ‘Spaceship’ Joe Stojsc, ‘King’ Richard Martin, Mari (aka DJ Kundalini), Orreyelle Defenestrate, Kurt—the-devil-you-know—Svendsen and a pantheon of other trailblazers, technomads and cyber-freaks.

I also met Robin Cooke, who had in 1996 informed me about Earthdream2000, an inaugural intra-continental techno-carnival where I would later meet many contributors to this collection. A radical road train, Earthdream is a momentous accumulation of Free NRG culture—a youth movement loosely organised into groups non-hierarchical in principle and committed to voluntarism, ecological sustainability, social justice and human rights. Free NRG people subscribe to an economy of mutual-aid and co-operation, are committed to the non-commodification of art and embrace freedoms of experience and expression. Artists and activists, their cultural output is a product of novel mixtures of pleasure and politics. Technicians and esotericists, they harness technologies in the pursuit of (re)enchantment and liberated space. Free NRG approximates that ‘1990s counterculture’ which George

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4 Earthdream: www.beam.to/earthdream

Acquired from www.ozauthors.com.au
McKay has called ‘DiY Culture’: ‘a youth-centred and—directed cluster of interests and practices around green radicalism, direct action politics [and] new musical sounds and experiences’. But it is an expression of what McKay himself had offered as a more accurate designation—a ‘Do it Ourselves’ culture—a network consisting of micro-communities of dissent and their collective, creative, interventions.5

THE PLAYLIST

FreeNRG is divided into four parts. In Part One, ‘Post Rave Australia’, the voluntary, proactive, and media-savvy characteristics of Australian techno dance culture are delineated. In ‘Doo! Australian Post-Rave Culture’ the editor attends to the reach of the rave diaspora from the late eighties in Australia, breaking into a detailed exploration of the new tribalism, political partying and inspired commitments of the technocultural nineties. Here, the ‘doof’ is introduced as an autonomous community event-space for and by youth. Following this, in a sweeping discussion of new alternative media techniques, Kathleen Williamson demonstrates how the local doof milieu has formed an activist media network using self-published print zines and e-zines to discharge a combination of activist, community and spiritual memetics.

Part Two, ‘Sound Systems and Systems Sound’, focuses upon the history, culture and activist agendas of sound systems in Australia. Enda Murray begins with an historical countenance of sound system culture detailing its roots in Jamaica, development in the UK, and its emergence in Sydney, where something of the local ‘folk’ ethos of DiY techno artistry is explored. ‘Never has folk music been so accessible or so loud’ (according to Spiral Tribe’s Mark Harrison).6 Digital monkey wrencher Peter Strong follows with a vivid insider’s account of the exploits of both Sydney’s Vibe Tribe and Ohms not Bombs sound systems, and thus, of Australian doof-lore. With Strong, the dance party is a funky rendezvous, even recruitment ground in ongoing struggles for Aboriginal sovereignty and a nuclear free future. Firing their broadside deep into this territory, Labrats outline the ideas behind their clean energy sound/cinema system. For ‘underground sampler’ ‘Monkey’ Marc Peckham, and ‘human tekno beatbox’ Izzy Brown, operating the solar powered system is ‘just like sticking a plug into the sky and leaving it run’.7 Mounting forays into the interior of the continent, the Labrats (not unlike Ohms not Bombs) are inspired champions of environmental and indigenous rights, disclosing in particular the operations of mining giant Western Mining Co, which bears the brunt of their rhyme and their rhythm. Armed with samplers, subsonic speakers and a determination to make a difference, technophiles and ecowarriors have joined forces entering into non-

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colonialist relationships with indigenous landscapes and peoples. This is the view taken by the editor as I introduce Earthdream2000 in the following chapter. Possessing sharp audibility against the background noise of a wide spectrum of youth cultural pursuits—‘Mad Max-Pricilla-Tank Girl’ style—Earthdream is a testament to the pro-active and inspirited attitudes of contemporary youth formations.

Such guides the way to Part Three—‘Techno-Ascension’. There, scrounger-shaman, Robin Cooke, proceeds to document the UK origin and antipodean trajectory of the Mutoid Waste Co, of which he is a founding member. There is little doubt that the ‘recycledelic’ industrial sculpture group have had a formative impact on the underground techno movement. Operating on a scrap-metal mediated re-enchantment principle, seeding the intercultural Earthdream vision, Cooke provides a blistering account of the Mutoid evolution—set on a seemingly inevitable course towards the Australian outback. Indeed, remote, interior and hinterland bush locales have occasioned new techno rituals (‘bush doofs’), with trance orientated events establishing particular popularity in Australia. In a dialogue originally transpiring in 1995, fluorescent rainbow warrior Eugene ENRG (aka DJ Krusty) communes with psy-trance pioneer Ray Castle over the esoteric inspiration and effects of such Trance Dance rituals. Approaching the topic from the anthropology of consciousness and drawing comparisons from entheogenic rituals in various traditional cultures, Des Tramacchi reports on the significance of outdoor trance parties as creative contexts for the expression of psychedelic spirituality. Following this, the reader will need no reminding that the tekno trance floor is a context for ‘serious fun’, after Rak Razam unveils his bush doof-inspired rendering of the ‘hundredth monkey’ theory—the Barrefull of Monkeys.

New and increasingly accessible technologies have empowered youth—despite corporate encroachment and state regulations—to penetrate, subvert or transform spaces for community and political action. This is the subject of Part Four, Reclaiming Space. In an analysis of the Australian Reclaim the Streets movement, Susan Luckman explores the Situationist roots and the local denouement of this manifestation of the global ‘carnival of protest’ juggernaut. The party/protest alliance at the heart of RTS, was most evident at the protest against the World Economic Forum meeting in Melbourne on S11 2000. Exploring the carnivalesque dimension of such public demonstrations, not unlike Luckman, Kurt Iveson and Sean Scalmer inquire whether such gatherings are effective forms of protest against global capitalism. Examining the transpiration of ‘play’ in both urban and cyber spaces (from mobile sound systems to melbourne.indymedia.org) and the apparent re-unification of cultural and political radicalism, their response, while cautious, is instructively optimistic. Finally, claims made for the radical potential of digital technologies adopted by Australian electronic music culture need also be approached with caution. Attending to the electronic music scene on the North Coast region of NSW, Chris Gibson observes that while it is certain that increased accessibility to new technologies has enabled decentralised musical and political spaces, the ‘democratic’ status of this culture is contentious.
PART ONE — POST RAVE AUSTRALIA
On beaches in the sand, in dunes, inland in dunes beside a creek. I’ve done it up in mountains, in high altitudes. I’ve done it in the Himalayas (Aleex on Doofing).  

The electronic music industry possesses a decentralised legacy. From the early eighties, developments in production and recording technologies permitted a means of access and level of independence which had enabled increasing numbers of young electronic (or techno) musicians to assume ownership and control over the means of music production (in their own homes) and distribution (through informal channels and independent micro-labels), despite efforts by the transnational entertainment industry to assimilate such activity. In Australia, the operations of this high-tech cottage industry, complimented by developments in digital recording, the internet and multimedia arts, has reinforced a grassroots sensibility potentiating creative interventions beyond that achievable by rock, punk or rave. This chapter provides an introduction to the rave diaspora in Australia and, moreover, explores a spectrum of proactive and inspired refrains issuing from the socio-digital landscapes of post-rave technoculture. As an enclave of affect and meaning, a youth cultural site of voiced dissent and epiphanous experience, that post-rave technotribal gathering, the doof, is singled out for special consideration.
AUSTRALIA RAVING

New Year 2000/01, near the town of Lindenow in Victoria’s La Trobe valley. As an advertisement in Beat magazine had announced, Earthcore’s key summer event (called ‘Primal Elements’) would be divided into four ‘primal element zones’: earth, fire, air and water. It didn’t take a particularly astute observer to note that this cultural production—beginning in December 1993 as a non profit event called ‘terra technics’, which evolved into Australia’s largest ‘independent electronic music festival’ and more recently a ‘dance music and lifestyle extravaganza’—is designed principally to accumulate the fifth element: $. Feelings remain mixed about this regular fixture in the Australian (and international) dance culture calendar. Earthcore has assisted local independent artists and has consistently made attempts to fly underneath the radar (or at least convince its patrons of its ‘underground’ status). Yet it has, nevertheless, grown to imitate and cultivate that which appears to be the life-force of the international dance music establishment, and that which is transparent in club and rave scenes—commodification. In the economy of the night, this hypermarket of style, this club without walls, trades in a high demand experiential commodity—dance.

Dancing or ‘raving’ as a club pursuit escalated following the acid house explosion in the UK in 1988. The cultural phenomenon, stimulated by UK tourism to the Spanish Balearic island of Ibiza and later subject to a moral panic, heavy licensing laws and ‘public order’ legislation, has been given extensive treatment. The utopic-transcendent rave arena is commonly understood to have been an escape from the heterosexualist, macho and aggressive predatory sexuality prevalent in rock, disco or nightclub settings. Yet, according to Angela McRobbie, as gender dissolved under a syncopated rhythm, the men behind the turntables were left largely ‘unchallenged in their control over the whole field of music production’. And while the rave was held to be a countercultural zone in the ‘second summer of love’, as Matthew Collin points out in his Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House, late eighties UK youth ‘took to the mythology of the hippie era—adopting a simulacrum of what they believed the sixties were like, a hand-me-down, pick-
and-mix bag of fashions and slogans—minus the radical politics of the era’. What has been widely referred to as ‘ecstasy culture’—due to the associated wide scale use of the entactogenic MDMA or ‘ecstasy’—developed into a technologically advanced leisure pursuit, with ‘house’ becoming ‘a bloated conservative mainstream, formulaic and predictable, dominated by a self-satisfied, self-serving elite’. Post acid house rave, once a celebrated temporary autonomous zone, had become, as Simon Reynolds put it, ‘the club as pleasure–prison, a detention camp for youth’. ‘Corporate clubbing’ was easily assimilated into the British leisure industry and was exported to Australia (along with Europe, North America, Japan, South Africa and a host of other destinations). With a miasma of derivative soundscapes (from happy house, to drum ’n bass, to trance) rave or club culture has become prominent in the ‘every-night life’ of a significant proportion of the Australian youth population.  

6 Collin Altered State, p.60, 275; Reynolds Energy Flash, p.424.  
7 Youth and Music in Australia, a project surveying the music related behaviour of Australian youth, reports clubs (which are differentially categorised to ‘dance parties’ or ‘raves’) as the most popular music venue attended by those aged between 18-24. As the report conveys, 11% of youth aged between 12-24 selected ‘dance/techno/trance’ as their favourite music. This is second only to rock (18%) and is significant when one considers that there were a total of 45 named categories. See G. Ramsey, Headbanging or Dancing? Youth and Music in Australia part 2, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1998.
But let me put this in perspective. Prior to local commercialisation, rave had infiltrated the night time underground of Australian capitals (especially Sydney and Melbourne). Between the very late eighties and 1992, the industrial estates of Sydney’s Alexandria became a common site for clandestine warehouse ‘raves’ organised by local and expatriate promoters inspired by the UK experience. Party locations were advertised using the Telecom 0055 recorded message service, enabling the party to remain aloof from media, the police and rival promoters (until the last minute). These were the ‘new school ravers’, which Seb Chan distinguishes from the dance party scene dominated by innovative promoters within the gay and lesbian community who, since the mid eighties, organised exclusive parties for an inner-city arts elite—some eventually held in the Hordern Pavilion. 8 In Melbourne, ‘raves’ are reported to have occurred as early as 1988. 9 Arriving as a pre-packaged UK affectation, these informal events represented, according to Gibson and Pagan ‘an almost megalomaniac appeal to a sense of internationalism, a sense of finally being on the ‘map’ of a global dance culture, despite the local paucity of artists or releases’. 10

While there is much reminiscing about the ‘democratised’ status of the early local rave scene and its spaces, there can be little denying that such a scene had, by the mid nineties, become subject to increasing commercialism and ‘domestication’ through state regulation patterns for which media generated moral panics—exemplified by that following the death of Sydney teenager Anna Wood—have been held accountable. Containment strategies such as that represented by the subsequent NSW Ministry of Police Code of Practice for Dance Parties (April 1998), ‘eased the commercialisation and incorporation of rave style into the mainstream through the growth of standardised club environments’. The Code of Practice is said to have represented the ‘decoding’ of rave spaces. 11 Applying equally to ‘dance parties’ whether small or large, the Code disadvantaged small scale promoters and operated to contain a new youth cultural pursuit within ‘legitimate’ leisure sites—clubs. At the same time that this new ‘commodified regulatory landscape’ 13 effectively discouraged not-for-profit parties (in Sydney and elsewhere), transnational entertainment corporations like Festival/Mushroom were effectively ‘buying credibility’ from independent artists and labels. 14 Mirroring trends overseas, dance/techno was attracting a wider market and turning big commercial

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13 Homan ibid,76. Organisers threatened with closure, and heavy fines and imprisonment for promoters.
profits. ‘Dance’ had already made an Aria Awards category by 1995. In July 1996, the ‘superclub’ Sublime opened in Sydney. After New Year 97/98, when a party at Victoria Dock’s Shed 16 hosted 10,000 people, Melbourne (and Sydney) has accommodated huge dance parties/festivals such as Hardware’s Two Tribes and Welcome.

With promoters seeking to ‘broaden their demographic’, the outdoor club Earthcore remains a curious case in point. Melbourne’s Age ran a story promoting the first Earthcore for the 2000/01 summer at Mt Disappointment. ‘Earthcore: Suits go Feral’ featured party-goers at Melbourne’s ‘largest forest rave’, who ‘are not merely your stereotypical conglomerate of ferals, hippies or candy-ravers’. No, Earthcore, ‘as its organisers boast’, accommodates a much ‘wider demographic’—‘becoming home to many a professional: doctors, lawyers, middle managers’.

The idea of middle managers ‘going feral’ for a weekend intrigues. In the words of Murray Bookchin, who uses the phrase in his critique of Hakim Bey’s anthemic TAZ (or temporary autonomous zone), such temporary ferality approximates a kind of ‘lifestyle anarchism’ for young urban professionals (including those able to afford the increasingly excessive price of entry).

Temporarily suspending wealth accumulation by spending themselves in spectacular moments of ‘e’-fuelled grandeur in a bush setting, the ‘suits’ are recharged, re-created, for their return to business and their assault on the next rung of the corporate ladder.

Perhaps I’m being a little unfair, as Bookchin’s polemic is directed at those staking some claim to anarchism, and is an approach unforgiving of any possible spiritual dimension. Yet, the approach does hold weight in accounting for dance culture, or in particular the Australian ‘Dance industry’, which is persistent in marketing the same brand of artificial ‘rebellion’, albeit in new bottles. It could be argued that local dance culture industries, have invested in the ‘rave-olutionary’ fervor which is in large part attributable to the moment when the UK’s Criminal Justice Act (1994) made dancing something of a political statement (when the subversive, radical, character of dance had been legislated into existence and thereby made credible). While there may be some credence to this in its place of origin, in a country which has not experienced comparable legislation, the radicalism of those acquiring subcultural capital from this rebellious chic, from this cheap import, is transparently ersatz. Yet, the dance culture industry trades in this fashion, this radicalism, servicing the desire to be ‘extreme’, a ‘renegade’—even if for one night a week.

17 In 1994, the Tory government passed the Criminal Justice Act (CJA). The Act constituted a repressive system of police and legal powers which have according to Alan Dearling ‘almost decommissioned a lifestyle’. See Alan Dearling (ed.), No Boundaries: New Travellers on the Road (Outside of England), Dorset, Enabler Publications, 1998, p.1. The Act includes clauses criminalising squatting and trespassory assembly (including open air ‘raves’ and free festivals not officially sanctioned, and, potentially, peaceful protests). The CJA registers the music associated with such social infractions as ‘sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats’ (Part V 63.1.b). Yet, police violence, shut downs and mass arrests were shifting ‘rave’ from entertainment to ‘movement’ well before the CJA. See Drew Hemment, ‘Dangerous Dancing and Disco Riots: the Northern Warehouse Parties’, in McKay DiY Culture, p.218.
The industry consists of charts, brand names, major corporate partners and its own media. *Tekno Renegade Magazine (TRM)*, a monthly Melbourne (and now Sydney) street publication, performs a role in reproducing subcultural capital for scene aspirants—firing a broadside of commodity accessories on a background of gloss and glare, enabling the ‘fashioning’ of state-of-the-art identities—authentic, ‘cool’ or, as many would have it, ‘totally sick’. Here, raving as rebellion is a mediated ruse. The street publication trades in and distributes rave’s ‘renegade’ mood—a kind of aloof insolence inscribed upon advertised techno-accessories, latest DJ sensations and music genres eagerly consumed by the rave massive. In its own way, *TRM* recapitulates the strategies of post sixties culture industries which had long recuperated rebellion, ‘hip’ or ‘alternative’ as a youth marketing category. Perhaps as a successor to rock’s ‘anti-establishment Pepsi Generation’ we now have the renegade Ericsson T20 MP3 compatible generation. As is echoed in Sarah Thornton’s discussion of other ‘subcultural consumer magazines’ and mainstream media, this kind of street press possesses an important role in manufacturing the culture to which youth gravitate and to which they draw upon in order to assign meaning to their lives and, as Thornton further points out, to establish lines of distinction from others.

Dance, ‘once a faceless genre of music has now well and truly entered the mercantile arena’—becoming ‘the rock ’n roll of the nineties’. So went the cover story ‘Marketing the DJ in 2000’ of *TRM*’s February 2000 edition. Complete with a ‘guide to marketing an electronic artist’ and an interview with a director of Global Recordings, the article went about celebrating this development. While in earlier volumes, *TRM* seemed to negotiate the underground of dance culture, bearing dance music’s decentralised origins and giving credence to the culture’s collusion with a variety of social and political issues, in 2000 the publication went the way of rock ‘n’ roll. This became most apparent in a growing number of profiles on male superstar brand names like Paul Oakenfold (in a coverstory ‘Introducing the World’s Highest Paid DJ: Paul Oakenfold’) the publication thus assisting the international entertainment industry in undermining a subversive attribute of early techno dance culture—contempt for ‘the star system’ and disruption of authorship categories—by spectacularising the artist. Furthermore, sexist imagery associated with rock—insouciant male posturing with background babe accessories—is endorsed through advertising.

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18 For a discussion of this see Thomas Frank, ‘Alternative to What?’ in Ron Sakolsky and Fred Wei-Han Ho (eds), *Sounding Off: Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution*, New York, Autonomedia, p.112.
21 Possibly due to a changes in editor and production team.
23 See Hesmondhalgh ibid.
ENTER THE DOOF

From an early period of the techno-rave movement in Australia, elements possessing anarchic, autonomist and anticorporate orientations have made deliberate efforts to not only withdraw from the spectacles of rock and punk, but to create something more substantial than the counterfeit culture of rave. Consolidating in inner city warehouses and outposts of opposition, like Reynolds, they have asked: ‘is it possible to base a culture around sensations rather than truths, fascination rather than meaning, jouissance rather than plaisir?’

As dance became regulated, contained and increasingly commoditised, as rave became domesticated in ‘pleasure-prisons’, as dilittante renegades queued at the turn-styles and weekend ferals occupied the dance floor, ‘doofs’ represented an escape route—an alternative to the encroaching forces of state, capital and cliché. In Australia, the term ‘doof’ has become a synonym for youth cultural dissonance, a ‘rave underculture’, its habitues embodying a refusal — ‘to be subjected to what the beer barons and the mainstream culture cabal dole out as entertainment’. An audio-inspired zeitgeist of Free NRG culture, the ‘doof’ is said to embody a ‘do it yourself/ourself (DIY/DIO) spirit [which] brings out people’s subversive strength motivating a move beyond passive consumption’.

In the face of the dominant club culture, and despite the term’s appropriation by unscrupulous promoters (prompting an ironic ‘Death of Doof’ party in NSW in 1997), ‘doof’ continues to be applied to non-profit community events, often held outdoors in remote regions where all-night dancing to a range of electronic musics transpire.

The northern coast of NSW has been significant in the emergence of doofs. Events held on moon cycles and solstices, populated by ‘feral hippy frequency cults’ have been operated by the likes of experimental arts collective Electric Tipi since 1992. Influenced by psychedelic parties in eighties Goa, accommodating fire twirlers, didj players, chai tents and tipis, ‘bush doofs’ around Lismore and Byron Bay have been laboratories for experimenting with alternative states of consciousness, especially through the use of LSD and other entheogens. With northern NSW and southern QLD coast psy-trance orientated parties in mind, Des Tramacchi has offered a definition of doof as a space where:

- a diverse spectrum of people gather to celebrate psychedelic community and culture, as expressed through characteristic psychedelic arts and music, and where people are free to explore alternate states of consciousness in a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment. The experience of autonomy is sought through the symbolic suspension or rejection of state imposed structures. Participants seek to dissolve conventional limitations on imagination and thought, momentarily inhabiting artificial islands of heterogeneity and exploration where novel connections and affiliations are forged and experimental social forms are incubated.

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26 Free, minimal charge or by donation, these events operate independently from the co-opting power of corporate capitalism. They are essentially non-profit and sometimes community activist fundraisers. On occasion, event-returns are desired to finance alternative Free NRG schemes.
28 Tramacchi ‘Field Tripping’, p.203.
Inscribed in this protean liminal moment can be detected something of doof’s greater social significance—for it implies an experience where music and other artistic contributions (lighting, sculptures, fireworks, theatre) possess a ‘use value’, where conventional spectator/star roles are not easily filled. Here, according to Hakim Bey, the artist is not a special sort of person, but every person is a special sort of artist.29 Yet, it goes further than this. Not to be dismissed as realms of ‘psychedelic materialism’—the ‘voracious greediness’ and ‘pleasure-principled acquisitiveness’ Reynolds sees characterising house30—here are social thresholds where voluntarism, a basic co-operativism, is encouraged in all members of the doof population (such that ideally, along with the dismantling of the passive spectator/genius performer divide, a punter/organiser divide collapses). In the doof, sound and lighting equipment, décor, food, technical skills and labour are often volunteered. The doof is therefore what Bey would call an ‘Immediatist’ art-enclave—non-hierarchical, not represented by corporate media, non-commoditised. It is thus like the idyllic participatory rave, which Gaillot called the contemporary non-ideological ‘laboratory of the present’, where all are active participants in the art ‘work’.31

The doof, thus approximates the anarcho-liminal TAZ, which Bey likens to ‘an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it’.32 The imputed invisibility of such an instance is, however, problematic when it is understood that the doof is not necessarily an act of ‘disappearance’ from ‘the Grid of Alienation’ but, especially as it spills over into a ‘direct action’ (like Reclaim the Streets or a forest road blockade), becomes highly mediated. In such cases, the intention is to attract the major networks, raise public awareness and influence policy through staged events and symbolic gestures. Mediation may be achieved through the use of camcorders, samplers, mini-disc players, zine production, html editing and data streaming by activists themselves, but the success of an event-action is often gauged by the occurrence of non-pejorative mainstream mediations.33 Here, techno is therefore deployed in the service of alternative ‘truths’. This is techno as political agency.

29 Bey TAZ, p.70.
32 Bey TAZ, p.101.
33 Also, while maintaining mobility beyond the knowledge of state bodies may be necessitated by legal circumstances in the UK and the US, in Australia it is questionable that a complete break from the state implied by the utopic TAZ is necessary or desirable. There are cases, for instance, where negotiating with state bodies, such as fire, health, Environmental Protection Authorities, and Aboriginal Land Councils may be necessary, and indeed sound practice.
The doof is a post-rave phenomenon with complex origins that can be traced through bohemian and agitational strands of (sub)cultural history. There is a long history of licentious enclaves pushing the social envelope. While doof’s more immediate bohemian origins include the UK’s underground ‘acid house’ scenes of the late eighties, and gay African American ‘house’ and ‘disco/garage’ scenes in Chicago and New York, we should also look to new traveller festivals, along with the funk and reggae and Northern Soul scenes. More distant, yet most formative, are those ‘psychedelic symphonies’ of the American sixties, the Acid Tests conducted by Ken Kesey’s Merry Prangsters. The lineage can be traced further back to other all-nighters, especially those of the 1920s Jazz era, which, in Australia, included the Artist’s Balls at the Sydney Town Hall or the French discotheques, like those operating in Nazi occupied Paris in WWII. The theme of transgression underpins and connects these historical moments. In these unregulated spaces, in these ‘gaps in the calendar’, the undisciplined body could safely submit to forbidden sounds. Western cultural history reveals such Dionysia to possess a perennial quality, and may have had their archetype in the clamour of the medieval carnival and market place which, as Bakhtin explained, licensed ‘temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order … [marking] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions’.

But doof’s oppositional potential is not exhausted by any ‘valorization of the moment’. The free party doof owes much to the development of UK sound system culture. With early influences from the emigrant Carribean sound system tradition, and links to nuclear disarmament activism, squatting, and the kind of experimental art and salvage Situationism for which the Mutoid Waste Co had become renowned, the culture took on a creative anarcho-punk trajectory. Holding free warehouse and outdoor dance parties, early sound systems Spiral Tribe, DIY Collective and Exodus were central to the free party explosion. With their motto ‘Peace, Love, Unity, Struggle’, Luton’s Exodus channelled party proceeds into self-help projects, squatted local buildings transforming them into informal community centres and housing co-operatives—such as HAZ (Housing Action Zone) manor.

Sound system free parties proliferated in the early nineties, seemingly reaching a crescendo with the Castlemorton ‘mega-rave’ of 1992, where the apparent traveller/raver connection was forged. Following the CJA, exiled ‘tech-nomad’ circuses toured Europe, North America and Australia. Spiral Tribe staged Teknivals in Europe from 1994, threw techno fiestas in Bologna and toured the US in 1997. Desert Storm and Dubious Sound System held free dance parties in Bulgaria and Bosnia. More recently, elements of Bedlam (and Negusa Negast) toured the US, Australia and East Timor.
CREATIVE RESISTANCE — ‘A SOUND SYSTEM FOR ALL’

Post-rave culture is largely characterised by a party/protest alliance championed by various strands of a new multimedia-savvy ‘carnival of protest’ movement in the west. The synergetic potential of techno and politics became evident in the mid-nineties when the Advance Party network and an umbrella group of free party rigs, United Systems, mobilised in attempts to oppose the UK Criminal Justice Bill, Act, and its aftermath. In Australia, a growing party/protest movement was strengthened when Circus Vibe Tribe emerged from the Chippendale anarcho-punk collective Jellyheads in 1993. Holding free (illegal), events in both Sydney and Victoria Parks, and ‘Reclaiming the Beach’ at La Perouse, Vibe Tribe were a sound system amplifying the view that ‘any politics of techno must also be a politics of action’.

As the Reclaim the Streets (RTS) and Carnival against Capitalism non violent direct action phenomenon gained momentum throughout the nineties, a new popular mode of mass protest was on the ascent. As a principal strategy in the mass rejection of corporate globalisation, direct action has been described as a ‘performance where the poetic and the pragmatic join hands’. The creative resistance of such might involve blockades, street theatre, freestyle rapping, sound clashes, graffiti, zine distribution and infectious subvertising—it is the ‘imagination rigorously applied’. While there have been various RTS actions in Australia, the ‘crown’ achievement of creative resistance transpired at S11 around the barricaded perimeter of Kerry Packer’s Crown Casino when a World Economic Forum meeting was blockaded between September 11-13 2000.

42 In 1994, Advance Party organised marches, and street parties - the first on May Day where Desert Storm sound system pumped house rhythms in Trafalgar square, and then in October, an estimated 100,000 people converged in central London. See Collin, Altered State, p.230-1.
43 Chan, ‘Bubbling Acid’, p.68.
From Jabiluka to S11, the sound system has become an effective tool, a motivator of collective dissent. Peter Strong, aka DJ Morphism, of Sydney band Non Bossy Possy and the Ohms not Bombs collective, thinks the partying and the protest are inseparable. He points out that during the mid-nineties when ‘dance party culture needed something to dance for’ and political causes needed ‘more cavalry’, the sound system provided the answer. Further to this, holding a ‘cut and paste mentality’ and wielding a sampler, Strong’s idea has been to ‘radicalise the dance floor with music laced with social and political themes’. In a production with diverse influences from punk to hip hop, ‘sounds themselves can be liberated’: a ‘lively bleep once held prisoner by an oppressive track is free to dance to a different beat. Evil lyrics of consumption, fear and greed can be detourned and mutated into statements of joyful resistance’. Strong is not alone in developing a sonic mediated dissidence. Sydney’s Organarchy Sound Systems, for instance, are known for creating ‘collages of hard dancebeatz and political sample-mania’. And, according to founder Baz B, the original vision for URB (Urban Renegade Broadcasting), which later became PsybURBia, was a ‘political radio station that would broadcast propaganda with beats under it’. Under the roof of what Strong calls ‘agit-house’, participants are simultaneously dancing and getting an education. Doofers may thus embody their politics, an experience which complicates the act of dancing. If raving is a ‘refusal’ of ‘logocentric imperatives’, a moment of pre-linguistic pleasure, where a ‘crowd of people [immerse] themselves in a collective experience of the materiality of music, each individual losing themselves in shared ecstasy whose medium is bass and rhythm’, agit-house pulls members of the massive towards the edge of the dance floor.

46 http://www.omsnotbombs.org 
49 John Jacobs and Peter Strong ibid, 1995/96. 
50 http://reflect.cat.org.au/organarchy 
51 Kol Dimond — from interview with the author. 
53 Gilbert and Pearson, Discographies, p.60.
Aurality does not exhaust the means via which dissidence is mediated within such environments. Visual artists (VJs) are an important element of the ‘sound system’, image and filmic montages often deployed as an accompaniment to the sonic manifesto. With the intention of subverting what they perceived to be ‘a dance music culture dominated by conservative ideas and devoid of an alternative content’, the experimental video performance group Subvertigo, who formed in Sydney in 1992, create ‘a hectic realtime mix of psychotronic agit-footage cut-up, and hypnoblobic video feedback live to the beat of the DJ’.54 And rather than just synching sound with the visuals, electronic artists in turn sample sounds from accompanying visual footage—generating, according to Sean Healy, ‘significant audiovisual fusions’.55

Labrats sound system advance to a further level, their vehicle consisting of audio (electronic music with voice samples and raps) and visual (a wind powered cinema screening activist footage)56 components which together facilitate the multi-mediation of current issues and events—a process which itself represents a remarkable level of playback-immediacy. When compared with a ‘culture which places more emphasis on the pursuit of jouissance than any other in living memory’,57 ‘political partying’—a kind of multimedia culture jamming—facilitates affect and meaning. And the multiple-functionality of such systems indicate something of the dual meaning of the phrase ‘sound system’. The systems ‘bring the sounds’, and bodies respond to the bass and rhythm. But they also carry a message—in voice samples programmed into a rhythm (or emceed by rappers) and visuals accompanying the beat—representing a crew’s or individual’s desire to disseminate fragments of an ideology, to evict spectators from their comfort zones, to achieve a shift in consciousness—a ‘sound system for all’.

Politically engaged techno-propagandists, digital artists like Strong, the members of Subvertigo, Organarchy or Labrats, are ‘techno-rebels’ whose ‘rebellion’ is not equivalent to a refusal of meaning, their multi-mediations not denoting withdrawal. Nor is the oppositional principle to their contributions restricted to independent production and distribution methods alone, or exhausted by notions of ‘aesthetic innovation’ or ‘progressive’ futurist prophecy, the vague defining characteristics of ‘techno-rebels’—a phrase lifted from Toffler’s The Third Wave, adopted by the first wave of Detroit techno artists and championed in recent mediations.58 Articulated within community and direct action contexts, these ‘works’ are efforts at disseminating alternative values and practices. Following Balliger, these ‘oppositional music practices’ attempt to ‘generate social relationships and experience which can form the basis of a new cultural sensibility and, in fact, are involved in the struggle for a new culture’.59 By contrast to the near monolithic ‘rave’—thought to propose no ‘new meanings capable of renewing the configurations of contemporary community’ and where demand for ‘a shared present’ conveys ‘an imperative not to give in to the future’60—such interventions appropriate technology in order to ‘reclaim the future’.

54 Subvertigo: http://www.sysx.org/vsv/subvertigo
56 Shot by amateur ‘camcordistas’—including themselves—perhaps compiled in their mobile ‘edit suite’. Labrats: http://lab-rats.tripod.com
57 Gilbert and Pearson Discographies, p.66.
60 Gaillot Multiple Meaning Techno, p.17, 25.
Techno-Tribalism and the Neo-Corroboree

...a collective of strangely appareled sound technicians ... stroking keys and twiddling knobs, huddling together and consulting each other in subdued tones while producing a cascade of melting acid riffs to twist the mind of the most diligent of bank clerks. Accompanying this seething mass of technology was a division of drummers, thumping out organic grooves on Jembays (sic) and assorted smaller percussive devices ... The cunningly gnomish technicians would bring out microphones and pick up snatches of ambient conversation and laughter from around the tent and then loop it and warp it into pulsating tendrils of liquid sound. In the center of the space was an enormous hunk of machinery with a cathode ray oscilloscope set in it. It was some kind of spectrum analyser which the goblins would hook up to one instrument at a time, producing a 3D analysis of the sound on the screen, a blue curve on a red grid. It was hypnotic and needless to say I fell under its spell for an indeterminate length of time, fascinated by the process of mapping sound in 3 dimensions.61

Experimental electronic music collective Clan Analogue, described here at Victoria’s Technofest March ’97, demonstrate that Australia has become fertile territory for the growth of diverse ‘techno tribes’. By such, I mean mobile social units like sound systems, performance troupes, experimental music and alternative media collectives implicated in an alternative technocultural network. Challenging a prevailing view of disenchanted and alienated youth, these inspired and proactive extropians are committed to a range of concerns—from the production of avant-garde soundscapes to the reduction of greenhouse gases, from non-corporate music production and distribution to media co-operatives, from enabling community space to organising and running benefits, from a nuclear free planet to a free Tibet. Post-rave technotribes are a technocultural variant of ‘neotribes’, which Michel Maffesoli explains are elective, unstable and fluid micro-cultures of sentiment and aestheticisation.62

61 Rufus Lane, email in Kronic Oscillator XV 1997: http://www.clananalogue.org
to elective consumption strategies, youth cultural formations grew independent from the structural determination (particularly class) and rigid characterisation of youth ‘subculture’. Consistent with ‘neotribalism’, technotribes are interconnected in a network, each node representing a possible site of belonging for contemporary nomads, achieving their fullest (sometimes only) expression in the party, the festival, the TAZ, the direct action, the doof, or, as it is often designated, the ‘corroboree’. Yet, such contemporary youth formations are also configurations of ‘DiY culture’, which George McKay describes as an oppositional movement. Fashionably committed to pleasure and politics, such new formations are not disengaged from the political (as in Maffesoli), but harbour ideological agendas reflecting an ecological sensibility, and non-exploitative, non-colonialist, attitudes.

The rough ethical-consumerist orientation which sometimes unites such neotribes operates within a climate of technical proficiency and artistic skill. Progressively accessible and affordable technologies, new digital audio and video developments and computer mediated communications are harnessed in local, national and global interventions. Technotribes have taken advantage of new technologies enabling decentralised production (eg. MIDI and CD burners), and the internet has been popularly harnessed as a support mechanism in efforts to ‘transcend state-regulated cartographies’. Websites are used by all as promotional devices, to advertise event locations, communicate philosophies and as portals for email subscription, mailing lists, newsletters and web-zines. The internet also facilitates independent music distribution via streaming audio and MPEG-Level III (or mp3) compression. Organarchy Sound Systems, for example, have set up a ‘public domain sound archive’ (‘mpfree’) where demo tracks are hosted as freeware. The site is made available by Cat@lyst, a Sydney collective committed to providing internet access to community activists, who were responsible for creating the open-source self-publishing software used by Indymedia. Furthermore, the digital sampling and recording technology mastered by the likes of Organarchy and the wider electro-milieu, enables creative pirating of public domain media debris on a scale which represents a serious challenge to the concept of copyright.

Within a collective framework, some ‘tribes’ facilitate skill and resource sharing. Originating in Sydney in 1992, and now with nodes in nearly every Australian capital, Clan Analogue is an experimental electronic arts collective consisting of sound composers, visual artists, coders, DJs, video artists, writers and designers. According to Jon Holdsworth (aka Purple World) from Clan Analogue Melbourne, manifesting with different lineups and studio techniques, Clan resembles UK 4AD label’s This Mortal Coil. Clan Analogue began as an ensemble of enthusiasts valuing the ‘tonal richness, controllability and flexibility’ of analogue drum machines and synthesisers. Following the digitalised simulation of the early analogue instruments throughout the nineties, Scot Art (aka

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64 http://reflect.cat.org.au/mpfree
65 http://www.cat.org.au
67 http://www.clananalogue.org

Acquired from www.ozauthors.com.au
Nerve Agent) informs me that analogue is ‘a process or a state of being’, apparently not distant from the idea of a collective, or a network of circuit paths. According to Scot, ‘a single transistor alone can only do so much … it needs a circuit, other transistors, to operate’. Not ‘digital creatures’, humans ‘are analogue wetware, a chemical-electrical circuit that exists in a network (society, nature) that allows these circuits to connect … to “oscillate” or otherwise display behaviour in accordance to … electro-magnetic theory’. As a social circuit board, Clan enables the building of networks by providing members with access to equipment, knowledge and advice, along with the opportunity to play live and co-produce music.

Despite the privileged position of males within electronic music culture, women are heavily involved in the production of post-rave technoculture in Australia. Heir to something of the DiY punk influenced ‘grrrl power’ or ‘riot girl’ movement of the early nineties, which saw the formation of all or majority-women bands in the alternative music scene, and specialist zines—examples of young women ‘marking a new feminist space for themselves’—there are increasing numbers of female electronic musicians and deejays including those volunteering their services in Free NRG fundraisers. Refusing to ‘scribble quietly in the corner’, Melbourne’s Nicole Lowrey (aka DJ Toupee) recently set up Femmebots as an online directory of ‘techno Femme Fatales’ (female deejays and producers).

Other attempts have been made to contest the subordinate role of women in electronic music culture. For instance, a project to realise ‘women powered gigs’ with an ‘inclusory vibe’, Sisters @ the Underground grew from Clan Analogue in early 1996 and represented dissatisfaction on the part of some women with male dominated decision making processes within the collective.

More recently, Chicks with Decks, a forum, then all-female deejay crew, emerged in Sydney. Women have also been heavily involved in seeding and facilitating events. Take for example, Jilly the Dragonqueen (Jilly Magee) who has assisted the operation of many Queensland events, though probably most known for originating Dragonflight which, between new year 96/97 and 99/00, attracted a host of Brisbane’s underground artists.

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69 http://www.femmebots.com

70 S@U, Sisters @ The Underground, Sporadical no4, 1997, p.24.
The ideological, spiritual and hedonistic traits of DiY technotribes are imagineered into a range of doofs that, like Dragonflight, are often ‘inter-tribal’ collaborations. These events, sometimes referred to as ‘corroborees’, are festive social networks. ‘Psychedelic communities’, ‘political parties’ or enclaves of ‘disappearance’, they provide a sense of community for culturally estranged youth. Hillgonda Rietveld has described the significance of such events for those similarly dissident, outraged or just outrageous:

For those who feel they have been dislocated in a political sense, made homeless in more ways than one, intense dance parties can provide a strong sense of community. Comparable to Caribbean sound systems, hip hop gatherings, gospel congregations or gay clubs. At times, the cultural output of the DiY dance scene seems to take on a cultural logic which in some way is comparable to migrant and diasporic communities.71

This sense of a shared exiled status is a fitting description for many Australian doofs. Industrial hard core orientated event ‘The Real Fuck Begin’, held in Sydney for New Year 2000/01 by System Corrupt (self-described as ‘anonymous agitators of the global free tekno underworld’) is an example of such.72 Hosting more diverse electronic music styles, along with activist information stalls, a healing zone and various workshops, Melbourne crew Psycorroboree’s annual Gaian Thump demonstrated that such communities can possess a proactive constituency.

72 http://www.systemcorrupt.com

Implying association with Aboriginal inter-tribal gatherings, ‘corroboree’ is a widely used trope designating something like an authentic ‘tribal’ or ‘sacred’ experience. The sacrality of an event is further augmented via the acknowledgement of the region’s indigeneity and, not unlike that transpiring in other contemporary Australian public events (ie. the Sydney Olympics and the opening of Museum Victoria), being welcomed (or ‘opened’) by indigenous authorities effectively validates the experience. Such was apparently the
case at Earthstomp 99, imagineered by WA’s Tribe of Gaia—whose boundaries are ‘defined by gravity and biosphere, not illusions like nationhood or class’. Earthstomp was held on the Easter full moon at Indjidup — described as ‘a respected place, a meeting place, a Dreaming place’. For co-ordinator Denise Groves:

I felt it was very important that Earthstomp had an indigenous component as a recognition that we, the Aboriginal peoples—the first peoples—have been the custodians of Australia for over 50,000 years...I feel tribal gatherings are a great way to foster co-existence, and couldn’t help but feel an overwhelming sense of pride and honour when the Wardani elders welcomed Earthstomp participants onto their land.\textsuperscript{73}

Transpiring over several days and nights, participants at ‘techno-corroborees’ like Gaian Thump and Earthstomp are more\textit{ inhabitants} than ‘punters’. Accommodating multiple ‘tribes’ committed to varying technical, artistic, esoteric and pedagogic pursuits, they are each like a festive-matrix enabling neophytes to gravitate towards variant social nodes, to ‘plug in’ to new meme and sound sources. Such can be highly inspirational. Replete with mysterious pathways leading to\textit{ cul-de-sacs} of untold weirdness and grottos of arcane aurality, the topography encourages novices to stray into unfamiliar territory. Enabling oscillation between on-site nodes, the subterranean technopolis may also condition a kind of ‘inter-tribal’ promiscuity—leading to hybrid identities and further collaborations.

The new ‘corroborees’ are sites where ultimate concerns are celebrated, dramatised or demonstrated. An environmental ethos is a particularly pervasive concern in post-rave culture. It is not uncommon to witness ecological ethics expressed in party promotions where for example, the phrase ‘leave nothing behind ... tread lightly’ conveys respect for the natural environment.\textsuperscript{74} Some events possess a distinct earth honouring theme. Earthstomp 99, for example, was a ‘forum for any inhabitant to give ecstatic homage to their planet’.\textsuperscript{75} But clearing up after a party or celebrating the planet’s beauty is not nearly enough for those on a more pragmatic quest to combine pleasure with politics. Planting native trees and cranking it up, Melbourne’s Tranceplant collective have, along with their Queensland compatriots Scleromorph,\textsuperscript{76} emerged to operate Australia’s ‘Environmental Sounds Events’. Other technotribal convergences dramatise issues relating to the activities of the forest and mining industries, and are often designed to fund campaigns mounted in opposition to these industries. Furthermore, with the emergence of intercultural gatherings in recent times, technotribes have demonstrated their support for Aboriginal communities and their causes. For instance, on ‘Invasion Day’ (Australia Day) 2000, the Ohms not Bombs ‘Free NRG convoy’ traveled to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra to assist in activities commemorating the Aboriginal Declaration of Sovereignty which had been presented to the federal government on the 28th January 1992.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{73} Kelly Rowe and Denise Groves, ‘Earthstomp ’99’, in Dearling and Hanley\textit{ Alternative Australia}, pp.159-61.

\textsuperscript{74} It is often argued that this is compromised when ‘sensitive environments’ are subjected to 12 hours+ of thumping bass.

\textsuperscript{75} Rowe and Groves ibid, p.160.


\textsuperscript{77} Free NRG tour 2000: http://www.omsnotbombs.org/index2.htm

Acquired from
www.ozauthors.com.au
In 2000, the Earthdream technomadic protest-theatre had also realised considerable intercultural dialogue and alliance forming outcomes. In the same spirit, motivated to ‘do something active for reconciliation’, Hocus Focus held Coexistdance at the Lake Tyres Trust Reserve—Bung Yarnda—in Victoria on NYE 2000/01. According to Karl Fitzgerald, who had spent 12 weeks negotiating with traditional owners to gain their permission, the former mission site became a non-violent dance-scape attended by 200 Koories—‘proving again that dancing can free your mind’.  

Demarcated zones of wonder and beauty, moments of transcendence, connection and purpose, ‘techno-corroborees’—especially trance events—are commonly felt to possess a religious ambience—to be potent sources of spiritual replenishment and maturity. This is most famously a characteristic of Earthdance, described as ‘a global dance party for world peace and healing’. From its inception in 1997 to 1999, the event focused on the plight of the Tibetan people, and in 2000 expanded to include other significant global causes though remaining ‘a united global dancefloor’ held in multiple locations simultaneously. Earthdance climaxes with a synchronized dance-floor link-up when a specially recorded song, ‘The Prayer for Peace’, is played at every event on the planet at 12 midnight GMT: ‘Morning in the Australian rainforest, midnight in London, afternoon in San Francisco and sunrise over the Himalayas—the global link-up is a profound and powerful moment that focuses the intention of millions of people on the affirmation of global peace’. Funds raised are donated to humanitarian causes. In 2000, events transpired in 71 cities in 33 countries, with Earthdance Sydney raising funds for Land Care Australia to maintain and improve the water quality in the Wollondilly River Catchment. 

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79 http://www.earthdance.org
The spiritual dimension to such events has evolved from the consciousness raising element of preceding ‘summers of love’. ‘Spirit’ here is often thought to lie at the junctures of cyber and body technologies—computers and psychedelics—and to be consequent to youth cultural experimentation with such ‘cyberdelic’ devices. Experimental esoteric landscapes, doofs may effect personal ‘peak experiences’ as the following memory of Technofest ‘97 intimates:

There were some moments which overwhelmed me completely — standing swaying on the edge of the waterhole, illuminated by swirling projections looking out at a performance which completely blurred the line between hallucination and theatre. Across the water amongst the twisted roots of a dead tree was a big industrial harp made of iron pipes and wire. Strumming the harp was a postapocalyptic cyberchick, lurching and plucking like a demented animal. Emerging slowly from the murky water was some kind of skeletal bovine mask. He would emerge slowly from the water as if entranced by the siren playing the harp. He would then slowly submerge only to rise again from another part of the waterhole. It was really too much for this humble raver, I had to look around for friends to help me deal with it and ended up lying on my back in the dust, grinning with disbelief.

Such epiphanies mark transitions, and perhaps become rites of passage into new states of being. Interactive ritual-theatre installations built into doof foundations borrow from a cornucopia of floating signifiers and iconographical traditions. The panorama of indigenous and ‘traditional’ belief systems and practices which inspired what ‘zippie’ Frazer Clark had called a ‘shamanistic inspired anarchy’ or ‘shamanarchy’, seems to have provided similar inspiration for the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre Company’s Labyrinth installations. Designed by Chaos Magician Orryelle—who once proclaimed ‘Fuck the Patriarchy; Fuck the Matriarchy; Let’s just have An -archy!’—the Labyrinths were interactive ritual initiation cycles weaving a multi-cultural and multi-subcultural tapestry of ancient mythologies and modern technology’.81

Commentators expound upon the spiritual potential of ‘enviroteque’ trance events as rituals of communion. That such events occasion a non-differentiated experience, a kind of temporary techno-communitas, transcending the boundaries between self and other is championed by many.82 Psy-trance aficionado Ray Castle, asserts that outdoor parties ‘celebrate an experiential celestial electro-communion—a participation mystique—with the numinous oneness and interconnectivity of all creation’.83 According to Kathleen Williamson, while sounds produced by the likes of Castle constitute ‘the new epic poetry’, trance dance ‘is the “coming of age” ritual which Western culture has long forgotten’. For Williamson, in the doof, ‘tekno anarcho-activists understand the power of the gnosis of trance, and may use lots of tricks and techniques to “direct” the energy of the dance’. While sound is the chief means by which transcendence and inner-knowledge may be achieved in such contexts, ‘artists have also buried crystals

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80 Lane ibid.
81 From the ‘ticket’ for the ConFest Easter ’97 Labyrinth. See: http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au/lab.html
83 Castle ibid, p.146.
under dance areas, used static visual art or computer generated visuals, and in particular [have investigated] … the symbology and iconography of ancient magickal and spiritual traditions’. Furthermore, in ‘reviving lost traditions’ and investing them with ‘new technological innovation’, the dance rite constitutes an answer to modern distancing from natural world rhythms:

Our convenient industrial cultures have practically negated our direct relationship with the earth and its seasons and cycles, and it seems that there is less and less reason to rely on, let alone investigate our instinctual being. Our experiences with sound, psychedelics and the dance ritual are the stirrings of communicating via the ebb and flow of the earth’s rhythms and letting it seep into our collective emotions.84

Eugene ENRG, aka DJ Krusty, traces the collective paroxysm of trance dance back to its putative Pagan or ‘tribal’ origins.85 Involving the assumption of an ‘Earth presence’, there is a prevailing chthonic aspect to this dance philosophy. Krusty informs that ‘energy’ located in and channeled from the Australian landscape is responsible for the ecstatic states associated with outdoor doofs:

I think there’s a sense of the spirit of the land. This land we now call Australia has a real spirit to being stomped. And if you’ve ever watched Aboriginal dance, its very much about stomping the earth ... if you watch techno ... it’s very much about stomping the earth .... [it] brings energy into the body, Earth energy into the body.86

INHABITING SPACE

‘Stomping’ is a significant means of inhabiting space, whether forest, desert, beach, park, warehouse or street. Dancescape occupation can be an imaginative process of appropriating, inverting, dwelling in and marking out place. This is especially significant to the DiY scene, as doofs are often reported to reclaim public space. While the proliferating nineties Reclaim the Streets campaign represents an exemplary process of inverting the meaning and purpose of public space, especially in countries where such demonstrations are anomalous or prohibited,87 these events are not always so public. Like their underground predecessors, informal dance parties have usually been means by which young people mark out local places for themselves—by which space has been rendered significant (inhabited). In the ‘subversive appropriation of cracks in the urban

84 Kathleen Williamson, Trance Magick: http://www.hofmann.org/voices/austrie.html
86 From interview with the author, Dec 1997.

EarthDream2000 Dancefloor, Alberrie Creek South Australia
(Phot. Saskia FotoFolk)

87 RTS road protests are reported to date back to 1971 in London. See D. Wall, Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements, London, Routledge, 1999 p.29.
landscape’, otherwise disused or derelict spaces are transformed, as in the conversion of a meatworks carpark in Sydney’s Alexandria into a youth arts and rehabilitation centre called the Graffiti Hall of Fame, and the sonic squatting performed by Melbourne Underground Development in a post-industrial warehouse complex in Footscray’s Maribyrnong Wharves precinct (the Global Village), or inverted, as in the occupation of the Northcote Bowls Club.

The most renowned occupation of public space in Australia is probably Vibe Tribe’s frequent revisitation upon Sydney Park opposite St Peter’s Railway Station, Sydney, where, in April 1995, their Freequency party was violently dispersed by police. Perhaps the most spectacular urban pirate utopia transpired in Melbourne in February 2000, when under the Westgate overpass, a temporary free-state was populated in close visual proximity to the city. A marginal ‘edutainment’ complex complete with multiple dance floors, kitchen and info stall, System Malfunction was designed to raise funds for the upcoming Earthdream mission. Amplifying drum ‘n’ bass and ragga roots from a concrete platform forming the base of a huge girder, international sound systems Bedlam (UK), Negust Negast (UK) and SPAZ (US) joined forces with local sonic mobs Ohms Not Bombs and Labrats who set up separate dance floors and an ‘activist chill lounge’ respectively. At the edge of the metropolis, under the shadow of one of the country’s largest bridges, through the night and into the day, alternative cultural territory was carved out—an island of freedom incubating transgressive transactions and enabling progressive awareness raising transmissions.

88 http://www.graffitihalloffame.com
89 Quote is from Chris Gibson 1997, ibid. The Graffiti ‘Hall’, an ‘anarchic headquarters for the self-empowerment of unemployed youth’ closed down by the pro-residential development South Sydney Council in March 2000 after a prolonged court battle, was founded by ‘underground saint’ Tony Spanos - who has also supported Ohms Not Bombs, funded wildstyle mural projects in Redfern, Newtown and Erskinville, and sponsored various Aboriginal sports programs and music workshops. Mick Daley, ‘Under Siege: Graffiti Hall of Fame’, Sydney City Hub, 2nd March 2000.

When four hundred people were transported on a ferry to Shark Island, 2 kms from shore in Sydney’s Rose Bay on February 18 1996 for Cryogenesis’s biannual day time ‘avante-garde chillout project’, they experienced something more than a literal ‘island of freedom’. Special K describes the transportation as something like a ‘rite of passage’ to ‘this essentially Sydney space, magically incorporating its cityscape and the amniotic fluid of the harbour offering rebirth and renewal’. Disembarking, the denizens of those confined spaces of ‘timelessness and eternal night’, inner city nightclubs and raves, awoke ‘into the finite daytime … into public visible space’. On Shark Island:

temporal hours of sunlight ruled over all and the children of technology were forced to obey the laws of nature once more … The day provided stimulation for all bodily senses, the eyes and ears being privileged by the combined landscape, seascape and soundscape. In more subtle ways the senses of smell, touch and taste were also stimulated by the environment. The taste and smell of seaspray, fresh air, marijuana and increasingly warm alcohol, the feel of grass, sand, water and rocks under feet temporarily freed from the bounds of shoes. These senses also evolved throughout the day for many as other chosen stimulants altered states of mind and added to the sense of occasion, of celebration and of physical and mental travel away from the everyday.99

The outdoor journey which potentiates connection to the natural environment is a recurrent and important theme. As Tramacchi points out, the ‘location of doofs in an ecological environment promotes a sense of linking the doof community to the landscape and allows the occurrence of spontaneous mystical bonds with nature’.93 Perhaps such bonding is enabled as metropolitan inhabitants are transported from inner city ‘pleasure prisons’ to Free NRG outdoor dancescapes.

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91 Cryogenesis began in 1993 as the event-organisation of Sub Bass Snarl sound system (www.snarl.org) who originated in Sydney in 1991/92. Since 1995, Cryogenesis has organised Sydney’s Freaky Loops Festival raising funds for Sydney Community Radio 2SER.


CONCLUSION

By the time dance/rave culture escalated in Australia, the particular form of nocturnal rebellion which rave represented had emerged as a fashionable form of youth resistance. Raving had become a marketable leisure pursuit—and the quality of subversion it offered was obtainable in regulated doses at a steadily increasing price. Moreover, the ‘subversive’ dimensions it possessed were in large part imported from a country where a generation of youth had had their practices—dancing all night to a filthy rhythm—heavily legislated against, effectively politicising activities that were often not necessarily oppositional or radical. Despite two terms of conservative government, the regulation of dance practices in Australia does not resemble the UK experience. While the comparatively vast landmass and relatively sparse population seem to be central to this comparison, the distinctive qualities of Australian ecological and cultural history, upon which the Howard and preceding Governments have made their mark, have triggered a response in contemporary youth cultures. An influential UK DiY movement notwithstanding, Australia’s geophysical, historical and political landscape has given form to a radicalism inscribed in local post-rave culture. The continuing threat to high conservation value areas, rainforests and wetlands, a burgeoning uranium industry, an indigenous rights movement and the struggle for independence, meaning and legitimacy are issues significant to a growing population of young Australians.
So say the transgressive ever-morphing edge-dwellers of Australian tekno-dance culture, where media activists engage in information war against government and corporate control. This chapter examines the role of the activist media, specifically self-published print zines and web or e-zines emanating from the Australian tekno fringe. Following a brief history of zines, it discusses activist tekno media’s response to commercial culture, production techniques and philosophies, followed by an examination of this media’s interest in sustainable community, new spirituality and participatory communication.

We’re psycho-chemical-regurgitated-bastard children working for a reprogrammable future. We can’t escape our creation, our legacy, can’t return to an archaic past or escape to a synthetic future. We have to confront what we have become and why. Like early organisms in a changing environment, we experiment with new collectivities, fields of being ... We reconcile culture as nature and our history plays as an alchemical psycho process through stages of realization.¹

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¹ Skitzo Serene, “Mutants Travel”, Since the Accident #2, Spring 1995.
What the hell is a ‘zine’ anyway? According to massive zine review chronicle, *Factsheet 5*, zines promote freedom of expression, individual and communal power, the value of diversity, and non-commercial opportunities in self-expression. They appear as low-budget self-published media, usually photocopied, printed or web-based, and distributed via mail order, through web-based distributors or over the counter at alternative stores, but mostly via word of mouth. Activist tekno zines are often disseminated at parties—the creative focal point for dance culture— or wind-up in community radio stations, alternative food, music, book or clothing businesses, in nightclubs, cafes and pubs, and even beside free street entertainment press. Some welcome subscriptions and produce regular editions, while others only appear now and again, or perhaps as a one-off. Some zines resurrect after years of hibernation. They may appear exclusively as virtual or print media or a combination of both.

Profit making rarely motivates zine communities with most publications traded, given away for free, or sold at near cost price. With this freedom from commercial pressure and manipulation by media owners, publishers and advertisers, comes an avalanche of diverse subject matter seldom considered by mainstream mass media. Zines are a community phenomenon, not expensively manufactured ‘popular’ culture.

Western grassroots press has its beginnings with the development of the printing press in 1450, which helped manifest the overwhelming changes in ideas and consciousness of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. The appearance of contemporary zines began with science fiction fanzines in the 1930s. These publications grew out of a desire for people to make contact, network and communicate their peculiar interests. Rob Hansen writes in his British Fanzine Bibliography that the pulp science fiction magazines of the 1920s and ’30s included letter columns from readers. One particular editor started printing the full addresses of letter contributors, which led to them writing to each other, setting up meetings, and to the beginning of a sense of community.

Fanzines emerged out of these sci-fi ‘fan’ communities in the 1930s, initially in the UK and the USA, and included funky titles like: *The Comet, Dawn Shadows, Futurian War Digest, Interplanetary News*, and *Mighty Atom*. Many contemporary zines, including those found on the activist tekno fringe demonstrate these original motivations of networking and communicating.

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2 electroidrive@hotmail.com, “‘Zine???” You Say?”, http://www.tbus.net/electrocution/zineblurb
3 *Factsheet 5*, http://www.factsheet5.com/History.html
5 Rob Hansen, rob@fiawol.demon.co.uk, ‘British Fanzine Bibliography’, http://www.fiawol.demon.co.uk/biblio/
Developments in media technologies have directly contributed to the explosion of self publishing in the 1980s and 1990s via cheap and accessible photocopying machines, inexpensive personal computers, desk top publishing computer software, as well as the emergence of the internet. Part of the alternative political and cultural publishing continuum in the West, Australian tekno activist media links to the underground political press of the 1960s and ‘70s. Some of the more well known include the UK’s International Times, Seed and Fifth Estate from the US, and the infamous Oz magazine\(^6\) whose Australian editors were charged with obscenity in 1971.\(^7\)

DiYStory

Contemporary Australian activist media promotes the do-it-yourself (DiY) revival energised via the Punk movement in the 1970s. As outlined in A S Van Dorston’s A History of Punk\(^8\), the DiY ethos is a liberating vision where disaffected youth could create a meaningful, participatory, culture. Grassroots networks and alternative distribution systems, ‘distros’, emerged as part of the Punk DiY surge, reclaiming the realms of creative production from stifling commercial culture. In Australia, the punk distro Spiral Objective\(^9\) doubles as a zine containing articles, art and reviews, and a catalogue of local music and media. Some punk zines, like Maggot Death, Deacle, Nervous Habits and Krankheit reflect the more grotesque, surreal and nihilistic edge of the culture, while Sydney’s Angry People, Loaded to the Gils, and Victim Culture, or Queensland’s Seditious Intent, Humans in the Mushroom Field and Fight Back focus specifically on DiY direct action, networking information, culture jamming, anarchy, animal rights, equality and feminism. Current zines like Personality Liberation Front and No Longer Blind continue this DiY tradition in Australian punk culture.

In the 1980s and ‘90s, other zines spreading the DiY message appeared in various guises including the subversive Brisbane zine The Future Now, and the incredible celebration of DiY energy and diversity exposed through the many issues of Woozy from Melbourne, and its associated zine, music, and video distro, Choozy. More recently, rural based zines like Tribe in Northern NSW, and web-zines such as Activate\(^10\) started by Sydney high school activists in 1998, continue to promote and propagate environmentally and socially aware DiY mutating culture.

Sound system activists, Ohms Not Bombs,\(^11\) note on their webpage: ‘The acid house boom of the late 80s saw a new format and arena for expression, excess and human interaction. Breaking down the barriers of traditional entertainment, the emphasis was placed on the participants of an event, taking the spotlight initially away from the entertainers’. The DiY subcultural tradition surged ahead in the early 1990s in Australia with the appearance of techno community sound system activists, Jellyheads, and later the Vibe Tribe collective which ‘took the concept in a different direction with its

\(^6\) Gerry & Mark, ‘The Rupert Bear Controversy: Defence and Reactions to the Cartoon in the Oz Obscenity Trial’, http://ccub.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/ruptage.html


\(^8\) A S Van Dorston, punk@fastnbulbous.com, ‘The History of Punk, Part II: Punk and Post Punk Subcultures Do It Yourself’, http://www.fastnbulbous.com/punk.htm

\(^9\) Spiral Objective Mail Order, spirolob@adelaide.on.net, http://www.popgun.com.au/spiralobjective/

\(^10\) Activate Anarchist Network, activate@cat.org.au, http://www.activate.8tm.com/index.html

liberationist anarchist politics, free parties and community fundraising dances'. These cyber-radicals and tekno-artists included in their creactive repertoire the Jellyheads newsletter and later, the ongoing series of Sporadical zines featuring an array tricksters intent on planting seeds of DiY and ‘perverting today’s youth’. Sporadical is the photocopied manifesto of an enduring radical voice in Australian dance culture, providing a rallying point for a wide range of grassroots concerns like reclaiming public and private space, sustainable non-profit economies, creative protest, alternative energy and non-hierarchical organisation.

Techno culture, underground parties, community events, and open air dance gatherings have taken up residency as a regular part of our culture. Radical electronic music, contemporary art, performance and community co-creation have created a vibrant cyber-radical techno tribal network … Dissatisfaction with the system is expressed with a more positive communicative bent, mutating, surviving and creating new media and communication networks. When an event is organized a community energy lays down a precedent that the space created is autonomous and free of all prejudice against human individuality and diversity. The ‘safe’ space takes on its own chaotic kinetic vibration, repetitious and non-repetitive sounds are emitted, new artworks displayed, contacts made and non-elitist community aerobics danced till the next day. It is hard for such spaces to be activated at traditional city venues where alcohol dominated spaces transmit the unhappy frequency of style conformity, centralised control and bad attitude security.

The cyber-femme print and web-zine Geekgirl contains a ‘doofstory’ about the Vibe Tribe which outlines the community activism of the collective and its connections to the DiY tradition:

As friendly party energy continues to build, webs of consciousness communicate between groups of like-minded party people. Vibe Tribe was established in 1993, designed to nurture the DiY/DiO (Do-It-Yourself/Do-it-Ourselves) spirit emerging out of the Sydney and Byron Bay regions at the time. Formed by a group of people dedicated to putting on non-commercial, full-powered events, the spirit of punk was sustained and painted fluoro as the techno seismic shift sent its tremors across Australia’s dance floors. The underground party has grown and diversified, despite often being denied access to inner-city spaces. This has energised and motivated a new generation of boffins, freaks, audio alchemists and networking nutters.

13 Sporadical zine online, http://www.omsnotbombs.org/sporadical.html
14 Sporadical, Summer 95/96.
17 mode5@triode.apana.org.au, ‘Vibe Tribe Rave’, Geekgirl #7, p.11.
Since the mid-90s, underground tekno culture has made good use of the explosion in internet availability, and accessible and affordable web technologies as new forms of creative expression, as well as new mediums for information dissemination and interactive organisation. The original purpose of Ausrave\(^{18}\), a national e-mailing list initiated by Rev Simon Rumble, was to discuss raves and rave music ‘back when such beasts existed’. By 2001, Ausrave has evolved into a ‘meeting place, a discussion point of all sorts of things’.\(^{19}\) Email communities like Ausrave, and Adrave\(^{20}\) in Adelaide, initiate and maintain information and social exchange. They debate, discuss, share music resources and reviews, and even form party collectives to organise events.\(^{21}\) Similarly, Michael MD’s long running cyber Site of Party, Rave and Club Information, SPRACI\(^{22}\), spreads local and global awareness about underground parties and music via the community itself, with free access for party collectives to publicise events.

Since 1998, activist tekno media has found new stomping grounds via events like the annual National Young Writer’s Festival\(^{23}\) held in Newcastle and Melbourne’s Media Circus.\(^{24}\) These gatherings mix and promote independent press and media mutators who share, discuss, debate, critique and network.

The Earthdream2000\(^{25}\) journey included a travelling zine library, the Abominable Knowledge Emporium, which materialised near Nepabunna in the Flinders Rangers, the Arabunna Coming Home Camp\(^{26}\) at Lake Eyre, briefly at Alice Springs and finally at the Berrimah warehouse in Darwin. On the same pilgrimage, Pete Strong from Ohms Not Bombs put together a special Earthzine edition of Sporadical while travelling between Coober Pedy, Alice Springs and Sydney.

What role do zines play in the activist media landscape? Both their content and methods of production and dissemination reflect and promote the values of their community. Activists splice up and reconfigure mass media in accordance with their own perspectives. They fuck-up, jam, subvert and unravel belief systems by using corporate symbols,
practices and commodities to perceptually engineer their own meaning. ‘They exploit the rich ambiguities of words, images, identities, commodities and social practices in order to craft protean perspectives, to rupture business as usual, and to stir up new ways of seeing and being in a world striated with invisible grids of technocultural engineering’.

Important debates in the evolution of democratic society, often absent within corporate media, arise in independent self-created media. These zines respond to powerful global media networks, to reliance upon their televisual ‘reality’ and to the associated decline in a culture of critical consciousness. After all, as Marshal McLuhan laments ‘we are all robots when uncritically involved with our technologies’. Activist media rejects long term control over public opinion, and management of the political agenda by business to protect profits. By expertly utilising innovative and traditional media technologies, activists attempt to re-balance the flow of information. Techno-fringe media provides tools for radical organisation and personal exploration, encouraging people to become self-aware, to inform and to experiment in alchemical zones of participation.

Reclaiming the Playground

Tekno activist media is anti-copyright—representing a common sharing of energy and ideas. Production involves copying for non-profit purposes, though often the zines request acknowledgement of the source. There is interest and practice in the fair use of popular culture for sampling, with active encouragement of further copying and dissemination by the recipient. It isn’t about ownership of information and associated profits but rather the availability of ideas and active encouragement for readers to contribute, copy and distribute.

Within DiY media culture the distinction between producer and consumer is fuzzy, as the culture thrives on a participatory horizontal network which assists in breaking down the commodity relationship of regular commercial publishing, as participants share zines and ideas with each other. Hakim Bey suggests in the final issue of the anti-copyright zine, Babyfish Fish Lost its Mama, that the world of commodities separates people and divides communities, that exploration of alternative economies and experiments in living, will (r)evolutionise the way we think and live.

31 Liberated gratefully and without prior permission from Peter Russell, pete@elfrock.demon.co.uk by The Hedonistic Imperative, http://www.hedweb.com/anticopy.htm
32 Hakim Bey, ‘The Marco Polo of the Subunderground’, http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/hakimbey.htm
To deconstruct the negative stereotype media creates about youth, by making our voices heard within the community and throughout society. To be unashamed, and unapologetic for who we are and the way we choose to express ourselves. To educate other generations about positive solutions by living out those solutions in experience and experimentation. Change the world before it changes you, contribute today!34

_Yoghurt_ zine, produced between 1996 and 1997 (a revived issue will be released in 2001) by an innovative youth collective in inner city Brisbane named Connect, shared ideas about how young people can create change in their community. Combining efforts with other grassroots organisations like Youth for Youth, Starving Artists, Radio 4ZZZ35, Focus on Creative Employment, and through producing _Yoghurt_, Connect explore a range of resourceful strategies required to create an empowering community. _Yoghurt_ declares a firm anti-censorship policy:

We believe that censorship does not prevent things from existing, it simply hides them making them more dangerous. Censorship results in ignorance and lack of education. Censorship demonstrates distrust and disrespect for the people the information is being kept from. Censorship prevents people from making an informed choice as to what view they will hold about the information.36

Members of Connect have contributed to the network of underground tekno collectives around South-East Queensland since the mid-90s. Originally the Chai Mamas, they provided food in chill zones at tekno events, and held monthly feasts like the Community Kitchen events. Later as the Chailight Zone and Spin n Jam1 37, the ongoing artist’s autonomous jam space, former members of Connect facilitate a Friday night explosion of electro-inspired spontaneity in inner city Brisbane.

In a fading 10th generation copy of _Copyrant_38 zine johnj@cat.org.au asks: what is originality? What is copyright? Who does it benefit? His examination suggests that our communities prefer to celebrate the supremacy of the profit making individual over the community, to the legal extreme. However, for many artists copyright stultifies the creative process through possession, commodification and separation. Our society tends toward a monoculture where only those with money control art, with copyright disrupting creative community by preventing an atmosphere of trust and cooperation among artists.39 Media activists believe that information piracy ensures equity40 and can result in a context where all can participate in creating meaning.41

35 4ZZZ 102.1 mhz, There’s No Other Radio Station Like It, http://www.4zzzfm.org.au/
39 johnj@cat.org.au, ‘Copyrant’, _Copyrant: The Free Zine with the Cure for Infomortis._
40 ‘This is Information: Piracy on the High Seas’, _Copyrant: The Free Zine with the Care for Infomortis._
41 Lloyd Dunn, ‘Plagiarism is the Negative Point of a Culture that finds its Ideological Justification in the Unique’, _Copyrant: The Free Zine with the Care for Infomortis._
Agitating in response to enforced marginalisation, zine producers combat widespread misinformation usually perpetrated by mainstream media and government. Articles like ‘Everybodies doing it: The Byron Bush Dance’ \(^{44}\) and ‘Peaceman! Policeman? Repetitive Beating at Cybernana’ \(^{45}\) in the Brisbane zine *FreakQuency*, which appeared in 3 issues in 1996, demonstrate that attacks on the party culture seem to derive from little more than misinformation and a determination to frighten people into conformity and obedience to authority. One of the most infamous police busts in Australian tekno culture, the free party *Freequency* \(^{46}\) which occurred in Sydney Park, inner city Sydney, on the 8th April 1995, involved 40 police with batons, riot shields and police dogs who charged the offensive dance floor at 2am. Apparently responding to noise complaints, police arrested 9 people, and 2 others landed in hospital. Two years later, the NSW Ombudsman released a report about police actions at the *Freequency* party. Even though the report failed to order further investigations due to a lack of evidence, it was noted that police did act confrontationally. By 1998, a NSW Government and Police Service Dance Party Code of Conduct \(^{47}\) had been drawn up. However, as Sebastian Chan points out in his article, *The Cops are Jammin’ the Frequency*, \(^{48}\) new battlegrounds appear in the struggle to reclaim community space, and information and education are the keys to future resistance.

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48 Yellow Peril, ‘Hey, the Cops are Jammin’ the Frequency!’, Critical Moments for the Sydney Free Party Scene, http://www.snarl.org/texts/features/freakquency.html
By 1996, local Adelaide tekno communities faced increased harassment by the police and state. *Sub Lumen* zine provides a rallying point for the frustrated culture: ‘I would just like to say get active. This is your freedom we are talking about here. And it is being taken away’. In Queensland *Freakquency* zine discusses the role of police following an incident at Brisbane community radio 4ZZZ’s Cybernana Market Day on 19 October 1996. For over 25 years, 4ZZZ has played a key role in questioning the authoritarian nature of Queensland’s laws, government and police via their ‘agitata, educate and organize’ doctrine, tirelessly supporting local artists of all types, especially music cultures and putting the ‘unity in community’. Making claims to have acted to protect the public from a sudden afternoon storm, on this day police called in reinforcements—including military police and horses—to remove people from the park. 4ZZZ and patrons accused the police of using ‘excessive force’, but a subsequent Criminal Justice Commission report into the incident exonerated police. *Freakquency* speculates that such incidents are merely training exercises for police with ‘young people and music lovers as the guinea pigs’. The law seems to have an unhealthy aversion to such a subculture which gathers outside the regulated boundaries of commercial social space, and demonstrates a very real interest in reclaiming ‘space’, both concrete and abstract.

Radical proponents of autonomy, the sound system collective, Ohms Not Bombs, support grassroots youth experiments in the use of public space. Recent issues of *Sporadical* include a number of articles about the Graffiti Hall of Fame established by Tony Spanos in the early 1990s. Throughout the past decade, the Graffiti Hall provided a grassroots youth space in inner city Sydney to offer direction and encourage creative pursuits for local youth and the wider Sydney community. The webspace documents that the space has launched various projects and initiatives that have positively influenced many people, promoting activities for ‘urban youth (to) channel their creativity into arts, music and sport’. Activists have often squatted or rented empty spaces for workshops, cafes and shops to trade local products and to act as information centres for current environmental campaigns and events, revitalising the neighbourhood by ‘offering workshops to kids in juggling, stick twirling, chakra knowledge and the creation of electronic music … Venues have always been a problem in Sydney where

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50 4ZZZ 102.1 mhz, *There’s No Other Radio Station Like It*, http://www.4zzzfm.org.au
51 Gary Williams (Ed), *Generation Zed: No other Radio like this*, p.70.
54 John and Pete, ‘Radical Raves Reclaim and Liberate Space in Many Dimensions: Is this Raveolution?’, *Freakquency* #2, p.22-23.
55 *Graffiti Hall of Fame*, http://www.graffitihalloffame.com/
56 ‘Spores of Liberation’, *Sporadical* #5, p.4

Acquired from
www.ozauthors.com.au
cops, councils and bureaucracy stand in the way of the creation of autonomous spaces’. Re-zoning to benefit property developers, South Sydney Council closed the Graffiti Hall of Fame to community use in 2000.

In May 2001, the council evicted artists and activists squatting empty council-owned buildings on Broadway in inner-city Sydney. The squatters improved the building and encouraged creative and communal use of the occupied space. Squatspace hoped to highlight the extremely high cost of housing in Sydney, and the wasteful mismanagement of public space perpetrated by government. ‘The opening up of the lucrative market for developers gives us a frightening vision of alienation as the region developed with no plans for improving the quality of life for local residents. What sort of ‘development’ do we want?’ The ‘Don’t board it up! Live it up’ vision of the Squatspace collective enacted a multitude of events, performances and actions, featuring political and experimental multi-media creativity over a number of months, as well as providing affordable workshop and exhibition space to community groups and artists. Warped collage artist, media manipulator, zine maker, and member of the System Corrupt collective, 7U?, was one of many who contributed to an ongoing Squatspace event called Media Jam which continued for a number of weeks leading up to the world-wide anti-globalisation protests on 1 May 2001.

In her Broken Pencil zine article, ‘Photocopied Politics: Zines (Re)Produce a New Activist Culture’, Hilary Clark says that while commercial media is hollow and superficial, the underground press represents an explosion of individual and collective energy—stimulating thought, setting examples and moving towards communities of consensus. Australian activist tekno culture defies such encroaching monoculture, actively generating meaningful media by providing an alternative grassroots documentation of many groundbreaking events and issues usually ignored by corporate media in Australia—including innovations in and use of alternative energy, Aboriginal land rights, the uranium mining industry and other environmental concerns. The first two Earthzine editions include detailed information about Arabunna elder, Kevin Buzzacott’s Walking the Land pilgrimage, as well as the activities surrounding the Aboriginal Tent Embassy established in Sydney at the time of the Olympics. The Earthzines include detailed first-hand accounts of anti-uranium blockades and other direct actions undertaken around Roxby Downs and Beverley mines in May 2000. A manifesto from alternative energy sound system collective, Lab Rats, appears in C.I.A. zine.

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57 Ibid.
62 M1 Alliance, Strike Against Corporate Tyranny, http://www.m1alliance.org/solidarity/default.html
64 Particularly as found in the many issues of Sporadical, as well as the Jellyheads Newsletter, Coughing Up Legging Men, Octarine, Pyrate, Yoghurt, Submerge, Another Bodgy Production and C.I.A.
66 tentembassy@hotmail.com, Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Victoria Park, Cnr City & Parramatta Rds, Broadway Sydney, http://www.graffitihalloffame.com/tent_embassy/tentembmain.html
I have a belief in the universal language of music and its power to unite communities and change the world! This is why we feel it necessary to take it back to the underground. Non profit solar powered underground community organized multimedia electronic experiments. FREE venues of the most acoustically bizarre form. Where the finger of the law and other party pooper oppressors can never catch us … in drains, in tunnels, sewers and sidewalks, keep your ears to the ground for sounds from the underground … get involved!  

Similarly, Yoghurt zine aims to ‘put power in its place and create community control’. The decentralist strategies discussed in this publication include active consensus, developing consciousness, local organisation, creating alternative institutions including zines and other media, trade networks like vegetable cooperatives, and preparation for non-violent resistance.

Zines often focus on promoting active organisation in specific ways, and providing focal points for information exchange. For example, music collective Clan Analogue’s web-zine *kronIc oscillator* and the *Cyclic Defrost* web-zine contain information about music distribution including practical tips on avoiding exploitation by the music industry and starting your own label. The zines are also a networking node for the tekno communities providing a space for discussions, feedback, sharing resources, as well as organising and publicising regular and one-off events. Since 1998, Lex Luthor and Yellow Peril of Snarl Heavy Industries, have produced 15 issues of a print and web-zine called *Cyclic Defrost* which has played an informative role in the evolution of the weekly Frigid club and associated electronic music community which is still growing after 5 years. In 2000, Sebastian Chan (aka Yellow Peril) teamed up with the independent electronic label, eLefant traks, to organise Australia’s inaugural Independent Electronic Labels Conference as an associated event of the This is Not Art festival. Tekno media activists, like Sub Bass Snarl and Clan Analogue recognise the importance of community and connection, sharing ideas and resources.

Zines promote self-education about issues considered taboo by society and suppressed by government. These publications are, after all, based on the premise that people think, and are willing to explore possibilities of regained responsibility and empowerment. According to the editors of Woozy, the purpose of zines: ‘is to get people to look at and consider alternative ideas, not unthinkingly take on a set of rigid, leftist rules. The idea is to encourage people to look at things differently not just conform to our ideas’.

67 The Adventures of... http://lab-rats.tripod.com/indexb.html  
70 Ibid.  
71 Clan Analogue, http://www.clananalogue.org  
72 Clan Analogue Zine, *kronIc oscillator*, http://www.clananalogue.org/ca_about.html  
73 *cyclic defrost* online, cryogenesis publication, http://www.snarl.org/cyclic  
74 Lex Luthor and Yellow Peril, Snarl Heavy Industries Version 4.1, http://www.snarl.org  
75 *cyclic defrost* online, cryogenesis publication, http://www.snarl.org/cyclic  
78 This is not Art 2001, 26 September — 1 October, Newcastle NSW, http://www.octapod.org.au/thisisnotart/2001/  
80 Editorial, Woozy #8 Ain’t Life Grand?
**Rave Safe** was a publication produced in 1996 by a group of party goers who gained support for this project from the NSW User and Aids Association as well as the North Sydney Area Health Service. The easy access information provides a non-judgmental approach to providing health information about drug taking and partying. It’s about saying ‘know’ to drug issues, and helping people act responsibly in recreational drug use. This commonsensical approach to lifestyle and health issues contrasts sharply with the alienating and ineffectual ‘tough on drugs’ approach favoured by successive Australian governments. Other zines, like *Octarine*—which appeared in 3 issues between 1996 and 1998—focus on important drug issues, approaching the subject from an heretically positive position by including articles about, for instance, the valuable use of psychedelic tools in ritual practice, and providing historical and contemporary information on community approaches to the use of drugs. *Octarine* also examines the connection between entheogenic drugs and the global threads of the trance dance experience in tekno culture:

The essence of the experience involves the secret language of sound, psychedelics and movement, and the tacit realization that the dance ritual is the inter-stellar conduit for such happenings. We are creating a temporary autonomous zone for our minds to investigate the mysteries of the universe, as we once again, like our distant ancestors, cajole the spirits of trees and the sky, the earth and the cosmos to come out to play—as one. Ancient earth drums dance in symbiotic merriment with the metallic inter-galactic beats as the circles of sound expand and astound our imagination with vibratory awareness.  

Each issue heralded a launch party featuring a psychedelic dance ritual, saturated in local colour and tekno crews. Known as the Octarine Supernatural Old Crone Hoedown, it was held in the former whaling station at Byron Bay, the Epicentre, in 1997, and on Fingal Beach at Tweed Heads on the August full moon in 1998.

**ZINES AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS (R)EVOLUTION**

Activist tekno zines investigate the reacquaintance with the creative process itself, spreading knowledge from a cast range of Western and Eastern mysticism, magick and philosophy. An experiential spiritual process helps people reassess life aesthetically, emotionally, and ideologically, teaching about the universe and ourselves: the amazing beyond the mundane. This alchemical generation, reinvigorates the long tradition of spirituality through technology and explores the ability to effect change both within the self and in the outer world.

Zines made by Justin Time (aka Justin Nomadness), such as πR8, *Pyrates, Cook+Eat the Fruit of Civilization, Where King Rules*, and *boo-kul-ba erbaira wan-shon*, promote this heretical investigation of the self and world: the (r)evolution of self-awareness. We need to recognize how things work, and also how to understand the nature of change; to take control and make the impossible manifest. Justin declares that there are ‘no boundaries but the horizon’ as he investigates the spiritual edges of perception while providing navigation via his zines for the imagination and intellect. ‘Hear me! Hear this! Pyrate ship be sailing and is dear in want of crew. You! So … lend yourself to pyracy of invention—an illusionary living pyrate entity—made in part of the New Age plunder of space-time-cycle of culture and the recesses of your psyche’.

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81 bigk@disinfo.net, ‘Trance Magick’, *Octarine* #3, Solstice 1998.
82 Operation Alchemy, http://www.beyondtv.org/operationalchemy
83 pyrate@mailcity.com, πR8.
Zines contain ideas and tools for initiating inner change, particularly through an exploration of the tekno trance(formatory) experience. So much that is (r)evolutionary about this culture is within the dance experience itself. As John and Pete explain:

Trance formation of linear time scales is also an important part of the radical rave project. Dancing in the endless metronumic beat is a liberation from the tyranny of human imposed chronologic. Allowing a simultaneous experience of milliseconds and hours. Eventually the suns slow rays bring the night to a close and the dancers feel the wheels of the universe turning. Many rave festivals are held at the special times of full moon, solstice and equinox. This is a conscious attempt to return dance celebration to natural cycles of the moon and sun. Cultural and tec know logical shifts have opened up dance music to polymorphous cross fertilisation.84

The dance space becomes a portal, a dreaming, a coming together on many different levels as the zone provides a point of personal and community transformation. Conscious action is the manifested quality of the re-emerging trickster archetype of Hermes: the mercurial language that transforms the subconscious. Hermes rules the world of communication exchange, brings the twists and turns of information to life and could be considered the archaic mascot of the information age.85 Within activist tekno culture, this dynamic is celebrated and opens many to the playground of spontaneous and experimental thought and action.

The mainstream media often refers to tekno culture participants as the Chemical Generation86 due to their apparent interest in ‘designer drugs’87, but as with other aspects of youth culture, the commercial media is missing the point about psychedelic drug use—most commonly LSD88, ‘magic’ mushrooms89 and from the 1990s sporadic appearances of DMT.90 While illicit drug use is usually considered deviant and dangerous by the hallucinating mainstream press, these chemical tools may potentialise personal and community transformation, heightening and deepening intense understandings and realisations. Psychedelics can prove revolutionary tools in the hands of psychonautical explorers playing on the fringes of contemporary sonic and visual art.

The creative process is at stake as changes in consciousness manifest in free party spaces devoid of commodification, in actions and ideas to strengthen community, and in the production of meaningful art for further transformation. In industrial society, most people are left alienated and confused about their roles in life. How are we to navigate through this existence? Survival of the mind is what most of us are faced with, though we have dimly remembered traditions to help transverse this incredibly complex web of the (dis)information age. The psychedelic tekno culture, like gnostic cultures before it, is revitalising information and tools to access the long and meaningful traditions in human spiritual evolution.

84 John and Pete, ‘Radical Raves Reclaim and Liberate Space in Many Dimensions: Is this R@veolution?’, Freakquency #2, p.22-23.
89 Mystical Mycology Australia, http://www.shaman-australis.com/shroom/
90 The Vaults of Erowid, DMT, N,N-Dimethyltryptamine, http://www.erowid.org/chemicals/dmt/dmt.html
Activist media propagates revolutionary ideas about space and place, exploring Hakim Bey’s influential idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ)\(^91\), including the utilisation of magickal spaces in the dance ritual, as well as investigating the inner space of imagination and play. A carnivale of characters appear in this experimentation zone: the fool\(^92\), outlaws, pyrates, tricksters, iconoclasts, supertramps, and fringe dwellers all dealing with the societal taboo of exploring the nature of being. Zines express the spirit of the trickster, the art of play and rebellion. They contemplate the ephemerality of life, the illusion of immovable ideologies, and the supremacy of the nature of change.

Since the Accident, a zine found in Sydney in 1995, discusses:

an imaginal realm that gives us hope for regeneration both now and for future possibilities… Could the Rave be one of many infinite portals, TAZs…? Could it offer a praxis, a mode of action, a tropism: something positive to move and grow towards rather than being alienated and atrophied by a nihilistic, cynical and dystopian perspective? ...Imagine the endless possibilities involved in dancing with characters who, for the course of the evening have no definite identity, yet many, simultaneously. The dancefloor is a place of interaction which goes beyond the usual constraints of verbal dialogue . . . Instead you are always free, as one party flyer suggests, ‘to change your mind and choose a different future or a different past’. A dialogue, trialogue or more, of movement enables you to create your own myths and fantasies around the people that you meet …A pot pourri of diasporic peoples inhabiting a new world.\(^93\)

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\(^92\) Welcome to Fools Paradise, http://members.aol.com/pmichaels/glorantha/foolsparadise.html

In his article World Entertainment War\textsuperscript{94}, Antero Alli\textsuperscript{95} notes whosoever governs the metaphor, governs the mind, and it is in underground tekno zines where activists are attempting, as Pete Strong proposes in \textit{Earthzine}, ‘to break through the wall and breach the veil of mainstream media misinformation that holds the status quo in place’.\textsuperscript{96} Media activists on the tekno fringe promote the temporary autonomous zone, or the crossroads, of the mind, a process to transmute symbols, remove boundaries, and express dissident thought, all the while developing and experimenting with new methods of organisation and communication. The spirit of the DiY publication is to liberate information exchange, forge new communities, embrace diversity and encourage creativity. As Douglas Rushkoff writes, ‘we have given up something much more precious once we surrender the immediacy of a living communication’.\textsuperscript{97} The Australian fringe media is a vehicle for art and ideas which spiral and connect people while helping to reclaim the imaginative playground—the abominable knowledge is participation, the process itself.

\textsuperscript{95} Antero Alli, http://www.paratheatrical.com/pages/bio.html
\textsuperscript{96} Pete Strong, \textit{Earthzine 1/3}, Sydney/Brisbane Australia, 2000/1
PART TWO — SOUND SYSTEMS AND SYSTEMS SOUND
At a recent forum at University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), Centre for Popular Education on Songs and Music for Cultural Action, an elderly gentleman enquired as to who was now carrying the mantle of Bob Dylan in the writing of protest music. The reply came that modern folk musicians do not necessarily carry guitars and that he should look to techno for the next ‘We shall overcome’. He wasn’t impressed! This chapter explores the use of reclaimed and recycled technologies as the basis for this new electronic ‘folk’ music. Detailing the history of sound systems, I trace the emergence of sound system culture in Jamaica, its evolution in the UK through to its presence in Australia, where it has become a significant element of local DiY culture.

Australia is following an inexorable global trend for conservatism and a return to a semi feudal system dominated by transnational capital. In sport, entertainment and the media, the dollar is the deciding force. The interests of commerce now regularly take precedence over public interest. For example, by-laws introduced in Sydney during the 2000 Olympics, citing the commercial imperative of the sponsors, forbade the use of amplification and the distribution of information (particularly of a political nature). Sydney activist, Louise Boon-Kuo, was threatened with arrest in breach of this by-law for using a megaphone and distributing leaflets highlighting these issues of civil liberty.1 The attempts by

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1 Sydney Indymedia archive, 18 September 2000. The Act in question was ‘Homebush Bay Operations Regulation 1999, Reg 3’.
commercial shipping company, Patricks (aided and abetted by the Howard Government) to smash the Maritime Union of Australia in 1998, was a prominent example of a private company attempting to break up what is one of Australia’s oldest public interest organisations. In sport, the David versus Goliath battle fought by Sydney Rugby League club, the Rabbitohs, to remain in News Ltd’s slimmed down NRL has, for many, typified the struggle between big business and community-based organisations in contemporary Australia.

Princeton scholar of international relations, Richard Falk, describes this trend as ‘a new medievalism’, with capital replacing Christ as the dominating influence. In No Logo, Canadian journalist Naomi Klein comments on the fact that the branded company logo (Nike, McDonalds, Shell) has now overpowered the traditional authority of church, politics and school. There are, however, dissenting voices in this ideological tussle. As eminent American political economist Amory Lovins recently asserted in Sydney: ‘markets make a wonderful servant, a bad master and a worse religion’.

DiY culture — Doing It Yourself

As the issue of commercial versus public interest is played out on the streets, in the clubs and in the galleries, the ideas of environmental sustainability, community and social justice have informed an emergent sector of the Australian cultural spectrum. Klein calls this the ‘new resistance’. An important element of this resistance is ‘DiY culture’, which encompasses a mix of sixties’ hippy idealism, nineties technology and noughties’ media savvy. It also includes a smattering of new age spirituality which, though possibly ‘end of millenium’ in nature, is nevertheless an important constituent. John McDonald, former head of Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia, recently wrote that one valid aspect of contemporary art is the continuity of ‘the religious impulse, the search for a higher meaning and a community of belief’.

DiY culture stems, ironically, from the eighties’ Thatcherite ideal of the privatisation of politics, yet it has tempered these ideologies with a renewed appreciation of ‘community’. In England, DiY culture was born of a coalition of rave, squat and traveller movements. The indiscriminate use of the Criminal Justice Bill legislation by the Tory Government to defeat the emerging direct action environmental movement created an unholy alliance of the above three factions. There thus evolved distinct communities of youth who espoused radical direct action solutions and were passionate on single issues such as the environment and social justice.

4 ABC Radio National, Background Briefing, Transcript of speech at University of New South Wales, Sydney on 4th July 2000.
5 Klein No Logo, p.446.
In Australia, similar communities of interest have evolved into sophisticated and well organised environmental and social justice networks. These alliances have cemented through festivals of resistance such as the Jabiluka blockade and the Earthdream tour. The internet has been significant as a communication and community building tool, joining remote and seemingly powerless individuals and groups into more powerful organisations. The formation of the Indymedia network in Sydney, 1999, for example, played a vital part in the defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in Seattle and has gone on to become a valuable media asset in building networks in 52 centres around the world. What has thus emerged from DiY culture, positioned as it is at the junction of politics, art and technology, is a fascinating potpourri of politics and pleasure, party and protest.

**SOUND SYSTEM — THE POUNDING HEART OF DiY CULTURE**

DiY art is centred around techno music which has become a universal currency in global youth culture. Techno music is delivered through sound systems, consisting of a loose network of artists and musicians who base themselves around the mobile PA. The PA forms the heart of the collective. The sound system is essential to the development of DiY culture. It provides the economic, social and cultural unit so vital to the political and cultural activities it inspires. Current Australian sound systems share a heritage of lo-budget home-built innovative technologies, hybrid musical tastes and grassroots political community activism with their precedent operators in Britain and Jamaica.

The sound system has its roots in mid ‘50s Jamaica where entrepreneurial entertainers cobbled together large hi-fis on which to play their music at local dancehalls. Coxsone Dodd, Duke Reid and Tom the Great Sebastian are the recognised grandfathers of the sound system, playing on the traditional single turntable with enormous wardrobe-sized home-made speakers. These Jamaicans were unique in adapting new technologies to their own requirements, cannibalising radios to make monster sound systems and shaping a type of electric folk music for a new generation.

Karl Irving, originally from Montego Bay in Jamaica, recalls how the early Kingston sound system operator, Trojan, disassembled radios to make speaker boxes and then installed these contraptions in an open air dancehall for all-night parties in the late fifties.

He took a speaker out of a radio—it was a Morphy radio—and put it into a box and then he hung it in what we called a booth—it was a dancehall made out of bamboo. We used to listen to a station called WINZ which had Latin-American and Cuban records playin’ all mixed up without the DJ talkin’ or interrup’. We used to get some wicked music comin’ in playing non-stop. And the people just buy a drink and dancin’ away.

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7 [www.sydney.indymedia.org](http://www.sydney.indymedia.org)
Like many of his countrymen, Irving emigrated to England and started his own sound system, Quaker City, in Birmingham in 1964. Quaker City played ska-beat (a mix of calypso and R&B) and later reggae at community halls and house parties in London, Manchester, Bristol and Leeds.11 In a nod to the greats in their home country, the emigrant West Indians named the sound systems they started in England after the best systems in Jamaica. Thus Coxsone in Battersea and King Tubby in Brixton were both London sounds sharing a name with their Jamaican progenitors. The sound system parties provided a means for the community to get together and linked emigrants in different British cities to each other and to their home.12

Entertainment styles within the new emigrant community existed outside of the mainstream and, as a result, often fell foul of the law. As Lynval Golding of the Coventry ska band, The Specials, explained:

You always got hassle in those days ‘cause British society, they’d all go to the pub and when the pubs close at 12 o’clock they’d go home to bed—That was their night out—and they couldn’t understand why we would want to stay up all night at the ‘blues’. So at that time the police would always come around and try and close the whole thing down.13

A sound system would set up in a private house and, for a nominal admission, would play into the late hours. Many ‘blues’ parties were also called ‘rent parties’, planned for the end of the month in order to collect the rent money for the landlord. The same tradition of community fundraising existed in black areas in New York where this style of event was known as a ‘block party’.14

‘Blues’ parties were almost exclusively black affairs and the dub music which typified them became progressively more bass-driven and moody. Dub reggae was politicised through its appropriation by second generation black British youth. Princess from Motivate sound system in Wolverhampton explained:

The sound system thing—it was a black thing. It gave them a chance to express in their own form and in their own style, what they felt about being alienated—reminded that they’re not from this country—they look different, they dress different and so what comes out on record and through the sound system was different. The experience of the youth in the ‘70s was different to the original sound guys from Jamaica.15

The sound system scene flourished in traditional black areas such as St Paul’s in Bristol, Handsworth in Birmingham, Brixton and Notting Hill in London, and in areas of Leeds and Manchester, but essentially remained out of the mainstream of British pop. The creation of British dub music provided a political and cultural outlet for black acts and occasionally threw up crossover acts such as West London’s Aswad and Birmingham’s Steel Pulse. The movement of sound systems for sound clashes and carnivals between these cities maintained lines of communication between communities.

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Black Britain opened its doors to its white neighbours at the annual carnival events in Notting Hill in London and Handsworth in Birmingham. With its roots in Mardi Gras, carnival consisted of long processions of dancers behind, at first calypso bands, and later mobile sound systems mounted on the back of trucks. (This tradition of using a musical ‘happening’ as a focus for cultural and political statement sowed the seeds for future Reclaim the Streets parties, and DiY culture picked up on this use of the sound system party as a rallying point for its constituency of interest). The annual carnival events became vehicles for black expression but were managed in a heavyhanded manner by the English police. The extraordinary police presence contributed to an outbreak of violence at Notting Hill in West London in 1976. Subsequent carnivals were characterised by the presence of huge numbers of police and the black sound systems remained in the underground.

In the early eighties, Broader musico-political groups, such as Rock against Racism, formed the background to the popular rise of groups such as Coventry’s Specials and North London’s Madness, who featured black and white musicians playing infectious ska music. These acts coated social comment with a sugary danceable musical style and achieved widespread success in the British charts. Britain’s inner city streets were rocked by widespread civil disturbance centred in the black areas of all the major cities. Attempting to make sense of this carnage was the anarchist band Crass who advocated a type of socialist anarchism.16

In the underground scene, Adrian Sherwood’s On-U Sound System were difficult to define in the traditional pop sense, but were instantly recognisable as a sound system in the sense of being a dynamic roster of artists making music in a collective way. Sherwood’s use of anarchist networks to distribute his politicised dub music resulted in links to the Black Rose Bookshop17 in Sydney’s Newtown, a connection that was to have a far-reaching impact on the Australian audience.18

The sound systems moved out of the black areas and into the mainstream British subculture with the advent of the ‘summer of love’ in 1988. Since 1986, sound systems like Soul to Soul had been running warehouse parties in London’s East End, squatting or hiring warehouses. These sound systems originally played soul, but then increasingly house and acid-house to all-night ravers. As the acid house boom took off in London, party organisers increasingly turned to the black sound system operators (who were accustomed to squaring up to police) to provide the sounds for their illegal parties. As Lynval Golding observed, ‘Having parties in warehouses and houses—that’s what we’d been doing for ages, except we called them blues’.19 In Coventry, for example, Chiba City Sound, a young white techno sound system had an intimate relationship with the West Indian Maccabee Sound System, availing of its equipment and expertise in staging parties in the Midlands.

17 http://www.web.net/blackrosebooks
19 Estimates based on author’s personal experience of Castlemorton Festival.
With the ensuing media hysteria surrounding the use of LSD and ecstasy at warehouse parties, it became increasingly difficult for the parties to happen due to intense police activity. Mutoid Waste, for example were forced out of their King’s Cross London Bus Garage base. Parties moved out onto the London orbital and admission prices skyrocketed to as much as $120 per ticket as commercial players became involved in the organising of events.

Partygoers from the urban squat scene, for whom the warehouse parties had been a cheap and welcome alternative to the overpriced city nightclubs, began to look elsewhere for entertainment, while links developed between squatters and the politically inspired new age travellers who had been roaming Britain in converted buses and trucks since the late seventies. The new age travellers presented a made network of countryside festivals (and cheap, strong and reliable dance drugs) which were quickly taken up by squatters and ravers. The Tory Government in Britain were nervous about this novel alliance. Tonka in Brighton, DIY in Nottingham, Bedlam, Circus Warp, LSDiesel and London’s Spiral Tribe were the most creative of the new style of sound system, incorporating the cooperative tradition of the black sytems but playing increasingly harder and faster styles of techno. Importantly, the parties were run for free, with a bucket being passed around to pay for diesel for the generators.

In May 1992, near a sleepy village on common land in the Malvern Hills about half way between London and Birmingham, with less than 24 hours notice and with almost zero publicity apart from word of mouth, more than 35,000 people came together to dance for 5 days in what is now regarded as something of a Woodstock for the Chemical Generation. The Castlemorton Free Festival prompted the Tory Government into action and the Spiral Tribe Sound System were taken to court and (unsuccessfully) charged with organising the festival. The incident did, however, give the Tories cause to introduce the Criminal Justice Bill, which was remarkable in its banning of ‘music which is characterised by the emission of repetitive beats’—techno music. As a result of this legal clampdown, many of the traveller artists moved away from Britain to Europe, the US, Goa in India, Koh Phangan in Thailand and Australia’s East Coast.

The impending passing into law of the Criminal Justice Bill (1994) created partnerships between civil liberties, sound system, environmental and social justice organisations. Techno sound systems, such as Desert Storm from Glasgow and DIY, had inspired the creation of ‘festivals of resistance’ against the Criminal Justice Bill. Protest marches in London ceased to be simply silent marches with speeches at the end but took on a life of their own through a mixture of carnival, music and dance. One of my enduring memories is stopping the traffic under the shadow of Nelson’s Pillar in London’s Trafalgar Square in 1992 to wave through the Desert Storm sound system as they blasted out techno to a huge vibrating snake of dancing crusties who proceeded to jump into the ornamental fountains and dance naked in the heat of the afternoon sun. Antibomb protests of the fifties and eighties used ‘Protest and Survive’ as a slogan, but DiY culture is more likely to advocate ‘Protest and Party’.
Though outlawed in England, the techno sound system carnival idea spread through Europe like a virus and many of those artists who had left found a ready audience for their music abroad. Spiral Tribe, Bedlam and many other of the English sound systems took their cooperative techno ideas to Europe, particularly Eastern Europe where it was cheaper to live, and audiences took to the new musical ideas with gusto. The European ‘Teknival’ free parties, including the annual Hostimichi festival near Prague in the Czech Republic, spawned several French, German and Dutch sound systems which found enthusiastic audiences, particularly in the squat centres of Amsterdam and Berlin.20 In contrast to Britain, where the format had been banned, mainstream Europe adopted the free sound system carnival format, now established in events such as The Love Parade in Berlin. Indeed, so popular is the event in Berlin, where now over one million young people take to the streets behind mobile sound systems, that it has drawn corporate sponsorship and has resulted in the creation of an alternative ‘Hate Parade’, which espouses a non-corporate back-to-the-squat ethos.21


JELLYHEADS AND THE BIRTH OF AUSTRALIAN SOUND SYSTEM CULTURE

In Australia, the development of the sound systems centred around inner city Sydney, Newtown and various groups working out of the Jellyheads Collective based in a warehouse in Wellington St near Central Station between September 1990 and April 1993. This was an anarchist run cultural centre which focussed on community based gigs and sought to forge a sense of community through the production of music, media, art and politics. The impetus for the Jellyheads came from a plethora of punk bands and the organising capabilities of anarchist squatters who met at Black Rose anarchist bookshop in King St Newtown. Prior to Jellyheads, Black Rose had organised all ages gigs at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre. It was cheap admission and complete with vegan food.22

An ‘artschool’ circle of acts based around media subversion formed a local scene. These included Kol Dimond, Jeh Kaelin, Sarah Bokk and Zippy Fokas in the Fred Nihilests and John Jacobs and Tony Collins (now an ABC journalist) in Mahatma Propaghandi. A videotape exists of the Media Liberation Front 1988 gig aimed at closing down the Sydney Stock Exchange when John Jacobs, Tony Collins and Craig Domarski, armed with two guitars and a 50watt vocal PA took on the might of the Sydney money machine in an event which pre-dated 2001’s M123 demonstration by 13 years.24

23 http://www.m1alliance.org
24 John Jacob video archive, 1988

Acquired from www.ozauthors.com.au
An emerging rave scene evolved around small warehouse parties in Marrickville which were advertised on Skid Row radio in Addison Rd. Skid Row broadcast essential listening techno shows on Friday and Saturday nights with information about party locations and details. Techno DJ’s such as Abel and Biz E played at Skid Row during this period.

According to John Jacobs—one of the collective’s organisers, and who has since had a hand in many of Sydney’s underground movements—Jellyheads were heavily influenced by punk and the ideas of anarchist band Crass. Jacobs went on to play a crucial role in the Vibe Tribe initiative and currently plays with Organarchy Sound System. He recalls Adrian Sherwood’s On U Sound and Gary Clail’s visits to Sydney as being seminal in the creation of a community-based sound system and also paved the way for the progression of musical styles from punk into techno music.

The punk bands had been unable to get pub gigs and so a dedicated venue was essential for their survival. Fundraisers at the Jellyheads warehouse resulted in the purchase of a small PA—the first communal sound system. The techno heads and hip hop fans were quick to realise the potential of plugging in a set of decks to this PA and the sound system was born. The warehouse became a springboard for many Sydney bands. Frenzal Rhomb and Nitocris were two of the many bands to play at the venue in the early days. Video nights were also held at the space as were many community events.


more bizarre, says Jacobs, than the celebrated Tofu-making workshops led by Willy from the punk band Tutti Parzi. There were many fun actions but there was also the serious stuff. Not least of these was the blockade of the Aidex international arms fair in Adelaide in 1991. Networks were made with other activist communities. According to Jacobs, ‘the forest activists showed us urban people a lot about how to use tripods (to block roads) and that was a good learning experience’.29

The shift in musical styles from punk to techno was a gradual one. Jellyheads members Kol Dimond and his partner Jeh Kaelin paid a visit to Goa in 1990 and brought back ideas about trance which was then popular at the Indian resort. There was also an exchange of ideas and music along the international traveller route with nearby Koh Phangan in Thailand, which was at its hedonistic heights around 1991. The move towards dance music was also facilitated by a constant flow of British travellers who brought their own style of dance music to Sydney.

While John Jacobs does not claim that Jellyheads was the only party organisation in Sydney, it was certainly true that the Jellyheads organisation was primarily about politics, particularly of a social-anarchist kind.

There were plenty of other people doing rave parties in Sydney. From the Rat parties in Marrickville to the gay parties at the Hordern. It was all illegal. But we were anarchists first and artists second. With us there was no one dude with a moblie—we were about people sitting in a circle and trying to do consensus decision-making. Putting the politics up front. When we sat down with our community to organise a gig, we were doing it as a political action first and art second. When Adrian Sherwood and Jello Biafra came out we hung out at the Black Rose bookshop and did a benefit gig at the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre in Redfern.30

Following a physical confrontation with police (during a concert by punk band, Toe to Toe) the Jellyheads warehouse venue was closed by the council on the basis of licensing law infringements and insufficient public liability insurance.

Finding themselves with a sound system and a readymade audience, some of the Jellyheads collective adopted the moniker ‘Vibe Tribe’, and started doing free gigs at venues including Sydney Park. The name Vibe Tribe, reflected the communal nature of the enterprise and was also a nod towards the original UK Spiral Tribe. As Jacobs recalls:

> it was exciting and a lot of people were into it and very soon up to 1000 people were turning up at Sydney Park. And there was no venue, as in no walls or bouncers, so it had to be free. The bucket would go around so it was forced into being a political thing. Anyone that came along could feel that something special was happening. Ravers and homeys, punks and down and outs. It was a good mixed thing.31

The Sydney Park parties continued until police violently broke up the Freequency party in April 1995. Again, Jacobs remembers the night:

> The police would often come and check us out but this night there were more of them and they wanted to shut it down. And they weren’t negotiating they were doing it with batons and when you start seeing your mates getting batoned on the dancefloor you get pretty solid and so everyone locked arms around the generator and people were on the mike saying this is our right to have our public space. And the cops went hard and they did naughty things and bashed people and arrested people without charging them. So it came to a head then, but it was good for getting the name around and after that Vibe Tribe were hugely popular. Just by charging $5 on the door they were able to make shitloads of money. So that was how they built up the sound system and got the funds for the bus because it was always the plan to make the sound system mobile.32

The continuation of the Vibe Tribe ideal can be attributed to the vision of Pete Strong, who went on to form the Ohms not Bombs33 sound system in 1995. Ohms not Bombs operate as a non-profit making organisation, pumping any money made back into the maintenance of their equipment and the upkeep of their vehicles. By holding film screenings and hosting information stalls on issues of social justice and ecology in conjunction with their gigs, the Ohms group inform and educate people as they party. Ohms not Bombs promote constructive use of technology in achieving sustainable community development. The Ohms psychedelic ‘infobus’ is thus a noughties version of Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters meets a Russian Revolution propaganda train meets Priscilla, Queen of the Desert!

33 http://www.omsnotbombs.org
PART TWO — SOUND SYSTEMS AND SYSEMS SOUND

SOUND SYSTEMS AND RECLAIM THE STREETS

In the early days of rave parties, communication ploys developed which enabled party organisers to outwit the police. Locations were kept secret until the last minute to avoid detection by police and get a critical mass of party-goers inside a venue before the police became aware of it. The size of the gig would make it difficult for the police to evict and the party would continue.

In May 1995 in North London, eco-activists used this ploy to stage the first Reclaim the Streets (RTS) in Camden High St. By the time the police were alerted to the event, there were already so many people in attendance that it was impossible to move the crowd on. Sound systems, such as the cycle-powered Rinky-Dink, became a vital part of the early RTS parties providing the levity which lended the proceedings a carnival type atmosphere as opposed to the confrontational mood of previous political marches (the terms ‘Fluffy’ versus ‘Spikey’ were used to distinguish the two atmospheres). The RTS format was adopted in many countries including Australia, where the first party took place in Sydney in November 1997. These ‘temporary autonomous zones’, where party-goers dance to mobile guerilla sound systems, are Situationist events. Everyone a participant—everyone an artist. In his book DiY Culture, George McKay describes these protest parties as both ‘a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance’.  

By 1998, the use of the internet enabled activists to coordinate RTS parties across the globe. Sydney’s Glebe Point Road event merited a mention in Klein’s No Logo as the most impressive free party in its scale and execution to happen in any of the 17 locations around the globe that day. Three sound system stages provided the music on the day. J18 1999 took this co-ordination to a new level when the ‘Carnival against Corporate Globalisation’ took place in 43 different countries on the same day. Software developed by local anarchist media group Cat@lyst, enabled Sydney activists to webcast their actions around the world and was later refined to provide the backbone to the highly successful media campaign which made the Seattle protests on November 30 1999 such a remarkable success.

Exponents of DiY culture are passionate about the value of art as a means of expression and not simply a commodity. Pete Strong, of Ohms not Bombs, sees today’s society gripped by the chains of economic rationalism, totally unable to grasp new concepts of social and cultural capital relating to art production. He feels that the artistic practice orbiting around the sound system, through its co-creation and ability to unite disparate groups, adds a new dimension to the lives of people who are touched by it—something the music industry and art gallery system is unable to provide.

34 http://www.gn.apc.org/rts
Sydney’s sound system future is secure with groups like Labrats, a veggie-oil driven vehicle with wind-powered sound system and solar cinema introducing a total renewable energy vibe into the mix. Squatspace, the squatted complex in Sydney’s Broadway which operated from February 2000 to May 2001 with a gallery, living spaces and free food nights, has introduced a new generation to the idea of establishing a community around co-operative and renewable resources. While sound system culture may be an underground and non-mainstream activity, it certainly constitutes a principle meme, mutating and becoming an integral part of contemporary Australian youth culture.

Paul Gilroy, author of *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack*, writes about the ‘diasporic intimacy’ between those of similar nationalities who are spread around the world. Internet technologies have enabled those involved in DiY culture to experience this diasporic intimacy as they set up global events like J18 and M1 (closing down stock exchanges around the globe on May 1st, 2001). The sound system culture which is at the core of the party and protest scene has come full circle in its recreation of carnival—reclaiming technology for the benefit of community. Folk music for the dot com generation.

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42 http://lab-rats.tripod.com
43 http://www.geocities.com/squatspace
CHAPTER FOUR—
DOOFSTORY:
SYDNEY PARK TO THE DESERT

PETER STRONG

THE OHMS NOT BOMBS PRAYER
(OR THE NORD’S PRAYER)

Our speakers that stand in corners Hollow be our subs
The System comes, Chai will be done
In Perth as it is in Darwin Give us each day our daily tunes
And forgive us our trespasses on National Park land
As we forgive those who make noise complaints against us
As I walk through the Valley of Doof I shall fear no Happy
Hard-Core
For I have seen the fluro lights I shall not flag or waver
But party solid through the night Odd in three spaces
The raver, the spirit and the holy banner Deliver us some
flyers
Telling us where and when

OHMS NOT BOMBS MISSION STATEMENT

Remember the revolution starts in your own mind
Mutate the state
Dismantle the arms trade
Make Australia Nuke free
Reclaim the future
Reverse Colonialism
Permaculturalise the Planet
Promote positive people power action
Love heals all Revolve Evolve Solve
Dawn of Doof

Way back in the spring of ‘92, part of the just formed Non Bossy Posse Collective were working out how to sequence a drum machine at one of Sydney’s emerging techno share spaces—at the St Peters end of King St in the city’s ghetto of diversity, Newtown. The relentless 4/4 kick leaked through surrounding walls and occupied the ears of an until now very patient neighbour. Something was afoot, a new steel pulse of motivational NRG swirling outward from the quantised beats. The ancient spores of freedom were about to find a vast new arena of expression. It wasn’t long before another knocking sound was heard, not beatmatched but several beats per minute faster then the jam. ‘Is that the cops?’ they yelled. At the door was a loud German woman ‘Helga’ who, after trying to escape the relentless polyrhythms in several rooms of her nearby house, became enraged enough to lodge a complaint. What Helga was about to say held great ramifications for the future of humanity. In her language there was an expression which became a much loved edition to Australian discourse: ‘What is this Doof Doof Doof all night long?…this is not music’ she exclaimed.

Sydney to Byron and Brisbane, Melbourne to Adelaide, the word was to become a share-household name before it ventured inland and up to Darwin later in the nineties. Record shops have ‘Doof’ sections, it appears now in mainstream press and is well known overseas. There was a trance band from the UK under the same name and spelling which seemed to be a parallel development, perhaps edged on as the culture cross-fractalled and hybridised globally. Helga’s later naming of disturbingly loud drum and bass as ‘ratatatat’ never really took on but the underground party crew embraced doof wholeheartedly.

The story of doof’s inception was told a thousand times and the cult grew as this new arena of creativity exploded worldwide. The word ‘doof’ is an onomatopoeia describing the bass driven kick drum so characteristic of techno music. It is also very close to the German for ‘stupid’ (dorf), probably having something to do with the complaining neighbour’s summation of the new style delivered in that seminal complaint. She couldn’t help but notice the scores of people streaming past her house to attend free parties at the postindustrial inner city playground and womb for that powerful free party spirit, Sydney Park in St Peters. A new motivational energy was inspiring a seemingly ever expanding group of people.

Techno culture, underground parties, community events and open air dance gatherings have taken up residency as a regular part of our culture. Radical electronic music, contemporary art, performance and community co-creation have created a vibrant cyber radical techno tribal network. As friendly and inclusive party energy continues to build, webs of consciousness communication between groups of like minded party people are increased.

These words from an early edition of Vibe Tribe’s cut and paste zine Sporadical (no 5) hold a hope that a critical mass of people can be motivated to overcome the earth destroying system by rising up and overthrowing oppressive governments worldwide. Using our secret weapon, ‘doof’, in this war against war, motivating the funky ‘Disarmy’ to blast down the canons of oppression with corrosive acid beats.
Techno music contained the raw energy of punk, the cut and paste sampling techniques of hip hop, the grooves of disco and funk, and reggae and dub sound system techniques all mixing in with the free experimentation of electronic music. The vast diversity of sounds has the potential to appeal to a large number of people, bringing them together in a free space to meet, dance and exchange ideas. The emphasis was the party, every participant the star. This space became known as a ‘doof’, as the meaning of the word morphed into a type of autonomous space where an evolution seemed to be taking place.

**Vibe Tribe Birth**

Before doof hit Sydney in the late eighties and early nineties, there was a collective called The Jellyheads, a group dedicated to transmitting anarchist principles at a time when the main liberationist and anti-corporate mantra was transmitted in the west through punk music. Jellyheads community fundraisers and gigs had Crass/conflict style local bands, vegan cafes and info on various activist operations like ‘Stop the City’. Sydney Park was originally reclaimed as a music space by this tribe with the Punk Picnics still a regular annual event in town. The initial free techno parties were mistrusted by some of the punk contingent. Graffiti in the park read ‘Kill Non Bossy Raver Scum, Techno=Disco’, representing the sentiment of those few who didn’t understand that the emerging techno movement was in it for the same reasons. A group called Mahatma Propaghandi created a bridge from full-on punk power to more Balearic rhythms and dance grooves containing the same liberationist message. As members of Jellyheads turned on to the acid house explosion, the Vibe Tribe was unleashed. The loose collective of people were drawn together to channel a powerful energy through allowing events to present themselves with maximum community involvement and co-creation, the project being a response to the mainstream commercialisation of the new rave craze. An early press release set the precedent.

Our aim is to create free-space, multimedia events in which people of all races, sexuality’s and cultural backgrounds can come together. Our events combine music, art, video, performance, circus skills and interactive installation. We encourage people attending to become actively involved and feel free to be part of the tribe if only for one night.

Vibe Tribe’s first event at the free party dance space of Sydney Park was Amazing on the 1st May 1993, which saw an anarchist picnic mutate into a full on free party all-nighter with no police intervention. A huge banner emblazoned with the words ‘Fuck the Rave Hierarchy’ was strung aloft, hundreds of people experiencing the amazing free party vibe dancing until after sunrise. The performance crew Icarus set up a wild fire show utilizing the brickwork’s ruins to awesome effect.

We didn’t dig the oppressive nature of the state and some nightclubs had, and continue to have, a tendency to reflect this. Many mainstream clubs exist to sell alcohol, make loads of money, enforce style conformity and are generally inaccessible to lots of people. We are now in a position of overflowing our warehouses and beaches etc with a totally awesome array of raver/freak-hybrid geek humanoids who have come to expect nothing less than a wild frolik-razzamatazzical cabaret, all-glittering with sequins and sequencers.
It seemed that in those hedonistic days nothing could stop this from growing and growing. The coming together of energies created a magic alchemy; donations were collected and pooled as a shared resource. Mad life changing events rocked Sydney, like the Acid Raindance beach party at Little Congwong Bay nudist beach in La Perouse (January 29, 1994), Symbiotica at the Graffiti Hall of Fame (March 11, 1995), and Carmageddon at the Toast Gallery (July 15, 1995). As it grew and moved into bigger spaces, it became much more visible.

A mixture of police and council intervention forced the crew to shed light on the issue of community space with a series of protests, letters and awareness raising, but it was not enough to provide an arena for this growing movement. Council and cops continued to limit access to affordable alternative space, spurred on by media misinformation. One party planned for Sydney Park had to be moved in the middle of the night as cops were waiting for us in the park when the genny was rolled in at sunset. A huge circle was called and mobile calls were made to find another place for 1500 people without notice. We eventually tracked down a warehouse in Pyrmont occupied by a friend, Geoff. The ensuing night was incredible, the party people and organisers re-set up the event in lightning speed in an industrial space that was unprepared for 1500 people. The dusty storage depot was full, and an anarchic mad vibe permeated the space.

Several people, including myself, freaked out and lost it at this party. One raver had hallucinated a fire and tried to put it out with the hydrant, I visualized the water to be coming from the trunk of Ganesh, manifested by the image rendered on the flyer. A feeling of uneasy ultra self-consciousness descended upon me, a fractal of fear saw the very make up of my being dissolve.

Drug psychosis, venue problems, crew dynamics and burn out became commonplace, a phenomenon temporarily preventing this amazing co-creating vibe from exponentially growing out of the underground and into the wider community. The space was evicted the next week. ‘Venue problems’ make life harder for underground and alternative groups to hold events outside the realm of pubs and clubs. Squatting a venue is a powerful political message, empowering people to access space normally declared out of bounds.

**Bush Party Madness**

The Awesomething Or Something event, a two day open air party at Wisemen’s ferry in November ‘94, was held near St. Albans, north of Sydney, where Geoff, the owner of the Pyrmont venue, lived. Geoff showed us a possible festival site out of town. On the Friday night, his home was burnt to the ground in the local town. It remains a mystery as to who was responsible for torching the old wooden pagan church, a much loved landmark. Punters arrived looking for the party to see the night sky lit up by the flames.

By Saturday arvo, the police had evicted the whole festival, but not before promoters and punters worked out a plan to save the Saturday night. The 500-600 strong turnout gathered in the local St. Albans pub, opposite the still smoking embers of the burnt church. Someone remembered a meditation retreat in the area, so a crew arranged to hire the alternative site for $300. Word made it back to the pub and a convoy quickly
formed and headed off to the new site, high up on a mountain near the Wiseman’s Ferry. Most made it to the new location, a mad night was had and, in the morning, an elemental lightning show seemed to jam with the party vibe.

**DESSERT TREKNO**

The legendary Acid Raindance beach party at the little Conwong bay nudist beach in La Perouse on 29th Jan ‘94 was an unforgettable night. Speakers were luged about a kilometer to the beach, along with the generator, chai shop, lights and everything else. The turnout was huge, boats pulled up and big bellied fisherfolk danced with ravers on the beach. Nudists turned up to find their spot going off to acid trance and tekno. One of the boat owners offered to transport the sound system back to an easier unloading place. The Vibe Tribe party machine was revving up and had big plans. A desert mission called Desert Trekno was developing in the collective’s mind. The plan was to hold party’s at the 1994 Adelaide Fringe festival, raise the money to buy a truck and embark on a figure eight tour around Australia.

The old Vibe Tribe Ambulance, doors emblazoned with mandlebrot set stencils, was a sight to see—its orange flashing lights still working. It was like a tardis, with its seemingly unlimited space to load stuff. The ambulance left for Adelaide packed with people, speakers, banners and desert dreams. We turned up at a Henley Beach sharehouse which seemed to house about 60-70 people in town for the fringe festival. As we soon learned, the only venue we could get was at Port Adelaide. We took a ten grand loss as punters were largely reluctant to drive the twenty minutes to our massive wharf-side warehouse.

Back at the Adelaide Fringe in ’92, the Imagineer doofs, placed in the fringe centre and growing exponentially over the three weeks of the festival, were legendary. While the Imagineer events, mixing freak and dance music culture, left their stamp on Adelaidian club history forever, our shows in ’94 had disappointing turnouts—evaporating our desert plans. The mad Russian guy whose PM 20K sound system rattled the docksidewarehouse three weeks in a row was very patient with us. We finally paid him months later when we returned to Sydney. The crew were tired, disappointed and burnt out. A morale-boosting gig at the University of NSW called Terrafractal helped clear our debt in one night.

**GATECRASHERS FROM HELL**

A ‘never give up, show must go on’ attitude meant that all advertised Vibe Tribe events went all night. Except, that is, for the ill-fated Freequency party in Sydney park on 11th April 1995. The Tribe gathered to stomp again in the now established free party playground, spurred on by the arrival of a super dynamic sound system built in Australia by a UK party ambassador, modeled on the Circus Normal sound system.

In the lead up to Freequency, the media had had a field day hyping Vibe Tribe as the new fashion craze—though focusing on the drug aspect. Police pressure was on. South Sydney mayor, Vic Smith, had called on police to crack down on illegal dance parties in the council area, and the rave alert was in full effect catalysed by a media focusing on the drug aspect of the emerging dance industry. After midnight, the cops arrived, including police rescue and scores of paddy wagons. A crowd of around 1500 people had gathered and were going
off to DJ DeeDee’s Irish jig, doof track. Police demands for a switch off, were met with offers to turn it down. But communication broke down and the ‘Gatecrashers from hell’ moved in on two flanks, storming the dance floor. Their raised batons were met with a determined resistance.

The music was switched off, then on again briefly as the console was retaken. I dived to the ground to intercept a falling mixer, only to be pounced on by a copper, dragged off and put in a wagon. He claimed I was going for his dog. Badges were removed and violence was indiscriminately waged on the freaks, homies, ravers and doofers. Calls for ‘peace’, ‘stand up for your rights’, ‘we are a community’ on the microphone, bounced off the lofty chimneys as dancers and volunteers were dragged away. The police managed to get hold of the genny before the Brackets and Jam crew, famous for their rowdy acoustic jam nights, kept the percussion going all night—occupying the autonomous space until the next day. People were arrested, only to be released away from the park. A few were hospitalised. The peaceful gathering turned into a bloody riot.

A protest day was quickly organised and held the following week. At ‘Batons are for Twirling’, about 400 people gathered around Newtown Police Station demanding that action be taken. They would not take responsibility for the violence. Under community pressure, an Ombudsman’s report into the police operation found the police to have acted unreasonably, but failed to press charges on any individuals. Responding to the situation, mayor Vic Smith said ‘I don’t have buildings where they can have these parties—let them go hire the Horden Pavilion’. The hire fees for such venues disqualify all but rich promoters from staging events.

**CARMAGEDDON**

The Police were determined to get the Vibe Tribe, who were perceived as drug runners and, according to a *Sydney Morning Herald* article on the Tribe, tried to gain new markets by giving away acid-chai. Drugs are a major part of our society. In the mid nineties hedonism and drugs were very apparent in this new arena of excess—but no more than in other scenes. People are still calling for the responsible and effective approach of harm minimisation and creating a safe space. But more than that, in our small but growing world we were steering dance philosophy from a drug to a social and political awareness raising experience.

The next VT event was more politically focused—responding to increasing road developments in Sydney. A pre-Reclaim the Streets maneuver, Carmageddon (15th July ’95) was a call to action to oppose the M2 motorway which was on course to cut swaths through some of the city’s last remaining tracts of bushland. Held at the Toast Gallery opposite the Headquarters for the Sydney Federal Police in Surrey Hills, the gig was on the cop’s doorstep. The gallery soon filled to capacity, spilling out into the street until it breached the roadblocks and had to become a free event. The crowd went ballistic, screaming out into the street until it breached the roadblocks and had to become a free event. The crowd went ballistic, screaming to every build up, new break and voice sample. Four grand was raised to assist the anti M1 campaign. Unfortunately the M2 was not stopped, but reinforcements were on the way. Reclaim the Streets took up the issue a couple of years later in ’97, the empowering actions of which were to boost the aspirations of the activist crews in Sydney.
After Carmageddon the crew became less prolific, but there were many smaller events held by various people who had crewed the Vibe Tribe vehicle. The Golden Ox, a squatted community centre in Redfern was a venue which nurtured the community vibe away from the media spotlight. Many 200-400 people events occurred with pun names hinting at the secret venue. Boll-Ox, Equin-Ox, Grav-Ox and Ox-illator made regular party goers feel at home, until the space was evicted, gutted and demolished.

An event held at Sydney Park called Up yer Atoll in the spring of ‘95 proved that the old stomping ground was not dead. A smaller sound system and turn out, and an effort to foster positive police liaison, meant the event was trouble free. There was a much talked about moment when police stopped to enjoy a chai in the morning and had asked about the track that was playing.

When you deal with police face to face, issues can be worked out if you forget the uniform and speak to the human being behind it. Communication can break down when there is vested interest involving fear mongering, councils and a sensationalist tabloid media pressuring the police to curtail youth culture.

**DANCE FOR YOUR RIGHT TO PARTY**

Although legendary, the Happy Valley parties were plagued with disastrous incidents. One held down at Wollongong in the summer of ‘95 was a massive production but the local authorities shut it down in the morning pressuring people to leave the site pronto. Road deaths occurred on the way back to Sydney. Of course, the media blamed the dance party with headlines like ‘killer dance craze’ adorning the tabloids on Monday morning. Another Happy Valley event at Gosford in the summer of ‘97 was moved on the Friday night. A friendly land owner had offered a safe space to save the gig, and the media and police were told that it wasn’t a rave but a big barbecue. ‘The World’s Biggest Barbecue’ saved the day. People were redirected and a new site quickly emerged.
About fifteen hundred were still in the house when the police and helicopters turned up. A defiant mood swept through the site. Hundreds of people ran to face the sea of flashing police lights. They again demanded we clear the site in one hour. No way! People entered into a debate with the cops reminding them of the dangers in sending people home when they weren’t ready. The main sound system was cut off and Triple J, who were in support of the party, transmitted a Happy Valley dance mix. Scores of small events developed around car stereos tuned in to the Js. The cops backed off and the party continued, though paranoia was rife. But the act of defiance was encouraging. The cops and media were wrong, and the crowd knew it. They were attempting to close down an industry which had become a serious threat to the dominator culture of alcoholcentric night club and pub conformity.

Vibe Tribe’s sound system was named after the Freequency party. Quency was born/freed from the back room of Smithy’s Sound in Newtown from funds raised at the last full on Vibe Tribe party, Stompede in March ’96. ‘Run to the chill’s, run for your chai’s’, it’s a stompede. The event was held at another squatted space about to be demolished called Airspace in Redfern, Sydney—an artspace that had been operating for years nurturing Sydney’s art and music culture. Chill-guru’s JuJu Space Jazz emerged from its hallowed walls as did a number of art projects. There was a huge turnout, a wild party and money to buy a sound system that was to continue as a community resource long after the Vibe Tribe party vehicle fragmented. After some of the original crew moved to Byron Bay, it was soon decided to call it a day—though VT multi media continued to offer support to other underground groups. But not before the Quency PA was taken on its maiden voyage across the desert. The early Vibe Tribe dream was about to be realised while at the same time laying to rest the powerful name.

FREAKY TOUR

The first great mission that really went out back happened in 1996, when the Quency sound system was taken up through Central Australia to Darwin. Vibe Tribe ambassadors had teamed up with the Freaky Tour, a Cheech and Chong style foursome who planned to hit the road and form a rock ‘n roll band. In a converted coaster and trailer with rig we spanned the great dividing range and hit what we thought was desert, just outside of Winton in Queensland where we stopped to soak up the amazing ambience. Well, actually we were forced to. The 2k sound system was too heavy for the trailer and a leaf spring had snapped. Saved by the BP Winton mechanic some 80 kms away, we towed the stricken trailer to a pit stop. The bearded mechanic was fascinated by the sound system and told us he used to roady for Tina Turner. We had been invited by a festival organiser in Adelaide to appear at Darwin’s String festival and as we headed north with a new leaf spring, we looked forward to honouring our commitment to putting on some dances in Darwin.

When we got to Darwin, the festival had become bankrupt, was being investigated by police, and was in disarray. We had to put on fundraisers in the tropical town to be able to leave. We approached the Bagot Aboriginal settlement about doing an interactive event there. When we got there to set up, the elder who had said ‘yeah, bring your disco here’, had gone
home to fish and no one knew anything about it. Anyway, we’d put the word out, and as we arrived and were unloading the system from the trailer, a mob of kids came to assist us to put up the décor. They were laughing and interested in every aspect of the equipment as the first track was dropped. Projections shone and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal danced for hours until midnight.

When word came through about noise complaints, we moved the whole show to another location in true Sydney-style. At Mindle Beach, site of the famous markets, we set up and doofed amongst the palms until well beyond sun up. ‘One For the Road’ was a great way to leave Darwin, kicking off at Bagot and finishing up at one of Darwin’s favorite beaches. We then traversed the country until we broke the radiator in Mount Isa. An ingenious device feeding water from a gerry container into the slowly leaking radiator fixed the problem.

We made it like this to Byron, where a large bush party welcomed the tour home to the east coast. Much to the dismay of Vibe Tribe crew there, Quency initially didn’t perform, but was eventually sorted and complemented by the Psi-Cada sound system. Psi-Cada was a small rig from the UK touring the east coast of Australia at the time before settling in Melbourne. A Vibe Tribe meeting was called and it was decided to call it a day—though Vibe Tribe multi media and the Quency sound system remained for a while to offer logistical support for other collectives with the free party spirit.

OMS NOT BOMBS

In 1995 a new group was formed to organise direct action with an anti war/nuke focus. Oms not Bombs seemed an obvious name that derived from a meeting to come up with a new project/collective. The name was partly inspired by Food Not Bombs – originally a US crew dedicated to providing free food. The OM sign represents universal peace in the ancient Sanskrit symbology. The name stuck. The group formed in response to our involvement in an anti French nuclear testing weekend of actions in Canberra in May 1995. Still in the old Vibe Tribe flagship, the ‘Ambi’, a mob of about seven had set sail to Canberra armed with a small sound system. On the lawns of the new Parliament House the genny was cranked, speeches were made and we started to play doof to a small but eager crowd. This type of doof protest travelling became a major theme of the late nineties. A second Vibe Tribe mission to Adelaide fringe festival in March 1996 saw a couple of good street party’s and a fundraiser.

Oms not Bombs were a vehicle which could be cranked up and ridden when the vibe was there and the ballistics were needed. In 1998, Sydney was buzzing with the anti Jabiluka campaign. The offices of Energy Resources of Australia, responsible for the controversial uranium mine, were under siege from the combined forces of Sydney activists, political animals and protest techno crews. An inner city project known as Graffiti Hall of Fame, run by philanthropic businessman Tony Spanos, was central in keeping the inner city blockade going. A permanent camp was formed in the heart of Sydney’s CBD. Conflict with police turned into successful liaison which
used to draw straws to see who had to go and tell the venue to turn it down. One disillusioned cop—who had heard of Tony’s work with youth and the local community—later left the force to help out with some of the Hall’s many projects.

The main voice of complaint over use of the Graffiti Hall venue turned out to be someone involved in the new developments whereby industrially zoned areas switched to residential. This was a recipe for disaster, as the relevant amenities are not being put in place at the same rate that the New York loftstyle apartments are going up. The multicolored concrete yard became a icon in the Sydney dance scene and is much missed.

During the nineties, Tony Spanos’ inner city meatworks, which were inherited from his father, had been transformed into a space that aided youth creativity, channeling it into positive expression. The Alexandria space is covered in wildstyle murals and is a milestone for Sydney’s dance party and graffiti subcultures. Tony’s Graffiti project saw what are now world famous graffiti murals spill out into inner city Redfern, Erskinville, Newtown and Bondi. The formally illegal spraypainting practice became legal with artists gaining recognition, business cards and self confidence. Gangs fighting over turf with layers of tagging became friends in the carpark of Graffiti Hall of Fame. Oms Not Bombs, held some of the last of a decades worth of parties in the space before council and the development lobby had the space shut down as an entertainment space. The force of inner city gentrification saw a halt to the much needed venue. A loud but very small minority used to make the noise complaints that saw cops coming down to Graffiti Hall to lay down the law.

Tony Spanos’ theatrical and emotional response often had the cops dumbfounded. He had a knack of pushing the cops to the limit of their patience and then somehow getting them to come around to his point of view. Rumour has it that they saw police refusing to move the camp on. Many rallies and sound system nights were had with suit-clad businessfolk dancing with ferals and freaks. The vision and goodwill of Graffiti Hall of Fame cannot be understated.
The multicolored Omnibus, an old state transit bus bought from an old depot in Wollongong, came into being at a Graffiti Hall party. With Tony Spanos’ lateral mechanics, it was unleashed on Sydney. Like a slice of Graffiti, it cruised the streets before embarking on its maiden voyage. People used to try to hail it at bus stops — one time it stopped and picked up someone going to Newtown. The Peace Bus, another legendary bus which had belonged to Sydney University, was also refitted with a 3k sound system and was used to protest the insane Jabiluka mine. The old green Oz Experience bus was also painted up with anti-nuke messages, broadside speakers in the luggage hatches, and an onboard DJ booth powered by a generator strapped to the roof. This booming system used to set off car alarms, rattle cappuccino cups, enlist much bemused head-scratching and bring hundreds of smiles to faces around town.

Dig the Sounds Not Uranium

The black hand superimposed over a yellow and red uranium symbol became the sign of the times. There’s something about Jabiluka—we knew it could not be mined. The Mirrar people had openly invited all to join them in opposition to ERA’s plan to mine their land. The more they tried to push it through, the more opposition seemed to appear. Plans were afoot to get up there and join the blockade that was well advertised in the major cities.

Oms not Bombs was needed now more than ever. In 1998, weekly meetings galvanised a crew of about 12 who were willing to crew the bus. Food was bought and the bus packed for the mega-voyage. Canberra-Goolongook-Melbourne-Adelaide-Alice-Darwin-Jabiluka or bust. We packed the roof racks and bus throughout the night and left town wondering what adventures lay ahead. We had the Quincy sound system, digital cameras, live techno gear and the crew’s bits and pieces crammed into the old blue bus. We got out of Canberra and headed south and were on the chilly plateau’s of the Snowy’s when fuel lines froze and we came to rest amongst the patchy snow and gums near Nimitabel. But local knowledge got us going and the tour went on assisting the Goolongook blockade before arriving in Melbourne.

A great crew of active groups were in Melbourne where a mad party—Oms Away— was held at Swinbourne University. It raised moneys for the tour and for the Jabiluka campaign. The next morning, the recovery party was to join in with the blockading of a meeting of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party just down the road. A near riot saw police on horses charge the
huge and diverse crowd; the meeting was disrupted and Hanson
cancelled her appearance. Oms member Ben appeared on the
front pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, wearing a dressing
gown to oppose a police horse. From Melbourne we headed
west to South Australia, Adelaide and up to the amazing Flinders
Ranges and Wilpena Pound. The majestic rock formations and
energised land was inspiring and a low frequency hum could be
heard in the huge crater shaped formation.

We continued up the Stuart Highway and veering onto
the Lassiter Highway to land at Uluru, where we put on the
first doof near the twin rock formations of Uluru and Kata
Tjuta in early June ‘98. We found a spot about 20 kilometers
from the Babylonian Yulara resort. The vehicles parked up
around some short trees, the fine red sand enveloped the feet
and we walked amongst the abundant flowers. A camp was
established and we headed into Yulara to have a beer and to
spread the word on the doof. We gained permission from Rupert
a local Aboriginal guide, who showed us around the rock on a
free tour telling creation story’s about one formation that looked
amazingly like a huge serpent head. As word and photocopies
got around the resort, we encountered ridiculous paranoia. The
Yulara management had threatened to sack workers and evict
tourists from the resort if they dared attend the Oms not Bombs
doof. About 100 people turned up—travelers, local Aboriginal
people and workers—who had defied the ban. On the cold
night, many reported that spirits were present in abundance.
People felt they were on the bottom of the ocean, a reality for
the region thousands of years ago. In the morning, a group of
camels and their stirrer came through camp.
From Uluru, we hotfooted it into Alice and immediately bumped into another camel man who directed us to the claypan—the Earthdream winter solstice venue in years to come. We partied here and traveled up to Darwin via Mataranka Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek. While in Darwin, we assisted the Jabiluka campaign, but parties at the protest camp were controversial with camp politics often not conducive to spontaneous creativity. On one night, Yvonne Margarula’s brother came to our party thanking the mob from down south for supporting his sister in opposing the might of ERA. Another night in town ended in a riot with security guards who didn’t approve of the bunch of ferals telling them that toxifying the planet with deadly uranium was wrong. The tour ended with the Oms bus falling ill to a broken cylinder, the crew jumped ship to board the Peace Bus which had been driven up from Graffiti Hall of Fame to save the Oms crew. We then hotfooted it back to the east coast. Passing Winton in far western Queensland, we witnessed the edge of a cyclone - its epicenter on the east coast. It pumped storm cells as far as the eye could see across the vast dry plains. We reached Byron Bay eventually to set up a great party amongst the damp glades of the Funky Forest before returning to Sydney again.

Earthdream 1999/2000

Since ’98, the desert tour has become a reality for many people as the international Earthdream convoy sent ripples of energy through the outback in the opening year of the naughties. Oms Not Bombs became known as Ohms Not Bombs—‘ohms’ being a symbol of resistance. This can apply to sound or the mass of people power needed in our non-violent war against the enemies of the earth. Earthdream people power maneuvers in ’99 saw the Peace Bus involved in an Earthdream warm-up party protest on the shores of the dry and salty Lake Eyre. The Peace Bus made the mission after the Oms Bus had been declared unroadworthy at the J18 protest earlier that year in Sydney. As we were expected at Lake Eyre for the solstice party, we drove hard, running gauntlets over the western NSW border until we descended on the remote and spectacular Keepers Of Lake Eyre camp. An amazing alliance was forged, with Arabunna elder Kevin Buzzacott, who had taken on the Roxby Downs uranium mine (which is draining the fragile desert ecosystems and threatening Arabunna culture). Aboriginal activists meet ‘Doof Warriors’—as *Sydney's City Hub* (vol 4, no 44 1999) named Ohms not Bombs on their front cover spread prior to the desert activist party-conference. Ancient future now, sharing a common vision of a just, sustainable and nuclear free future. Reinforcements arrived the following year.
We had known the UK’s free party ambassadors, Bedlam Sound System, were coming for Earthdream2000, but it was unbelievable just how motivated this crew were. Totally self-funded from party fundraisers in London, they rocked up with a whole shipping container full of sound system—decks, lights, and the whole party package. A mad free party in Byron Bay called Free NRG saw the crews meet all the Australian free party contingents. A beach event at Wooyong attracted about 1500 party crew despite police roadblocks—many had to walk 8 kilometers laden with chai pots, records and cakes.

Fundraisers were organised, Earthdream awareness-raising parties were held throughout the Summer and Autumn, the word was put out, through our electronic and cut and paste flyer/zine media channels. The 200 plus convoy set off, gaining momentum from Port Augusta in May 2000. The crazy Mad Max style adventure really turned heads in the outback. Connections were made, fantastic desert parties were held, and the ball was now rolling for a major reaction against the earth destroying uranium industry. Earthdream saw black and white working together with a common vision. True reconciliation occurred on the dusty dancefloor of Coober Pedy, the roadblock at Roxby, and in workshops at several Aboriginal communities.

SOVEREIGNTY NOT SORRY

The millennium year also saw Kevin Buzzacott’s ‘Walk for Peace and Healing’ from Lake Eyre to the Sydney Olympics. The 3000 km walk involved Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal activists who carried the sacred fire of justice to finally converge upon the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Victoria Park in September 2000. The high profile squatted park embassy, set up by Canberra Tent Embassy veteran Isabell Coe and a host of supporters, was telling the real story of Australia to the throngs of international media in town for the games. This galvanized the community around the sovereignty and land rights/treaty issue, and the ball was now in motion for an effective challenge to colonial occupation and the lie of terra nullius. The link between indigenous and other activists in both Sydney and in the arid lands of the centre, was strengthened.
The temporary autonomous space reclaimed in Sydney Park in the early nineties has evolved far away from the gravity of the major city planets of this vast land. Out in the green-tinged centre a new society is developing based on non-hierarchy, liberationist principles, and shifting the chains of knowledge and respect back to the custodians of the land. Collective dreaming towards a free energy future is setting an amazing new precedent for a fear-free place for new generations to live in.
The roots of techno and the underground dance scene came from revolutionary beginnings such as Reclaim the Streets, squat, warehouse and open air free parties and festivals. Like most things in today’s world, dance parties have been commercialised and corporatised.

The Labrats solar powered sound system brings the party scene back to its roots as a revolutionary force of beats and breaks, bleeps and squeaks in the face of authority that is destroying our environment and the people that depend on it for their survival.

By using solar power and other alternative technologies we are showing there is an alternative to the burning of fossil fuel and the use of nuclear reactors that are polluting our environment. By using these sustainable alternatives we can sideline destructive power sources, proving our independence in an environmentally friendly way.

Music is a powerful metaphor when used for political change. A road can be blocked, a piece of land can be reclaimed, a place of oppression can become an autonomous zone to the sound of music. Dancing can change the world and the sun can provide the sounds.

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1 http://lab-rats.tripod.com
HOW THE SOLAR SOUND SYSTEM WORKS

It’s basically a massive car stereo. Twelve volts is the key to alternative energy efficiency when you’re using solar power. We’ve got three solar panels on the van, one on the caravan and a wind generator. The power produced is stored in a hefty battery bank. We’ve got 12 volt amplifiers and a 240-volt inverters to power the decks. This enables us to pull up anywhere and hold a party, ‘cause its all set up in the back of the van ready to go.

Issues important to our survival, like the fate of our forests, potential contamination of our environment by mines, waste dumps, emissions from industry, human rights violations etc, are often misconstrued by the corporate media or more often ignored due to financial interests and basic prejudice. This became more and more apparent with our increased involvement in different campaigns. Over the years, while the media tended to focus on the colour of your dreadlocks or whether you’ve had a shower instead of the real issues, we had our faith restored in the crews at SKA TV (Access News)², CAT TV, News Unlimited³ and, more recently, Indymedia.⁴ These are grassroots community media in which footage from different actions we have documented could be broadcast to the public without being tainted by commercial interest. They’re a great outlet for urban dwellers but when it comes to informing people in remote communities, who are often more directly affected by land rights and environmental issues, a different medium is required. It was out at the Arabunna Going Home Camp⁵ at Lake Eyre South in the South Australian desert that the Wind Powered Cinema was born, and on it, the revolution is being televised. The wind power consists of an art noveaux looking silver stream lined wind generator, mounted on the front of our silver fibreglass bubble of a caravan. It contains a bank of six deep cycle batteries, which run through an inverter, which turns the 12 volts into 240. We then plug the LCD projector into the inverter and let the show begin.

The mobile self-sufficient cinema has enabled screenings in all manner of surreal places. During Earthdream2000, at the gates of Roxby Downs uranium mine, we showed footage of the Chernobyl disaster to mine workers. We had a debut screening of the Beverley uranium mine documentary Emu Spew projected onto the side of the Bedlam sound system truck in the clay pans near the infamous Pine Gap. Yet perhaps our biggest Earthdream home movie screening happened when Showdown in Seattle and a Sydney Reclaim the Streets doco were projected onto the giant silver screen of an abandoned drive in movie cinema on the outskirts of Alice Springs. Anywhere, anytime, showing relevant docos to a cross-section of society at many more obscure places along the way. The objective of the wind-powered cinema is to show a reality of life that you probably won’t see on TV.

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² http://www.accessnews.skatv.org.au
³ http://www.cat.org.au
⁴ www.indymedia.org
⁵ http://www.lakeeyre.green.net.au
WHO ARE THE LABRATS?

IZZY (babbling) Hmm well the Labrats are me and Monkey Marc and anyone who will help carry a speaker, filter some veggie oil, play some funky tunes or freestyle some crazy rhymes on the solar powered sound system. Sometimes it might feel like you’re just a labrat in someone’s big god damn evil experiment and you think ‘fuck this, I’m taking control of my reality’ because the alternatives are there. And if we get off that apathetic brain numbing medication they feed you in the laboratory and use the waste of this society to create independence from all those things that are messing with the future of the planet, sort it out and have a rockin’ party while we’re doing it…why not!

Labrats Sola Sound System manifested in Darwin at the time of the Jabiluka protests in 1998. I had travelled from Melbourne to Adelaide with an oversized tricycle that had a bodged together bunch of old 12v electric wheelchair batteries, a solar panel and a small 12v PA on the back. My original vision was to ride this metal monstrosity from Melbourne to Jabiluka. After breaking an axle in Adelaide, we decided that it was not particularly viable and shoved it on the roof of my friend’s landrover. So we arrived at Jabiluka with a large broken tricycle and a sound system just a bit too big to hitchhike with. At this point I felt some form of collaboration was necessary to make this party happen. It was then that I met Monkey Marc who came to the Northern Territory with similar intentions to play music at the blockade. So we combined forces, becoming partners in mischief and mayhem. Marc had the decks, mixer and records, I had the PA batteries and solar panels. We had a couple of crazy parties, put it all in the get-away vehicle, and hit the road in the van that now runs on veggie oil.

MARCI’d come up from Sydney after hearing about the blockade. I’d been doing parties with Trevor Parkee and the All Funked Up Crew and had also been doing a radio program on 2SER with Trevor on a Saturday afternoon. I’d been playing mainly old black funk music and some reggae and dub...
from the ‘60s and ‘70s. I was essentially inspired by people such as Gil Scott Heron, The Last Poets, James Brown and bands with songs of political and social struggle. I believed at the time that it was music like this that would give us the strength to take on all the baddies in the world involved in such things as uranium mining and cultural genocide.

I remember watching TV and seeing loads of worn faces of blockaders up at Jabiluka and thought that if I took this music up there to the front line, we could bring some hope back to the situation, and we may even win. So off I went to Darwin, armed with my decks, sampler, an 808 and a bunch of (in those days) clean records. When I got up there, my mate Peta had a warehouse, later nicknamed the Toilet Block, which became the local feral refuge centre for burnt out blockaders.

The first party we did was a classic. About 100 people turned up at the Jabiluka camp. We had these tough little speakers which were distorting so much you could have played the same track all night and no one would’ve noticed. Most people loved it (apart from a few old and young grumps). Every time our 12v batteries ran out people would run over to the nearest car and rip out the battery and boom—off we’d go again. When we ran out of power for the decks we got out two tape walkmans and DJ’d with that. That was Izzy’s expertise…nothing ever stopped us. There was so much energy there.
After our many crazy attempts at parties, some of which became pretty legendary, the Ohms Not Bombs crew turned up with their party machine. After a very psychedelic beach party, I decided to open up a feral friendly nightclub in Darwin with Pete from Ohms called Molybdonite. Both of them turned into full-on riots, with the local bouncers deciding that ferals were nothing but scum and deserved to be bashed. There’s nothing like red neck Australia to make you feel welcome. After this, things got a bit hairy and lots of stuff happened that I can’t go into here and well … we were forced to take to the road.

**How does the van run off veggie oil?**

**Marc**

Well, first you need a diesel engine. We’ve installed a whole new fuel system so the car, in essence, runs like a dual-fuel vehicle. To get the van running on veggie oil we built a heated fuel tank that heats the oil by circulating hot water from the radiator through a copper coil in the tank. This thins it out enabling it to be used as a fuel. We then installed a fuel pump and an extra fuel line with a re-washable fine filter to clean the oil before it hits the motor. At the end of the oil fuel line is a tap. The basic principal is to start the van on diesel for ten minutes, which heats the oil in the tank. When the oil is hot enough we turn the fuel pump on, the diesel tap off, the veggie oil tap on and brrrmrmrmrmrmrm… it’s fish and chips all the way.

Before we turn the motor off we run it on diesel for 5 minutes to clean out the motor. It’s as simple as that. It is very efficient as we actually get more miles per gallon on veggie oil than we do on diesel. Also, all the oil we get is old oil so it’s all recycled and free. We’ve done just over 20,000 km’s around Australia for basically nothing.

Environmentally, the van puts out much less pollution than normal diesel. We haven’t been able to afford proper emissions tests but we were able to gather a rough estimate of the benefits. It has no net CO2 emissions, no sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide is reduced by 10-50%, soot emissions

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6 [http://www.omsnotbombs.org](http://www.omsnotbombs.org)
are 40-60% less, hydrocarbons go down 10–50% and importantly a whole range of carcinogenic aromatic hydrocarbons are reduced from 60–100%. Of course, by growing veggie oil plants this eats CO2s to produce oxygen. So there are many advantages. Also you no longer have to rely on the corrupt world of petrochemical companies. No more blood for oil.

IZZY

We had the solar pumping the tunes and the wind cranking the visuals, but we were still driving around on diesel. It’s 320 kms to the supermarket from Lake Eyre camp so the fuel thing really hit home and just seemed a bit hypocritical. We were looking at hydrogen, water power, solar and biodiesel but none were viable in our desert location. It was out there that we saw a documentary on the Bougainville Revolutionary Army called Hell in the Pacific. It showed the BRA driving around on hand ground coconut oil as a fuel, and we figured that if they can do it against all odds so can we — in the middle of the desert. But we’ve got chip shops instead of coconut palms.

BACKGROUND

Izzy

All my life I have moved around. When I was a child my father worked for ASIO which meant that we moved every two years leaving little contact or connection with places we moved from. These days, I move around for very different reasons. Though the travel bug has roots in military and government instruction, it is now used to fight the results of their misuse of power. It’s ironic really… you could say they trained me well. I left home when I was 16, jumped in a van and ended up at a forest blockade called Curbia in southern NSW. The camp was on the edge of a half logged coupe, making the contrast of beauty and destruction very apparent. The issue was hot in the papers though ‘ferals’ were the press’s main attraction. At this camp, I was lucky enough to witness a win to have the forest protected. I have witnessed very few since then, but it was this initial win that gave me the enthusiasm to keep trying. This was shortly followed, in 1995, by the Forest Embassy in Canberra. Forest activists, loonies and freaks from all over the country converged on the lawns of parliament—it was an inspiring time. The crew from NEFA (North East Forest Alliance) kept me alive with their rocking communal kitchen. With 50 people hanging on, making noise and running amok, the stump truck (a semi trailer with 2 big old growth stumps on the back) did blockies around Parliament House.
The first techno party I ever manifested was a fundraiser for Geco (Goongerah Environment Centre).\(^7\) I was about 16, had no money, no phone, no venue, no sleep, knew no DJs, in fact very little at all about the whole Sydney techno scene. But I had lots of enthusiasm and determination. I figured that it had to be done in order to save the forests. So I drew a flyer, ran around like a maniac, lugging large things on public transport and babbling at anyone who would listen. Thanks to the Vibe Tribe and everyone supporting the cause, the party went off. It proved to be an excellent awareness-raising exercise. We got a carload together and went down to the blockade at Sellers Road in East Gippsland. Loggers, greenies, cops, lock-ons, tree sits, magic mushrooms, glow in the dark fungus, giant tree ferns, crazy possums, snow floods and fires…all the things that make doing what we do such an adventure.

I don’t know how many times I have been arrested, bashed or verbally abused. Arrested for some thing I didn’t do, denied my right to a lawyer (or a telephone call), strip searched, had our vehicles, camps or houses raided. Once I was even flown with 4 police escorts on a private aeroplane from Eden (home of the evil Daishowa woodchip mill) to be imprisoned in one of the worst women’s prisons in Australia for 7 days with no actual charge. I’m just one of many who have felt the long arm of the law with all its prejudice and corruption and violent tendencies (though it’s ten times worse if you’re black in your own land). They say what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger or maybe but maybe it just drives you insane with frustration. It’s definitely more fuel to the fire. I really feel sometimes that we could have saved the world by now if it wasn’t for the police—a few close calls really makes you appreciate living.

In jail my brain is full of irritation.
Knowing environmental degradation
Goes full steam ahead with civilisation
Feeling powerless from my position
Its in the shades of grey they took our rights away
These bars will never make me forget about freedom
These pills they give me wont make me stop thinking
Coz I’ll be on the front line
Just to give this earth a bit more time (written in prison)

Hitchhiking around Australia from forest to desert, redneck town to concrete jungle, broadens one’s awareness of the variety of characters and environment that makes Australia what it is. After a couple more laps of Australia I decided to hitchhike around the world. A roadside street and gutter perspective contrasting the world’s most poverty stricken nations to the most industrialised countries, affirmed my commitment to environmental activism. In England, Europe and Japan, I witnessed how humans can practically destroy the natural environment. Dancing in acid rain at a Czech teknival, a riot of a thousand

\(^7\) http://www.geco.org.au
squatters over a piece of concrete in Berlin, too many sun rises over industrial landscapes trippin’ off my scone thinking I don’t want to see Australia turn out like an industrial concrete overdose. We still have so much left to fight for.

Marc

I too moved around a lot as a kid all over the place. I lived in Greece, Yemen and Egypt and spent the rest of my childhood growing up in Wales. My dad used to fly around the world a lot with his job and we used to follow him. I think I’d been on something like 26 plane flights before I was 10. I saw many different cultures and hung out with all sorts of people — from rich Arabic captains, to the poorest people. We witnessed immense poverty, usually only next door or even under the staircase. By contrast, we had our own body guard who used to accompany me and my brother to the swimming pool. He’d just stand at the edge of the pool with his machine gun. I remember wondering why people always wanted to help the poor when they seemed to be the happiest. Then, when I was eight, I saw the refugees and civilian soldiers of the Palestine Liberation Front coming through the streets of Sanaa, Yemen, shouting and firing their guns in the air. I remember young boys with arms and legs blown off and all sorts of horrific injuries fixed up with bits of old cloth. These people just kept walking and driving their old dodgy trucks because their homelands had been taken. At this point I realised that something was wrong with the world and not everyone was as lucky as me.
In 1986, when I was 13, my family moved to Sydney having realised that Maggie Thatcher was ruining Britain. I used to sing that Sex Pistols song where it goes ‘...no future, no future for you and England’s dreaming’. After going to school in Sydney, I applied to do a degree in Geology. I’d always had an interest in the way the planet had formed. After a 5-year degree, I decided that I was going to be an environmental geologist. Since there were virtually no jobs around like this at the time, I tried to get involved in cleaning up the mess the mining industry leaves behind. As the last 6 months of my degree involved working in a mine, I applied for a bundle of environmental jobs. But my university found me a job working in an underground gold mine in Cue, in the desert of Western Australia instead. As it was compulsory, I took the job believing how I would clean up the mess they’d created. But, I spent everyday working in the mine—as an underground sampler—and when my 6 months were up, they offered me a job as one of the geologists for the mine. Though I tried to have some influence over environmental issues, decisions were mostly made from higher places. Next thing I knew I’d been there for two years.

One morning I woke up and my house was on fire. To cut a long story short I actually died in the fire and my alarm clock eventually managed to wake me out of a carbon monoxide induced haze. Everything I owned went up in smoke. After this, a bunch of strange things happened including an instance where a couple of spirits visited me and my mate in the other room telling my mate that the mine was full of restless spirits and that everybody should get out. A week later, I rolled the company 4WD nearly killing myself again. I felt I was in the wrong place, so I gave up my job and hit the road. I ended up in Darwin after my car had broken down in The Kimberleys and everything I owned had been stolen. My brother reckoned it was karma for working down the mines. Later I took up contracting exploration work in Darwin and the Tanami desert. It was here that I met the local Aboriginal mob after breaking down on the side of the road. The driller and I were talking away to them all excited, but they were totally freaked out. I realised that all they could see was the man who had come to take their land away again.

That was it! I was as far away from what I wanted to be doing in this world than I ever could be. So I switched sides, deciding to do something more positive with my life.

The Labrats Sola Sound System has been involved with Reclaim The Streets in Sydney Melbourne Adelaide and Hobart. It’s been transported on skateboards, trolleys, bicycles and in the back of the veggie oil van. The sound system is a statement in itself — drawing attention to pollution problems and global warming. Although we have copped some shit about driving the van at RTS people are getting educated by this living-driving alternative.
Unfortunately, we have become a bit of a cop magnet having been defected eight times in seven months for any trivial matter. We’ve even been told we could be fined for our paint job as it might be offensive to horses and cattle. This was in cow free inner-city Sydney.  

Music has been an essential part of my life. After singing for a few hardcore and funk bands, I started listening to hip hop and doing graffiti - becoming influenced by people like Chuck D. Rap seemed at the time to be the clearest and funkiest way to get your message across without sounding like you were whingeing (which was what rock ‘n’ roll seemed like to me). So I went out and bought myself an 808 drum machine and a sampler—which became my most inspirational tool. I started sampling from the TV and radio. I use vocal samples as they have an ear of authenticity about them. Also, I don’t have the lyrical prowess to rap myself. I’m a classic at putting my foot in my mouth. Luckily, Izzy fills that gap and the whole thing becomes 10 times stronger. The rap element, which Izzy and other rappers have brought to our music, is the poetry of our time, telling our stories in total honesty, communicating our fight to save this planet. So with Iz, the story is our version—100% uncut. And we’ve got loads to tell.

There’s nothing better than positive lyrics coming in over a funky beat. You’re automatically reaching a wider audience. There are many people who come to our parties for the music, but who, after hearing the message from the street, became involved in campaigns. Music is also the best way to block a road. Most of the time the cops hate it because they don’t get time to think, and when that happens that wonderful element of chaos comes steamrolling through.

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WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE EARTHDEEM TOUR?

IZZY

I’d heard about the Earthdream tour when travelling in Europe a few years ago. In the first week of my return to Australia, I went to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. There, I met Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, an Arabunna elder calling for people to come out to his country in the desert of South Australia. The Lake Eyre South region is currently facing the devastating affects of Olympic Dam uranium mine operated by Western Mining Company at Roxby Downs. I saw the potential for this tour to coincide with the issues and campaigns of the land through which the convoy would pass. I felt inclined to go out there to do some groundwork for the journey. So prior to Earthdream2000, we have been in the desert fighting the mining companies, learning about the land and Aboriginal culture. Earthdream99 was held at Lake Eyre camp, attracting around 200 people out into the desert. Three days of wild parties were followed by direct action on WMC. This was an inspiring time for everyone, seeding the mobile party protest convoy that grew with Earthdream2000.

A highlight of EarthDream2000 was the five day ‘reclaim the road’ party where we blocked the main intersection to Roxby Mine and had a rockin’ party, a BBQ for the workers, a mutant cabaret show, and a hip hop sound clash war featuring MCs Oshara and Yohan. Most importantly, we discovered that cops don’t like Speedbass (ridiculously fast techno (IZZY BROWN)
from San Francisco). Marc reversed the van, the speakers getting closer to the police blocking the road. Sporadic beats, bleeps, bass and babble of speed bass penetrated their senses causing them to literally walk backwards, get in their cars, wind up their windows and piss off in a state of panic—enabling the Ohms not Bombs Peace Bus to pull across the road and block it for the next five days.

There is a secret war going on out there. On the road we have met its casualties and its perpetrators. In Coober Pedy, the children bear the defects and the old people the scars. There are cataracts in the eyes that witnessed the atomic blasts at Emu Junction and Maralinga, but still no recognition or compensation for the innocent victims of the nuclear industry.

In Maree, there is fear and uncertainty to speak out against WMC after they funded an armed attack on those Arabunna people opposing the Olympic Dam expansion of the Borefields into their traditional lands. As a result, two were shot dead in self-defence. WMC funded conflicting native title claims, drugs, guns, cars and payouts. The police left town leaving locals in the hands of a WMC bought and bribed fear campaign that still lingers. These days they offer gifts of basketball stadiums, paint for the school, street signs and contaminated water tanks. All this in an effort to gain control over the waters of the Great Artesian Basin. WMC are buying up pastoral leases in every direction.

In the Adnyamathanha community of Nepabunna, west of Lake Frome, we witnessed the divide and conquer techniques used by Beverley uranium mine operator Heathgate Resources, an Australian subsidiary to the US military giant General Atomics. With their ‘just sign this for a pair of cowboy boots and a hat mentality’, they prey on unsuspecting members of the Adnyamathanha community to sign away their traditional lands. With token gifts for some, they’ve turned people to squabble amongst themselves, uninformed and divided. Heathgate, like many other mining companies, used the Native Title Act to gain access to Aboriginal land against the wishes of the majority of the community—a familiar story.

The battle continues with Pangea Resources proposing that Billa Kalina (between Coober Pedy, Maree and Woomera in South Australia) is the perfect destination for the world’s nuclear waste! Due to massive public protest, the international waste project is still on the drawing board. Yet, a national radioactive waste dump has been approved, unannounced to most of the population. It’s like they think no one lives out there. Nothing new for the elders in Coober Pedy who continue to campaign to protect their traditional land.
In 1999 I was involved in a three month camel trek (Humps Not Dumps) with seven other women walking over 1000km to different nuclear-industry hot spots in the Billa Kalina region to try to draw attention to the proposed radioactive waste dump. It was pretty intense. Lots of physical space, but not much head space, romantic idea but a lot of hard work. Maybe it was the gender imbalance or just a personality thing. Either way, I’ll leave it to your imagination. Eight girls, three months, wild camels, good and bad dust storms, can’t see the track in front of me, lightning lighting up the night like day revealing wet camels with their eyes bulging, bucking and jumping like a rodeo show, rope burn and blisters, debates about ideology, our differences exposed like our bodies to the elements.

WMC is a different story. I have developed a very personal vendetta with this corporate beast of mass destruction. I am writing this only weeks after they bulldozed our camp to the ground for the second time. By living in ... blockade camps or communities, you develop a sense of personal responsibility to stop the atrocities you are witnessing. When you are directly affected, you see the destruction first hand. When your friends or family are the casualties of this secret war, then statistics, propaganda and paper is nothing and it becomes very raw. Us and them and the brainwashed soldiers in between. Just victims in denial too busy being part of the problem.

I am a senior Aboriginal woman from Kokatha country.
I am responding to your press release today that announced the three final nuclear waste site location. Your government and all the successive governments are guilty of committing ‘ecocide’ and genocide against the first nations of this ancient country. By the way the old people are still waiting for a ‘sorry’ when many of them were exposed to the black rain clouds that spread shortly after the test at Emu Plain.

The Kungka’s know first hand about the dangers of nuclear by-products, bombs, contaminated lands and health problems that have resulted over the last 47 years Australia talks of reconciliation but how can we reconcile when this waste is going to be dumped on the ancestral lands of the Kokatha people? How can the government continue to negotiate and make decisions about stolen lands, without the consent of all the Kokatha people who are the custodians and who have already had their lands stolen back in the 1950s when their lands were annexed by the Commonwealth Government using the doctrines of Terra Nullius?

This is morally wrong and the Kupa Piti Kungkas have always opposed this proposal. We know the country, because of our connection to the land that dates back to at least 40,000 years. Scientists don’t have the history like us. How can they offer guarantees that this is the perfect environment for storage?

Irati,Wanti!!
(‘The Poison — Leave It’!! in Yankunytjatjara, Central Australia).  

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9 http://www.iratiwanti.org

10 www.green.net.au/humpsnotdumps
EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND DIRECT ACTIVISM

As we all know, the future’s with the kids. On the Humps Not Dumps camel trek we visited Roxby Downs High School, camels and all. It was an excellent opportunity to talk to the kids of the mining town, many quite concerned about their parent’s health and the risks involved with the nuclear industry. We tried a similar thing at the primary school in Woomera, but because of the younger age group they ended up laughing at the camels digging up the sprinkler with their noses on the school oval. That night, we showed films at the local park about Jabiluka and the dangers of George W Bush’s Son of Star Wars (National Missile Defence) program. This was quite fitting as most of the kid’s parents were Americans working at Narrungar (ex US base) and the kids seemed to know more about the military details then we did. At the school in Leigh Creek we had the kids sign a replica 44 gallon radioactive waste drum with comments about their views on the waste dump. It turned into who could write the rudest thing about John Howard—so I guess that’s a good sign.

On Earthdream2000, we visited schools and communities doing cabaret circus-style shows. A small group worked with the anti petrol sniffing program in Yuendumu in the Tanami desert, where we ran hip hop workshops and a roller disco, painted a mural on the youth centre and screened the local favourite, Bush Mechanics. It was pretty wild. Some of the kids had never seen records before and were keen to use them as frisbees. In an attempt at damage control we played music in a cage in the youth centre. As there was ‘sorry business’ going on (with elders busy mourning the death of an elder), most of the time it was just us and all the kids from the community. The sniffers found our fuel tank, but to their dismay only found veggie oil and decided to smash our window instead—all part of the excitement in front of the roller disco.

More recently, we did a gig for the kids at the settlement in Redfern, Sydney. Most of them preferred to yell into the mike than rap, and others preferred to sing along to the cheesy RnB the organiser requested. One can only hope the message is getting to the kids and music seems a fun way to reach them. So far so good.

There’s definitely a revolution happening on the streets all around the world. People have simply had enough and nothing’s going to stop them getting out there and doing something about it. People want change and can see that governments or big companies don’t give a stuff, so they’re going to have to do things their own way. While generally we feel like we’ve been tricked in their twisted game, we have an advantage. They’ve
taught us all their tricks through years of social programming, so we know all the ins and outs and we’re going to use it against them. We also have another advantage—street knowledge—and no matter how much they try to infiltrate or undermine us, they’ll never work it out because we’re on different levels. As OB-1 says: ‘use the force’. Believe me, if you follow that advice you’ll always stay one step ahead.

I guess it’s about independence motivation and freedom this is our musical metaphor about the things we’re for and against getting the message in ya head a musical metamorphisisation breeding the freedom of information it’s about tunin’ the teckno-logy fittin’ it to the ecology and its working we’re working together getting clever with this community-minded unity We got the alternative energy For a nuclear free autonomy

LabRAtS over AND out there!
Contemporary environmental activist and social justice networks have lately enthused over the zeitgeist evoking dictum: *drive out, amp up and lock on*. Pirating and harnessing a spectrum of new and old technologies, mobile neotribes are conspiring in a proactive climate to celebrate and protect natural and cultural heritage in Australia. This chapter focuses on the convergence of environmentalism and electronic music cultures in nationwide responses to forest, nuclear and native title issues. It also explores the role of various techno-tribal sound system collectives and *technomadic* pilgrimage rituals exemplified by the inter(sub)cultural ‘corroboree’ *Earthdream2000*.

Nineties environmental techno-tribalism traces its roots to mobile not-for-profit sound system collectives emerging in the UK in the late eighties/early nineties which themselves drew upon a variety of influences from new travellers, to anarcho-punks to zippies. While the oppositional stance of UK techno-traveller milieus may be as questionable as that asserted by their more sedentary relatives (the entrepreneurial hype, Dance Party politics and reactionary hubris of ravers), convergence with the growing DiY anarcho-punk movement saw technoculture implicated in a more proactive social agenda, of which the anti-roads and Reclaim the Streets\(^1\) movements are exemplary.

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\(^1\) [http://www.gn.apc.org](http://www.gn.apc.org)
Technocultures are developing beyond the ‘e’-volutionary diatribe of ‘dunce culture’ with habitueés desiring to make sense of their world, uploading their demands for a legitimate place within it. Travelling the UK festivals in the early nineties, the original tech-savvy indicator of this phenomenon was probably ‘the peoples sound system’, Spiral Tribe. Whereas the London orbital party promoters ‘had seen the English countryside as a green-field development site for … [their] new leisure concept, the Spirals understood it as a politically charged environment, an historic arena for a clash between rebels and oppressors’. Future-primitives, Spiral Tribe believed they were connected to prehistoric nomadic tribes and that techno was the new folk music. A loose collective, the Spirals wore black post-apocalyptic apparel with their insignia ‘breach the peace/make some fucking noise’ prominent.

According to Mathew Collin, they believed free parties were ‘shamanic rites, which using the new musical technologies in combination with certain chemicals and long periods of dancing, preferably in settings with spiritual significance, could reconnect urban youth to the earth with which they had lost contact, thus averting imminent ecological crisis’. Partly indicative of the upsurge in Celtic identification, this ‘pan-global army of techno-pagans and dancefloor dissidents’ are said to have pursued a ‘terra-technic’ anarcho-mysticism. This brand of dissidence has influenced local formations.

CUSTODIANSHIP AND THE NEW TRIBES

While circumstances in the UK have been formative, historical and environmental conditions in Australia are significant to the emergence of techno terra-ism. Contemporary Australia is witness to the growth of a consciousness which, through an intimate awareness of the deep wounds of settler history upon the environment and Aboriginal inhabitants, is at odds with a colonialist future. An emergent body of literature attends to processes of Euro-Australian reconcilement and custodianship in regard to native landscape. In his Future Eaters, Tim Flannery hints at a movement towards what he calls ‘ecological attunement’. The wisdom in taking ‘ownership’ of past wrongdoings and assuming custodial obligations towards Australian landscape, towards local place, is constituted in what Freya Matthews calls ‘reinhabitation’. Alongside permaculture projects, ‘eco-villages’ and ‘landcare’, such strategies are symptomatic of a local ‘ecologism’. Perhaps at a wider level we are witnessing processes whereby European Australians are establishing a legitimate place on this continent through ethical action—establishing, in line with the historical project of Peter Read, the right to ‘belong’ here.

In a climate which has seen the growing recognition of a deeply humanised landscape and a concomitant ‘sorry’ movement, such processes are rarely disconnected from ‘reconciliements’ with Australia’s indigenous peoples.  

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As nodes in a contemporary youth network committed to celebrating and defending local landscapes and Aboriginal peoples, techno-anarchist sound systems evidence such ‘attunement’. These technocultures are ‘neo-tribes’, or *technotribes*, in Michel Maffesoli’s sense of temporary and ‘empathetic’ voluntary associations, networked in an ‘underground sociality’. These are ‘DIY cultures’ committed to both pleasure *and* politics. Far from eschewing a political ‘program’, they pursue ideals consistent with an historical sensitivity and ecological sensibility—transparent in reconciliatory gestures, ethical consumption and their broader cultural output.

These ethical technotribal formations have grown from a marginal cultural movement establishing firm roots in Australia—radical ecologism. A multifaceted critical standpoint delineated by Carol Merchant, radical ecologism is a system of discourse and practice indicating an awareness of rampant environmental devastation inflicted under the guise of ‘development’ and by the globalising trend of modernity. Here, an understanding of the abuses of ecological rights is closely linked with a growing knowledge of human rights abuses, suffered especially by indigenous peoples at the hands of transnational corporations. Since the early eighties, in campaigns to protect sites of natural significance around Australia, Earth-defenders have surfaced. With hippie, punk and pagan influences, throughout the nineties these feral guardians of heritage have matured at multiple sites of resistance, forming activist eco-tribes and engaging in acts of *terra-ism*.10

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Comparison with competing youth cultural trajectories is instructive. Where the definitive acronym for ravers may be the neohippy PLUR (peace, love, unity, respect), ferals subscribe to NVDA (non violent direct action). Obstructing, boycotting and performing activist-theatre for the purpose of promoting change is perhaps where ‘feral’ may be distinguished from ‘raver’, for whom ‘disappearance’ has been offered as a defining quality. While the rave massive is implored to ‘get busy’, this is usually a playful pursuit associated with non-productive expenditure. While media may focus on welfare dependence, and resource development-dependent communities may dismiss them as taxpayers liabilities or just ‘bludging scum’, eco-activists claim, through voluntary efforts to save sites of significance, they make productive contributions—that they work for future generations by saving our heritage.

Raving and ferality are spectacular pursuits. Yet, the risks associated with ferality are not merely sartorial, a matter of style or adventurous embodiment as in raving. Ultimately, the feral spectacle is confrontational—often justified as ‘environmental work’. And the ‘risk identity’ assumed differs from that which is apparently cultivated by new Travellers who are said to actively embrace chaos by ‘putting themselves in danger from the things others fear so much: transiency, eviction, ostracism, placeless identities, poverty, harassment and uncertainty in one’s life’. Not a placeless pursuit of orgiastic expenditure, the feral project, taking the form of ecologically conscious counter-development action, is a terra-ist life-strategy of (re)connection and defence.

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This postcolonialist disposition persists in decidedly extropian youth formations. In a proactive and inspired climate coinciding with the turn of the millennium, Australian post-rave technoculture is heir to the feral legacy and has provided a culture of opposition with sophisticated campaign tools—an armory of technology (eg. DAT, sampler, synth, mini disc, internet, MIDI). As Andy Parks suggests in an edition of Radio National’s Earthbeat, music has long provided a powerful tool in environmental and other protest campaigns. While electronic musics do not possess an exclusive power to ‘unify people and draw attention to a cause’, recent technologies nevertheless enable producers to establish new techniques of ‘connect[ing] directly to the heart’. For young people refusing rampant consumerism and ontological disconnection, eco-techno amalgamations have presaged new strategies of celebrating and defending a heritage threatened by resource development interests, tactics for combating the mining and forestry industries, timely ways of expressing attachment to country.

Since the mid nineties, audio-visual technologies, aggregated into ‘sound systems’, have been harnessed to serve the cause. Jellyheads and Vibe Tribe veteran Kol Dimond, aka DJ Fatty Acidz, has observed the intertwined growth of political consciousness and the sound system:

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In the last five years I’ve seen thousands upon thousands of people who weren’t politically motivated, switched on to more single issue politics, saving things, and fighting for things, anything, whether it is the classic cases of Jabiluka, or rezoning in Sydney or Everleigh Street, wherever there is a major environmental concern you’ll find a sound system now. You’ll find people … are seriously unable to separate the two. (Earthbeat 18/12/99)

From the mid nineties, sound systems would provide the bass lines for road protesting blockades (and later, Reclaim The Streets festivals). In July 1995, Vibe Tribe collaborated with activists protesting Sydney’s M2 motorway in Carmegeddon. In September 1997, a second Carmegeddon RTS event was held in Moore Park where the Quency Sound System featured. Electronic musicians and sound systems participated in awareness and fun(d) raising campaigns throughout this period—combating road, native forest and uranium mining industries. In 1996, an early Sydney environmental activists fundraiser was held by the Sisters @ the Underground in conjunction with Clan Analogue called Doof Punk Tree Trunk.

East Gippsland’s Geco (Goongerah Environment Centre) is a notable beneficiary of funds generated by benefit doofs. Combating the obliteration of Victoria’s remnant old growth forest, and recognising the prior occupation status of the Bidawal, Geco is a grassroots eco-tribe. Since the early nineties, Geco has blockaded clearfelling operations designed to service government subsidised export woodchippers. In recent years its primary objective has been the defence of Goolengook forest (and its many rare and threatened species)—campaigns funded through Melbourne benefits. In June 1997, Flora Faunacation was held at the Red Room in Thornbury. 1998 saw Eco-Doofender at Fitzroy’s Shunyata in March, Psycorroboree at The Cage off Little Bourke St in June, and ECO TERRA at Brunswick’s Dane Rehearsal Studios in September. Terra-Techno transpired in Carlton in November 2000. Most of these events, and others held outside the city like GoolenDoof in Ferny Creek Reserve in the Dandenong Ranges in October 1998, have incorporated the performance of often improvised theatre to electronic soundtracks.

In recent times, eco-tribes have thus become closely affiliated with electronic music culture. Geco’s vegan food kitchen has had an almost ubiquitous presence at parties like Gaian Thump, Reclaim the Streets and Earthdream events. Yet, perhaps the earliest convergence was a series of Melbourne events held by the Imagineer collective in 1991. At these events, according to collective co-founder Andrzej Liguz, ‘the Ferals crossed over with the techno subculture and the two groups spent enough time together to form their own hybrid child: the Feral/Techno scene’. I recall this child of the nineties surfacing much later at Earthdream ’97 (the third Earthdream2000 preliminary event) held on Winter Solstice at Stonehenge Campground in East Gippsland. This was a site

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14 Named after a series of UK road blockades in the early nineties (Wall 1999:63).
15 http://www.geco.org.au
16 Similarly the Timbarra Cafe Collective, raising funds for ongoing opposition to Ross Mining’s gold project on the Timbarra plateau (NSW), have been present at numerous events.
where those preoccupied with defending threatened old growth mixed it with those equally serious about bringing off a party; where constructing blockade defences, erecting large scale artworks and building a rhythm had become integral components in a larger radical scaffolding. Fluro fetishists, and crazy trouser posses were out in die hard numbers, sharing the floor with decorated field strategists. Within a ring of gum trees on a knoll in a cow paddock, dancers greeted a dawn pitching the sky in cloudy rivulets of orange/red, animated by a sublime trance soundtrack mixed by DJ Krusty who played inside one of two upended kombi vans forming the base of a Mutoid Waste Co ‘car-henge’.

Geco’s Celebrate and Defend Gathering at Goongerah East Gippsland, has been held under a full moon in January since 1994. In 2001, the Gathering featured forest information tours, NVDA workshops and entertainment (in the form of electronic, acoustic and hybrid music performances). The Gathering hosted several Psycorroboree DJs, bands including Pan, and Labrats and Yum solar powered sound systems. The event provided a means of introducing participants to breathtaking yet unprotected heritage sites continually threatened by woodchipping interests. Participants were informed that ‘these Ancient Forests survived the last ice age but are rapidly disappearing under the onslaught of the industrial logging regime’. As an activist skill-sharing event and a recruitment campaign for logging coup blockades through the summer, the gathering prompted a ‘reclaiming of the future’ through active responses to the unsound practices of the past and present.

These and further interventions, such as planting native trees on the camping site, signified a proactive response to past environmental malpractice—a kind of ecological reconciliation. Regenerating land and reconnecting with country has been a central preoccupation of the Victorian collective Tranceplant, whose ‘Resurrect the Bush’ festival at Easter 2001, for example, was ‘a mission to protect the waterway, thicken the undergrowth and defeat those grizzly weeds’. That Tranceplant acknowledges the authority of local

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18 http://lab-rats.tripod.com
19 www.green.net.au/goongerahgathering
20 www.tranceplant.org.au

Acquired from
www.ozauthors.com.au
Koori populations (who have performed on-site permission ceremonies), strengthens a reconciliatory agenda. Coexistdance, held at Lake Tyres in Victoria on New Year’s Eve 2000/01 by Hocus Focus, was similarly committed to reconciling with native land and peoples. After local Aboriginal rights activist Robbie Thorpe ignited the main fire with ‘sacred ashes’, ‘fire stokers kept it roaring all night as the sparks proved that fire-works. Four giant gums alight, burning stories of trust into the memories of the Bung Yarna’. Hosted on the site of an Aboriginal reserve, and attended by 200 Kooris (representing two thirds of the attendees), Coexistdance saw DJs playing under what Karl Fitzgerald (aka Voiteck) called: ‘a shanty of old tin and sawn off car roofs, a real survivalist DJ booth’. Before New Years Eve, ‘Koori kids helped paint banners, as the elders wandered around checking out the sound system and associated dj toys’. Karl articulates something of the event’s significance:

The evening sunset was beautifully calming over the stilled lake—sacred ground vibes everywhere. A real sense of Australian history hit home as you sat watching the setting sun, imagining what had happened on these shores over the years. With old colonial wagons and ploughs rusting away in the nearby swamp, it really put a twist to the coming of 2001.  

“DOOFING FOR THE PLANET”

Benefit doofs proliferated in the late nineties and it wasn’t just the activities of the forest industry which had provoked them. Australia is estimated to possess half the planet’s uranium ore deposits, and since the 1996 election of the Howard Government — which scrapped Labour’s notorious Three Mine Policy—nucleocrats have reveled in plans for Australian industry expansion at both ends of the nuclear fuel cycle: hosting uranium mines and radioactive waste dumps. Such threats have triggered intercultural alliances and cross-neotribal solidarity under the chanted maxim ‘keep it in the ground’ and the oft-sampled soundbite ‘get rid of the Howard Government’.  

In 1997, ignoring Environmental Impact Statements and strong opposition from traditional owners, the Mirrar, Energy Resources of Australia Ltd (ERA) received federal approval to build a new uranium mine at Jabiluka in Kakadu National Park (a World Heritage listed area). In 1998, Mirrar and environmental groups were attempting to secure World Heritage in Danger status for the Park, and protestors were readying for a major blockade to prevent the mine’s construction. In mid year, fundraisers were held around the country. A multiple recipient list email ‘DOOFING FOR THE PLANET — STOP JABILUKA MINE’, stated that it’s ‘time for the doofers of Australia to make their presence felt and show their true colors … GREEN NOT GREED’ (16 July 1998).

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23 http://www.mirrar.net
In June-July 1998, two key events were held in Melbourne. Hosted by Monash University’s Caulfield campus, Yellowcake was the first dance event to convene most of the underground crews in the city, raising thousands of dollars for similar parties around the country and a fund to buy vehicles and supplies for the Jabiluka blockaders committed to fighting ‘the corporate greed machine and protect our futures’. This was followed by Oms Away on July 18 at Swinburne University. The well attended event raised money for the Melbourne Jabiluka Action Group and assisted the Ohms not Bombs crew to undertake their planned mission to Jabiluka that year. The event accommodated three dance floors supported by many of Melbourne’s underground DJs: Ground Zero (‘the impact zone’), The Fall Out Shelter, and The Mushroom Cloud.

Jabiluka has been a key issue to which activists and aesthetes alike have rallied. Originating in 1995 to protest French nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific, the post Vibe Tribe techno-anarchist crew Ohms not Bombs has been prominent in fund and awareness raising activity. Ohms not Bombs is a repository for disaffected yet inspirited youth insisting on making a ‘public new sense’. Gretta, who, as Adrenalentil, plays live music using an analogue synthesizer and an 808 drum machine, was attracted to Ohms through a feeling that was something like ‘a religious belief that we were gonna save the planet’. ‘We just love this country’, she says. ‘We wanna help save it from the nuclear fuel cycle. We love being on the road’. The ‘Dig the Sounds Not Uranium’ tour of ’98 saw Ohms take their ‘multi-media infodelic sound system’ on the road in an old State Transit bus dubbed ‘the Earth Defender’. Manifested through two key benefit doofs in Sydney, and assisted by the Melbourne doofs outlined above, the tour was a Mobile Autonomous Zone (MAZ) which saw Ohms hold 30 events around Australia. At the primary destination, Jabiluka, doofs were held where anti-mine voice samples were ‘activated over the various forms of funky beats’. On the day of mass action when many protestors were arrested wearing John Howard masks, Ohms played Yothu Yindi’s Treaty ‘as everyone got put in paddy wagons…it was like the soundtrack to revolution’.24

24 Peter and Faith Strong, ‘Oms Not Bombs’, Alan Dearling and Bendan Handley Alternative Australia: Celebrating Cultural Diversity’, Dorset, Enabler, 2000, p.44; Mick Daly, ‘Doof Warriors: Turning Protests into Parties’, Sydney City Hub June 17, 1999, p.9. Going on to develop a clean energy sound/cinema system, with their infamous vegie oil van and ‘toaster’ caravan which functions ‘like a music studio and a little video edit suite’, Labrats emerged out of this top-end campaign.
During ‘98, the Graffiti Hall of Fame Peace Bus — which was to join the Earth Defender at Jabiluka and revisit the desert in ‘99 and 2000 — had been providing nightly sounds for a ‘tent embassy’\textsuperscript{25} pitched outside Sydney’s ERA offices for several weeks:

Like some crazed pirate galleon on wheels, the bus would broadside earth destroying mining company offices, with a barrage of sonic arsenal. The steel pulse of ‘protest techno’ was pumped through a 3k sound system emanating from the luggage hatches … The Peace Bus would doof its was around Sydney rattling latte glasses by loudly pumping the sounds through the streets. If this is a war for the future of Australia then this brightly coloured tank is there firing a funky arsenal designed to activate people into joining the growing movement for a more sustainable future.\textsuperscript{26}

Integral to Sydney’s 1998 Palm Sunday March, a mobile 5k rig ‘pumped out beats and voice samples as the march wound its way through the streets’. Marchers halted outside the offices of ERA, where there were speeches, and where experimental techno band Non Bossy Posse (NBP) amplified their anger. ‘End of an ERA’ is an edit of NBP Palm Sunday work available on Organarchy Sound System’s\textsuperscript{27} Filthy Jabilucre CD.\textsuperscript{28} Originally a one hour radio show for JJJ FM’s

\begin{itemize}
\item Protests embassies have arisen all over the place. In Melbourne in 1999, Music For Yo’ Mumma, promoted as a ‘Jammin for Jabiluka’ event, took place on August 8, to raise support for the ongoing World Heritage Embassy Camp in Falkner Park. Camp members held daily vigils outside the offices of North Limited, parent company and major shareholder in Energy Resources of Australia Ltd at the time.

\item ‘On the Road – 90s Style’, TRM, March 2000, pp. 36-37.

\item http://reflect.cat.org.au/organarchy

\item Organarchy, a collective splintering from Non Bossy Posse in 1995, ‘is about fusing nature, technology and liberationist ideas and forging this fusion into dance music’ (from Sporadical no 4, 1997, p.50). They first released tracks on the 1997 Beatz Work compilation, tracks slated as ‘underground wave form emissions emanating from the East Coast of Australia’.
\end{itemize}

Mix Up program, *Filthy Jabilucre* became anti copyright shareware. Organarchy burn individual CDs for a small donation and distribute them to community radio stations, activists and even making master tapes available for further duplications, sampling and remixing by other culture jammers.
In these examples, it seems to me that the audio assemblage holds significant weight, that it communicates something more than an anti-industry stance. Audio technologies are used in a proactive measure to communicate awareness of the sacrality of remnant and threatened sites. Conveying the significance of landscape at risk, the music itself amplifies reenchantment. The productions, the music and performances themselves thus evidence strong sentiments of attachment—both to land and co-conspirators. The desire to identify with an absent nature at risk is apparent in various releases like PsybURBia’s *Carmageddon* LP, on which the track ‘Urban Forest Odyssey’ features the popularly sampled mantra ‘our beautiful forests, our old growth, our wilderness and rainforests’. The concomitant desire to defend threatened nature is illustrated by ‘My Law is Earth Law, and I’ll do everything to protect the Earth’, a skilfully digitised audio-quote from a female activist on ‘Earth Law’ a track found on Non Bossy Posse’s *Activista* LP. And the issue driven samples in such music may strengthen a community of doofenders. As Andy Park explains, protest techno ‘reinforces and celebratse the beliefs of those who identify with its sentiment, and like the old folk songs and union songs, creates a sense of unity amongst the group’.

*Filthy Jabilucre* tracks represent pertinent examples of the ‘doofumentary’, where bass rhythms are overlaid with what Peter Strong calls ‘liberationist voice grabs’, with significant aural effects engineered to convey a desired message. Here, the electro-communiqué is distinctively anti-uranium mining. Audio agit prop, post-punk cut-n-mix techno. Organarchy tracks are appropriately described as an ‘alternative newscast’. Filthy Jabilucre tracks signify respect for and deference to traditional custodians. ‘Kakadoof’ cites a motivating speech by spokeswoman for Mirrar, Jacqui Katona: ‘Jabiluka is in the Park ... Mirrare people, traditional owners, they’re saying “we don’t want uranium mining in this country. We wanna keep culture strong. We wanna have a future for our community. We want a future for our children”. And people are here today because they want a better future for Australia’. The final track, ‘Heal the Planet’, features dialogue from senior custodian Eyvonne Margarula: ‘white fella money … is not gonna fix anything – it’s gonna kill us”.

The title track includes ‘Kakadu is sacred’, a chant sampled from the Jabiluka blockade. As it is explained on the web site: ‘Love it or hate it, it’s a hit with the ferals on the picket line, so we grabbed little samples of the chant and then beat matched them into the music’.

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30 Taken from David Bradbury’s film *Jabiluka*, this is dialogue also used in ‘Blackfella Money’, a Signal to Noise track featured on GreenAnt’s *Anthi-Ant Beatz* (downloadable from mp3.com/s2n22n).
31 www.cat.org.au/jabilucre
A beyond Mad Max optimism united this mobile consortium. For rather than post-apocalyptic, the tour was underscored by a millenarian objective (or ‘dream’) — to avert current and potential local/global crises in which the uranium industry is heavily implicated. For one reason or another Mad Max had infiltrated the consciousness of travellers. Earthdream was billed as bigger than Mad Max — or ‘Madder than Max’. Radio National’s Radio Eye program referred to the convoy as ‘Merry Pranksters meets Mad Max’. Yet, Earthdream is a competing genre, for Max dwells in the survivalist world these techno terra-ists strive to avert. While Max is the ‘ruler of the wasteland’, Earthdream participants seek to hold sovereignty over their future, and that of the planet. Questioning current practices, seeking alternatives, and generating dialogue with Aboriginal inhabitants, these new nomads desire to prevent a range of nuclear crimes the ultimate of which provides the context for the Mad Max trilogy.

For Mel Arki of the 1999 all female Humps not Dumps camel crusade, Earthdream is an ‘environmental gypsy convoy’. It is about ‘rejoicing and celebrating the beautiful planet that we are a part of … re-inspiring our connection with the land … and re-recognising [that] we are not beyond our environment’. She says the tour ‘crystallises’ the reality that the Earth ‘is our life, it is the reason we’re here’, and that ‘we need to manage our impact on it’.

33 www.beam.to/earthdream
34 http://reflect.cat.org.au/mpfree/earthdreamers
35 It was widely rumoured that Mad Max IV would be shot at Coober Pedy coinciding with Earthdream’s presence there, providing temporary work for more than a few travellers (as extras). It remained a rumour.
36 www.green.net.au/humpsnotdumps
A skilled performer, DJ and blockade strategist involved in organising doofs like Transelements, and active in protesting unethical mining operations around Australia, Rusty Far Eye sees Earthdream as an awareness and ‘reconciliation’ tour: ‘meeting with the people on the land and working with the people who have been living here before the white man’. In this context, ‘working’ means taking a stand, acting in solidarity with Aboriginal people to intervene in and disrupt unethical biodvelopment practices. A flamboyant techno-activist, Rusty remembers his first action at 15 years of age protesting the South African Springbok tour of NZ (his native country): ‘I wore a crash helmet, cricket pads, a cricket box, big fat gloves and leather padding on my arms and things … it was full on’. Acting in solidarity with indigenous communities opposed to the activities of the uranium industry in South Australia, it still is.

Prior to 2000, Arabunna elder Kevin Buzzacott, known as ‘uncle Kev’ to hundreds of his ‘adopted family’, had been rallying support for his campaign against Western Mining Corporation (WMC) which operates the world’s largest copper-uranium mine at Roxby Downs (Olympic Dam) 180 kms south of Lake Eyre. WMC’s growing demands on underground water sources in one of the driest regions on the planet has had a devastating impact on Aboriginal peoples (especially Arabunna and Kokatha) since such sources feed the precious springs around the Lake Eyre region essential for their cultural survival. In their quest to become the world’s largest uranium producer, WMC hold full state and federal approvals to draw up to 42 million litres of water per day from the Great Artesian Basin. As this is drying up the culturally significant Mound Spring sites, Buzzacott has sent an open invitation to all concerned people to his Arabunna Going Home Camp37 established on the southern shores of Lake Eyre South.

Robin Cooke himself had been invited by Kev at the desert action and music festival ROXSTOP at Olympic Dam in 1997. Earthdream was awakening. In 2000, on the heels of an earlier action at South Australia’s Beverley uranium mine in support of the mining-beleaguered Adnyamathanha community, the rolling juggernaut of buses, coasters and kombis—a mobile shanti-town—made its way northwest to Buzzacott’s camp along the Oodnadatta Track. There, they became an inspired ‘sonic mob’ prepared to make a stand against Olympic Dam. Rufus, who runs multimedia outfit Isnt Media and is half of live duo WD40, remembers his first trip out to the camp for the Earthdream99 doof. Kevin Buzzacott was an inspiration:

Every day we would sit around the fire and uncle Kev would describe his vision of the future, or what he thinks are the steps we need to take to create the future that we want to live in. His ideas were progressive in the sense that anyone who comes out here to this bit of land and feels the spirit of the old lake and dances on the land, they’re welcome. And you feel the call to defend it. And that’s what uncle Kev’s all about. He keeps on talking about finding a way home, or finding a way forward, and his idea is that we have to do it together. Aboriginal culture and white culture. We sort of have to work together in spite of all our historical conflicts.

37 http://www.lakeeyre.green.net.au
Earthdream99 was indeed a momentous convergence of green, black .... metallic blue and fluro pink—united under the anti-uranium flag (outstretched black hand fore-grounded on radiation sign) and a UV lamp. According to Emily Vicendese, reporting afterwards in Tekno Renegade Magazine, ‘travelling in a campervan with the rest of the Space Trukin’ Crew from Melbourne, it became obvious that the red and barren earth is not a terra nullis’ (sic). As government conspires with industry to condemn a nation to an intractable toxic and radioactive legacy, the counter-message is one of proactive enchantment: ‘we need to take responsibility for our land, to respect and revere the Earth, to see it with the eyes of its native caretakers—as sacred land’. Caretaker, Kevin Buzzacott implored those who sat down at his fire, to join his struggle, to become Keepers of Lake Eyre: “You owe this to your kids and we owe it to our ancestors”. Emily’s description of her participation in this ‘beautiful and unique’ landscape is decidedly elechthonic:

Without the distractions of the city it is easy to hear the Earth: she speaks to us like an electronic frequency which tweaks a line in your neural net and spreads the current down to the pads on your fingertips and feet. Doofing in the desert to funky music under a vast blanket of stars was an experience that everyone should know and understand, and fight to preserve.38

Dwelling out at the Lake camp on and off since its inception, doing ‘whatever it takes to look after the land’, Marc and Izzy of Labrats39 sound system—who’ve latterly formed hip hop posse Combat Wombat—had already merited the ‘Keepers’ mantle. According to ‘uncle Kevin’, says Marc, ‘Lake Eyre is calling, and its calling us back. The old spirits are calling us to come and protect the country and look after the country. So we need to be there to make sure nobody comes in and stuffs up the country. So basically we sit on our hill that overlooks Lake Eyre. We keep an eye on Lake Eyre’.

Many of those called to the camp in 2000 would form protective commitments to a wounded land. Dingo, a ‘stolen generation’ Kamilaroi, inter-cultural broker and Radio Nowhere shockjock travelling with Ohms Not Bombs, felt it was his duty to be out there helping Kev. At a camp meeting

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39 http://lab-rats.tripod.com

Acquired from www.ozauthors.com.au
prior to the Olympic Dam action, Dingo roused those gathered: ‘walk your talk … I’m not gonna die with a stomach ulcer at 70 years old, saying “I’m sorry kids I didn’t fight fucking hard enough for you or your planet”’. Soon enough, the convoy headed to Roxby Downs and the site of one of the largest known uranium deposits on the planet.

From May 21-25, a symbolic blockade was mounted at a T-intersection near the mine’s entrance. Referred to by Marc as a ‘Dis-army Diprotodon’, the Labrats van backed up on the main entrance to the mine on the second day of the camp, and solar powered speedbass with orbiting djembes animated the carnival of protest fanning out ahead. Kev was at the helm to exhort WMC CEO Hugh Morgan to cease an operation which according to Buzzacott is ‘an invasion, robbing us of our right to life’. That afternoon saw the inaugural performance of the Half Life Theatre Company’s anti-uranium road show Consider it Dug in front of the mine’s gates. Viewed by a large audience of protestors and police, the show was repeated two nights later for miners and Roxby citizens inside the protest enclave. The day afterwards at the town’s primary school, a ‘mutant circus’ pantomime was performed dramatising corporate greed, land dispossession and radiation sickness to a hip hop rhythm. Performances from Miranda Mutanta, Commander Starlight, Minnie the Mutant, the Uranium Sisters and rappers MC Yohan (as Professor Half Life) and Dr Chau (Ishara) were most entertaining. The central character was Miranda’s pantomime villainess ‘The Future Eater’—a monstrous ‘embodiment of greed and consumerism’, in possession of several huge gaping mouths. Miranda had arrived in Australia seven months before from Europe where she had traveled for several years with the female performance troupe Shelanagig. Inspired by Tim Flannery’s book, she had been dress rehearsing her insatiable monster at doofs like Tranceplant. Flannery, Miranda explains, describes humans as ‘future eaters, the ultimate predator species’, an idea inspiring a character representing a likely future for humanity.

The blockade itself became a Reclaim the Streets style Peace Camp—a techno activist zone. The Ohms Peace Bus and the Labrats van came to rest at opposite ends of the blockade circle, their PAs mounting an hilarious sound clash (involving rival emcees). Audio snatches of Kevin Buzzacott and Adnyamathanha elder Ronnie Coultard taken from video recordings of the then fresh action at Beverley were sampled in tracks played: ‘its our ancient land, our dreamtime’, ‘black, white, brown or brindle, we’ll fight this mine’, ‘your party’s over’. Extolling the technologies on hand, Rufus claims the action was a ‘demonstration of the power of … [camcorders, computers, samplers] to make art in a really immediate way. To take some really contentious vocal samples from the action that’s only a couple of days old, and rework them into a track and pump it right back at them. I think that’s really powerful and really funny’. Protesting within the context of ‘having some serious fun’, this was technomadic activism — a contemporary battle in a long running campaign for a nuclear free future.
Under the authority and leadership of Arabunna elder Kevin Buzzacott, Earthdream’s reclaim the uranium edutainment action against WMC’s Olympic Dam mine at Roxby Downs in May 2000 was a momentous episode in an outback odyssey which assisted technomadic participants in becoming closer to country. The event encapsulates the will to an historical and ecological consciousness at the heart of a low impact, tech-savvy youth culture. The nineties feral-rave union has progenated new tribes and rites through which radicalised youth seek legitimacy against the colonialist legacy of the parent culture.
PART THREE — TECHNO-ASCENSION
CHAPTER Seven—
MUTOID WASTE Recycledelia
AND EARTHdream

ROBIN COOKE

MUTOID SKull & CRoss SPANNERS
by ALEX WRECK

MUTOID WASTE SPINNING DNA RINGS AT
EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY, NOV 97
(Photo. SASKIA FOTOFOLK)
PART THREE — TECHNO-ASCENSION

KICK START

London ‘82, Shepherd’s Bush, Freston Road, The Independent Republic of Frestonia. Here at one of the largest squats in England, an entire street full of Victorian terraced houses had been joined attic to attic, bedroom to bedroom and garden to garden. The water main had been punctured and a river babbled freely through the green backyards. Frestonia had its own passport office and all citizens were called either Mr or Mrs ‘Freston’! The last stronghold of hippie-community-idealism, the ‘authorities’ were confused and for a while children of flower-power lived free within the choking confines of Thatcherite London. The bakery, the bicycle repair shop, the signwriter, the ufologist, the herbalist and the astrologer were there. One house stood unoccupied … it leaked too badly and even the rats had a damp time there.

The bi-monthly parties in the gardens were relaxed affairs… Guitar strumming, chillom-toking, quiche-eating get togethers, where friends were all around and the local gossip circulated … ‘What was going on in the empty house?’ There was some strange activity; tarps were flapping gently on the roof, the guys and dolls were wearing black leather and body piercings; an enormous hand painted red and black sign was nailed and tied to the front of the house at a rakish angle … it yelled fearlessly ‘Apocalypse Hotel’.

Things were about to change. The next party had a wedge driven into it. Behind the Apocalypse burned a massive bonfire fueled by doors and windows from within the building, a great double tripod frame supporting the spit-bar sat over the fire; the hippies watched nervously as amid flying sparks and jubilant jeering a Vespa scooter was ceremoniously impaled on the spit and allowed to rotate slowly above the inferno. First the battery exploded showering sizzling acid into the flames and then, gunshot-like, the petrol tank blew—echoing its rapport between the towering stacks of housing commission blocks that surrounded us. ‘Shit … these punks are fucking crazy man’ yelled a distraught hippie as he rolled his chillom back into its Indian print cotton scarf and fled for the safety of his brick built smoking-den. The sirens screamed in and the red and blue emergency lights stabbed over the top of the corrugated iron back wall of ‘Fortress Frestonia’. The First axe tore a two foot vertical gash in the corry followed by three more, rending a vulva-like slot wide enough to birth a stream of clanking yellow-helmeted firemen. ‘What’s the trouble?’ the first-born yelled. ‘No trouble mate—just having a bit of a barby’ returned the biggest punk. The firemen stared at the Vespa, by now well cooked … ‘Yeah well … Bon apetite … keep the fire down lads’. Jubilant yelling ensued as the firemen duly exited, with a little more difficulty, back through their slot.

A cast iron drainpipe was jammed at 45° into the fire and half-empty Aerosol cans dropped mortar like down the barrel. After about two minutes an earsplitting detonation signaled the fact that somewhere above us spun the remnants of a Dulux product. Three times that night the fire brigade returned, called in by the same old woman who from her concrete box halfway up the tower-block was convinced that a terrorist war had broken out in the urban backwaters below her. She wasn’t far wrong.
I soon began to befriend these punks, in fact they soon became better friends than most of the now shocked and disturbed hippies of Frestonia. When two years previously, I succeeded in getting the sack from my night job sweeping the streets of Earls Court and Notting Hill, I realised that I must be ‘unemployable’, and after a spell as ground man for my tree-surgeon mate, I shared part of his premises to set up my own business repairing and restoring Morris Minors. This quiet cobbled mews also housed the office of ‘Gentle Ghost Removals’ and a couple of artist’s studios.

Joe Rush occupied one of these studios and was also one of the Apocalypse Hotel punks. He and Alan used to ride around the streets of London at night with planks of wood tied across the pinion seats of their motor bikes pretending to be fighter planes in a dogfight. I used to ride around on an old butchers bike with baskets fore and aft and a small noisy, smoky, two stroke engine powering the rear wheel pretending to be a 1930s eccentric from outer space. Twice a week, I would see Joe unloading his Royal Enfield 350 of its burden of old washing machine and motor cycle parts into his studio and twice a week I would wonder what in the hell he was doing with it all. One week I had to ask. ‘I’ve seen all this stuff going into your studio—but nothing ever comes out. What are you doing with it all?’ ‘You’d better come and look then’, he replied. Up the creaking stairs. Sam Lightning Hopkins blasting from a couple of ripped speakers, through piles of junk, to a proud, magnificent, poised sculpture of a chopper-scrambler bike and rider, its shadow silhouetted against the white gable end wall, and for all the world looking as if it was about to kickstart itself and take off through the window.
‘Shit, what is it?’ I asked. ‘Joe Exile’ replied Joe. I observed how the chest of the rider was actually formed from an old BSA fuel tank and how the biceps were actually shock absorbers from a Norton. I touched it … the arm fell off … ‘Sorry’. ‘No that’s ok, the welding ain’t up to much’ said Joe staring at the small car battery, some coiled coat hanger wire and a cracked electrode holder that comprised his welding kit. ‘Hang on a minute’ I said and ran back downstairs to get my Italian Arc Welder. Three hours later, we had the sculpture welded and had had the realisation that Joe was a mechanically-minded artist, I was an artistically-minded mechanic, and that thus were fused the idealism of the hippie and the anarchic reaction of the punk; the Mutoid Waste Company was born.

Where ‘mutation’ implies the ‘production of a new species through alteration or change’, I was forced to rethink my conceived notions of the word, up until then loosely connected to the results of nuclear warfare. I had walked away from a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament rally at Hyde park Corner in the ‘70s despairing at what hundreds of people in duffle coats and Wellington Boots singing songs in the rain was actually going to DO for the situation. Mutation was something that would slowly and painfully devolve the human race as a result of some idiot on one side or other of the Atlantic pushing a button! But here this young punk dropped a bombshell of realisation into my own consciousness. Sure we in the Northern Hemisphere may be bombed flat at any second, so much had the tentacles of the cold war insidiously inserted themselves into the mindsets of a whole generation. But we weren’t dead yet.
Joe told me stories. I told Joe stories. Over many pints of Guinness at the local, which was very local, we began to share visions—his born of the rat infested basements of Portobello, cranked into a Surrealistic realm by the ingestion of heavy snorts of Butane lighter gas—my own from the hash and LSD perceptions of my adolescent journeying. Joe was King Rat, as a rat had once told him from its position amongst the empty mouldy baked bean cans of the basement floor. I knew there was a lighter realm—a dimensional interface that was accessible to the human mind-matrix.

The mutation and creative recycling of waste materials into sculptural and artistic form was a template that suited us both. But first and foremost Joe assured me one has to empirically Mutate oneself. This was my initiation. I had spent years pulling apart and rebuilding Morris ‘A’ series engines to the point that I had nearly become one. So OK, hang loose and actually become one! Joe had some gigs fixed at the Palace theatre and Olympia and we had a weekly free rampage up Portobello Rd Market on Saturdays that a German TV crew were coming to film. Joshua and Kitty Bowler who ran Crucial Gallery became our ‘managers’. My first mutation saw an army back-pack frame supporting a Morris Minor Rocker Cover and spark plugs for a shoulder piece, an Austin Atlantic dashboard and instrumentation for the chestplate; my crash hat supported the ignition distributor and a flashing orange indicator lamp. Joe had a banana and a Tannoy speaker glued to his head. Along with Justina the envy girl as nurse, an old side car bolted to a three wheeled rickshaw as an ambulance, and Joshua, aka ‘Harry Chrome-Head’, as body guard, we proceeded up Portobello Rd among much hilarity and amazement to offer a Free Instant Lobotomy service to anyone who may have felt in need of it!

GETTING ON THE ROAD

Now there was no looking back; we knew we could scale this up to a level whereby a whole mobile road show consisting of mutated personnel and vehicles could actually travel the country. Within a year Joe had inherited and restored his father’s beautiful coachbuilt Commer Lambourne horse transporter, and I had a 29 seater Plaxton-bodied Bedford Embassy Coach complete with all the curved glass and ‘50s style Bakerlite and chrome embellishments. We were getting there. Fearless Frank from Frestonia who had just finished touring with Floyd and the Stones saw our potential and ‘let us in’ to the now neglected gardens. Joe had built a fibre glass skull onto the front of an old army ‘Green Goddess’ Bedford bus subsequently used by World Domination Enterprises, the local acid-trash band responsible for the anthem ‘Lead-Asbestos’. On return from their European tour, World Dom donated the ‘Goddess’ to Mutoid Waste Co.

Horsebox, Coach and our first large scale vehicular mutation, the Skull Bus (a forty foot apparition sporting a full skeletal rib cage frame trailing off to a sporty rear end accessing the flat-bed loading space come stage area), comprised the first official Mutoid Waste Co Roadshow outing with a gig in the muddy paddock of the ‘Theatre Field’ at Glastonbury Festival 1985. By ‘86 we had amassed a supportive group of like-minded crew and squatted the empty land at Evesham St by the absurd M40 motorway. Rickey-Lee, from the old gypsy Lee family, joined us as resident scrapman. Richie Bond, Big John, Greg, Sandi and others all had vehicles suitable to our mission. We squatted the old Coach Station at King’s Cross and met with local squat support and embryonic warehouse party group 3CP, and the first of the infamous Mutoid Waste Exhibition Parties was born.
Our motif was designed by Joe and held a neolithic skull backed by the cross-spanners—the technological evolution of creativity from that first branch of mutated humanity via the Masonic symbol of Autonomy through Piracy, to the post-industrialist Thatcherite wastelands and on into the ultra-violet Mutant here-after of the future.

Joe felt that rock ’n’ roll had died alongside the great British motorbike industry, but when it came to finally bury its body it had already gone. We were enacting a search through the rock and roll graveyard for that body. The punks strutted their existence through the black bin-liner tunnels of their own labyrinthine trap. Here was an impossible future—everyone was wearing black as if trudging home from someone else’s funeral. We injected so much ultra violet colour, so much totally impossible future that I believe we helped steer a generation away from self-destruction. What, when you queued for three hours to pay £3 to enter an environment that was more post-apocalyptic than the post-apocalypse? What then? Burning cars hanging from roofs, giant robots smashing themselves in the head with pneumatic hammers, dark murky floodwaters separating the dance floors, open fires, gallons of beer, the Mutoid band thundering out the Zombie-Beat, angle-grinder spray-spark audience attack. Screech-rock full fluro Goddesses, World Dom grunging and thrashing through a smoke haze from the back of the Skull Bus, two car shells drummed flat by six foot scaff poles in the manic grip of the Zombies. This was truly phenomenal. It was impossible to leave a Mutoid Waste party and see the world through the same eyes. Reality had slipped. Perhaps one was glad to be alive after all!

Someone once asked me ‘why the Skull Bus; its grey, its death, its threatening’. I replied ‘that it may never actually be a reality, that this fibre glass and steel be only as such, that we never see the reality of the nuked out shells of a public transport system!’ The penny was beginning to drop.

‘86-88 saw an incredible series of party events growing exponentially in attendance. Publicity was always minimal relying instead on word of mouth networks. Regular evictions served to freshen our outlook and sharpen our vision and make the next party that much harder to find. Under the guidance of Joshua Bowler, MWC was becoming flavour of the decade. London Weekend Television produced a ‘South of Watford’ zany arts program that gave us leeway to script and direct the program. Hugh Laurie got fully worked over! Meanwhile the artistic merit of our work was gaining recognition. The Mail

SKULLBUS AT GLASTONBURY 1985
(PHOTO. ROBIN COOKE)
on Sunday ran a major feature article and we toured our eclectic collection to TV studios in Newcastle for Eurotube; back to London for an Eric Clapton video shoot; Network Seven caught on, and probably the most inspiring gig to date was our involvement with Fisher Park Productions on the Jean Michelle Jarlunds Docklands Revolution event.

This felt good—at last as artists we were reaching a wide audience. Joe’s supposition that the only license we needed was Artistic License and that the only rule on the license was that you did not have to carry or produce it, was starting to ring true.

In ‘87, Joshua had fixed for us to go to Munich and create an environment for a party hosted by Gloria von Thurn und Taxis, the new young wife of the patriarch founder family of the German Postal System and one of the richest women in Europe. We turned that city upside-down. Blasting up and down the main drag, outside the Speir designed and Hitler–built Kunstler House, in a Volkswagen Beetle with no mufflers, enormous truck wheels fitted and pieces of F1-11 Starfighter jet welded to the arse-end; the police didn’t even know which license to ask for, least of all artistic license!! I returned via Berlin.

Ivan Dredd had joined us as master drummer. Carl and Barry the identical twin DJ Deck masters. Lucy Wisdom, publicity and fire juggling whiz. Strapadictome stalwart toilet builder, rhythm ace and insane notions guru. Gerry Gester genius constructor. Dave Godshite mouth master. Sam Hegarty, the genius cyber art pioneer who later held an exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. Alex Wreck, graphic artist and sculptor extraordinaire. And a host of other brilliant multi-talented back up crewsters ready to steam in and enact the people’s revenge.

Yes Thatcher had really done it this time. ‘86 saw the Battle of Stonehenge mash up 300 travellers headed for the eleventh annual Stonehenge Free Festival. 500 army squaddies wearing police overalls were given aerial backup to ‘Smash the Peace Convoy’. Blood, teeth and broken glass splattered the earth of the ‘Beanfield Massacre Ground’. The old law that if ‘a public gathering continues for twelve years consecutively, it be allowed to continue annually ad infinitum’ was obviously too horrendous and threatening a reality for the Home Office to entertain.

In ‘87 the Mutoid Waste road show hit Glastonbury Festival once again. Two full ‘car-henges’—two cars upright and one across the top—were constructed and a compound boundary fence of assorted scrap completed the installation; a tractor based dinosaur and Joe’s immortal ‘Pterodactyl’ sculpture overlooked the whole scene. This was the turning point for thousands of people. Stonehenge Festival was dead; Glastonbury charged a high entry fee and had top line acts; MWC that year bridged the cultural gap between the yuppie weekend party goers who took their pressed denims out of the bottom drawer once a year and the now confused and dazed remnants of the Peace Convoy who had had their cultural headstones confiscated. The car-henge installation became the iconic substitute for the real thing. ‘Fuck you—if you want the stones [which now ‘belonged’ to British Heritage and had a fence and guard dogs around them] you can keep ‘em—we’ll build our own!!’ The dictum ‘Mutate and Survive’ was born and a whole generation of ‘New Age Travellers’ had their spirits restored. A Marathon drum-in took place from sunset to Summer Solstice (Northern Hemisphere) dawn with the
It was time for Joe and I to have a few pints of Guinness and one of our talks. It was now illegal to hold unlicensed parties. It was now illegal for more than 12 people to gather together and cause ‘sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats’. It was now illegal to hold a public gathering on private land even with the owner’s permission—and if this did occur, it was the landowner (through a Draconian reversal of the trespass laws) who became liable for prosecution. Fines escalated to £80,000. It was time to Mutate and Survive if we ourselves wished to continue to be freely creative.

Sandi, who had given birth to our son Luke in January ‘87, chose to move to Tasmania and it was in the course of our farewell discussions that the concept of a massive gathering in central Australia in 2000 was seeded.

New Year’s Eve at Brixton Academy went off in true Mutoid style with Rockets, Smoke and Droids Bungying down from the ceiling. For the first time every vehicle had its own battery and was able to start ‘On the Button’. From this the Mutoid thumb to thumb hand-shake evolved.

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FORTRESS EUROPE

Joe and I decided the only course of action was to go back underground, earn enough money to put the whole show on a boat and resurface in Amsterdam.

Summer Solstice ‘89 saw the ceremonial raising of a car-henge sculpture on ‘The Island’ in Amsterdam which at the time was Europe’s biggest squat holding about 500 people from all over the world. Two big shows there and the sale of t-shirts and beer fueled our whole show to Berlin. Lucy Wisdom had followed up on my ‘87 visit to Berlin and arranged for the use of Gorlitzer Rail Station, which was being sifted of undetonated bombs and turned into a public park. After the show there, a small group of Mutoids including myself, Lucy and Thomas chose to stay on at Gorlitzer and construct a two part sculpture on the rail lines. This would consist of a massive Robot figure with a VW Beetle for the chest offering a silver Bird of Peace to the east. Both sculptures would be on wheels and capable of rolling on the tracks.

We wrote letters to Gorbachev, Bush and Eric Honnecker asking them to open the gates in the wall and allow us to push the Bird of Peace through to the Eastern side as a symbolic gift. The man was to stay in the west smiling over the top of the wall. If ever the wall came down the two sculptures could be reunited in central ‘no man’s land’. Gorbachev and Bush did not reply but Honnecker did stating that ‘East Germany would never open its frontier’. I wonder if Bush and Gorbachev knew something he didn’t or indeed if he had any idea of the events that would rock the world within the next couple of months!

It was an exciting and bizarre time. The Mutoid presence in Berlin had forged strong bonds with Rainer from Interglotz and with the Dead Chickens who were now both fully supportive of the Volkswagon Man project. Since writing to Honnecker, we were put under 24 hour military surveillance by the East and they watched our every move through cameras, binoculars and high power telescopes. One evening the gates clanked open for the first time in 20 years revealing a group of well armed intelligence officers. ‘Do you still intend to give us this gift?’ ‘Yes’ we replied. At one point they were convinced that we intended to fire the bird with rockets over the wall to them!

By the 13th September ‘89 the sculptures were welded into position on the bridge followed by a party which involved setting up mirrors so that the soldiers looking over the wall could also see the slides being projected onto the west side of the wall.
The tour continued via Wykan Zee and Amsterdam to Paris where we occupied an immense rail shed in Pt de la Chapelle in the north of the city. Squatting laws in France are reasonably humane, as no evictions can take place until the Spring Equinox. This allowed us six months to build up a full-on show. The Berlin Wall fell on November 9th, the day before my birthday and Lucy dragged me off to a Party for Channel 9 TV where Archaos—with whom we had worked in London—were performing.

Mutoid presence in Paris served to act as a uniting force for the four or five squats that already existed there but who had thus far managed to avoid speaking with each other. We worked with Nina Hagen, who built a mock up of the Berlin Wall across the front of a cinema where her after-party was to be. Our job was to smash it to pieces! Las Kuras det Banas also performed with us at the time.
Our show in Paris entitled ‘Where’s the Party?’ called in ‘World Dom’ from London and Rainer Interglotz from Berlin and totally went off. Five thousand people rocked the night away. Paris needed a kick in the well-manicured arse and we gave it to them!!

THE ANCIENT REDLAND

My focus was turning to Australia and one night whilst Joe had his nose deep in AD2000 and the antics of Judge Dredd and the Air Surfers, I asked him ‘what about Earthrock 2000 at Uluru?’ ‘No, its called Earthdream 2000’. I knew he knew!

I drove to London, sold my bus and brought a return ticket to Australia. On the tarmac of Sydney airport carpark, I shut my eyes, turned through 180° and opened them again for my first ‘official’ impression of Australia … Wow, a full spectrum 180° Rainbow—a good omen. On arrival in Melbourne, I rang Andrzej Liguz who had photographed the Mutoids heavily in London. Within three days, through him, I connected up with Ollie Olsen, Geoff Hales, Adam Jaffers and Troy Inocent, who at that time had come away from the Max Q project with Ian Hutchence of INXS, to work on their 3rd Eye project which, along with Gus and Andrew Till, would later mutate to become Psy-Harmonics.

My tools arrived by sea just in time to sculpt the Wizard of Oz for a Mutoid Party at the Esplanade’s Gershwin Room in St Kilda. Hugo, Brendon and Fiona of the ‘Blue Meanies’ Tie-Dye surf-wear factory were setting up shop in Ormond Rd and commissioned MWC to mutate their shop; a massive fluro muffler-tree acted as a clothes rack and a cyber rainbow serpent mezanine floor acted as a communal meeting place. It
was here that Johnny White Ant taught didjeridu and several meetings with the 3rd Eye crew and LizMania took place. I was warned of the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ by Ollie. Geoff Hales (aka Rip van Hippy) was amazingly supportive at this stage.

Andrzej introduced me to the Down to Earth Co-operative and, after some tricky eco-discussions, they agreed to a car-henge at their NYE 1991 ConFest at Walwa. Karen and I single handedly dug the foundations for the cars (two utes and a station wagon). It was a memorable event heralded by an extreme cool change marked with an awe inspiring electrical storm. One clairvoyant woman present claimed that there were three UFOs above the clouds choreographing the lightning.

Meanwhile, it was time to check out Sandi and Luke in Tasmania and soon I found myself inspired by the horror of the logging machinery there to produce the ‘Panamaniac Mk III’. A vast mechanical droid with chainsaws for hands and feet that hung in a tripod at the Jackies Marsh Festival was the centre piece for our performance which Sandi directed. The Wild Pumpkins at Midnight played a beautiful set and the newly formed ‘Horehound Posse’ was to connect with them again in St Kilda, London and Berlin.

I returned to Melbourne to focus on Earthdream and conspired with Paul Auckett, DJ Andrew Richard, Andrzej, Hugh McSpeddon and LizMania to hold the first Earthdream party at Liz’s Basement in Munster Terrace. We flooded the dance floor with ultra violet paint and water, Anna and Karen built a Skull Throne around the only toilet, Hugh’s Projections adorned the silos above us and 500 people ‘went off’! Beat and Impress articles of the time carried hints of an Aeroplane-henge in the desert in 2000. To my knowledge, this was the first party to be held at the venue, which is still in regular use.

“THE SILOS’ BY HUGH MCSPEDDON,
MUNSTER TERRACE ‘91
I needed to feel the spirit of the centre. Karen, Anna, Paul and I mutated the interior of the Pier Hotel in Port Melbourne building on an underwater feel with fluro watery entrance-ways leading to a Submarine engine room theme in the main floor. I flew to Alice and spent two weeks with Paul’s mate James Nugent, who was the ‘flying lawyer’ for the Central Land Council. He showed me the red centre from the air and the road—a spiritual awakening which is still strong and close to my heart. It seemed that the destiny of the Earthdream project was beginning to solidify. The seeds were sewn.

I flew out of Melbourne on the June Solstice and passed over Uluru at 30,000 ft. Just as the last orange rays of the sunset tipped the top of The Rock. To this day that remains the closest I have ever been to the Global Solar Plexus Chakra.

**Europe United**

On returning to London, I caught the Wild Pumpkins at Midnight playing at Bay 63 under the Westway, and caught up with Joe who had his own gallery in Portobello. Two days later we were on the road to Italy where after touring from Paris to Barcelona the MWC had been invited to perform at the International Theatre Festival in SantArchangelo near Rimini in the north of the country, and had set up a permanent HQ camp in an old gravel quarry. There the Italians had welcomed us and soon two Fiat trucks were winched upright to form a truck-henge, the largest ‘henge’ to date, and the centre piece of that year’s performance.

Joe and I both knew that Berlin was calling us again. We knew that no where in the world had as much waste and scrap metal lying around as that city. The Russian military has pulled out and anything that didn’t function properly was left behind; literally thousands of trucks, military tanks and aeroplanes were heaped up in vast towering masses around the old camps. For artists adept at working with waste, this was a once in a lifetime opportunity.
We pulled into Berlin once more and how strange it was to be on ‘the other side’ of the wall! With the invaluable help from friends we met in 1989, we secured the use of a strip of ‘No Man’s Land’ running by the great River Spree between Charité and the Rieschstaag for a massive show. The Spiral Tribe sound system came over, hot from the Castlemorton Gathering in England, as did Kennie’s LS Diezel, Sam Hegarty and the Circus Normal outfits. This was to be the largest confluence of alternative sound systems, circus art and performance to date. Karen had flown over from Melbourne and we were ready to go hunting.

In the next three weeks, with Thomas’ trucks, trailers and cranes, we were to pull in six armored amphibious personnel carriers and two Mig 21 fighter jets. The shit hit the fan. Media, police, government and military officials began queuing up for explanations as to how none of them knew about any of this until they had read about it in the morning newspaper. One popular question was ‘Is this a political statement?’ Our reply was ’No, this is simply a logical artistic progression. We work with waste materials. In 1989, the easiest materials to access were Volkswagons and Mercedes. In 1992 it is easier to access tanks and aeroplanes!’ This was ‘Swords-to-Ploughshares’ time!
Things quietened down and we got on with the art. Rainer Interglotz executed an amazing paint job on one of the Mig’s depicting a skeletal twin-headed serpent crushing a Kalashnikov automatic weapon. The other Mig ended up nose down in the ground at the base of the bunker from which escapees to the west were shot. Construction work on ‘Tankhenge’ began and thus the build up for one of the most amazing alternative/techno events. A four foot diameter drum was re-skinned with cowhide by Janos, a Hungarian Gypsy master drummer, and played every night at sunset to call in the protective energies. Tankhenge was raised using two cranes and three military truck winches and a celebratory ‘Tankquette’ feast was held underneath it!

‘Tachelles’ hosted our NYE pasty ‘Blast off 94’ which featured one of the Migs raised on the boom-arm of a crane and the crashing sound tracks of the Spiral Tribe sound system. It was here that I first met Steve Bedlam and shared the Earthdream vision with him.
After some months in Amsterdam, where Gerry Gester and I had built a Ford Escort car henge at Americahavens and developed an insane flame throwing system, I packed my four wheel drive East German military truck and other toys into a 20ft shipping container and I was ready to return it and myself to Melbourne.

Fearless Frank, Joe and Spiral Tribe were by now transporting one of the Migs to Prague for a memorable ‘Teknival’ event there.
BACK DOWN UNDER

Within two weeks of arriving in Melbourne I had hooked up with Richard and Heidi, John, plus Phil Voodoo and Sioux of Melbourne Underground Development (MUD), who were running the massive Global Village complex in Footscray. Affiliations soon developed with Down to Earth, Hardware, Earthcore, Vibe Tribe, Transelements, Psycorroboree, Green Ant and Psy-Harmonics. Mutoid Waste thus side-stepped the political bullshit and focused on producing unique installations (such as spinning DNA rings and the spinning-car fire-shows), that were popular with all the major rave, doof and techno promotions.

Earthdream meanwhile was beginning to get a life of its own. Earthdream II and III were held in the Global Village complex and threw a mix of live percussion and angle grinders into the musical equation. Earthdream III was held at ‘Stonehenge’ Caravan Park in Buchan St, Gippsland. A beautiful green hill that supported a circle of trees with a solstice-sunrise-facing gap just big enough to house a car-henge consisting of two VW Combis as uprights and a Kingswood station wagon as a nicely proportioned top-stone. Murray, Damo and Ev were instrumental in effecting other brilliant site work – a giant bonfire in the shape of an acid smiley-face visible from the other side of the valley. Mark Hogan, Bam Bam, Sugar and Krusty all played killer sets (from the car-henge), but shit it was icy cold and we were all grateful for that beautiful sunrise.

In ‘97, the Roxstop event at and around the Roxby Downs uranium mine was a further opportunity to explore the Earthdream path to the desert and to erect the ‘Giant Radweed’ sculpture. This piece was made from an old windmill mutated into a flower that breathed fire. It seemed, and indeed was, a long way from that ‘70s public rally in London. It was an honour to be two hours drive from the biggest uranium mine in the southern hemisphere where perhaps we could actually do something about it! I travelled north and visited the Western Arrernte elders with Lisa (aka DJ Blue Lama) and Paula from Down to Earth—an astounding meeting which confirmed further the potential of the project.
Earthdream IV was held in June ‘98 at Sub-city, the old chocolate factory above the Nas-car track in Sunshine, Melbourne, run as an arts village by Tim Meyer. This major gig featured the Mutoid Waste Fire Organ and Mega Zortche’s incredible Tesla Coil together with the colour-frequency-chakra-sequencing of our Band ‘Manual Overide’. The embrionic Techno Healing Machine had proved itself.

By now, Humps not Dumps and the Labrats were part of the equation and the Mutoid Waste Co premiered the radio controlled quad rotary fire strobe installation at Earthdream ‘99 which was held for the first time in the desert. Uncle, brother and Arabunna elder Kevin Buzzacott, Ronnie and Reggie Dodd and I had all met at Roxstop ’97 and this land with all its beauty and mining problems seemed to call out to host E.D. ‘99. This final Earthdream before ‘The Big One’ served as a crew communication and planning platform. Ohms not Bombs were instrumental in both the musical and logistical sense with Pete Strong only now informing me of how inspired he had been by our ‘87 car-henge gig at Glastonbury.

Things were tying up and all the years of work and connections made began to make sense to me as an organo-human consciousness network that was by now many times greater than any of the individuals that comprised it! I had visited the Rainbow Gathering at Omeo and passed the word to Feather on Earthdream. She smiled her knowing smile and said ‘all is as it is meant to be’.

From the early days of Earthdream planning, I had innocently assumed that Uluru was the venue and that New Years Eve was the time. It wasn’t long before I realised that summer in the desert was going to fry people, and by ‘97 Andrzej had assisted in breaking that rumour by publishing an article globally in the Big Issue that stated that Earthdream was not at Uluru, nor was it on NYE. Perth’s REvelation Magazine also carried an article on MWC with information to this effect. E.D. ‘99 proved that the desert winters are in fact very pleasant weather-wise with long cold night but warm t-shirt days.
Fearless Frank and Mark Bedlam had contacted me stating that Steve Bedlam had got it together and that there was a 40k sound system ready to be shipped to Sydney. ‘Was there any money?’ ‘No’ was the definite reply; everyone on this gig was paying their own way.

I realised too that Earthdream2000 was not a single solitary event but an entire journey to begin on May 1st 2000 in Port Augusta and travel over the ensuing months via Wilpena Pound to Alice Springs and Darwin returning down the east coast via Brisbane to Sydney and Melbourne.

Krusty and Pip from Earthcore invited MWC to put together the main dance floor for their NYE 2000 gig. The event provided the opportunity to access a couple of scrap metal aeroplanes from Liecster Wise at Moorabin Airport in Melbourne, and Bernie and Ray from the Great Northern Rail Company lent us the front section of an ‘S’ Class Locomotive that happened to be sitting around their yard ‘making the place look untidy!’ The spinning car beautifully mutated into a giant clock face by Sandi; the Fire Organs and Mega Zortche’s Tesla Coils spat sparks and flames around the locomotive-based DJ booth and the two Beechcraft Baron aircraft suspended from the trees in the background provided a set that truly honoured the start of the new millenium. Oz from Squiffy Vision Lighting Design brought the whole thing to life with his amazing light show. Stig and Pascal, whom I hadn’t seen since ’89, showed up from Paris and filmed the event as in fact they had at the Paris gig.

The Bedlam crew had arrived in Australia and were on their way from Byron. The Great Northern Rail Co and Australian Southern Rail had agreed to transport the planes from Melbourne to Port Augusta at ‘neutral costing’, an act which restored my faith in humanity!

Richard Martin, who was at E.D. I in 1991, set up the website free of charge and was reporting increasing numbers of hits. The scene was set for Earthdream2000 to start moving itself.

The International Rainbow Gathering was held in Australia early in 2000 and the great eco-warrior Rusty did trusty and heroic work reinforcing the Earthdream ‘myth’ to those people. The publicity machines of Labrats and Ohms not Bombs had gone into overdrive, the planes had left Melbourne, and Frank and Steve and crew were ready to hit the desert and would meet us there before collecting the planes from Port Augusta. Frank and I did an emergency run to transport the Spinning Car to Alberrie Creek. We were ready.
Seven heavenly bodies including the sun and the moon were about to move into alignment in the Earth house of Taurus in the form of a ‘Grand Stellium’, a configuration that occurs once every 13 thousand years or twice in the 26,000 year sidereal orbit. The wind powered cinema was up and running showing carnage-movies from previous activist encounters. The plain-clothed police were sneaking around generating lists of license plate numbers and everyone was looking to see who would arrive next. Camp fires were lit and we settled in to get to know each other.

The next six months would see what I believe to be some of the most significant and important learnings in our slow evolutionary climb out of the swamps of genetically inherited amnesia. Yes, the sound systems thumped; yes, plane-henge was erected; yes, gallons of capsicum spray was emptied on us; yes, we met Aboriginal elders; yes, babies were born; and yes, thankfully, no one died! Yes, but what good are any of these experiences unless they are contributing towards an awareness of the Higher Realm? What good unless that dimensional interface is to be accessed by our own localised human group-mind matrix?

A young woman approached me on the verge of tears, having just seen some of the messy footage of hysterical activists getting reduced to pulp by police. ‘What are we to do?’ she pleaded. ‘How do we get rid of that little shit John Howard?’ she asked. ‘We need our own elders … white people … to be responsible’. I looked her in the eyes and gave her a quote from an astrological piece from Dan Furst regarding the implications of the Grand Stellium. ‘When the greater number of humanity realise that focussed intent is both far less messy
and violent than revolution, governments will not have to be terminated, they will simply evaporate through lack of serious attention and regard. Humanity meanwhile will have much more important work to be doing! ’Thank you!’ she said, and smiling, walked away.

Are we to continue to be sheep obediently bleating the narrow emotional bandwidth of yesterday’s television sagas to each other? Are we to continue to swarm mindlessly from one consumeristic generation of gadgets to the next? Must we continue to look up, powerless and helpless, through the multi-layered hierarchy of our own elected shepherds? Can we allow the fear based, negative limitation of authorities everywhere to maintain domination, manipulation and control? No, I believe not! But the question remains ‘How not?’ The answers are coming… slowly.

Earthdream 2000 was to be an experiment in lateral open-ended, autonomous, self-governance. No ‘leaders’, just specialists. No central funding, just what you have in your pocket. No meetings, just the lateral passage of communicated ideas. No committees, just the allowance of self-forming groups or cells of common interest and focus. No arduous itinerary, just a loose thread of key dates and places.

Most of us are now aware of the ‘100th Monkey Syndrome’, the apparent critical-mass threshold over which the instant telepathic transport of information and ideas, within a group or species, becomes the norm. The apparent learning en masse of new behavioural patterns, or the apparent inception of a ‘new’ idea by many individuals—remote from each other—in the same instant of time.

The Earthdream group would very quickly build its own 100th Monkey Syndrome within itself. When one sits in the desert for a couple of weeks, just watching the sun and the moon ‘go around’, one’s own emotional shit and baggage starts to bubble to the internal surfaces. No television here to distract one, no consumerist gratification tactics can be employed here; soon one is having to face, deal with, process and heal one’s own shit. This leaves an empty and clear space waiting to be filled.

There was some heavy physical and emotional violence at Beverley uranium mine. There was fear amongst the authorities and residents of Roxby Down ‘Copper’ mine. Fear that ‘they’ were coming, fear of job loss and fear of radioactive contamination. The best thing we could do was to bring love and humour to the situation. The true warrior’s best weapon is Love. This is exactly what happened. The self-formed performance cell (which incidentally were the first to recognise each other amongst the amorphous mass of 2 or 3 hundred people that were Earthdream) had Star Force, security, miners, Aborigines, ferals, locals and activists all standing around the same fires in the middle of the same road blockade cracking up laughing at the same show which was taking the piss out of the whole thing anyway … Oh what a healing!!

Thus healed, the group was, I believe, beginning to form a crystalline awareness of itself and its power, that was both holographic and fractal in nature. With the final realisation that no one was telling anyone else what to do, and with the humorous suspicion that if we didn’t apparently know what we were doing next how could the authorities have the remotest inkling of our plans, we surged forward.
We surged forward not as a group but as individuals from
the same hive. The Croatian owner of a Coober Pedy Op-Shop
dreamed in detail of our arrival there weeks before we actually
arrived! Just as the reluctant security guard at a Western Mining
Company pump installation deep in the desert had dreamed
graphically of our arrival, before we actually arrived! Were
we beginning to access the ‘Dreamtime’?

We surged forward knowing and trusting that the apparent
utter chaos of our progression was in fact the finely tuned order
of universal intelligence. That intelligence activating our pre-
encoded genetic blueprints and handed down to us via central
galactic, Alcyonic, solar and finally Gaian anthropomorphic fields.

Do we really use 10% of our brains? What is the other
90% for? If the conscious mind can handle 15 bits of
information a second, the subconscious can process 70 or 80
million bits a second as fluid intelligence. If a box of tissues
sits between these two levels of consciousness, separating
them, I believe as a group we pulled a single tissue from that
box; thus raising the level of our ‘consciousness’. If this tissue
removing process has ‘exponential potential’, then in a few
years we can chuck the whole lot out, on a necessarily steep
learning curve, and access consciously the 4th and 5th
dimensional realms, where we can instantly generate our own
realities. Time is collapsing. This leaves only Now.
Joe and I used to surmise the existence of a wall in our future. This wall was made of rubber and many who were attempting to break through it were in fact simply bouncing off it and ending up further back and ‘behind’ their original starting point. We knew we had to build a ‘machine’ that was heavy enough, sharp enough and fast enough to rip clean through this inertial wall when we encountered it. This happened in 1988 with our exodus to Europe. I would like to suggest that through the cyclic nature of time that we should be aware of a new wall in our ‘now-future’. This wall is, I suspect, far less tangible and made of the mists and fogs of the etheric realm. To get through this one we need to raise our bodily vibrational rate and trust with open hearts and tuned intuition that we can and will transit this ‘veil of miasma’ and emerge intact into the timeless reality of our own envisioned future.

Ronnie Dodd, one of the last Arabunna still living on the land south of Lake Eyre, explains the potency of proper guardianship of the land in reference to the activities of Olympic Dam mine (at Roxby Downs): ‘Them mob goin’ to blow ‘emselves up you wait! Diggin’ like rabbits in the ground—there’s a fault line under there … when they go through that the water goin’ to come in and flood ‘em out like rabbits’. He squints at the ground before stating a truth that I believe is so enormous, so simple and so pivotal to our sustained future that it is impossible to ignore and must as such be worked toward and honoured fully: ‘You don’t have to go bangin’ your heads on their fences and barrages, you just love the land, you just dance the land, and land will do the rest’.
CHAPTER EIGHT —
PSYCHIC SONICS: TRIBADELIC
DANCE TRANCE-FORMATION

EUGENE ENRG (AKA DJ KRUSTY)
INTERVIEWS RAY CASTLE

INTRODUCTION

In the half decade since this discussion with Ray Castle, dance culture has come to permeate the pores of society. In the fast evolving cyberworld of more memory, options and access, the *tranceremonial* space we discussed has shifted orbit. With the freaks replaced by fashion and the music commodified, the artistic heart supplying the visionary lifeblood to these events receded and the events suffered as a consequence.

While the tribes still gather to pound their feet on the earth, indoors or out, and the incessant beats of bass crash African drums into the classical symphonic frequencies of the west, their pulse seems to offer a weak reminder of the beat of the earlier trance dance gathering. This was a time when it was all just dance music and no categories, the drug was primarily LSD, one or two DJs would play all night long, the multi-dimensionality of space-time would open on the dance floor and magic *would* happen. After the shock of the new and the magic of that first bite, the moment, like all great moments in cultural art, passed. Nowadays, eight or more DJ’s compete to persuade the dance floor of their prowess and the music played must be of a certain style or it is no longer deemed ‘trance’ or ‘psychedelic’. The drug of choice is MDMA, and few venture out onto the perimeter - where it was all happening before 1995.

Yet, like an organic cycle of life, death and renewal, a resilient magic once again takes root. Indeed, the truths discussed here are timeless. This ‘communion’ was held in 1995, during the peak expression of the Goa trance phenomena, which by then had evolved into a world wide underground dance tribe full of enthusiasm and possibility. Having experienced the full cyclical spiral of this culture, I am now
confident that the many branches and splinters which have grown from the psychedelic trance tree trunk, will develop and procure a new aspect of dance culture refocused on evolution, multi-dimensionality and fulfill our destiny towards mass consciousness transformation.

Change Is The Only Constant (Universal Law)

A DIALOGUE

KRUSTY Ray, thanks for taking this time to share. From the way I understand art and culture, I see you as a PSYchoactive cyber shaman: from the foothills of Byron Bay (Australia), via Neon Tokyo (Japan) Studios, via Goa (India) Spiritual Global freak party Disc Jockey evolution, scribing magical alchemical sounds. I see you as embodying a visionary voodoo quest to awaken consciousness through sound as a technician of the sacred.

RAY Part of the shamanic richness I strive for is the magic of trying to extend the natural universal laws into trance dance music and channeling this music in my role as a DJ techno shaman. So that the collective group dynamic can come into alignment, to use these potent spatial moments to access certain knowledge or data in our DNA or the transpersonal self. We are like the Australian Aboriginal who, for eons, have contemplated the planetsphere with their dreamtime, while beating their sticks and blowing through a hollowed out pipe (didjeridu). These open-air, wilderness, tribadelic, pagan-like parties
(rituals), are along this line of primordial communion. I see cathartic dance as a reconnective therapy, and a rekindling of a free-form play space, which we had as children.

Krusty

You seem to understand the communally, unifying potency of this art form, where this practice walks hand in hand with the evolution of the multi-dimensional human body/brain/spirit somatic. Cyber shamans are pilots navigating the future amidst the turbulence of the all prevalent information wars being waged. The Middle Ages=Techno Age we are currently fumbling through, fossicking for the fundamental frequency. I sense a deep spiritual intent to what you do as if you are guided by hidden hands, to assist in the rebirthing of new sound paradigms.

Ray

This pursuit is very ‘TransNeptunian’. The dissolving of boundaries. You can see why rave culture is so addictive. Kids want to escape the mundane, and this euphoria is amplified by the use of psychedelics. I think the popular—kiddy rave—drug, ‘ectasy,’ is the lowest rung on the chakra ladder. I wish to push it to higher plateaus of consciousness expansion, and ultimately not with the use of drugs, although they are powerful psychic amplification agents. These substances open doors, but unfortunately habitual, dependent users, get psychologically stuck in the door. Its like regressing back into the womb, where there is no pain of being a separate entity, in an undifferentiated fusion state.

Krusty

I reckon what your art is all on about is sound frequency alchemy, ritual magic, image media, art installations … The Dance Party … Your intention however, behind all this is for the dance floor folk to achieve the transcendental bliss states: a consistent plane of existence known to the mystics and cultural practitioners throughout the ages. The techno-music aesthetic of Cyber Shaman/Artist/Human Ray Castle then must be specifically designed for people to enter trance states while dancing, allowing the body and mind to go beyond the mundane everyday world of the mind/ego/illusion to arrive at the NOW! A zone which the mystic strives for and the drug user is seeking.

Ray

This pursuit is very ‘TransNeptunian’. The dissolving of boundaries. You can see why rave culture is so addictive. Kids want to escape the mundane, and this euphoria is amplified by the use of psychedelics. I think the popular—kiddy rave—drug, ‘ectasy,’ is the lowest rung on the chakra ladder. I wish to push it to higher plateaus of consciousness expansion, and ultimately not with the use of drugs, although they are powerful psychic amplification agents. These substances open doors, but unfortunately habitual, dependent users, get psychologically stuck in the door. Its like regressing back into the womb, where there is no pain of being a separate entity, in an undifferentiated fusion state.
The peak experience, whether it is a sexual orgasm or the self abandonment we feel at a trance dance party, is a letting go of the defences which bind us to our ego, our aloneness, and the controlling personality of the mind. One aspect of the Goa mythical dance party movement has been to bring a more spiritual vibration into this art form, and make the whole experience more cosmic, and ultimately more holistically edifying. This has encompassed a neo-hippie fashion trend, which has identified with the taoist East and its deities, and a revisioning of sound frequency alchemy, ritual magic, image media, ceremonial art installations. All of which are infused into a potentially healing, unifying social event, for the individual, the community and the planet. When we dance together, we are one. There is a micro/macro reverberating affect. Like people meditating or praying together. A now post-Goa, anti-podal mindscape. A mystical experience mediated via the technology. It relates to the maxim of the Aquarian age, where science and a more individuated religious experience can merge. Composers and DJs of Trance Techno, tend to be anonymous communal artists, and don’t have the hierarchical, narcissism of the previous rock musician archetype. The author of Cyberia, Douglas Rushkoff, states that, ‘the mission of cyberspace counterculture of the 90s is to explore unmapped realms of consciousness and to re-choose reality consciously and purposefully’. I would add to that, the mission of challenging existing media as well as the manipulated and manipulating world views of the dominator culture.

The cybershaman is an info-warrior out of necessity, and what better way of dismantling obsolete thinking and action, than with the cyber artillery of the techno-fluro-tribal party.

It’s to do with very subtle realms of energy related to the strange attractor theory in the ‘new physics’. The relationship of technology to organic interdimensional consciousness. It comes down to fractal harmonics, numerology, sacred geometry and manipulating symbols and sound signatures (beats and frequencies), thus creating a digital occult—a holistic-hip-gnostic—music of the spheres. So that we realign with organic rhythmystic cycles of becoming, at one with the galactic dance. Ultimately this reveals that we are all individually, co-creators of the universe; each of us is everything. The heavens do incline but they do not compel. We do have free will and we create our fate, the stars do reveal connecting patterns, and mirror life on this earth plane. Astrology is the study of the relationship between time, space, cycles of nature and internal/external personal and collective events. When I do a party I always cast an astrological chart to check out what energies are involved, to gauge what kind of art to present and what type of music to emphasise. Obviously, the Moon cycle is a very powerful barometer on
the psychic atmosphere and mood of the public, but also other celestial alignments, so you know what kind of powers you are playing with. *Deejays are power freaks!* I feel a huge amount of responsibility in this role. If you sense the need to cast yourself in this directing, controlling, position, then try and do it in a clear minded way, without unconsciously projecting too many personal agendas through the prime time of these trance-dance, altered state, sacred spaces. The dancers put themselves in your hands to take them on a journey, it’s like psychic surgery. Its important to understand the dynamic of raising this energy in the body and psyche, through progressing the various levels of intensity in the music, to make a spiraling progression. Its to do with raising the kundalini serpent energy in the body’s chakra system. The party is a chakra journey, and finally you reach a crown-chakra-type unfolding, like a flower, when the light comes in the morning, and the progression of the music should reflect this. But this can only come if you have ridden through the more interior, darker, dimensions of the vigorous, visceral night groove. This darkness into light, sound into light, dynamic is a powerful quality of the Goa style wilderness parties. If you can adjust the sound with this celestial shift of energy, it creates immense, ecstatic rapture, which can take the gathering into a melting, ascension, state.

*Krusty* Dance has always been central to any ritual magic and God Head experience. Shamans and priests/priestesses from all societies and known civilisations throughout the world have used music and dance to induce trance states. A basic esoteric teaching is that each being is a microcosm—a reflection or miniature—of the macrocosm, or universe. Each of us truly does contain the energies of the cosmos within us. *Ecstatic sacred dance* is a means of stimulating these energies and bringing them into expression and activate a deeper level of consciousness. Such dance is the intent of this techno tribal movement, offering the sacred opportunity for people to experience their BLISS.

*Green Ant Full Moon doof Nov 2000*

*Photo: Brent Tanian*
Non-believers and non-participants will never understand the true ritual power of dance. There is a connection between the catholic mass religious ritual and a trance techno dance party. Participants at raves, especially outdoor ones, feel a connection with another level of consciousness and realise a personal, rather than an institutional, deified, dogmatic, spiritual experience.

This transcendent, dissolving, unifying experience is fundamental to the psycho/spiritual nature of humans. Deep down we yearn to experience this connectivity to the whole, which is what we experienced when we were in our mother’s womb; at that initial stage, our spirit is taking form, coming into a body. We truly feel that we are the centre of the universe, floating in space (the oceanic womb), where there is no ego, no sense of self, no separateness, we feel a total interconnectivity with everything. The innate desire to lose one’s self in a transcendent, transporting experience, pulls us back to that primordial source experience; it is like a returning home. This can be realised in various communal spiritual practices which all the religions tell us about, or to lesser degrees, even just going to the pub or being in a crowd at a sports match. This ecstatic state of intoxication of the spirit, or just being part of an event, is the craving we have when we gather together for social intercourse, or even as a passive audience. Humans have a strong need to come together for a unifying collective experience and I sense it connects us to a very communal, tribal, element in our social nature. The Greeks strove to recreate this archetypal need with their emotionally-charged, mythological, theatre. The mass hysteria at a sporting event, matches that of a full blown rave. Perhaps one is seen to be more regimented than the other, but there are codes of conduct, mind sets, and regulatory factors, whether that be referees, DJs, rules, bpm, or beat/style genres of music and body expression. And of course, psyche-lubricating-substances, or soma, are a part of the whole dissolving process which assist in the dropping of our defences, temporarily. So that we can let go and feel connected to something greater than ourselves, but then we have to come back down again and be alone with all our conflicting feelings.

So its always this pull between wanting to be in a fusion state, the bliss we experienced in the womb, and the pain of having to become a separate entity and live in the boundaries of the body and work with mental and emotional processes which challenge us with a vast array of dysfunctionalism in our innate quest for unconditional love, both interpersonally and communally. Transcendence is about rising above existential angst, which translates into the flight of the spirit out of the body. It can be seen as, escapism from the mundane, seeking nirvana or shunyata, the religious bliss state. Music is the most powerful, emotion catalysing, vibration, artform, we have as spiritual warriors. Frequency and rhythm activates the
The modern shamans are midwives to a pregnant universe (which I see as the birth of human/cosmic expression of a self conscious state of awareness) who are helping to prepare the way for the shift in consciousness which is so sorely needed today. The shift from mechanistic rationalist modes of thought to what has been called a sense of ‘participation mystique’ in life. This is the dance party experience: dancers/artists/organisers are one tribe, one heartbeat, either everyone gets it or nobody gets it. I sense, Ray, that when you do your digital sound alchemy in an event, you impart a direct experience of the infinite, which is the empirical experience held within the dance, the In The Eternal Moment Of Bliss state. The social, audio and visual sampling of innumerable cultures and timescapes compresses the history and future of civilisation into a single moment, when anything is possible. This then is the power of the Goa realisation.

chemistry in the psychosomatic body/mind. Deep images, sensations and memories are re-ignited. These dance rituals are about the gestalt of the body, releasing regenerative, primitive, psychosexual energies, which we as ‘civilised’, mind-driven westerners, fret about, with our awkward, retentive, neurotic social programming. The dance cathexis—a group cathartic psychodrama—on tribal, techno, beats, offers a potent temenos (sacred space) for reintegration of disconnected parts of the Self, which becomes a therapeutic sonic homeopathy of sorts.

So tekno tunes are like tinctures, and when we dance to them they activate cellular memory, in our metabolism, like electronic enzymes. Combining this with psychotropic drugs creates a powerful catabolic, biochemical reaction. Raves and techno trance parties are easily seen, by the outsider, as a dance-drug-cult, where the participants are predominantly on the drug ‘ecstasy’, and emit a synthetic sensual, fluffy love aura, which often creates a euphoria or autoeroticism. But for me, personally, I find when the celebrants are not dosed or contrastingly are on hallucinogens, (ie. acid, mushrooms, mescaline, DMT), there is a much deeper transpersonal, Gaian-mind-like resonance in the event. I often get the feeling at a party with people on ‘e’, speed or amphetamines that they would be just as content to convulse to the sound of a train coming down the tracks.
I feel that Goa trance is tapping into a quantum quick step. This movement in contemporary music mirrors the present transit of Uranus in Aquarius. Which suggests a free, independent, spirit, with mystical, cosmic, consciousness. A promethean quest to awaken spiritual ideals and experiences via technology with a popular, collective, art movement. The hippies, in the ‘60s, gave us aspects of that, and now it is coming around again on a higher arc of the spiral. Rushkoff defines it as ‘a synergistic congregation of creative thinkers bringing the tools of hi-tech and advanced spirituality together’. The foundations of our most deeply held beliefs and myths are being shaken (Pluto in Sagittarius), with a rebirth and revisioning of ancient spiritual ideas. The dilemma of a fixed, static, traditional religion, is that it struggles to maintain a position in the present which is wholly conditioned by the perceptions of the past.

India, the home of religion, has been a sanctuary for dharma bums, mystics, truth seekers, misfits, freaks, druggies, drop-outs, hippies, anarchists, futurists, new agers and a plethora of world travellers, who are seeking to escape the mundane world, questing for a higher experience and answers to the big questions. India and psychedelic trance-dance is for those who want to shed their egos and embrace something quite numinous (spirit reflecting) and potentially more psychically edifying. This tribadelic techno trance movement was started in the time-warped, ancient vase of Goa, India, by the seasonal nomadic jetset hippies, who are most definitely outside of conventional society. They sustained their unshackled, fringe, bohemian, lifestyle, by smuggling bomm shankar (charis) out of India to the West and Japan and collecting the latest mind-blowing psychedelic dance music. Charis (hash) had been legal in India, up till the mid ‘70s, and its use by Hindu yogis and sadhus, as a soma, or heightener of the senses, was a part of that culture’s tradition, until America put heavy anti-drug pressure on all Asian countries at that time.

Goa techno trance actually originated from hard line, electronic body music, groups, like Nitzer Ebb, Front 242, Frontline Assembly, as well as Eurobeat. This international, underground cult, network, of outer space travellers and drug dealers, then brought this music with them, on tape, to Goa, to play at beach and jungle parties that they made, which were non commercial, spontaneous, extremely flamboyant, outrageous; and bomm! …the Goa trance, hyperspace, collective mind set evolved. On top of this, there was a copious supply of acid and other hallucinogens always free at most parties there. After 1989, the party season in India has been intermittent, because of politics, especially related to drugs and the growing popularity of the scene. This once, secret, dance-dharma-zone, became much publicised and the parties more difficult to make and less magical.
Goa, the actual place in India, has now become more mythical than the free environment for partying it once was. With its present commercial, tourist treadmill, commodification, and the attention focused on it, via this music fashion, it’s now been tamed into a kind of clubby Ibiza, and has lost its raw, out-there, wildness, which the freaks gave it. But at least it’s in India, which is totally mad, chaotic and surreal, and will maintain some degree of unhinged, unpredictability, as opposed to other Asian tourist traps like Thailand and Bali. India is freak friendly, hardcore and in-your-face. Its more conducive to time travellers and truth seekers than straight tourism. That’s why it’s a hippie Mecca, and will continue to be so.

A unique genre of dance music has been spored from this, a *cyborganic counter culture of psychonauts*, distinct from the mainstream of urban house, hip-hop, rave, acid, techno which was being generated in Europe and America, for clubs and urban venues, with lots of commercial manipulations and hype by music press and labels, just like we are ironically, currently, witnessing in London now, with ‘Goa Trance’. DJs and musicians who have experienced the exotic seduction of the Goa vibe, then went back home to the West to do custom made tunes for the occasion and set up labels to promote it, and now it is being packaged as a pop fashion, which inevitably happens to any social art movement which has some substance. It’s amazing it took this long to become hip, it’s been going on now, for ten years, but its basic principles are ancient. London is very good at whipping up fashion-fad-fusions with its infectious media, but in reality, England, with its Criminal Justice laws, is one of the most repressive societies for such events, and this just fuels its underground, shadow offshoot—English eccentricity—which I see as a curiously creative rebellion against a very traditional class society. Let’s see where this freaky, flavor of the month implodes too, now, globally. *Pop always regurgitates itself.* Goa is not about one scene calling the shots, it’s *a universal frequency freeway.* The party scene in Goa, India, had always been very international, which flushed out narrow, parochial attitudes and tastes. Although the quality of psychedelic music being produced in London, has been very prolific and quintessential, of recent, its root 4/4 beat form is grounded in ‘80s Euro techno. Similarly, if you look back to the ‘60s, you can see what the British electric guitarists did with American blues music. It’s all about innovation, whatever form it takes, and obviously now, the present immense palette of technology offers infinite possibilities for psychic, sonic, evolution in this medium. Which is an electronic umbilical chord, that links us all together in one pulsating, *doofadelic*, trance dance, and offers the possibility to break down psychological, cultural and political boundaries.
The vibe in abstract trance music is about universal themes, not subjective personality fetish, soapy romanticism or urban frustrations. This has made it rather illusive to market by the music industry corporations (ie. give it a face). Its production and networking has been by a very alternative, grass roots, international subculture. Now we have a whole new psychedelic wave of computer whiz-kids, who didn’t party in the ‘60s, but many were born then, thus are fully hip to its revolutionary spirit, and are now redefining and reinventing it, with a *midi maverick*, post modern, attitude. I remember, in ‘86/87, having to dig around the b-sides of dance records, or their dub versions, to find more spacey, weird, instrumental mixes, to suit our more, off-centre, way-ward, esoteric needs. This thread of meta-music is like a sound track for a journey through time; past, present and future. There were always too many insipid vocals, and often tracks were too short. So we used to use Sony Walkmans—no DATs then—to cut up the track, edit it, and stitch it together with various versions to make custom Goa mega mixes for the party. At this time techno musicians had no idea of what was being done to their material and the context it was being played in. The *elecktrickery* of the techno shaman’s cybertools allows for a kind of *sound sorcery*, all of which enhances the capacity to do this sacred work. There is often a thin line dividing and defining the various qualities of doof, techno, acid, trance or whatever you want to call it. Basically it comes down to whatever evokes the spirit to a state of emotive, euphoric, ecstatic, aliveness; but within this there is a potent fertile space for subliminal suggestion. And for me, it is steering it towards a connection with the *Universal OMM*. The *psychic sonic harmonic* that unites us all to the cosmos and creation; a *theosophical trance*. 
I sense the current pop rave scene isn’t where you are projecting your energy, rather you are facilitating a spiritual ritual mainframe: booting up the techno genre software.

I don’t want to focus too much on my role, myself as DJ, in the environment of a dance party. Essentially the DJ is a channel, for sound-morphing the vibe, which creates a force field, or magnetic resonance. The essence of dance music is that it has brought the main event back to the individual rather than focusing on a creative ego on stage or live musicians, as in rock music. Even live techno tweaking musicians, I am dubious about. Laurie Anderson says ‘Watching someone play a keyboard is as interesting as watching someone doing the ironing’. I would much prefer some abstract, symbolic, theatre. It’s all to do with personal empowerment via movement, as the frequencies and beats move the air in the space which triggers your emotional body. The lighting and art also tunes and sanctifies the space, preparing the ground for magick to eventuate, rather than formula, commercial, fashion, fictions, with lots of voyeurism and ego jerk-off. I wish to strive for higher consciousness events and music is a powerful catalyst. Esoterically, as the dervish dancers knew, we are able to tap into invisible realms of meaning, to penetrate the true nature of the physical space-time continuum. The electron does behave like a particle, with access to information about the rest of the universe. These parties are like a pluton, neutron, electron dance of pure energy, which flushes out blocked psychic residue.

So what you are suggesting with this quantum quick step is that a kind of phase locking is occurring. The ingredients, the strobe atoms, sonic beams and organic cells are syncopated into linked, chain reaction cycles that promote the creation of a single, interdependent organism, where feedback and affirmation can take place immediately and effectively. Rushkoff defines it as ‘a phase-locked group of dancers with sound and light, which begins to look like a living, breathing, fractal equation, where each tiny part reflects the nature and shape of the larger one’. The ultimate phase-locking occurs in the dance itself, where 10s, 100s, 1000s of like-minded people play out the techno tribal ceremony. People learn to communicate with their bodies on psychic hallucinogenic, spiritual (white light) levels, instead of being only dialed into this extremely cerebral, narrow-band-width TV society which dominates the mass mind. At this type of techno event there is no need for people to say anything, but just to bond with everyone around; all defences are down, there is this transpersonal love, you talk about, and an uninhibited, non-judgemental openness. The unification, merging, fusing experience. Unlike the hierarchical, patriarchal, traditional Christian ritual, which is dominated by a priest, techno cyber shamans, such as yourself, open the space as a pagan ritual, free-for-all, that is created by a group of equals, and offers a vehicle to experience one’s own BLISS.
A dance party is a *chiros satori experience* (time outside of regular time), where one can gain a bright-light-bulb-like experience of illumination and understanding. As when the raver or dancer states that s/he feels most alive when they are dancing, and this religious-like ecstasy, offers a healing of our various splits and a reintegration with our instinctual self, through such peak, bliss, experiences, which will permeate through into all aspects of our life; so it can have a very transformational, life-altering, affect. And yes, dance parties have transmuted the role that organised religion once had to lift us onto the sacramental and supramental plane.
In a place affectionately referred to as ‘Disco Valley’, the music has been pumping continuously for hour after kaleidoscopic-light-filled hour. The sun is beginning to rise over the rainforest mist; dancing feet create intricate patterns of tread over the geological patterns of earth; the rock on which we dance seems to breathe, to be flesh. The ecstatic and tender expressions on the faces of participants reveals that they have shared in something ‘other’, perhaps in something ‘sacred’.

The preceding vignette strives to convey that very special place doof participants can access when all the elements of ecstasy enter into alignment. In this chapter I use perspectives and methodologies from studies in religions and the anthropology of consciousness to examine aspects of the quest for experiential transcendence and spiritual autonomy within DiY parties, or doofs. Much of the material presented here is

(PHOTOS: KADAICHA)
Potential Movement, Transpersonal Psychology and Neo-Paganism are also often present. The emphasis on ritual expression through space at doofs is quite distinctive and pervasive. Doof organisers often aim to imbue an atmosphere of sacrality to the events and may perform ceremonial and magickal activities to consecrate their selected site. At the Nam Shub of Enki Partee individuals marked out sacred space prior to the party by arranging seven candles around the circumference of the dancing ground. Further down the beach other people placed nine candles in a formation somewhat reminiscent of the Qabalistic ‘tree of life’ glyph. The ‘trance space’ at the Dragonflight party was modelled on a seven-pointed star, in the center of which was a cylindrical black altar decorated with white hieroglyphs (the most prominent being the Tjet sacred to Isis) and surrounded by monstrous heirloom pumpkins.

I wish to pursue three different themes in connection to psychedelic dance parties and spirituality. The first theme, Substantial spirits, deals with the controversy that has been associated with the spiritual uses of psychoactive substances in the ‘western’ context. The second theme, Trance and transgression, focuses on the ritual significance of transgression in psychedelic parties. Finally, Sacrificial NRG considers the relative absence of the ritual acknowledgment of sacrifice in doofs as compared to entheogenic dance rituals in other societies (an entheogen is a substance that purportedly induces experiences of divinity). I argue that this absence of the sacrificial is a consequence of the cultural context of psychedelia within what some sociologists optimistically refer to as ‘late-capitalism’.

1 Organised by Jilly and Raze; Phil/Nam Shub of Enki, Matt, Matt, and Kath; and Jilly, respectively.
Leaving the question of the religiosity of the psychedelic movements aside, psychedelic parties suggest—at the very least—systems for inducing and using collective ‘peak-experiences’. As Abraham Maslow has emphasised, many psychoactive substances certainly seem capable of triggering peak-experiences, and peak-experiences are intrinsically valuable in Maslow’s model. Indeed, the term ‘peaking’ is used by trippers to describe the more intense phases of a psychedelic experience. Psychedelic dance parties are all the more interesting for their being ostensibly secular, yet borrowing liberally from the terminology and iconography of religion and spirituality. Incidentally, Maslow felt that ‘…LSD and psilocybin, give us some possibility of control in this realm of peak-experiences. It looks like these drugs often produce peak-experiences in the right people under the right circumstances, so perhaps we needn’t wait for them to occur by good fortune’. However, in general Maslow advises a moderate approach, warning against becoming attached to the peak experience as an end in itself, or trying to ‘escalate the triggers’ without integrating the experience.
The motif of communality has been one of the more recurrent elements in discourses about psychedelic parties and there exists a general consensus about the centrality of experiential transcendence—sometimes conceptualised as ‘dance-delirium’ or the ‘implosion’ or ‘disappearance’ of subjectivity among party-goers. The overall impression is of losing oneself or transforming oneself through shared, multifaceted sensation…participants understand their experience in terms of community, interconnectivity and mass unity…This feeling of extending the self to become other, is a kind of imagined metamorphosis…representing fascination not with forces but with metamorphosis…Metamorphosis occurs as the self is destabilised, disembodied and “dispersed across social space”.

Sam Keen has suggested that ‘LSD, DMT, and mescaline’ may give rise to a ‘Dionysian consciousness’…based upon a body ego of the polymorphously perverse body’ in which the self is reduced to a focused awareness of sensations and the world becomes ‘totally eroticised’. This collective consciousness is especially pronounced at parties where MDMA is a conspicuous element. During the plateau of

MDMA effects, interpersonal differences appear to evaporate producing a condition of almost total identification of self with other. Within the psychedelic dance rapture, participants may lose or suspend subjective experience of themselves and merge into a kind of collective body, a place where desire and production meet in a state of flow.

In forest settings this magickal transcendence is very potent, as the energies are charging and morphing and zinging around people and the ether. We may become little ‘animals’ investigating the primal, orgiastic, instinctual aspects of our nature. We may find ourselves in swirling vortexes and see people moving as one with each other—completely tranced out and sharing some unknown luv.

Marghanita Laski has argued that the attachment of religious ‘overbeliefs’ to experiences of aesthetic or ecstatic intensity is gratuitous rather than essential. Laski felt that ecstasy is more important than ideology. Laski’s published views on psychedelics (in particular mescaline) were that their use did not constitute a form of ecstasy. However, Laski wrote at a time when there were relatively few accounts of psychedelic experiences; and she seems to have succumbed to the kind of fallacy of relevance known as the ‘converse accident’, arguing that, as some accounts of mescaline (such as that of R.C. Zaehner) are clearly more absurd than blissful, then those of others (for example, Aldous Huxley) who claim to have been graced by beatific visions, must necessarily be mistaken.
Margaret Mead, while accepting the mystical validity of some LSD experiences, is careful to distinguish variations in individual responses:

It must be recognized, however, that there is no necessary relationship between the use of drugs and religious experience. The ordinary LSD ‘trip’ has no more necessary relationship to mystical experience than the drinking of ten cocktails has, after which many people experience various alterations of consciousness.  

Indeed, much of orthodox religious practice has no necessary relationship to religious experience either, but the point is still a valid one: not all who have ‘tripped’ at a happening, rave, or doof have had epiphanies, and not all arrive at the same interpretations of their experiences.

TRANCE AND TRANSGRESSION

Transgression literally means ‘to step across’. The social and religious worlds have a moral character. Rules, laws and taboos govern society. Georges Bataille has written extensively about the ways in which taboo and transgression fulfil and complement each other. In the writings of Bataille we find a link to the opposition between the world of work and sobriety on the one hand, and a sacred sphere of activities that extravagantly or even violently exceed that other world’s boundaries. For Bataille, taboos circumscribed activities that are ‘violent’ in the sense that they are intimately connected to the vertiginous cycle of reproduction and death. Taboos attach to ‘violent’ behaviours such as sexuality and murder because these behaviours are antithetical to work, which Bataille constructs as humanity’s attempt to deny the explosive profusion and wastefulness of nature—an unstoppable extravaganza in which life annihilates and replaces life. In such a vision, nature in its orgy of creativity and destruction possesses both poles of the Holy: the mysterium tremendum and the mysterium fascinans. These twin qualities are also conferred on taboos which are attracting and difficult to resist: the transgression of taboo is tantalising, yet to complete the transgression is to invoke terror of the consequences. Transgressing the taboo does not eliminate the taboo; indeed it reaffirms it. Yet, perversely, without the taboo the transgression is less attractive and yields less pleasure. In any case, taboo and transgression are ideal ritual tools for creating a sense of the strong emotional paradox that is the Holy.

The most frequently used and most favoured psychoactive substances at psychedelic parties are LSD and MDMA. Because of the current illegal status of these materials, their use necessarily constitutes a form of transgression. Transgression of laws provides a valuable mechanism for transcending the logic of the everyday. Transgression is therefore frequently one of the ingredients in the category disruption that is a central mechanism of liminality. At the very least, the possibility that any rule may be transgressed is indicative that cultural categories are not absolute.

Transgression can also be a sign of inconsistencies within the moral life of a community—that the rules and organisational principles of one part of a society are not adhered to by another segment of the same society. However, such a lack of moral unity may be not so much a sign of social dysfunction as an indicator of a society’s vigour, a sign that there are works to be performed and there is still room to create.

What then of the general taboo against chemical modification of consciousness? Inebriation takes the chaos of nature to new dimensions of extravagance. The instability and discontinuity that accompanies life is in total sympathy with the dizzying onset of substances such as MDMA, tobacco, or the yajé potion of the western Amazon. The insistent sensuality of many psychoactive substances, and the conundrums into which they lead the intellect, speak of the close affinity of inebriation with sexuality and death. The triad of inebriation, sexuality, and death are related by their sensual aspect, and defined by their opposition to work.

Huston Smith has argued that the psychedelic movement of the Sixties responded to the moral inconsistency of western society by adopting a strongly antinomian stance. Antinomianism refers to the belief that the individual can develop their moral faculties to the point where external laws become obsolete.\textsuperscript{20} The Sixties counterculture was influenced by a melange of philosophies stressing self determination, epitomised by catchphrases like ‘be free’ and ‘do your thing’. Among the more important of these individualistic philosophies were existentialism and the ideals of Gestalt Therapy as practiced by Fritz Perls at Esalen.\textsuperscript{21} The ethos behind doofs is also one of freedom, expression, and resistance. One of the most vocal contemporary proponents of antinomianism is Hakim Bey, author of \textit{T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone}.\textsuperscript{22} Bey’s iconoclastic and anarchistic ‘poetic terrorism’ has exerted a considerable influence on the cultural style of the neo-psychedelic movement and Australian edge-culture generally.\textsuperscript{23}

The use of LSD and MDMA at dance parties in Australia is a transgression of the various State laws, and this transgression accentuates the fundamental division of moral unity at the level of the State: the split between the State as a republic of free citizens, and the State as an abstract, sometimes repressive, law-dispensing authority. This transgressive act can be seen as a method for rupturing the continuity of structure and entering the ‘liminal’ orbit. Transgression of public morality is of course a common element of the liminal phase of rites of passage and amorality is also a frequent characteristic of the Holy.


\textsuperscript{21} Neville Drury, \textit{The Elements of Human Potential} (Longmead, UK: Element Books Limited, 1989).

\textsuperscript{22} Hakim Bey, \textit{T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism} (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

Dancing can also be a powerful mode of transgression. The movements of bodies at doofs can be read as social texts defining new and creative lines of flight. Hard-house, trance and other new forms of electronic dance-music played at doofs catalyse new modes of dancing. Free-form dance promotes exploration of novel ways of being embodied:

Disco, heavy metal, grunge, punk, acid house, and hardcore techno pose generic ‘rules’, and these distinctions are manifested by diverse behaviours on the dancefloor. Dance music radically alters bodily expectations and possibilities … The aural space between the amplifier and the ear is a site for political struggle. This is a queer space for bodily circulation … Dance music is continually being restyled, importing aural sensations and defamiliarising the semiotic encounter with the mobile body.24

The fluidity and flexibility of the body is used by dancers as a loom on which to restructure the fabric of social identity. Ingesting psychedelic materials that give rise to dramatic changes in somatic awareness would appear to augment this process of corporeal de-subjectification. The dancing bodies of doofers are potent sites of resistance, experimentation, autonomy, and transcendence. Psychedelic parties provide expressions of body-oriented awareness that reflect changing attitudes toward sexualities, socialities, and genders. Tripping at doofs can be truly recreational in the literal sense of facilitating the dynamic re-creation of social beings. This is a process of stepping across the limen, with a strongly initiatory sub-text; and, significantly, it takes place in a highly public and communal ‘participation framework’.25

Transgression of identity can be achieved through metamorphosis. Many doof participants transform their appearance through highly elaborate and beautiful costumes. Examples that I’ve observed at local parties include a Halloween witch costume; a rainbow-coloured, plumed headdress and a long white robe; Chaplinesque garb; bizarre, electronic, bleeping glove puppets; leonine prosthetic tails; and a menagerie of other costumes composed of furry, shiny, luminescent, and metallic looking materials. One striking costume observed at Dragonflight consisted of a pink and white gingham bodice clasped around the form of a chrome-haired woman with enormous matching gingham platform shoes—like the diva of ecstasy itself—mouth full of fragrant bubble-gum, and clasping in each hand the attribute of a lit magnesium sparkler, frenetically dancing like a fleshy avatar of the goddess of meteors.

Tripping is usually discursively constructed as pertaining to the mind, but it is as much about the body. Indeed, only minuscule quantities of any orally ingested psychedelic ever make it to the brain. If we free ourselves from the Cartesian model of body/mind, then tripping can be analysed as a kind of ritual sub-cellular body modification in which vast numbers of psychedelic molecules are temporarily attached to receptor sites on the surfaces of sensory neurons within the Central Nervous System (CNS). This act, ingesting a psychedelic, is charged with great territorial, political and ontological significance. These cellular surfaces are perhaps the most hotly contested regions of the body as they are the interfaces between the sense-mediated environment (which is controlled by exterior power regimes) and the transcendent subject (and the anarchic order of the Self). Psychedelic drugs may be used to reconfigure unsatisfactory relations to external control regimes and to affirm the autonomy of the transcendent subject.

Another form of transgression associated with psychedelics is the transgression of states of consciousness. The Sixties counter-culture borrowed freely from the philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism.26 Many of these philosophies have since diffused into popular awareness, especially through the proliferation of new religious movements, particularly the polymorphic New Age. The concept that the ‘reality’ of everyday sense perception is actually maya—an illusory construct—has become axiomatic among many contemporary spiritual seekers. States of inebriation can be interpreted as configurations of maya which are more ‘transparent’ or which contain ‘flaws’ that afford glimpses into an ‘ultimate reality’ or ‘ground state’. Psychedelics, after all, are said to ‘alter’ or ‘distort’ the perception of reality; reality is said be illusory: ergo, psychedelics might provide a portal to a non-illusory condition.

**SACRIFICIAL NRG**

Psychedelic dance parties in Australia can be compared and contrasted with entheogen-oriented all-night dance rituals in a number of other societies. Such rituals are widespread, and are particularly well-represented among the many indigenous peoples of the western Amazon27, the Huichol of Mexico,28 and members of the Bwiti cult of Gabon in equatorial west Africa.29 One is particularly struck by the similarities between doofs and these other rituals. Even a perfunctory analysis reveals a great deal of overlap: all the rituals involve special preparations such as fasting and beautification; ritual space is always created; the music is nearly always loud, continuous and hypnotic with a pronounced percussive component; ecstatic group dancing is used as a trance technique; coloured light sources are often used; the

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psychotropic substances used all have a net stimulating effect, but also induce visions and a degree of dissociation or ‘de-subjectification’; and sociality always takes the form of an immersion into a collective state of *Gemeinschaft* or ≠. In view of all these similarities the differences that do exist require explanation. Why, for example, is the idea of ‘sacrifice’ extremely important in these other rituals, but less evident in doofs?

The theme of this collection is ‘freeNRG’, but at this point I wish to introduce the possibility that there is a cost associated with psychedelic energy, and I don’t mean the cost of the generators or the outrageous price of an ‘e’. The first law of thermodynamics predicts that energy inevitably has at least one cost, and that price is transformation. According to the foundation myth of western physics, the energy of the universe is constant: it cannot be created, only transformed. Living systems such as ourselves are subject to a series of surrenders and transformations that collectively comprise the condition of mortality. One series of transformations which intersects the human condition are those related to nutrition. Solar light is transformed into bio-chemical energy by plants, and some of these plants are subsequently converted into chemical energy, cellular growth, and excrements by herbivores, which may be subject to further predation or may become hosts to other organisms or to ideational systems.

The theoretical model proposed by Maurice Bloch places the dynamics and emotions associated with predation close to the heart of religious ritual and sentiment. In Bloch’s view, rites of passage involve instilling in those undergoing initiation, in the first instance, a sense of vulnerability—of being prey—through such devices as being ritually stalked or otherwise victimised. In the next phase of ritual the initiate is brought into a sense of power and an identification with the hunter. The suggestion of threat is occasionally present at doofs: for example, when I attended a dance party at Fingal Head Beach I was told by two independent informants about an ectoplasmic ‘devil-dog’ that is said to haunt the location. In the case of *Stomping Monster Doof*, the theme itself suggests supernatural danger. The ‘prey into hunter’ ideas of Bloch’s converge with the very widespread religious idea of ‘sacrifice’, in other words, the ritual acknowledgment of the transformational costs of energy.

Another theorist of religion, Bataille, emphasised a further set of transformations involving the shift from states of continuity to states of discontinuity. Human reproduction involves a series of cellular shifts to and from continuity and discontinuity, commencing with the sudden ejaculatory discontinuity of spermatozoa from their genitor and ending with the discontinuity of expulsion from the womb. Life is conceptualised by Bataille as a state of anguished isolation from other orders of existence, while death and putrefaction constitute an eventual relaxation of discontinuity and merging into continuity with other matter. Human energy requires that

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other organisms are sacrificed to sustain us, and it also means that we ourselves are destined to become the fuel of other transformations. Some of our bodies will fuel the funeral pyre, while Bataille speaks eloquently for the buried ones…

…death will proclaim my return to seething life. Hence I can anticipate and live in expectation of that multiple putrescence that anticipates its sickening triumph in my person.32

For Bataille, both eroticism and the religious impulse are part of the human response to these life and death transformations. In other words religion involves coming to terms with sacrifice and discontinuity. Religions afford a number of ways of coming to terms with discontinuity. One of the most effective ways that religion creates continuity is through the formation of strong social bonds; in its ideal form the intimate and immediate sociality that Victor Turner calls *communitas*.33 Continuity in the form of *communitas* is an important feature of psychedelic parties. From the collective psychedelic ‘dance delirium’34 to the extended, unconditional embraces of MDMA ‘puppy piles’ and the acid ‘mind-meld’, subjective continuity with others is sought and often actualised. While this experience of continuity may be fleeting, the resulting long-term changes in outlook can be profound, as attested to by the many personal accounts of psychedelic transformation.35 Sacrificial motifs are frequently prominent in the mythology associated with entheogenic dance rituals in other societies. Many instances could be cited, but the reader can gain a reasonable impression of their prevalence from the three examples cited below.

34 Jordan, “Collective Bodies”.

Throughout the western Amazon the entheogen yajé is taken in conjunction with stimulating Amazonian coca, tobacco and cashirí—a kind of beer—during ecstatic, night-long dance rituals.36 Yajé or ayahuasca is compounded from a number of different plants. The entheogenic properties of yajé are the result of a unique and sophisticated pharmacological synergy.37 The basic ingredient is nearly always the stems of the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Depending on the region, leaves of other plants, especially *oco-yagé* (*Diplopterys cabrerana*) and *chacruna* (*Psychotria viridis*), are added to intensify the enchanting properties of the drink.38 These latter plants are rich in the psychedelic N,N-dimethyltryptamine or DMT. Substances (b carbolines) found in *Banisteriopsis caapi* have distinct psychoactive properties, but also facilitate the more spectacular visionary action of DMT.39 The myths relating the origins of yajé often centre on themes of sexuality, sacrifice and death.40 In the mythology of the Desana people of the western Amazon yajé was first obtained by their ancestors as a result of their tearing apart the luminous, newly born, incestuously begotten child of the supernatural Yajé woman.41
Another instance of entheogenic sacrifice can be found among the Huichol. The Huichol Indians of Mexico ingest the vision-inducing cactus *Hikuri* (*Lophophora williamsii*) during a sacred pilgrimage to a high desert called Wirikúta where the cactus grows in abundance. The *Hikuri* or ‘Peyote’ is also harvested for later use in a ritual known as the *Hikuri Neixa* or ‘Peyote dance’. The *Hikuri* has a central sacrificial aspect. It is mythologically associated with both deer and maize. During the harvesting of *Hikuri* it is first stalked as if it were an actual deer. The pilgrimage leader, the *marà’akáme*, ritually slays the *Hikuri*/deer by firing an arrow into it. The *hikuri* is later ceremonially divided between the pilgrims.

Among the Fang people in Gabon, West Africa, members of the Bwiti religion eat the powdered roots of the stimulating and visionary *eboka* plant (*Tabernanthe iboga*) during all-night religious dance ceremonies. The last of the Fang creator beings—Zame ye Mebege—is said to have made *eboka* from the slain body of the Pygmy Bitumu. Zame cut the little fingers and little toes from the corpse and planted them throughout the forest; they grew into *eboka* bushes. Eventually

Bitumu’s wife learned how to use the *eboka* roots to communicate with her dead husband and with the ancestors before she herself was ritually and willingly killed by strangulation.

The above examples are sufficient to demonstrate that entheogens in other societies generally have a sacrificial character and are often viewed as intermediaries between the realms of continuity and discontinuity. These sacrifices are often recounted or alluded to during ritual. On the surface, sacrificial themes appear to be absent from Australian psychedelic dance cultures.

Two elements of sacrifice come to mind in connection with DiY psychedelic parties. The first is the idea that the party itself is an offering. The party is often an extravagance that is not firmly anchored in the mundane profit-oriented economy, and which often involves a great deal of volunteer effort. Further, the party participants must contribute a lot of energy in order to ‘make it happen’, so there is considerable expenditure of sacrificial or ‘free’ energy. The second sacrificial aspect of the psychedelic party is a volitional and temporary sacrifice of individuality to the ‘collective body’.

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43 S.B. Schaefer and Furst, *People of the Peyote*.
The relative lack of sacrificial expression in psychedelic
party culture may be linked to certain tendencies of the western
form of modernity to suppress or censor overt, explicit
expressions of sacrificial reality. Indeed, capitalism and
consumer culture require that the sacrifices of production
remain concealed in order to fortify monopolies and to obscure
the unpalatable links between the chic boutique and the Third
World sweatshop. Capitalism is embedded in myths of free
energy or ‘unlimited growth’. In this regard Berger has
characterised capitalism as a variety of cargo-cult that assumes
that commodities can manifest in a socially equitable manner.
Christianity, industrialisation, and the sciences can all be seen
to emerge out of a striving to dematerialise sacrifice.

The major ‘sacrament’ of the dance cultures—LSD—is a
product of organic chemistry, a tradition emerging from an
alchemical philosophy that sought to transcend sacrifice and
halt ‘corruption’. LSD is a semi-synthetic substance. The
production of LSD generally proceeds from ergotamine
tartate. For commercial purposes, this substance is usually
extracted from submerged cultures of the fungus *Claviceps
paspali*. The fungus is sacrificed to the process. Other costs
associated with the production of substances from clandestine
laboratories are the environmental and occupational health
impacts of procedures involving toxic solvents and reagents.
In the popular imagination LSD is often perceived of as
‘synthetic’, which is to say that it is somehow created *ex nihilo*

50 Grof, 1976.
51 Stanislav Grof, *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy*
Having made the above distinctions regarding sacrifice, DiY parties nonetheless provide a vital response to the way of life that Berger describes as ‘…the insensate offering up of lives to a petrified concept’. The psychedelic party eclipses many other religious forms in the arena of techniques for inducing and sustaining strong trance states. The party can be seen as a great engine of ecstasis containing numerous synergistic triggers: auditory and photic drivers, archetypal symbols, aesthetic stimuli, ‘freaks’, ‘trippers’, planet Earth and a big dose of spirited high energy, PLUR, wonder, and ‘happy vibes’. At an experiential level, doofs open a juncture where individuals are able to share in a kind of *agape* or collective ecstasy that mitigates against the sense of *ennui* and isolation so often associated with modernity. Doofs also provide an opportunity to experiment with new social forms, meanings, and identities through a variety of modes of creative transgression. Finally parties afford the possibility of a more concrete engagement with life through ‘ego-death’ and experiential transcendence.

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CHAPTER TEN—
DIRECTIONS TO THE GAME:
BARRELLFUL OF MONKEYS:
A GAME OF SKILL TO TEST
NERVE AND BALANCE

(AGE 3 AND UP)

RAK RAZAM

OBJECT OF THE GAME

Is to pick up all 100 monkeys one at a time without dropping any. Everyone is needed because this is a closed system. NRG needs open circuits to travel within a closed system, which means everyone has to link up on the same wavelength to transmit the NRG flow.

In the beginning ... there was DOOF. There was music and dancing and much mischief, monkeys and dogs running round and great fashion and we smoked a lot of dope and took more psyberdelics than I’d ever taken before in my life and GOD was it GOOOOOOOOOGOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD!!!!!!

It was my first time, right on through to the other side and don’t look back only forwards and I met a whole bunch of crazy people and lost my Bugs Bunny slippers and dragged my beanbag all over the festival like it was my lounge room and broke the dawn overlooking the beach with Kurt and met Nicole on the football field and we played Twister on the dance floor while Tsuyoshi DJed, back when trance was his gig and the music twisted and tweaked and got into places in my head I didn’t even know existed and nothing would ever be the same again. In the beginning there was Transelements 2, there on a football field in the Otways, replacing the cultural power spot of football and Western ideology with the tekno-pagan revival of the dance floor, as sport gave way to Saturnalia and the festivities began. And there was this cartoon assed girl lost in the MIX like a fluro acid Fraggle and grooving on the edge of the dance floor with the biggest smile and funkiest pants made of old ‘70s bedspreads with tassels around the feet and a hand made yellow t-shirt with a yellow Barrel of Monkeys figure...
... when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness may be communicated from mind to mind. Although the exact number may vary, the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon means that when only a limited number of people know of a new way, it may remain the consciousness property of these people. But there is a point at which if only one more person tunes-in to a new awareness, a field is strengthened so that this awareness is picked up by almost everyone!146

For those of you who came in late the name of the Game is FUN, at all times. It says so in the DIRECTIONS TO THE GAME that come in each red, yellow and blue Barrel of Monkeys game, Ages 3 and Up ... Just give it a good hard shake and scatter the monkeys into the dirt, and the Game has begun.

HOW TO PLAY
1 Be yourself. Tune into the Now and go with what you feel, melding your NRG and thoughts with that of your crew, so you all influence each other to a group consensus.
2 One or more monkeys will have a brilliant, impossible, totally outrageous idea.
3 Synchronization and focus will occur as a mission develops, a creative venture that mobilizes all your actions into a common goal: ART.
4 Hook monkeys together so resources and skills can be shared until you pick up at least 5 good people, forming a crew.

WHO ARE THE BARRELFULL OF MONKEYS???
Well, we ALL are. Some of you just don’t realise it yet.

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Everyone’s shining like their insides have been let out onto their outside for the first time, like they’re truly alive and the energy is building, riffing off the music and the dancers and the VIBE as the collective energy builds and the group mind is set and all systems are go, the dance floor’s pounding to a sliding 4/4 beat quicksilvering through the night air as the stars shine down past fluro string webworks and there we are sitting on the edge of the dance floor with wide eyes and open hearts and giggles, down where the toys live ... Inflatable palm trees, inflatable couches and pools and crocodiles and animals, the future is inflatable and instant just like those ‘thwuck’ self inflating tents they advertised on late night teleshopping shows, instant, disposable, NOW, it’s all about the NOW, about switching yourself ON and throwing yourself into the moment. Kerri, Mel, Paula, Idan and I are playing Barrel of Monkeys in the dirt at a Rainbow Serpent doof in 1999 in an altered state of mind, having an illegal amount of fun. It’s a hot breezy night and Mel and Paula are indulging in magic gum that crackles on the roof of their mouths and pops like lightning and thunder exploding along the tastebuds ... Mel is picking up the monkeys scattered in the dirt and hooking them together arm in arm, creating a rainbow chain. Red is worth 25 points, yellow 10 and blue 2, but if you get three colours in a row it’s a rainbow string that doubles the overall points and if you get all rainbow strings in a row it doubles again and red is a fire-earth monkey and yellow is air and blue is water so if you pick up the colour that matches your elemental sign you’re off to a good start and there are as many ways to play the Game as there are players and the only rules are there are no rules and once you know that you’re ready to play the Game.
In becoming familiar with magical ideas, reading books, learning symbol systems and correspondences, one comes to learn the ‘game rules’ of magic. Like any other game, the rules define the framework of activity. For a game to be worthwhile, its rules must be flexible, open to different interpretations, and allow for different needs and situations. Involvement with magical practice shows that the game rules of Consensus Reality are more flexible, and have more loopholes than one may have originally thought.²

A shooting star blazes through the cloudless sky as the pop and crackle of magic gum fills the air and Paula and Mel lean forward with open mouths and hold up their monkey string as a dog barks and rushes past and the crowd surges and groans with appreciation as the DJ kicks the vibe into overdrive here at the heart of the doof, where the magic lies and everything is timeless and eternal and in the flow, all kids at PLAY.

And then I’m off, shapeshifting with the music DNAing its way through the air and changing us from the inside out, purging all the negativity and stress of the Old World Corporate Culture as we dance on the earth, off racing on hands and knees and barking mad chasing the dog and do you know how good it feels to get down and dirty and take on the form of a dog and sniff the air and smell the sweat and strange earthy smells and hear the music in modulating frequencies and run around with no fears and be free? In the heart of the doof lies the TAZ, the Temporary Autonomous Zone where the players get to shed their skins and hard regrets and tune into the NRG bouncing off each other, free of fear, the great social conditioner, stark raving mad and we’ve all lost the plot and it’s only when you lose the plot that you truly GET IT. Monkeys barking like dogs changing form breaking down barriers, carried away into the starry night and the music and the dancers and a bobbing sea of smiles and every dog has it’s day and it’s own doof, too, you know. How could you forget the DOG DAY DOOF, when ultra-high frequency music that only dogs could hear overlapped the trance and sent them into altered states like the humans ... Dogs and monkeys, monkeys and dogs—they’ve been with us at the parties right from start round the tribal fires and as the vibe builds all across the world and the paradigm shifts and people let go of their fears and wake up to the age old ritual of the dance, they’ll be with us at the end, too. Which is to say, all parties are the same. Not on the outside, but at the core, where it really counts. In the MIX, the group mind. The Vibe of the Tribe, where the FUN is and where it takes us to. Where the Barrellfull of Monkeys shake their thang.

PART THREE — TECHNO-ASCENSION

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

A crew/cell/affinity group needs 5 people. Assign them elemental roles, Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Spirit and teach them about balance. Discover each others best skill and teach it to each other. Watch monkeys come and go from your crew as numbers ebb and swell through the Adventure, arm in arm and big smiles on faces, united in madness. Always gather your core crew around you to initiate and close each venture, to integrate and grow from each surfing of the Novelty Wave.

We’re deep in the MIX and it’s Psycorroboree 99 at the Bavarian Boy Scout Doof Camp in the Otways again and I’m on a raft with Andy, Queen of the Ferals in an artificial lake, playing down by the chill with the other monkeys, listening to urban disco grooves on a sunny afternoon. Andy and I are almost taking each other’s heads off with the paddles and splashing around as another dog goes by with a stick in his mouth and all the parties blur together. Idan’s parked next to Paul and Trish’s teepee, the one that got flooded at the same site at Alienation 2, water slowly encroaching on the beanbags and everyone too stoned to move and Idan’s the boyfriend of Mel who knows Paula and was almost going to be my ride up to the party and six degrees of separation doesn’t cut it, it’s more like three degrees in the dirt banging doof scene, a real TRIBE of freaks united across space and time and long working weekdays by the dance. And Paula’s best friends with Mel and knows Jimmy, whom I bump into when Nicole falls over him on the edge of the dance floor when she’s OFF it, which is most of the time and later in the day Jimmy and I are carrying round light globes and breeding mad ideas as we wander through the crowd looking for baking trays to strap to our feet so we can be towed along by a ute in the wet campground field, grass-skiing fine as you please on a Sunday afternoon when the dance floor floods and it turns into a real mudfest and we slip slide along to funk assed electronica as the rain keeps coming down.

But the vibe lives on, a whole crowd can be swayed by the vibe of one mad fool dancing in the rain with a smile on his face and the last desert island tuft of mud under his feet in a totally submerged swamp. And Jimmy knows Matt and Sia from the Planet Maya party years ago, the little Green Ant one out in the bush with the wonderful fluro artwork from the Japanese Equinox Trybe, where it rained again, curse of the Green Ant Full Moon Parties stomping on the dirt and calling down the heavens, where Leon and I met Dr.13, the acid casualty DJ that could do the Rave Safe Chaos Ball in only 13 seconds, best of a dozen bush doofers that passed by our van that all had difficulty with it. Every driver should have to complete the Rave Safe Chaos Ball - the kid’s toy with shapes of stars and squares and circles in - in under a minute or they shouldn’t be allowed to drive, better than a breathalyser and more fun. The PLAY is in the toys, you know, but the fun comes from within.

And Dr.13 introduces me to Ken and Arwen, long time Earthcorians who meet Paul and Trish through us as all our lives intertwine around lost weekends and music and good times with friends dancing in the bush, rail hail or shine and Trish’s hooking fluro hula hoops over the teepee as part of the never ending Rave Olympics and singing the ‘Buffalo Sunshine’ dance counterclockwise round the camp, which never fails to bring out a ray of sun if you stomp round chanting “buffalo sunshine buffalo sunshine buffalo buffalo sunshine!” and put your heart into it and believe in it like all

Acquired from www.ozauthors.com.au
good dances. And you haven’t seen the king of the phreaks till you’ve seen Paul in his Purple People Eater costume with tiny felt dragon wings and unicorn horn and purple cartoon dragon suit standing on the roof of his four wheel drive with the bubblegun blowing out rainbow bubbles into the day as the monkeys dash round with water pistol cannons shooting the local yokels all decked out in medieval armour.

NOW it’s Psycorroboree2000 and full on Excalibur extras from the local re-enactment society are decked out in replica Medieval armour with swords and shields and they’re getting a rusting from the Sarge as he kamikazes by in his Colonel Blake army hat with fishing hooks and camo pants and thongs, beer belly hanging out proudly as his water pistol mows them down like a Monty Python Vietnam-Rave sketch. NOW it’s Planet Maya again, where the illusion of time and space melts out there on the dance floor as the whirling dervish energies melt the old world culture and feed a new type of mythology into being, a new type of human free from the imprints of the exoteric culture and the same all over the planet, peaking and pulsing on the dance floor, TURNED ON to the VIBE and radiating energy back in cosmic feedback loops to the planet and the stars above ... can you hear it? Gliding down the Murray River on a six foot discoball and it’s beautiful, shining against the muddy brown water as we float along one Earthcore at Moama, March ‘98, and I name it Kali and man it like, broke my heart to give it back when they found us glistening on the water like the crash of an alien discotheque. Can you hear it? Party after party after party ... the music and the dance ... the secret is the dance...”

Is it possible that trance-dancing is one of the most basic forms of intentional suffering and conscious labor? Is it possible that such dancing, performed by the right people in the right way with the right intentions, is capable of producing exactly that same energy Gurdjieff believed Mother Nature needs from us? Could it be that the use of psychedelics in conjunction with intensive dancing to certain specific rhythms, by a new breed of individuals, may be a way to fill our cosmic obligation without the life-long spiritual training otherwise required?²
IMPORTANT

Everyone has a piece of the puzzle. Everyone has a right to play the Game their own way, at their own pace, according to whatever programming language they happen to be working with.

And Diva Knievel and Nicole are there at S11 with the Big Blue Chimp, the giant five foot totem of the crew as it blocks police batons and bursts at the seams, fighting against the Corporate Hive to shut down the World Economic Forum, chanting “The R-Evolution Starts @ the Funnybone!” and playing Totem-Tennis on the lawn of the Crown Obsceno as the boys in blue look on and smile... And we’re bumping into people we know and losing others and meeting new ones for the Tribe and Glenn has gone home and Tim and Mandy are there at times with Phoebe and Brett and other times not, and we meet Clae and Robin and Al and Zoe and Martyn and Lou and Natalie’s wearing the Mexican wrestling mask and Arwen’s got the Donald Duck inflatable round her waist that first got broken in at Tranelements 3 in a nude run across the dance floor and NOW: it’s Yellowcake 98/Anti Uranium party and Syl is there, mad French Syl in his Kaptain Khaos superhero costume—green and blue tights with polka dot cape—selling mescaline cactus freeze dried in the Oslo backpackers in St. Kilda and transferred to little bags at ten bucks a pop and it makes you go all telepathic and sink into the electronic swamp music as it buzzes round and I’m melting into Clae’s head and he into mine and all the boundaries are shifting, surfaces intersecting, the envelope is pushing against the organic edge of the unknown and Syl is passing another joint and NOW: it’s Earthdream 99 at Lake Eyre on Aboriginal land and we’re in the middle of nowhere and it feels like home. Clae, Robin, Alyce, Helen and I are reading children’s books under a big dark sky with a fire burning and Issac’s just travelled 80 km each way into Marree along the bumpy Oodnadatta track for Tim Tams and we’ve bitten them off at each end and are sucking tea through them and don’t tell me this isn’t magic and a monkey’s Dreaming ‘cause it’s all too beautiful for words and the sweet beat sounds of electro disco funk are rippling out on a cloudless night as dozens of Mad Max ferals funk it up under shooting stars as the fire organ bellows bursts of flame and everyone is a performer and everyone is Art and the MIX is melting into the flames and on to Earthdream2000 near Uluru and the next party and the next and the next and the next and the next as we all come together.
And everyone knows everyone, eventually, inevitably, and the monkeys have lost it so we’ve got it and it’s all Planet Bob, it’d be so much easier to remember names if everyone was a Bob and if only there was a hand signal to say I recognize your face in the crowd and it gives me great pleasure to see you again and I don’t remember your name but have a great day and I’m sure we’ll see each other again, and there can be a word for it if we invent it and the whole crowd’s a canvas making ART... We’re developing a new way of telling time through STORIES, see, like the Dreamtime. No need for years, just remember the cultural legend of the PARTY, all of them all over the world, what happened at each and what music was played, what psyberdelics you took, the ideas you had and the ART that went down. Get as much of it recorded for transmission into the global datasphere and sell your exploits as ART to pay for more creative living that will shape the fashion of mainstream culture and THE LOVE OF ART SHALL SAVE THE EARTH!!! Because these are our personal histories, our stories, our dreamings. This is when we were OFF it, when we lost the plot and found out what the story was really about. When the physical, the mythical and the Dreaming all flowed together, outside time, in the party. Which, as all hardcore pleasure terrorists know, the only time involved with the doof is how long till the next one.

HOW TO SCORE

Once you have your rhythm, you can ride the Flow. Everything becomes grist for the mill. All things are good. Everything becomes a learning experience, a GAME. The universe is an interactive software mirror that reflects whatever you give it. It feeds us NRG to help us grow, even negative situations challenge our Browser preference settings to polish our rough edges till there aren’t any left, no hooks to snag the steady flow of NRG. All ideas create reactions which affect the physical canvas. Ideas breed negative entropy, something from nothing. The GAME replicates in the void. The Rules change a lot, but the end goal is always the same: FUN.

What was it Terence McKenna said, way back in the chill out zone at Transelements 2, doing his spoken word riffs against a muted theremin (electronic musical instrument) backdrop, glaring fluro sarongs splattered with Oms and stars and DNA prints and suns and the more you look into them the more they open up like a thousand petalled lotuses blossoming in your head? Ah yes:

When you cease to believe that you’re Nobody and you begin to believe that you might be Somebody, this is considered proof of severe mental disturbance, and you become a candidate for sedation at this point, because usually the discovery that you’re Somebody excites you into inappropriate states of arousal, which means you interfere with other people’s being asleep, and you run around trying to inform them of the true nature of things ... The only conjuration against that developing into a problem is Humour. You have to have a completely jaundiced view of reality; you can’t take anything seriously, including your own most serious constructs and expectations, because it is ultimately some kind of joke.4

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4 Terence McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, Harper Collins *fight

Acquired from

www.ozauthors.com.au
I know I’m talking the sizzling beancurd here and I’m strung out and speeded up and maybe it’s that it’s all just soundbytes linked together and going nowhere put perfectly self contained like spiders on acid spinning silken circles in a crumbling memory bank losing the plot off and on forgetting what we’re talking about and falling into kodak moments all around and strings of building synchronicities weaving over the day and the night before in deep resonances and coincidences as the Game shows its source code like a quantum hussy flashing a leg.

It’s the year 2000 and I’m surrounded by friendly ferals at an urban doof TAZ in the back streets of Fitzroy, feeding me bongs in the back of their van and sunning ourselves in the gutters without a care in the world and we’re talking the talk and meeting faces and forgetting names going round and round, people meeting people in ebbs and flows of information exchange like wave packets in the quantum foam and new faces and old faces and everyone looks familiar like old photos of ‘40s actresses and everyone has a special story and riffs off each other and if you ask them nicely at the right time of day or night their story becomes part of yours and vice versa and everyone has an earliest memory to share and a facet you’ve never seen to them before. Tim runs barefoot with the camera up to the Black Elvis busking by the side of the road and I’m having the same conversations over the course of the day with disparate people about the same shit, like crews and individual autonomy and elemental roles for each of the five members and Mandy’s explaining how she wants to capture live feeds of reality at doofs and instantly autoremix and edit with digital effects that are re-projected back onto the original reality canvas and I’m trying to explain about feedback loops and nature and how the sky is falling and the old world is changing, rapidly changing all around us as the focused flight of a balloon punctuates the sky, rising up to wherever it is that balloons go when they die and all of a sudden like a bolt out of the blue it hits me that Mandy’s idea is the same as my idea just expressed according to the level of the Player, which is drawn from data strands which have already been seeded in the fertile minds of a whole generation at the same time, that we’re all starting to get the same ideas and everyone thinks they had it first when its not linear, its lateral, everyone’s getting it at once, it’s what McKenna calls the Logos phasing in through us and the whole culture is one giant information engine pumping out new programming code for the job ahead as the paradigm shift accelerates and the world turns, shifting headspace gentle lap of waves, magic magic magic language flowing like wine, datastreaming pulsing all around till the brain’s just deconstructing reality feeds like a TV and propagating immediate programming code metaphors of what’s going on and then leapfrogging to the next nodal point, trying to ride the flow as long and lovely as it allows you to go before breaking into gibberish. And for a few brief moments of clarity it all makes sense before it’s soundbyted into digestible packets of the overall puzzle for individual heads and reduced to words; so we all contain unique information in billions strong parallel processing units called individuals that are starting to link up and pool data and memes and melt together in the DOOF, in the MIX of group consciousness out there on the dance floor and fuck me, does it feel GOOD!
PART THREE — TECHNO-ASCENSION

FOR PLAYING ALONE

Stop. Slow. Unfold. Find your place and grow in it. Express yourself to the best of your abilities and encourage the same in those around you. Follow your heart. PLAY. You now have the Rules to the Game. Pass on.

>>>MONKEY ISLAND. DEC 21/2012. GPS/ 23° North 74° West/ the BLUE ZONE>>

...And I look out from my morphing, sapient banana lounge and take a sip from my Mai-Tai with a disposable robo-umbrella with its LCD advertising screen and continue dictating into the GOODBOX tm, pulsing the Tribal history onto the group’s mental intranet, the thoughts transmitted by the data-bindis on our foreheads. Switching to HIVE mode I can ‘hear’ the others in my head, louder now, the Vibe coming on strong like a digital spiderweb through the Network. We’re coloured red and yellow and blue with bio-dyes to protect us from the harsh UV rays here on Monkey Island as we set up the party area down by the beach. Giant Elvis holograms pixillate together from a laser over the crowd and there’s this giant 30 foot transparent beachball with a dozen naked people in it rolling along in the foreshore of the waves just like the old Coca-Cola ad from the ‘70s except they’re breathing in FOXY-MDMA in a fine spray mist and elongating through the surf in slow-motion, golden late afternoon beats. People are doofing on the surface of the water through transmolecular technology, sinking into the bass, all of us friends and Tribe mates networked together through the years, now gathered for the party to end all parties, the ALOHA doof for the End of The World As We Know It And I Feel Fine tm! If the GAME has to end then it might as well be with a party, I’ve always said. Off to my right that old drug pig Tsuyoshi is up there on the decks with the Tek Crew, transmitting the party in live streaming footage to other monkeys all across the globe and as the last party begins it overlaps through the quantum foam with the first and all the ones in between ... And we’re all there, monkeys, on the beaches of paradise and waiting to surf the last wave of culture and dance in the new world order; and we’re building human pyramids and wearing firemen hats and big smiles and playing with all the dogs running into the surf trying to catch disco bubbles in their mouths as we play the light fantastic and drink beer and smoke cigarettes and dance and talk the sizzling beancurd and we’ve all got the answer and it’s different for all of us but it’s the same thing and the more words we have for it the deeper the GAME goes and the more it flows till you can almost see the edge of the barrel and this is IT, what we’ve all been waiting for …

DO YOU WANT TO PLAY?

barrelfullofmonkeys@yahooogroups.com
CHAPTER ELEVEN—
PRACTICE RANDOM ACTS:
RECLAIMING THE STREETS OF AUSTRALIA¹

SUSAN LUCKMAN

RECLAIM THE STREET
DECEMBER 16 2000, NEWTOWN SYDNEY
(PHOTO: PETER STRONG)

May 1968 and France on the verge of anarchy... An atmosphere of martial law in Paris and hundreds of factories occupied ... 140 American cities in flames after the killing of Martin Luther King... German and English universities occupied ... Hippie ghettos directly clashing with the police state ... The sudden exhilarating sense of how many people felt the same way ... The new world coming into focus ...
The riots a great dance in the streets.²


In the 1990s, one of the more interesting and contentious claims to have emerged from within dance music cultures (in particular those involved in raving per se as a personal and collective practice) is that it functions as a model of positive political action, opening up new spaces for joyous and non-oppressive experiences of both self and community. While progressive claims vis-a-vis electronic dance music practices should not be taken on face value, there certainly remain clear instances where contemporary dance musics, dance and the spirit of ‘carnivale’ have been employed strategically by diverse groups of activists both in Australia and overseas. As a vehicle for oppositional political movements, raving (or more specifically its music and dance), as a claiming of space—both physical and metaphysical—has provided a locus for creative oppositional activism in the nineties and beyond. Such activism is perhaps exemplified by the Reclaim The Streets movement.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was published as: “What are they raving on about?: Temporary Autonomous Zones and Reclaiming the Streets” in Perfect Beat 5.2, 2001, 49-68. With thanks to Graeme Turner, Graham St John, jj, RTS-Adelaide, Ken Miller, Karl-Erik Paasonen, the two readers of the Perfect Beat article, and the party ppl who ‘fight the good fight’.


Acquired from
www.ozauthors.com.au
The *esprit de corps* felt at a good doof, rave or dance party has commonly been associated with the carnivalesque, or as a sort of Bacchanalian festival. Thus, it is to the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin⁴ that some commentators (writers and/or participants) have been drawn in order to make sense of the experience. Writing in the specific context of the European night-time experience of the club, academic and DJ Hillegonda Rietveld compares raving to holidays, arguing that ‘nightlife is a moment in which the established order is undone, where one can relax’.⁵ Rietveld firmly locates clubbing within consumer society. At the same time, however, she does not undervalue the practices within which she herself is heavily invested not only as a scholar but as a practitioner. She proposes that those who live the life of dance music as nocturnal release do not seek to criticise the status quo, but rather they wish to escape it. Further, in so doing they are acknowledging that ‘official culture’ cannot provide all the cultural identities the citizenry may require.⁶ Therefore people seek to fill this void themselves.

Talking in a more general sense, Mary Russo reiterates Bakhtin’s contention that the space of the carnival is both a part of, as well as set apart from, the everyday life of dominant cultures.

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⁶ Ibid. 65

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[t]he masks and voices of carnival resist, exaggerate, and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and organized society. It is as if the carnivalesque body politic had ingested the entire corpus of high culture and, in its bloated and irrepressible state, released it in fits and starts in all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery, and degradation. The political implications of this heterogeneity are obvious: it sets carnival apart from the merely oppositional or reactive; carnival and the carnivalesque suggest a redeployment or counterproduction of culture, knowledge, and pleasure. In its multivalent oppositional play, carnival refuses to surrender the critical and cultural tools of the dominant class, and in this sense, carnival can be seen above all as a site of insurgency, and not merely withdrawal.⁷

It is this more self-consciously oppositional and playfully postmodern spirit of carnival which has been seized upon by the ‘Reclaim The Streets’ movement.⁸
PART FOUR — RECLAIMING SPACE

‘WHEN ROAD RAGE BECOMES ROAD RAVE’ – RECLAIM THE STREETS

Unlike Rietveld’s ravers who seek to temporarily flee into hedonistic abandonment, those involved in reclaiming the streets as a militant practice seek explicitly and deliberately to employ feelings of unfettered pleasure in the service of an oppositional critique of global capitalism. They employ the modalities of the carnivalesque in order to explore the possibilities thus presented for ‘an alternative social arrangement’.9 Drawing upon the long tradition of environmental protest and opposition to lifestyles and identities based upon the distraction of compulsory consumption, ‘Reclaim The Streets’ (RTS) actions are unrehearsed, informal, illegal ‘guerrilla’ street festivals. They are designed to challenge the industrialised world’s addiction to unsustainable transport practices which rely on polluting and non-renewable fossil fuels.

Cars are but the end-point of a whole global system, controlled by oil-producing nations and the multi-national fuel corporations. This system employs environmentally destructive and human health threatening practices at every level of its operation. RTS also draws attention to how local communities are broken down through the individuating privatised space of the car, not to mention the attendant dominance of roads over other forms of public amenity. These roads represent dangerous and polluting arteries ironically dividing people from one another. Further, RTS actions are also a response to the increasing privatisation of public space in the industrialised world, where even such previously accessible civil amenities as shopping strips, public seating and parklands are being sold into private hands, and ‘undesirables’ are moved on by zealous security personnel. RTS seeks to derail this particular ideological juggernaut, replacing it instead with a pedestrianised social space. In words posted to the Sydney RTS website:

Only if you visit a city like Venice, totally free of cars, do you really understand how relaxing a busy city can really be. Picture a car-free main street. A smooth quiet Light Rail running down the centre, a beautiful avenue of trees, luxurious cycleways, widened footpaths, expansive outdoor cafes—the best street in Sydney, an economic powerhouse, creating jobs and a livable neighbourhood. Our politicians, councillors and bureaucrats have such limited vision. Let’s do it ourselves.10

RTS protests seek to challenge and question the ordering of society’s priorities by presenting what for the participants at least is one possibility of a more pleasurable alternative: a society which embodies the freedom and shared sense of community of the festival. Participant Stephen Dixon offers the following explanation on his web site where he provides a report on a Melbourne action in 1998:

Reclaim the Streets is a party with a purpose, a celebratory taking back of the street space, normally off limits to anyone who values their safety. Dominated by inefficient, noisy, polluting and dangerous machines, one third of our cities is devoted to cars. Unlike demonstrations or rallies, RTS is all about having fun, it is an experiment in what the world would be like without the omnipresent automobile that fills the air with fumes, noise, fills our media with its image, warps our economy with its hunger for resources, and which is responsible for a quarter of a million deaths annually.11

10 http://members.nbci.com/_XMCM/sydneyrts/index.html

Acquired from www.ozauthors.com.au
The party is usually centred around a sound system and thumping techno beats, hence the movement’s overt connection to the practice of raving. Subtly, it taps into what we can call a meteorically risen community, united superficially around the music and dance, but grounded more fundamentally in the overlapping of shared ideological concerns.\textsuperscript{12}

RTS emerged in its current form in London in 1995, where the prolonged campaign against the further extension of the M11 motorway through suburban Claremont ‘placed the anti-road and ecological arguments of Twyford Down in an urban, social context’.\textsuperscript{13} In the UK, it has grown and expanded alongside the high-profile anti-motorway protests which had begun to come to the British public’s attention and attract broad-based support at around the same time. Opposition by ravers to the British Conservative government’s introduction of the controversial \textit{Criminal Justice Act} further aided in facilitating the merging of contemporary dance music cultures and political action. RTS also has conceptual and ideological similarities with Critical Mass, a movement which seeks to draw attention to the value of bikes as modes of transport (especially as compared with cars). Since the early 1990s the idea has spread with RTS interventions having taken place in different cities and regions around the industrialised world. Globally, beyond Australia, actions have occurred in locations such as London, Bristol, East Sussex, Cambridge, North Wales, Norfolk, Tottenham, Brixton, Brighton, Birmingham, Nottingham, Hackney, Ljubljana, Lyon, Utrecht, Berlin, Prague, Stockholm, Turku, Vancouver\textsuperscript{14}, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, and Tel Aviv. RTS actions have also been organised in solidarity with other groups, such as was the case with London’s Trafalgar Square street party in April 1997 where around 10,000 people participated in solidarity with the striking Liverpool dockers.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 140. While the first group to use this name emerged around 1991, most writers cite 1995 (in the wake of the ultimately unsuccessful occupation of resumed houses on Claremont Road in London which were marked for demolition in order to make way for an M11 link road), as a more accurate date from which to trace the origins of the current incarnation of RTS. The article ‘The Evolution of Reclalm The Streets’ available from http://www.gn.apc.org/rts/evol.htm provides an excellent overview of the origins of RTS in England during the 1990s.

\textsuperscript{14} A media release issued via internet discussion groups from the Direct Action Media Network (DAMN) list and available from http://aspin.asu.edu/hpm/archives/Apr98/0305.html states the party which occurred in Charles Street, Vancouver on April 18, 1998 was the first RTS event to be staged in North America.
In Australia, the southern hemisphere’s first Reclaim the Streets street party occupied Enmore Road, Newtown in Sydney on November 1, 1997. Participants met at Lennox Street in nearby Camperdown before moving out onto the ‘secret’ final destination. By all accounts, the ‘party with a purpose’ went off more or less to plan: the street was reclaimed, thus calling attention—at least to passers-by—to the need for safer, more socially and environmentally sustainable alternatives to the Australia’s car addiction. To the advertised sounds of DJs and sound collectives/groups including Sub Bass Snarl:

...thousands blockaded the streets to traffic with 3 huge bamboo tripods, erected a bizarre art installation sound tower pumping out psychedelic dance music, built a permaculture garden in the middle of the road and had an all day street party in the liberated zone—dancing, playing street cricket, reading the Weekend Papers and generally hanging out in a safe, friendly care free environment.

Befitting its size, Sydney has been arguably the major hub of RTS activism in Australia with around nine mass street parties being held in RTS’s name as of February 2001. Sydney’s RTS alliances also draw upon the city’s legendary ‘free party’ scene and its historical status as the gay/lesbian/queer dance capital of Australia, as exemplified in the Hordern Pavilion dance parties of the 1980s. Elsewhere in Australia, RTS street parties have become a part of the political landscape in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Lismore, while kindred, though lesser scale and not distinctly RTS actions have occurred in Canberra. Websites recording details or anecdotes of Australian actions speak of numerous tactical strategies for securing the road, many derived from direct action campaigns elsewhere. Foremost among these is the tripod which is not only valuable as a means by which to ‘claim’ space and provide a focal point for an action, but is a valued activist tool given its portability and the fact that it provides a virtually instantaneous scaffold, providing a perch onto which to ‘lock-on’.

The style of RTS actions share a number of key features. Rather obviously but nonetheless worth noting, they are basically an urban occurrence; they bring to the city or town many techniques, such as the previously noted tripod structures, first employed in rural environmental anti-logging or anti-development/road protests. While there is clearly no formal membership system or ‘party line’, RTS events are not totally spontaneous. At some point a group of people have to take it upon themselves to become a necessarily clandestine organising collective in order to undertake such tasks as deciding on a date, time, and location at which to meet, and to organise such necessities as a sound system, street signs, and, ideally, legal support, police liaison and media contact people.

16 http://members.nbci.com/_XMCM/sydneyrts/previous.html
18 On Sunday, June 11 2000 a ‘critical mass style’ bike ride took off from Garema Place in the City to ‘reclaim the streets of Canberra’, and in opposition to a V8 Supercar race also held in central Canberra that weekend: http://lists.samba.org/pipermail/ultimate/2000-June/000897.html
19 Such as is often done with a bike ‘D-lock’ encircling a person’s neck. The dangerously precarious nature of such a situation makes police removal of the person on the structure a slow and considered affair.
In a strategic move akin to the system for getting people to the now mythic original illegal raves in the UK, the final destination is not identified. Rather a gathering place is advertised and people in the know are told to be cued in one way or another to connect with others there for the party. Then the group moves out onto a road and marches on towards the final party site. Once the road site has been secured, the party begins.

Attention turns now to getting music happening. Generally this involves moving a sound system and generator into the street and getting it running. If the amplified system is either confiscated or otherwise ineffectual, the party’s soundtrack may be provided acoustically by the participants themselves. Through either fate or design, RTS events do not compulsorily involve amplified music. Eyewitness reports and other forms of textual evidence point to their significance at other actions also. Drums can pound out a unifying dance beat both in the absence of, or alongside, electronically generated aural stimuli. Further, the types used tend to be highly portable as such provide an accompaniment which can confound even the most committed police attempts to close the party down. They are also cheaper than a sound system to replace should the police impound them.

Local dance crews and DJs are the key source of the non-acoustic vibes; with a big party, in a relatively secure space, events can even branch out to become substantial dance festivals in their own right. Sydney has seen a number of such events including one on Sunday, February 22 1998, on a scale described by a first-time RTSer:

Pretty soon the whole street was grooving to the funky sounds of the main PA, while the smaller ‘chill’ PA pumped out some very danceable hip-hop & dancehall reggae. The third PA was for live acts, & being on a hill it was ideal for sitting under the shadecloth to watch. The music was varied, a bit of everything to keep the diverse gathering happy.20

Clearly, not all sites can support an event on this scale. The Sunshine State’s (Queensland’s) three RTS actions have been centred around a more modest single sound system pumping out techno, house, drum ‘n bass and trance vibes (as well as impromptu acoustic support). At the second Brisbane event (May 16, 1998), even this single system did not really fire up, with the police moving in on the relatively small crowd fairly early on in the event, their energies focussed on confiscating the equipment which was eventually removed—supporting car, trailer and all. It is at times such as these that the back-up option of percussive beats really comes into its own. This said, however, the first Brisvegas party—powered by ‘road-rashin’ car-bashin’ stompin music’ provided by DJs Phil from Namshub of Enki and Ben Abrahams—kicked on into the evening when the party moved off the road and into an nearby park.21 Melbourne events have also taken similar turns such as at the March 28, 1998 Victoria/Lygon Streets action which saw the street party adjourning into the Flagstaff Gardens with the approach of darkness: road rave becomes free community doof. Adelaide’s first party in March 2000 went off with the help of the Labrats sound system, plus tunes provided by two DJ areas.

20 Alister Ferguson, ‘Reclaim the Streets’, Ausrave-Digest v1 n538, ausrave-digest@spectrum.com.au 26/2/98
Music itself is obviously a vital part of the RTS vibe: music has a unifying power. It enables the reclamation of aural space. In the words of music theorist Robin Balliger, ‘[m]usic is hardly just sound that is passively listened to, but a sonic force that acts on bodies and minds and creates its own life rhythms; rhythms that power recognizes and tries to monopolize through a relentless domination of societal noise’. Therefore, music’s unique properties ‘can be employed as a powerful counter-hegemonic device that goes beyond thought to being. Music as socially organized use-value is a threat to the individuated, consumption-oriented desiring machine of advanced capitalism’.

She reinforces this initial argument, asserting that ‘[s]ound or P.A. systems may create an internal spatiality or ‘temporary autonomous zone’, but through them music can traverse and challenge spatially organized social divisions’. Creating, a larger, unified TAZ; beyond yet also within the individual.

22 RTS-Adelaide, private correspondence.
23 Ibid.
25 Ibid. 23.
26 Ibid. 24.
TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONES

Music and dance are an essential element in RTS actions, but in terms of protest movements this is hardly a new thing. Street theatre, music (particularly drumming) and singing are established and valued vehicles for oppositional action alongside, and generally subservient to, the more conventional protest march and speaker list. However RTS uses music and dance as its primary focus; no (or few) speeches are made, and the actions ideally seek to claim positive space, only being oppositional or negative to the degree that they hope to draw attention to society’s deficits through positive example. There are exceptions to this. RTS protests/festivals are linked through their participants and aims, to wider political struggles, in particular, activism in the industrialised world specifically directed at meetings of global trade organisations. RTS protesters were active at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) protests in Seattle, as they also were at similar protests in London, Davos, Washington, Prague and the 2000 Asia-Pacific gathering of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Melbourne (‘S11’). Indeed, these protests represent a logical progression from the more narrowly conceived RTS actions and as such are a testament to their success in initiating a new cohort of people into direct activism.

As the size and frequency of the global movement against large IEOs (International Economic Organisations) grows, given RTS’s activist foundations, I envisage it will become even more overtly tied to, or blended into, these more focussed political—frequently carnivalesque—eruptions. As ‘Del’, a British RTS campaigner, states in an article for Arena Magazine,

Reclaim the Streets does not make demands on someone else, such as the government. We want direct action to be seen as the norm, the standard way to take action. It’s more than just a transport campaign. The Left continue to debate among themselves rather than take action. RTS is not for armchair chats but for those who want real change. I’d like to see RTS broaden, and to see people take action to end the growth economy. It’s not reformist, it’s essentially revolutionary.27

Del may well have gotten his wish. Since the publication of his words in 1995 the industrialised world has indeed seen the emergence of a trans-national coalition of activists opposing the unfettered growth of the global economy; a movement whose primary targets are the seemingly all-powerful, unelected IEOs.

In a structure common to many contemporary political affiliations (such as S11), ‘Reclaim The Streets is more a collection of techniques of operation and a series of points of potential intersection than a specific definable organization’.28 Writer Sandy Newman takes this even further and in so doing neatly captures the capacious sense of collective purpose that underpins what for the media and elite IEOs at least, is an apparently unfathomable and disorganised rabble:

There is always a great deal of mystification, real or pretended, about the purpose of these street parties. They are, in Montevideo as in London, protests against whatever individual protesters don’t like. With a modest printing budget and a website, anyone can organise one. Pick a time and place, advertise a street party, invite absolutely everyone. The willingness to party in the street seemingly in every case implies a certain political agenda, which is broadly green, anti-state, anti-capital. They take advantage of the existence of a leftist personality, organised by some natural or cultural force, to replace any necessity for a party line or a rally or a series of speakers. We all know what it’s all about. And: if you have to ask, there’s no point explaining.²⁹

It is also important to note that the RTS movement is not only an umbrella concept under which to organise and loosely connect mass actions. If it were a ‘dot.com’ company, the RTS name would be a valuable commodity in a market where product awareness is everything. As an anti-capitalist vehicle, the name is clearly without copyright, free to be used by anyone seeking a focus for their actions. To this end, an unquantifiable number of smaller scale protests are also conducted in its name; these may simply be graffiti runs, or, more practically and innovatively, the professional quality painting up of new bikepaths on roadways overnight.

Methodologically, the ‘spontaneous’ urban guerilla-style tactics informing RTS and other road protest practice are often compared to the ideas espoused by the Situationist Internationale (SI), and this is a connection acknowledged by some punters and commentators, though the exemplary indication of this connection must be ‘Madchester’s’ Hacienda nightclub itself.¹⁰ Naomi Klein in her popularly received book No Logo declares RTS ‘the most vibrant and fastest-growing political movement since Paris 68’.³¹ Later, the comparison is demonstrated explicitly in a discussion of the RTS event held on the M41 in London:

Two people dressed in elaborate carnival costumes sat thirty feet above the roadway, perched on scaffolding contraptions that were covered by huge hoop skirts … The police standing by had no idea that underneath the skirts were guerilla gardeners with jackhammers, drilling holes in the highway and planting saplings in the asphalt. The RTSers—die-hard Situationist fans—had made their point: ‘Beneath the tarmac...a forest’, a reference to the Paris 68 slogan, ‘Beneath the cobblestones ... a beach’.³²


¹⁰ The Situationist call, ‘The hacienda must be built’, was deliberately evoked at the opening of the famous Manchester’s club, which, though now sold off to be made into bourgeois apartments, symbolises the heady days of acid house in the UK. Additionally, the SI have emerged as a point of reference in informal conversations I have had with people both at and about RTS actions (sometimes in connection with Bey’s idea of the TAZ), and a quick search of internet sites where RTS is discussed will reveal a similar trend. More tangential links also occur in relation to the closely related anti-capitalist technique of ‘culture jamming’ (as détournement) in Sadie Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, and with regard to the frequently utopian imagery around raves in Steve Reynolds, ‘Rave Culture: Living Dream or Living Death?’ in Steve Redhead (ed.) The Clubcultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies, Blackwell: Oxford, 1997.


³² Ibid, 313.
The SI are perhaps best known for their involvement in the 1968 ‘Paris uprising’ when a student uprising provided the trigger for wider political unrest including a general strike, but the SI were active over a far greater period than this. Underlying all SI action and thought was a commitment to the basic premise that the everyday and art should not be two mutually exclusive spheres of social life. Peter Marshall, in his extended history of anarchism, offers the following summary of the key premise underpinning the SI:

Under capitalism, the creativity of most people had become diverted and stifled, and society had been divided into actors and spectators, producers and consumers. The Situationists therefore wanted a different kind of revolution: they wanted the imagination, not a group of men, to seize power, and poetry and art to be made by all. Enough! they declared. To hell with work, to hell with boredom! Create and construct the eternal festival.

To these ends, such artistic ‘actions’ or ‘moments’” would take place in quotidian, everyday uses of the city and its buildings, an idea which has clear resonances with the methodologies of contemporary ‘Reclaim The Streets’ activists, thus explaining at least in part the appeal of the SI and its ideas to this later cohort of urban critics. Additionally, the SI’s approach to ‘the Spectacle’ was demonstrative of a subjective approach similar to that arguably employed by RTS in regard to an appreciation for the degree to which the industrialised world is collectively immersed within a commercial apparatus capable, indeed which thrives on, the recuperation—or ‘discovery’—of new trends, oppositional or otherwise. In the words of Sadie Plant:

[t]he most radical of gestures is indeed vulnerable to integration, and expressions of dissent are often deliberately fostered as political safety-valves. But the situationists were convinced that none of this precludes the possibility of evading, subverting, and interrupting the processes by which effective criticism is rendered harmless.

Situationism has long been critiqued for its elitist intellectual avant gardeism, and it would be easy to dismiss the RTS movement by tarring it with the same brush. Certainly the vast majority of the participants have at least a cursory level of higher educational experience and uphold elements, at least on some level, of a classic leftist platform. But RTS’s ‘artistic’ eruptions foreground embodiment and sensory pleasure, pushing aside for the moment at least an intellectual or theoretical approach to oppositional consciousness raising. Furthermore, while the intent ≠ may fall far short of being realised in practice, RTS events—like the ideal rave/doof upon which they are based—aim to be inclusive and to embrace all-comers. Not everyone is interpellated by this particular manifestation of the spirit of carnivale, nor do they feel able to approach a group of people who do tend to be young, well-educated, largely (but certainly not exclusively) white, generally dressed in at least a moderately non-conformist

33 Formed in 1957, the SI brought together a number of like-minded artists and intellectuals excited by such avant garde movements as those inspired by Dada, Surrealism and Lettrism. The Lettrist International, lead by Guy Debord, merged at this time with another group, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (MIBI), and it is from this union that the SI rose.


manner and claiming space by means of body shaking beats. But many are, including many people I have been surprised to see ‘come to the party’, having made the sort of glib assessment we make everyday on the basis of highly problematic stereotypes.

Another way in which the raving-based RTS may avoid the orthodoxies and other pitfalls of Situationist tactics as espoused by the SI is that for many of the dance music scene’s participants interested in such ideas, their understanding of the SI and its raison d’etre comes filtered through the writings of ‘ontological anarchist’ Hakim Bey. Bey, and his musings on what he coins the ‘Temporary Autonomous Zone’ (or TAZ), have themselves achieved something of a mythic status in rave/doof circles. First performed and broadcast as a spoken word performance in 1990, Bey’s prose espouses a call for people to seek out and occupy those spaces which have fallen through the ‘net’ of governmental or corporate systems of regulation. While making a quick nod to the Situationists and their ideas, he prefers not to ‘fetishise the Leftism of 68’. Ever the existential explorer, he notes in a fashion which provides some insight into his own approach that the ‘Situationists can be criticized for ignoring a certain “spirituality” inherent in the self-realization & conviviality their cause demands’.

Romantically drawing inspiration from the ‘minisocieties’, positioned physically outside of the control of nation states, which functioned as home bases for the ‘sea-rovers and corsairs’ or, as they are more commonly referred to, pirates of the eighteenth century, Bey hopes that it is possible for people in this day and age where everything appears to be mapped and ‘discovered’, to find, at least temporarily, ‘free enclaves’. Drawing as he does on the ideas of key figures in critical theory and other intellectual fields, Bey’s prose is perhaps a classic

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37 In this regard at least, Bey’s essay bares some similarity to the more academically minded examination of the desire to find ‘cracks’ through which to ‘escape’ in Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor’s Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life, London: Routledge, 1992.
39 Ibid, 81.
example of the sort of thing Russo had in mind when she expressed reservations regarding the fact that what ‘has come to be called “theory” has constituted [itself as] a kind of carnival space’ taking licenses stylistically. It certainly says something about the community of people involved in such things as RTS that significant numbers of them are able to make any sense of such a intellectually intertextual document in the first case. I do not have the space here to do justice to his writings. Nor do I want to leave you with the idea that I uncritically accept them and the utopia they theoretically offer, but in terms of the object under discussion in this chapter—the RTS movement—Bey’s words resonate with a group on the whole marked by its cultural capital, which is arguably actively attempting to find a praxis informed by their exposure to ideas and skills at university. To put it in Harawayian terms: that many RTS participants wish to explore in practice the theoretical possibilities they have encountered as theory could be construed as a form of situated knowledge; the use, rather than denial, of the tools at hand, imperfect though they may be. To this end, Bey’s prose at least metaphorically fashions a means by which to set about the task.

While, as one friend cynically commented to me, a TAZ is only briefly the thing you have before the police arrive, a successful RTS action enthuses and re-energises those present. RTS and other like actions are valuable as a politically sustaining force for the individuals involved. The release offered by fun and/or festive political actions can serve as a circuit breaker in the cycles of ‘burn-out’ commonly identified among communities of activists. In my experiences as both a participant and observer at S11 in Melbourne, RTS Brisvegas and other large-scale blockades/protests in Australia, the strategic use of the carnivalesque (music, dance, games, performance, theatricality and the like) at militantly oppositional protests does provide participants with a welcome and necessary positive break from the more directly confrontational action. This is especially so for those who engage in NVDA blockading, of which RTS could be considered an undisciplined form.

A similar point is developed by playwright and dramaturge Silvija Jestrovic with regard to the use of street theatre and performance in Yugoslav citizen’s protests in the 1990s against the Milosevic government. Beyond its value as a means by which to productively focus and organisationally channel participant’s energies, she additionally avers the value of elements of the festival or carnival as a valuable self-preservation mechanism: ‘the theatricality of political protest has a protective quality, at times transforming the scene of collision and potential violence into a space of play’. The sort of violence faced in those moments is something which even ‘hardened protesters’, a discourse which seeks to palliate the depersonalisation required for a dominant reading of images of ‘violent protests’, need to be able to personally work through. As such, the discharge of anger and/or other feelings does not inherently need to lead to the divesting of all counter-hegemonic energies, just as ‘debriefing’ is seen as a productive, not eviscerating process.

42 Russo, ibid, 221.
In an ironic twist, the accessibility and less ascetic demands ‘dance activism’ makes upon its participants, has politically reanimated a significant minority of young people in the industrialised world who have been systemically disenfranchised by hostile politico-civic discourses which have scapegoated young people, turning the phrase ‘youth’ into ‘a significant category for “disciplining” in social policy’.\(^{44}\) The stylish appeal of such actions is not inherently a negative for RTS, indeed it is something to be explicitly exploited in the service of a desire to build a wider movement. Such ludic *modus operandi* have revitalised direct action politics at a time when discourses proclaiming widespread political apathy, the ‘death of socialism’ and the so-called ‘crisis in the left’, not to mention the meme of ‘political correctness’ which has been successfully employed to marginalise or simply deride progressive voices in the industrialised world, have been repeated so often they have become naturalised. Reclaim The Streets and similar actions mark a renewed visibility of and popularity for direct action which never actually went away, but which in the 1990s in countries such as Australia, had mainly been identified as the sole province of ‘extremist’ environmental and/or anti-militarist—‘single-issue’—campaigns. Leaving the last word to Sydney party people: shunning ‘[o]ld forms of political dissent—the demonstration, the march, the rally’ which reduce participants to ‘passive observers of a “spectacle”. The Street Party is a grassroots celebration of direct action and street-level democracy, empowering, exciting and joyful!’\(^{45}\)


CHAPTER TWELVE—
CARNIVAL AT CROWN CASINO:
S11 AS PARTY AND PROTEST

KURT IVESON AND SEAN SCALMER

From September 11-13 2000, Crown Casino in Melbourne was the venue for the Asia-Pacific meeting of the World Economic Forum. During these three days, thousands of people did their best to get in the way, in a blockade organised by a loose alliance of critics of corporate-led globalisation which called itself S11.

Looked at from one perspective, the blockade wasn’t much fun. While only 20 or so protesters were arrested, 400 claimed that they had been injured by police, and 50 required hospital treatment of some kind. There was a systematic removal of police identification badges, frequent baton charges, and continual intimidation. Even when police were not attempting to smash their way through pickets, a general sense of threat permeated the gathering. Large numbers of Victorian police moved around the Casino in formation, some on horseback, and the police helicopters which hovered overhead produced a menacing aural backdrop. On the last day of the protest, one participant remembered that she was ‘dragged along Spencer Street by my hair, dodging vicious kicks and thumps’. Another was run over by an unmarked police vehicle, which sped off leaving her and her comrades in its wake.1

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However, if the conflict between police and protesters raises a number of important questions, it does not exhaust the experience, range, invention, or significance of the S11 protest. Typically, at around the same time as the hit-and-run by police, four activists ran a lap of the Casino in the buff, to the delight and cheers of many on-lookers. Over the three days of the blockade, violence, trepidation and excited dramatic display coexisted in this shifting, paradoxical, unstable way. Even journalists employed by the mainstream media were forced to concede that a kind of political carnival was unfolding. Elizabeth Wynhausen of *The Australian* called it a ‘sort of carnival of the left’ (12/9/2000, p. 4). Damien Carrick of ABC Radio postulated a similar view in his report on the morning of September 11 for *AM*:

> It’s quite interesting, it oscillates between a carnival, and … you have ten foot puppets, you have twenty foot dragons, all sorts of colourful drumming, and what have you. The fountains in front of Crown Casino, which are quite enormous, have been filled with detergent, so as we speak there are clouds of bubbles wafting over the street. But then every now and again the atmosphere turns when buses or cars try to enter, and the protest becomes quite serious and the atmosphere changes quite dramatically. And then five, ten minutes later it changes back again, so the atmosphere is really quite strange.

In this chapter, we focus on these more irreverent and pleasurable aspects of S11. We trace the carnivalesque nature of the blockade as it unfolded in both urban space and cyberspace. We document its debt to the tactics and techniques developed by DiY collectives at the fringes of Australian dance and youth cultures. Finally, we pose the pressing question—can such carnivalesque gatherings represent an effective form of protest against global capitalism?

‘EVERYONE IS A JOURNALIST’—CYBERSPACE AND S11

The creation of independent media has been central to contemporary DiY culture and activism in Australia. As Kath Williamson and other contributors to this collection have noted, activists have invented and circulated alternative and oppositional values in zines, on community radio, and through e-lists and internet sites. The skills developed in these flourishing alternative media were put to very effective use by members of the S11 Alliance. Indeed, the S11 web-site—www.s11.org—was a fundamental part of the campaign to shut down the WEF meeting at Crown Casino. So how was the internet was used by S11 activists? What were the various protest-practices constructed through cyberspace?

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2 At the time of writing, this web-site is still archived at its original address. The web address was also used to promote protests/festivities on May 1 2001.

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Most obviously, the S11 website was used to disseminate an alternative perspective on the WEF meeting. The site provided a comprehensive critique of the WEF, and exposed some of the dealings of corporations involved in the Melbourne meeting. Radical standpoints on issues such as globalisation, mining, sweatshops, human rights and climate change were articulated. Links to the web pages of other organisations involved in campaigns against corporate capitalism were provided.

Some activists took steps to ensure that the message on the web reached a wider audience. In late June 2000, a still unknown group hacked into the official Nike web-site, and browsers were automatically redirected to the S11 Alliance site. Over the next 19 hours, www.s11.org received almost 900,000 hits. The international and national media were astounded, fascinated. Both brief reports and sustained analyses followed (Herald Sun, 26/6/2000, p.9; Sydney Morning Herald, E/MAG, 9/2000, pp.18-22). Less adventurously, but in a similar vein, ‘cyber-warriors’ supporting S11 set up a site using the name ‘Melbourne Festival’ as well as sites that aimed to attract those mistyping ‘Olympics’—<olympisc.com>—or searching for the ‘Melbourne Trading Post’—<melbournetradingpost.com>. In all of these cases, surprised browsers were faced with announcements on the protest action, analysis, and links to further information. Both electronic browsers and newspaper readers soon learnt more about the anti-WEF actions.

But the dissemination of alternative perspectives on the WEF was not the only function of www.s11.org. It was also used as an organisational tool. The web-site was used as a vehicle to explain and promote a decentralised and non-hierarchical mode of political organisation. The basic unit of the S11 Alliance was the ‘affinity group’—defined as a ‘workable size group from which creative, inspiring and autonomous actions can spring, either spontaneously or pre-planned’. Through the website, a wide range of protesting tips for these groups were offered, covering issues such as the legal rights of protesters, health and safety, and the layout of Crown Casino. In the weeks before September 11, the site was regularly up-dated with the latest information on the blockade, and notices of preliminary events taking place in Melbourne and elsewhere were posted. Artwork for stickers, posters and leaflets was freely available through the web-site for anyone who wished to download and disseminate such material. The meaning and importance of non-violent direct action was carefully articulated for all those who planned to take part.

Of course, this organisational information was available to anyone who found their way to the website, regardless of whether they were sympathetic to the protest against the WEF meeting. Journalists and police alike referred to the S11 website as a means of undermining the protest. In an almost parodic performance of investigative research, critics of the WEF protest continually re-publicised information openly available at www.s11.org as if it were part of a secret, sinister plot. Internet communications were used by authorities as evidence of a planned invasion of British anarchists (Sydney Morning Herald, 7/8/2000, p.4). The Herald-Sun used information garnered from S11’s web-site to summon outrage at the involvement of high-school students in the campaign (18/7/2000, p.7). Gerard Henderson thought that there was ‘reason for genuine concern’ that the protest would become violent.
He also thought that the S11 web-site explained why (Sydney Morning Herald, 5/9/2000, p.12). Andrew Bolt quoted from apparent S11 chat-sites in order to argue that protesters planned for violence (Herald Sun, 31/8/2000, p.18). In late August, Sydney Morning Herald journalists noted that the S11 Alliance had posted a list of ‘essential items to bring to the planned blockade’, and they highlighted the advice to bring ‘gasmasks, helmets, goggles and energy snacks’ (30/8/2000, p.5). Imre Salusinzsky carefully scanned the S11 site, and managed to find discussions that highlighted the more trivial or superficial concerns of activists, which he eagerly reproduced for readers (Sydney Morning Herald, 28/8/2000, p.17). Other journalists reported claims of ‘email bomb-threats’ to opponents of the demonstration (Herald Sun, 1/9/2000, p.2), or claimed that the S11 site had been inundated by ‘furious’ opponents of the protest (Herald Sun, 14/9/2000, p.18).

However, activists were not unaware of such uses of the web-site. Indeed, the fact that journalists and others could access the information provided was used to good tactical effect in garnering further publicity for the protest. In late August, for instance, it was announced that John Farnham’s hit from the 1980s, ‘You’re the Voice’, had been chosen as the official anthem of S11. A picture of Farnham and link to a recording of the song was posted at www.s11.org. The public attention was massive. Legal action was threatened unless the link was removed (Herald Sun, 24/8/2000, p.2). S11 refused (Daily Telegraph, 25/8/2000, p.18). Farnham’s manager, Glenn Wheatley, fretted over the impact on his client’s reputation (Herald Sun, 25/8/2000, p.1). Complaints from sincere fans flooded an affiliated website, while protesters defended the song as ‘the people’s anthem’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 25/8/2000, p.3). When Farnham’s distaste for the protest became obvious, fellow rock-veteran Ross Wilson offered his own song, ‘No Soul’, as an alternative (Australian, 31/8/2000, p.5).

The motives of S11 activists are open to question on this matter. Publicly, their commitment to the ‘You’re the Voice’ was unwavering and seemingly ingenuous. Officially, the enormous media coverage that the issue aroused was only ‘inadvertently’ achieved (indyBulletin, no. 2, p.2). Perhaps this was the case. But given the rather large distance between Farnham’s brand of warbling and the electronic sounds which were pumped from the mobile sound system during the protest, there is another possible interpretation of this controversy. The entire incident may have been an elaborate ‘publicity-trap’, engineered to provoke outrage, conflict, and the ‘investigative’ interest of commercial journalists.

The internet was also used as a means to contest dominant media representations of the protest event itself. During the three days of the blockade, melbourne.indymedia.org served as space through which mainstream accusations of protester violence could be dissected and challenged. On this site, blockade participants were able to upload photos and video footage, along with written accounts of the protest. As the banner on the site proclaimed, ‘everyone is a witness. everyone is a journalist’. The Melbourne Indymedia group also published and distributed IndyBullitens on each day of the protest.
S11 activists used the net in a variety of ways but they were united by both a technological aptitude and a sense of mischief and play. And they were certainly effective. According to the *Australian Financial Review* (16/09/2000), the S11 site was the four hundredth most popular website in the world over the first two weeks of September. During the course of the blockade, more than 700 stories were uploaded to melbourne.indymedia.org and the site registered over 700,000 hits.5

‘A CARNIVAL OF THE LEFT’—
**URBAN PUBLIC SPACE AND S11**

When the actual blockade finally got underway, it radically transformed the urban space around Crown Casino. The actions of S11 participants were fluid, and varied across space and time. Cars were banished from the roads surrounding the Casino, and entrances were picketed by thousands of protesters. Many of these protesters carried banners of their own making, others wore costumes and played musical instruments, and some carried giant puppets and engaged in street theatre.6 Some even sang ‘You’re the Voice’. Thousands of unionists marched to a rally outside the Casino on the second day of the blockade. On the last day, another large group of protesters danced their way through the Central Business District.7 Sounds were provided by DJs and MCs inside a mobile sound system which was decorated as a giant drum of nuclear waste. The contraption was towed around the Casino to provide a soundtrack throughout the three days of the blockade.8 The transformation of the urban space around the Casino had been helped by the Victoria Police, who had erected concrete and steel barricades around the perimeter of the complex. These barricades, and the walls of surrounding buildings, were covered with chalk and spraypaint graffiti.

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5 See *S11 Spring: Democracy Beats the World Economic Forum*, Recollection and Analysis by Greens MPs and others, 2000, p. 6 (available via archived S11 web-site).
The transformation of the public space around the casino was certainly not achieved with precision, despite the best efforts of some megaphone-wielding organisers. Sometimes a sense of humour helped. On September 11, for instance, we spent twenty minutes walking hurriedly down the river—following lots of other people who seemed to think there was an urgent need for numbers to stop the loading of barges—only to find a marshal telling the crowd who had gathered that nothing was happening. As we walked back, hundreds more continued to arrive as reinforcements. A man started shouting to anyone who would listen that we were all victims of an elaborate hoax—"It’s an old military trick!! They’re stretching our available forces so they can make a strike!!". He told us we were doomed to fail, because of our lack of military experience and organisation. We certainly felt inept later on that day, when trying to help friends hang a huge banner from a bridge over the Yarra river. No matter how hard we tried to weigh it down, the wind kept blowing it back up onto the bridge and smothering us all. The water bottle with which we tried to weigh it down even conked a fellow activist on the head (thus constituting one of the only cases of—self-inflicted—protester-violence!)

To some hard-headed political organisers, all of this was a sideshow to the ‘main event’. However, from a perspective moored in DiY culture, just the opposite is true. DiY activists are consciously engaged in attempts to fuse pleasure with politics through the organisation of events in which ‘social criticism is combined with cultural creativity in what’s both a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance’. From this perspective, the music, the graffiti, the costumes, the bubbles, the humour—even the apparently hopeless actions—were central to the blockade itself. In their use of carnival and play, contemporary DiY activists are the latest in a long line of cultural and political movements to have embraced the power of carnival to ‘de-naturalise’ the rhythms and expectations of everyday life. The actions of protesters during S11 were designed to unleash the radical potential within the everyday by upsetting conventional expectations about the kinds of behaviour that are ‘in place’ and ‘out of place’ in the urban spaces around Crown Casino. As geographer Tim Cresswell has shown, while such expectations attached to ‘place’ often appear natural, they are inevitably a product of domination.

The de-naturalisation of urban space can have far-reaching political ramifications. In this instance, the WEF had relied on the power of both the local state and private developers to provide a space in which its meeting could take place. In the event, the ability of these local authorities to provide this space was challenged. The expectations normally attached to the spaces around Crown Casino—which would have allowed for the unobstructed movement of cars, conference delegates and gamblers—were no longer sustained. Rather, these expectations had to be enforced, sometimes violently, by police. The carnival outside the Casino thus took on a wider significance; not only was it fun, but it inconvenienced and obstructed an institution of global capitalism. S11 protesters were not simply thinking globally, they were acting globally.

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10 For an interesting discussion of such movements, see Greil Marcus, Lipstick Traces: a Secret History of the Twentieth Century, Cambridge (USA), 1989.
But such a deliberate use of carnival and play in protest raises a number of practical questions. Can protesters pursue different tactics simultaneously, or are there limits to this process? Can some follow a portable loudspeaker, dancing around the Casino, while others maintain a permanent, assailed blockade? Can the trade union official and the anarchist display their particular attachments to the same unifying cause without undermining each other? Can some picketers defend themselves against police violence without weakening the claims of those who remain committed to non-violence as an ethical and political position? These questions of unity and difference have been pertinent to social movements ever since the abandonment of the centralised model of political organisation. However, it is our belief that the form of the S11 campaign suggests some useful answers, which we explore in the following section.

UNITY AND DIFFERENCE IN THE POLITICAL RITUAL

Following anthropologist David Kertzer, it is useful to think of the S11 carnival as a kind of ritual. According to Kertzer, most successful popular movements are generally accompanied by the development of rituals—forms of repetitive, standardised, symbolic behaviour. Chief among such rituals are not only carnivals, but also pledges of membership, marches, songs, uniforms, and demonstrations. All of them act as unifying forces. This is so in a number of ways.

First, rituals involve public identification with a political group, and this display of open, public commitment can bind participants together in a kind of common membership. During such events, our dependence on others is brought to the surface. Our attachment to others increases, and the varied ‘theatrical stimuli’ that make a collective gathering—the changes in light, colour, gesture, voice, body-contact—all generate powerful feelings for those that are also present.12

Second, because those who take part in carnivals or demonstrations diverge from the routines of ‘everyday life’, and jointly challenge the norms governing particular spaces, they are therefore likely to develop a sense of ‘communitas’ or affection for fellow-participants. In this sense, the political ritual may be compared with those ‘liminal’ moments in social life that exist between the cracks of ordered routine—moments that Victor Turner associated with pilgrimages and ‘coming of age’ ceremonies in more traditional societies. During these moments the order and hierarchy of conventional social life is set aside. New possibilities become attainable and social relations stretch towards universal comradeship.13

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12 David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, New Haven and London, 1988. For the importance of rituals to popular movements, p.92; for the definition of rituals, p.9; for theatrical stimuli, p11; for dependence on others, p.62; for increasing attachment, p.72-3.

Because the unity engendered by such rituals is emotional, it can transcend the more doctrinal, tactical or institutional divisions that beset most campaigns. We may passionately disagree with you about the wisdom of Marx versus Bakunin, but we feel that we are ‘on the same side’ as we tramp down a wide street on May 1. We may think that you are too directive when you shout from a megaphone, but we feel a sense of strong affinity with you as an angry cab-driver honks his horn at our joint presence. As a result, most political movements that possess an ongoing career develop rituals—the feminist movement has its International Women’s’ Day; the labour movement its May Day and Labour Day actions, for example. It is such actions that provide for the development of a sense of *esprit de corps* among social-movement members.

However, if all forms of collective performance allow for the cultivation of unity despite difference, the S11 actions heightened this effect in a number of ways. First, because many participants in S11 were influenced by the efflorescence of DiY culture, their sense of identification with others was increased. They shared a common knowledge and competence in a kind of ‘sub-cultural script’, which took in the more superficial matters of appearance (dreads, shaven skulls, piercings, tattoos), but extended to musical tastes (head-bobbings and nods of recognition to the same tunes), and still more broadly to terms of address and to familiarity with ways of dancing and standing, walking and sharing. As participants rolled in to Melbourne, hopping rides and lobbing on local friends’ doorsteps, ties of friendship were strengthened and extended. A sense of common identity bloomed. In these circumstances, differences among protesters on issues like ‘the history of globalisation’ or the relationship between the police and the State were unlikely to matter very much.

Second, as already noted, many of the actions that occurred under the general umbrella of S11 challenged the existing configuration of Melbourne as a city. As in all great carnivals, actions occurred ‘out of place’. Nudity moved from the bedroom to the highway; dancing from the club to the stock exchange; writing graffiti from the dark of night to the sunny street. Anthropologist Roberto Da Matta has suggested that this process of social dislocation can have profound implications for the cultural experiences of participants and spectators. In his study of the Brazilian carnival, Da Matta argued that as objects and actions moved outside of their typical spaces, the norms governing individuals were increasingly shaken; that usually unquestioned dimensions of social life came to be questioned; and that the intensity of symbolic display was likely to rise. According to this logic, as demonstrations bring new actions to new spaces, so the questioning of everyday existence, and therefore the sense of joint marginality from ‘mainstream’ society will also increase.\(^\text{14}\)

Under such conditions, a sense of shared warmth and commonality will develop among the excluded. Unity will arise, even as difference continues.

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Unity emerged despite difference within S11 for other reasons. Crucial here was the action of police. The violence perpetrated by police upon protesters has been documented elsewhere.\(^{15}\) What has been less examined is the consequences of that violence for the self-conception of protesters. Political scientists have long recognised that when violence is used in collective conflicts, the political situation is immediately simplified for those present. Ambivalent potential adversaries can quickly become actual enemies. Behaviour and beliefs can become radicalised. Most directly of all, a sense of shared threat is likely to cement a feeling of interdependence and therefore identification with others similarly threatened.\(^{16}\) As police circled menacingly, as batons reigned, as stories of brutality and intimidation were passed on, so the sense of unity among participants also increased.

Manifestly, this was true for those with arms linked on the ‘front-line’ near the entrance to Crown Casino, especially on the morning and night of September 12. However, the technologically-wired nature of the protest ensured that this unity was especially strong. As noted earlier, the internet served as both a means of disseminating movement views to outsiders and journalists, and as a point of contact and exchange between S11 participants. As the sense of anger at the mainstream media’s distortion of police action rose, so internet-savvy activists related their own experiences and views. Through the sharing of such experiences, a ‘movement-narrative’ about the protest emerged, and those who shared the (narrated) experience increasingly identified with each other. They had seen (many of) the same things; faced (much the same) police action; understood the event in (largely similar) terms. They were thereby unified.

Clearly then, the unifying force that characterises all forms of collective performance was strengthened by a number of specific elements of the S11 blockade. In the process, the ties between advocates of DiY and relatively ‘straight’ political activists became increasingly strong. All of those present felt a palpable sense of unity that seemed new, exciting. As one participant, Jeff Sparrow would soon put it, this seemed to presage a novel political formation:

> The blockade also confirmed that the old Cold War certainties are continuing to evaporate, producing a milieu of quite striking ideological fluidity. Many of the S11 demonstrators were six years old when the Berlin Wall collapsed—for them, the idea of advising a Marxist to ‘go back to Russia’ simply wouldn’t make sense. With the absence of that historical baggage…the kind of identity politics in which the celebration of difference leads to disunity almost as a matter of principle proved notable by its absence. I watched a friend sell a revolutionary magazine to a woman dressed as an enormous beetle without either of them feeling any incongruity about the transaction.\(^{17}\)

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\(^{15}\) The most graphic and powerful account produced by the protesters is a video: SKA TV, Melbourne Rising: protest against the WEF, first screened on Ch31 Access News and at the Melbourne Trades Hall, 18 September 2000. The video is available at http://clients.loudeye.com/imc/melbourne/melb-rising.ram.


CONCLUSION

S11 is not the first time that cultural and political invention have merged. All social movements—‘old’ as well as ‘new’—have been characterised by this cross-fertilisation for at least two hundred years. Most recently in the 1960s, the Diggers and the Yippies of the United States brought a delight in satire and sometimes irrational display into a novel form of ‘anti-disciplinary’ protest.18

However, in the early 1970s the growing repression of the State fractured that developing ‘unity within difference’. Political radicals were pushed into increasingly adversarial, ‘serious’, and sometimes violent poses. Cultural radicals grew disaffected with ‘straights’, retreated to music, art and film, and stayed away from demonstrations and conferences. From this point onwards, students of contemporary social movements increasingly described them as dispersed, fragmented, and inevitably concerned with symbolic and personal issues.19

Debates about the merits of the victory lap of Crown Casino by four naked protesters are illustrative of this tension. Did the blockade end with a victory march through the streets of Melbourne, as proposed by protest marshals? This is the version of events preferred by some of the members of the Democratic Socialist Party writing in Green Left Weekly (20/12/2000, p. 14-15) after the event. For them, S11 succeeded in spite of, not because of, the affinity group model of organisation. While alliances were important, the protest ‘did rely upon the level of authority which the marshals had won over the course of the blockade’. For others, however, the victory lap of Crown Casino by four naked protesters provided a more fitting end to a protest which, despite the best efforts of mega-phone wielding revolutionaries, remained fluid and spontaneous until its dying moments (see this debate about the end of the protest at the indymedia site20).

The challenge of the S11 protest is to see whether the contemporary reunification of cultural and political radicalism can be maintained. This may prove difficult. As the improvisations thrown up by S11 are recycled in other contexts, so they are likely to become relatively routinised and structured. The police can be expected to manifest ‘tactical adaptation’, and to attempt to neutralize the new combinations of party and protest, cyber and urban-spatial insurgency.21 The sense of play and uncertainty may give way to routine inhabitation of an official new political role: ‘the anti-globalization protester’.


19 For a history of the American New Left in these terms, see Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage, Bantam Books, New York, 1987. For a portrait of contemporary movements as inevitably dispersed and symbolic, see the influential work of Alberto Melucci, recently synthesized in his Social Movements in Complex Societies: A European Perspective, Arena Journal, no. 15, 2000, pp.81-97.

20 For the development of rituals into more highly-structured performances over time, see David Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, p.92. For the notion of tactical adaptation: Doug McAdam, ‘Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency’, American Sociological Review, vol. 48, no. 6, December 1983, p.736.
There is no guarantee that these snares will be avoided. The best hope will rely less on an attempt to replicate the precise happenings around the Crown Casino, and more upon continuing communication between nominally ‘cultural’ and ‘political’ groups. This needs to take place through old and new media; in urban and cyberspace. It must be based both upon a continued willingness to accept difference, and upon an equal refusal to see ‘party’ and ‘protest’ as conventionally opposing terms.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN—
APPROPRIATING THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION: DANCE MUSIC INDUSTRIES AND CONTESTED DIGITAL SPACE

CHRIS GIBSON

The barbarians are at the gate ... they’re in the moats, and they’re climbing up the sides of the castle. (Robert Goodale, CEO of Ultrastar, a New York internet firm promoting links for unsigned artists).1

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that change in the musical orientation of youth subcultures in the 1980s and 1990s could not have happened without key technological developments. It is tempting to adopt a determinist view of the technological changes that have enabled dance party culture, and its associated radical fringes, to emerge: new drum machines allowed repetitive beats with mechanical precision; samplers made reconstruction based on breakbeats possible; home sequencing software allowed decent master recordings to be produced and digital storage formats (like Digital Audio Tapes) have meant that small scale producers no longer have to rely on bulky, arcane reels of multitrack tape.

Technological change, it must be said, is often driven by those who have vested interests in making money from them: companies such as Sony, Technics, Toshiba, Akai and Denon have thrived on the growth of electronic dance music and home-grown recording. Yet, such commercial success in electronic music technology should not be seen to automatically signal a ‘sellout’ to corporate interests on behalf of subcultural producers, something Simon Reynolds has suggested undercuts the ‘politics of sampling’.2 Rather, the ushering in of new technologies opens up opportunities for those at the grass roots of musical production (as opposed to the oligopoly of entertainment companies that own the rights to over 90% of the world’s recorded music) to transform the relations between themselves, their audiences and capitalist producers in the music industry. Periods of technological change, chaotic flows and surges between ‘stable’ regimes of capitalism, can expose weaknesses in the legal armour of corporations and allow reconfigurations of established power relations to occur. Technological changes triggered by capitalist institutions in the search of further profits introduce periods of uncertainty, as corporations invest in new methods of profiteering that, despite all the best forward-planning and market research, inevitably involved risk (something specialist ‘risk management’ consultants are now increasingly contracted to manage). Such junctures can provide strategically important opportunities for radical action, and equally, for oppressive action, if resistance is not articulated quickly or effectively.


While digital technology was originally conceived as a means to extract profits from consumers, it has somewhat inadvertently become a new way for grass roots activists and musicians to appropriate a means of production, opening up new possibilities and spaces for musical creativity, collective action and political consciousness as well as new tactics of communication for organisers, artists and angry musicians. The longevity of such actions will determine the success of agitators in reconfiguring established power relations in music production and consumption.

**Restructuring Production — The Advent of Digital Technology**

Most commentators have discussed global music production in the context of a new ‘convergent’ ‘info-tainment’ industry\(^3\), where information dissemination, entertainment, music, film and computer games are channelled to consumers through shared platforms, by the same giant media corporations (such as TimeWarner, Sony, Universal, News Corporation). Yet, in this atmosphere of concentration and convergence, there are also processes of upheaval, both in Australia and elsewhere, as several factors force structural change on the music industry. During the 1990s major studios have closed down or have changed into mastering studios (such as Studio 301, Sydney); the number of live venues has shrunk; new digital technology has shifted aspects of the means of production away from initial corporate investment; the popularity of dance music as a consumptive disc culture (rather than buying pre-recorded dance music) has forced corporate executives to rethink their standardised marketing strategies; while record companies are less likely to provide large budgets for recordings by new artists (‘risk investments’) and as a consequence, the difficulty of financing national and international distribution and tours for local artists has been magnified.

Central to this change has been the digitisation of all forms of audio and visual information, and the ability to, for example, segue licensed music recordings to computer game soundtracks: a system of recording, transmitting and reproducing information with a level of hitherto unparalleled accuracy, durability and universality of application, allowing ‘any signal, whether a sound or an image [to] be transmitted or manipulated in similar ways’.\(^4\) Much has been made of the possibilities for decentralisation in the information industry in relation to production and consumption; as Celia Lury has put it, ‘The radically democratising potential of these new technologies is thus that all signals, previously confined within specialised means of production, can now be transmitted to the audience within one common means of distribution’.\(^5\) While this facilitates corporate convergence and cross-media promotion of cultural products (as with Nintendo’s internationally successful Pokémon campaigns), it has also given opportunities for producers of much smaller scope and budget to access means of production.

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\(^5\) Ibid.
TURNING SOUNDS INTO 1S AND 0S — DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS

Digital technology emerged as a major force in music production in the 1980s and 1990s. At its most basic, digital technologies convert audio sound waves into binary code by sampling the audio signal for volume (amplitude) and pitch (frequency) at a given rate (the standard for CD quality is 44,100 samples per second). Digital technology has advantages over older analog equipment, for example through extremely low signal to noise ratios (i.e. a clearer signal with no tape hiss or background noise) and high levels of flexibility. Digital information can be stored in computer files with less danger of deterioration over time, and can be converted into a range of formats (pressed into a CD, segued with film or television footage, converted into a video game soundtrack) more quickly and with more reliable results compared to analogue technology with its range of recording media, formats and incompatible equipment. This flexibility remains a crucial element of the support of digital technology by major corporations such as Universal who govern and administer extremely large copyright catalogues and thousands of master recordings (Universal Music Publishing, for example, owns over 650,000 music copyrights).

Digital recording techniques emerged in the 1970s, for music that was intended to be distributed on conventional vinyl albums (an effort mainly aimed at hi-fi buffs), yet the main push towards embracing digital technology in distribution formats only occurred after the widespread slump in the recording industry in the late 1970s/early 1980s. The development of digital technology and the subsequent promotion of the compact disc format of music distribution was really meant as a way of kick-starting a lagging market for popular music, developing strategies of re-selling music already consumed by ‘baby-boomer’ generations on vinyl albums in the new format.

There has always been an historically tense relationship between technical advances in the recording and reproduction of music and sound recording and copyright holding companies. As an example, radio broadcasts had a dramatic impact on the recording industry during the great depression, providing access to new music without charge, as opposed to the relatively expensive and luxurious shellac phonograph discs. This example of technological development led to a series of well documented crises in the recording industry, including slumps in sales of both gramophones and pre-recorded discs, and national industrial action by the American Federation of Musicians. Yet, in the context of the development of digital recording and formats, such tensions were overridden by the aggressive intervention of music companies in the development of new technologies. As Jim Fifield, CEO of EMI Music has been quoted as saying,

If you looked at where the big [growth] blips were, you saw that the advent of the cassette brought portability to the music industry … A tremendous surge. And then here comes the CD, which is of superior quality with instant access to tracks… That’s why EMI has always been supportive of new technology. Because if any of those new technologies grab hold, the music industry is going to go through another big boom.6

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Ironically, given Fifield’s statement, the case of the recordable audio cassettes was seen to benefit record companies **only** when those firms controlling the recording and distribution of copyright material were involved in the development of technologies, as with the Sony Walkman. Previously, the recording industry challenged manufacturers of cassette technology as a potential area for breach of copyright through pirate reproduction. Similarly, the recording industry blunted the widespread diffusion of Digital Audio Tape technology (DAT) by forcing hardware manufacturers to adopt Serial Copy Management Systems (SCMS), limiting repeat copying of protected material.

The development of the compact disc, on the other hand, involved a joint venture between Sony and Philips Electronics (who then owned PolyGram Records) in 1978, which led to the development of a standard format, disc size, sampling rates and frequency response for the compact disc. The implementation of compact disc technology was intended to replace the vinyl record, making the format obsolete and requiring consumers to re-purchase favourite back catalogue recordings in the new format: ‘There’s much higher profit margin in CDs. So why sell something for $8.98 when you can sell it for $15.98? … Well, it was a huge windfall when everybody wanted to go out and buy all the Beatles albums again on CD’ (John Branca, ATV Music Publishing’). Digital technology in sound recording and reproduction facilitated the success of the compact disc as a means of re-routing copyright material and as a means of distribution with higher margins than vinyl records. Yet, technological development in the digital realm, aimed at making recording gear more powerful for studio applications, also made equipment cheaper for the home recording and small studio market. Companies including Roland, Tascam, Akai, Fostek, and Yamaha now specialise in producing equipment that can record professional quality digital information at much lower costs than previous analogue technology. In addition to these specialist units, sophisticated software for hard-disc recording and sequencing has meant that all recording and sound processing activities can also be completed within a personal computer.

Digital technology has already meant that producing quality recordings is becoming possible for musicians without recording deals. Contracts previously required major labels to advance production costs to the performer, to be re-paid as an advance against future royalties. In turn, software and specialist digital recording equipment manufacturers now target amateur musicians, bedroom enthusiasts and home studios with emphasis placed on the ability to produce high-quality recordings without relying on external investment. The rapid emergence of music editing software, Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) capabilities and sequencers, along with advances in digital recording gear, have meant that professional recordings are now much cheaper, and within closer reach of amateur musicians and localised scenes. Indeed, the whole notion of ‘making music’ has shifted, from mechanical skills associated with playing instruments (with years of tuition and practice) to expertise with the interface of a computer screen, mouse and keypad. Sequencing, mixing, sampling and looping become a part of the creative process.

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7 Ibid, p.45.
Accordingly, support is no longer automatically necessary from major labels for recording and production costs, suggesting new possibilities for copyright arrangements such as artist-held copyright, licensing arrangements with majors, and more radically, anti-copyright stances.

**Electronic Dance Music and New Digital Spaces**

Some aspects of dance music production, shaped by patterns and sites of consumption (the ‘rave’, the club, the ‘mix’) remain distinct from corporate activity in music, requiring more complicated circuits of material than those assumed in ‘conventional’ systems of production and distribution. Digital technology is heavily involved in establishing the parameters for dance music production, within which more radical activities and esoteric expressions have flourished. These developments have not been without legal challenge. Sampling forms a core practice of youth cultures in cross-cultural contexts, yet threatens legal structures for the protection of copyright, and departs from established musicological wisdom regarding ‘creativity’ and cultural expression. Significantly, sampling techniques have been seen as a way to radically de-centre means of production in terms of the ‘raw materials’ of production, appropriated through consumption of music commodities. As Paul Gilroy argued in the case of American hip hop cultures:

The artefacts of a pop industry premised on the individual act of purchase and consumption are hijacked and taken over into the heart of collective rituals of protest and affirmation which in turn define the boundaries of the interpretative community. Music is heard socially and its deepest meanings revealed only in the heart of this collective, affirmative consumption.9

Dave Hesmondhalgh charted this process in British dance music, assessing various claims of democratisation in the field of production, sampling and DJ cultures, and possibilities for structural and geographical shifts towards decentralised production.10 Several hundred dance labels have emerged, based around small print-runs of specialist sub-genres, with little promotional costs compared with releases from major labels. The British experience has to a large extent been replicated in Australia, although local DJs still tend to favour overseas releases within live sets. Adam Brown argued that democratisation is possible through consumption practices; while Simon Reynolds contrasted the radical DiY rhetoric of sampling practices and crowd consumption with engagements with technology on a musicological level, arguing that its ‘real’ politics lie in the aesthetic, signalling ‘the death of the Song, to be replaced by thecentred, unresolved, in-finite house

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track; the brain-rotting vortex of quick-cutting in video and TV; the supercession of narrative, characterization, and motivation by sensational effects.  

Within more radical electronic dance music scenes there are particular modes of consumption that stem from the genre’s digital base; sampled, patchwork beats are strung together with few conventionally identifiable ‘imprints’ of individual creativity (that might be associated with particular performers, such as distinctive vocal tones, instrumentation, or characteristic arrangements). In this respect, the construction of composers as ‘stars’—the crucial element of the mass marketing and consumption of musical product by majors as part of ‘ideologies of authenticity’—has been less apparent. While some trance DJs, for example, have become ‘stars’ and are the central figures in the marketing of actual events (as with Tsuyoshi Suzuki), their fame is not always easily transferred into sales of recorded product. An instrumental focus over an extended set, with a lack of choruses or hooks, negates the common popular music convention of repeated lines as in-built jingles within songs. Importantly, the credibility given to DJs in radical fringe scenes relies on their ability to mix snatches of sound from different sources (from political speeches to dentist drills), to blend tracks in terms of beat and key, in ways which mirror the initial re-construction of the tracks themselves through practices of digital sampling.

CORPORATE REACTIONS AND ABSORPTIONS

In response to these patterns of consumption, major labels (and some independents) have attempted to create ‘the star’ in dance music in a number of ways: first, by marketing compilation CDs, often mixed by more commercially-orientated and well-known DJs, in an attempt to sell the ‘experience’ of a whole set. These releases tend to focus on the chosen sets of individual DJs in ways which piggy-back on the marketing of these names in event promotions (such as compilations by John Digweed, Sasha, Carl Cox and others); feature music typical of particular genres (hence the rise of many series of releases featuring, in turn, micro-niches of house, hard house, trance, drum and bass, speed garage and so on); collect together music that characterises particular clubs (as in the Café Del Mar series based on a popular club in Ibiza); or certain geographical places known for dance music. Solo artists and groups that are marketed by major labels tend to be signed to subsidiary ‘independents’ as part of niche marketing campaigns, or linked through licensing, which is a more common feature of capital’s appropriations of dance music. Rather than provide major investment for a project, corporations are now establishing separate licensing divisions between dance labels and local subsidiary offices, a separate layer from conventional corporate structures. Some Australian labels, including Mushroom Distribution Services (now fully absorbed within News Corporation), Shock and Creative Vibes, also handle licensing and distribution agreements with overseas labels. Figure 1 shows corporate linkages between Festival/Mushroom, owned by News Corporation, and Mushroom

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Distribution Services; MDS subsidiary labels; Australian and international labels with licensing arrangements. It has become a more common trend for independent dance music labels, many of which have emerged from more radical aesthetic circles, to join into alliances with multinational capital in this way.

Such absorption of electronic music into the domain of corporate interests (largely through licensing deals and other ‘flexible’ agreements) does not necessarily spell the end for the radical potential of all dance cultures or alternative cultural production. There are always more genuinely ‘independent’ and radical activities taking place, usually in the margins, as artists continue to create music free from recording contracts, and collectives are established to organise and distribute new sounds. Some of the most interesting examples of these have emerged, not in inner-city areas of Sydney or Melbourne, but in non-metropolitan contexts, where digital production and distribution may have had the greatest impact on grass-roots creativity.

**Decentralised Music Production and the NSW Far North Coast**

Discourses on digital recording technologies are particularly attentive to geography: recording studios, mastering suites, radio stations, labels and management companies—all a part of the agglomerations surrounding music production—have been generally located in major centres of production, such as Melbourne and Sydney in Australia. In non-metropolitan areas, those with aspirations for music (with the exception of country singers), suffer from simple industrial and geographical factors inherent in traditional paths of career.

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**Figure 1**

*News Corporation, Festival/Mushroom Subsidiaries and Licensees, 1999*
development within the music industry, what Simon Frith has called a ‘rock pyramid’, an ethos of ‘working your way up the ladder’ from local to national and perhaps international exposure. This traditional path to success has been very much a part of music industry labour politics, serving two main purposes: to encourage labour (bands) to approach record companies (rather than capital seeking a labour force), who continue to control the resources necessary for promotion and distribution; and to instil in musicians a false modesty at early stages of their careers, encouraging artists to sign individual, and often harsh, contracts. As a result of this, centres of capital have always been in large urban areas—and in close proximity to inner-city scenes that are valorised as ‘credible’ and from which most signings are drawn. Crucial areas of national radio/TV exposure, A and R and national press, situated between regional scenes and national stardom, can act as barriers for local musicians without corporate support, while the smaller relative populations of Australian rural regions prevent a critical mass large enough to emerge that would solidify discrete subcultural scenes, laying a platform for future creative growth. The simple issue of distance from productive centres lessens the chances of electronic artists climbing the pyramid through to national exposure. The recent rise of home recording cultures in some regional and remote areas of Australia, in tandem with internet distribution, reflect attempts to rearrange this conventional trend.

The NSW Far North Coast provides one case study where digital production has been appropriated in an attempt to reverse the seemingly inevitable momentum that draws artists into the inner-city. The Far North Coast is a coastal rural region that has undergone significant demographic, cultural and economic change since the 1970s, with the area now thought of as a ‘lifestyle’ or ‘creative’ region, in part a legacy of its hippy traditions dating back to the establishment of the Aquarius Festival in Nimbin in 1973. The region has seen some of the highest rates of population growth in Australia since then, attracting a myriad of subcultures, migrants, retirees, students, the unemployed and travellers to its natural and cultural environment. The region has a strong ‘alternative’ discourse of economy and identity, being increasingly positioned as somewhat different from urban consumerism (although this is certainly being augmented by new forms of consumerism in popular tourist towns such as Byron Bay) and resistant to multinational capitalism.

Dance music genres have become important cultural styles in the Far North Coast. The region hosts a number of DJs, electronic music producers and dance clubs and has a long history of outdoor doofs: some sanctioned, others proceeding without planning permission. Retail outlets stock a large range of dance and electronic music styles, from drum and bass through to ambient ‘chill’ music. Trance subcultures on the Far North Coast are generally associated with discrete communities of participants: feral scenes (including environmental activists, anarchist political movements such as Organarchy Sound Systems), local music producers (such as the labels Digital Psionics and Edgecore), and largely

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apolitical backpacker subcultures and styles originating in Europe. These are connected through an increasingly international network of producers, scenes and tourist sites mythologised as places of origin and consumption (Ibiza, Goa, Eilat (Israel), Bali, Ko Samui (Thailand)). Crucial to the growth of Byron’s ‘underground’ dance scene was the staging of a series of dance parties in the Epicentre complex (and some other sites) during the 1990s, which tapped into both local feral/activist scenes and ‘traveller’ subcultures (made up of itinerants, backpackers, etc).

More radical doof parties occur at a range of non-permanent venues, that have included community halls at Corndale and Coorabell, agricultural greenhouses, open spaces on private land, state forest clearing areas, beaches, rock-climbing gyms and converted abattoirs. The use of the term ‘doof’, reflects important links between the underground dance party scenes in Sydney and the Far North Coast. Many Sydney-based promoters and organisers have moved to the region, in part a reaction to increasing surveillance and pressure from authorities in Sydney (such as the 1995 closure and police violence associated with the Vibe Tribe’s Freequency party at Sydney Park), but also as part of the wider processes of counter-urbanisation of youth cultures which has transformed the region’s demography and cultural identity. On the one hand, electronic music activities on the Far North Coast emphasise ‘the local’, with local systems of production contrasted against corporate music, and at the same time, new systems and networks are sought by local musicians and labels in efforts to both lessen dependence on the corporate sphere and create new global linkages as part of a more radicalised agenda of subcultural alliance.

CONSTRUCTING ‘THE LOCAL’ AS A POLITICAL/ECONOMIC POSITION

An awareness of the barriers to wider participation in the music industry has had a range of effects on NSW Far North Coast scenes and artists’ perceptions of production. While few are willing to relocate to capital cities, many have adopted digital technology, self-financing recordings, and re-assessing the validity of the ‘pyramid’ career path. Artists and labels have been keen to generate interest through subcultural, technological and community networks, utilising new methods of production and marketing, and maximising benefits from local modes of consumption. In a general sense, there is a strong ethos of localism and local production apparent on the North Coast, based around popular knowledge of the importance of local agglomeration and multipliers throughout the regional economy, and emphasising the importance of do-it-yourself (DiY) philosophies.

Levels of localism in the music scene are a part of the wider community’s interest in maximising the ‘boundedness’ of the local economy through dense networks of local producers, services, suppliers. Such sentiments are not necessarily articulated as resistance to global capitalism; indeed, many local producers of art and craft goods maintain profit accumulation as the mode of business operation. Yet, the ethos of local community exchange does provide the context within which several types of DiY production flourish, including ‘shoes, beds, jewellery, art and craft, clothing, furniture, home wares, one-off glassware, cosmetics, surfing goods, even baby-wear’.

production primarily consisted of the manufacture of low-cost cassette ‘demo’ recordings for folk and rock bands, who would attempt to secure live music bookings, and perhaps lure interest from record labels further afield. More recently, however, with the advent of more affordable technology, digital home production has been taken up in much more serious ways by musicians of all descriptions, and in particular by techno artists such as Paul Chambers, Fred Cole, Kol Dimond, AB and Luna Orbit. Artists now control CD pressing, either as self-funded projects, or as independent releases signed to local labels, or through labels established by the artists/scenes themselves. In an immediate sense, digital recording provided decent quality sound at a more accessible and cheaper price. As one composer commented,

[Digital technology] is a great thing democratically. It’s empowered people who previously couldn’t afford studios. You couldn’t afford to do it. It was an elitist thing, and it was part of the framework that enabled the multinational labels to maintain a stranglehold on the industry, so in that sense it’s great. In terms of quality and accessibility for people of lesser means, it’s a really positive thing.¹⁵

A typical self-recorded DiY CD in the region is either sold through the promotional efforts of the musicians themselves, or through independent distributors such as Edgecore, based in the hills inland from Byron Bay. Figure 2 represents the number of releases per year recorded as part of a database of production details compiled during 1999 in a wider PhD project on North Coast music production. Releases are broken down into details on distribution and copyright. Here information on the production and distribution agreements for releases is organised into those wholly self-funded and distributed, those distributed by independent labels (or labels established by the artists themselves) and those with support and financial backing from major labels. These trends reflect a boom in local production since the more widespread availability of digital recording gear. Figure 2 also shows copyright arrangements for CD releases in the area, from those recordings where artists retained copyright, to those where mechanical copyright over a master recording were held by independent or major labels.

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In a general sense, copyright (the central plank of corporate property rights in music) has not completely disappeared in local music production, with artists on the whole affirming the need for legal protection of their works. To some extent an awareness of copyright has probably been heightened through the advent of digital technology, where artist control of copyright (through ownership of masters) has replaced the abstractions of copyright held by a third party. At the same time, issues of copyright were not given the same prominence as in national and international debates on technology and music. While copyright issues were spoken of in interviews, they were not identified as crucial to the future of the region’s music industry. Accordingly, twenty-five releases provided no details on copyright ownership. For DiY enthusiasts in smaller production agglomerations, the stakes are simply not as high as with multinational catalogue owners. Meanwhile, electronic music collectives aligned with more radical political agendas, notable Organarchy Sound Systems (based in the small hamlet of Rosebank) adopted anti-copyright stances, encouraging sampling and copying of their work through association with MACOS (Musicians Against Copyright on Samples), articulating a more direct affront to the systems of private property ownership upon which multinational profit is based.

Other elements of ‘local’ production systems for DiY material involve the distribution channels used to promote CD releases. Networks of communication and information flow are crucial in sustaining the region’s various electronic subcultures (psy-trance, drumnbass, house, doof). Flyers and posters around towns are important ways of disseminating information with little expense; community radio stations support specialist shows; local papers and street press list venues and performances. In the North Coast region the social praxis of production is usually interlinked with consumption; musicians are usually regular customers of retail outlets who accept their releases on consignment, while social groups, subcultures and political/lobbying organisations provide the support mechanisms for musicians at benefit gigs, community events, festivals and markets. These groups then make up the target audiences for releases that appear in the region. In this regard, music promotion capitalises on already existing social networks and political-economic beliefs; networks are established through political circles—environmental activists, anarchists, students, socialists—that lead to electronic artists sharing friends and musical spaces with those performing folk, spoken word, poetry and some thrash/funk. The most well-known examples of these are regular events held in village dance halls, that were rediscovered as part of a search for alternative, non-alcohol aligned and cheap sites for parties. Often connected through non-government organisations and protest groups to particular audiences, hall gigs place a distinctive emphasis on ‘community’ and the singularity (rather than regularity) of particular events.
BEYOND THE LOCAL —
DIGITAL NETWORKS AS RADICAL SPACES

There have also been other reactions to the position of the region in relation to music capitalism and means of production. These emphasise going beyond localism, but in ways that do not automatically assume intentions to travel through expected chains of production, distribution and consumption. With an emphasis on mobility and the erosion of geographical distance and barriers, these strategies attempt to go beyond the ‘local as site of resistance’ paradigm and aim to integrate local musicians in wider networks of influence and dissemination. With these changes come new sets of linkages between music and place, and an emerging political economy of music production connected to a wider sense of radical activity.

Electronic artists in the region taking advantage in the growth of digital home recording technology aimed to produce commodities that were not intended to ‘take off’ in terms of retail sales, and instead were targeted at networks of subcultural influence and alliance through which products move for consumption in particular social spaces. One example of this is the trance/techno label Digital Psionics, run by DJs Luke Psywalker and Luna Orbit. In similar ways to those apparent in the North Coast’s folk scene, the production of psy-trance compilations by Digital Psionics was funded through staging a series of events at halls and local venues. These involved low overheads (Luke estimated only A$150 in costs, mainly for hiring a generator); collectively-owned P.A. system and DJ equipment; and grass-roots promotion through flyers and their weekly trance show on Bay-FM. Digital Psionics have also helped to stage larger events in more rural locations such as the 1999 Summer Dreaming Festival at Drake, inland from the North Coast region.

During 1999 Luna Orbit, under the name Orbit Constructions, released the CD *Fresh Green Eggs*, featuring low-key trance electronica with samples and drum loops. In this case, music was produced that was not intended to be initially consumed by people in their own homes through mass distribution. The mini discs and CD-Rs produced by members of the Digital Psionics collective were distributed through global social networks of trance DJs and producers (largely based on email), radio stations and event promoters, with intended consumption in (re)constructed dance party environments and DJ sets. Fred Cole, another local electronic music producer (and half of D*Ranger) describes a particularly vivid example of these sorts of networks:

I recently produced a track in DAT format that was played in London three days after first being played on the NSW North Coast. A few weeks later the same track arrived back on the North Coast via a visiting Israeli DJ who had received it from a German DJ in Tokyo.\(^{16}\)

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This reflected a number of particularities of the politics of contemporary electronic music production. First, releases were not targeted for retail sales. The subcultural capital assigned to these commodities comes from being unattainable for purchase through conventional retail. The preference for trance DJs to beat mix with CDs, minidiscs and DAT tapes rather than vinyl, the standard in other fragments of dance cultures, was buttressed on the rarity of a commodity rather than its ubiquity as a mass-consumed product. Indeed, the credibility of dance DJs as cultural gatekeepers relies on their ability to filter releases and select tracks from personal sources and informal networks, promoting their own individual style over the imprints of creativity found in the recordings themselves. In interviews with producers at Digital Psionics, they discussed the extent to which they would reserve material they had received for special events (rather than play it on their radio show, in order to limit its exposure and the risk of home taping). It also became apparent that for them it was more important to be seen making cutting-edge music in an international landscape of producers, DJs and promoters than to maximise retail sales in local or national markets. Rather, emphasis was placed on creating a combination of rarity and high demand for their expressions among a small number of ‘influential’ people within the global trance music nexus, in order to promote the credibility of the label and assert its identity in a tightly interconnected trance distribution network.

In October 1999, the label released the compilation CD *Psionic Sounds*, featuring tracks sourced from various points throughout their electronic network of associate DJs and friends, including Morphem (Berlin); Dogma (Zagreb, Croatia); In Sect (Uppsala, Sweden) and Fripic Bounce (Torino, Italy), alongside Byron Bay sound systems.

**Conclusions: Deflating the ‘Digital Revolution’?**

Is it possible to assert that technological change in the music industry has enabled musicians in regional areas greater access to recording technology and opened up potential systems of production for local music? In the first instance, the advent of home recording has unambiguously enabled artists to control more aspects of the production process, something that often troubled many studio engineers interviewed for this research. The recording and production of commodities was often carried out by musicians, a shift from divisions of labour which posited the musician as one component in a production process alongside sound engineers and assistants, production directors, mastering engineers, pressing plants. Musicians are now the target consumer group of equipment required for production rather than high capital intensive companies. On the Far North Coast, this meant that quite diverse musical experiments were released and stocked on shelves of local music stores, leading to a rise in the general level of musical experimentation and involvement.

Like the advent of any new technology, there is always a tendency towards an inflation of the importance of changes in production processes. While digital recording gear is capable of producing high-quality material, this does not mean that all digital recordings will indeed achieve a professional level of sound. Conventional studios are still likely to be utilised for projects funded by major corporate interests, mostly established artists. In addition to this, artists keen to use digital technology still have to raise necessary funds to purchase equipment and/or a powerful home computer. While the costs of such hardware are dramatically cheaper than previous recording technology,
these developments do not automatically infer a completely
democratic musical production environment, most obviously
for those unable to afford a computer, racks of effects or digital
mixing desks in the first place.

So, it would be highly premature to suggest that the
emergence of these forms of music production and distribution
have completely replaced, or even made a significant impact
on the established means of production in the music industry.
Paul Chambers, who runs his own digital suite in the hamlet
of Possum’s Creek and participates in the Edgecore collective,
acknowledged the advances in home recording equipment that
have enabled his own creativity to emerge in the field of
electronic dance music, yet offered a less utopian view of the
wider commercial viability of home recordings, and the need
for further mastering and professional promotion:

To a certain extent it’s changed. You’ve got access to a lot
more software, and it’s quite easy to make your own music,
which wasn’t available 10 years ago, 20 years ago, but I’ve
been making music, we go and get it mastered, and there is
a level where the better gear you’ve got, the better sound
you’re going to get, so there is still that. We just try to do the
best we can. 17

In addition, systems of production that have emerged in
Australian electronic music circles and on the Far North Coast
only partly deal with the dilemmas of distribution: the fact
that power in ‘conventional’ music capitalism is now
concentrated in the nexus of control and distribution of
copyright material. While music production of the type
described here tended to exist in discrete networks of producers
and consumers, it is unlikely to impact on wider markets for
music commodities. Internet distribution has been discussed
as one way of bridging gaps between artists/producers and
wider markets, beyond the reach of multinational interests in
the music industry. Yet these too, can only succeed with points
of access from other key sites. At the same time as home
production has become more apparent in Australian electronica
and in regions such as the Far North Coast, it has also exploded
in Europe, North America and Asia (such as Japan’s taku-roku
‘home recording’ movement). While this is a very positive
thing in terms of widening the scope of grass-roots music
production and the possibilities of transmitting recordings
across geographical space, without strategic linkages as with
Digital Psionics’ subcultural alliances, or Organarchy’s
network of activist connections, new and vibrant sounds, as
well as the radical possibilities of electronic dance cultures,
are likely to be swallowed up in a sea of digital noise.

and a regional music industry, PhD thesis, University of Sydney.