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Tim OLAVESON

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE - AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph.D. (Religious Studies)

GRADE - DEGREE

Department of Classics and Religious Studies

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT - FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

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the Rave Experience in Central Canada

M-F. Guédon

DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS DE LA THÈSE - THESIS EXAMINERS

P. Beyer

B. Given

C. Laughlin

R. Shields

J.-M. De Koninck, Ph.D.

LE DOYEN DE LA FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES
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**“Non-Stop Ecstatic Dancing”: An Ethnographic Study
of *Connectedness* and the Rave Experience in Central Canada**

Tim Olaveson

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the rave experience in central Canada. More specifically, I investigate in detail the experience that ravers around the world have called *connectedness*. I begin by describing the historical antecedents to rave, which trace back much farther than most people believe. Moving through acid rock, disco, the Northern soul scene, New York garage, Chicago house, and Detroit techno, I then describe acid house—rave’s immediate predecessor—and its technological quantum leaps, electronic and chemical. Discussing its roots on the island of Ibiza and in the popular culture capital of the world, “Madchester,” I then trace acid house’s explosion into what we now know as rave (despite the fact that the term was passé before the phenomenon had even hit North America). I then review the literature on rave culture, which falls into two broad categories: sociology and cultural studies. Finding most of these analyses lacking due to their underlying epistemological foundations and resultant methodological approaches, I illustrate how the most fruitful approach to studying rave, especially *the rave experience*, is an experiential one. After outlining the fundamental tenets and some methodological requirements of experiential anthropology, I describe the methods used in this research. In the following chapter, I provide a multi-sited narrative of the people and places I encountered during field research, with a particular focus on my own lived experience. I then illustrate how some aspects of rave in central Canada allow it to be characterized as a religious or spiritual experience for some participants. I go on to explore the central theme of that experience next—connectedness. Again using my own and my informants’ experiences as illustrative, I outline the five key features of connectedness, in the process demonstrating its equivalence with Emile Durkheim’s *collective effervescence* and Victor Turner’s *communitas*. Finally, in the conclusion I pose the questions: What is the teleology of rave? and What is the future of rave? I answer these by returning to Durkheim and Turner, particularly the similar but seldom recognized processual and dialectical understanding of social life inherent in both of their anthropologies.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	6
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	13
A WORD ABOUT SPACES AND PLACES	14
CHAPTER OUTLINE	15
CHAPTER 2 - DISCO, ACID HOUSE, RAVE, CLUB – THE HISTORY OF RAVE AND THE BIRTH OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC CULTURES	16
THE ANTECEDENTS OF RAVE CULTURE	16
THE RISE OF THE DJ	18
ACID AND THE 60'S	20
NORTHERN SOUL	22
THE REAL DISCO	24
THIS IS OUR HOUSE	31
THE PARADISE GARAGE AND LARRY LEVAN	32
THE WAREHOUSE AND FRANKIE KNUCKLES	35
HOUSE TRACKS	42
DETROIT TECHNO	44
ACIEED!	47
HOMEGROWN HOUSE	50
IBIZA	52
SUMMER OF LOVE	55
MADCHESTER RAVE ON	58
RAVE	60
JUNGLE	70
NORTH AMERICA THE (B)RAVE	73
RAVE TODAY: "ELECTRONIC MUSIC CULTURE"	88
CHAPTER 3 - SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RAVE	98
AS MORAL PANIC	101
AS ECSTATIC DISAPPEARANCE	102
AS SUBCULTURAL CAPITAL	104
VARIATIONS ON A(N) (OLD) THEME: RAVE AS RESISTANCE	106
TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONES	106
SEX, GENDER, AND RAVE	108
CLUBCULTURES?	111
AS THE "NEW TRIBES"	113
AS RAVE-OLUTION	116
RAVE STUDIES IN CANADA	118
THE NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH TO STUDYING THE RAVE EXPERIENCE	122
EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH	126
THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE	126

FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE TO EXPERIENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY	130
RADICAL EMPIRICISM AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRAXIS	135
RESEARCH METHODS	139
<u>CHAPTER 4 - THE RAVE EXPERIENCE IN CENTRAL CANADA</u>	148
BEGINNINGS – TORONTO CANDY	148
FREAKIN’ 2000 – MY FIRST “REAL” RAVE	152
LA BELLE PROVINCE	164
“THE MONTREAL CROWD”	164
EVAN, CHARLES, AND THE OTTAWA SCENE	185
RAVING AS A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE	204
EARLY LITERATURE	204
“MUSIC, DANCE, AND RAVING BODIES”: RELIGIOUS THEMES IN THE CENTRAL CANADIAN	
RAVE EXPERIENCE	207
RAVES, RITUALS, AND RITUALIZING	236
<u>CHAPTER 5 - CONNECTEDNESS IN THE RAVE: A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE OF COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE/ COMMUNITAS</u>	242
“CONNECTEDNESS”	242
EMILE DURKHEIM AND VICTOR TURNER AS THEORISTS OF RITUAL	246
COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE/COMMUNITAS	250
CONNECTEDNESS AS COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE/COMMUNITAS	258
ELECTRICITY, EXALTATION, ENTHUSIASM	258
EMBODIED, NON-RATIONAL, EMOTIONAL	264
COMMUNAL AND COLLECTIVE	272
TRANSGRESSIVE, LEVELING AND HUMANIZING	280
TEMPORARY, CREATIVE, AND UTOPIAN	286
SO NOW WHAT?	293
<u>CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION – THE TELEOLOGY OF THE RAVE EXPERIENCE</u>	295
CONNECTEDNESS AND DIALECTICS	298
OTHER DIALECTICAL MODELS OF RELIGION AND SOCIETY	299
THE FUTURE OF RAVE	304
REFERENCES	307
IMAGES	320

Chapter 1 -

Introduction

December 12, 2002 - Tiesto @ The Koolhaus, Toronto, Canada

It's 11:30 pm and I'm standing in an impossibly long line outside of The Koolhaus in Toronto, waiting to see the world's #1 DJ, according to BPM Magazine. As we and the 300 or so people in front of us inch forward, I can feel the anticipation and anxiety building in the pit of my stomach. As usual, I feel out of place here, a double-impostor trying desperately to fit in--a 31 year-old anthropologist trying to impersonate a 20-something pleasure-seeking devotee of trance.

I'm conscious of the chatter of people around me in the line, but not really of its substance. I remind myself to pay attention, to listen for anything significant, for anything meaningful. People talk in whispers or hushed tones, discussing who they're going to meet inside, how much they paid for their ticket. Occasionally I hear a reference to what drugs they're going to take tonight.

Against this inauspicious backdrop, Bella, the girl standing next to me, suddenly blurts out in a loud voice, "So would this be considered a real rave, or like, what is this?" Trying desperately to hide my embarrassment, I ask Bella to keep her voice down so we can retain at least a modicum of coolness, and then try to explain to her the difference between this event and a "real" rave.

This is the first rave for Bella and the guy standing next to her, Parva. Neither one knows what to expect, and I can see the apprehension on their faces. I've been doing this for 3 years now. I feel responsible for them, in more than one way: for the \$50+ ticket to the event that I encouraged them to buy; and for their entire experience and well-being during the night, since they are beginners, and I'm now a "veteran" of the scene, even though I often don't feel like it.

After a surprisingly short 20 minutes and a moderate frisking at the door, we eventually get in. The lineup at the coat check is now impossibly long, so we decide to forego it and leave our coats somewhere inside the club. We pick a meeting spot or "home base" and check out the club. It's a typical after-hours club, modeled after countless others in cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Amsterdam, etc., which in turn were modeled after legendary house music venues like The Paradise Garage, the Warehouse, and Manchester's hallowed Hacienda. It's essentially nothing more than a large warehouse--a rectangular room approximately 400x300 feet in dimension with bare concrete floor and industrial-type aluminum siding for walls. There are drink and juice bars around two adjoining walls of the room. Alcohol is being sold, but I see very few people walking around with alcoholic drinks in their hands. Most of them clutch either a bottle of water or some type of energy drink with a chic, postmodern label on it. This is a Goldclub event, one in a series of special "traveling" clubs with its own lighting, sound, banners and other ornamentations, and superstar headlining DJs. Goldclub is sponsored by the cigarette company Benson and Hedges, and is now a recognized brand. Although I will attend another Goldclub event later in the summer of 2003, this is my first and I'm impressed by the elaborate lighting and video equipment. Two large video screens with gold neon lighting rimming them hang down on either side of the DJ booth at the front of the club. Throughout the night they display mildly psychedelic imagery interspersed with promotional graphics for the DJs and their compilation albums, as well as the Benson and Hedges logo. Draped from the ceiling at various places throughout the club are dozens of "intelligent" lighting systems, whirling, flashing, pulsating to the beats of the music played by the DJ. Four lasers perched near the ceiling fire gold coloured darts of light into and over the crowd of dancers from opposite ends of the room.

After we stash our coats behind a sofa at the back of the room and survey the club, we head to the dancefloor. It's now 12:20 am. The DJ playing is Luke Fair. He also belongs in the trance genre, and I'm impressed with his track selection. The crowd is too. People are dancing energetically and the floor is full. As usual, it takes me a while to unwind and shed some self-consciousness. I try to get into the music and do at times, but it's a fleeting type of abandonment. I can see that Bella and Parva too are enjoying the dancing, but still appear a bit reserved.

... It's now about 1:50 am, and the crowd is growing impatient, as am I. We came here to see Tiesto, the greatest DJ in the world. While waiting in line for the bathroom earlier, several

people mentioned that he was supposed to come on at 1:00. That was almost an hour ago. The tension has been building steadily for more than 2 hours now. It's palpable. The dance floor has gotten steadily more packed. Luke Fair has done a great job keeping the energy up and the crowd moving, but he's not the reason most of us are here. I occasionally hear shouts of "Tiesto!" from the crowd. I'm starting to wonder if the promoters are going to have a riot on their hands soon.

Suddenly a slender figure appears on the DJ platform beside Luke Fair. The crowd gives out a cheer, and I recognize Tiesto from the flyer for the event, which sports a picture of the handsome DJ on its cover. He nods his head up and down to the track currently playing, and puts his headphones around his neck.

A few minutes later, the track comes to an end. The crowd yells appreciatively as the opening DJ leaves the platform, and then for about 10 seconds there is relative silence ... Suddenly a synthesizer riff wafts over the crowd from the massive speakers encircling the dancefloor, a bright, uplifting melody with classical overtones. People begin to cheer louder and louder as the melody builds in volume and pace. After 40 seconds or so, the kick drum comes crashing in at 140 beats per minute with an explosion of stomach-smashing bass and a smattering of syncopated, machine gun high hats.

The crowd absolutely detonates. People are jumping up and down, shaking their bodies, screaming and calling out "Tiesto!" at the top of their lungs. I am too. The excitement and anticipation built up for what seemed like an eternity has finally reached its climax. The dam of emotions, excitement, and effervescence has finally broken. I look around at people's eyes and faces. They're totally transfixed by the person on stage. One guy next to me has a T-shirt with 00 written on the back and above it the slogan "Tiesto is God". A little while later I look to my right and make eye contact with another young male of Latin descent. "The nod" occurs--that moment of unspoken, almost invisible and yet apodictic communication between ravers. He comes over to me and I say that I can't believe how amazing this is. He agrees with me, looks me in the eye and says with the utmost genuineness, "The answer never comes easily. Defying definition, it's called Trance." We exchange the nod again, and then keep dancing.

As I dance to Tiesto's tidal wave of uplifting trance, the immenseness of what the Latino raver said to me suddenly hits me like a ton of bricks. Standing here in a concrete warehouse

crisscrossed with laser lights, immersed in a sea of euphoric, gyrating bodies, it is one of the most profound things I've ever heard. I focus my attention on everything around me, on how I'm feeling right now, on Tiesto and the magic he is weaving over the crowd, and I realize how absolutely and irrefutably true that statement is. I realize that this is one of the deepest and most profound experiences of my life, and I know beyond any doubt whatsoever that the same is true for many of the people dancing there with me. More than at any other time in the last 3 years of my life, I realize that the rave experience has been a religious one, not only for other people, but also for me. I also realize how difficult it's going to be to explain that to people who have never been to a rave, and who think that religion is something that only happens on Sundays in old buildings with pointed roofs. Then I stop thinking and just let Tiesto transport me to a totally other dimension...

One of North American parents' worst fears is discovering that it's 2:00 in the morning and they don't know what their kids are up to. They could be getting drunk at a house party. They could have snuck into a bar full of lonely, middle-aged men with the wrong intentions. Or worst of all, they could be at a *rave*. A rave, with sleazy drug pushers doling out brain-melting pills! A rave, where children barely old enough to understand what they're doing have wanton sex in dirty, dingy, abandoned warehouses in the seedy part of the city! A rave, where rival gangs face off with guns and knives and innocent children are killed in the crossfire! The only thing more terrifying to parents than their child being at a rave is their powerlessness to understand it all. Why would my child be at a rave? What is the attraction? Why can't they see how dangerous it is? Why do they do it? Why?

In the following pages I will attempt to answer these questions. I will explain, from an anthropological perspective, how and why the rave movement of the late 20th century blossomed into the largest ever youth cultural movement in recorded history.

And although directed at an academic audience rather than the fear-struck parents of teenagers, my explanation should provide some comfort to the latter as well.

Before beginning to unravel this mystery, however, I must establish the limitations of my explanation. By the time I'm finished writing this thesis, it will already in a sense be out of date. In fact, by the time I'm finished writing this *chapter*, my subject matter will have transformed itself in a myriad of ways. That is the challenge of attempting to write about rave culture.¹ Rave cultures are constantly on the move, constantly reworking and remaking themselves, constantly looking for the next big sound, the next big high. And this doesn't apply only to their music. Even the word "rave" is in a sense a misnomer, no longer meaningful to the participants of dance cultures in several areas of the world: as early as 1993, "raves" were considered extinct in Britain, partially because people had moved into after hours night clubs, and partially because the word tends to attract negative press (see for example Critcher 2000). As I will demonstrate below, this same cycle tends to repeat itself in communities around the world, including Canada. Although many of the events I attended over the past three and a half years were called "raves," some were called "parties," "clubs," "events," and "festivals."

¹ As well as there being literally dozens of different genres of "rave" or electronic music, there are also several different terms used to denote an event at which such music is played. Moreover, these terms tend to come in and out of usage over time and in certain geographies, and even according to participants' varying experiences in the subculture. For example, during fieldwork in 2000 in the city of Toronto, several informants explained to me that the word "rave" is now seen as dated and its use frowned upon, and Reynolds states that as early as 1989 "raver" was an insulting term in parts of Britain (see also McCall 2001; Reynolds 1999:77). "Party" was the more appropriate term at that time. However, when I used the term "party" in Quebec City in 2001, participants had no idea what I was talking about. To them, what we were doing was raving. The point of this discussion is that there is no one term that accurately captures all of the practices about which I write below. However, for the sake of simplicity and consistency, I will use the noun "rave" to refer in general to electronic music events, and the verb "raving" to refer to the practice of attending raves. In some cases I will use more specific terms, such as "clubs" or "clubbing" when referring to events in particular venues or in particular genres.

“So,” you may now be asking, “how can one possibly perform an anthropological study of a subculture that is never the same from one week to the next?” The answer is that, in a sense, one can’t. I can’t predict exactly what people will be listening to next weekend in Montreal’s glitzy, steamy Aria nightclub, even if I know who will be DJing there. I can’t predict exactly how people will be dancing, or exactly what drugs they will be taking. I can’t predict if there will be a significant number of men there on the prowl for a sexual encounter, or if the vibe² will just be open, friendly, and nonsexual. I can’t predict exactly what people will be wearing, how they will relate to each other, or what they will get out of the night. But I *can* tell you why the vast majority of them will be there, and I can tell you how many of them will be feeling. I can tell you these things for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that I could be there myself. You see, I have become a raver.

When I first decided to study rave culture and the rave experience, I contemplated focusing on the music, the fashions, the array of drugs consumed, and other types of data. I soon realized, however, how quickly these things changed within rave culture. I also began to realize something else, which led me to the focus of this research. I realized that raving, like so many other types of social experience that anthropologists and sociologists study, cannot be fitted neatly into conceptual categories and theoretical models. But more than this, I realized that raving is not only a social experience, it is fundamentally *an experience*.

What I mean by this is that raving, like an ever-increasing number of contemporary Western social practices, is not so much about fitting into a certain class or

² More will be said about “the vibe” later. For now it is enough to state that the vibe in a rave or night club is the general atmosphere and attitude of participants.

group, about dressing a certain way, or about consuming certain products, as it is about having (or “consuming” (Malbon 1999)) a certain type of experience. This is not to say that ravers and clubbers don’t exhibit recognizable social indicators and material culture. On the contrary, micro-rave and electronic music scenes have blossomed and are still blossoming around the globe, each with distinctive manners of dress, distinctive musical tastes, and distinctive predilections for the consumption of particular psychoactive drugs. And sociologists, political scientists, and cultural theorists have written several pages on these and other surface features of rave and club cultures, in an explosion of “rave studies” that began in the late 1990’s and is still picking up steam.

But as I read these and other studies of rave culture and rave participants, I still didn’t have a good sense of what was actually going on at a rave. Moreover, I began to get a sense from reading firsthand accounts by ravers that raving really wasn’t about any of these surface features. The *raison d’être* of raving seemed to be *the rave experience*. My curiosity was increasingly piqued as I read about how incredible and magical it was. It almost began to sound religious:

Although ravers don’t feel the need to give their superhuman power a name or personality, when a rave “goes off,” everyone has a shared experience of connectedness and hundreds or even thousands of people can feel like one being with a shared purpose and direction. (Fritz 1999:179)

As I continued reading about ecstatic ravers “trance dancing” all night long, I began to realize that the existing academic literature on raves was missing an entire wealth of data that appeared to be central to the rave, according to ravers themselves. And it also became apparent why that data was all but missing from existing academic studies of the rave. I realized that, to quote Canadian middle-aged raver Jimi Fritz again, “Raving is not

something that can be experienced vicariously” (Fritz 1999:199). I realized that to truly understand the essence of the rave as ravers saw it—the rave experience—I would have to become a raver myself. So that’s what I did.

Research Questions

As Critcher noted of the British club scene in 2000, “With half a million adherents a week and over 40% of 15-24 year olds visiting a club at least once a month, clubbing is a highly popular pursuit and a significant part of the leisure industry. Yet little has been done to understand its appeal” (Critcher 2000:158). With reference to rave culture in Canada, the situation is even more bleak. Brian Wilson, author of the only English language multi-year social study of Canadian rave culture whose results have been published, sums up the situation:

Although a tradition of ethnographic research on youth subcultures in Canada has emerged since the 1980s, one of the most prominent and historically significant subcultures of the 1990s and now the millennium, the ‘rave’ subculture, has generally been overlooked for its substantive and theoretical importance in Canadian youth studies. (Wilson 2002:375)

This thesis is in large part an attempt to fill precisely this void. While dozens of academic pieces have been written on sociological aspects of rave cultures around the world, less than a handful have attempted to present an emic view of the rave experience, to “provide an appreciation of [rave’s] precise cultural form” (Critcher 2000:158). Aside from Wilson’s, which focuses on the classical sociological notion of resistance, none has done so in Canada.

Two basic questions have guided this research into the rave experience:

1. What is the nature of the rave experience?

2. Can the rave experience be modeled anthropologically, and if so, how?

In the pages that follow I will answer these questions, drawing on three and a half years of archival and intermittent field research in the central Canadian rave scene.

A Word About Spaces and Places

“The central Canadian rave scene” as a firmly bounded geographical or social space does not exist. Rather it is the term I have coined (in conjunction with colleague M. Takahashi) to refer to the rave and club cultures existing in and between the major cities of Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec City. I will discuss the area in which I performed fieldwork more fully in the third chapter on methodology. But for now, it is important to note that although I will indeed be making some “universal” claims about rave culture and the rave experience (despite the dangers of doing so in the current anti-universalist / anti-essentialist intellectual climate), I do not intend to paint a homogeneous and static picture of them. Rather, I will

contend that raves are characterized by the tension between their expression at localized, socio-cultural particularistic levels, and within larger cultural globalizing tendencies, much like other emerging “religio-social” movements in the 21st century. ...[While] [l]ocal cultural influences tend to shape rave events on a multiplicity of levels, including the utilization of space, the selection of music, social and interpersonal atmosphere and communication patterns, the participants’ dress, and the selection of psychoactive drugs available ... a number of themes and structural³ elements seem to be common to the rave experience, and to rave culture as a whole ... (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:77)

What I do in the pages that follow is use written sources, interview data, participant observation, and my own firsthand experience at events in the central

³ By “structural” what I mean here are the things that define rave events, the elements without whose presence an event would not be called a rave. An example of one of these is electronic music. Few ravers would consider an event a rave if there were not some form of electronic music present, whether the genre is “house,” “jungle,” “techno,” “trance,” etc.

Canadian scene as a window into these deeper, more structural components of the rave experience worldwide. And in contrast to the “surface” elements of rave, which as I mentioned above change on a weekly basis, I will demonstrate that these structural elements have thus far changed very little since the birth of rave and its predecessor, acid house, in the late 1980’s.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two of the thesis provides a history of the dance cultures that led up to the rave phenomenon, including its immediate predecessor, acid house, focusing primarily on the countries of England, Canada and the United States. In chapter three I review the academic literature on rave, which originates primarily from the disciplines sociology and cultural studies. I also point out some of the shortcomings of previous approaches to the academic study of raves, and then outline the epistemology and methodology underpinning this study. In chapter four I relate some of my own and my informants’ rave experiences, focusing on specific recurring themes. Drawing on more recent rave studies and my own fieldwork I then engage with the idea of the rave experience as a religious experience, and address the problem of rave as ritual. Chapter five explores in depth the most often reported component of the rave experience—the experience of connectedness. It models connectedness and the wider rave experience using a theoretical framework developed elsewhere (Olaveson 2001) —the notion of *communitas*/collective effervescence and dialectics. Finally, in chapter six I conclude by orienting connectedness, rave, and similar cultural experiments within a wider sociological and evolutionary perspective.

Chapter 2 -

Disco, Acid House, Rave, Club – The History of Rave and the Birth of Electronic Music Cultures

Spreading to every provincial corner of the UK, rave culture became a highly organized leisure industry. Still underground, in terms of its atmosphere, it was at the same time the norm: what Everykid did, every weekend. –Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy*, pg. 79

... [A]s a musicologist I find [rave's] musical structuring differs more radically from that of its precursors than most previous forms of pop. In fact, I think you almost have to go back to the change from Leroy Anderson's 'Blue Tango' into Presley's version of 'Hound Dog' to find such an essential musical shift in the world of Euro-American popular music. –Philip Tagg, "From Refrain to Rave," pg. 213

The Antecedents of Rave Culture

Rave culture has its historical antecedents, distant in dance halls of the inter and post war years, immediate in the disco of the 1970s, but it adds a new dimension. In bringing together music, dance and drugs, it produces an experience which is greater than the sum of its parts, especially in its suffusive ambience: a sense of being and belonging. –Chas Critcher, "Still Raving: Social Reaction to Ecstasy," pg. 153

I would agree almost totally with this very insightful statement of Chas Critcher's, except that he seems to imply that the combination of music, dance, and drugs was not present in dance halls and disco. As I show below, these three elements have been present

in every North American and British dance culture in the twentieth century. I do agree that there is something different about its latest incarnation in rave culture though. But rather than the mere presence of these three elements, it is their advanced sophistication, driven primarily by technology, which makes rave special. Where jazz and disco *began* to employ rapid, energetic music, dance, and psychoactive drugs to produce extraordinary experiences in their habitués, *rave took this to another level altogether*.

Any study of rave cultures and the rave experience cannot avoid discussing the media central to it—vinyl records, turntables, samplers, mixers, drum machines, bass machines—as well as the role and practices of the persons who manipulate those media to produce a rave—the DJ (Disc Jockey) and the music producer (often one and the same person). As several authors have noted, from the 1990s onward the DJ has steadily risen in status and visibility as a pop cultural icon, to the point where he⁴ has replaced traditional performing artists like the rock band as the musical superstar of our time. DJs are such an integral and focal point of rave cultures that both they and their equipment are regularly co-opted by multi-national corporations' product advertising: television advertisements will often insert a passing shot of a DJ standing over turntables, hands on the mixer controls, into an otherwise totally unrelated narrative. Such obvious and often facile marketing gimmicks are no doubt a desperate attempt by corporations to keep pace with and capitalize on a popular culture dominated by the idiom of electronic music produced, remixed and selected for consumption by DJs.

⁴ Throughout the text, I will use the pronoun "he" to refer to the DJ, for both simplicity and for the fact that the overwhelming majority of DJs are male. It should be understood that the term DJ implies both sexes, however.

Despite the recentness of the frenzied popularity and cult of the DJ, it is important to have a brief look at the history of the DJ and the playing of recorded music to crowds, for several reasons. First, because the rave phenomenon occurred during the Information Age, when attention spans and the average person's sense of history are constantly shrinking, it is important to remember that it wasn't always this way. Second, examining the history of the DJ and Anglo-american dance cultures allows us to retrace the way we came to the present moment of the global domination of rave and electronic music cultures. And third, contrasting the rather meager role of the DJ in music cultures of the past to the present situation highlights just how revolutionary the developments of the past 20 years have been.

The Rise of the DJ

When acid house and rave culture blossomed in the late eighties, it would find in itself all manner of evocative echoes from the psychedelic sixties—from the feelings of community and the scale of its events to the belief that this combination of drugs and music could really, no honestly ... if only you'd try it ... change the world. —Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life*, pg. 65

In *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, probably the most thorough and detailed examination of DJs and dance culture in print, music journalists Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton trace the history of the disc jockey from the earliest days of radio to the superstardom of the late 1990's. The following discussion is based primarily upon their work, as well as various other written sources.

In early 1920s America, the medium of radio began to flower. After an initial debate as to how the airwaves should be used and the first Radio Conference in 1922, hundreds of stations appeared within months. At the same time in Britain, the first news

broadcast was read on the BBC by Arthur Burrows. Five years later Christopher Stone became Britain's first DJ, playing American jazz records. As more and more radio stations appeared and the use of records increased, a tension that would reassert itself time and again in the history of popular music during the 20th century appeared. Due to the superior sound reproduction of live performances, recorded music was considered an inferior art medium. As a result, the U.S. Department of Commerce granted preferential licenses to radio stations that didn't use recorded music. However, with the Depression, the use of records increased as radio stations and networks couldn't afford to broadcast only live music (Brewster and Broughton 2000:24). Naturally, this development caused a reaction among musicians, whose livelihood depended upon live performances. Over several decades, a conflict ensued in Britain and the United States between musicians and music publishers on the one hand, and broadcasters and DJs on the other. Believed to have been coined in 1941, the term "disc jockey" was likely originally meant to be an insult.

Brewster and Broughton claim that the genre of rock and roll itself was created by a DJ: "Rock'n'roll is said to have been born on the night of March 21, 1952, when Alan Freed, a DJ on Cleveland's WJW, hosted his Moondog Coronation Ball, a huge concert of rhythm and blues. ... [T]he event drew a phenomenal crowd, almost wholly black" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:34). Quoting a college student of that time, they continue that the authorities broke up the event because they had never seen that many black people in the street (similar moral panics would occur during the birth of rave). The local press campaigned for Freed to leave town, which he did. Freed moved to New York and enjoyed huge success on WINS, playing mostly "black" records. As he continued to help

popularize rock 'n' roll music, the genre received negative reactions from mainstream America. Eventually, both Freed's and rock 'n' roll's popularity garnered them too much attention from the authorities: the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a large "payola" (record companies paying DJs to play their records) investigation, one of the results of which was Freed's conviction, which carried a \$500 fine and a six month suspended jail sentence.

Acid and the 60's

Although not dominated by DJs per se, Brewster and Broughton include acid rock and the counterculture of the 1960s as another important era in the evolution of the DJ and his role and status within popular culture. It was in the acid rock era, they write, that clubs, musicians, and event promoters began to experiment increasingly with how to enhance the music experience, not only with psychoactive drugs, but also with visual stimuli, props, and other types of performance, a theme that would evolve even further by the time it hit rave culture. Ken Kesey's Acid Tests of 1965-1966, for example, "were a series of freeform "events" in which the participants drank Kool-Aid laced with [LSD]" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:66). The Grateful Dead played at the first Acid Test on December 4, 1965, and according to Brewster and Broughton, revolutionized the way people listened and danced to music:

The Dead did to rock music what the disco DJs would later do for dance music: they contorted it to within an inch of its life. ... Their "songs" became rubberized workouts that were tailored there and then, specifically for the needs of dancers, whose bodies—and, often, clothing—had been loosened from their moorings and set adrift on memory bliss (Brewster and Broughton 2000:66)

While they weren't DJs, the way the Dead twisted and experimented with sounds and images to enhance and intensify the drug and dance experience, including using such devices as tape loops, recording devices, video equipment projecting psychedelic images onto walls, and people drumming along with the music, anticipating the techniques of future house and rave DJs and promoters.

Similar developments were occurring in other locations. In New York, an early psychedelic club was the Electric Circus, which was decorated to look like an enormous Bedouin tent, complete with projections of home movies, liquid lights and psychedelic patterns. Andy Warhol booked it for a "happening" the entire month of April 1966, during which the Velvet Underground played. In London, at clubs like UFO, both live bands and recorded music played and anything went, as "...people would trip out, read books, dance or simply stare at the refracting patterns of lights on the wall" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:68).

After "a trip too many," however, rock music would drift away from rhythm and dancing and become "music for the head," yet another pattern that would surface in rave culture. However,

The whole hippie trip had opened up the doors of perception for club promoters, showing them just how much it was possible to do within the club experience. This brief era also acted as a powerful inspiration in the lives of future visionaries like disco pioneer David Mancuso—indeed disco's early years would be full of the brotherly love which sixties acid seemed to foment. Its styles, its artwork, its decor, and its *psychedelia* would be echoed in the shock waves of acid house twenty years later. ... Once the disc jockey had come out from the radio and entered the dancing arena, his job had changed radically. He was now no longer a simple record selector and tastemaker, he had the essential fact of audience response to deal with ... in some sense, the audience *was* the event, and the DJ a responsive controller of their pleasure. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:71)

Northern Soul

A full fifteen years before rave culture would whistle into existence, northern soul provided it with an almost complete blueprint. Here was a scene where working-class kids came together in large numbers, across great distances, to obscure places, to take drugs and dance to music that no one else cared about. It was a scene in which togetherness and belonging were all important. —Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life*, pg. 77

The northern soul scene is unfortunately often overlooked in histories of dance cultures. But as the quotation above illustrates, disco, acid house and rave culture would owe it a huge debt. Geographically, it was centred around a number of smaller cities in northern England, mainly manufacturing towns like Manchester, Wigan, Tunstall, and Blackpool. Spatially, the scene was entirely club-based—its songs didn't need, nor did they get, radio play. Northern soul music was comprised of songs by Motown artists, especially obscure artists, or obscure songs by well-known artists and those who copied their sound. The key criteria for them was they had to be danceable and very rare.

The northern soul scene helped to develop a new respect for the DJ. It was seen as an artform, both in the playing of the records and in locating them. Northern soul DJs hunted down and collected rare records (this is likely where the term “rare groove” originated) with a zealously that bordered on fanaticism. The scene was also where some of the techniques of disco, house and acid house DJs were developed, including playing one track after another with no pauses between them, and introducing builds and lulls in tempo (Brewster and Broughton 2000:84).

Some of northern soul's legendary clubs were Wigan Casino, voted as the world's best discotheque in 1978 by Billboard magazine, and The Torch. Ian Levine, probably the greatest northern soul DJ, recounts his first night DJing at The Torch:

[T]hat night was the first night I DJed there and it was the most electrifying night of my whole career. ... You could not have squeezed one

more person in that club. They were hanging off the rafters. It must've been 120 degrees. It was so hot and packed, the sweat was rising off people's bodies as condensation and dripping back onto them from the ceiling. (qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:89)

Ian Dewhirst, another key northern soul DJ, describes The Torch in a passage that could also have been penned about the legendary rave clubs to come: "It was like a dream. Like suddenly knowing you're home. And this wonderful ... feeling of togetherness. All these other enthusiasts, misfits and nutters that had traveled from all over the place. It just felt like a really little, elite, very tight scene" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:88). Also like rave, unfortunately, the northern soul scene began to fracture into two camps (rave would later fracture into dozens), as progressive-oriented DJs branched out into new directions and were opposed by traditionalists. The split contributed to the scene's ultimate demise. Yet the immense impact it had on dance and club cultures echoed on for years. Its impact on the people who spent many sweaty, euphoric nights in small clubs in the north of England was no less prolific. Andy Wynne, a former northern soul clubber, describes how he bought the sign from the Wigan Casino as a way of keeping alive the best times of his life:

Everybody thought I was crazy. I told the people at work I was taking Thursday and Friday off. They asked if I was going away. I said, "No, I'm going to Wigan." You couldn't begin to explain to them. They wouldn't understand. It signified a particularly happy time in my life when I discovered the greatest music, the greatest atmosphere, the greatest scene ... (Brewster and Broughton 2000:105)

Wynne's story also highlights how difficult it is to write about or describe the club (rave) experience, and how one must really experience it for oneself.

The Real Disco

These days the name "disco" is stuck to *Saturday Night Fever*, to the Bee Gees, Abba and the Village People, to plastic compilation CDs and tacky retro club nights ... In its own time, however, for its original family, it was the word of salvation. ... Disco was the revolution. Disco was freedom, togetherness, love. Disco was dirty, spiritual, thrilling, powerful. Disco was secret, underground, dangerous. It was non-blond, queer, hungry. It was emancipation. ... [I]t was the hottest, sexiest, most redeeming and mostly deeply loving dance music there has been. –Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, pg. 126

Most people do not know the real history of disco, nor have they ever heard real disco. Instead, as Brewster and Broughton state above, mention of the word conjures up tacky clothes and tacky songs, style with no substance. Disco followed on the heels of the cultural fermentation and experimentation of the 1960s. And like almost all clubland innovations, it sprang from "the energetic underclasses" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:128). Disco was in fact a part of the movement for increased rights and public visibility of gays and African-Americans. With decreased attendance by the upper crust of New York society and with increasing tolerance of openly gay patrons in night spots, black, Hispanic and gay attendance at clubs in New York rose. Several clubs actually catered specifically to the gay population. While possibly the least acknowledged, this association between black, homosexual men and dance culture was the single biggest engine driving the latter, from the dawn of disco right up until the birth of rave in the 1990s.

Francis Grasso was the first true DJ in the modern sense. He didn't just play what the crowd wanted to hear. He didn't just play top 40 hits. Although he did respond to what made the dancers move, he subjected the crowd to his taste, and took them on a journey. He changed the relationship between the DJ and his audience. He manipulated the crowd, took them on a voyage, a narrative. Grasso was a star in New York; he dated

Liza Minnelli and was a good friend of Jimi Hendrix. And like other DJs to come, Grasso consumed drugs voraciously and lived life to the fullest.

One of the things that made Grasso unique was the fact that he kept the beat going constantly, kept the dancers up continuously. The club where he honed his DJing skills was the Sanctuary in Hell's Kitchen, which was housed in a former German Baptist church and described by Albert Goldman as "the first totally uninhibited gay discotheque in America." Grasso kept the dancefloor packed beyond capacity all night, every night of the week. Sanctuary was a wild place:

Housed in an old church in the Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan, when the club opened in 1970 it was called the Church: the decks were on the altar, church pews served as seats, and a huge painted devil's head leered from the wall surrounded by naked angels indulging in just about every sexual act imaginable. ... Drug dealing was open, and although sex was confined to the toilets, the boys on the dancefloor simulated it by grinding against each other, sometimes forming long humping daisy chains across the club. (Garratt 1998:9)

Grasso was not the first DJ to beat mix (overlap the beats of the song about to end with the one just beginning), but his extended mixes took the technique to a new level, which was more difficult during that period because songs had live, imperfect drummers on them, rather than electronic beats as today's tracks⁵ do. Grasso is also said to have perfected the slip-cue, during which a record is held stationary overtop of a spinning turntable with a felt pad on top of it, and then dropped in at the exact moment the beat starts. Some of the other techniques he pioneered are using two copies of the same record

⁵ "Track" is the modern term commonly used to denote a song. The term track probably originated in Chicago during the beginnings of the house music scene. The way music is produced is by recording each "track" of a song (i.e. the rhythm track, the melody track, the vocal track, etc.) and then mixing them together into the finished song. As house music began to blossom in Chicago, producers began creating minimalist songs that consisted of little more than a drum or rhythm track, which could be played by DJs on their own or to supplement another complete song.

to extend a song, and phasing, during which a second copy of the same song is played simultaneously, but slightly out of synchronization, which creates an echo effect. Grasso was soon joined at Sanctuary by two proteges, Steve D'Aquisto and Michael Cappello. Despite being just sixteen years old, Cappello was a natural and later became one of the key DJs of the disco era, playing at the Limelight club. The three DJs would spend several days together playing and hunting for records, fueled by speed and crystal methamphetamine.

Another legendary and extremely influential figure in the history of dance cultures was David Mancuso. Born in Utica, New York, and raised in an orphanage, Mancuso eventually moved to New York City. In 1970 he began throwing after hours parties in the loft where he lived on 647 Broadway. This legendary space in dance and club history simply became known as The Loft. What made Loft parties so famous was that they set the standard for the best disco and house clubs to come, in many dimensions. Mancuso was an extremely warm and loving person, and somewhat of a mystic: "Mancuso has lived with a lifelong obsession about the relationship between recorded music, the person who plays that music and the bodies and souls of the people listening and dancing" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:142). He paid exquisite attention to all dimensions of his club, including the quality of the sound system, the selection of music played, the psychoactive drugs on hand for consumption, the decor, and the status of his guests. In this regard he too was foundational in developing the archetype for the total club/rave experience, and would influence several after him, not least of which was Larry Levan. For the sound system, Mancuso asked a well known sound technician of the time, Alex Rosner, to rebuild the club. As a testament to how important Mancuso took the club

environment to be and how determined he was to give the gift of the perfect night to his guests, Brewster and Broughton claim that "The precision of the sound system which Rosner and Mancuso created between them has subsequently become the accepted standard for every nightclub in the world" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:143).

Equally as important as the quality of the sound at The Loft was the quality of the people. Entrance was by invitation only. This created a warm, intimate, and caring atmosphere:

A clientele selected by genuine friendship, music and sound that was out of this world, and a uniquely welcoming environment: no one had ever been anywhere quite like this before. The Loft was a revelation. Only a couple of miles separated it from glamorous clubs like Arthur, Le Club and Cheetah, but it was worlds apart in concept and execution. Since his many friends were drawn from the full spectrum of the counterculture, Mancuso's club became a refuge from the outside world; a secret cabal of the disaffected and disenfranchised. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:144)

One of the key themes that will emerge in later discussions of the ethos of the rave experience is its highly emotional nature. The Loft experience appears to have been very similar, according to those who were there. The combination of the unrivalled sound quality, the intimacy of the participants with each other, and perhaps most importantly, the intentional and loving manner in which the music and atmosphere was selected, produced some of the most transcendent experiences for those who were there:

To many of his regulars, David Mancuso was a god-like figure, revered and respected. Over a brilliant sound system, he played Motown, rock, African, Latin, and later Philly soul along with hard-edged Euro funk bands, and many who were later to become major players in the New York club scene had their first taste of underground clubbing at the Loft. "He didn't play records unless they were very serious," recalled Larry Levan years later. "I used to watch people cry in the Loft for a slow song because it was so pretty." (Garratt 1998:13)

Dancing at the Loft was like riding waves of music, being carried along as one song after another built relentlessly to a brilliant crest and broke, bringing almost involuntary shouts of approval from the crowd, then smoothed out, softened, and slowly began welling up to another peak. (Vince Aletti, qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:146)

Besides Mancuso, other influential DJs and clubs at the birth of disco in New York City were Nicky Siano at the Gallery, Walter Gibbons at Galaxy 21, Tee Scott at Better Days, Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles at the Continental Baths, and David Rodriguez at the Ginza and the Limelight. Rodriguez, a heavy drug user who died of AIDS, is fondly remembered by his peers as one of the most aggressive DJs of the time, but also one of the most passionate ones. In an interview in the mid-1970s Rodriguez describes how disco and the art of DJing were spiritual to him, a theme that runs throughout dance cultures in their early phases:

I view the whole scene as a spiritual congregation. ... You've got hundreds of people in a room, and their bond is the music. There isn't any tension between gays and straights; the common denominator is the music. I can get high—literally high—just on the music alone. Sometimes I weave the records together to tell a whole love story in one night. Do you know what it's like to hear the whole room sigh when a record starts? It's like applause to me! (qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:163)

Brewster and Broughton extend Rodriguez' thoughts further in a passage worth quoting at length:

Without a doubt, disco heralded the arrival of a new figure: the DJ as high priest.

There had been hints of this before, in clubs with names like Salvation and in the blasphemous imagery of a place like Sanctuary. Several earlier DJs, such as Grasso, had been able to whip up their crowds into a devotional frenzy and had been compared with witchdoctors, priests or other religious figures. During the rise of disco, the relatively recent line which the western world had drawn between dance and religion was questioned and blurred.

By the mid seventies, clubs, especially the gay ones, had truly become places of worship. For many, this was where you went to receive your weekly sacrament. "There is a lot to it," agrees Alex Rosner (who, after having built many of the disco era's more revered sound systems, now spends his time designing custom amplification for churches and synagogues). "George Freeman at Galaxy 21 often talked about that. He said he was providing a venue for a spiritual experience."

Interviewed for the *New York Post* in 1975, Steve D'Acquisto asserted, "Disco music is a mantra, a prayer—nobody goes to church anymore, and if you listen to those songs, like "Fight The Power," "Ease on Down The Road" and "Bad Luck," you're getting religious and political instruction."

Albert Goldman, in his insightful book *Disco!*, shared the sentiment: "The disco scene is a classic case of spilled religion, of seeking to obtain the spiritual exaltation of the sacred world by intensifying the pleasures of the secular." (Brewster and Broughton 2000:164)

Another famous New York disco with a religious name was inspirational for many. The Saint was a gay disco that opened in New York in 1980:

It was the headiest experience I've ever had in my life ... And it is unrivaled still. It was liberating, spiritually uplifting. That's where I learned to love my brothers. (anonymous clubber, qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:196)

The Saint's dancefloor would be a mass of bodies, each one sculpted to perfection, moving in tribal unison. To the strains of the club's ornate music, these beautiful men would proceed to get utterly trashed—on angel dust, Quaaludes, Ecstasy, cocaine, amphetamines. They were Greek gods with drug habits. The lights would go down, the projector would come on, and as New York went about its Sunday morning chores, a few thousand men would take a snort of their poppers and continue dancing near-naked under the electric stars.

"It was the apotheosis of the underground dance experience," said Michael Fierman, one of the Saint's DJs. "The main point of what we did was to create a commonality of experience for everyone there, unifying several thousand people." (Brewster and Broughton 2000:197)

Other cities around the U.S. began to develop disco scenes also. DJs were recruited from New York and Florida to establish new clubs in cities such as San Francisco.

In a pattern that Sarah Thornton delineates in *Club Cultures* (Thornton 1995), disco's demise came once news about it began to percolate into popular culture and it lost its "cultural capital." Soon everyone was buying, listening, and dancing to disco. Sensing an enormous cash cow, the major record labels wasted little time in flooding the market with it. Soon there was just "too much disco" and people began to hate it. Although the writing was already on the wall by that point, the release of *Saturday Night Fever* was the final straw. Disco had become too big for its own good and suffered a massive backlash. T-shirts and bumper stickers with the slogan "Disco sucks" appeared everywhere and record sales began to plummet dramatically, as did attendance in the clubs.

Brewster and Broughton are quick to point out that "the news of disco's death was always greatly exaggerated," however (Brewster and Broughton 2000:270). Rather than disappear completely, disco simply lowered its profile and transformed itself into something else: house. As Reynolds explains, house is a direct descendant of disco: "House didn't just resurrect disco, it intensified the very aspects that most offended the discophobes: the mechanistic repetition, the synthetic and electronic textures, the rootlessness, the "depraved" hypersexuality and "decadent" drugginess" (1999:24).

Brewster and Broughton summarize disco's enormous impact on dance and club culture in the following way:

Musically, disco was revolutionary to an astonishing degree. It was at the heart of some of the most radical innovations to date in the way music is envisaged, created and consumed. It changed clubs almost beyond recognition, it affected radio dramatically, and it had an important effect on the balance of power in the music industry between the independent labels and the majors. ... And with songs being constructed specially for the dancefloor (longer, more beat-oriented, more *functional*) and records being treated as DJs' tools rather than just representations of a live performance, there arrived a new conception of what popular music could be. ... As for the club DJ, the disco era was when he came of age. This

was when he became a star, even a god to his dancefloor. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:127)

An important point about disco is that it, like most revolutionary moments in dance music and dance culture, occurred when all of the necessary elements were present and in the right combination, such as a restless underclass, and the availability of new technologies (chemical, acoustic, etc.) or the use of existing technologies in new ways. This dynamic is common across all significant dance cultures, perhaps nowhere moreso than in disco's successor, house music.

This is Our House

In the beginning, there was Jack. And Jack had a groove. And from this groove came the groove of all grooves. And while one day viciously throwing down on his box, Jack boldly declared, "Let there be House!" And House music was born. I am, you see, I am the creator. And this is my House. And in my House there is only House music. But I am not so selfish, because once you've entered my House, it then becomes our House, and our House music. And you see, no one man owns House, because house music is a universal language spoken, understood by all. You see, House is a feeling, that no one can understand really, unless you're deep into the vibe of House. House is an uncontrollable desire to Jack your body. And as I told ya before, this is our house, and our House music. And in every house you understand, there is a keeper. And in this house the keeper is Jack. Now some of you might wonder, "who is Jack and what is it that Jack does?" Jack is the one who gives you the power to Jack your body. Jack is the one who gives you the power to do the snake. Jack is the one who gives you the key to the wiggly worm. Jack is the one who learns you how to walk your body. Jack is the one that can bring nations and nations of all Jackers together under one house. You may be black, you may be white, you may be Jew, or Gentile. It don't make a difference in our house. And this is fresh!!!

So go the lyrics to "Can You Feel It?" by Mr. Fingers, aka Larry Heard, an early and legendary house music producer. "Can You Feel It?" is likely cited by more people

than any other as the prototypical house track, for its beat and its bubbly, squelchy bassline.⁶ But the spoken lyrics quoted above also serve consummately as an anthem for house. As I'll discuss below, to those who spent countless nights on the dancefloors of archetypal clubs such as the Paradise Garage and the Warehouse, more than just a style of music, *house truly was a feeling, a movement, a unity of all Jackers into one.*

The Paradise Garage and Larry Levan

The most famous dance club in history is also the one that served as the Petri dish in which disco, early electronica, and several other genres of popular music were mixed, fused, and juxtapositioned until the result emerged—house music. Located on 84 King Street in west SoHo in an old parking garage, The Paradise Garage was only open for the length of a decade (1977-1987), but its legend will doubtless survive for several more. It is difficult to overestimate the complete and far-reaching effects it has had on every dance culture native to the Western hemisphere. Larry Levan, the Paradise Garage's DJ, was a pioneer and progenitor in the new role of the DJ as producer, remixer and hitmaker. He also had the perfect laboratory in which to perfect this role—one of the most devoted and energetic crowds in history:

[Levan] grew to enjoy such a passionate relationship with the people on his dancefloor that they worshipped him more or less as a god. The Garage sound system is reckoned by many to have been the greatest of them all. Elements of the club have been carefully copied by many which came after it. It even has a genre of music named after it. Today, Larry Levan is regularly hailed as the world's greatest ever DJ, and his club elevated to mythic status whenever it is mentioned. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:272)

⁶ See also Langlois (1992) on "Can You Feel It?" as the house anthem.

The Garage was seen as a truly special place. Not only the patrons, but even the staff felt that way. As one New York DJ put it, “And for everyone there, it really was the temple. It was sacred ground” (Johnny Dynell, qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:272). Reynolds echoes this:

Philly and Salsoul were the soundtrack, with the songs’ gospel-derived exhortations to freedom and fraternity creating a sort of pleasure-principled religious atmosphere. John Iozia described the Garage as both pagan (“an anthropologist’s wet dream ... tribal and totally anti-Western”) and ecclesiastical (the dance floor was a fervent congregation of “space-age Baptists”). Just as regulars used to call the Gallery “Saturday Mass,” and Salvation was styled a cathedral, Garage veterans regarded the club as “their church.” (Reynolds 1999:35)

The atmosphere at The Paradise Garage during the birth of house music was a special one. Members of the Garage (admittance was by membership card only) felt simultaneously like they were part of an elite group and a large family, with Levan as the patriarch. Several of the world’s best DJs, past and present, were members, including David Morales, Danny Tenaglia, Cevin Fisher, Junior Vasquez, Danny Krivit, Kenny Carpenter, Francois Kevorkian, and Joe Clausell. All of them consciously and openly attempt(ed) to re-create the magic of the Garage. Worldwide superstar Junior Vasquez, for example, explains how he built his whole career on following the lead Levan set. ““I idolized Larry,” he says. “I still do to this day, he was the greatest. And I do live in the past when it comes to that, and I keep striving, wanting to create that feeling, that lounge, that [DJ] booth”” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:273).

Born in Brooklyn in 1954, Levan’s real name was Lawrence Philpot. Levan’s first club gig was at the Gallery, where his job was to spike the punch (usually with LSD) each night. From there he moved on to DJ with one of his childhood friends, Frankie

Knuckles, at the Continental Baths—a gay bathhouse in New York. Knuckles eventually left for Chicago to found the other pillar of house music (more on this below), leaving Levan alone at the Baths. Levan's next gig was Reade Street, a very popular and very wild club. When it was closed down in 1976 due to violation of fire regulations, Levan teamed up with owner Michael Brody to open the Garage.

Levan had learned about the importance of creating and controlling the total environment from the best—David Mancuso—and he wasn't shy about taking control when he felt it necessary:

Although the Garage had a very talented and experienced light man in Robert DaSilva—who had also worked the lights at the Gallery and Studio 54—Levan had a second set of controls fitted on a rail along the top of the booth. When the mood took him—when he was ready to take people for a ride—he would draw the console towards him and decant the booth of its occupants. It was like clearing the flight deck for takeoff. ... “The difference between the Garage and other places, was that he was controlling the entire environment,” says Danny Krivit. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:276)

While not exceptional technically, another of Levan's advantages was that he was a virtuoso at reading and playing the crowd's emotions, foreshadowing the mastery that the world's best house, trance and other DJs display today.

What made him great was his sense of drama, his obsessive control of all aspects of his clubbers' experience, and his heightened ability to transmit his personality through the very grooves of his records. ... [Levan] understood how to make a visit to his nightclub a total experience. What would be served up on a particular night depended on any number of variants, with only one thing certain: Levan gave good show. He could shock you. He could thrill you. He could amaze you. He could even appall you. The only certainty was that he would surprise you. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:275)

Levan's emphasis on control extended to his track selection. The music played at the Garage was an eclectic mix, composed of both disco classics and a range of other

genres of songs including rock, rap, and electronica. Levan sometimes took this to an extreme and forced new songs on his dancefloor until they responded to them. This extended to commercial songs also. If Levan liked a song and felt that it would sound good in the Garage he would play it, even if it was a “tacky” Top 40 song.

Levan’s excessive drug use finally caught up with him. He died on November 8, 1992. Each year a party is held on his birthday to celebrate the life of the man acknowledged the world over as the greatest DJ ever.

The Warehouse and Frankie Knuckles

When Frankie Knuckles left his friend at the Continental Baths in New York, it was to take over the residency⁷ at the Chicago club The Warehouse. The owners of the club had originally contacted Levan in 1976 and offered him the residency. But Levan was playing at Reade Street and had already begun planning the Paradise Garage. In his stead he recommended his friend. Knuckles played opening night at the Warehouse in March 1977, and the next week also. He was offered the job, which included a financial interest in the club. He decided to take it. That decision would be another of dance culture’s defining moments.

The Warehouse held around 600 people, but on busy nights as many as 2000 were crammed in. The Warehouse had three floors: the top floor sported a seating area, in the basement free juice, water and snacks could be had, and in between was the dancefloor. Standard attire was elegant but made for dancing and sweating. Like the

⁷ A “resident” is a club’s regular DJ. Although not typically under contract, he nevertheless will have certain nights of the week during which he performs for an set sum.

Paradise Garage, the crowd was mostly gay and almost entirely black. Saturday was the big night.

In the early years of the Warehouse, the parties were intense. The dancefloor was very hot; steam and waves of heat drifted up the stairwell leading to it. Glistening black bodies drenched in sweat “jacked” away to the sounds of Knuckles’ mixes over the powerful sound system. “Jack” became a very popular term in late 1980’s – early 1990’s North American popular culture. Although used variously during that period, within the culture that built up around house music it referred primarily to a style of dancing.

“Jackers” were people who “jacked,” that is, danced in a particular way to house.

Reynolds interprets jacking the following way:

As house music evolved, this idea—achieving freedom by abandoning subjectivity and self-will—became more explicit. Gradually, the hypersexual imagery was supplanted by a postsexual delirium, reflected in the Chicago dancing style known as “jacking.” In disco, dance had gradually shed its role as courtship ritual and opened up into unpaired freestyle self-expression. Jacking took this to the next stage, replacing pelvic thrust and booty shake with a whole-body frenzy of polymorphously perverse tics and convulsive pogo-ing. (Reynolds 1999:29)

As jacking referred to a particular style of dancing and a particularly free and frenzied form of embodiment, “For a long time the word “house” referred not to a particular style of music so much as to an attitude” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:294). To be “house” was the equivalent of being “cool”. Good music could be called house, a good club could be called house, anything underground was house. Even certain cliques of people were house. “A recognizable house style soon developed: baggy Girbaud jeans and sports sweatshirts were popular (a look later taken up by the world of hip hop, which at this stage was dressed in tracksuits and Kangols)” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:303).

The look could also include bleached jeans and spiked hair. The “pump” haircut was also a house trait: a tall, flat-topped haircut.

Not only did the Warehouse inspire idioms and styles of coolness in Chicago, it and Knuckles’ DJing would become famous and spark a major musical revolution:

As well as popularizing the funky, the soulful—the dangerous—side of disco, which the city had rarely heard, he also imported its spirit, fostering among these polite, godfearing Midwesterners the communal, emancipating hedonism of disco’s gay underground. In doing this he was the catalyst for an unprecedented explosion of musical creativity. His club would give its name to a new genre of music; he would become known as its godfather. The music was house. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:294)

Knuckles’ music was radically new to the Chicago crowd, as they hadn’t seen DJing techniques like those he brought from New York before. He would use mixes and edits to reshape the sounds, and would use sound effects like speeding locomotives panning across the room as he turned out all the lights. Enhanced by drugs like LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) and MDA (methylenedioxyamphetamine) (a precursor to MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine)), Chez Damier explains that “Kids would totally lose their minds” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:294). Unlike the techno music scene in Detroit where drug taking was the exception, Chicago house went hand in hand with stimulants and hallucinogens (Reynolds 1999:26).

Nights at the Warehouse under Knuckles’ direction would soon be described in the same religious terms as were used by devotees of the Garage, both by the dancers and by him.

Many DJs speak of their work in religious terms, few with as much clarity as Frankie Knuckles. “For me, it’s definitely like a church,” he explained on Chicago’s WMAQ TV. “Because, when you’ve got three thousand people in front of you, that’s three thousand different personalities. And when those three thousand personalities become one personality, it’s the

most amazing thing. It's like that in church. By the time the preacher gets everything going, or that choir gets everything going, at one particular point, when things start peaking, that whole room becomes one, and that's the most amazing thing about it." (Brewster and Broughton 2000:292)

As Reynolds explains, house offered a sense of communion and community to those whose sexuality might have alienated them from organized religion:

In other house tracks, spiritual redemption and sexual rapture are fused in a kind of eroto-mystic delirium. Jamie Principle's "Baby Wants to Ride" begins with a prayer, then the Voice of God declares that it's time to relate "the Revelation of my Second Coming." But the "coming" is decidedly profane: an encounter with a dominatrix, who strips Principle, makes him beg, then rides him through a porno-copia of sexual positions. (Reynolds 1999:31)

In terms of track selection, when he moved to Chicago Knuckles essentially just kept playing disco. This was about the same time that disco became extremely popular and commercialized. His Chicago crowd loved it. However, by 1980 new disco tracks had started to dry up as major record labels tried to distance themselves from the increasingly "tacky" genre. By the time disco was officially declared "dead" in 1981, Knuckles was already experimenting with older tracks from labels like Salsoul and Philly International, as well as with postdisco sounds from New York and the more electronic sounding Eurodisco tracks he could get his hands on. Since many of these were "downtempo" or slower in beat than his crowds were used to, he experimented with ways to speed them up by using a reel-to-reel tape recorder, extending portions of songs, adding new beats and sounds. Knuckles explains that he had to do this to "feed his dancefloor" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:296). The metaphor he uses is an instructive one that we'll see repeated in the later acid house and rave movements. Like these movements, as house continued to grow one of its driving forces was music built solely

for powering the dancefloor, for driving participants out of their heads and into their bodies in wild abandon for hours at a time. The challenge that Knuckles faced has been faced by every DJ since his time—to find music that would keep the dancers going.

Knuckles' experiments with music were the roots of house music. Eventually, the amazed dancers at the Warehouse began experimenting on their own with remixing songs in their basements and bedrooms. This was the beginning of what is now a regular occurrence in suburban bedrooms across the globe, as well as a multi-million dollar industry. Some of the best dance tracks played at the biggest raves and clubs around the world are produced by ordinary teenagers in their bedrooms, and literally dozens of new hardware and software products have been developed to help them do just that. "Closer to an architect or draftsman, the house auteur is absent from his own creation; house tracks are less like artworks, in the expressive sense, than vehicles, rhythmic engines that take the dancer on a ride" (Reynolds 1999:30). And as Reynolds goes on to explain, the process of creating electronic music today looks vastly different from the way music was traditionally created:

Although it can be performed live, techno is seldom *born* in real time. Rather, electronic music is programmed and assembled sequence by sequence, layer by layer. Even the separate constituents of a track, like keyboard riffs and arpeggios, don't necessarily come into being as discrete musical events. Step-writing, a technique whereby a rhythmic or melodic pattern is programmed into the sequencer note by note or written on the computer screen, allows for the construction of complicated riffs that are often beyond the real-time capabilities of even the most dexterous keyboardist. Not only does this make it easy to correct errors and add nuances, but sequences can be rearranged, edited, run backward, and generally messed around with on a trial-and-error basis. Furthermore, the same basic riff-pattern can be played in any "color," with the musician free to choose from a vast sonic palette of synthesized "instruments" and self-invented sampladelic timbres. (Reynolds 1999:43)

At first written off by mainstream culture as “fag music,” house began to take hold outside of Chicago’s homosexual, African-American community. Eventually, straight white people began showing up at the Warehouse, a development aided by the fact that it was the city’s only after hours club. This invasion by white suburban youth is another pattern that repeats itself in acid house and rave. While house music and the house movement would likely never have extended far beyond the Warehouse if different socioeconomic groups hadn’t discovered it, their arrival spelled the end of the initial, utopian phase of the house movement, as would happen later with acid house. As more white, heterosexual patrons began to frequent the Warehouse, a different vibe developed. Sensing the potential, the owners doubled the previously low \$4 admission charge.

Knuckles decided to leave the Warehouse and open his own club, the Power Plant. In his place, the Warehouse hired DJ Ron Hardy and changed its name to the Music Box. Hardy’s club ethic differed from Knuckles’. Where Knuckles orchestrated peaks and valleys in the night, Hardy, “...fueled by a far more demonic appetite—for both music and narcotics,” blasted his dancefloor with as much hardcore intensity as he could. He was just what the developing house scene needed, as he and its participants had discovered the house experience and now wanted to see how far they could take it, yet another pattern that would emerge in the acid house and rave phenomena (see also Reynolds 1999 on this).

““Ron Hardy? Everybody hated him, he was mean and nasty, a drug addict. He had a huge ego, that’s how he was. But, oh man, he was GREAT! He was the greatest DJ that ever lived,” remembers veteran house producer Marshall Jefferson” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:298). Another quotation from a Chicago clubber that experienced

Hardy's magic illustrates his power over his dancers, and also the importance of the collective energy to an event's success:

He was like an idol. The first time I saw him spin, it was his birthday, and just to see people literally crying because this man had them so hyper, seeing people pass out, I was like, 'Hey this is my type of party!' I'd never been to a place where the DJ had a control over the people where they would dance and scream, and at some points cry. Depending on how high they were, they were passing out from pure excitement. It was the energy that was there. (Cedric Neal, qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:300)

Marshall Jefferson, later to become an influential house music producer, highlights another key element in Hardy's success at the Music Box, one which would be emulated by DJs to follow him—volume: "I was touched by God! The volume, man, just BOOM!!! It penetrated through my chest and took hold of my heart" (qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:301). My own experience in the central Canadian rave scene, and that of my informants, revealed a similar relationship between the volume of music at an event and its effect on dancers. I discuss this in chapter 5.

Hardy and Knuckles ended up dividing clubbers' attention for the week, with the older crowd gravitating to Power Plant and Knuckles' more nuanced sets, and most of the younger, harder-edged partiers opting for the almost maniacal intensity of the Music Box.

At times, the crowd seemed to transcend physical limits. They would literally climb up the walls. They would fall to the floor, legs thrashing in the air, screaming for Hardy to pump it up more. (Garratt 1998:41)

Descriptions of Knuckles' and Hardy's sets in these early days of house are also the first to liken the relationship between the DJ and the dancers to a sexual one, as the DJ teases the crowd with a slow build-up of beats and intensity until the climactic crescendo, an

idea that has been examined recently in literature on the “DJ as technoshaman” (Hutson 1999; Hutson 2000).

House Tracks

As house culture boomed its arrival in this lakeside city, the DJ’s aim was to drive dancers into states of drum-hypnotized fury, using endless thundering rhythm tracks to work the dancefloor towards the orgasm of a great vocal song. This style demanded a steady supply of simple, repetitive drum tracks. People had seen how basic a track could be. Studio equipment had become small and affordable. Suddenly, everybody in Chicago became a producer, eagerly pushing tapes under DJs’ noses. –Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life*, pg. 306

Brewster and Broughton claim that in 1984 there were two defining moments in the explosion of house music and the do-it-yourself ethos of producing house tracks: Jamie Principle’s “Your Love” and Jesse Saunders’ “On And On” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:306). These were the first two Chicago house artists. Saunders’ track especially changed the house music scene, as it was immensely successful despite its low production values and the fact that it was made by a true amateur. Saunders later went on to sign with major record label Geffen and moved to Los Angeles. Suddenly everyone knew someone who was making house music. New tracks flooded the local clubs, aided by the fact that vinyl records could be pressed at a local plant for only a few hundred dollars. Producers tried to outdo each other with new combinations of sounds and rhythms, and a fierce DIY (Do It Yourself) ethic developed.

As with Detroit techno (discussed in the next section) but to a lesser degree, house music’s founding influences were not only disco and Philadelphia soul, but also European disco and synthesizer pop. One producer especially is often singled out as a formative influence on the shape of electronic music today, and was a guiding light for house producers also. Based out of Munich, Giorgio Moroder produced one of the first

synthesizer pop hits for Chicory Tip – “Son of my Father” in 1972 (Reynolds 1999:25). Moroder then recruited U.S. soul diva Donna Summer to work on a number of projects, two of which would go on to become mega hits and help define disco as a genre. “Love to Love You Baby” was a seventeen minute long epic that changed Summer’s career and featured her orgasmic moans over a sultry disco beat. “I Feel Love” contains similarly airy and seductive vocals by Summer, but its instrumentation is entirely electronic. These two innovations of Moroder’s—vastly extended tracks and purely electronic accompaniment—would be used by the producers of house and techno tracks to follow.

The two labels that dominated the house scene were DJ International and Trax (see Rietveld 1998 for a detailed discussion of house music production). Trax was owned by Larry Sherman, a former Vietnam veteran. Sherman also owned the only record pressing plant in Chicago, giving him a monopoly on vinyl—all tracks eventually had to come to him. And he took advantage of it. Sometimes people would bring him a track to be put out on their own label, and Sherman would press it under the Trax label instead. Adding to the dodgy reputation that the house music industry developed was the fact that Chicago pressings were renowned for their poor quality, partially due to Sherman’s penchant for recycling old vinyl. There were also rumours of shady deals and rip-offs, and few producers are said to have ever received any royalties for their songs.

By 1987 the Chicago house scene was in decline. Rap arrived and clashed with it. The democratization of dance music created by the DIY ethic meant that the market was flooded with house tracks, many of them poor. In yet another pattern that would continue throughout the 1990’s in acid house and rave, city officials eventually began closing down after hours parties and withholding late-night licenses for clubs. The influential

WBMX went off the air in 1988 and sales of house records dwindled to only one tenth of their peak numbers (Reynolds 1999:34). Frankie Knuckles returned to New York when his Power Plant closed in 1986. The Music Box followed in 1988. Ron Hardy, like Larry Levan, was himself eventually consumed by his drug consumption, selling off his rarest records for another fix, and dying in 1992. However, the musical and cultural revolution that Chicago began was just picking up steam across the ocean in Britain.

Detroit Techno

During the mid-1980's three youth from the Detroit suburb of Belleville would drive the 300 miles to Chicago to sell records they had made to DJs like Ron Hardy of the Music Box, and then hang out in the clubs to see how the audience reacted to them. The trio consisted of Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson. More than anyone else these three would become known as the founders of a major genre of music still played at raves and clubs to this day: techno (see Sicko 1999 for a detailed history of techno).

“The Belleville Three” as they were known, lived in a middle-class, mainly white Detroit suburb of the same name. Drawn to each other primarily because they were amongst the only black kids in their neighbourhood, they also shared an affinity for the music they all listened to on late night radio shows like The Electrifyin’ Mojo’s (DJ Charles Johnson) “The Midnight Funk Association” on WGPR, and The Wizard (techno producer Jeff Mills) on WDRQ. Johnson played an eclectic mix of funk, rock, and European synthesizer pop, mixing such artists as Parliament-Funkadelic, Prince, the J. Geils Band, and Kraftwerk. It wasn’t long before Atkins, May and Saunderson were getting together in one another’s basements, creating their own mix tapes, and experimenting with new sounds.

Much has been made of techno's stark minimalism and futuristic sound resulting from the influence of its birthplace—the industrial city of Detroit. On the other hand, when techno first emerged, it was seen by many as simply house music made in Detroit. One indisputable fact is that Detroit's club scene was not as vibrant or central to techno's genesis as New York's and Chicago's were to the garage and house sounds:

In Chicago, it was all about being *effective*: see what works, throw it into the pot (stealing anything you don't have), and get it onto the dancefloor before anyone else. The Detroit approach grew to be far more serious and self-aware. As their fame grew, and as they were pressed for the ideas behind their music, these people didn't want to be just kids throwing tracks together, they were thinkers, musicians, artists (Brewster and Broughton 2000:321)

Reynolds also notes the correlations between Detroit techno's minimalist and more melody-friendly music and the fact that its music scene was mainly heterosexual, and Chicago's rhythm- and dance floor-driven house tracks and its large gay constituency (Reynolds 1999:23). While techno is often written about as an intellectual and philosophical genre of music, several journalists have revealed that its underlying aims and philosophy were added only after it reached fame (Brewster and Broughton 2000; Garratt 1998). On the other hand, Derrick May and Juan Atkins have maintained that the Belleville Trio's involvement with techno was "a serious philosophy," as well as a way of distinguishing themselves from the "ghetto" label applied to black youth (even though all three were from middle-class neighbourhoods) (Reynolds 1999:15).

One of the first "techno" tracks was "Alleys of Your Mind" produced by Cybotron, which consisted of Atkins and Rick Davis, an electronic music experimenter and Vietnam veteran already with an album to his credit. Cybotron, as well as May and Saunderson, were heavily influenced by the so-called Krautrock industrial groups of the

1970s who pioneered the use of synthesizers and drum machines, the most famous of these being Kraftwerk. Other influences included science fiction and futurologists like Alvin Toffler. Cybotron produced another series of tracks which only received local play. Then in 1985, under the name Model 500, Atkins produced “No UFOs,” which some proffer as techno’s founding record. Still others insist it was “Nude Photo” by Derrick May.

Like many before him, the Chicago underground club scene had a formative effect on May. Speaking of Frankie Knuckles at the Power Plant, May says “Frankie was really a turning point in my life ... When I heard him play, and I saw the way people reacted, danced and sang to the song, I knew this was something special. Not just being a DJ and playing music and being on a mission, but playing music with love. This vision of making a moment this euphoric ... it changed me” (qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:329).

Around this time, Chicago’s house music was becoming big business in Detroit. Record deals were being signed with such figures as Steve Silk Hurley and Farley Jackmaster Funk. However, no one had discovered the bevy of Detroit techno tracks being produced by the likes of May, Atkins and Saunderson. That was until Neil Rushton, a DJ in the northern soul movement with ties to Detroit, dialed the number on the sleeve of Derrick May’s “Nude Photo” release and asked him if he was interested in releasing more records. What resulted was a compilation album by Virgin Records called *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*. Techno was born.

Acieed!

The drug MDMA or Ecstasy was first involved with dance music in the New York gay scene. In 1985 Ecstasy became more widely available in Britain, although still expensive at 20£ a pill. It had been in London since the early 1980's, "but nobody had discovered its application as a trance-dance drug" (Reynolds 1999:63). It was mainly being used in more intimate environments by small groups of friends. Some suggest that former Culture Club frontman Boy George and Marc Almond of Soft Cell introduced the drug to London, but George himself makes no such claim in his autobiography *Take It Like a Man* (George 1995), which also provides a fascinating look behind the scenes of the popular music and club culture of the 1980's and 1990's, including places like the Paradise Garage, where George first tried Ecstasy. Soft Cell came out with what many believe to be the first Ecstasy influenced track in 1981: "Memorabilia." In obvious homage to the drug and its dance-friendly properties, they titled their next album *Non Stop Ecstatic Dancing*, the inspiration for the title of this manuscript.

However, Ecstasy didn't really fit with the London club scene and ethos of the time, which was all about being cool and dressing to impress (Reynolds 1999:57). Also, the rare groove and funk being played in the clubs wasn't the right "musical backing" for the Ecstasy experience. "However, when Ecstasy was combined with the formidably danceable sound of house music—complete with its heightened emotive force—the results were to be nothing short of seismic. It was the most potent combination yet of a particular drug and a particular music. The club scene cool was about to be blown" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:364). Whereas in the past dancing in a London club was

terribly uncool unless you were a fantastic dancer and could put on a show, *when Ecstasy and house music met, everyone was dancing.*

More specifically, when Ecstasy and *acid house* met, everyone was dancing.

Brewster and Broughton describe how the genre was born:

No one in Chicago had expected their music to have an impact outside the city, let alone over in London, but it was in the UK that this music would rise to its greatest heights. “Love Can’t Turn Around” and “Jack Your Body” led the way, but the export market was secured when Nathaniel Pierre Jones discovered the super-synthetic sci-fi squelch noises hidden deep within an otherwise redundant music machine. Jones is better known as DJ Pierre, his group was Phuture, and the music they pioneered would become known as “acid house.” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:315)

The “otherwise redundant machine” within which Jones discovered the characteristic squelch of acid house was the Roland TB 303 bassline machine. The TB 303, along with the 808 drum machine, are perfect examples of older (and in the case of the 303, inferior) technology being rediscovered and fetishized within dance cultures. The 303 was originally meant as an accompaniment aid for guitarists, although it never really caught on in that capacity. As Pierre and his friends Herb Jackson and Earl “Spanky” Smith discovered, when they turned some of the knobs on the 303 up to the maximum and tweaked others, the 303 made a burbling, squelching bleep. The trio kept experimenting with the sound, trying to find other noises. The polished result of their experimentation was “Acid Tracks,” the first acid house track, and “its name and sound would be the basis of an entire subgenre of music” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:315)

Upon finishing the track, the trio rushed it over to the Music Box for Ron Hardy to play; at that time, Hardy’s opinion of a record meant everything. Below is the story of how the first acid house track was received at the hottest house club in the world in 1985:

When Hardy played it, the results were astonishing. "The fuckin' floor cleared," recalls Pierre with a laugh. "We just sat there thinking, 'OK, I guess he won't be playin' that ever again.'" But Hardy waited for the dancefloor to fill up and then forced the song on his clubbers again, gaining a slightly better reaction. He waited a while and then played it a third time. By the fourth time he played it, at 4 A.M. when everybody's drugs had kicked in, the crowd went ballistic. "People were dancing upside down. This guy was on his back, kicking his legs in the air. It was like, 'Wow!' People were going crazy, they started slamdancing, knocking people over and just going nuts" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:342)

Upon reaching the UK, acid house received the same initial reaction.

House cleared dancefloors wherever it was played. Veteran DJ Johnny Walker was told, "You've gone right off the rails," when he introduced it to his funk crowd. When Maurice and Noel Watson started playing house at Delirium at London's Astoria, the management had to build a cage to protect them from the violent reactions of the hip hop heads. At another club, Jazzy M, the first to play house on British radio, was pulled off stage and threatened with a broken bottle for putting on house tracks. "What are you playing this gay music for, what are you doing? I wanna dance with my girl," shouted his attacker. When Mike Pickering came down to London from Manchester's Hacienda, a black guy handed him a note: "Stop playing this fucking homo music" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:342)

However, through the efforts of music journalists like Sheryl Garratt who had been to clubs like the Warehouse and the Paradise Garage and were excited about this new sound, as well as quick-minded A&R people like Pete Tong (then of London records, now an international superstar DJ and host of BBC Radio's popular Essential Mix program), Chicago's acid house sound continued to be imported and received radio play. "Love Can't Turn Around" made it to number ten on the charts in 1986, and "Jack Your Body" number one, in January of 1987. Despite this moderate success, it wouldn't be until a number of elements came together in 1988 that acid house would truly explode in Britain.

Homegrown House

As more and more house records came over from the U.S., it was inevitable that some British DJs and producers would begin trying their hand at making house tracks. Some of the early pioneers were Double Dee and Steinski, Coldcut, S'Express, 808 State, A Guy Called Gerald, and M/A/R/R/S. The latter's huge number one hit "Pump Up the Volume" was made with newly available cheap samplers and composed virtually entirely of samples stolen from other songs, illustrating just how easy it was to make this new, electronic dance music. As in Chicago, house music production in Britain was very much based on a DIY philosophy. Hesmondhalgh notes how the DIY culture of bedroom production led to "a significant *decentralization* of British subcultural music production. Towns which could easily be dismissed as cultural backwaters are homes to thriving dance scenes" (Hesmondhalgh 1998:236). A quotation by DJ Iznogood, rated the number one Montreal DJ in a poll by *The Montreal Mirror* in May 2001, sums up just how anonymous yet effective electronic music can be:

Some people play intelligent techno, minimal stuff and you need to be half-baked to understand what the DJ is doing in that case I play stupid music just to make people dance. So many of my records I can't even identify. They're white labels, everything from '60s ad jingles to new techno. The guy who made it could be right next to me and I wouldn't know it. (qtd. in Anonymous no date-b)

Hesmondhalgh echoes this with the point that dance music cultures have tended to be less concerned with authorship and performer identity than other music subcultures such as rock and roll (but see Goodwin 1988 for a different interpretation; Hesmondhalgh 1998). Rather than individual performers and groups (although this has changed somewhat in the past 4 or 5 years with the emergence of the superstar DJ), music tracks are recognized

and valued for their associations with record labels. Literally hundreds of “micro” labels have formed and disappeared in Britain between 1988 and 1998 (Hesmondhalgh 1998:240).

Two former punk musicians took this to the extreme and showed just how post-modern acid house and the new dance music could be. Jimmy Cauty and Bill Drummond formed a group called the JAMs (Justified Ancients of Mu Mu) and then the KLF (Kopyright Liberation Front). As the KLF, the two enjoyed huge commercial success, all the while thwarting the rules of the music industry and playing ironically with their audiences:

Bathing their projects in a rich web of mystic references taken from cult book *The Illuminatus Trilogy*, Drummond and Cauty attacked all that was sacred to the rock-based music industry. Playing the game by all the wrong rules, they assaulted the dull notion of originality, took free-for-all sampling⁸ to extremes, and released a series of outrageously copyright-infringing records. Then, in a blend of eager cynicism and inspired originality, they put a collage record together and took it to #1(UK). With a title—“Doctorin’ The Tardis”—that was a piss-take of Coldcut’s “Doctorin’ The House,” it combined glam rock, rapping and the theme tune from the TV show *Dr. Who*. It reached the UK’s top slot in June 1988.

After their chart success, they wrote a book called *The Manual (How to Have a Number One The Easy Way)*, which described exactly what its title promised, giving an incisively amusing insight into the workings of the pop industry. ... This could have been the manifesto for what was underway—nothing less than a revolution, precipitated by the DJ, in the acceptable way to make music. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:352)

⁸ “Sampling” refers to copying bits and pieces of other songs or sounds for use in a new track. While sampling used to be an expensive way to create songs—during the era of the large and costly Fairlight Computer Musical Instrument—there are now dozens of affordable technologies, both hard and soft, that allow amateurs to produce electronic tracks right in their bedrooms. Once an electronic music producer has sampled a sound, it can be manipulated in infinite ways, such as looping it over and over, changing its pitch, tone, etc. It is no exaggeration to say that sampling has revolutionized popular music (See Reynolds 1999:41ff for more on sampling).

In “Sample and Hold: Pop Music in the Digital Age of Production,” Andrew Goodwin remarks on the massive wave of sampling and pastiche and brought on by hip hop and house music and perfected by groups like M/A/R/R/S and The KLF, remarking that “The degree to which pop music in the 1980s has become self-referential is now so developed that some musics sound like copies of parodies” (Goodwin 1988:36). In another remarkable statement, *considering that he was writing in 1988*, Goodwin describes how synthetic sounds have become so normalized in contemporary music that they have begun to refer to themselves rather than the “original” sounds:

What is extraordinary about this is that by the time Roland came to work on its next generation of (digital) drum machines (such as the TR-707), the electronic handclap sounded so ‘natural’ to pop musicians and audiences that they sampled their own electronic simulation from the TR-808 machine, rather than ‘real’ handclaps. (Goodwin 1988:42)

Ibiza

As strange as it sounds, the final piece in the puzzle of acid house’s explosion would turn out to be a small group of Londoners vacationing on the popular and glitzy Spanish island of Ibiza. Long a favourite vacation spot of celebrities and socialites, in 1987 the island sported a number of large, glamorous open air clubs with names like Pacha, Amnesia, and Ku, some of which are still world class clubbing hot spots attracting the best DJs in the world. In fact, much as the two magical letters “UK” were enough to get a Toronto raver’s blood flowing throughout that city’s 1990’s obsession with British club culture, the word “Ibiza” has a similar effect in rave/club communities everywhere today.

By 1986, the big club on the island was Amnesia, and the resident DJ was Alfredo. While he had discovered house through a New York drug dealer who brought him DJ International and Trax releases from the Chicago labels, because the holiday crowd at Amnesia was so mixed and had little exposure to such underground sounds he played an eclectic mix of electronica, Top 40, Eurodisco, and Bob Marley. As Garratt describes, fueled by Ecstasy, the recipe was a success:

Alfredo is the first to admit that his choice of old and new records from all over the world was a naïve one. ... But for now, he just threw it into the pot with chart pop, British synth bands, indie rock, Euro disco, reggae and anything else that seemed to fit. The Ecstasy that had started to come in via the hippies, cultists and jet-set clubbers was another ingredient. And, on a dancefloor illuminated by the dawn and then warmed by the Mediterranean sun, the recipe worked. (Garratt 1998:93)

By the summer of 1987, after Margaret Thatcher was elected for a third term and the outlook seemed bleak for the growing masses of the unemployed and disenfranchised, the already steady stream of young Britons vacationing on the island increased. Among them were Trevor Fung and his cousin Ian St. Paul, south Londoners who had worked on the island before and decided to open a bar in San Antonio named The Project, after a club night⁹ Fung and friend Paul Oakenfold had created in Streatham. The place became a favourite hangout for UK expats that summer, with several hundred people standing around outside each night. Garratt describes how all of the ingredients came together and a revolution was born, in a passage worth quoting at length:

⁹ The term “club” is polysemic. A “club” is a night club, in which people “club”—go out dance, drink, consume drugs and generally party and have a good time. A third sense of the term club is the one I am referring to here: a club can be a special night held in a bar, conference centre, or as is most often the case, a night club. These “clubs” will be organized by promoters or entrepreneurs, who rent the space from the owners and bring in their own DJs and perhaps even lighting rigs, décor, and drugs.

Ian St. Paul went to Amnesia early in the season. He and Paul Oakenfold had lived in New York for a while at the start of the eighties, and had spent many nights at the Paradise Garage. Unexpectedly, St. Paul now found the same kind of atmosphere out in Ibiza. ... In the sun, away from dreary England, the normal rules ceased to apply that summer. Reality had been suspended, and life seemed like one long holiday. Ecstasy had broken down the barriers, and this small band of Brits were building their world anew: looking after each other, sharing money, food and beds, watching sunset at the Café del Mar then gathering at the Project before hitting the clubs together, they were closer than family.

“We were there to dance! And dance, and dance, and dance! And not stop!” said Adam Heath, then a nineteen-year-old clubber from Bromley. “We got into this ideal, the E-ed up, loved-up thing; we wouldn’t have been so close without it. At one stage, eighteen of us lived in one apartment with six single beds. We all got into the clubs for nothing. They knew us, they called us “the crazy English” and they loved us. Everyone was quite young and well-traveled. We all had the same mentality, which was to have a really good time and try as hard as possible not to think about anything else. When we all came back from England, it really struck me that we’d got some kind of ... it felt like a religion. (Garratt 1998:97)

When Oakenfold joined his friends on the island for a two week holiday at the end of the summer, everyone in the group tried Ecstasy, some of them for first time, including Oakenfold and Danny Rampling. It changed their lives. They spent the night dancing to Alfredo’s eclectic, upbeat mix at Amnesia under the warm Mediterranean sky. The next day, Oakenfold, Rampling, Nicky Holloway and Johnny Walker reflected on the night.

The four of them spent the next day at their villa discussing what had happened. How they’d felt. The things they’d seen. The music they’d heard. Finally someone suggested they get into the pool, and they held hands and floated in the water, the Art of Noise’s ethereal “Moments In Love” playing on the tape they’d acquired of Alfredo’s set.

“I felt spaced out,” remembers Johnny Walker. “Very tranquil, very peaceful. When someone suggested we all get into the swimming pool, we didn’t have to think about it, it wasn’t a conscious thing. We just got in, lay there, linked hands and transcended off somewhere, just floating. It felt so good.”

“I felt as if I’d been to heaven and back,” says Danny Rampling. “We

discussed the whole thing, and I just said, “This has *got* to happen in London!” (Garratt 1998:101)

Indeed it would.

Summer of Love

When “the crazy English” returned to cold, damp London, they vowed to keep the spirit of what they had experienced alive. They did so by throwing a number of small clubs. Invites were by word of mouth only, and the dress and music were Balearic—colourful, baggy holiday clothes, and an eclectic mix of indie and dance tracks. Oakenfold and partner Ian St. Paul held Balearic nights in their south London venue the Project Club. After the regular club closed at 2:00 AM, 150 Ibiza veterans were let in, along with a number of big names in London fashion, film, music, and clubland.

Oakenfold also flew in Alfredo to play. Simon Reynolds relates the scene:

What these prime movers encountered was a complete subcultural package of slang, behaviour, and clothing, hatched during the summer in Ibiza. The look was a weird mix of Mediterranean beach bum, hippy, and soccer hooligan—baggy trousers and T-shirts, paisley bandannas, dungarees, ponchos, Converse All-Stars sneakers—loose-fitting, because the Ecstasy and nonstop trance dancing made you sweat buckets. Recalls Oakenfold, “London clubs had always been about people drinking, trying to chat up girls, looking good but not dancing. All of a sudden we completely changed that—you’d come down and you’d dance for six hours. The idea was ‘if you’re not into dancing, then don’t come down.’” (Reynolds 1999:59)

The Project parties were so well attended that police eventually got wind and closed them down, since they didn’t have a license to stay open after hours. Undaunted, Oakenfold and St. Paul started a new venture—Future, in a club called Sanctuary. Future, along with another little endeavour called Shoom, would provide the blueprints for acid

house, a dance culture and movement that would sweep over Britain like wildfire and eventually mutate into rave.

Shoom was the “granddaddy” of clubs in acid house lore. Stories about its legendary atmosphere still abound in rave literature and amongst ravers. It was begun in October of 1987 by Danny Rampling (still one of the top DJs in the world) and his wife Jenni, in the Fitness Centre in Southwark Street. It was a tiny place, with a capacity of only about 200. The atmosphere was very close and very intense. Strawberry flavoured smoke filled the air; many who were there describe the smoke as so thick that you couldn’t see more than a few inches in front of your face. The club was named after the sensation of coming up or “rushing” on Ecstasy, which some Ibiza veterans called “shooming.” Also, as Reynolds notes, “The imagery on the flyers, membership cards, and newsletters was blatantly druggy: pills with Smiley faces on them, exhortations to “Get Right On One, Matey!!!”” (1999:60). Shoom was also one of the primary reasons for the energy drink Lucozade’s association with the rave scene, as Lucozade was one of the only beverages available at the Fitness Club in which Shoom was located.

Reynolds claims Shoom was a revolution in “the sociology of the body” in 1980’s London:

Unlike the typical West End club, the Shoom scene was not about being seen, but about losing it—your cool, your self-consciousness, your *self*. ... Gay behavioural codes and modes of expression were entering the body-consciousness of straight working-class boys, via Ecstasy. Oriented around communal frenzy rather than cooler-than-thou posing, Shoom was the chrysalis for rave culture, insofar as *rave* in its pure populist form is the antithesis of *club*. (Reynolds 1999:60)

The Shoom experience was life-changing for many of those who were there. Danny Rampling relates that the aim of Shoom was to create an alternative community, a closed

space where people could be in a state of total freedom. There were initially no restrictions whatsoever (Brewster and Broughton 2000:369). Reynolds takes him to task on this issue, however, pointing out as others have that that was not exactly the whole story:

The Shoom ethos was love, peace and unity, universal tolerance, and we-are-all-the-same. It was supposed to be the death knell of clubland's snobbish exclusivity, but there was an essential contradiction in the way that the Shoom experience was restricted to the original clique and their guests, plus a few minor celebrities like Patsy Kensit and Paul Rutherford of Frankie Goes to Hollywood. (Reynolds 1999:61)

Jenni Rampling, Danny's wife, controlled the door and the membership list, and acquired a wide and reportedly well-deserved reputation for being a "queen bitch" in her efforts to keep only the "right people" in the club (see also Thornton 1995 on practices of exclusion in British club culture).

As more and more people heard about the acid house craze and rushed down to Shoom to see what it was all about, more clubs began to open. In the spring of 1988, Paul Oakenfold decided to open another club, this time on a much bigger scale. Spectrum was held every Monday night in the 2000 capacity gay club Heaven, and billed itself as a "Theatre of Madness." Nick Philip, a clubber who decided to check out Spectrum when it opened, verifies that the title was apt:

I was quite shocked, almost appalled, actually. ... Just the hedonism, and how out of line everyone was getting. Back in the late eighties, the club scene was quite uptight, you had to wear exactly the right clothes to get in. You might see the odd person there who was really out of it, but it was not the general rule. But at Spectrum, everyone looked like they were from fucking Mars. Drenched in sweat, wearing baggy shit, and all just looking at the DJ with their arms in the air, like it was some really weird religious ceremony. I was quite freaked out by it. (qtd. in Reynolds 1999:61)

Another club foundational in cementing the acid house movement and bringing it into the public consciousness was Nicky Holloway's The Trip. The atmosphere at The Trip was also very liberationist and anti-club. Many people report how after The Trip closed at 3:00 AM, clubbers would pour out onto Charing Cross Road, stopping traffic and partying in the street; the police would eventually show up, sirens blaring, and the crowd would dance around the van to the rhythm of the sirens, shouting "acieed,"¹⁰ which became the mantra of acid house. All of these clubs took off as more and more people discovered the incendiary combination of acid house and Ecstasy. So popular did the combination become that by 1992 there were more than 1 million British youth clubbing every weekend, and Brewster and Broughton write that Ecstasy became an almost universal experience for British youth, a normal part of growing up. By the summer of 1988, now known as the infamous "summer of love" because of the masses of E'd up acid housers roaming the streets and clubs of London, acid house had truly arrived.

Madchester Rave On

While house music initially struggled to gain a foothold in London, in the north it was embraced immediately. One of the reasons was the Hacienda, one of the most famous clubs in the world, located in Manchester, a city already famous for its pop musical history. Owned by Factory Records boss Tony Wilson and the seminal new wave band New Order, the club's moniker was inspired by the Situationists' utopian slogan "The Hacienda Must be Built" (Reynolds 1999:93). The fascinating story of the rise and

¹⁰ Incidentally, another big acid house hit was titled "We Call It Acieed" by D-Mob, which reached number 3 on the British charts in November 1988 and caused quite a stir because of its title's interpretation as a drug reference.

fall of the Hacienda has been chronicled in many books, including *The Hacienda Must Be Built* (Savage 1992) and even in a recent movie—*24 Hour Party People* (2002).

Although the Hacienda was a perennial money loser for its owners and was eventually closed in 1997, in terms of its influence on music and dance culture, it is on a par with the Paradise Garage and the Warehouse.

The Hacienda was one of the first clubs in the world consciously modeled after seminal New York clubs like the Paradise Garage. With a spacious, open design and minimalist, industrial-looking décor inside, the Hacienda was housed in a former yachting store showroom. The Hac, as it was affectionately known, inspired many other clubs in the northwest of England and later, all over the world, which tried to copy its “vibe.” Its two resident DJs were major figures in the rave and wider electronic dance music movements— Graeme Park and Mike Pickering of new wave band Quango Quango.

Manchester also produced the Happy Mondays, an “indie dance” group that successfully bridged rock and roll and dance in the early 1990’s and was responsible for the phrase “Madchester,” used the world over to describe the incredible creativity and energy of the city’s music and pop cultural scene. ““Madchester replaced the workaholic materialism of the eighties with a new spirit, encoded in the slang buzzword “baggy”: loose-fitting clothes, a loose-minded, take-it-as-it-comes optimism, a loose-limbed dance beat descended from James Brown’s “Funky Drummer”” (Reynolds 1999:98). The Mondays were absolutely legendary for their excessive drug use, partying, and devil-may-care attitude—so much so that while possessing a knack for writing catchy, danceable tunes as well as a huge following, they suffered Icarus’ fate. In one disturbing

but supposedly true scene from *24 Hour Party People*, when Tony Wilson, part owner of the Hacienda Mondays' bankroller, meets lead singer Shaun Ryder in a pub to collect the "album" the group was supposed to have produced during a protracted, million-dollar recording session (read: drugfest) in the Caribbean, Ryder pulls a gun on him. The Mondays were also E-vangelizers: perennial bad boy/prankster Ryder admitted that the band used to distribute Ecstasy to the crowd during their performances (Reynolds 1999:96). Similar to but less prolific than the Mondays were a host of other bands emerging from or inspired by the north of England, many of whom sported a punk rock heritage: the Stone Roses, The Charlatans, The Inspiral Carpets, The Shamen, and Primal Scream. All had that unique Madchester sound—a rock-dance crossover. Two acid house groups that came out of Manchester were 808 State (named after the Roland 808 drum machine) and A Guy Called Gerald, among whose successful tracks were "Pacific State" and "Voodoo Ray," respectively. 808 State was a pioneering group in the subgenre of rave music known as ambient¹¹ (there are now dozens of sub-varieties of ambient).

Rave

A rave was an idealized version of clubbing. It wasn't about visiting some purpose-built venue, it was about creating somewhere new; it was about building a city for a night. A club had a place in space and time, but a rave was made of possibilities. A rave existed in the minds of the people who danced together. Without them it was nowhere, just a field off a motorway exit. While Margaret Thatcher claimed, "There is no such thing as society," in her face were thousands of people making alternative one-night communities. Raves emphasized the ecstatic acid house ideal: it was people that counted above everything. —Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life*, pg. 370

¹¹ Ambient is a much slower paced, melodic, and often dreamy form of electronic music. Ambient is frequently played at after-parties and in chill out rooms.

In the summer of 1988, a few promoters from the acid house club scene decided to throw some events outside of the clubs. Some of the initial small events were thrown by Boys Own, a small cultural collective that had been baptized and converted at Shoom. With events being held in open fields and warehouses (continuing an already existing tradition of underground warehouse parties in and around London), they began to increase in size, volume, and sheer grandeur. Word had spread rapidly about the acid house craze and its new “hug drug” which took the dancer on a four hour orgasmic ride, and everyone wanted to experience it. The huge parties began to be called raves, and rave promotion companies sprung up, each trying to outdo the other in giving ravers the most mind-blowing experience of their lives. As Matthew Collin quotes Steve Proctor, a DJ at the time, minds were certainly blown: “There’s people still out there in the country in homes, who couldn’t deal with the reality that the rest of life wasn’t going to be like this” (Collin 1997:81). The scenes were truly spectacular:

Johnny Walker recalls DJing a Biology event in June 1989 at the height of the movement. Here, in an open field in Hertfordshire, the night sky streaked with lasers, gathered an incredible 12,000 ravers. Walker, up on a stage, found himself DJing for a churning sea of people, all locked into the groove of his records. “It was breathtaking, to be onstage and look out and see that many people dancing to what you’re playing, it was just incredible” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:370)

The most famous promoter of the era of acid house and early rave was Tony Colston-Hayter, a professional gambler and capitalist prodigy who truly thrived on throwing the most spectacular and elaborate parties and not only tried to outdo the competition, but himself as well. Colston-Hayter was also the person who invented the flyer-infoline system of advertising raves. He would put out a flyer for a party with only a telephone number on it. People would call the number on the night of the party and

would be told to show up at a specific location. They'd arrive at the checkpoint and someone would be waiting, telling them where to go next. Sometimes several checkpoints would have to be negotiated until they were finally told where the party was. The method was devised to avoid the police and keep the venue secret until the last minute, so they would have a harder time closing it down. Some central Canadian raves still use the method, but more as a technique for generating excitement and nostalgia about the early days of rave than as a way of avoiding authorities, since most events are now held legally in licensed public spaces.

Colston-Hayter ran a few companies, most notably Sunrise. As the tabloid press started to get wind of the massive parties replete with drug use and ecstatic, sweaty dancers, it became increasingly difficult to hold parties in London. Colston-Hayter made a bold move that would begin the "orbital" or "M25" party trend—parties held just off the newly constructed M25 orbital highway.¹² In the fall of 1988 he sold 1000 tickets to the Sunrise Mystery Trip, a rave held in the wilds of Buckinghamshire at an equestrian centre. Colston-Hayter spared no expense to ensure the authorities wouldn't interfere and to guarantee a spectacular night. Ravers were transported there by bus from London. Collin describes the scene in a passage worth quoting at length in *Altered State: The Story of Acid House and Ecstasy Culture*:

Flares burned along the wooded approach road, and as the coaches drew nearer, lasers flashed into the sky and a low hum slowly became recognizable as the throb of house music.

Colston-Hayter wanted to create a hedonist wonderland; he had even hired a children's bouncy castle for clubbers to cavort upon like weightless astronauts. After the confined intensity of inner-city warehouses, the spectacle was breath-taking, like being freed into a

¹² One of the best and best known ambient music groups, Orbital, appears to have derived its name from these raves.

fantasy playground sparkling with the fairy dust of MDMA. At the peak of the night, the lights went off, the building filled with dry ice and in total darkness Steve Proctor dropped the needle on the majestic opening chords of Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, the theme from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. As the portentous orchestra swelled, a green laser strafed the clouds of dry ice and hundreds of arms raised in unison, cutting through the smoke; all that was visible from the DJ's raised platform were disembodied hands, reaching outwards as if to touch the heavens, frozen in the strobe lights like a weird HR Giger machine.

"Fucking hell!" exclaims Proctor, still awed by the memory years afterwards. "I'd been DJing for eight years then and I thought I'd seen some crazy things, but to be that far down the line and to experience something like that was fucking mindblowing." As dawn broke, people frolicked with the horses and gathered flowers to weave through each other's hair, while Proctor attempted to capture the feeling in music, closing with the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour* and Bobby McFerrin's *Don't Worry, Be Happy*. Although, in chronological terms, this was the end of the first acid house Summer of Love, the Mystery Tour in fact signalled the beginning of the second. A new, technologically enhanced environment for the Ecstasy experience had been invented. (Collin 1997:88-89)

Nineteen eighty-nine, the second Summer of Love, was the year of the rave explosion, when orbital parties were being held everywhere. Service stations on the M25 were the scenes of spontaneous parties, with people stopping and meeting other people, dancing around their cars to music coming from stereos, all the while on the hunt for raves. Rave had taken the already angelic Shoom experience and fed it through a 10,000 watt amplifier:

For journalist Helen Mead, dancing with ten thousand people "on Ecstasy" was "completely fucking mind-blowing, compared with doing it in Shoom with two hundred people." (Reynolds 1999:76)

This was the beginning of acid house going overground, going mainstream. Soon everyone was raving, or wanted to be. What was initially a small, underground movement of Ibiza veterans and their friends congregating around a particular musical sensibility,

style of dress, and most of all, intimate social experience and interpersonal ethic, rapidly became a huge youth culture that swept Britain like none other before it. As Thornton delineates in *Club Cultures*, this was a natural next phase for acid house, as it is for all new cultural movements. And the natural reaction of many in the original Balearic crowd was to thumb their noses at what they considered the eager, clueless masses scrambling for the next big thing. Borrowing from an earlier youth movement, the term “acid ted” was coined to refer to them. “The idea was that the neophyte ravers in bandannas and Day-Glo T-shirts, shouting “acieed!” and dancing on the tables at the tacky nightclub Camden Palace were the equivalent of forty-year-old teddy boys with fifties-style rockabilly quaffs, drainpipes, and brothel creepers” (Reynolds 1999:68). Rave was now a part of the mainstream, and in a big way.

Between 1990 and 1992, a circuit of commercial megaraves evolved: Amnesia, Raindance, Kaos, Mayhem, Eclipse, World Dance, Helter Skelter, Elevation, Fantazia, Dreamscape, Vision, and many more. These massive events drew crowds ranging from ten to twenty-five thousand to dance all night inside giant hangars or under circus-size tents in the open countryside. ... The two-hour line, the humiliating body frisk, and the surly bouncer all became part and parcel of the rave experience. (Reynolds 1999:130)

As rapidly as it had taken Britain by storm as the latest scene to be a part of, acid house was termed passé by those in the know, illustrating just how quickly the new dance cultures could mutate. Another derogatory term for the newer, younger population flocking to the scene was “lilac camel”: lilac was a popular colour for sneakers at the time, and camel referred to the fact that teenagers who’d taken too much Ecstasy would rapidly chew gum, their tongues hanging out of their mouths (Reynolds 1999:69). Reynolds explains how veterans of the scene also suffered from excessive drug use:

By the end of '88, the scene had lost some of its innocence—ironically, partly because of the fresh-faced teenage newcomers who were taking psychoactive substances they weren't emotionally mature enough to handle. But many of the original, more experienced scenesters were also in a bad way. "You'd see people who were completely abusing it," remembers Mr. C [of the popular acid house group The Shamen]. "Seven or eight pills on a Friday, ten pills on a Saturday, and half a dozen on a Sunday." (Reynolds 1999:69)

The story of prototypical Madchester band The Happy Mondays' demise is a good example of the drug excesses of the early days of rave. While groups like The Shamen and The KLF aspired to a type of New Age rock/rave communal spirituality, the Mondays were really about nothing but drug- and music-based hedonism. Shaun Ryder eventually moved on from Ecstasy to the physically addictive and harder drug heroin. While spending months in Barbados attempting to record their fourth album, *Yes Please!*, Ryder also developed a crack cocaine habit and the band spent more than £250,000 on drugs and partying. But the result was just a poor imitation of their previous records and led to the bankruptcy of Factory Records. The Mondays split up shortly after.

Another disturbing trend developed in 1989 when gangs began to enter the scene. As more and more people began raving, more and more drugs were consumed. "Drugs meant money; money meant warfare for market control between rival drug gangs" (Reynolds 1999:109). The gangs demanded to have their own people working events as security. Eventually, clubs like the Hacienda had to install a metal detector at the door to keep out guns, knives and other weapons. The problem became so serious that the Hacienda actually temporarily closed its doors voluntarily in 1991 after several violent incidents.

As the initial “honeymoon” phase of acid house came to an end, the beginning of rave dawned. Simultaneously and symbiotically, the music, drugs, and the dance party experience got harder: a new, faster genre of music known as “hardcore” developed, which later splintered into further sub-genres of music like jungle and Belgian techno; the quality of Ecstasy being sold at parties was said by insiders to have declined, with amphetamines comprising a larger amount of the substances ingested; and the initial utopianism of acid house was stripped away to reveal the locomotive of the rave experience: 150 beats per minute and the anthemic shout “Hardcore!”:

During those three years, 1990 through 1992, the British hardcore scene wasn’t so much a melting pot as a mental pot, an alembic, heated by the flames of drug abuse, that generated new sonic amalgams with every season. All hail the “*alchemical generation*,” to twist Irvine Welsh’s famous phrase: half a million British kids who boldly sacrificed their brain cells to spawn some of the maddest music this planet has ever heard. ... The buzzwords of the era were revealing. Pleasure was expressed in a masochist slang of catatonia and brain damage: on a good night, you’d get “faced” (off your face), “sledged” (sledgehammered into a coma), “cabbaged” or “monged” (turned into a vegetable). Good tracks were “mental,” “kickin’,” “banging,” “nosebleed,” or “bone” (as in boneheaded) (Reynolds 1999:114, 126).

At the end of 1991, the average rave track was 125 beats per minute (bpm), while at the end of 1992 it was approaching 150. Hardcore is, as Reynolds states, one-dimensional music. But the single-mindedness with which it pursues its goal of intensity is what makes it commendable to him, and as close to the essence of rock and roll as possible:

What’s the essence? Not sex or drugs or dance, but any or all of these insofar as they’re about *intensity*, a heightened sense of the *here and now*. To live in the now, without memory or future-anxiety, is literally childish. For those with an investment in techno’s maturation as an art form, the two most offensive aspects of ‘ardkore were its regressive, toytown streak and its naked drugginess. ... Just when it seemed possible to argue for

electronic music as more than just the soundtrack to drugging and dancing, along came 'ardkore: not so much music as a science of inducing and enhancing the E-rush. 'Ardkore seemed best understood as a neurological rather than cultural phenomenon. (Reynolds 1999:139)

"The hipsters" (Ibiza veterans and acid house pioneers) complained disdainfully about such "cheesy quavers" and "E-monsters" going "mental" to such frenzied music:

"teenage boys with sunken cheeks, pursed lips, and massively dilated pupils, T-shirts tied round their waists to reveal gaunt adolescent physiques further emaciated by excessive Ecstasy intake" (Reynolds 1999:126).

Reynolds' description of the 'ardkore UK raver matches closely what I witnessed at events in every city in which I raved during this research. In Toronto especially, at an event called Space Invader¹³ in 2000, I danced in the hardcore/jungle room with hundreds of gaunt, Caucasian teenagers pogo-ing up and down furiously to the 160-180 bpm music. I also remember walking into the bathroom later at the same event and witnessing a boy that could not have been more than 16 years old pacing back and forth, eyes as wide as silver dollars, looking completely lost and out of control. While many of the conclusions that I draw about the rave experience and movement in this thesis will concern personal, spiritual, and social growth and development, scenes like these constantly reminded me that rave and the elements comprising it can indeed be dangerous, especially for unguided youth in search of meaning and in search of themselves.

The hardcore sound (also sometimes called "bleep and bass"), which later mutated partially into jungle, was all about bass frequencies. The Sheffield label Warp,

¹³ Incidentally, "Spaced Invader" is also the name of a huge house hit of around the same time by the DJ/producer Hatiras.

for example, put out a number of tracks that experimented with different techniques to produce the deepest bass frequencies, such as re-recording bass tracks onto tape successively with the equalizer levels turned up to the maximum (Reynolds 1999:116). While extreme, deep bass would later emerge as the hallmark of the jungle sound, when I discuss the rave experience in detail later it will become evident how essential bass tones are to all genres of electronic music made for dancing. Some of the big hardcore tracks of this period were “Testone” by Sweet Exorcist, “Aftermath” by Nightmares on Wax, “Ebenezer Goode” by The Shamen, “Frequency” by Altern 8, “Chime” by Orbital, “I Want You (Forever)” by Carl Cox, “Sesame’s Treet” by Smart E’s, “Charly” and “Everybody in the Place” by the massive commercial success The Prodigy, and “Energy Flash” by Joey Beltram, which Simon Reynolds considers the greatest techno song of all time (Reynolds 1999:122).

Although the initial coverage of rave was relatively positive, with *The Sun* actually describing the acid house scene as “cool and groovy” and selling Smiley T-shirts, the British tabloids quickly changed their story, sniffing around the large events and running features with titles like “SPACED OUT! 11,000 YOUNGSTERS GO DRUG CRAZY AT BRITAIN’S BIGGEST EVER ACID HOUSE PARTY” (1989). A moral panic was instantly created, with acid house’s folk devil being the “Acid House baron,” “a mercenary Pied Piper figure luring the children of England into a world of bad trips and orgiastic delirium” (Reynolds 1999:66). However, instead of the damning media coverage discouraging the parties, it had the opposite effect: rave exploded with a force some commentators claim was unparalleled in British pop cultural history. Although the police were initially tolerant of the parties, as public attention and fear of them mounted,

raves were increasingly closed down and fines handed out. When a twenty-one year old girl named Janet Mayes died an Ecstasy-related death on October 28, 1988, the tabloids were all over it. Then in 1990, a bill sponsored by MP Graham Bright known as the *Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act* was passed, significantly increasing the fines that could be imposed on rave organizers. The game was on.

Now that raves were clearly illegal, those sections of the great unwashed who thrived on anti-establishment action—travelers, pagans, squatters, eco-warriors—started throwing free parties, the bigger the better, as a continuation of the old hippie festivals. There followed some summer cat-and-mouse madness as the cops and the travelers played tag, and in 1992, when 25,000 people arrived to dance on Castlemorton Common in Worcestershire to 100 hours of techno-shamanism from the nation's collected sound systems, the government made it clear that they'd had enough. To set an example, members of the Spiral Tribe sound system were arrested and charged with "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance," only to win their freedom in a court case which cost the taxpayers £4 million. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:373)

A special police force called the Pay Party Unit, headed by policy chief Ken Tappenden was established to deal with the raves. The Tory government's next offensive was the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, which curtailed the right to free assembly and increased the powers of the police, and became law in 1994. Brewster and Broughton claim that "The Bill was an attempt to fight social change with the iron heel of legislation, and it united the outlaws as never before" (Brewster and Broughton 2000:373).

The CJB was unique in that it was the first time the pop music of a youth culture had been specifically prohibited. Its famous definition of house and techno as any "sounds wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of a series of repetitive beats," showed just how seriously government saw the threat of dance culture, with its combination of music, drugs and hordes of lusty young people. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:373)

The *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act* incredibly gave local police forces the discretionary power to investigate gatherings as small as ten people and order them to disperse if it was believed they were setting up a rave or even waiting for one to start. Failure to comply constituted a crime punishable by a three month sentence or a £2,500 fine.

Despite being a fan of hardcore and a raver himself, in *Generation Ecstasy* Simon Reynolds can't help but remark on how rave had taken a turn for the worse by 1992, just as it was about to burst at the seams:

From my double vantage point as fan and critic, participant and observer, darkside was a pivotal and revelatory moment: the life-affirming, celebratory aspects of rave were turned inside out, the smiley face torn off to reveal the latent nihilism of any drug-based culture. ... The dance floor was full of dead souls, zombie-eyed and prematurely haggard. Instead of outstretched arms and all-embracing extroversion, you'd see automaton/autistic body moves and vacant self-absorption. ... What started off as fun began to acquire the tinge of desperation. The folkloric drug tales got grimmer—stories of people throwing up, then picking the half-digested pills out of the puke and gobbling them down again; rumors of kids using syringes to shoot speed in the toilets. What I remember most of all from the late '92/early '93 era is the number of ravers whose smiles had been replaced by sour, cheated expressions—they hadn't come up on their Es, probably because they'd overindulged so heavily the past few years that the old buzz just couldn't be recovered. (Reynolds 1999:208-209)

Jungle

Ask a teenager what “rave music” is today, and he or she will either look at you in bewilderment or smile at you with a patronizing look that says “It’s so past your time that you wouldn’t understand even if I tried to explain it to you.” However, up until 1992, “acid house” or “rave” could accurately be used to refer to just about any of the tracks being played at raves in Britain. But as the drugs and music got faster and more intense,

rave culture underwent the first of countless splits and subdivisions, splits which were roughly aligned along class, and regional lines as different groups adapted the music to their particular situations and worldviews. The first real subgenre of rave music to emerge from the umbrella genre of acid house was “hardcore,” described above. As the size and frequency of raves increased, the demand for Ecstasy escalated and the quality of the pills available declined. As still happens today, pills sold as Ecstasy were often nothing more than amphetamines or amphetamines with a sprinkling of MDMA in them. And as the drugs that dancers were taking got “speedier” and facilitated a less empathetic and emotional experience, the music to which they danced followed a similar evolution.¹⁴

Closely following hardcore was jungle, a music characterized by rapid syncopated beats, extremely deep bass, and few if any melodies. It has since evolved into several other subgenres, including the major one known as drum ‘n bass, which is even more minimalist than jungle. Some of the early and legendary jungle DJs were Fabio, Grooverider, Photek, Dillinja, and the commercially successful Goldie. Often considered the first significant and truly indigenous black British music, jungle had dropped the smiley face of acid house and replaced it with an edge that belied the harsher realities of “Inner City Life,” the title of a big jungle track by Goldie.

Between 1992 and 1994, jungle shed the chrysalis of hardcore, and with it every last vestige of the rave ethos. ... Happy isn’t quite the word: jungle’s militant euphoria is fueled by the desperation of the early nineties. Composed literally out of fracture (“breaks”), jungle paints a sound picture of social disintegration and instability. ...[Jungle is] a nonverbal response to troubled times, a kind of warrior stance. The “resistance” is in the rhythms. Jungle is the metabolic pulse of a body reprogrammed and

¹⁴ This symbiotic relationship between dance drugs, genres of dance music, and the dance experience sought, is an important theme that I have treated elsewhere (see also Reynolds 1999:310; Takahashi and Olaveson 2003).

rewired to cope with an era of unimaginably intense information overload. As such, its rhythmic innovations will pervade popular music well into the twenty-first century, as insidiously and insinuatingly as rock 'n' roll, funk, and disco have done in the past. (Reynolds 1999:252, 253)

Because jungle is composed of breakbeats—the percussion-only section of funk and disco tracks—one of the fundamental ways it differs from traditional pop music, as well as the dance genres of house and trance, is that it lacks a steady, “four-to-the floor” kick drum beat. It is therefore less predictable, and harder to dance to. Some people describe it as having a more “treacherous” or “sinister” feel; it is certainly more frenetic than house music, or newer genres such as trance. With new technological advances such as time stretching/compression and pitch shifting, breakbeats can be manipulated in a vast number of ways: sped up to impossibly fast rhythms that no human drummer could ever achieve, or transformed into a sound that no longer resembles a drum beat.

The period during which jungle really took off in Britain was 1993-1994. While it had been considered a primarily black genre, within a couple of years it had become very popular with white suburban kids. And in terms of its production, more than half of its founding and prominent DJs and producers were white, including Aphrodite, Doc Scott, Dead Dred, Hype, and Pascal (Reynolds 1999:259). In fact, my own favourite jungle/drum 'n' bass artist, Mystical Influence, is a white Torontonion. Reynolds claims that “Far from being racist (as Shut Up and Dance alleged) the term “jungle” actually codifies the multiracial nature of the scene as compared with the mostly white audience for trance and “Intelligent” techno. The true meaning of “junglist” is defined not by color, but by class, insofar as all working-class urban youth are “niggas” in the eyes of authority” (Reynolds 1999:259).

Three other departures from acid house that characterized jungle were a “cooler” atmosphere and emotional mood, alternative drugs of choice, and the addition of the MC. Less emotionally open and more guarded, jungle raves became less about sweating the night away on the dancefloor and “losing it,” and more about looking cool as in pre-acid house club days. “The new taboo on sweat and the rowdy communion it symbolizes signaled that the scene’s emotional temperature had dropped. By 1993 eye contact was disappearing from the London hardcore scene; bonhomie gave way to a surly vigilance” (Reynolds 1999:260). Rather than Ecstasy and hallucinogens, marijuana and amphetamines were the dominant drugs in the jungle scene, drugs that fostered less empathetic experiences in favour of more paranoid and speedier ones. And due to the founding influences of Jamaican sound systems, the MC joined the DJ on stage and became a big figure in jungle, shouting out rhymes over the music. “Jungle MCs get around the semantic poverty of their patter by utilizing an arsenal of incantatory techniques that bring spoken language closer to music: intonation, syncopation, alliteration, internal rhyme, slurring, rolling of *r*’s, stuttering of consonants, twisting and stretching of vowels, comic accents, onomatopoeia” (Reynolds 1999:262).

North America the (B)rave

New York Rave

America’s first purported experimentation with rave parties occurred when Frankie Bones, a New York house DJ/producer, was flown over to England to DJ at an Energy rave. He was so moved by the experience of DJing for 25,000 people until the early hours of the morning, and by his first Ecstasy experience at the club Heaven in

Charing Cross, that he vowed to bring the rave experience back to America. Bones started out with a number of small parties—15 people, then a few dozen, then 100—at which he even projected videos of massive raves in Britain as a sort of “how-to” lesson or instructional aid. Then as promotion company STORMrave, which also included Adam X, Heather Hart (later to become a well known DJ) and promoter Dennis the Menace, Bones began throwing large parties in warehouses and beaches, emulating the Tony Colston-Hayter technique of multiple checkpoints to get to the event. During 1992, a STORMrave was being held approximately every month. Other parties also started springing up and a Brooklyn rave scene developed, centred around Bones and mainly Italian-American DJ/producers. Bones operated his own record store, Groove, with Adam X and Heather Hart, and started producing tracks as well.

New York’s answer to Tony Colston-Hayter was Michael Caruso, or “Lord Michael,” as he was known. In 1992 Michael opened two hardcore nights at Manhattan clubs Limelight and Palladium: Adrenalin and Future Shock. The soundtrack was “full-on Belgian-British-Brooklyn brutalism,” the atmosphere intense: “Moby—then DJing at Future Shock and making waves with tracks like “Go”—later likened the experience of spinning for this crowd to “playing in a penitentiary”” (Reynolds 1999:147).

Another seminal development in the American rave scene was NASA, which opened in July 1992 in New York at a club called Shelter. NASA sported a very young crowd—mainly suburban youth, and very fast music—the beginnings of hardcore, trance, and jungle, at 150 bpm. Short for Nocturnal Audio and Sensory Awakening, NASA was created by Scotto, a high profile lighting director, and DB, a London DJ. Although short-lived, NASA set a blueprint for U.S. rave in many ways. Its music was breakbeat-

oriented, anticipating the fusion of house and hip-hop that would characterize the jungle explosion in Britain that year. However, it also set a blueprint for the rave look:

Unlike the dressed-down, jeans-and-sneakers Storm crowd, the NASA kids were inventing the look that was to become the dominant US rave style. "It was the fusion of hip-hop culture into rave," says DB. "Super baggy trousers halfway down their asses, Tommy Hilfiger, Polo—preppy gear that became hip-hop clothing and then entered rave. But back in '92, it wasn't so label-oriented—lots of backpacks, lollipops, flowers in the hair, smiley faces. Very kiddy-innocent looking—nineteen-year-olds trying to look like they were five-year-olds. (Reynolds 1999:148)

Scotto also claims that NASA was where some of the distinctive styles of rave dancing were invented, like "the liquid," in which the dancer holds their hands in front of their face, fingertips to fingertips, and undulates both arms, hands and fingers as if they were one long, fluid rope or snake.

American West Coast Rave

While New York and the East coast had STORMraves and NASA, the West Coast was learning about rave and developing its own scene, through party organizers like The Wicked Crew, Truth, and Moonshine. Developed largely by British expatriates like Mark Heley (a Cambridge graduate and rave visionary mythologized as a shaman in Douglas Rushkoff's *Cyberia* (Rushkoff 1994)), Malachy and Martin O'Brien, and psychedelic gurus Fraser Clark and Genesis P. Orridge, West coast rave sported a '60s ethos and was decidedly psychedelic:

P. Orridge was actually a peripheral figure in the UK's acid house scene. But his widely disseminated ideas—psychedelia/sampladelia as the creative abuse of technology; house's 125 bpm as the primordial trance-inducing, alpha-wave-triggering tempo that connects Arab, Indian, and aboriginal music; the manipulation of sonic frequencies to achieve "metabolic engineering," a la Aleister Crowley's dictum "our method is science, our aim is religion"—pretty much defined the San Francisco

scene. In the more hyperbolic West Coast versions of rave's history, P. Orridge is credited with actually introducing acid house to the UK in the first place—a total myth-take! (Reynolds 1999:150)

Reynolds also notes a number of influences on “San Francisco’s neohippy version of rave: the neuroconsciousness movement’s covert research into designer drugs and archaic plant psychedelics; the Internet/Virtual Reality/posthuman/”extropian”/Mondo 2000 scene on the fringes of Silicon Valley; New Age culture; Haight-Ashbury’s history of acid rock and psychedelic happenings,” and the fact that much of the U.S.’s drug supply came from West Coast labs (Reynolds 1999:150).

The legendary Full Moon outdoor parties that occurred around San Francisco are metonymic of the entire West coast scene and have been emulated across the world at places like the island of Pha Ngan in Thailand, where each month when the moon is full thousands of tourists and travelers descend on one of the island’s many beaches for all night raves (I was there on my honeymoon in 2001; unfortunately, the moon wasn’t full!). Thrown by the party collective known as Wicked, Full Moon parties occurred outside under the night sky in such locations as former military bunkers and hidden beaches. The Full Moon parties were free of charge, and while there was one-upmanship between them and other San Francisco parties, it was of a more spiritual and psychedelic type than a financial one, with promoters trying to outdo each other on how fantastic a trip they could take their ravers on. Such a heady, druggy, and psychedelic scene resulted in some unusual occurrences, including incidents of purported mass hallucination: “At one party in late ’92, several hundred people “saw the same spaceship come down and land,” claims Wade Hampton. “There was this acid floating around called Purple Shield.

That party is legendary in San Francisco. After that party, most people walked away *as one*” (Reynolds 1999:156).

Los Angeles, by comparison, was developing less of a spiritual scene in favour of a more fashion conscious, after hours club scene. Steve Levy, a DJ and promoter from London, began holding regular raves in the area under the title Moonshine, and later founded a label by the same name. Levy and his brother also branched out into other products in the late 1990’s and produced the American rave scene documentary *American Massive* (2000). Daven the Mad Hatter, another flamboyant and bombastic Los Angeles promoter who even had his own publicist, threw a series of spectacular raves beginning with LSD (Love Sex Dance). Daven’s raves, like many of the others on the West Coast, featured extravagant, themed decorations and even elaborate installations, including moving props and sets operated by hydraulics. Events in Los Angeles grew ever more elaborate and outlandish, culminating in Gilligan’s Island, a 1200 strong event held on the island of Catalina during which the ravers took over the island after police were unable to stop the event (Reynolds 1999:160). After Gilligan’s Island, the Los Angeles scene is reputed to have “lost its underground edge” and gone more mainstream, with tickets to events being sold in record stores and even through the franchised ticket business Ticketmaster, as is done with most large events today in central Canada. Yet, Reynolds claims, Los Angeles was once the most thriving rave scene in America, and very much resembled the early days of UK acid house with its communal spirit:

But there was a utopian aspect to Southern California’s rave scene—the racial mixing that was going on. “It was the first time in my lifetime I saw people from every neighbourhood—San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, Long Beach—coming together,” says Todd Roberts. “Every weekend you’d see a lot of people you’d never even come into contact with. It was especially nice, being African American myself, to see black

youth involved and not just a bunch of white kids acting weird. Rave allowed me to talk about and see LA as a better community than most people give it credit for. It is a very divided city. But this was the first time those walls were breaking down. ... Utopian? It was as utopian as LA could get!" (Reynolds 1999:160).

Even Furthur and the Midwest

Rave also managed to find its way into the most unlikely corners of the U.S.—the sleepy American Midwest. In the mid-1990's one of the more thriving American scenes was located in Wisconsin. Its most famous events were a series of three day outdoor raves called Even Furthur, borrowing the theme from Ken Kesey's Acid Tests. Still held today, Reynolds describes Even Furthur as analogous to England's free party circuit. At Furthur '96, which he attended, more than three thousand people showed up, from as far away as California and Florida to dance and trip out to three days of music and more than 100 DJs. There was no security and no lights. Tents, RVs and campers were strewn all over the hillside. People wandered the site full of mud, some with few clothes on (Reynolds 1999:302). Overall, Furthur seems very much like an annual Ontario festival I attended in the summer of 2003—*Om Festival*.

Furthur is organized by The Drop Bass Network (DBN), headed up by Kurt Eckes. Still active today, DBN maintains a website—www.dropbass.net, on which it advertises events and news, and sells merchandise such as turntable slip mats, record bags, stickers, etc. The DBN also has a record label, and a declared mission of representing the "dark side" of rave. In the 1990's it also threw "techno-pagan ritual parties" that attracted attention from the local authorities, partially because of tongue in cheek promotional materials and symbolism containing Satanic references.

Reynolds claims that Furthur '96 is a microcosm of American rave in the late 1990's: zealous and dedicated promoters and participants, sustaining the event and the local scene through hard work, ingenuity, the Internet and fanzines (fan magazines) like *Tripp E Tymes*, in contrast with excessive drug use, very young participants, and a precarious relationship with the law (Reynolds 1999:303). By 1996, while rave in America still hadn't escalated into a national news phenomenon, virtually every year since 1991 some current affairs program has "discovered" it and proclaimed it as the next big craze and danger for the nation's youth (Reynolds 1999:303). Reynolds also notes how every rave scene in Britain and the U.S. seems to have a two year honeymoon period until problems appear and it begins to decline. The decline is usually tied to excessive drug use and ravers turning to polydrug use to try to recapture former highs. Insiders such as Frankie Bones witnessed and experienced this with the New York and East Coast rave scene. "Kids were combining Special K [ketamine], angel dust [PCP], Es, acid, and they'd just become a ball of jelly, sitting on the floor" (qtd. in Reynolds 1999:305).

DB, a big American DJ in the early nineties who also played at NASA in New York, summarizes the American rave scene by saying that it is more like a fad than a lifestyle for most people. Whereas in Europe, people may grow out of raving but still like the music, in America kids grow into and then out of the rave scene, especially after excessive drug use, and stop listening to the music (qtd. in Reynolds 1999:312). Quoting informants such as the Hardkiss brothers from Florida, Reynolds claims that as of 1999 there were few states in the U.S. that didn't have some kind of rave scene, with Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia being strongholds in the south, Washington, Baltimore, New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia in the east, and the entire West

Coast from Los Angeles all the way up to Vancouver in the west (Reynolds 1999:316). Reynolds also mentions how smaller “rave communities” are developing in the U.S.—loose-knit networks of people with similar musical (and often pharmacological) interests that throw small, intimate, and often free parties. This accords with what I witnessed in the central Canadian scene. For example, I attended a few parties organized by a small collective based in Ottawa known as W.O.M.P. (Word Of Mouth Parties), featuring mainly goa or psytrance music.¹⁵

Canadian Rave

There isn’t a lot written on the Canadian rave scene, largely because like many other cultural products, it was largely imported from the U.S. and Britain. Despite this, Canadians actually have a lot to be proud of when it comes to rave culture.

The Toronto rave scene in the first half of the nineties encompassed one of North America’s largest rave populations. To this day, the city remains one of the continent’s more vibrant rave centers, serving as an outstanding example of how the imported culture of rave has been absorbed differently in different environments. (Silcott 1999:75-76)

Silcott goes on to discuss how many American rave scenes, although initially begun by expatriate Brits, eventually developed their own “American” sensibility. Toronto, however, never quite got over its love affair with all things British when it came to rave. “In Toronto, the initial impulse to do what the British do never quite wore off. It still exists, and it has led to the creation of a rave scene quite different from almost any other in America” (Silcott 1999:76).

¹⁵ For a brief account of the history of the goa trance scene, see Saldana (2002).

One of first rave production companies in Canada was Exodus, started by group of Brampton teenagers with Scottish roots. At first they started turning up at warehouse parties and Toronto gay clubs, where the dominant musical form was house, imported from the New York scene. This caused some tension with the house crowd, who didn't like the dressed down style and hardcore music of the Scottish crowd. Eventually Exodus found an after-hours club named 23 Hop at 318 Richmond Street West, and began a night called Exodus. Two of the early DJs were Mark Oliver and Dr. No (aka Neil Thomas). Oliver still DJs in Canadian megaclubs like Toronto's Warehouse club complex. The Exodus nights grew in popularity, in no small measure because of the Ecstasy that the promoters distributed at the club. The Brampton crowd also began imitating UK rave styles, wearing clothing like Joe Bloggs jeans, football jerseys and scarves. They also began calling Brampton "Brampchester" after developing UK rave and music capital Manchester.

When London was inventing jungle in 1992-1994, other North American cities were following a different track and experimenting with house, trance, and hardcore. Ever the loyalist, however, Toronto followed lockstep with its sister city and began building what British style magazine *i-D* has called "the largest jungle scene in North America" in 1995 (qtd. in Silcott 1999:76). The difference was, however, while London's jungle scene was a mixture of black and white DJs and nutters, Toronto's jungle scene was very white indeed.

While the Exodus parties ignited the Toronto rave scene, they were still small time compared to what was going on in Britain with the explosion of acid house, orbital parties, and massive, multi-day events. Vacationing in Toronto in 1991 and witnessing

first hand the Canadian craze for anything British, North Londoner Alex Clive decided to stay in Toronto “to basically make a rave scene, to synthesize a real rave crowd” (qtd. in Silcott 1999:81). Clive had previous party promotion experience, having worked with renowned club promoter Philip Salon. Capitalizing on his heritage and its cultural currency, he founded the rave promotion company Chemistry and began promoting elaborate events featuring standard elements and techniques of UK rave: full colour flyers, big name DJs (such as the Shamen’s Mr. C), and special attractions such as bouncy castles, trampolines, and massive sound systems. By 1992, Chemistry was one of the best known rave promotion companies in North America .

As Silcott notes, Clive obsessed with creating a total rave environment during his early events, much like Tony Colton-Hayter had with Sunrise. At one event called 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, Clive spent days creating and hanging ornamental fish from the warehouse ceiling in which the rave was held. During another event called Magical Mystery Trip, seemingly modeled after Sunrise’s Mystery Trip, Clive rented two red double-decker buses and covered the windows so participants could not see where they were being taken for the event (Silcott 1999:83).

Clive was understandably nervous when the Toronto police called him into the station one day in April 1992 to discuss his fourth rave, appropriated titled Chemistry 4. He found out that they knew everything about him and his parties, including who his friends were, and who his DJs were. Their surprising response typified the Toronto authorities’ initial attitude to raves:

They said the Toronto police force’s attitude was quite simple: that they wanted the events safe and that they would rather have two thousand young people in a safe, controlled environment on weekends than running loose on the streets causing mischief. Before I left, they patted my back

and said, 'Have a good party.' I walked away from that police station smiling from ear to ear. I was, like, 'I can not fucking believe this! I *love* this city!' (qtd. in Silcott 1999:84)

In terms of ideology, Silcott notes that Clive's raves never went beyond the standard references to love and unity. This was unsurprising, in light of his obsession with production values. "'Raves are fast becoming the biggest movement in youth culture of all time,'" offered a Chemistry flyer for a party called Lost in Space. "Breaking down the barriers of racial and social ignorance and, above all, having a wicked time. We believe this is the true meaning of rave." Somewhat cynically, Silcott claims that in Toronto "having a wicked time" really was about as far as it went; consonant with the dynamic in the Los Angeles scene, Toronto rave was really about entertainment: "After a year or so of playing around with this meaning or that message, both cities eventually settled on scenes based upon the twin aspects of hedonism and sheer grandiosity. Rave as entertainment. A playground for grown-ups—or almost-grown-ups" (Silcott 1999:85). As 1992 came and went, rave in Toronto was becoming an industry. A new all-dance radio station, Energy 108, was created. Vinyl made a comeback as new record shops sprang open, as well as clothing stores catering to the new fashions associated with dance culture. Notable examples of these which are still major forces in the Canadian dance culture scene are Play Da Record and Eastern Bloc Records, and Modrobes, which now sells rave-inspired clothing worldwide.

Besides Chemistry, another early and influential rave promotions company in Toronto was Nitrous, founded by seven partners including Energy 108 DJ Don Burns. Burns had attended an L.A. rave in 1992 and was so overwhelmed by what he saw that he decided to import the idea to Canada. At the time, L.A. raves were lavish, expensive

productions, often following the UK model of elaborate telephone answering service messages and checkpoints to get people to the party. Burns re-created the same idea in Toronto just for its excitement factor, because at that time the Toronto authorities had not yet cracked down on raves in the city. Silcott describes how some of the early Nitrous raves were “a bit hokey,” with bungled elaborate themes and displays, buffet tables and even a pig roast sponsored by the local Loblaw's supermarket (Silcott 1999:88). Nitrous was also criticized for booking successful commercial acts like 2 Unlimited, a dance group with several top 10 hits in the early 1990s (McCall 2001:43). As the numbers at Nitrous parties continued to swell, it reformed itself as Atlantis and specialized in legal raves held in eccentric venues such as the Ontario Science Museum and the CN Tower. Chris Sheppard, then a DJ on Energy 108, played at many Atlantis raves. Sheppard is most famously known for his dance and techno compilation CDs advertised on television, and as a larger than life personality in Canadian dance and pop culture.

By 1993, Toronto had developed one of the biggest and most successful rave scenes in North America. However, the honeymoon period was coming to a close. Following on the heels of UK rave's descent into bad drugs, darker music, more overdoses, and increased violence, Toronto's rave scene got darker. This downturn coincided with the rise of rave promotions company Pleasure Force, run by Alan Stevenson and Mike Stein. Stevenson also owned the rave lifestyle shop X-Static, which sold tickets to events, clothing, accessories, and music. By many accounts, the Pleasure Force raves were troublesome, with drugs of very poor quality (imported by Stevenson himself), extremely dark music, and very young crowds:

Pleasure Forces were mega-hardass—so huge, and so bad. Every corner you turned there would be some guy: ‘E, speed, E, speed, coke. ...’ I was

seventeen at the time and loving it, fucked on crystal meth [crystal methamphetamine] and Es, living for the Pleasure Force parties. (Andrew C., qtd. in Silcott 1999:92)

As Silcott notes, eventually Pleasure Force's aura caught up with its proprietors. In 1995 Alan Stevenson came under investigation for drug trafficking and was forced to leave Canada, under a further cloud of suspicion concerning his rumoured involvement with child pornography. Stevenson's brother Amon came in to replace him at X-Static and was found dead later that year, a suspected suicide. However, many believe that his brother's business associates may have had something to do with his death (Silcott 1999:92).

Rob Lisi, a Portuguese Canadian in charge of music at X-Static and fan of the emerging UK jungle sound, founded the promotions company Syrous in 1993 with his brother Vito. My first ever rave—*Freakin' 2000*, a Halloween rave in Toronto's Better Living Centre—was co-promoted by Syrous. Syrous, together with Delirium, launched Toronto's jungle scene into what would later be considered by many as the strongest one in the world outside of the UK, and "...among the most vibrant and populated rave scenes in North America today" (Silcott 1999:97). Delirium was created by Marcus, a jungle and drum 'n' bass DJ whom I met during this research. With roots in Toronto's West Indian sound system culture and University of Toronto's CIUT, Marcus helped cement the jungle sound in Toronto, featuring such DJs as Dr. No, Medicine Muffin, Jungle PHD, Ruffneck, and the Hrderu. Marcus still DJs and has his own recording studio, and Syrous held its last rave in October 2003, its 9 year anniversary.

The Montreal rave scene, for obvious reasons, developed along much less Anglophiliac lines than did Toronto's. Instead, gay house and warehouse parties and bars,

as well as the gay party circuit events (i.e. the Black and Blue festival) have been the guiding forces in Montreal. This perhaps explains the more “housey” and “trancey” scene currently found in the city; unlike Toronto, which has a number of well developed dance sub-cultures—jungle/drum ‘n’ bass, trance, house, happy hardcore, psytrance, etc.—Montreal’s dance music scene appears to be comprised predominantly of various offshoots of trance, house, and techno styles. As I did during events in Toronto and Ottawa, during my raves in Montreal and other cities in Quebec I collected literally hundreds of flyers for other raves. Very few of the Quebec flyers advertised raves featuring jungle/drum ‘n’ bass DJs, in contrast to Toronto where well over half did.

In the early days, DJs like Tony Desypris would spin at illegal warehouse parties held in secret locations, playing some of the same tracks from his other, legal show, Utopia’s Paradise on CKUT 90.3 FM (Lightburn 2003). One of the first, and probably the shortest-lived, clubs in Montreal modeled on the acid house and rave aesthetic was Crisco. Held each week in Le Sage theatre on Sanguinet Street in 1991, Crisco was collectively spawned by Pierre Vin, creator of Le Beat, Montreal’s premier new-wave dance club of the ‘80s, and SKY pub; Sylvain Martinello, a club kid of the time who would later launch other nightspots; Chris Farley, resident DJ at Business and later manager of Angels; and Christian Pronovost, a veteran DJ who would become the resident at Crisco (Lightburn 2003). Crisco was the epitome of the DIY rave ethic: each night the crew had less than ninety minutes to set up the equipment, and so the club looked different each time. And because they had virtually no budget, the sound system wasn’t the best, nor were the “visuals”; for the latter, some glitterballs were simply hung from the ceiling and an old reel-to-reel projector played back psychedelic imagery on the

walls. However, as Lightburn explains in a passage whose storyline has been told time and again about the rave experience around the world, the right combination of music, drugs, people, and attitude came together to create a cultural revolution:

"The club had these Ecstasy dealers," explains Pronovost, "who weren't affiliated with any organization. They went to New York and Amsterdam and dealt only pure MDMA, not that filtered crap of today. On one dead night, about 20 people who presumably tried Ecstasy for the first time lost it to the music I was playing. The drug opened some gate in them." It wasn't just the cat that was let out of the bag that night - it was the whole litter. Soon there were absurd line-ups of college kids amped on the hot party favour of the moment. The fashionistas and glitterati were out in full force, the gay contingent represented, all of them quaking to the soulful house strains of classics such as "Coming on Strong" by Desiya, "Still in Love With You" by Melissa Morgan or "Grandpa's House" by Kerri Chandler. It didn't take a genius to deduce that a phenomenon was brewing.

Pronovost describes the dancefloor's frenzied dynamic: "Reynald Gonsalves [of WOW record shop] handed me a white label copy of 'Ran Kan Kan' [a Masters at Work collab with Tito Puente] at the booth, I didn't even listen to it just mixed it in right away. The crowd lost it, the same as with the Todd Terry mix of PM Dawn's 'Watchers Point of View' - people were screaming." (Lightburn 2003)

Unfortunately, the perfect mix of elements that was Crisco would last only three months. Embodying yet another archetypal pattern in rave scenes, as the club got more successful, those with a hand in it wanted their palms even greasier. When that didn't happen, calls were eventually made to the fire department about the lack of a fire permit, and the club was closed down in the spring of 1992.

Tara McCall, a former McGill University student and raver, and author of *This is Not a Rave: In the Shadow of a Subculture*, claims the first real Montreal rave was Rave New World, held on February 4, 1993 at club Metropolis, with mega-acts Moby and The Prodigy playing live (McCall 2001:44). Alternate rave legends claim, however, that the city's first rave was Solstice, organized in part by DJ Tiga. In any case, by 1994 several

more raves had been held, and a raft of promotion companies and DJ/producer collectives had appeared, some of which are still in existence: Neksus, Enigma, Beat2Beat, Liqueen, Channel, 514, Millenium, Shock and Experience, and the Vitamin DJ team. The early raves primarily drew white youths from suburbia and were held in warehouses outside the city. New after-hours clubs such as Storm, Playground, Foufounes, and Sona began appearing also, spawned by the city's developing dance culture (see also Katigbak 2003; McCall 2001:45).

Perhaps more than any other, DJ Tiga is readily identified with the Montreal rave/club scene. One of the hottest Montreal DJs in the late 1990's – early 2000's, Tiga vacationed in the Goa region of India in the 1970's, where his father was a DJ. The slender, self-assured DJ was one of the driving forces behind the early Montreal rave scene in the early 1990's. His management company AM Only's website credits him with the following innovations and influences on both the Montreal techno and rave scenes in general: bringing in guest DJs, staging intense street promotions featuring rival gangs of street acrobats, colour flyers, multi-DJ sets, and "orchestrat[ing] no less than ten major events, including "The Orb Live," "Pure," and the very first North American appearance of continental illusionist Jean-There" (Anonymous no date-a). Tiga was also a co-founder of one of the current pillars of the after-hours club scene in Montreal—Club Sona—as well as record label Turbo Recordings.

Rave Today: "Electronic Music Culture"

The DJ's craft and his skills were close to fully formed as long as twenty years ago. Disco and hip hop were his moments of true innovation. Most advances since then have come in his role as a producer, and in his possession of a good manager. But with wily representation and clever marketing, the DJ is now the hero of his age, a popstar, a crowd-draw, a reliable brand name. And he gets paid (like supermodels and movie stars, those other victors of late consumer capitalism) not according to how talented he is, nor how hard he works, but by the size of his franchise—how many ears he can reach and

how many units he can shift. —Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, pg. 341

Rave culture today is much more difficult to describe than its forebears such as garage and acid house. Whether that is due to the fact that in writing about the past we inherently tend to produce neat, clean narratives out of actually complex and fractured realities, or to the fact that rave culture today really is more diverse and complex than its predecessors, I'm not sure. Whatever the case, it is no exaggeration to state that electronic music culture, a more inclusive and current term than rave, has taken popular culture by storm. In the late 1990s, rave culture went *supercommercial*. Dance is now a very profitable segment of the music and entertainment industry, with 1000's of full length albums and singles released each year; 24 hour dance music television stations; thousands of dance music radio stations across North America and Europe; the inundation of product advertising with jungle and techno songs and riffs; new software and hardware products released each year to aid in electronic music production; and the birth of the superclub as a brand. The Ministry of Sound (MoS), originally based in London but now a worldwide brand, is an example of the latter, beginning as an enormously successful night club and branching out into a retailer of music, clothing, and other products.¹⁶ Large commercial brands now sponsor raves and club nights. There are even "touring" clubs such as Benson and Hedges' glitzy *Goldclub* series, two of which I've attended. *Goldclub* events can occur in any night club; special lighting equipment, décor, and sound systems are brought in to give the event a recognizable brand image.

¹⁶ Superclubs also *export* their club experience to exotic locales, one of the most famous being the "birthplace" of acid house and rave: "Cream, Ministry of Sound, Renaissance, Miss Money Penny's, Manumission, all big names in the UK, all had set nights in the main clubs in Ibiza—Pacha, Privilege, Amnesia, Es Paradis [by 1998]" (Sellars 1998:613).

Appropriately, Benson and Hedges cigarettes are sold at these events, usually by waif-like scantily clad women wandering around, neon-lit display cases in hand.

The same phenomenon appears to have occurred the world over. As Brewster and Broughton state, “In the UK, clubbing had become an ordinary thing to do. It was suddenly a “mainstream leisure activity,” and it was increasingly the heart of young people’s identities” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:396). Similarly, St John writes the following about Australia:

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 ... (St John 2001b:31)

Top DJs today travel the entire globe and play in the biggest and best clubs in the world. It is no exaggeration to say that in at least one segment of youth culture, they have completely assumed the position formerly held by pop and rock stars. The best DJs have devotees and followings bordering on the religious. The story of superstar DJ Sasha, a legend in the early acid house scene (and recently a guest DJ at Ottawa after hours club Surface) provides another apt example of the meteoric rise of the DJ as a culture hero and pop god:

At Shelley’s in Stoke-on-Trent, such was their admiration for the resident DJ’s talents that the club’s regulars built him into a real hero. At the end of each night, this DJ—a Welshman named Sasha—found a queue of people waiting to shake his hand. Guys even asked him to kiss their girlfriends. ... Sasha’s stardom was quite genuine. His audience reacted as they did because his music—stirring concertos of a cappellas and piano-laden house—was generating very powerful emotions. Admittedly, Ecstasy was a contributing factor, but it was his skill as a DJ, his ability to connect with his dancers, that made Sasha a star. (Brewster and Broughton 2000:389)

Sasha himself is reported to have resented the way he was deified and sold to the masses, including a cover of him on *Mixmag* with the caption “SON OF GOD?” Nevertheless, the absolute devotion he enjoyed from his fans illustrates the exalted position of the DJ in contemporary dance culture.

The phenomenon of the DJ as producer and remixer has also taken off since it was first introduced in the disco and house scenes. Norman Cook, aka Fatboy Slim, describes how DJing and producing/remixing go hand in hand:

When you’re DJing, you spend untold hours just standing watching people dance. And you begin to realize which bits of a record people react to and which bits get them going. You just learn what makes people dance. ... When I’m in the studio, I think back to the night before and what kind of things worked with dancers. You remember how you felt when you put a tune on and it rocked the crowd; or when you played a groove that the crowd totally got into. Even when they’d never heard the record before. It doesn’t necessarily mean you make great pop music, but if your music’s aimed straight at the dancefloor it gives you a head start. (qtd. in Brewster and Broughton 2000:353)

Another trend of rave scenes today are skyrocketing admission prices. Even during my three years of research I noticed considerable ticket price inflation. When I began attending raves in 2000, a ticket for a medium to large rave (500-2000+ people) in Toronto or Montreal was \$25 - \$35. One of the last events I went to was at the after hours club Aria in Montreal. Granted, it was to see the #1 DJ in the world—Tiesto,¹⁷ and another very big name, Armin van Buren, but the ticket price was \$65. *Sixty five dollars to dance and watch a couple of people play records all night.* This in itself is a testament

¹⁷ I use DJ Tiesto as case study or paradigm of the superstar DJ throughout the manuscript because he was voted the #1 DJ in the world in 2002 and 2003, and because I’m very familiar with his work. See Image 1 for a picture of Tiesto in action.

to the value and significance of the DJ to North American popular culture, as well as the huge appeal of rave.

Canadian electronic music culture today still seems very much in search of “the next big thing,” on the one hand, and yet caught in a backward glance at its history on the other. As an example of the latter, older musical forms like “electro” (‘80’s influenced poppy synthesizer dance) are coming back into vogue, and at the time of writing, the squelchy sound of acid house also seems to be creeping back into house and trance tracks. Whatever the future of electronic music cultures, one thing can be stated about them unequivocally—they are global. In the remaining chapters, while I focus on the experiences I had and the people I met and spoke with in Canada, there is no question that a large portion of what I witnessed is occurring around the globe, and as was evident in this history of dance cultures, has been occurring for several decades, although in different cultural contexts and with less advanced technology—both musical and chemical.

The central Canadian electronic music scene today is a mixed bag. On the one hand are megaclubs like Stereo, Aria, and Sona in Montreal, and the massive complex of interconnected clubs known as the Warehouse in Toronto. These buildings draw in thousands of clubbers every weekend and on certain nights throughout the week. They have resident DJs who spin on regular nights, but also open their doors to special events and promotions (like the *Goldclub* series), where top DJs from around the world are flown in to play, along with custom sound and lighting systems. Tickets to special events like this will run from \$15 to as much as \$70. And despite the high entry prices, all of the special events I’ve attended were absolutely packed. In many ways, the scene at one of

these superclubs is not that different from a rave. At virtually all of them, participants will be ingesting psychoactive drugs to enhance their experience. What is ingested will vary according to the location of the club, the type of music being played, and what is available in the area. Also, while during my fieldwork their incidence was certainly less prevalent, I did witness such traditional rave accoutrements as glowsticks and other light-emitting objects, protective masks smeared with Vicks Vaporub (to enhance the Ecstasy experience), and layers of ornamental plastic jewelry at superclubs. Similarly, the pre-pubescent “candy” style of dress and child-like imagery characteristic of raves was much less prevalent at most of the clubs I attended, while it was the norm at several raves, especially in 2000 and 2001 in Toronto, and at almost every event I attended in Montreal and Quebec City.

At the other end of the spectrum are small, intimate raves thrown by DJ/producer/graphic designer/psychedelic head collectives in all of the major cities in central Canada, and likely in smaller towns also. An example of one of these collectives is the WOMP (Word of Mouth Parties) collective of Ottawa. I attended two WOMP parties during fieldwork, which I discuss in more detail later. In brief, parties such as these are generally non-profit and organized on a volunteer basis by people attempting to re-create the vibe and spirit of acid house and early rave gatherings. These are people for whom PLUR (Peace Love Unity Respect, the supposedly universal credo of rave) is still alive, even if they no longer use the somewhat tarnished acronym (See Image 10). The number of people at these smaller, “private” raves can be anywhere from 20 to 200. The atmosphere is usually very friendly, warm, and inviting, but can also be intense. In terms of styles of dress, almost anything can be expected; because the environment is usually so

secluded and the participants all known to each other, a great deal of experimentation will occur, both socially and in terms of material culture.

In between these two poles of contemporary electronic music cultural events lie the continuation of the large scale commercial raves that began around 1990 in Britain, and 1993 in the U.S. and Canada. Some of the events I attended in this category were *Space Invader* in Toronto in December, 2000, *Révélation* in Quebec City in January, 2001, and *Lollipop 3* in Quebec City in March, 2002. These events can vary widely in attendance, but will usually be on the larger side, with as many as 5000 participants. Drug use will usually be a prominent feature—typically as many as 80-90% of attendees will be under the influence of some type of psychoactive substance. The style of dress and rave accoutrements can vary widely. Some events are more “candy,” involving employment of pacifiers, several layers of beaded jewelry, stuffed animals, backpacks with cartoon characters on them, fun fur, Dr. Seuss hats, etc. In terms of the vibe at these events, it too often represents a middle ground between after hours clubs and smaller private raves. At least some people will usually be openly friendly, even to strangers.

A fourth type of electronic music cultural event that I attended was a multi-day outdoor festival, which I discuss in more detail in chapter 5. Multi-day and single day electronic music festivals are less common, but there are now some well-established and world famous ones held annually, such as the Berlin Love Parade. Another is Burning Man, a 4-5 day technological/music festival held each year in the Black Rock Desert, 120 miles northeast of Reno, Nevada. “[K]nown for its sex, drugs and dancing culture,” Burning Man is well-attended by participants from all over the world, and most especially by high-technology workers from California’s Silicon Valley (Chalmers

1999:45). The climax of Burning Man is the burning of a twelve metre high stick figure effigy made of wood and neon lights on Saturday night, the significance and meaning of which is a mystery to most participants. Similar to the Australian festivals (“doofs”) and direct action protest events described in St John (2001c), art installations incorporating technology and industrial refuse are also prominent features at Burning Man, as are ritualized performances.

Trance

The type of music featured at the majority of the events I describe below is trance. Trance is a repetitive, hypnotic genre of electronic dance music that took the global dance scene by storm in the late 1990’s and shows no signs of abating.¹⁸ Brewster and Broughton concur: “At time of writing, trance, favored by DJ stars like Judge Jules and Paul Oakenfold, has a near-complete dominance of the UK commercial club scene and is making serious inroads worldwide” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:334). Trance is also definitely my favourite genre of rave music, and catalyzed the most profound and ineffable experiences during my raving career. Once again the rave scene cliché and mantra of this project that “you have to experience it yourself to truly understand it” applies; as the Latino raver from my opening fieldwork snapshot put it to me, trance defies definition. During my first, pseudo-rave event at an Ottawa after hours nightclub, one of my informants, Kim, could only describe trance to me as “an overwhelming feeling of elation ... you’re on a different planet” (Ikon, September, 2000).

¹⁸ Discussions in most Internet chat rooms seem to suggest that trance’s peak popularity occurred between 1997 and 2000.

In terms of musical elements, it is relatively easy to dissect. Trance, especially epic or progressive trance and my favourite genre, uplifting trance, has a driving 4/4 or “four on the floor” beat comprised of 8 bar blocks, and a tempo of between 120 and 150 bpm. A loud, deep, electronic kick drum keeps the beat and is the constant of the trance track. Added to that 4/4 bass beat are more rapid, multiple and overlapping syncopated rhythms, typically in the higher octaves. The (synthesized) sounds used for these quicker rhythms typically resemble high-hat cymbals, snare drums, bongo drums, hand claps, rattles, and other percussive instruments. Finally, added to this mass of overlapping rhythms are repeating patterns of typically classically-inspired synthesized and sampled melodies and riffs. What gives epic, progressive, and uplifting trance its characteristic intensity and makes it a favourite genre at raves and dance clubs are the continuing crescendos that punctuate it. Called “builds,” these crescendos begin with a breakdown or interlude of the 4/4 bass beat. At this point, the crowd of dancers is momentarily suspended standing in place, looking around, taking a drink of water, perhaps wiping the sweat from its collective face. The breakdown continues with a simple but uplifting sampled or synthesized melody at low volumes. The build then begins, as the melody is repeated at increasing volumes, octaves, and perhaps pitch. The effect is a steady and palpable building of intensity and anticipation in the crowd, especially a crowd already bursting with the jittery energy of healthy doses of Ecstasy and speed. A good trance track and/or a good DJ will extend the build, longer and longer, thereby extending and increasing the intensifying effect on the crowd. Finally, at the height of the build the heavy beat of the 4/4 kick drum beat is “dropped in”¹⁹ at massive volume, possibly

¹⁹ Hence the phrase “drop the bass” and terminology in rave scenes like The Drop Bass Network.

accompanied by a final machine-gun blast of the snare drum. The effect of a good, sustained build and climax on a crowd of dancers must be seen, heard, and felt to be fully appreciated. I have witnessed climaxes at rock concerts, dramatic performances, and sporting events, and the sheer effervescence of a really good build by a superstar DJ easily compares with if not surpasses any of them. Dancers shout, scream, and yell at the top of their lungs. They jump into the air and pound the concrete to the beat with their feet. I've watched people cry and hug one another. I've witnessed people leaping up and down and flailing their limbs in all directions, unable to physically express what they were feeling. I've seen people drop to the ground and roll in the dirt, baying and howling like animals. Speaking from my own experience, I've never felt more alive and ecstatic than at the best raves I've been to, with a truly great trance DJ taking me on peak after peak of ecstatic bliss.

Chapter 3 -

Social Scientific Approaches to the Study of Rave

Raving is not something that can be experienced vicariously. –Jimi Fritz, *Rave Culture*, pg. 199

...[T]hose who write about the rave rarely solicit the voices and experiences of people who actually go to raves. –Scott Hutson, “Technoshamanism,” pg. 60

As I demonstrated in chapter two, contrary to popular perception the rave phenomenon has actually been “in the making” for several decades. The acid rock, disco, house, and acid house movements have all contributed in some way to what we currently understand as rave, although as I also pointed out, “rave” is now a meaningless term for many ravers. And as I will suggest in chapter six, what we currently consider rave will undoubtedly provide at least a partial foundation for new music and dance-based social movements of the future.

Once rave’s history has been traced out in this way, and when one considers the rapid globalization of the rave phenomenon and the rave experience, it is a remarkable fact that academic commentators have been relatively silent on it until the last five or six years. With the exception of a few sparse social analyses of rave in the early 1990’s (McRobbie 1994; Redhead 1993), virtually nothing scholarly was written on rave until the end of the millennium, when it appears that “the academic community has woken up

to the presence of this ubiquitous (sub-)culture” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003; see also Critcher 2000; Reynolds 1999). Since 1997, an accelerating number of scholarly studies of the rave phenomenon has appeared, primarily in two broad fields of inquiry.

The first field of inquiry into the practices of rave is in the medical sciences. Article-length medical publications on rave in the English language have originated in the countries of Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands (for examples, see Adlaf and Smart 1997; Brown, Jarvie et al. 1995; Lenton, Boys et al. 1997; Lenton and Davidson 1999; Measham, Parker et al. 1998; Pedersen and Skrondal 1999; Power, Power et al. 1996; Shewan, Dalgarno et al. 2000; Topp, Hando et al. 1999; Van de Wijngaart, Braam et al. 1999; Weber 1999; Weir 2000). “The majority of publications on raves and dance culture from the medical and health sciences fields deal[s] primarily with demographics of drug use, drug policy issues, and harm reduction strategies” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:73). With few exceptions (Van de Wijngaart, Braam et al. 1999; Weir 2000), none of the medical sciences publications display in-depth, contextual knowledge of the socio-cultural matrices within which raves occur. As a result of these two factors, this body of literature is rather one-dimensional and superficial and tends to neglect the fact that drug-taking is only one of several micro-sociological practices collectively comprising the macro-sociological practice of raving. It therefore also tends to devalue the agency of rave’s principal actors, and to “miss or misinterpret the elements that are of central importance to ravers themselves, such as the purposively varied nature of different rave music genres and the relations between this variegation and the types of drugs used at raves, as well as the physiological concomitants of these relations (for an exception, see Power et al. 1996)” (Takahashi and

Olaveson 2003:74). Furthermore, even these studies' basic definitions of rave quite often betray a simplistic understanding of what in fact is a complex and detailed subculture with an extensive history, as demonstrated in chapter two.²⁰ Take for example one definition found in a 1995 article on Edinburgh raves, which is accompanied by just a few sentences of elaboration: "A 'rave' is a dance event where music is played non-stop for several hours and the dancing is hard and fast" (Brown, Jarvie et al. 1995:168).

The other broad field of inquiry into the rave phenomenon has occurred in the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies.²¹ Because the primary questions of this research are anthropological/sociological in nature, and because the phenomenon in which I am centrally interested—the religious experience of connectedness at raves—is an inherently social one, I will summarize the sociological literature on raves in much more detail below. In doing so I will demonstrate, in concurrence with Scott Hutson (Hutson 2000), that while these studies have raised some interesting questions and provided some plausible initial conclusions, they ultimately present superficial analyses about rave. I will then discuss the reasons for this superficiality: lack of privileging the voices of those who rave; lack of taking one's informants seriously; and lack of direct, bodily knowledge of the rave experience. In short, I will argue that what previous research on rave culture and the rave experience has failed to do is employ an experiential approach. At the conclusion to the chapter I will then outline the manner in which I employed such an approach during this research.

²⁰ Although most of the sociological analyses of rave evince an understanding of the subject much deeper in nature, some obviously betray an erroneous and simplistic one. For example, Critcher states that "Acid house refers to no more than music associated with LSD" (Critcher 2000:146).

²¹ For the sake of organization and simplicity, on occasion I include in this summary of the literature analyses within other separate, yet broadly conceived, *social* disciplines, such as cultural geography, tourism and leisure studies, and social psychology.

As Moral Panic

In “Raves, Risks and the Ecstasy Panic,” Sean Hier demonstrates how the events of 1999-2000 in the rave community in Toronto, Ontario precipitated a “classic moral panic ... through the construction of a discourse centred on the dangers and risks associated with Ecstasy use” (Hier 2002:34). However, paralleling the argument made by Thornton (Thornton 1994), Hier contests and problematizes the traditional theory of moral panics. Using the Toronto rave scene as a case study, he illustrates how Toronto’s rave communities successfully subverted the moralizing discourse in mainstream media through engaging with alternate media outlets, thereby demonstrating the relational aspect of governance and the agency of social actors in “moralized political projects” (Hier 2002). For example, Hier notes that “the actions of [Toronto mayor] Mel Lastman and [police chief] Julian Fantino were singled out for interrogation by supporters of the rave communities as threatening to push raves underground, concomitantly escalating the risks involved with raving in Toronto” (Hier 2002:47). As a result, on August 2, 2000, city council voted 50-4 in favour of sanctioning raves in city spaces.

Critcher (2000) echoes Hier’s analysis when he writes that “Rave culture is surrounded by the language of risk” (Critcher 2000). He claims that the moral panic framework does in fact approximate the social and governmental reaction to rave culture in Britain, but suggests a less unitary narrative, on three fronts. First, there were actually three separate but interrelated moral panics—about New Age travelers, raves, and Ecstasy use. Second, precisely who the folk devils were was far from a settled matter; ravers themselves were usually portrayed as victims, promoters were sometimes targeted, and universally vilified were drug dealers. And finally, Critcher suggests that the media

coverage was not as monolithic as has been suggested. Quoting McDermott et al. (1993), he states that broadcast media were more balanced in their coverage and actually forestalled the development of the panic (Cricher 2000:153). In contrast to Critcher but along the same grounds as he outlines, however, Sarah Thornton and Angela McRobbie (McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Thornton 1994; Thornton 1995) favour either a radical revision of the moral panic model if it is to convincingly apply to the dynamics and history of rave culture, or a rejection of it altogether in such an analysis.

As Ecstatic Disappearance

Probably no other article has been cited or quoted more often in academic and journalistic pieces on rave culture than Antonio Melechi's "The Ecstasy of Disappearance" (Melechi 1993), which appears as a chapter in Steve Redhead's *Rave Off: Politics and Deviance in Contemporary Youth Culture* (Redhead 1993). Although brief and somewhat disjointed, "The Ecstasy of Disappearance" has been interpreted by many as an insightful analysis of the essence of the rave experience.

Melechi outlines a very brief history of the birth of acid house on the island of Ibiza and its importation to England by young tourists. He then suggests that although the concept of "the tourist gaze" is useful in analyses of traditional types of tourism, it is inapt in this case. This is because the Balearic holiday, and British acid house itself, comprises a spectacular disappearance, a disaccumulation of self and culture: "To understand the pleasures of the dance floor we must move to a different logic of tourism where one comes to hide from the spectre of a former self (Britain and San Antonio) to disaccumulate culture and disappear under the dry ice and into the body" (Melechi 1993:32). Hence, there is nothing left at which to gaze; or at the very least, the body has

moved “to a different plane of pleasures” (Melechi 1993:33) than the traditional “phallic domain of visibility where female absence is reflected” (Melechi 1993:33). Melechi compares rave to Baudrillard’s America: both represent “a seductive absence and enticing void where one can partake in the Ecstasy of disappearance” (Melechi 1993:32). For Melechi, the spaces of acid house:

represent a fantasy of liberation, an escape from identity. A place where nobody is but everybody belongs. ... This is the enigmatic void of Acid House: where the invisible hide and the mute prefer silence, where the Ecstasy of disappearance resists the imperative to reveal one’s self. (Melechi 1993:37-38)

Unfortunately, Melechi’s rather depressing interpretation of the rave as an empty, superficial, and ultimately meaningless void would proceed to directly and indirectly inform a host of other readings of rave as just another symptom of the postmodern, just another cultural product all style and no substance. For example, echoing and quoting Melechi, Josephine Leask characterizes the clubbing experience as anything but human, as “a journey and an arrival at a spiritual void” (Leask 1996:38). Similarly, in the same volume as Melechi, Hillegonda Rietveld writes that

To try and find a depth beneath the aesthetic of the rave-event is like trying to deflate a bouncy castle (a favourite feature at open air raves): all that can be found is air and an affirmation of a Thatcherite enterprise culture, leaving its shape, the representation of the dream of ‘love’, hope and happiness, deflated in the process. (Rietveld 1993:57; see also Hemment 1997; Jordan 1995; Vitukhnovskaya 1996)

This statement is especially surprising coming from Rietveld, whose former membership in seminal new wave/house group Quando Quango, current status as a house DJ, and meticulously researched doctoral thesis on the house movement (Rietveld 1998) clearly

evince her passion for electronic music and its culture.²² Nonetheless, as we will see, rave culture and the rave experience is in fact meaningful for many participants, and represents anything but a “spiritual void.”

As Subcultural Capital

Sarah Thornton was the first scholar to treat the idea of rave culture and its manifestations as subcultural capital, adapting Bourdieu’s term. In “Moral Panic, the Media and British Rave Culture” (Thornton 1994), and especially in her widely cited doctoral thesis, published as *Club Cultures* (Thornton 1995), Thornton brought an early and fresh insight to some of the cultural and social dynamics underlying the rave scene.

One of Thornton’s fresh insights is a more nuanced and mature examination of the media’s relationship with rave cultures. Contrary to the previously one-sided analysis of ravers as victims of the mass media via the tabloids’ overblown stories of drug overdoses and rampant adolescent sexcapades, Thornton demonstrates ravers’ agency in utilizing alternative media such as fanzines and flyers to construct their own discourse about their culture. Thornton also highlights how even negative portrayals of rave in mass media serve to construct and develop the culture in various ways.

Thornton’s central project in both works is describing the process by which subcultures like rave develop and define themselves against an “Other,” which in this case is mass culture or “the mainstream,” which latter term Thornton problematizes. “More than fashionable or trendy, underground sounds and styles are “authentic,” and pitted against the mass-produced and mass-consumed” (see also Hesmondhalgh 1998;

²² I suspect that the cynicism and postmodern reading of rave in Rietveld’s article may have perhaps been subtly coerced, originating in the environment that it did—a seminar led by Steve Redhead at the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture.

Thornton 1994:177). Thornton goes on to describe the various techniques that members of rave cultures utilize to protect their subcultural capital from going mainstream, such as white labels and the word-of-mouth advertising of raves.

Jerrentrup (2000) presents a similar, yet more simplistic argument for “techno” culture in Germany, claiming that it has been “mainstreamed” and is in decline.²³ Despite the obvious falsity of the latter statement (Germany is still one of the most vibrant and productive locations for electronic music culture in the world), Jerrentrup does offer some acute observations that also hold true for North American rave culture. A sampling of these are:

1. Big capital and extra-musical commerce has invaded techno culture: cigarette companies sponsor tours with techno musicians, and travel bureaus organize trips to raves.
2. Techno music has become a part of our everyday listening environment, played in shopping spaces, reception areas, elevators and warehouses.
3. Techno is now established as a musical genre in large chain stores.
4. Techno discotheques have permeated the world.
5. Techno DJs and producers are now superstars.

Taking a decidedly economic perspective, Smith and Maughan also theorize about the process by which rave and dance cultures accumulate and distribute cultural (and financial) capital. Refreshingly, they begin with the following statement: “Young people, therefore, should not just be seen as a group that threatens the social order and needs to be ‘dealt with’, or as consumers of forms of postmodern culture, but as individuals and members of collectives which are at the forefront of creating a new culture and economy” (Smith and Maughan 1998:212). From this statement it is clear that the authors depart from the well-worn paths in the study of subcultures.

²³ See also Verhagen et al. (2000) for a similar analysis of the gabber (an extremely fast and aggressive dance music genre originating in Amsterdam and Rotterdam) scene in the Netherlands.

Smith and Maughan sum up their argument thus:

It is our contention that the music industry takes a basically Fordist structure, and that the music scene coming out of the dance culture takes a post-Fordist structure. This can principally be seen in the huge number of micro-labels, the use of new technology which reduces the costs of production, a cultural aesthetic that embraces this diversity and the sounds that can be made from the technology, and an underground culture which generates space for the micro-labels and restricts the domination of the major music corporations. (Smith and Maughan 1998:212; cf. Hollands 2002; Chatterton and Hollands 2002)

Brown (1997), Gibson (1999; 2001), Goodwin (1988), Hesmondhalgh (1998), and Reynolds (1999) similarly discuss the shifts in the cultural, material, and political dynamics of production and consumption that accompanied the acid house and rave explosions through such techniques and innovations as digital music production, sampling, white labels, micro-labels, flyers, web-based communication and promotion, and the deliberate eschewing of the “star system.”

Variations on a(n) (old) Theme: Rave as Resistance

Temporary Autonomous Zones

The spaces and places of rave have been taken up for analysis by a number of authors. Several in particular have drawn upon anarcho-mystic philosopher Hakim Bey’s idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, or TAZ.

Chris Gibson, for example, notes that scholars of popular music are “increasingly engaging with issues of space and place...” (Gibson 1999:20). In terms of rave’s use of space and place, Gibson highlights the contrast between previous musical scenes’ (such as rock and “indie”) mythologization of fixed locations with rich traditions against the idealized rave, which “occupies space momentarily, before such industry narratives are

solidified. ... This radical sense of spatial *fluidity* is perhaps most vividly accounted for in the works of left-anarchist Hakim Bey, whose essay on the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) has been influential in shaping a radical rave practice in NSW [New South Wales]” (Gibson 1999:22). Gibson further highlights Bey’s advocacy of the use of the Internet in establishing TAZ’s, and the way that this has been taken up by electronic music communities in Australia (and in fact in rave communities the world over).

Tim Jordan argues, based on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, that raving is an example of a postmodern revolutionary movement. Paradoxically, however, raving can be considered a politically indifferent revolutionary movement because its only aim is the continued production of the “collectively lived present” (Jordan 1995:139). Jordan also mentions Michel Maffesoli’s concept of tribes as an apt description of the type of social collective that raves engender. Also drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari, among others, Drew Hemment argues that *ekstasis* – the *raison d’être* of the house (rave) movement, embodies a temporary suspension of our humanity, specifically the puritan self that thwarts and holds desire in suspense:

In dance the body stands forth and becomes ecstatic. If the self is a sedimentation of a certain stable alignment of forces, the ecstatic body sets those forces loose. ... The self that is ‘lost’ on the dancefloor is neither abstract nor eternal, but the historical product of a puritan heritage – and this heritage is in crisis. Amidst a generalized loss of meaning, the modern subject is cut adrift, disorientated and unsure. (Hement 1997:25-26)

Importantly, Hemment recognizes with Gibson and others that much of the panicked reaction by authorities to the early raves and warehouse parties during the acid house explosion derived not from their illegality or danger to participants, but from their opening up an unstructured physical (and social) space, from “the lack of a clear

regulative framework” (Hemment 1997:33; see also Luckman 2001; St John 2001a; Tramacchi 2001).

Sex, Gender, and Rave

As perhaps *the* major youth cultural phenomenon and, as some have argued, revolutionary movement of the last half of the twentieth century, it is to be expected that issues of sex and gender in rave culture would be treated by scholars. However, as Pini noted in 1997, “With the notable exception of Angela McRobbie’s *Shut up and Dance* (1994), none of the existing academic works on this scene, or on clubbing more generally, seriously address the position of girls and women within rave” (Pini 1997:153). The essay written by McRobbie that Pini refers to was in fact one of the first pieces of true academic writing on rave. McRobbie, of Goldsmiths College, University of London, first treated gender issues in rave culture in a chapter titled “Shut Up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity,” in her edited book *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (McRobbie 1994).

McRobbie’s work on rave “is characterized by optimistic descriptions of the ways that 1990s youth seek and use ‘pleasure’ as a symbolic escape from the social tensions of their times” (Wilson 2002:379). While she seems to be reaching at certain points in her reading of some of rave’s practices (either that or she simply misinterprets them, as for example when she writes that pacifiers, whistles and popsicles are a way for female ravers to symbolically seal off their bodies from sexual advances), and her analysis barely scratches the surface of rave, she does present some noteworthy and interesting conclusions. For example, she highlights the paradox in the fact that while the androgyny and ritualized safety of the rave opens up new socio-sexual spaces for women to explore

their bodies without the expectation of sexual attention, raves are also yet another cultural phenomenon in which the means of production are controlled predominantly by males; most DJs are male, most promotion companies are owned and/or operated by males (see also Pini 1997; St John 2001b). In addition, McRobbie eruditely notes the particularly gendered way in which dance, the principal medium of social expression and relationship in rave, departs from previous youth subcultures: "Dance is where girls were always found in subcultures. It was their only entitlement. Now in rave it becomes the motivating force for the entire subculture" (McRobbie 1994:169). Whereas in previous subcultures dance was viewed as a particularly feminine form of embodiment, and ideals of "coolness" and subcultural style for men involved remaining aloof and in control, in rave "losing it" and abandoning oneself to the dance is acceptable and encouraged for both sexes.

Maria Pini echoes many of the conclusions reached by McRobbie concerning the paradoxically simultaneously novel and traditional relationship between women and rave as subculture. For example, she writes that "rave represents an undoing of the traditional cultural associations between dancing, drugged, 'dressed-up' woman and sexual invitation, and as such opens up a new space for the exploration of new forms of identity and pleasure" (Pini 1997:155). Departing from gender-oriented analysis for a moment, Pini also reaches some conclusions that anticipate later studies of rave which would begin to view it as a religious or semi-religious experience (and that will be discussed in the next chapter). Quoting some of her informants, Pini notes how rave had begun to take on the overtones of a "cult" for them, and had become an important part of their identity structures. She also recounts her informants' descriptions of the rave's breaking down

social barriers and giving them a sense of “becoming part of something ‘bigger’” (Pini 1997:161). Further anticipating anthropological and religious studies perspectives on rave, Pini notes the centrality of the body and emotions to the rave experience, including the fact that much communication in the rave is nonverbal.

Unfortunately, she fails to further explore these promising potentials in this article, limited as it is by its narrow focus and methodological weaknesses. Her focus on gender analysis inevitably leads to a misunderstanding, similar to McRobbie’s, of some of the most fundamental teleologies of the rave—she views it primarily as a practice whose ultimate aim is the pursuit of pleasure. Thus her conclusion that rave is “...possibly best understood as a non-phallic form of pleasure” (Pini 1997:167). While the field of sexuality inevitably comprises a part of the social dynamics at work at a rave, contrary to Pini’s and McRobbie’s dominant reading of the rave as a space of hotly contested and constructed gendered identities, sometimes “a cigar is just a cigar.”

The ultimate methodological shortcoming and intrinsic error in Pini’s treatment of the rave epitomizes the problem with so many of the other analyses in the cultural studies literature. Using the “notion of ‘textuality,’” Pini states that “My particular reading, then, aims to elucidate the stories or ‘texts’ through which women experience rave ...” (Pini 1997:155). Despite its current popularity as an interpretive framework, the concept of textuality is probably the worst possible investigative tool for any sustained and substantial analysis of rave, and particularly of the rave experience. With such a body-centred, fleshly, ephemeral practice, “instead of inventing nonsensical rhetorical devices [like] Pini’s “text of excitement” ... in an inept attempt to flatten and “textualize” an

immensely contoured, sensual, and intense experience like raving, the experience itself should be the object of study” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:90).

Dealing specifically with Ecstasy use, Sharron Hinchliff’s “The Meaning of Ecstasy Use and Clubbing to Women in the late 1990s” also focuses on women in the rave/club scene. Arguing that qualitative data, particularly from female drug users, has been traditionally undervalued by drug researchers, Hinchliff interviewed eight female Ecstasy users from South Yorkshire between the ages of 21 and 31. Several of her conclusions mirror those of McRobbie and Pini. For example, her informants relate that they felt much safer in dance clubs and raves as opposed to regular pubs, because of the frequent absence of alcohol and because they didn’t feel like sexual targets. Respondents also indicated a greater sense of independence, amicability with other females, and a sense of friendliness and unity with the crowd.

Clubcultures?

Steve Redhead, then of the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, edited the first book length scholarly publication on rave culture, *Rave Off: Politics and Deviance in Contemporary Youth Culture* (Redhead 1993). *Rave Off* was largely exploratory and from a purely textual approach had a rather “cobbled-together,” slapdash appearance.

However, being the first book to seriously treat the “already outdated” subcultures of acid house and rave, *Rave Off* is cited widely. I deal with the individual contributions to *Rave Off* thematically in this chapter, and therefore will not discuss the book as a whole here.

However, Redhead’s subsequent work on “clubcultures” deserves some comment.

Redhead takes the theoretical construct and object of study of Sarah Thornton’s 1995 book *Club Cultures* and reifies it in *Subcultures to Clubcultures: An Introduction to*

Popular Cultural Studies (Redhead 1997) and *The Clubcultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies* (Redhead, Wynne et al. 1998). In these works, Redhead argues for the abandonment of the outdated, classic notion of subculture (and the “subculture as resistance” model) in favour of what he calls “clubculture” or post-subculture, characterized by a dissolution of the line between the subcultural and the mainstream, an erosion of meaning and authenticity, and a nostalgia for styles/forms of the past (see also Muggleton 1997). As I discuss below, the entire concept of “clubcultures” is suspect for many reasons, and the thesis that all cultural practices falling outside mainstream culture are in some way “clubcultures” betrays a tunnel vision and an Anglo-centrism bordering on the absurd; not all contemporary practices occur in or revolve around clubs or the clubbing experience. Moreover, as others have noted, the *Clubcultures Reader* doesn’t even really deal with clubcultures (Bennett 2002).

Falling within the “clubcultures” school of cultural studies and yet tremendously more nuanced and researched is Ben Malbon’s *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality* (Malbon 1999). In many ways *Clubbing* is a turning point in the study of rave cultures. Rather than just the stylistic elements of rave and club cultures and their habitués, *Clubbing* attends to the actual physical experience of clubbing and raving as a serious object of academic study. Malbon’s basic thesis is that clubbing is an essentially apolitical, hedonistic practice through which social actors “lose themselves” in order to paradoxically “find themselves” (i.e. explore the self and form identities) through highly embodied “playful vitality.” Malbon draws upon Maffesoli’s concepts of neo-tribes and unicity and Turner’s *communitas* in his attempt to map the clubbing experience, ultimately abandoning both in favour of his own “playful vitality.” While I have several

problems with the way he uses and dismisses these theories, Malbon's serious and detailed attention to the experience of clubbing itself, as well as his lack of trepidation in exploring its ephemeral side, warrant praise.

As the "New Tribes"

Aside from the notion of resistance, another of the most popular ways of framing raves and the communities they engender (both real and virtual) in the sociological literature has been as "tribes" or "neo-tribes," derived from Michel Maffesoli's sociology of "sociality," especially his *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (Maffesoli 1996). In this work Maffesoli uses the concept of the tribe to describe the micro-groupings characteristic of social identities in the increasingly consumer-oriented societies of late modernity. Modern tribes or neo-tribes "foreground the immediate and the affectual and are marked more by their practices and spacings of inclusion and exclusion and their shared styles than by more formalized memberships and contractual codes of behaviour" (Malbon 1999:57). Also more important than formal membership in neo-tribes such as rave are shared notions and priorities of emotionality, community, atmosphere, and especially ephemerality; the notion of membership in a particular tribe is less important than the fluid movement between different tribes. Quoting Maffesoli, Halfacree and Kitchin write that neo-tribes are places "where people gather together to 'bathe in the affectual ambience' ... in their search for community and belonging, the loss of which is the leit-motif of the postmodern condition" (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:48).

In "Subcultures or Neo-Tribes," Andy Bennett argues precisely that "those groupings which have traditionally been theorized as coherent subcultures are better

understood as a series of temporal gatherings characterized by fluid boundaries and floating memberships,” or neo-tribes (Bennett 1999:600). While Maffesoli himself theorized that the neo-tribes were a recent development and in contrast to the counter-cultures of the 1960s and 1970s (Maffesoli 1996:76), Bennett contends that the process of tribalism began earlier and is tied to the origins of mass consumerism originating after the Second World War (1999:607). The example Bennett uses to illustrate his point is the “contemporary dance music scene” in Britain. He ultimately argues that contrary to previous studies of the relationship between musical taste and visual style,

urban dance music opens up entirely new ways of understanding how young people perceive the relationship between musical taste and visual style which negates the notion of a fixed homological relationship between musical taste and stylistic preference by revealing the infinitely malleable and interchangeable nature of the latter as these are appropriated and realized by individuals as aspects of consumer choice. (Bennett 1999:613)

The malleability and even fragility of neo-tribes is echoed by Baumann in a passage from his *Intimations of Postmodernity*:

Their existence is transient and always in flux. They inflame imagination most and attract most ardent loyalty when they still reside in the realm of hope. They are much too loose as formations to survive the movement from hope to practice. (qtd. in Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:51)

The insightfulness and precision of this remark will be evident in chapter 6 when I draw some conclusions about the future of rave cultures, and the applicability of dialectical models of religious movements and cultures to them.

In their discussion of the world-renowned indie music and rave community Manchester, Halfacree and Kitchin draw attention to place as a central feature of the neo-tribal collective. In particular, they claim that “Only by producing a distinct space can a

neo-tribe survive” (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:52). With regard to Manchester, they note that:

Even with the establishment of a sound and varied infrastructure which went beyond music (for example, Joe Bloggs fashions), Madchester was pronounced ‘dead’ by 1991-2. Madchester ultimately failed to produce the space required for its music, with its hedonistic immaturity, and the failure to link the music sufficiently with broader aspects of everyday life and experience. In this light Madchester can be compared unfavourably with other neo-tribal groupings, such as ‘New Age’ travelers, who appear to display a more developed sense of identity. (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:52)

However, Halfacree and Kitchin also suggest that Madchester’s demise was in part a function of its attempt at subverting “an intensely capitalist music business” (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:52).

Additional studies applying Michel Maffesoli’s theory to dance cultures with varying degrees of precision include St John (2001b), Roberts (1997), and Klein (1999). For example, Klein offers a simplistic, blanket analysis seemingly intended to cover the entire spectrum of rave musics and their developments, such as the statement that the whole of techno/house was developed by black American urban teenagers as a response to high unemployment and bleak futures, and that local techno scenes in Europe are formally known as “tribes” and have adopted “the original Black subculture” (Klein 1999:21, 24). House’s and techno’s (two separate and distinct genres/movements) histories are far more complex than this, and while I do not have firsthand knowledge of the European techno scene(s), it is highly unlikely that all or even many local scenes and dance communities go around calling themselves “tribes.” As far as adopting “the original Black subculture,” whatever that may be, many of my informants and acquaintances during this research stated that if anything, the matter is quite the contrary:

rave and dance culture seems to be far more progressive and widespread in Europe than in North America, including the fact that in genres such as epic or progressive trance, virtually all of the music played at North American parties is made by European artists.

As Rave-olution

While there have been countless comparisons between rave and the American counter-culture of the 1960's, most commentators are quick to point out one of the fundamental differences: rave's apoliticality. For example, Langlois wrote the following in 1992: "The ideology of the House phenomenon does not propose an alternative lifestyle to mainstream culture, neither could it be described as a cathartic outburst from socially frustrated sections of society. What House does sometimes generate is a transient but powerful experience of shared sensual over-stimulation. It provides colour, excitement and a sense of community for a generation with few obvious causes to follow" (Langlois 1992:237).

In contrast to this and aside from the fundamental recognition that dancing at a rave is at root a political action in that it simultaneously signifies and reifies a form of being-in-one's-body antithetical to the dominant discourses of embodiment in most developed nations, some scholars have described particular segments or pockets of dance culture with overtly political ends and/or methods. For example, in a fascinating and award-winning essay, Stephanie Marlin-Curiel describes how in 1999 young nationalists organized a rave in South Africa with the specific goal of "redefining Afrikaner identity in the wake of Apartheid's demise" (Marlin-Curiel 2001:150). Held in a barn in Melkbosstrand, forty minutes from Cape Town, *Transmissie* was the first in a planned

series of parties whose aim was to spread the message that it was time for Afrikaners to reclaim their personal and cultural identity (Marlin-Curiel 2001:151).

In the context of the co-option of the Madchester indie music and rave scene, Halfacree and Kitchin quote Bloomfield (1991) as stating that "...there has been a pattern that music which at first expresses opposition to the social order is then inexorably commodified by the capitalist structures of production" (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:52). Although certainly giving too much credit solely to the Madchester rave scene, they go on to write that although it ultimately died, it gave birth to another, much larger neo-tribe—the Raver:

For many adherents, Rave seems to be no longer just music but a whole way of life: clothes, attitudes, language, the media's 'Generation X'. Moreover, this neo-tribe has assumed an increasingly political tone, spurred on by the Government's clampdown on illegal raves in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and the contacts between Ravers and 'New Age' travelers, with their eco-anarchist ideas, symbolized by the Castlemorton Festival of 1992 ... In other words, neo-tribes originating largely through regional musical identity *can* evolve to assume much more national political and cultural significance. (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996:53)

The political and cultural significance of these emerging neo- or "techno-tribes" forms the basis for another body of literature on "post-rave" electronic music cultures, sometimes called "doof" cultures (an onomatopoeic reference to the sound of the archetypal 4/4 bass drum beat underlying most forms of techno and trance; see Murray (2001) and Strong (2001) for histories of doof). Edited by Graham St John, *FreeNRG: Notes from the Edge of the Dancefloor* (St John 2001c) deals primarily with Australian doof cultures, focusing especially on their relationship with and appropriation of the techniques of other subcultural groups such as DIY (Do It Yourself) cultures (Iveson and

Scalmer 2001; Murray 2001), sound systems (Murray 2001), environmentalist groups (St John 2001d), “travelers,” New Agers, the Situationiste Internationale (SI) (Luckman 2001), and direct action protest groups (Iveson and Scalmer 2001; Luckman 2001; St John 2001d; Strong 2001). In the opening chapter, St John argues that, contra Melechi and others who critique rave and post-rave cultures for their ultimate emptiness and futility at instigating real change, such cultures are in fact involved in generating meaningful social experience leading to cultural and political change:

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*. ... 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’. 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’—such interventions appropriate technology in order to ‘reclaim the future’. (St John 2001b:20).

Rave Studies in Canada

While there have been popular (Fritz 1999; Silcott 1999), medically oriented (Weir 2000), and demographic (Weber 1999) works published specifically on the Canadian rave scene, as I mentioned in the first chapter there has only been one multi-year, sociologically-oriented study of rave culture in Canada to date; or at least there has only been one whose results have been published. Brian Wilson’s “The Canadian Rave Scene and Five Theses on Youth Resistance” (2002) is based upon three and a half years

of fieldwork conducted between 1995 and 1999, primarily in the city of Toronto and some of its outlying suburbs.

In this article, Wilson notes that unfortunately and inexplicably, considering the media and regulatory attention that it has received, rave has remained in the “subcultural shadows” of other groups like punks and skinheads in Canadian research on youth. To address this, in his analysis of the Canadian rave scene Wilson engages both current strands of theory in Canadian youth studies and international theories on rave and youth studies. Theoretically, Wilson remains within the “resistance” model of analysis, employing and modifying recent theoretical projects such as those of McRobbie, Thornton and Malbon. Specifically, Wilson posits “five theses of youth resistance” within the rave scene.

Wilson’s first thesis on resistance is that *rave is a form of symbolic “purposeful-tactical” resistance*; there was evidence in his research that raving was a form of symbolic, purposeful resistance to mainstream value systems and culture (Wilson 2002:400). However, he notes that “not all ravers gave subversive meanings to their activities at any given time, and often ravers viewed their activities in more or less resistant ways over their rave subcultural careers” (Wilson 2002:401). The second thesis is that *rave is a form of “adaptive-reactive” resistance*. In other words, the practice of raving is employed by ravers to adapt to “the high-speed, ever-accelerating technological-cultural evolutionary process” of the turn of the century. This resistance is manifested in ravers’ freely embracing (and over-embracing) technology in contrast to the mainstream population’s reaction to it; in their active participation in alternative social development;

and in their utilization of technology in purposeful, tactical ways (e.g. downloading copyrighted music, having virtual parties, etc.) (Wilson 2002:402).

Wilson's third thesis on rave as resistance is that *it is a form of "trivial" resistance*: while many participants claim that rave is a movement with the aim of changing society in non-offensive, subtle, yet real ways, its efficacy in this project has been overstated. With specific reference to the PLUR doctrine, Wilson writes:

That is to say, while rave's PLUR revolution might allow some youth to 'feel (temporary) [sic] better' about themselves, in the end, what was intended to be a meaningful, united, social movement is little more than false sense of resistance for many ravers. Furthermore, underlying rave-related practices that are supportive of this doctrine are *tensions, contradictions, and complexities that undermine any "real" subtle resistances that might take place beyond those existing in small pockets of the rave scene*. (Wilson 2002:403; emphasis in original)

Wilson continues this argument to the conclusion that the rave movement is in fact tolerated by the authority that licenses mainstream commercial culture because of its inefficacy. Furthermore, those aspects of rave culture most threatening to the dominant culture have been diluted through "strategies of neutralization," further reducing its efficacy in effecting real social change (Wilson 2002:404).

Wilson's fourth thesis on rave as resistance holds that *rave is a form of self-aware or oblivious non-resistance*. While Wilson finds that rave is empowering and sometimes resistant for youth, and not simply escapist and hedonistic, he notes that many participants find in the rave simply a place for safe drug use, dancing, and "losing it." In other words, many ravers rave for the pure pleasure it provides them, nothing more. Wilson continues: "These kinds of arguments problematize the idyllic "pleasure as resistance" thesis espoused by Malbon and McRobbie. The point here is that

empowerment, coping, and pleasure (among other benefits that are sometimes read from rave culture) can be analytically distinct from resistance, subversion or transgression” (Wilson 2002:405; emphasis in original). Finally, Wilson’s fifth thesis is that *rave culture actively supports reproduction of the dominant culture*. Through the process of becoming commercial and “mainstream,” certain segments of rave culture reproduce many of the inequalities and attitudes that it purportedly opposes. This same point has been made by McRobbie (1994), Pini (1997), Thornton (1995), and others.

Brian Wilson’s study of the Canadian rave scene is an important contribution to rave studies in at least two ways. First, Wilson’s is the only multi-year, in-depth study of rave in Canada whose results have been published. The vast majority of rave studies to date have been: a) superficial readings of rave’s surface features, b) conducted in Europe or Australia, or c) both. Wilson’s work provides a deeper gaze into Canadian rave. The second important contribution Wilson’s work makes is that it both summarizes and furthers current sociological theories on rave. Wilson’s “The Canadian Rave Scene” is probably the most nuanced analysis of rave as resistance published to date, despite the fact that it is obviously a condensation of a much larger work (his Ph.D. dissertation). Whereas so many previous attempts to place rave within a cultural studies or sociological model have resulted in unidimensional, overly deterministic or bland theses, Wilson’s analysis takes into account competing theoretical stances and allows them to coexist, in a mature and nuanced treatment that recognizes the multidimensionality and heterogeneous nature of the Canadian (or any) rave scene.

If one weakness with Wilson’s work can be found, it lies in his use of the phrase “Canadian rave scene.” As he freely admits in this article, his fieldwork was conducted

entirely in and around the city of Toronto. Despite that fact, Wilson seems unaware of or unconcerned by the fact that there are thriving rave scenes in other Canadian cities and towns, and that they are in fact distinct from the Toronto rave scene. This oversight is apparent even on the last page of the text, when Wilson writes “Clearly though, there is a need to be cautious about proclaiming the “end of youth culture” (in Canada) considering the structures at work in the Toronto rave scene” (Wilson 2002). Here as elsewhere, Toronto metonymically stands for Canada, betraying an oversight on the author’s part of the importance of place in the rave context. Despite this (relatively minor) shortcoming, Wilson’s work superbly addresses a gaping hole on studies of rave in Canada.

The Need for a New Approach to Studying the Rave Experience

In an apt quotation, Hollands sums up some of the shortcomings of recent studies of youth cultures:

... recent studies of youth cultures have been pre-occupied with more post-modern ‘readings’ of styles (Muggleton, 1997, 2000), lifestyles (Miles, 2000), club-cultures (Thornton, 1995; Redhead, 1997), and ‘neo-tribal’ patterns of activity (Bennett, 2000), and have often failed to address questions of inequality and spatial separation among different consumption groupings. (Hollands 2002:154)

Such postmodern readings, he continues, are heavily “textualized” and

end up in discussions about endless chains of signification, competing generational multicultures, or decentred subjectivities (Cohen and Ainley, 2000). At best, attempts are made to show what these hybrid youth cultures say about our so-called post-modern society and culture—usually in the form of reaffirming its existence, thereby masquerading as both ‘evidence’ and ‘cause’ simultaneously. (Hollands 2002:158)

The work of several scholars of rave and club-cultures that I summarized above, including Redhead, Melechi, McRobbie, Thornton, (the early) Rietveld, Luckmann, and

Pini focuses on just such semiological readings of taste and style, de-centred subjectivity, and absence of meaning. There is little question that rave is a decidedly postmodern practice and phenomenon, as many of these analyses amply demonstrate. And yet I cannot help but agree with Hollands' statement that postmodern analyses of postmodern (sub)cultural formations often appear to accomplish little more than a *fêting* of the latter, as well as a justification for the world in which we currently live. Andrew Goodwin, writing all the way back in 1989, makes much the same point:

... by conflating postmodernism as *theory* and as *condition*, the former finds itself with a vested interest in promoting the latter, if not morally and/or politically, then as a cultural form of far greater significance than the evidence often suggests. (Goodwin 1988:49)

Other scholars of rave and dance-based cultures have begun to similarly problematize the epistemological foundations of the extant work on them. David Muggleton, co-editor of the recently released *Post-Subcultures Reader* (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003) and himself firmly rooted in this school, nevertheless wrote in 1997 that "What is now required is an approach where the subjective meanings and perceptions of the subculturalists themselves constitute the first, privileged level of analysis" (Muggleton 1997:201). Brian Wilson echoes this when he states that "[post-subcultural] theories remain underdeveloped and particularly abstract until evaluated through an analysis of the meanings that youth give to their activities, and the various contexts of youth behaviour" (Wilson 2002:381). And about the "club-cultures" school of thought headed by Steve Redhead (see e.g. Redhead, Wynne et al. 1998), Hollands poignantly writes that "...despite continued reference to keeping alive a tradition of ethnography, Redhead's work provides very little room for the actual voices and actions of young

people engaged in club-cultures” (Hollands 2002:156). Finally, Scott Hutson, one of the handful of scholars to have performed real fieldwork amongst ravers before the turn of the millennium, observed in 1999 that “Once the surfaces [of rave] are interpreted as meaningless simulacra, postmodernists often stop interpreting,” and that “...those who write about the rave rarely solicit the voices and experiences of people who actually go to raves” (Hutson 1999:60).

The cautions expressed by Hollands, Wilson, Hutson, and Muggleton can be boiled down to one important notion: the danger with postmodern theorizing *on the postmodern*, as with any form of social theorizing, is that the act of theorizing can eventually lead one so far astray from the actual, lived experiences of the subjects or groups about which one theorizes, particularly in the case of rapidly changing and fluidly-constituted social entities such as ravers and rave communities, that it loses all attachment to social reality and becomes an end in itself. As Clifford Geertz writes about the notion of lived experience during cultural studies, “... without it, or something like it, cultural analyses seem to float several feet above their human ground” (Geertz 1986:374). While much of the sociological scholarship on rave to date adds to our understanding of this significant end-of-the-millennium social movement, a substantial amount of it does in fact float above the actual experiences and stories of its subjects, and is concerned more with advancing postmodern theory and examining the postmodern condition at the expense of real and thorough examination of data on and about ravers themselves—what they think, who they are, what they get from raving, and most importantly for me, why they rave. After examining the majority of the sociological and cultural studies literature on rave, one is left asking several questions, including:

Do we really understand rave culture? Why have people from globally diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds embraced rave so enthusiastically? What is it about the rave experience that attracts people, especially youth? More importantly, what does it feel like, what does it *mean*, to rave?(Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:73)

From the outset, very few of the extant studies of rave culture employing a cultural studies or postmodern approach have a legitimate chance of answering these questions. The reason lies in the epistemologies they employ, which in turn informs their methodologies.

The [postmodern] approach, while providing a stimulating initial critique, ultimately lacks the necessary methodology for an in-depth analysis of rave culture. Cultural studies and postmodern critiques tend to reduce the rave experience to a text, and then deconstruct what they perceive to be its fundamental aspects, such as its politics and gender dynamics, or else remain on the level of its “meaningless” glittering surfaces, such as its stylistic elements. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:90)

The first stages of this research were similarly textual in nature. With the rapidly accelerating number of publications on rave culture, it was and still is relatively easy to read about what occurs at a rave. However, what quickly emerges from the literature, including hundreds of first-hand accounts by actual ravers, is that the rave experience is a particularly ineffable one; as with most religious and altered consciousness experiences, it translates very poorly into language. Roger Abrahams comments on this problem in the context of the anthropological reporting of events and experiences in the field: “This problem becomes all the more intense when reports are committed to paper or some other medium of record. With the increasing distance between the act and the apprehension of it by the reader, the hearer, the viewer, a loss of the spirit [of the experience] is more likely” (Abrahams 1986:49). Moreover, what ravers themselves continually emphasize

when discussing their experiences is that *raving is fundamentally about a bodily experience, and it is inherently meaningful for some participants* (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:74). During my research, it did not take long to realize the truth in a statement made by middle-aged Canadian raver Jimi Fritz in his *Rave Culture: An Insider's Overview*: "Raving is not something that can be experienced vicariously" (1999:199). Clearly, to begin to understand the rave experience, to at least *begin* to plumb the depths of meanings which some ravers ascribe to it, a new epistemological and methodological approach was needed.

Epistemology and Methodology of the Research

We have called such experiences "extraordinary," but it should be kept in mind that experiences which may be extraordinary for Western-trained anthropologists may be commonplace for most traditional peoples around the world –David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet, "Introduction," *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, pg. 7

The Anthropology of Experience

Of all the human sciences and studies anthropology is most deeply rooted in the social and subjective experience of the inquirer. Everything is brought to the test of self, everything observed is learned ultimately "on his [or her] pulses" –Victor Turner, "Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama," pg. 33

We all have very much more of the stuff [experience] than we know what to do with, and if we fail to put it into some graspable form ... the fault must lie in a lack of means, not of substance. –Clifford Geertz, "Making Experiences, Authoring Selves," pg. 373

Whole volumes are written about religious ceremonies and mythologies that contain little or no information about the experiences of people involved in those activities. –Charles Laughlin et al., *Brain, Symbol and Experience*, pg. 12

The epistemology and research methodology underlying this research is anthropological. More specifically, I espouse and have employed what has been variously termed "the experiential method," "experiential ethnography," or simply "experiential

anthropology.” The focus on experience itself as an object of study during anthropological fieldwork was largely instigated by a collection of essays published in 1986 called *The Anthropology of Experience*, edited by Victor Turner and Jerome Bruner (Turner and Bruner 1986). Anthropologists had been discussing notions of performance, authorship, and reflexivity in anthropology for several years already, and two extremely influential books marking a watershed in both anthropology’s conception of itself and the way it is practiced would appear that same year: *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1986). While all three books deal with questions of representation, authorship, the production of knowledge, and the politics of field research, *The Anthropology of Experience* highlights and problematizes that which underlies all of these—experience itself.

Born largely out of Victor Turner’s “processual anthropology” and the anthropology of performance, the essays in *The Anthropology of Experience* attempt to shift ethnography’s focus to “how individuals actually experience their culture, that is, how events are received by consciousness” (Bruner 1986:4). While they reflect a deep concern with reflexivity and self-awareness on the part of the ethnographer, at the same time they attempt to formulate a path out of the existential “infinite hall of mirrors” in which the anthropologist can get caught, his gaze forever returning to himself in a defeatist recognition that he can never truly know the Other, and all attempts to speak for the Other are epistemologically and politically flawed (see also Myerhoff and Ruby 1982 for more on this point).

There are several difficulties with making experience itself an object of inquiry, however, one of them being that “We can never know completely another’s experiences,

even though we have many clues and make inferences all the time” (Bruner 1986:5). In addition, Abrahams reminds ethnographers that ““experience” itself is a deeply coded word in our own culture; that is, the very conditions of modernity, especially as pursued in the United States, value experience for its own sake,” as well as the fact that, “as a nation of individualists, [North] Americans have placed ever greater importance on experience, relating it to our notions of the person in constant development, always heading toward some kind of self-realization” (Abrahams 1986:48, 50). Nevertheless, Bruner, Abrahams and the other contributors to the volume argue that experience itself, especially when viewed processually—as a stream of consciousness, always in flux, intersubjective—must be the starting point of serious and respectful ethnographic inquiry.

The anthropology of experience also explicitly acknowledges the fact that all genres of anthropological expression inevitably fail to capture the richness and complexity of lived experience in the field (Bruner 1986:7). In fact, the conventions of the discipline mandate such failure, especially when the lived experience is particularly vivid:

... ethnographers’ experiences of dreams and visions were, and still are, most often suppressed in ethnographies ... As a result anthropologists inevitably provide descriptions and analyses of what others do, think, dream, see, and feel, without ever portraying themselves as doing, thinking, dreaming, seeing, and feeling in similar ways. (Goulet 1994:18-19)

Anthropologists are trained to air such extraordinary experiences only in private conversations or personal diaries, lest they be painted with the same brush as Castaneda (see Marton 1994). And yet the removal of such pith from formal ethnographies tends to dry up the text, resulting in correspondingly dry reading, poor reviews, and poor sales, if

the monograph is even published. To counter this, rhetorical devices are employed in an attempt to reintroduce the immediacy and vitality of things learned “on the pulses”:

Most good ethnographers, interestingly enough, reintroduce vitality in their descriptive accounts by including illustrative snatches of personal narrative, bits of biography, or vivid passages from their fieldnotes (Peacock 1984). In effect, the experiential component returns to the account *as a by-product rather than as an explicit object of research*. We systematically remove the personal and the experiential in accordance with our anthropological paradigms; then we reintroduce them so as to make our ethnographies more real, more alive. (Bruner 1986:9, emphasis mine)

This tactic simply adds another layer of perceptual and cultural filters onto an already massively filtered account of lived experience in the field. By shuffling off vivid, immediate, and even controversial experience into the epistemological closet, anthropologists trapped in this paradigm simply remove the reader one step further from an already distant location where real things happen to real people, including the anthropologist himself.

While *The Anthropology of Experience* took a courageous first step in re-visioning the epistemology within which ethnographic research and reporting takes place, it was still just that—a first step. In terms of introducing a new paradigm of anthropological research, it falls short in several areas: a few of its essays continue to betray an almost obsessive allegiance to the “culture as text” hermeneutic model; it raises several problems with the notion of experience but offers no sophisticated explanations on how to model experience itself; and it never truly bridges the gap between epistemology and methodology—the conclusion one is left with after reading it is “Okay, anthropologists need to focus on experience in the field, their own and others’. But how do we do that?”

Unfortunately, the latter is still very much a valid question in the year 2004. In fact, as Throop (2002; 2003) notes, although the concept of experience has come into vogue during the past 5-10 years in anthropology and the social sciences generally, the vast majority of the time it is used with little precision or explanation. What's more, although many anthropologists are now concerned with conducting "experience-near anthropology" (Wikan 1991), exactly how to do so is still very much up for discussion. While I cannot delve into this topic very deeply here, I will explain some of the foundations of an experiential methodology, as well as how I attempted to practice them during fieldwork.

From the Anthropology of Experience to Experiential Anthropology

As a first step, however, anthropologists can begin to take their informants seriously and to entertain the idea that an informant's account may be more than a "text" to be analyzed.—David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet, "Introduction," *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, pg. 12

While informed by the textual experimentation and innovations described in and instigated by *Writing Culture* and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, experiential anthropology involves a shift away from the text, and is "...removed from the textualist lock-in" (Poewe 1996:181). This is in contrast to much postmodern and post-structural social research (including rave research), which "is rarely informed from direct ethnographic fieldwork, or for that matter from the actual practice of any phenomenology" (Laughlin and McManus 1995:39).²⁴ Related to this is the important insight made by Laughlin and McManus that the writings of Jacques Derrida which

²⁴ See also Laughlin (1988; 1994).

inspired the post-structuralist movement betray an obvious ethnocentrism in their almost complete concern with the written word; in other words, post-structuralism as informed by Derrida glosses over the tremendously rich, vibrant, yet non-literate meaning and symbol systems of oral cultures.

Another shortcoming of the post-structural approach lies in the fact that even with the experimentation in authorship in the 1980s and '90s,

With few exceptions, most formal ethnographies tell us little about the experience of the fieldworker and almost as little about the experiences of the people being observed. Rather, we have records of the system and institutions that order the lives of people in groups, enlivened every once in awhile with a representative anecdote. On the whole, however, the reflexive dimension of the ethnographic literature has not been well developed. While we have a number of fascinating autobiographical reports from the field, there is very little address on the part of the fieldworker as to how cultural norms and professional expectations entered into the collection and reporting of materials, much less what was happening to the collector that might have made a difference ...
(Abrahams 1986:54)

As I mentioned above, several previous studies of rave have taken the flattening and textualizing of the immensely corporeal and sensuous experience of raving as their jumping off point, rather than exploring the visceral, carnal nature of the rave experience itself, whether through informants or personal experience. While textualizing lived experience—abridging the practical activities of real persons—is the “unfortunate end game” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:90) of anthropological or any other academic research, employing such a methodological strategy compresses and squeezes out the “juicy bits” of such experience from the finished account at the outset. An apt analogy belying the deficiency of such a strategy lies in modern techniques of digital file compression.

In the technique of Compact Disc-to-MP3 file conversion that has revolutionized the music industry, once the source data (the original song on CD) has been converted during the compression process, it is gone forever. The song, now in MP3 format, is smaller and more easily portable (as are the textualized fieldnotes of a field experience). However, what remains is a degraded copy of the original. Bits (literally) of information are systematically eliminated from the original song to shrink and contain it in the new format. However, the loss of sound quality may be barely noticeable in the new MP3 file, provided the bitrate during the transfer was sufficiently high.

With the recording of intersubjective experience, however, the amount of degradation is inevitable and substantial: words and even ideas are inherently inferior, ill-equipped tools for reproducing lived experience. And yet if we are to somehow capture lived experience in the field and represent it in our own culture and the academy, we are stuck with them. Like digital music files, however, we are much further ahead maintaining the data in its native format for as long as possible before converting it to the inferior format. And because conversion is inevitable, we are far wiser to savor as deeply as possible the original, with all of our senses and with empathetic and focused attention, in order to return whatever luster we can to the representative copy when we arrive home. Such a strategy makes infinitely more sense than immediate conversion and artificial manipulation (with textual devices).

Contrary to postmodern and post-structural research, the thrust of experiential anthropology is to focus on the *lived experience* of real people engaged in the practicalities of their daily lives. As opposed to most ethnographies of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the polestar of the experiential anthropologist is not the construction of the

Other's *worldview*, but rather the entrance into their *lifeworld* (Jackson 1996). In fact, as Goulet and Young remind us, anthropologists' informants often insist that rather than the logocentric, cognitive approach to learning by which most Western-trained anthropologists are enculturated, an experiential approach is essential to an understanding of local accounts and knowledge of such things as dreams and visions (Goulet and Young 1994). Guédon makes the same point about her fieldwork among the Dene, not only with regard to dreams and visions, but also daily activities and cultural practices:

Learning thus about menstruation taboos, I found it increasingly difficult to speak of belief—a term with strong intellectual and cognitive connotations—for most of the content of the “belief” I was taught was physical and kinesthetic. (Guédon 1994:43)

What Guédon relates in this passage and the rest of the essay from which it was taken is how for the Dene, knowledge is not so much an intellectual construct as it is a doing, a telling, a process. Thus for Guédon, to learn “Dene ways” was to hear stories, not explanations; it was to actually sew a moccasin, not be given instructions on how to do so. Guédon also relates how her experience among the Dene was not that of an impartial observer, a professional “fly on the wall.” Instead, she entered deeply into Dene ways, sharing their experiences and in the process becoming a bit more like them.

Such empathetic, sincere, and deep sharing in the lifeworld of one's informants as Guédon practiced is a crucial component in an experiential method. Of course, even an experientially focused anthropology suffers from the intractable epistemological problem inherent in any ethnographic study, namely that the reader cannot share directly in the ethnographer's experience in the field, and must ultimately “take the ethnographer's word for it” (Manyoni 1990:10).

However, and especially so for cultural practices focused on techniques of embodied knowing, the ethnographer's process of interpretation can only be strengthened by getting as close as possible to the actual experience had by her informants. Moreover, irrespective of the extent to which the anthropologist's experience approximates that of her informants, such an experience-near (Geertz 1976; Wikan 1991) methodology will at least locate the researcher in a position to ask relevant and "appropriate" questions (Given 1993:93), and thus limit the potential for misrepresentation. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:74-75)

While a call for sincere and empathetic participation may at first simply seem like a plea for traditional participant observation, in fact it flies in the face of more than a century of mostly tacit anthropological training and enculturation. Despite the lessons of post-colonialism, new science, and the reflexive turn in anthropology, as Goulet explains,

Ethnographers constantly remind themselves—lest they be reminded by their colleagues—never to “go native,” never to become one of “them,” lest the resulting ethnography become a naïve espousal of another people's worldview and ethos thus losing all objective and scientific value. (Goulet 1994:16-17)

Conversely, a fieldworker employing an experiential methodology “surrenders himself” to the culture (Poewe 1996:196) with the intent of becoming “one of them,” of “going native,” with the recognition that she must eventually come back (Goulet and Young 1994:309; Lindquist 1995).²⁵ Proponents of the experiential method argue that only by experiencing another culture in full, empathetic participation can the anthropologist speak with any authority about the experience of its members.

In *Experiencing Ritual* (Turner 1992), Edith Turner describes another key trait of an experiential anthropologist—she must be willing to be changed. Throughout the book

²⁵ It is important to recognize, however, that “becoming one of them,” experiencing everything one's informants do, is not always possible, as a female colleague once pointed out to me in relation to research I was conducting on men's healing groups (Laura Cohen, personal communication, 1997).

Turner appears to struggle with the question of what she really saw during an African healing ritual—an actual tooth extracted from within a patient’s body, or a spirit form. Regardless of what it was, Turner is sure about one thing concerning the experience—it changed her forever. This same theme forms the title of a 1994 collection of anthropological papers further exploring and advancing the experiential method: *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* (Young and Goulet 1994a). Each author in the book describes how their sincere, full, and empathetic attempts to experience the lifeworld of their subjects changed them in some way, a hallmark of truly experiential ethnography.

In a bold and important article titled “Writing Culture and Writing Fieldwork: The Proliferation of Experimental and Experiential Ethnographies,” University of Calgary anthropologist Karla Poewe takes the entreaty to fully and empathetically participate in the Other’s culture one step further. Calling for a re-examination of methodological praxis *in the field* rather than *at the writing desk*, Poewe urges that “...if the ethnographic other experiences something, so can, indeed should, the anthropologist” (Poewe 1996:190). Such a bold statement recalls recent scholarship on the epistemological concept of *radical empiricism* and its relevance to anthropological practice.

Radical Empiricism and Anthropological Praxis

In recent years, William James’ concept of radical empiricism, of including the widest possible range of human experience within scientific investigation and treating one’s own experience as primary data, has entered discussions of method in anthropology (Jackson 1989; Jackson 1996; Laughlin and McManus 1995). A radically empirical approach privileges not only textual data, but in fact any and all data captured in the field,

including the experiences of the anthropologist, be they “ordinary” (fishing, cooking, sipping coffee with an informant) or “extraordinary” (dreaming, meditating, entering a trance state). Moreover, radical empiricism in anthropology

is rooted in the recognition that not only are the notepad and the tape recorder tools of the anthropologist in the field, but *the entire person of the anthropologist is a research tool*. Viewed from a non-dualistic understanding of consciousness and the structuring of experience in the lifeworld, the anthropologist, when doing experiential fieldwork, is herself embodied knowledge. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:75; emphasis in original)

The radically empirical anthropologist takes up Poewe’s call to experience everything possible that her informants do. In effect, *she becomes her own informant* (see also Bruner 1986:23; Goulet 1994:19; Szostak-Pierce 1999:144 on this, the latter in the rave context itself).

Employing a radically empirical approach when investigating transpersonal experiences such as raving requires what Laughlin calls transpersonal participant observation:

The methodology in transpersonal anthropology is essentially no different than for any other aspect of the ethnographic enterprise. Basic participant observation is geared to the demands of the questions being asked and the domain of culture being explored. ... Transpersonal participant observation therefore requires that more emphasis be placed upon participation, than upon more passive observation—what Goulet and Young (this volume) refer to as “participant-comprehension.”

Transpersonal participant-comprehension means following the instructions and procedures given from within the culture (perhaps as given by a teacher, shaman, or guru) leaving oneself open to whatever experiences arise as a consequence of performing ritual and symbolic practices, and recording what happens, using whatever symbolic media are available ... (Laughlin 1994:102; see also Laughlin 1988)

As Laughlin explains, however, employing a radically empirical and/or a transpersonal participant-comprehensive methodology does not necessitate simply accepting one's informants' explanations as true and foregoing any etic analysis. Instead, true anthropological science is based upon applying etic methods and explanations to the fullest possible range of emic data (Laughlin 1994:102; for an example of an anthropologist apparently omitting the second component in this model, see Turner 1996). Unfortunately, Western-trained ethnographers are enculturated in a monophasic culture (Laughlin, McManus et al. 1990) which not only fails to privilege extraordinary experiences such as the transcendental experiences often had by ravers, but in fact pathologizes them. Laughlin et al. note that "The failure of modern Western culture to prepare individuals for an easy, fearless exploration of alternate phases of consciousness has the unfortunate consequence for science of not equipping most ethnographers with the experiential and conceptual material requisite for sophisticated research into the religious practices of other cultures (see Evans-Pritchard 1965:17, 87)" (Laughlin, McManus et al. 1990:155).

An important component in a radically empirical investigation of transpersonal experiences such as raving is an emphasis on corporeal, sensuous data; data inscribed upon and collected through human bodies. "The body" has recently become a popular topic not only in anthropology but also the social sciences generally. Related to experiential ethnographies have been anthropologies of the senses (Howes 1991; Stoller 1989) and anthropologies of the body (Benthall and Polhemus 1975; Blacking 1977; Coakley 1998), which highlight such pertinent methodological issues as non-Western cultures' alternative schemas for privileging the senses and information gathered through

them, and the necessity of anthropologists' raising their awareness of their own cultures' schemas. As Bryan Turner points out in "The Body in Western Society: Social Theory and its Perspectives," an anthropology of the body was being formulated as long ago as Mary Douglas' work on pollution taboos, and in fact really began with Mauss' conception of *habitus* and "body techniques" (Turner 1997). As in any scientific paradigm, it simply took a backseat to the most popular epistemology of the day; in the first half of the 20th century this was functionalism, structural-functionalism, and structuralism, in the last half, structuralism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism. Contrary to the latter's focus on language and texts, a body-centred, radically empirical method calls for

a rigorous attention to phenomenology, and awareness not only of cognitive experience in the field, but also data which is collected *through the body* of the anthropologist. It also entails awareness of the preconditioned, intentional, and constructed basis of perception, and of how this necessarily impacts the experience of the anthropologist in the field, and the data gathered. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:75; see also Jackson 1996; Laughlin 1988; Lindquist 1995)

Abrahams makes much the same point in *The Anthropology of Experience*, and recalls Laughlin and McManus' critique of Derrida above: "Without the deep investigation on our own part of how our experiences reflect our deepest cultural concerns, and the patterns we unwittingly impose on developing peoples, we have just another Western ethnocentric model of analysis" (Abrahams 1986:50, see also pg. 70). Attempting to practice an anthropology of the senses in an ethnography of the rave experience is especially important due to its highly physical and embodied nature, as Saldana points out about the Anjuna goa trance scene, where "you can *smell* the dancing" (Saldana 2002:52, emphasis in original).

A final methodological component of an experiential anthropology is the willingness on the part of the researcher to suspend disbelief and take his informants seriously. Again, while this may seem obvious in the same way that full and empathetic participation in a host culture's lifeworld may, its simplicity is deceptive. In their introduction to *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters*, David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet highlight this as perhaps the most crucial commitment of a truly experiential method, as well as the one most often broken:

The emic (inside) reality of one's informants is frequently viewed as something which may be intensely interesting—even eminently reasonable (given the premises upon which the system is constructed). But emic views are not considered as serious alternatives to Western scientific conceptions of reality. In other words, one's informants are not taken seriously. (Young and Goulet 1994b:10; see also Evans-Pritchard 1965:121; Hutson 2000:37)

In the same volume, several authors espousing the experiential method describe how they too struggled with seriously committing to their informants' models of reality, and for good reason: to do so means nothing less than altering one's worldview and ontology (hence the title of the book), a profound and disquieting experience for anyone. And yet, once they did so, explanations and accounts offered by their informants began to make sense on a different level. A new and deeper understanding developed, as the anthropologists' experiences began to be modeled and even perceived with their host cultures' categories and values.

Research Methods

In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline the research methods used during this project, and how I attempted to employ the experiential method as much as possible.

Because this method places the investigator squarely and centrally in the research process, much of the description that follows is written in the first person. As explained above, anthropology, in fact any quest for knowledge and understanding for that matter, inextricably implicates the human subject. This is especially true for any social science. No matter what methods of data collection are used, they inevitably involve one of the investigator's perceptual apparatuses, where they are received as sensory stimuli, relayed back to the brain, cognized, and then analyzed and represented in some symbolic form. This is so whether scholars acknowledge it or not. I have chosen to both acknowledge and bring it to the forefront of my analysis of the rave experience. Much like the experience itself, my descriptions of raving will be personal, fleshly, introspective, and emotional rather than distant, disembodied, and hyper-rational.

Research on this project commenced in the fall of 2000. At that time, there were half a dozen or so popular books about rave culture, which I collected and read, including Simon Reynolds' *Generation Ecstasy* (Reynolds 1999), Matthew Collin's *Altered State* (Collin 1997), Mireille Silcott's *Rave America* (Silcott 1999), Jimi Fritz' *Rave Culture* (Fritz 1999), and Sheryl Garratt's *Adventures in Wonderland* (Garratt 1998). The only book-length academic publication on raves that I could locate was Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures* (Thornton 1995), which actually dealt with the "post-rave" phenomenon of clubbing, and which was actually quite sophisticated and ahead of its time when it was published in 1995. Ben Malbon's *Clubbing* (Malbon 1999) had just been published the year before, but I did not discover it until 2001. *Clubbing* is by far the most complete and insightful academic look into the actual experience of raving/clubbing published so far,

although I disagree with some of its theoretical conclusions, as I will explain in chapter five.

While there were a few dozen article-length academic treatises on rave by the year 2000 (not counting medical studies focused solely on rave drug use) rave scholarship did not really take off until the new millennium. In particular, scholarship on the theme of rave-as-religion was virtually non-existent until the year 2000, with the exception of Scott Hutson's prescient article on technoshamanism (Hutson 1999).

While surveying the archival material on raves, I began attending them also. I often went to raves with a colleague and fellow rave researcher, Melanie Takahashi. Melanie and I co-attended raves for several reasons, including the fact that it was less difficult to go with another person than to go alone (especially being a researcher and older than the average raver), and the driving could be shared when attending out of town raves. On the last point, for example, driving back to Ottawa from Montreal or Quebec City at 11:00 am after raving for twelve hours was neither an infrequent, nor an easy task.

In all, I attended approximately 40 raves and after hours clubs between September 2000 and April 2004. My pattern of attendance was intermittent and clustered. I would attend 3 or 4 events in a 4-5 week period, and then sometimes not rave again for 1 to 3 months. Although my initial goal at the beginning of the project was to attend about 50 events, I had to adjust it due to the difficulties of living a "double life." When I began the research, I made the decision to stay in Ottawa rather than travel to a remote fieldwork locale for an extended period, due to a desire to start a family and maintain a part-time job I had recently begun. I thus decided to focus my fieldwork on the metropolitan centres of central Canada: Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City.

While this type of urban anthropology, conducted from one's home, carries several advantages, I would soon find out that it also entailed its own special difficulties. In a remote locale, the only people whose opinions matter to you are those of the people you are studying. You try desperately to fit in, to become "one of them," an expert in the culture. In my case, not only did I work hard to fit in, to become a "real raver" each weekend as I ventured out to dark, steamy warehouses full of sweaty, youthful bodies, but each Sunday morning I had to re-enter my own "world," the world of suburban homes, fresh-cut lawns, minivans, and 9-to-5ers who pay their taxes and privately worry about their children growing up to be "deviants" like the people with whom I had just partied for 12 hours. So many times in the wee hours of the morning did I make the weary trek back to my suburb, up my street, and into my driveway dressed in adolescent costume and reeking of sweat and cigarette and marijuana smoke that I began to wonder who I really was. While anthropologists in remote locales only have to deal with the culture shock concomitant to entering and leaving the field once, urban anthropologists often have to deal with it every day, or in my case, every weekend.

The same is also true of personal relationships, particularly marital ones. There is only one goodbye and one re-familiarization during protracted, remote fieldwork. During my research, my wife and I had 40 of them. And as understanding as she was while I descended into a mysterious subculture about which she knew little, aside from the completely negative press it receives in the popular media, the past three and a half years were extremely difficult at times, especially when combined with major life events like a wedding, a new house, and a new baby. Because of all of this, I conducted fieldwork

whenever it was feasible, attempting to representatively cover the four major cities in my study.

In terms of sampling different rave communities, as I described in chapter two there are now dozens of varieties of electronic dance music, and raves and rave micro-communities now tend to cluster around specific genres. My initial intent, before learning just how much they could vary from one another, was to research several of these genres simultaneously. I eventually focused primarily on one, which also happens to be the most popular one on the globe right now: trance. More specifically, most of the events I attended featured at least one room or DJ playing epic or uplifting trance, hard trance, or psytrance.²⁶ While I did attend several events which featured a wide variety of other genres, including variations of house, techno, and jungle, my analysis and discussions in chapters four, five and six will therefore pertain to these variations of trance, unless otherwise noted.

At all but a handful of events, I brought with me a small notepad and a pen in order to jot down observations. Because of the typically low lighting within the raves, it was sometimes difficult to take extensive fieldnotes. I usually supplemented these at home in my study within a few days of attending an event. During the first 12 to 24 months of research, I tended to focus my observations on demographic and material aspects of the events I attended, such as gender proportions, average age of attendees, physical layout of the event, paraphernalia used by attendees, etc. Later in the research I began to devote most of my attention to behavioural and micro-social interactions between and amongst participants, including myself. I often found it frustrating trying to

²⁶ I will describe the features and differences between these genres in chapters four and five.

probe into the rave experience precisely because it is such a bodily, introspective, and ineffable one. This was especially true when observing attendees at events, but was often the case when interviewing informants also. I could not pry into the minds of the people I raved with to find out what they were thinking, nor could I inhabit their bodies to feel what they were feeling. Nor could linguistic categories accurately capture the content of the rave experience, as many of my informants told me, and as I learned for myself when I began raving. This only served to bolster my conviction that an experiential methodology was necessary to at least attempt to delve into this intense experience.

In addition to observing others at, before, and after events, I attempted throughout the research to practice personal phenomenology. Due to a small amount of training in meditation and guided imagery, I knew some simple techniques for quieting the mind and focusing awareness on different parts of the body. This proved useful in attempting to translate into words some very intense and transpersonal experiences. My fieldnote template included a Personal Phenomenology section, in which I catalogued sensations, emotions, cognitions, reflections, and more from each event. I also kept a journal during the research, in which from time to time I recorded personal thoughts and reflections about my experiences and how they related to my life as well as the changes I was undergoing.

Concerning psychoactive drug use, I concur with noted psychoactive researcher and anthropologist Marlene Dobkin de Rios when she writes "I believe that a drug researcher must have some subjective experience in order to understand the nature of informants' reports" (Dobkin de Rios 1984:179). There is absolutely no question that drug use is a key component of the rave phenomenon in North America and Britain, and likely

around the rest of the world also. Although definitely not the only drug used at raves, nor sometimes even the most prevalent one (see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003), MDMA in particular has played a monumental role in the development of acid house, rave, and club culture, and raving while on Ecstasy is unequivocally a qualitatively different experience than raving without it.²⁷ I therefore felt I would have been both contravening my experiential methodology and misrepresenting the rave experience and my informants had I not heeded Dobkin de Rios' advice and at least tried it. Once again, the subsequent experiences I had and the data I collected validated my decision to employ a radically empirical methodology. There is absolutely no question that I would have missed not only a whole range of data, but also a crucial range central to the rave experience for the majority of participants, had I not decided to try it. Because longitudinal studies of the health effects of Ecstasy on humans are not yet available, however, I limited ingestion to only a few instances.

In addition to archival research, participant observation, and personal phenomenology, I conducted 15 personal interviews over the course of the research. It is difficult to determine how representative my sample is, due to the fact that thus far there has been little demographic study of rave cultures in Canada. Moreover, since the focus of my research is on the qualitative nature of the rave experience itself rather than on sociological or demographic characteristics of the rave population, my strategy was to explore in-depth a few key themes with a small group of key informants. Informants were therefore recruited primarily through word of mouth. The interviews were conducted in

²⁷ I do not mean to imply here that one cannot have an intense and spiritual experience raving without ecstasy, as some of my informants, as well as other sources, have stated. However, the rave experience is unquestionably unique while using Ecstasy.

informal settings, including my home, informants' homes, and coffee shops. Participants signed and were given a copy of a consent form approved by the University of Ottawa Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board. All but two interviews were tape recorded.

The one sampling bias I did consciously correct for was gender I formally interviewed 7 men and 7 women.²⁸ For various reasons the vast majority of my interviews were with residents of Ontario rather than Quebec. Despite this fact I attended more raves in the province of Quebec than in Ontario, and raved several times with a small group of Montreal ravers that I got to know quite well. I was thus able to get a close look at their rave practices and have dozens of in-depth discussions with several of them. I will draw upon this group as a primary resource in the remaining chapters, discussing their opinions and experiences, but will not quote them directly, for reasons I will explain later.

Up until now, this dissertation has been largely impersonal in tone. Aside from some theoretical analyses to come, I will be departing from that tone. I will be portraying rave in central Canada as I experienced it, as I lived it for three and a half years. There is little doubt in my mind that I could have experienced it more deeply, that there are thousands of people in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec City for whom raving is truly a way of life moreso than it ever was or ever will be for me. Jimi Fritz and others could not be more right when they write that raving cannot be experienced vicariously. But my hope is that by my experiencing it as fully as I was able to in my own particular

²⁸ One woman was interviewed twice.

circumstances, I will bring the reader just a little bit closer to one of the most intense and spiritual experiences being practiced by people of all ages today.

Chapter 4 -

The Rave Experience in Central Canada

Rapid advances in the scale and complexity of society, particularly after industrialization, have passed this unified liminal configuration through the prism of division of labor, with its specialization and professionalization, reducing each of these sensory domains to a set of entertainment genres flourishing in the leisure time of society, no longer in a central driving place. While it is true that the pronounced supernatural character of archaic ritual has been greatly reduced, there are signs today that the amputated specialized genres are seeking to rejoin and to recover something of the numinosity lost in their sparagmos, in their dismemberment. –Victor Turner, “Dewey, Dilthey and Drama,” pg. 42

In accordance with the methodology I chose for this research—experiential anthropology—my discussion of the rave experience in central Canada that follows is portrayed as I experienced it. In addition to presenting my observations, analysis, and conclusions, I also describe personal experiences, thoughts, musings, emotions, and desires as they occurred throughout the research. As will be seen, these ran the gamut from transformative, life-affirming epiphanies to fear and despair.

Beginnings – Toronto Candy

As mentioned in chapter 3, I was frequently accompanied during field observations by a colleague and friend, Melanie Takahashi. My accounts of specific events and interactions with informants will therefore frequently make mention of her.

The first event I attended was an after hours Ottawa club called Ikon in September of 2000. Through friends, Melanie had established a contact who was willing to speak to us about his rave experiences, and agreed to meet us at Ikon. Kim²⁹ was an Asian-Canadian in his mid-twenties and had been raving for about two years. Also at Ikon was Lee, a friend that Kim had met during his rave “career.”

During my undergraduate days I was into the club scene. Virtually every weekend, and at the least twice per month, my roommates and I would go out to such “mainstream” Ottawa clubs as On Tap, Houlihan’s, Spodee-odee’s, and my personal favourite, RJ’s “Boom-Boom Saloon”. Although we were aware that such places were often little more than “meat markets” where both men and women alike went with just two things primarily in mind—to guzzle alcohol profusely and try to take somebody home—these were the places to be for university students. Like most Canadian university students, I suspect, we were testing ourselves, conducting our own protracted rites of passage into adulthood through four liminal years of experimentation—physical, social, emotional, and sexual. And like most university students, I suspect, we had little idea that a whole alternative to this ritualized weekend of pubbing had developed and was in full blossom, even in a sleepy city such as Ottawa.

So when I cued up at Ikon that night and then walked into the dimly-lit nightclub, my thoughts were, “Okay, what’s so different about this?” I continued thinking that until thirty minutes later, when Kim appeared and came over to sit and chat with us. As he talked about how he got started raving, I noticed that only a handful of people in the club were drinking alcoholic beverages, despite the fact that it was still well before last call.

²⁹ The names of all informants and acquaintances have been changed throughout the manuscript to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

This was the first club or bar I'd ever been to where water and juice were the drinks of choice. Not yet being familiar with the rave/after-hours club scene and its drugs of choice, I got myself a Corona at the bar and felt even more out of place than before (as all anthropologists do when entering the field) as I sheepishly ported it about the club.

It wasn't long after returning to chat with Kim that I was disabused of another illusion concerning night clubs and introduced to another of rave's unique traits. A large man in his early thirties in a flamboyant outfit walked right up to me, sat down, and started talking to me. He asked me what my name was and if I was having a good time. I said that I was, and that it was my first time at Ikon. His name was Bob.

Ikon is a gay-friendly bar, and several of the male attendees that night were obviously gay. I wasn't sure about Bob though. Regardless of his sexual orientation, I was struck by how friendly and fearless Bob was. I was a total stranger and he simply walked up to me and began a conversation. What's more, he seemed genuinely interested in me having a good time and feeling happy that night. It was almost as if I was at his home and he wanted to ensure I had a pleasurable evening. After he chatted with me and those around me, Bob gave us all some candy he was carrying with him, as well as his card. I looked at it, thinking it would be a business card. Instead, it simply had his name and e-mail address on it, and some decorative borders at the corners. This was also the first time anyone had given me a calling card with no title, occupation, name and place of business, or other significations. The card simply told you Bob's name and how to contact him. And true to form, Bob urged us all to e-mail him. Then he left to go chat with some other people. The two things that stood out for me from this micro-social interaction were Bob's generosity and his genuine interest in my and my party's well-

being and happiness, and his total lack of social fear or pretense. He came right up to us as total strangers, shared a small gift of food as well as a part of himself, invited us to contact him to get together at another party, and then left. No declarations about income, occupation or status (veiled or overt), no apparent fear of being socially awkward or rejected, and with no apparent expectations of us, sexually, materially, or otherwise. I was obviously surprised by this encounter, as I had seldom, if ever, experienced anything like it before. It would prove to be the first of countless such exchanges over the course of the next 3 years.

After chatting some more with Kim and Lee and hearing about their rave careers, I went out to the dance floor, where another surprise greeted me. A young professional with whom I had recently collaborated on a project at my part time job with the federal government was on the dance floor with a young woman, perhaps his girlfriend. He wore a skintight sweater made from Lycra or a similar elastic material, and his female companion was scantily clad. The contrast of seeing him in a three piece suit just weeks before and seeing him now in a skintight bodysuit drenched in sweat, and in an after hours gay bar to boot, took me aback. When I approached him and said hi, he looked somewhat shocked too. After thinking about it for a moment, I realized why. I too wore a suit to work and acted and spoke quite formally in that setting. And yet here I was too, dressed down and getting very sweaty and very physical in what would certainly be considered a “taboo” place by my work colleagues. Or it could have been that he was concerned about my mentioning this to one of his colleagues and exposing his secret life of clubbing. This was to be my third observation about the rave scene: most of its habitués lead double lives. They go to university, they work in nine to five jobs, they are

professionals, they are the people next door. As has happened to me on several occasions since beginning this research, I discovered they are people you've spent days if not months with, yet you never knew about their secret nighttime activities.³⁰

Freakin' 2000 – My First “Real” Rave

About a month later, I experienced my first “real” rave, a bittersweet experience that would indelibly etch its stamp in a myriad of ways onto virtually every subsequent field experience I had for the next three years. *Freakin' 2000* happened on October 28 at the Better Living Centre on the CNE Fairgrounds in Toronto. I again attended this event with Melanie and Kim, meeting both of them at the venue itself. I made my way to Toronto by car, by myself. Although I had done fieldwork before, I was quite nervous and filled with anticipation. As Kim had informed me, was a true rave and would give me a taste of what they were all about. As would happen hundreds of times prior to future events, a panoply of thoughts ran through my head as I sped down highway 401, early acid house tracks blasting over my car's stereo: Would I fit in? Was I too old to be doing this? What was it going to be like? Would I try Ecstasy tonight? What would that be like? How was I going to stay awake until 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning? Would Kim think I was cool enough to rave with him?

After meeting up with Melanie and getting into our costumes—*Freakin* was a Halloween rave—we headed to the CNE Fairgrounds, where a lineup had already formed at 11:00 pm. As we waited in line, I was shocked when a young male, probably no more

³⁰ As a brief example, several fellow students in my university courses have been raving for years, one of my dentist's hygienists informed me he was a raver when I told him of my research, and I spent a good six months working closely with a colleague at my part time job before discovering she was a raver; rather, she discovered I was one when she overheard me making plans to go to an event one day on the telephone.

than 20 years old, asked me if I had any “E.” So much for my fears about looking like a narc³¹, I thought to myself. Then again, I remembered, I’m dressed up in a big clown suit. I could probably pass for 18 or 48.

Once we got inside the doors, a truly massive warehouse complex stretched out before us. It’s difficult now to estimate how many square feet the complex comprised, but it easily held the 5000-6000 people that attended *Freakin’* that night, with ample room for another 5000-6000. The temperature inside was cool, bordering on cold. I found out later that this was so because the organizers and security guards had several emergency exit doors held open, probably in an attempt to keep the ravers’ body temperatures down.³² The floor was bare concrete, and the walls were industrial aluminum siding. There were 3 separate DJ stages: one jungle/drum ‘n bass, one house or trance (I’m not sure which because at that point I didn’t understand the difference between the two genres), and one unknown. Only the house/trance stage was playing music when we entered, and it was not very loud.

At the time I estimated that the average age range of participants at *Freakin’* was 15-25. The gender proportion appeared to be about 60/40 men/women, which was typical of the majority of events I attended during the course of my research, aside from some jungle/drum ‘n bass events, where the percentage of males was higher. This was to be my first exposure to the “typical” raver, or more accurately, the typical “candy raver.” Candy ravers tend to be young, often still in their teens. Their styles of dress and the paraphernalia they bring to events emphasize the child-like/return to innocence motif

³¹ A slang term in several youth cultures for “undercover narcotics police officer.”

³² Ambient temperature at raves is something that appears in much of the literature, due to the real concern with overheating, dehydration, and possible fatalities linked with Ecstasy and continuous, vigorous dancing.

found at many raves. At *Freakin'* and other events, candy ravers can be seen wearing several brightly coloured beaded necklaces and bracelets. They also often wear baby pacifiers on necklaces around their necks, which can be sucked on and bitten to alleviate a side-effect of Ecstasy use—jaw tension and bruxism. Further accentuating the child motif are teddy bears and other stuffed animals, and grade school-sized knapsacks, some of which are also designed to look like furry animals (see Image 2).

One of the characteristics common to virtually all of the ravers at *Freakin'* was their level of fitness. I was astounded at just how fit they were. I witnessed perhaps a dozen or two participants (out of 5000) who were overweight, and only a handful who were obese. All others were either very physically fit or extremely thin, some of them even looking emaciated. I was able to tell this because there was a great deal of flesh on display. This is not to be interpreted to mean that participants were dressed in overtly provocative ways. Some were, but this was the exception rather than the norm. As so much of the rave literature describes, participants simply dressed comfortably and lightly or shed layers of clothes once they entered, primarily to better facilitate dancing and the sensuous experience of raving. Hundreds of males had their shirts removed, and several dozen women sported halter or bikini tops. Some even wore just a bra. As I describe below, the amount of flesh on display at this event paled in comparison to some of the raves I attended in Montreal and Quebec City.

The average reader might interpret this to imply a raised level of sexual energy at the event. While this may have been true for some attendees, it was not so on a collective level, judging from the interactions I witnessed between participants, as well as my own experience and my conversations with others. Although I had read about the particular

and uniquely non-sexual atmosphere at raves, it was still surprising to witness, at least during the first portion of my night at *Freakin'*. I don't recall witnessing any overtly sexual or romantic interaction between any participants at the event, nor do my fieldnotes mention any. Despite a healthy mix of young, fit males and females, several hundred of whom had little clothing on—and what clothing there was often left little to the imagination—as well as an abundance of pumping, hypnotic music and psychoactive substances available for consumption, the atmosphere at *Freakin'* was an overly friendly and platonic one.

After walking around the space and taking it all in for a while, we ran into Kim. It was about midnight. He was glad to see us and very pumped up about the night. He introduced us to some of his friends, who were excited too. I could see that some of them had already taken some kind of drug, as their pupils were very dilated and they were noticeably fidgety and chattering away nonstop. Then, as we were standing in the middle of the largest part of the complex, the lights began coming on overhead and the music being played by the house/trance DJ stopped. No one seemed to know what was going on. After ten minutes of standing around, people began to be herded outside by security, through the nearest exit. Someone told us that a possible fire was being investigated in the basement. We and several hundred other people were shuffled through one of the main exits, where we began to wait. It was the end of October, and the temperature could not have been more than about -2 or -3 degrees Celsius. With no coats on, in fact with very little on, this large mass of ravers stood there shivering, wondering if and when we were ever going to get back in and start the party. Finally, after about forty-five minutes of suspense, the doors were opened and people began streaming in. As I walked back to

the house/trance area, I noticed several firefighters walking past, exiting the building. Several ravers approached them and shook their hands, thanking them for allowing us to continue on with the party. The firefighters smiled and conversed with people, and even allowed their pictures to be taken with several ravers. As I watched this happening, I mused about the fact that several thousand young partiers had just been expelled from the building into a very frigid October night, many of them with absolutely no idea what was occurring or if they would even be permitted to re-enter. And during all of this, the only confrontation I witnessed was one raver being escorted out of the event by security. Not only that, but the ravers did not even appear very upset about the whole situation. Where I thought there would be screaming and yelling of complaints, instead there was patient optimism. On the other hand, I recalled a number of similar incidents from the bar scene during my undergraduate days where violent fights broke out when patrons were asked to leave or were barred from entering a club. Moments later when Kim rejoined us from outside, he remarked about the very same thing to me, saying that such peaceful and respectful behaviour was what rave was all about.

Moments later, loud house music began blaring from the central DJ stage and the lights were dimmed again. The crowd erupted at this, as did I. I followed Kim to where his friends were congregated. At Ikon and in e-mails between then and now, Kim explained to me that he wanted to introduce me to the rave scene. He explained how there was a tradition in which experienced ravers did this. This included taking personal responsibility for “giving” new ravers an extraordinary and safe first experience. This was important, he said, because the first experience is usually the most special, and intense one. Then Kim asked if I wanted to try Ecstasy. I had already decided in advance

that I would try it, and answered yes. He gave me a small white pill, and I gave him twenty dollars. He told me to just take half of the pill at first, and then if after one hour I felt okay, to take the other half. I broke the pill into two halves and swallowed one with a sip of bottled water.

An hour gradually passed as I walked around the complex and danced for a while. I didn't feel much of anything, except perhaps a bit of lightness of being. I began to wonder if Ecstasy was going to have any effect on me. Maybe I needed more. Maybe I was just trying too hard to feel its effects. Maybe I was given a fake pill, a not infrequent occurrence as Ecstasy has gained in popularity and demand has risen. I decided to take the other half of the pill.

Just as I was swallowing it, two men walked up on either side of me. One of them asked me what I had just swallowed. Flustered and scared, I said that it was an aspirin. They said they didn't believe me. They again asked what it was. I stuck to my story. They asked me other questions, like Who had I come with? How old was I? Where had I gotten the pill? etc. Then they asked me to come with them so they could ask me some more questions. I was led to the back of the building and through a black door. The room was brightly lit, and there were several men in the room, some of them in Toronto Police uniforms. There were also some ravers in the room being questioned by other officers. One of the officers who had brought me to the room asked me some more questions. I repeated my story about the aspirin, knowing that it sounded ridiculous. I also told him that I was a Ph.D. student studying raves. He didn't seem to believe me, so I took off part of my clown costume so he could see that I really was 30 years old. While he still thought I had ingested something illegal, he believed that I really was studying raves after that.

After a few more questions, he decided to let me go back to the party, but with a warning not to swallow any more pills that night. I left the room and rejoined Melanie, Kim and his friends.

I felt extremely foolish for not being more careful than I had been, even though Kim and his friends were much more nonchalant than I had been when they took their pills. I also began to question not only my personal values for taking such a risk, but also my research methodology and ethics, even my entire project. I had narrowly escaped being charged with a serious offense. I was badly shaken by the incident. I wanted so badly to tell Kim what had happened, and to be careful himself, but at the same time I didn't want him to feel guilty since he was my "guru" for the night. I also didn't want him to think I was an inexperienced fool.

This was the context for my first Ecstasy experience. After rejoining the group and telling Melanie about the incident, I began to feel strange sensations in my body. They began in my arms. They felt lighter and more sensitive to the touch. In a few moments the sensations increased in strength, and spread to my legs also. I began to feel nauseous, so I sat down with my back against a large support pole near one end of the main part of the complex. Melanie sat down with me and helped me through the experience. The nausea increased in intensity, and was accompanied by a sensation, difficult to describe, of a strong shift in awareness and control over my person. It felt as if a qualitative shift in awareness was occurring, without my willing it. It was overwhelming and a little frightening. I felt for a few seconds or so that it was intolerable, that I needed to lie down and wanted it to stop. Then the panicky-ness of it began to subside, as did the nausea. This whole phase lasted between three and five minutes, but

felt much longer. The tingliness in my limbs steadily increased, and spread to my entire body. My whole body felt much lighter and more sensitive. I also began to feel very euphoric. I had briefly experimented with a couple of psychoactive drugs earlier in my youth, and recalled the sensation as being similar to this, except there was a much greater bodily element to this experience, and it just kept getting stronger and stronger. The entire time from when I first felt tingliness in my arms to the end of my “rush” (the common term for the “coming up” phase of the Ecstasy experience) was about an hour. After that came the “plateau” phase, which lasted about 3 hours before it began to gradually decrease in intensity.

As so many people have written, the Ecstasy experience, and particularly raving while on Ecstasy, far outstrips language’s capacity to capture it. The closest analogy that has been drawn to it, and which approximates my first experience at *Freakin’*, is of a four hour orgasm. The entire body feels like one huge nerve cell under simultaneously constant stimulation and relaxation. The smallest touch of the skin feels electric. The most trivial pat on the back or arm around your shoulder feels so soothing, so nurturing. And a back massage, even if spontaneously given by a complete stranger (which often occurs at a rave), is simply incredible. With every stroke, every knead of your flesh, you can almost see the tension evaporating, wafting away from tightened sinews weary from the stresses and worries of everyday life. When a crowd of people raves on Ecstasy, especially when the people bring good intentions and the vibe is right, a lot of touching, hugging, and caressing will occur. And when you rave on Ecstasy, *you want* to be touched and to touch people.

When non-initiates hear descriptions like this, the mental picture they immediately tend to form is of massive orgies of scantily clad teenagers fornicating in dark corners. Nothing could be further from the truth. In terms of emotional effect, Ecstasy is *agape* rather than *eros*. Reports of its aphrodisiacal qualities in the mainstream media have not only been grossly exaggerated, they are blatantly false. Not once during the approximately forty events I attended did I ever witness any orgies or sexual acts between participants. Some events did have a more sexual vibe than others, particularly those in Quebec City and Montreal. But even these, as with the rest of the raves I attended, were unusual specifically for the lack of sexual tension and motives of their attendees. If anything, rather than heighten libido, Ecstasy increases one's desire to love others in a specifically non-sexual way. Louise Gray, a journalist and disciple of the legendary acid house club Shoom, describes it this way, in a passage that echoes conversations with many of my informants:

... [I]f anything it was the complete opposite. Very little sex happened that year. People were very cuddly, and that was very nice: you could be cuddled by complete strangers in a totally nonthreatening way, 'cos you knew nothing was going to happen. If you got upset about something, this crowd of strangers' hands would descend on you. It was touchy-feely, an amorphous sensuality—but it wasn't a *sexuality*. (qtd. in Reynolds 1999:63)

Aside from my next experience with Ecstasy, which I describe in chapter five, never in my life have I felt so emotionally open and compassionate toward other human beings, regardless of their age, sex, or ethnicity, as I did at *Freakin'*. Ecstasy is called "the hug drug" with good reason. Not only did I hug the people with whom I was raving at *Freakin'*, but I hugged complete strangers, with absolutely no fear of social

awkwardness or rejection. And I received several hugs myself, with an openness I had never felt before.

Although extremely difficult, one way of attempting to describe this emotional openness and compassion is by comparison to a similar experience with which probably ninety percent of readers can identify. After consuming a sufficient amount of alcohol, social inhibitions begin to break down. People are more likely to say things in social situations which they normally wouldn't. Physically, interaction with acquaintances and even strangers is less guarded. Personal spaces shrink, and contact with others' bodies is socially accepted and occurs more frequently. And not only do social inhibitions and personal spaces tend to decrease in direct proportion to the amount of alcohol imbibed, but so does control over one's motor skills and higher cognitive functions.

The opposite is true of the last point with the Ecstasy experience. When you are in the rushing or the plateau phase, you do feel extremely compassionate and open to others emotionally, and fears of social miscues and physical contact diminish. However, you are completely aware of the transformation, as well as of any consequences that may result from your behaviour. In other words, you are more lucid and aware that you are contravening social codes, but the codes no longer matter: your moral valuation of them shifts such that there is no reason why you shouldn't hug a stranger; there is nothing to fear in showing someone that you care about them, even if they do not care about you. Norms of individuality, social distance, and secrecy are perfectly available to rational scrutiny, but seem trivial. As some of my informants put it, unlike drunkenness, the Ecstasy high is not "sloppy"; one is still in control of one's actions. Social fear simply

melts away, and you feel free to interact with people in ways that you would normally repress.

And far from restricting or retarding higher cognitive abilities, the Ecstasy experience actually catalyzes lucid thought and penetrating introspective insights for many people, as it did for me. In an instant, I was able to see and understand the basis of fears and problems that were affecting my psychological and physical health. This did not entail my overcoming these fears and problems; in fact, some of them I am still working on today. However, Ecstasy provided a quick and direct path³³ to lucid awareness of deeper, unconscious parts of my personality, contents that previously had only appeared to me in more symbolic and indirect forms, such as in dreams and momentary insights.

Another of Ecstasy's effects that I experienced at *Freakin'* is its heightening of other senses, and synaesthesia. I describe this in a passage from my fieldnotes:

I first heard drum 'n bass that night, and it penetrated to my soul. Normally it wouldn't be the type of music I'd like, but the sound waves just hit my body like real waves. With every deep, vibrating note of bass, my body quivered, was physically impacted. I just stood there in the crowd, eyes closed, hands hanging down by my sides, absorbing the bass as it pummeled me, as it washed over me. Every inch of my skin actually vibrated with each long, subsonic note. This was definitely a synaesthetic moment. It was also paradoxical. On the one hand, I couldn't get enough of it, and didn't want it to end. But on the other hand, the drum 'n bass also made me feel dark and slightly afraid. I think this also may have a lot to do with what had just happened. (*Freakin'* 2000, October 2000)

Although I had tried psychoactive drugs before, and understood the term synaesthesia, I had never experienced anything like this. Drum 'n bass is a typically dark, "heavy" form of electronic music, especially that played by the DJ I was listening to, Mystical Influence. Its extremely deep, brooding bass notes impart an ominousness, a sense of

³³ Which of course entails its own danger.

doom, and at the same time its rapid-fire, jackhammer snare drum and high-hat rhythms induce a jitteriness, an anxiety. Some d 'n b fans, and authors such as Simon Reynolds, claim that the jungle and d 'n b scenes' most popular drug, cannabis, suits the music because of its sometimes dark and paranoiac qualities. Whether or not that is true, I was moved by Mystical Influence's set that night like no other music has ever moved me. On the one hand I could not get enough of the way in which the booming, towering bass notes caressed my skin and the way the rhythms penetrated my body and forced me to dance; but on the other hand, the dark intensity of it, combined with the machine gun, often spooky rapping and shouting of the Jamaican MC accompanying Mystical, induced in me a feeling of dread and foreboding. I have no doubt that this was amplified by the negative experience with the police that had just occurred; it seemed to be a classic case of set and setting influencing a psychoactive drug experience. It was because of this experience that I came to have a bipolar relationship with drum 'n bass. I liked listening to it occasionally, but it always tended to put me in a dark and anxious mood.

After I had "come up", I spent the rest of the night dancing in the d 'n b and house/trance rooms. I've never been a good dancer and usually could not be coaxed out onto the floor of a traditional club without three or four pints of liquid courage, but at *Freakin'* I danced almost non-stop. I learned there and at future events another reason why Ecstasy has formed such a close and symbiotic relationship with raves: not only does music sound and feel much better while on Ecstasy, but it is very hard not to move your body to it. Ecstasy makes you want to move, to dance, to get into your body. Even the people who stand around the edges of the dancefloor at raves, and there are not many of them, are usually nodding their heads, tapping their feet, or moving some other part of

their bodies in time to the music. By the time I left *Freakin'* at about 7:00 in the morning, I was sore and exhausted, having danced for nearly four hours straight.

My next rave would be a little over a month later at Spaced Invader, again in Toronto. It was my second experience with Ecstasy, and again produced several insights into the rave experience, and especially the experience of connectedness. I will describe it in chapter five. For now, here is a passage from my fieldnotes that attempts to explain how life-changing *Freakin'* was for me:

The feeling, the experience, was indescribable. I kept saying over and over "I can't believe it." "I can't believe it." That was the only way I could describe how intense, how out of this world it was. ... It was the most intense, incredible experience of my life. Even with the extremely negative thing that had just happened, I've never felt so euphoric, exhilarated, so empathetic. At one point I walked up to a girl wearing a shiny silver space costume and told her that she was beautiful. I truly meant it, but in a completely non-sexual way. She was beautiful, and I wanted her to know it. I wanted her to feel good about herself, because she should. I wanted to give her that little thing. It didn't matter what she thought of it. It didn't matter how she reacted. I did it because I felt it, and because I wanted to. She smiled and said thank you. I think she understood. For the rest of the night I talked to strangers easily, felt at home, comfortable. (*Freakin' 2000*, October 2000)

La Belle Province

"The Montreal Crowd"

In December of 2001, I attended a small rave in Montreal called *Groove 2*. *Groove 2* was one of a few excellent examples of an event with a strong sense of connectedness. When I discuss connectedness in chapter five, I describe the events of *Groove 2* in detail.

In addition to being an excellent example of the connectedness that can occur at raves, *Groove 2* was also where I first met the group of ravers that I called “the Montreal crowd,” with whom I periodically raved until late 2003. As with so many of the experiences, events, and knowledge that I lived through during this project, I find it very difficult to put into words the character of the Montreal crowd, as well as my relationship with them.

The Montreal crowd was a group of young francophones who periodically rave together. This is really the only demarcating or inclusionary characteristic of the group that I could observe, aside from one other, that being psychoactive drug use. To my knowledge, every member³⁴ of the Montreal crowd used drugs at least occasionally and had tried them before getting involved in raving, and for most of them, drugs played a major role in their rave practices. Although I didn’t formally interview members of the Montreal crowd, it appeared that French was the first language for each of them, although most could communicate in English. They were all in their twenties, and a couple in their late teens. One exception to this was Jean-Claude, who was in his early thirties.

The first three members of the Montreal crowd whom I met were Dominic, Jake, and Dale, at *Groove 2*. Dale was Dominic’s friend during the first two events I attended with the Montreal crowd, but the only time I really got to speak with him was at *Groove 2* and I did not really get to know him. I found out later that he and Dominic had a dispute and I never saw him again at any of the raves I attended with the Montreal crowd.

³⁴ I use the term member loosely here. I don’t know if the Montreal crowd has a name for itself; in fact I doubt that it does. Rather than a club, gang, or organization, it should be seen simply as a collective of like-minded, or rather like-feeling individuals who congregate sporadically to bathe themselves in and soak up the same atmosphere, ethos and experiences. Another way to view it, of course, is as a neo-tribe.

Dominic was the unofficial leader of the Montreal crowd. This was never expressed to me overtly by anyone in the group, but it was evident as I watched people interact at each event. An engineering student in his early twenties when I first met him, Dominic had piercing blue eyes and a quiet assurance. His conversation in English, while passable, was nevertheless slow, but since my French is rudimentary by any stretch of the imagination we conversed in English ninety-five percent of the time. My initial impressions of Dominic were of an extremely thoughtful and intense young man. At *Groove 2* and a later event, *Lollipop 3*, we had some quite metaphysical conversations, particularly about his favourite philosophers. I believe two factors contributed to Dominic's preoccupation with the metaphysical during the first year and a half that I knew him: his imminent graduation from university and uncertain plans for the future, and the fact that he was still in the "honeymoon" phase of his raving and likely his Ecstasy "career." The first couple of times we raved together, he was still very much enthralled by the Ecstasy experience. The last time we raved together, he still valued it for the pleasure and connection with others that it facilitates, but the content of his conversations was decidedly less philosophical, at least the conversations to which I was privy.

In addition to Dominic, Jake was the member of the Montreal crowd whom I got to know the best and who, like Dominic, usually played a central role in the group. The fact that Jake lived in Sherbrooke, a good hour's drive from Montreal at the least, and that another lead figure in the group—Jean-Claude—lived in Quebec City while I raved with them, illustrates just how unique and special rave is and lends some credence to those who proffer rave as one of Maffesoli's neo-tribes. Jake explained to me how he met

Dominic, Dale, and some of their friends at *Groove*, the successful predecessor to *Groove* 2, and struck a close and continuing bond with them immediately. Jake's friends from Sherbrooke and eventual girlfriend, Josée, joined the group, as did Dominic's and Dale's friends. At some events, there were up to 20 people in the group, from Montreal, Quebec City, Sherbrooke, and points in between. While some of them may have had other things in common, like age and university attendance, it was clear that the heart of their relationship, the heart of their intense and intimate bonds, was the shared experience of raving. This has continued to amaze me during my research. I witnessed people who previously were complete strangers, and still now only saw each other between 3 and 10 times per year dancing, hugging, massaging, and baring their souls to one another, and to me. And the catalyst for all of this was the rave experience.

Also in his early twenties, Jake worked at his father's printing business in Sherbrooke. Like all of the Montreal crowd, he had a thin build and sometimes showed up at raves appearing slightly emaciated, a condition likely caused by sometimes heavy Ecstasy and amphetamine use. I liked Jake and suspect that most everyone does. Quick with a joke and a smile, he always seemed genuinely interested in your welfare and happiness at a party. Jake and Dominic seemed to have a special relationship, and it was interesting to watch it unfold over the three years that I knew them. Jake was acutely aware of his lack of a post-secondary education but seldom brought it up in an overt way. Like Dominic, he was a thinker, at least while he was raving. He often gave his views on a subject, and then concluded with a phrase like "But this guy is the real brain here," putting an arm around Dominic. I participated in or observed several philosophical and intellectual conversations ending in this way. In contrast to the tentative way in which

Jake asserted his intellect, he was unequivocal with me about his status as a party person. He loved to party, to be together with good people and close friends.

A Typical Rave with the Montreal Crowd

After raving with the Montreal crowd several times, a pattern emerged. In particular, several ritualized practices comprised a typical night for them. Based on discussions with informants and what has been reported in the literature, I believe the same pattern can be generalized not only to other rave scenes in Canada, but also to rave practices in several other countries.³⁵

A night of raving with the Montreal crowd usually began for me with a long drive east to Montreal, Sherbrooke or Quebec City. I usually drove with research partner Melanie and sometimes one or two other friends. While Ottawa to Montreal is not a long distance, Ottawa to Sherbrooke or Quebec City is at least three hours, and the latter closer to five. The “pilgrimage to the party” is one of the ritualized subcomponents with a long (relatively speaking) history in acid house and rave. Rave literature and folklore often speak of people driving across several states in the U.S. to get to a big event, sometimes even coast to coast. One raver from Rochester, New York whom I spoke to at *Space Invader* (Toronto, December, 2000) told me that he regularly traveled to parties. He made the trip to *Space Invader* because it was put on by the production company Hullabaloo,

³⁵ This does not preclude the fact that other “sub-scenes” or “sub-subcultures,” if we can call them that, may have their own ritualized practices in and surrounding rave events. Goa or psytrance scenes, for example, are highly ritualized and employ a greater range and volume of syncretic appropriation of religious and esoteric symbolic complexes. Such scenes are also often more exclusionary, and remain so through the use of specialized communication strategies and techniques, some of which are as ritualized as the events themselves.

whose parties he had been to before and really liked. He told me that he would travel as far as 6-8 hours for a good party.

The drive to the party begins or strengthens the process of bonding between ravers, which will only intensify at the rave. In my case, the drive usually included listening to electronic music (usually some form of trance), talking about who would be at the party, what drugs would be consumed, and talking about raving in general. As with all events and especially during the pilgrimage to the party, the excitement, anticipation, and tension leading up to the party helped to set the stage and bring the energy levels of the group up to a fever pitch. This could be seen on people's faces, and I certainly felt it myself. Aside from general excitement and anticipation, some of the thoughts that typically ran through my head were: Will I have a good time tonight? Will we find the party? Will I be able to stay up all night? Will I "fit in" with the crowd? Will the music be good? and if I was going to ingest a psychoactive substance, Will it be a good experience? Will I enjoy it? Will it be "clean"? Will it last a long time?

In addition to setting the stage for the rave and bringing up the energy levels among ravers, the drive to the party serves another purpose: separating one from the mundane, non-rave world. Despite my education in ritual studies and the anthropology of religion, it took several events before I recognized this occurring in myself. It first happened in 2001 on the way to a small goa rave in Montreal called *Homeworld*. It was 11:30 pm and I had stopped for gasoline and a coffee at a rest stop on highway 17. After gassing up my car, I walked into Tim Horton's for a caffeine infusion to help keep me awake for the rest of the night. The rest stop was only a dozen kilometers or so from the Ontario-Quebec border; the area was therefore very Francophone. I noticed patrons

sipping their coffees and staring at me. I felt out of place and uncomfortable socially, but attributed it to the fact that I always feel uncomfortable ordering in English when in a Francophone area. Then I realized how I must have looked and acted. I was dressed in cargo pants—a little trendy even for non-ravers at my age, a brightly coloured, baggy T-shirt and running shoes, a beaded necklace around my neck, and I was chattering and bouncing around constantly, excited about the party to come. It suddenly dawned on me how out of place I was. And then a second realization hit me: I was in “no man’s land.” I was neither back home in my 9 to 5 life, nor was I really raving yet. I was “betwixt and between,” in transition to becoming a raver for the night. The feeling this epiphany left me with was unsettling. I suddenly craved community, to be a part of something, to fit into some accepted category. I had left “regular” society but had not yet made it to my destination. I paid for my coffee, hopped back in the car, and kept driving.

Upon arriving at whatever city in which the rave was happening, the next step was usually a cell phone call to Dominic, Jake, or another member of the group for more detailed directions to the apartment of whomever was hosting the pre-rave party or get-together. The pre-rave party is an important yet often overlooked element in the ritualized rave, as is the “after party,” discussed below. I went to two pre-rave parties at Dominic’s Montreal apartment and one at Phil and Lucie’s, two other members of the group. These gatherings serve many purposes: they provide a place for the group to meet before heading to the rave, especially helpful for people driving in from another city; they give people in the group some time to talk and become reacquainted before the rave, where less of the communication between them will be through speech, and more of it in the form of dancing, cuddling, massaging, etc.; they provide a time and place for people to

“get sorted”³⁶—order their drugs for the night or receive and pay for their order, as placed by the designated member in the group; they help get people’s energy and mood “up” for the night, via a number of means—listening to electronic music, reconnecting with friends and re-establishing bonds of intimacy, preparing costumes or outfits for the night, and perhaps consuming some “warmup” drugs for the night, such as marijuana or amphetamines; and they provide a time and place for the group to make its plans for the night. The last point merits some further elaboration.

During my research I gained access to only three or four rave groups or micro-communities to compare and contrast with each other. Three of four groups that I observed and temporarily joined prepared for and viewed raves in a similar way. The Montreal crowd was one of them. The best way to describe this outlook or perspective is to say that the group considered the rave, and the entire night, as a serious and important event, and prepared for it accordingly. This is not to say that there was a solemn mood or that strict procedures were followed. Rather, the Montreal crowd took their raving seriously, and took special measures to ensure that it went successfully. For example, Dominic, the de facto leader of the group, often took charge of ordering the drugs for the group. Not only did he take everyone’s order, visit the dealer, receive the goods, dispense them at the pre-rave party, and collect people’s money, but he “policed” people to ensure that they had an adequate supply to ensure a good evening. On one occasion, as he was dispensing someone’s order, he said something to the effect of “that will never last you; you had better buy some more.” This was just one of several incidents that illustrated to me that many aspects of the preparation for a rave were taken quite seriously by Dominic

³⁶ This phrase originated in the United Kingdom and is still used in some rave communities today. I never heard it used by the Montreal crowd, however; I’m not sure if an equivalent one exists in French.

and other members of the group. Another one of these aspects is the way in which the event's nights were planned, again, usually by Dominic. Not only was great care taken with regard to the acquisition of the drugs to be consumed, but also with regard to getting safely to and from the venue, acquiring tickets, and dressing oneself for the night. In addition, even the time and circumstances of drug consumption were often carefully planned and executed. At the last rave I attended with the group—*Scream* (Montreal, October 2003), for example, Dominic and several other members of the group had made a plan to take their first Ecstasy tablet at the same time, during the peak of the rave (this is a common practice not just in Montreal). When one person in the group told him that he had already taken his Ecstasy, Dominic was surprised and took his right away, to try to synchronize their rushes and plateaus. While I am sure that part of Dominic's meticulous planning of a typical rave is due to his leadership-oriented personality, I am also confident that another part of it is due to the reverence he feels for the rave experience and for Ecstasy. Other members of the Montreal crowd expressed this to me, and I witnessed it in other groups with which I raved.

The mode of transportation to the rave was usually by car, which at times was disconcerting since members of the Montreal crowd were usually still under the effects of a complex cocktail of several drugs when we left the event, and I heard stories from some of them about driving home while "on" a hallucinogen like LSD and seeing things on the road that were not there. However, at one event, *Scream*, Phil and Lucie's apartment was a twenty minute walk from the rave, so most people walked to the venue. Once at the venue, there was usually some form of lineup at the door, which meant waiting to get in. This afforded the chance to carefully hide one's drugs for the night. The women in the

group were sometimes given the drugs to hide in bras, because while the level of thoroughness of event security varies widely, they never frisk women there. After a usually quick frisking by event security, we would give our ticket at the door in exchange for stamp on the hand as proof of admission, and then walk into the venue.

At most events there were outer vestibules where tickets were collected and merchandise sometimes sold, such as beaded necklaces or bracelets, glow sticks, or water and sports drinks. They also usually contained coat checks, although I seldom used them, either carrying my coat into the dance area or leaving it behind in the car. After the vestibule, there were either of two ways to get to the main area or areas, if the event had several DJ booths or stages: walking directly into the dance area, or walking through a hallway, down some stairs, or through some other sort of passage. At several events, such passages were purposely elaborated, elongated, or exaggerated. For example, at *Révélation* (Quebec City, January 2001), which was held in an industrial warehouse, there was only one dance area and one DJ stage, and a long hallway leading into it. There were several other doorways that could have been used as an entrance to the event, but the one specifically chosen was several yards away, which provided an elongated passage from the ticket and coat check area to the dance floor. Moreover, all of the windows were darkened in the hallway and the lights were turned off. Getting to the dancefloor, therefore, was like passing through a dark, quiet tunnel. When emerging from the other side, you were hit with laser lights, strobes, the smell of marijuana and cigarette smoke mixed with dry ice and sweat, and a pumping, pulsating blast of hard techno. At *Homeworld* (Montreal, March 2001), there was a darkened stairwell to navigate to get to the rave. Being a goa rave, and a particularly syncretic one at that, the effect was of

descending into a strange and mysterious world of religious iconography, made all the stranger for the fact that it was held in a Christian church basement.

Once inside the actual rave space, the first thing the Montreal crowd usually did was establish what I called a home base. In reality, it was nothing more than a patch of bare floor. We would place our packsacks there, and strip off any coats or excess clothing. Home base served as a meeting point and a place to relax and “chill out” (take a break from dancing). It was also usually the place where people prepared and took their drugs. On some occasions one or two people would watch for security or police while the other members of the group swallowed their pills or snorted their amphetamine or ketamine powder. On others, members of the group would simply discreetly take their drugs.

During the course of my research I was often surprised by the apparently more relaxed attitude of Montreal and Quebec City ravers with regard to drug consumption and the authorities, especially after my experience at *Freakin' 2000*. The Montreal crowd seemed generally unworried about being caught with drugs. I questioned Dominic about this on one occasion. His reply was that the security guards were generally quite tolerant, provided that people were discreet and didn't openly display illicit substances. In terms of the police, the group had never had trouble before. I noticed the same general attitude in Quebec City. The pungent aroma of marijuana was prevalent at the events I attended there, and it wasn't difficult to spot people snorting speed or ingesting pills.

As I mentioned above, the members of the Montreal crowd with whom I established a rapport did not usually take their Ecstasy immediately upon entering the rave. An exception to this would be an event where we arrived quite late, or if the DJ

whom the members really wanted to hear was coming on soon. While speed was generally seen as an appetizer, Ecstasy was the main course. Ketamine was used by many members of the group also, but usually not until well into the night, after one or two hits of speed, and perhaps a tablet of Ecstasy. Since the effects of ketamine are intense but short-lived, I suspect that members of the group would snort it occasionally to add small peaks to their high.

After establishing home base, depositing coats, backpacks and any other gear, and perhaps taking a few hits of speed, individual members of the group or smaller subgroups or pairs would do any number of things, such as: wander around the venue, checking out the various DJs; see if any other people they knew were there; find the bathrooms; buy some bottled water and perhaps some glowsticks; or start dancing.

Once inside the rave, the main foci for the Montreal crowd were fourfold:

1) achieving the right physical and psychological state mainly through consumption of psychoactive drugs; 2) generally experiencing pleasure and physical/psychological freedom; 3) getting physical and into one's body through dancing and physical contact with others; and 4) expressing and opening oneself socially and connecting with people on a deeper and more intimate level. The catalysts for the achievement of all of these goals were ingestion of Ecstasy and other drugs, the quality and volume of music being played, and the presence of a mass of other like-minded people with the same goals. I discussed some aspects of the first and second foci above in the context of the pre-rave party. Fulfillment of the other two occurred mainly during the rave itself and the after party.

As I mentioned above, Ecstasy was seen by the Montreal crowd as a special drug, as it is by most people in rave communities around the world. When a rave was nearing its climax, whether that meant that the best DJs were coming on, everyone in the group was together and inside the event safely, or the energy in the group and/or the event simply felt right, people would ingest their tablet(s) of Ecstasy. This had to be planned at least thirty minutes in advance, as it takes the typical person between thirty minutes and one hour to begin to feel the effects, and as long as two hours before the full onslaught of the Ecstasy rush.

I noticed that almost all of the members of the Montreal crowd remained quiet and/or stationary after they had ingested their Ecstasy. I didn't ask anyone directly about why they did this, but from other conversations I believe it is because many of them still feel the side effects of nausea and disorientation during the rush phase. Some of them also told me about negative experiences they had had on Ecstasy, and so they were probably being cautious and respectful of the drug's power. Another factor for this pattern of behaviour may lie in the fact that even with trusted sources, one never knows with absolute certainty what is in the pill just ingested. The rave literature is littered with reports and anecdotes about groups of ravers and sometimes entire raves being sold fake Ecstasy pills, or worse, being sold some dangerous concoction of other narcotics and becoming very ill.

It was noticeable when the Ecstasy began to take effect on people. After 5-15 minutes of disorientation and sometimes mild panic, solemn looks began melting into smiles. Toes tapped. Jaws worked. Hands beat out rhythms upon knees. Muted conversations turned to streams of consciousness. Guarded postures released into easy

and fluid movements. The combination of Ecstasy, speed, the overpowering beat of the music, and the rising energy of the crowd finally became too much for several members of the group. Rising to their feet, they made their way onto the dance floor, leaving the others behind in progressively deeper and more intimate conversations and physical contact.

More and more is being written about the styles of dance that have sprouted from acid house and rave culture. Typically, dancers at a rave or after hours club dance alone and face the DJ, as opposed to “regular” clubs and bars, where dancers may face any direction, and in which groups of friends will form a circle and face each other while dancing. Facing the DJ is not a rule but rather a tacit code within rave culture. I did witness events at which not all dancers faced the DJ, but this was the exception rather than the rule. One event at which I noticed this was *Space Invader* (Toronto, December 2000). In this case, the DJ was the first one on the roster for the night—usually indicating lower status and likely less experience—and made several mistakes, such as mixing tracks poorly and selecting tracks that disrupted the crowd’s energy. Another indication of the universality of this behavioural code is the fact that one of my neophyte raver informants, Bella, found it strange and out of place when she witnessed another raver not facing the DJ during an event.

Aside from facing the DJ, there is only one other relatively static or concrete code of behaviour with regard to rave dancing: just about anything is acceptable. While informants did express this to me, it is also something that you simply understand after raving a number of times. One of the centrally attracting features of acid house was that people could go to an acid house party and dance without having to look cool. This

included wearing whatever you wanted and dancing however you wanted. As I explained in chapter 2, this was a total break with previous clubbing practices, where being cool meant wearing the right clothes and posing on the edges of the dancefloor rather than making a spectacle of oneself (see Collin 1997; Garratt 1998; McRobbie 1994; Reynolds 1999). This same openness and acceptance of acid house migrated to rave culture. Just about any kind of dancing was accepted at the raves I attended, provided it did not harm other people. As mentioned above, I observed a wide range of dancing and other stylized kinetic activity on the dancefloor at the raves and festivals I attended, including: “regular” dancing using the feet, legs and arms; rapid on the spot pogo-ing; yogic postures; rolling around in the dirt; crawling, leaping, and growling like an animal; martial arts postures and movements; head, neck, back, stomach, and other body part massages; and hugging. Provided that it did not injure or insult anyone else, almost any kind of physical activity was accepted at these events. At the 2003 *Om Festival* (June 2003), a few participants even spent the festival completely naked (despite the frigid morning and nighttime temperatures!).

Women and men were just as likely to dance with the same style at the raves I attended. There are some distinctive styles and techniques which have arisen in the central Canadian scene, such as the Liquid, one variation of which involves undulating your hand and arm so that they imitate a standing wave. The same thing can be done with the fingers of both hands interlocked in front of the body, to create one long, fluid standing wave with both arms. There are other particular, less-fluid rave dances more difficult to describe and involving the whole body. One feature they have in common is a jerky or jabbing style; feet and hands carve the floor and air in quick, truncated motions.

Sometimes ravers simply jump up and down rapidly, with little other body movement. Such an angular and jerky style of dance, in addition to resembling the angular and emaciated bodies of young ravers, likely derived from the similarly staccato style of “jacking” born in the house and acid house scenes of the late 1980’s.

Having had probably too much experience in the traditional club scene frequented by university students during my undergraduate days, I can attest to how completely contrary the atmosphere is in the latter, and how radical a break the level of social openness and acceptance of the rave scene is. The contrast between raves and clubs was also evident during a night in December 2002 when I went with a number of ravers in search of an after hours party in downtown Ottawa during a weeknight. Instead of anything resembling a typical rave or after hours trance party, all we could find was a “regular” club playing a mix of 1990’s and early 2000’s Top 40 dance songs. The two things that instantly struck me upon entering the club were the extremely slow tempo of the music, and the hostile and guarded atmosphere of the club. The place was small and packed with people dressed casually but sharply. People seemed to nervously dart their eyes over each other, surveying the scene and likely potential chances for sexual encounters. The night was a rude awakening for me. I had been raving for two years, and had not been inside a club like this for almost a decade. I felt dirty and unsafe being there. I was used to walking into parties where few people had come to find sex, where you could dress however you wanted, where everyone danced and no one cared how you danced, and where you were met with smiles and greetings instead of cold, appraising stares. In something even as small as the reaction received when someone bumped into you, there was a world of difference. At 95% of the raves I’d been to, people actually

apologized and asked if you were okay when they bumped into you. At this club, patrons pushed by, elbows and shoulders out, without a second thought or glance. My experience here is echoed by many ravers in the central Canadian rave scene (see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003).

When I or the members of the Montreal crowd weren't dancing, we were either walking around the rave space, talking to someone, or "chilling out." "Chilling out" or "chilling" is a phrase that has entered common parlance in youth and popular cultures over the past decade. It generally refers to relaxing, taking it easy, or cooling down: you can be "chilling out at a friend's house" by watching television, playing a video game, or just "hanging out"; or you may be told to "chill" if you're too upset about something. Chilling out at a rave is usually done in what is called a "chill out area." Virtually every rave will have one, and while they are usually demarcated and segregated from the rest of the event in some way (several of the raves I attended actually had a "Chill Area" or "Chill Zone" sign over them), some consist simply of a few couches, chairs, or foam mattresses placed in the corner of the warehouse or club. More typically, there will be some kind of boundary physically and ritually separating the chill area from the dance area. Some of the implements I saw used to mark this boundary were ropes with curtains or sheets hung from them, office dividers, and concrete/wooden walls (i.e. the chill rooms were separate rooms altogether). Chill rooms are typically sparsely attired. The bare minimum is usually a few foam mattresses placed on the concrete floor, for people to sit or lie on, but I have seen chill rooms consisting of nothing more than a curtain sectioning off a patch of warehouse flooring. Nicer venues, especially after hours clubs, will have

chill rooms with upholstered furniture, and may also bring in foam or real mattresses for the event.

One of the purposes of the chill room is to serve as a place for people to cool down from extensive dancing. Rave promoters are therefore wise to construct and appoint them well, as most of the serious injuries and deaths that occur at raves are reported to result from ravers overheating, dehydrating, or both. A secondary function of the chill room is as a place to explore one's body and the bodies of others in forms other than dancing. Ecstasy, as I have described, is a drug with a particular appeal to the tactile. A normal stroke on the arm becomes an electric caress of a thousand tiny feathers; a friend, even a total stranger, giving you a massage or running their fingers through your hair harkens you back to the unconditional loving caress of your mother when you were a child. It's no surprise, then, that physical activity other than dancing can be witnessed at raves, particularly intimate and interpersonal physical activity.

I must stress again, however, that I saw very little if any sexual activity at any of the raves I attended. There was physical contact however, and contact between strangers. People spontaneously gave and offered each other massages. Friends and strangers alike hugged each other. And perhaps most interestingly, "puppy piles" or "cuddle puddles" developed. Although I don't have much firsthand experience from which to draw, a cuddle puddle is basically a mass of ravers sprawled out on chairs or mattresses, sometimes two or three people high. In a cuddle puddle you could be lying on, beside, or underneath total strangers; you could have a part of your body stroked, massaged, kneaded, or just held; or you could just lie there, soaking up the warmth and intimacy of the contact with other bodies (see Image 3).

Despite the fact that I did not witness any overt sexual activity during my raving career, as well as raves' explicit popularity with many people (especially women) because of their characteristic non-sexual vibe, I did witness firsthand an apparent case of their open and accepting environment's effect on a sexual relationship that bears mentioning. When I first met the Montreal crowd, Dominic was dating Penelope, one of the girls in the group. At the third event I attended with the group, although it was clear during the pre-rave party that Dominic and Penelope were still dating, by the time the event was over, this was no longer the case. I noticed throughout the night that Dominic and another girl in the group, Paulette, were spending a lot of time together and were touching each other a lot in the cuddle puddles. Normally this would not be out of the ordinary; several times during my raves with the Montreal crowd I saw male members massaging, hugging, and touching other male's girlfriends. But on this night, Dominic and Paulette seemed to spend almost all of their time together. At one point I even saw them kissing each other. All of this happened as Penelope was nearby and sometimes in clear view. When we later went to the after party, Dominic again showed signs that he was with Penelope, but also did the same with Paulette. I was confused trying to figure out who was with whom and what was going on. At the next event the situation was cleared up: Dominic and Paulette were now clearly together, and Penelope was out of the picture, although she still came to the raves with them. Dominic and Paulette have been a couple ever since, and are still together to this day.

There were likely several other factors and dynamics at work in this situation, even before the event where Dominic and Paulette appeared to get together. However, it was clear that that event represented a turning point of some significance, fraught as it

was with clear ambiguity. Since then, I've often wondered how much of a role Ecstasy and the rave played in bringing about the events that transpired, though I never asked Dominic or Paulette the question. On a similar note, during another rave with the Montreal crowd I witnessed Jake's girlfriend Josée passionately kissing another girl, again in Jake's plain view. This time curiosity got the better of me and I asked Jake if he and Josée were still dating. He said matter-of-factly that they were, and that occasionally Josée liked to be with girls. Once again, I have no more details about the relationship than this. Rather than rave playing a key role in such experimentation, the Montreal crowd may simply have been a collection of socially and sexually experimental people. Based on some of my conversations with them, however, rave did open them to whole new ways of viewing people and the society in which they lived, and likely impacted their view of personal relationships as well.

A typical rave with the Montreal crowd continued with alternation of extended dancing, chilling out in the chill room or at home base, and consuming more drugs. While I was usually tired and prepared to leave by six or seven o'clock in the morning (although my stamina did improve by my third year of raving), they were diehard ravers and usually wanted to stay until the very end or close to it. When enough people in the group wanted to leave or the last DJ had played his final track, someone (usually Dominic) rounded up everyone from the group and we left for the after party.

Despite the fact that it has been all but totally neglected in the rave literature, the after party could form the basis of an entire study by itself on the ritualized components and transformative potential of the rave. A typical after party with the Montreal crowd began when we arrived back at the apartment of whomever was hosting it. At some

events, such as my final rave with the group—*Scream*, the group split up during the night. At this particular rave we had split up because a problem with the venue meant that only some of us got into the event; the rest took the party back to Phil and Lucie's house for the night. So with this event as with some others, the after party began with a reunion of the group. One thing that never failed to strike me about the Montreal crowd was the genuine warmth and care they showed for each other, and for me. This was evident in the huge smiles and embraces when they reunited. It was as if the members returning from the rave were arriving from an arduous, year-long battle, rather than a party for which they had just left four hours earlier.

The next phase of the after party was gathering in a comfortable room and reacquiring or sustaining the high. In terms of spatial arrangements and levels of physical contact and intimacy, the after party was a continuation and in one sense an intensification of the rave itself. Taking the *Scream* after party as an example once again, when we arrived back at Phil and Lucie's house several of us sat or lay down in circles of 3-5 people in a modestly sized living room. People either sat or lay against each other or in close proximity to one another, much closer than the typical distance when conversing with someone in a "normal" social situation. Some of them continued to give each other back, leg, neck, and other massages. To sustain the energy and the high of the night, more speed and/or Ecstasy was taken by several members in the group. For some of them, this meant the third or fourth hit of both substances. At other after parties I also saw some members smoke marijuana.

I will argue later that the hermeneutic circle of the rave experience is a largely incomplete one because there is little interpretation of the definitely vivid and

extraordinary experiences that participants have, leading to the question of to what extent these experiences are integrated into their lives. If any such interpretation in fact occurs, it likely occurs at after parties such as the one following *Scream*. While the loudness of the music and its irresistible call to dance discourages sharing and reflecting upon personal and interpersonal experiences at the rave, the spatial arrangements and more tranquil, comfortable setting of the after party invites it. There were deep and frequent conversations about such topics as drugs, education, one's purpose in life, the benefits and purpose of raving, relationships, philosophy, and friendship, as well as about more pedestrian and everyday topics. It was not unusual for someone to share their deepest problems and pain with a new acquaintance, as happened to me during the *Scream* after party and at several other events. At every event I attended to the end with the Montreal crowd, the pattern was the same: they would return to someone's apartment, sprawl out in cuddle puddles on the floor or on comfortable furniture, consume more drugs, and connect with each other through the sharing of their innermost thoughts, and sometimes, pain.

Evan, Charles, and the Ottawa Scene

This being a multi-sited ethnographic study, representing my rave experiences and history in the scene(s) according to geographic location is not only difficult but also somewhat misleading. For example, although I have located this description of my experiences in the city of Ottawa third, in fact my first after hours club event was in Ottawa and throughout the three years I performed fieldwork I attended sporadic events in Ottawa. Bearing this in mind, my experience of the Ottawa rave scene was the most intense and in-depth in the final year of my fieldwork, and so I describe it here. To

understand and contextualize that experience, it is first necessary to describe two informants who irretrievably influenced it.

I first met Evan at *Boo 2*, a small Halloween 2002 rave held, paradoxically, in the popular and centrally located English pub Stout Brothers on Bank Street. The rave itself was literally a non-event: only an hour or so after gaining admission, all of us were asked to leave the building and wait outside in the -8 degree Celsius weather. A short while later fire trucks and a sewage truck arrived and their occupants entered the building. After a delay of an hour or so we were allowed back inside, but the party never really got going and we were again evacuated, this time for good.

Melanie and I briefly met Evan in the cue for the event and then reconnected with him inside, before the fire trucks arrived. It was initially difficult to tell how old he was since he was dressed in costume. From the way he spoke and the topics he discussed though, I knew he was older than the average raver. I later found out that he is in his mid-thirties.

Right away I felt there was something markedly different about Evan besides his age. At first I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but by the end of the night at *Boo 2* I was describing him as less open and trusting than 99% of the ravers I had met previously. An example of this from my notes:

I also asked him several questions, and I asked him at one point if he minded if I took notes. He said he didn't mind, but that he would not say anything about himself personally. He said that if I wanted to know that information I should go to the XVI website [an Ottawa rave community website], where he had personal information listed. (*Boo 2*, November 2002)

It wasn't that Evan wasn't polite and even generous, allowing Melanie and I back to his vehicle to warm up while we waited for the rave to resume, and offering to introduce us to the rather exclusive Ottawa goa scene. It was the way in which he did these things. For example, before we could meet some of his friends from the goa scene, we were to write short synopses on ourselves and our interests in the scene that he would pass on to potential contacts and interviewees. I did this, although no other informant had ever requested anything remotely like this. However, to my knowledge Evan never passed on my synopsis to anyone. In addition to these events, there was his body language, which was also different from that of other ravers I had met, more guarded. As I got to know him over the next year I learned that Evan was more private about his personal life than many of my other informants.

Evan fell outside of the norm of the typical central Canadian raver in other respects also. Not only much older than the average raver, he was also at a different life stage. While Dominic, Jake, and the rest of the Montreal crowd were all single and still sorting out what they wanted to do with their lives, Evan's lifestyle was much closer to my own—settled and career-oriented.

Demographically speaking, therefore, Evan was outside the norm for central Canadian ravers. However, he did embody a certain stereotype that existed in the early days of rave in the United Kingdom and has been recently reported in countries such as Australia, the United States, and Canada – the yuppy raver or “feral suit” (see St John 2001d). Like the surprised fellow government employee I bumped into at Ikon during my first after hours club, by day Evan was a professional; by night, a devoted initiand in the most psychedelic and druggy variant of the rave scene—psytrance. The setup was

perfect: because he had flexible work hours, Evan didn't have to worry about appearing at the office neat and tidy at 8:00 am sharp after a night of partying until 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning. Like my government colleague, myself, and thousands of other "feral suits," Evan took his work and his partying seriously, and had the means and the organizational skills to get what he wanted in service of the latter.

Surface

Following *Boo 2*, my next event with Evan was a night at Ottawa's best after hours club serving the rave community, Surface. Owned by a small collection of electronic music aficionados, DJs, and veterans of the rave scene, Surface is a small club by the standards of large cities such as Toronto, Montreal, New York, or London. The building in which it is housed has been used as night club space continuously since at least 1993, under various incarnations such as On Tap, Spodee Odee's, and others. Newly remodeled, it now has a definite warehouse feel, again most likely a purposeful move in emulation of the warehouse ethos of 1980's British warehouse and acid house parties, warehouse raves, and clubs such as the Hacienda and the Paradise Garage. Sparsely decorated, the interior comprises two main rooms (dancefloors), both on the main floor, and a lounge/chill out area on the upper floor with a balcony overlooking the largest room. Separation of the rooms and the chill out area is effected by staircases, elevation, and both permanent and collapsible walls. The latter are useful in that they can be removed when a really big DJ plays the club, thereby effectively creating one larger room. Also, at the end of the night the collapsible walls can be removed to expedite the exit of patrons. As in most after hours clubs, although stylized decorations are sparse, the sound system and lighting rigs are sophisticated. In the main room there are 8 sets of

intelligent lighting rigs hung from the ceiling and various walls. Two mirror balls are also suspended from the ceiling, in locations where they can be targeted by the lighting rigs. At a later event, I also noticed a green laser mounted on the ceiling of the main room, opposite the DJ booth. There are windows in the club but they have been blacked out so as not to allow any light in. In terms of the audio characteristics of the club, there are 4 banks of large speakers in the main room, 2 on the floor, the other 2 suspended from the ceiling. The sound therefore hits you from four different, roughly equidistant directions when on the dancefloor. This is the most common configuration of speakers at all of the events I attended.

My first visit to Surface with Evan was in the fall of 2002. The headlining DJ was Mistress Barbara (see Image 4), a rising star out of Montreal and now an internationally known techno and hard techno DJ with a series of albums titled *Relentless Beats*. The night began at Evan's house, where Melanie, Evan and I met for a couple of drinks before heading out to the club. We then drove into Ottawa in my truck. The driving was slow and treacherous as a snowstorm had just hit the city. We arrived at the club, parked the truck, and got into the cue outside. Following a twenty minute frigid wait that seemed more like an hour, we were allowed in.

It was only around midnight, but the club was already quite full, a testament to Mistress Barbara's popularity and following. Evan showed us around the club and introduced us to a few people from the Ottawa scene, particularly the goa scene. One of them, Luca, invited me to a WOMP (Word of Mouth Party) occurring in a few weeks. I couldn't help but feel special at that moment, that I was making my way into yet another "secret society" of the rave scene in Canada.

The DJ that was opening for Mistress Barbara, DJ Heaven, was currently playing. As I made my way to the dancefloor, I realized that this was the first event in which I would dance to the beats of a female DJ, in fact two female DJs. I made a mental note to pay closer attention not only to how I felt throughout the night, physically and emotionally, but also if there were any differences that might be due specifically to the DJs being female.

Despite all of the hype and her reputation, I found it much more enjoyable dancing to DJ Heaven's set than to Mistress Barbara's. Barbara's set was simply an onslaught of hard techno; to me there seemed to be little variation in tempo or mood. It was not so much a journey as a full-out sprint, 150+ bpm with few breaks or interludes for a full two and a half hours. In contrast, Heaven played a more musical form of techno, less intense with more midrange, melody, and some good builds. Surprisingly, a few of Barbara's mixes were sloppy as well, something which always breaks the flow somewhat when I'm dancing, as it reportedly does for other people too. Melanie and Evan also felt that Heaven was at least as good as Barbara on this night, although the crowd was very much into Barbara.

I did notice a qualitative difference in my experience of and connection with the two female DJs during the night. All of my previous rave experiences, while positive and uplifting, were sexually neutral. My admiration, even adoration, of the DJ during the peaks of the rave were intense. As some informants have said, it's difficult not to develop a strong emotional connection to a person who brings you such intense pleasure and joy, who takes you on such incredible journeys. But to this point, that emotional connection was entirely platonic. On this night, however, I observed a sexual colouration of my

gratitude and adoration of the DJs.³⁷ It wasn't lust; I was not physically attracted to either DJ, and in fact I never really got close enough to them to have a good look at them. Although difficult to describe with words, the difference seemed to be inherent in the power dynamics of the relationship. In other words, the significance was that I was being taken on this journey by a woman rather than a man, and a competent, self-assured woman at that (especially in Heaven's case). It was that my experience, my consciousness (to a certain extent) were being controlled by a woman, and it was intensely pleasurable and sensuous, although she never actually touched my body with hers. Less so with Barbara but definitely with Heaven, I felt that she was in control of my body and my emotions. It was at once liberating, exciting, and slightly disconcerting. Since the event I've reflected further on the nature of that experience. I suspect that at least part of the reason it was different, and slight disconcerting, is that I have always felt slightly intimidated by powerful women. As I will discuss below on the topic of the "technoshaman," the DJ is indeed a very powerful figure at a rave.

During the first DJ's set especially, I began to feel that familiar sense of connectedness and intimacy with Evan and Melanie. Although the only drug I had consumed that night was alcohol, and a small quantity of it at that, I think it served to loosen me up a little. Also, as I argue below, I believe it acted as a catalyst in retuning neural networks associated with mood, sensory perception and body perception to a state similar to those I had experienced during previous raves when I had ingested Ecstasy. This was also aided by the energy of the crowd, the similarly structured and enjoyable music, and the company of a close friend (Melanie) and a new and exciting acquaintance

³⁷ Several of my female informants (Miko, Bella, Marilyn, and Sarah) also reported sexual attraction to or a sexual colouration of their feelings for, male DJs.

and informant (Evan). I began to feel intensely relaxed and increasingly aware of and in tune with my body. Although it didn't hurt very much, I could feel the places in my back and neck where I was storing tension and stress, and I knew that it was in fact stress causing that tension. I also felt less inhibited about dancing, and began to really get into the music and let myself go. I closed my eyes and withdrew into my own world, my own body. It felt wonderful.

I also felt much closer to Melanie and Evan. I gave them both a hug and told them how happy I was to be there with them. They reciprocated and voiced the same thing. I noticed, however, that Evan did not seem as "open" or as truly empathetic as I was, or as I had felt from other rave friends. When we embraced his body felt stiff against mine. This was in spite of the fact that he had ingested a tablet of Ecstasy two hours previously, and had expressed that he indeed was feeling its full effects. Although I made a conscious effort to suspend my disbelief in his disingenuousness and give him the benefit of the doubt, I just did not feel the same purity of intention and purity of heart from him, as I had not on our first meeting. Whether this was in fact the case or whether I was misreading him or projecting my own thoughts or feelings onto him, I'm not sure. My perception of Evan's guardedness could also have been entirely due to the fact that after all I was in a position of power with throughout the time of our relationship: I was collecting information from him with the intent of publishing it. Moreover, I was documenting his participation in a culture still very much viewed with suspicion; a devious, underground movement, and a movement that involved illicit drug-taking. Evan therefore had the most to lose in our relationship. Perhaps his actions were actually well-advised when viewed in this light.

After dancing and chilling out to Mistress Barbara's set for a couple of hours, we decided to leave. I drove us slowly back to Evan's house through the snowstorm once again. We sat in his living room and had a couple of drinks, played some music, and talked. It was a nice way to unwind from the night. As I listened to the music and the soft lull of voices, I began to drift in and out of sleep. Suddenly Evan was sitting beside me and nudging my knee, telling me it was time to leave. I laughed and said, "Yeah, right," thinking that of course he was joking. As I began to doze off, he again said, "Come on, time to go Tim," nudging my leg again. Incredulous as I was, I began to realize that he was serious. He was kicking me out of his house in a snowstorm, after I'd had a few drinks and was sleepy, and after clubbing at an after hours party with him. I was in shock. I mumbled to him that I just needed half an hour of rest to sleep off the bit of alcohol I'd had and then I'd be fine to drive. Politely but seriously, he insisted that I had to go now. I put on my shoes and jacket, said goodbye, and went out to warm up my truck. I thought that perhaps Evan had kicked me out of his house because he didn't like me, or because I threatened him or had breached some code of conduct of his. Any of this may be true, but I also learned that on at least one other occasion he had done the same thing to another friend of his from the rave scene.

More than any other, this event shaped my impression of and relationship with Evan. As I drove home through the snowstorm, still groggy and slightly feeling the effects of the alcohol, a flurry of emotions washed over me. I felt hurt, betrayed, confused, and angry. What Evan had just done seemed so wrong to me on so many levels, and made me wonder if I had been wrong about the rave scene. Maybe it really wasn't much different than the traditional club scene after all. Never in my rave career

thus far had anyone done anything like this to me, and neither had I read or even heard about such behaviour. In fact, I understood quite the opposite to be the norm and the unspoken code between ravers: of paramount importance at and after a rave was the comfort and safety of one's fellow ravers. So many times had the Montreal crowd offered, no, begged me to come back with them to the after party to relax, unwind, and rest before the long drive home. Even total strangers had offered me this kindness at other out of town raves, upon finding out I had traveled from Ottawa to be there. And yet, here was a three-year veteran of the scene who had raved all over Ontario, who had even done the clubbing circuit in London at huge icons of the global dance scene, forcing me out of his house and into the cold winter night when he knew I wasn't in good condition to leave, and when I had asked him to stay. I had never even had to ask for this on previous occasions; it was always spontaneously offered. I just could not understand, nor believe, how a raver could do this to another raver. It was so far outside of PLUR and the general spirit of rave. It hit me like a ton of bricks, out of the blue. As I drove home through the storm, I felt vulnerable, violated.

Despite this terrible experience with Evan, however, I continued raving with him and actually interviewed him about his rave career. He later admitted to me that he felt bad about what he had done the night we went to Surface, and at another rave I told him how much it had upset me and hurt my feelings. I told him that I didn't expect anything from him in return, I just needed to say those words to him.

My relationship with Evan reminded me, if at times I had almost forgotten, that as much as I wanted to believe I was a raver just like any of my informants, I could never escape the fact that I was still an outsider here, a participant with an ultimate purpose

unrelated to raving. In the absence of that alternate purpose, after that first night at Surface with Evan I might have reacted differently. I might never have raved with him again, because I found it difficult to trust him. Deep down I felt that when the chips were down he would sacrifice my safety and my interests for his. But because I needed him, because he had something that I wanted—three years of insight and experience in the scene—I put on my best face and continued to associate with him. Although it comforted me that I had told him how he had hurt me that night after Surface, I sometimes found it hard to shoo away a little voice in the back of my head telling me that I was being dishonest with him, that I wasn't really raving with him because I liked him. Then again, Evan was an intelligent man and had probably figured that out for himself. Still, it was the most uncomfortable relationship I developed in the field, and part of me fears that he may someday read this, recognize himself, and be angry with my portrayal of him. To that I can only reply that I have represented my experience and opinions about him as honestly as I can. While Evan certainly did teach me a lot about rave and about the Ottawa scene, the bottom line is that we weren't good friends and to me he embodied many things that ravers were not, although again this may be a function of my position as a researcher. I will always be grateful for the way that he let me into his world a little and shared his time with me, however.

Charles and the Ottawa Goa/Psytrance Scene

In my opinion Charles was the antithesis to Evan, the hero to his antihero, and the more I got to know him the more I admired and respected him, even if I didn't share all of his views on life and lifestyle. Again, in keeping with my decision to base this research heavily in my own, first person experience of the people and subcultures I encountered, I

am disclosing this at the outset, in order that the opinions and conclusions I draw may be considered in light of it. Moreover, as I have analyzed and reflected on what I experienced, observed, and was told about the central Canadian rave scene, I have attempted to be aware of the ways in which my personal thoughts and feelings may impact the data, for example how my admiration of Charles may have made it easier to suspend disbelief in some of his claims about the benefits of rave.

I first met Charles at one of Evan's house parties. Perhaps the best way to describe him is as a person who attempts to live his life in a conscious and purposeful way, much like some of the people I've met during previous research on New Age healing groups. Let me elaborate on this.

Charles is in his mid-twenties and like Evan, he is a professional by day and a raver by night. Also like Evan, he is Caucasian and clean-cut in appearance, aside from the beard that he wore at times during the period in which I knew him. Charles' favourite music was goa or psytrance, and he was a member of the exclusive Ottawa psytrance scene. He was an intellectual person, as seems to be characteristic for such members: he thought about and discussed things of deeper import and concern than the average person, and he seldom answered a question without observably giving it sincere thought. I remember having few conversations with him about mundane aspects of everyday life, but then again, I often asked him questions about such deeper issues as I tried to probe his knowledge and experience of psytrance and rave. Even though Charles knew the conclusions that I was driving towards in my study (a perennial problem with interviewees), he also seemed to answer my questions very honestly.

Charles had been raving for about 5 years when I met him. His first event opened him to a world unlike anything he had seen before. Initially attracted to what he calls mainstream or epic trance, he later "graduated" to goa or psytrance (since the Ottawa psytrance community seems to prefer the term psytrance, that's what I use from now on). I don't believe Charles ever used the word "graduated" with me, but it was very clear from our conversations that he viewed mainstream or epic trance as a lesser form than psytrance, at least partially because of its widespread appeal to the masses.³⁸ Charles attended psytrance events almost exclusively when I knew him. His other favourite genre of electronic music was ambient, another "intelligent" genre of electronic music. In fact, he seemed to enjoy ambient music even more than psytrance, although as he himself put it, "no one dances to ambient," and so when he attended events, they were usually psytrance events. What the two genres have in common is a heady, psychedelic feel to them, an appeal to the cerebral as much if not more than to the bodily. Charles actually produced his own ambient music in his apartment on a computer and some other mixing equipment, and has DJed at local events, including a regular ambient/psytrance night that ran at, of all places, the graduate student pub Café Nostalgica on the University of Ottawa campus throughout 2002. One of the unquestionably strangest field experiences during my research was dancing wildly with a group of grungy, tripped out psytrancers at Nostalgica on a Tuesday night to the thundering blast of hardcore psytrance and techno.

Being interested in raving as a form of spirituality or as a religious experience, I naturally asked Charles about his thoughts on the subject, and on spirituality in his life.

³⁸ For an excellent discussion of the progressions through and clashes between various genres and tempos of music in the rave movement, see Reynolds (1999, especially pp. 181ff).

In addition to practicing yoga, Charles also studied and practiced tai chi. He was very much aware of how he lived his life, and seemed to be in conscious control of it. For Charles rave was about connecting with people and “opening the heart.” Being single, he would not turn down a romantic possibility if it presented itself. However, time after time in my experience with him, he returned to this metaphor as a way to describe the benefits of raving, and of the Ecstasy experience:

Charles: ... I find in itself MDMA is an interesting drug because it shows you, it shows you what you could be like if, you know like those moments like when your heart is open ...

... Have you ever been at a club and there was this like beautiful girl on the other side of the room and you like didn't know what to say to her, and you walked out of their going like fuck why didn't I talk to her?!

Tim: Oh yeah! [laughing]

Charles: Okay well on Ecstasy, I'd never do that. If I saw a beautiful girl I would just go up to her and tell her, and like, it always just flows, like she's just really happy to talk to me. And so it shows me this is what I could be like if I just had a bit more of an open heart, if I had a bit less fear mentality or something or whatever.

... Especially with the MDMA experience, if the MDMA is, like if you're doing a quality self-analysis, if you're approaching it from the perspective that I'm describing here, a party can be a time to dance, to break loose of mental and physical blockages, time to connect with community, a time to express your talent if you're a DJ, and also a time to, if you're doing quality MDMA, none of that crystal [crystal methamphetamine], none of that shit, but like quality MDMA, to go through some really good like, chemical therapy, chemical like self-analysis, introspection, a kind of introspection that can promote wellness in your person. (Charles, January 2003)

For Charles the best nights out comprised a DJ playing good psytrance music, quality (meaning pure) Ecstasy, and the company of close friends and/or like-minded people. He usually could find the first two elements, and for the third he had become part of a small

collective of psytrancers in the Ottawa area with whom I became familiar and with whom I raved on several occasions.

Ottawa Psytrance

At my first night at Surface with Evan in November I was introduced to Luca, one of the key players in the Ottawa psytrance scene. Within just a few minutes of chatting, she invited me to an upcoming WOMP party. According to its website, WOMP “is a small creative collective of dj's, designers, artists and partygoer's who get together now and then to have some fun”.³⁹ WOMP throws small, intimate, free or not-for-profit raves with a particularly psychedelic feel. From 2002-2003 I attended one WOMP party and several other events at which WOMP members were present and/or played an organizing role. I very much wanted to interview some of the members, but this never materialized. I developed a decent rapport with Luca after a month or so of meeting her, but after several cancellations due to her busy schedule I stopped contacting her for an interview. Despite what Charles said to me about the local psytrance scene being unpretentious and friendly, I found WOMP a hard nut to crack and had to conduct my observations “from the outside.” Once again, at the outset I was clear with the members I approached that I was studying rave and dance cultures, and this have generated a guarded reaction from them. After all, as Thornton (1995) has demonstrated, publicity and mainstreaming is the subcultural kiss of death for underground scenes and collectives like WOMP.

The driving principle behind WOMP seemed to be throwing parties that explored the boundaries between electronic music, dance, visual art, and psychedelic drugs, and

³⁹<http://www.google.ca/search?q=cache:FQJ4RTSPZRMJ:www.jedlooker.com/womp/+WOMP+Ottawa&hl=en&ie=UTF-8> (Note: this is an archive of the original page, which is no longer available online.)

that recaptured some of the “magic” of the early days of acid house and rave that so many people speak about—the days when parties were free or break-even, when the drugs were good and clean, and when people didn’t bring an attitude to the party. Comprised of 11 core members as of late 2002, WOMP exhibited several of the features of other rave micro-communities: the use of fictitious party-personas with exotic monikers like Skymonkey, Wooferbitch, and Colloidal Dispersion; affinity for and exploitation of high technology in the creation of artistic spaces, events, and communities; managed exclusivity; and experimentation with alternative lifestyles and community. These are features WOMP also shares with an apparently growing number of alternative lifestyle festivals merging electronic music and art installations, such as Ontario’s annual *Om Festival* (which I attended in 2003 and discuss later), and the legendary Burning Man Festival in the Nevada desert. In fact, several members of WOMP have attended Burning Man and seem to have imported its techniques and ethos.⁴⁰

The WOMP party I attended was held on November 30, 2002, in the SAW Gallery in downtown Ottawa. The name of the party was *WOMPER Room*, an absolutely ingenious title simultaneously incorporating the party collective’s name, a wordplay on the syndicated children’s television program *Romper Room* broadcast from 1954 to the 1980’s, and the theme of the party, the larger rave movement, and WOMP itself—rediscovering your inner child and creativity through music, dance and psychoactive drugs (See Image 9). *WOMPER Room* began at 10:00 pm and ended at 4:00 am. I arrived at about 10:30. Here is a description of the setting from my fieldnotes:

⁴⁰ They actually created a fascinating website describing their “mission” for the Festival, their campsite plan and its significance, etc.: <http://www.artvessel.com/technowhale/>

The party was in the basement of the SAW Gallery, in what I believe was the SAW video gallery. After paying at the door, you had to walk through a room of installations, which were Caution Taped off. Then there was another doorway opening into the main area.

In the main area, directly to the left was another doorway leading to the back entrance, washrooms, and some storage space. Just to the right of the doorway was a small bar area, with some upright coolers. Straight in from the doorway was the main room, which had been divided into two with a floor-to-ceiling curtain. The DJ area was set up at the front of the room, with a large (10' x 10') video projection screen behind it, hooked up to a computer. Throughout the night a program on the computer projected images onto the screen. The images varied from the standard fractal-type to bizarre sequences of video footage of city landscapes, 1940's and 1950's scenes of very staid and uptight-looking people dancing stiffly, and other bizarre or out of place scenes. There were speaker stacks at the front of the room, by the DJ area, and also at the sides. I noticed that at the far side of the main room there was a portable air mover rented from Home Depot plugged into the wall and sitting on top of one of the speakers. It was turned on and operating.

The main room was quite small, about 18 x 20 feet. Still, there were not that many people at the event, so it was not crowded when we were dancing. The back room separated off by the curtain, which was called the "WOMPER Room," was about 18 x 15 feet. There was an air mattress on the floor in one corner of the room. There was also a chest with cardboard pasted onto it, and on it was painted "Tickle Trunk" in pastel colours. There was a blacklight in this room so of course the effect was terrific. Inside the trunk were toys and costumes that people played with throughout the night. One guy even built a car out of Lego blocks and was pulling people around on it throughout the night.

Also in the WOMPER Room were two ropes reaching up to the ceiling and then making their way over the curtain and into the main room. Attached to ropes were large swaths of cloth. Throughout the night people would grab the ropes and pull them up and down, making the cloths dance up and down in the main room. (*WOMPER Room*, November 2002)

By the time I attended *WOMPER Room* I had been to more than two dozen raves and after hours clubs. Some of these had been smaller and more intimate events, with a stronger feeling of connectedness between participants. But I had never been to an event like this one. When I arrived, members of WOMP and some of the invitees were still

setting up the venue. The music had not begun yet, and the elaborate décor was still being constructed and arranged. There was a large basket of oranges and free water available. People were painting mandala designs on construction paper in bright colours. Friends and acquaintances were reconnecting with each other. Even before the actual party began, I could see that this was not like most of the raves I had been attending. There was a palpable sense of the collective creating the event, and not just in the sense of its energy. During both setup and cleanup after the event, several people participated. I did too. *WOMPER Room* was thus literally the creation of a TAZ—socially and materially—by a collection of like-minded, like-emotioned people.

Another noticeable difference at this rave was the age of the participants. The crowd was noticeably older at this party. There were no teenagers whatsoever, and the average age looked to be about mid 20's and later, although no one appeared to be older than about 30-35. Also unlike the typical events I'd been attending, there were absolutely no candy ravers here. There were people dressed in elaborate costume, such as Luca, who wore a bright orange dress and a homemade wig made of what looked like thick bands of orange felt. Another man had yellow dreadlocks in his hair. In contrast to this, and in common with commercial raves, there were also people dressed simply in cargo pants or jeans and a T-shirt, some wearing baseball caps—a plain, pedestrian outfit, and my typical rave costume.

In addition to being older, this crowd seemed more bohemian to me, a characterization that would prove correct after partying with them again later, especially at the 2003 *Om Festival*. Being into psytrance and hard trance, members of WOMP and the Ottawa psytrance scene were correspondingly into more psychedelic drugs such as

LSD and psilocybin (magic mushrooms). At *WOMPER Room* I didn't see or smell any evidence whatsoever of marijuana being smoked. This may have been due to other reasons, including the fact that it was being held in space normally used by the public and perhaps the owner of the venue had specified no smoking. However, I was later told that the WOMP collective was "into mushrooms" in a big way, and the highly psychedelic and cerebral nature of its events gives me no reason to doubt that. In addition, Charles, who was loosely affiliated with WOMP, told me that his favourite psychoactive drugs were Ecstasy and LSD.

After arriving at the event, I assisted with the decorations until about 11:00 pm when the music started. I danced gently for a while, talked to people, and explored the items in the WOMPER Room. After an hour or so I began to feel more relaxed and got into the music more. I could feel my body loosening up and starting to relax. The whole atmosphere in the party seemed relaxed too. It felt very welcoming. It was easier for me to let my guard down and really dance to the music. From my fieldnotes:

I felt really happy on this night. I felt confident, and I felt that I am okay (something that hasn't happened often lately). ... One difference with this event was that I felt very accepted and comfortable, almost like I was part of a special little group and everyone wanted me there. When I first entered I did feel a little self-conscious and worried, but after a while I felt totally comfortable and at home, probably more so than at any other event I've been to. Not sure if it was only the group and the location that caused this, but there was a definite difference in how I felt. As far as pure enjoyment, I think this is one of the best parties I've ever been to, if not the best. (*WOMPER Room*, November 2002)

Raving as a Religious Experience

Early Literature

If conversations with my informants over the past three and half years as well as the available literature on rave culture are to be believed, the events I attended in the central Canadian rave scene are generally similar to those occurring virtually the world over. Also generally similar the world over is the way that these events are being explained and/or interpreted. In chapter three I enumerated these explanatory and interpretive frameworks, which generally fall under the themes of rave as moral panic; rave as ecstatic disappearance; rave as subcultural capital; rave as resistance; rave as neotribe; and rave as revolutionary movement. The timeline for the emergence of these schools of explanation/interpretation of rave culture stretches from 1988 to the present, with a pronounced peak occurring in the late 1990's.

It wasn't until around the time that I began this research that new explanations and interpretations of rave began to surface. It began with a few articles which suggested that rather than a meaningless escape from reality or simply the latest postmodern trend, raving might actually be a new practice through which youth especially attempt to create meaning and community. Moreover, it was suggested that raving might actually be a meaningful practice to some participants. Not surprisingly, the studies which claimed this were increasingly based in actual fieldwork in rave communities, including conversations with ravers themselves.

The next evolution in rave scholarship has been an even larger theoretical leap. Since 1999 and especially after the turn of the millennium, a handful of studies have appeared which suggest that raving might actually be a form of spirituality or religious

practice for Euro-american youth. For example, in “Ecstasy as ‘This-Worldly Path to Salvation,’” Michael Corsten makes a tentative attempt “to reconstruct techno as the symbolic and proto-religious practice of a modern urban youth scene” (Corsten 1999:91). Corsten also claims that the European “techno scene” should be interpreted as a rite of passage established and initiated by its participants (Corsten 1999:122). In the journal *World of Music*, Becker and Woebs make similar tentative claims about the para- or pseudo-religious quality of the German techno scene:

... [The] DJ becomes the personification of “groove” as a God-like creator who takes possession of dancing human bodies. The “club” is a pseudo-religious pilgrimage site for communication and interaction. Here, through the medium of rave music, a psychedelic rite in the sense of altered consciousness is created with the goal of producing a long-lasting, hypnosis-like state of trance among the participants. (Becker and Woebs 1999:59)

A more thorough and nuanced approach, supported by fieldwork in San Francisco and the southeastern United States and interviews with actual ravers, is contained in Scott Hutson’s 1999 and 2000 articles “Technoshamanism: Spiritual Healing in the Rave Subculture” and “The Rave: Spiritual Healing in Modern Western Subcultures” (Hutson 1999; Hutson 2000). Hutson’s analyses were a breakthrough in rave studies for two reasons: they argued that raving was a spiritual and even a healing experience for some participants, and they solicited the views of actual ravers and took those views seriously. Hutson argues in “Technoshamanism” that “the DJ acts much like a shaman who, aided by key symbols, guides the ravers on an ecstatic journey to paradise ... through altered states of consciousness” (Hutson 1999:54). The music, lighting, and guidance by the DJ serve to “trigger trance” and ecstatic experiences during which positive spiritual transformation is effected. Ravers experience nondifferentiation, unity, and

“communitas,” through which their spirits are “fed” (Hutson 1999:66). Hutson attempts to take this novel interpretation one step further in “The Rave.” Citing the work of authors like Gilbert Rouget, Andrew Neher, Richard Lee, and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, Hutson proposes that ravers experience altered states of consciousness, which prepare them for the process of symbolic healing. Again arguing the importance of taking ravers’ accounts of their spiritual and healing experiences seriously, Hutson suggests that “the DJ’s mastery of the techniques of Ecstasy qualify him/her as a shaman in the more general sense of Eliade’s definition [of a shaman]” (Hutson 2000:39). Technoshamans effect healing in ravers by taking them to a place of unity and non-differentiation similar to Turner’s notion of communitas, an enactment of Eliade’s myth of the eternal return.

Another of the few authors who since the turn of the millennium have suggested approaching rave as a religious experience is Des Tramacchi. Tramacchi’s analyses of Australian psytrance doofs share at least four notable similarities with Hutson’s work on San Francisco raves: 1) they approach doofs from an anthropological perspective; 2) they employ Victor Turner’s concepts of liminality and communitas; 3) they take seriously participants’ claims about their interpretations of the events; and 4) not surprisingly, they feature participant observation and firsthand experience as methods. “Field Tripping: Psychedelic *Communitas* and Ritual in the Australian Bush” examines doof as the third in a series of three psychedelic waves that reached the mainstream, the first two being the sixties counter-culture and eighties rave (Tramacchi 2000:202). Tramacchi claims that those attending doofs “may be affected by a sense of connectedness, community and sacrality which extends beyond extreme pleasure or even Ecstasy” (Tramacchi 2000:203). The doof is a ritual of alterity, Ecstasy and community during which

spontaneous *communitas* is produced as participants connect with each other at a deep level. Tramacchi continues this argument in “Chaos Engines: Doofs, Psychedelics and Religious Experience” (Tramacchi 2001), focusing more specifically on the role of psychedelics in catalyzing the religiously interpreted experience of “Ecstasy” many participants have at these events. Comparing doofs and their employment of hallucinogenic drugs with the rituals of the Huichol of Mexico, the Fang of Western Africa, and the inhabitants of the western Amazon, Tramacchi goes on to state “It is my contention that the various psychedelic dance-cultures contain virtually all the elements of putative new religious movements” (Tramacchi 2001:172).

“Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies”: Religious Themes in the Central Canadian Rave Experience

Although things had been brewing for some time, and aside from the work of Corsten, Hutson, and Tramacchi, until the year 2003 there were no other English language academic publications seriously examining religious aspects of the rave experience. In that year, however, “Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies: Raving as Spirituality in the Central Canadian Rave Scene,” an article I co-authored with Melanie Takahashi, appeared in the *Journal of Ritual Studies*. The article presents the results of an exploratory study based on several months of participant observation in central Canadian rave communities, 121 surveys completed by ravers in these communities, and a content analysis of 84 raver testimonials posted on the Internet. It outlines the seven central themes of the rave experience emerging from the data—a feeling of “connectedness” amongst participants, its highly embodied nature, the centrality of altered states of consciousness (ASC’s) to it, its interpretation as religious or spiritual, personal

transformation, the creation of utopian social models, and its neo-tribal nature—and concludes that more study is possible in a number of these themes, as well as in other areas. The rest of this chapter explores one of these themes in more detail—religious interpretations of the rave experience in central Canada—illustrating that in fact raving is a meaningful and religious experience for many participants.

There is no question that raving is a highly meaningful practice for a substantial population within the central Canadian rave scene. A theme that continually re-occurred during conversations with participants at events and in the quantitative data was that raving had in some way changed their lives, and usually for the better. Twenty-seven of the 84 Internet testimonials (32%) specifically used the phrase “changed my life” to describe how rave has affected them. Other phrases were also used, such as “stimulated personal growth,” “transformed me,” and “changed my attitude.” These two anecdotes were representative of the general tone:

Throughout my life I have always been one of the quiet ones. Shy, underconfident, insecure and introverted. I have always led a safe and routined life, my only real excess being cannabis which I have smoked enthusiastically for 12 years. (Since I was 17) Guided by my 3 closest friends that night, I popped the Dove [a “brand” of Ecstasy] I was given and finally realised exactly who, and what I am. At the party which we then went to, I soared! I met literally dozens of like minded people, many of whom have now become very close friends and I talked and danced into the following morning, amazed that anything could feel so incredibly True. Until that night, I never knew that I could ever feel THAT good, that content, that in love with the world.

I felt that wide doors had been opened, for I was able to see myself without the crushing ego, that self-suppression that has haunted me most of my life. I now know possibilities I could not see before. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:88)

The first time I met Dominic and Jake at the intimate Montreal rave *Groove 2*, they expressed much the same thing. At their first rave, they told me, they had been changed forever—their values, their outlook on life, their way of thinking, their way of analyzing things. For Jake, one of the special things about rave was that since that first night, whenever he meets someone who's raved before, he doesn't need to say anything to them; he just knows how they feel. Again, the two of them emphasized that this phenomenon, the rave itself, and why people rave could not be explained. You had to experience it for yourself.

While testing for “meaningfulness” in a social practice is a daunting task to say the least, testing for “religiousness” can be even more difficult if not impossible. In the raver testimonials Takahashi and I looked for descriptions containing certain key words, including “religious, spiritual, enlightenment,” etc. A surprising 42% employed such terms, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Common Spiritual Descriptions of the Rave Experience in Personal Accounts

(N=35, mutually inclusive)

Terms	Number Using	Percentage
Spiritual or Spirituality	19	(54%)
Transcendence	6	(17%)
Religious	4	(11%)
Enlightenment	3	(8%)
Sacred	2	(6%)
Bliss	2	(6%)

(Reprinted with permission from Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:84)

Interestingly but perhaps not surprisingly, while many of the testimonials openly admitted how “deep” and meaningful their rave experiences had been, they seemed to struggle with appropriate language to describe them, and were reluctant to employ words like “religious” or “spiritual”:

The beauty of periodic raving is somewhat like the periodic sacrament in the religious world.

A religious experience; God has come down from the heavens to give YOU a hug. Heaven is here, now and forever. The awakening of the Gaian mind.

Never before in Western culture have we seen a tribalish-dance ritual where people are encouraged to explore emotions and 'spirituality' (if you call it that). (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:84)

We noted this same pattern of reluctance in our survey of central Canadian ravers. On one occasion, when the respondent came to the question “Have you ever had a religious

or spiritual experience at a rave?” he actually quizzed me on whether we were trying to establish a link between the rave experience and religion. When I answered that we were, he was emphatic that rave had nothing to do with religion. And yet the rest of his survey responses seemed to indicate that he had had some very profound experiences at raves. In total, 28% of respondents indicated that they had had a religious or spiritual experience while raving. We also asked respondents whether the importance of religion had increased, decreased, or remained the same since they had begun raving. For 27% of respondents, it had increased (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Importance of Religion and Number Reporting Religious Experience Among Survey Respondents
(N=121)

Importance of Religion in Respondent's Life Since He/She Started Raving	Number Reporting	Percentage
Stayed the same	66	(55%)
Increased	33	(27%)
Decreased	10	(8%)
Did not answer	12	(10%)
Religious /Spiritual Experience at a Rave?	Number Reporting	Percentage
No	75	(62%)
Yes	34	(23%)
Did not answer	12	(10%)

(Reprinted with permission from Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:85)

While these results are suggestive, it is very important to recognize, as we did in the article, that

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from these results, due to the ineffable character of religious experience, and due also to the negative connotation that “organized religion” has for many North Americans.

... Also, a wide range of extraneous variables may have contributed to a change in the importance of religion in a person’s life. However, the survey data does indicate a correlation between raving and spirituality. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:85)

As we also noted, several popular authors on rave culture have described its religious or spiritual interpretation, as well as how some rave micro-communities have developed more elaborate practices and codes (See Collin 1997:73, 199ff; Fritz 1999:179-189; Reynolds 1999:65, 153ff, 237-248; Silcott 1999:43, 58ff, 70-71), and “ravers also tend to be spiritual experimenters, and are often associated with such interests as UFOs, science fiction, paganism, satanism, mysticism, and the New Age (cf. Collin 1997:82)” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:85). As other authors have noted, MDMA is seen as a valuable tool and aid to personal growth, not just during the rave or in its original psychoanalytic setting, but also in “spiritual” group settings during which couples and groups of friends ingest it and work through issues in a ritualized manner.

Within the rave setting, some ravers we spoke with emphasized that

the ingestion of psychoactive drugs and in particular MDMA, should be reserved for the rave environment and it is this pattern of use which distinguishes a raver from a drug addict. In reference to MDMA, one informant stated “for me the experience is sacred and special, by not doing it all the time it stays that way.” References to MDMA as “Adam” and “the holy sacrament” also reinforce the view that for some, the rave experience is a form of nascent ritualizing wherein drug use is considered appropriate only in that ritual or sacred space. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:85)

During my own research, the theme of religious interpretations of raving by participants continued. This manifested itself in two distinguishable ways: overtly

religious iconography and/or objects syncretically appropriated from other traditions, and interpretations by ravers of their experiences as religious or spiritual in nature.

Religious Symbolism and Iconography

In “Music Tourism and Factions of Bodies in Goa,” Arun Saldana describes the psychedelic party scene in Anjuna, in the Goa region of India, which inspired the goa trance/psytrance genre of electronic music and parties. Saldana explains how the Anjuna party scene is largely composed of “the freaks”—hippies, New Agers, and travelers, and “charter tourists,” who are largely seen by the former as outsiders “polluting” the subcultural purity of the scene. Among other things, Saldana discusses the syncretic and appropriated symbolism of the scene:

Nicely metonymic are, for example, the *Om* and yin-yang symbols painted on the trunks of coconut trees in fluorescent paint. Nature is cool, but just not enough; it has to have that little psychedelic touch. Om, by the way, is omnipresent in the Goa trance scene – on stickers, as tattoos, drawn in the sand, on websites, vehicles, clothing. It’s one of those Hindu elements that was appropriated to signify ancient Indianness, mystery, sacredness, cosmic rapture. Apart from the usual hallucinogenic clichés – mushrooms, planets, spirals, bubbles – you can also see Ganeshas and Shivas in the fluorescent paintings hung up by artists at parties. (Saldana 2002:50)

The similarity of the symbolic iconography that I observed in the central Canadian rave scene with what Saldana describes above illustrates how, contrary to what Takahashi and I wrote in “Music, Dance and Raving Bodies,” translocal symbolic codes are developing in rave cultures. For example, at several events, especially psytrance events, the same symbols were on display. *Homeworld*, a small goa rave held in a Montreal church basement, was extremely psychedelic and religiously syncretic. After walking through the back door of the church and down a flight of stairs I found three or

four young men sitting behind a table set up for receiving admission fees. One of them seemed to have already begun his party, his pupils extremely dilated. Candles and incense lined the table. After paying the entrance fee I walked through a short, dark hallway, through some doors, and into the party space. The smell of more incense, as well as marijuana, immediately hit me. The room was dark except for a few coloured lights hung from the ceiling. There were several banners and tapestries hung on the walls. There was also a collection of them hung at the back of the dancefloor, across from the DJ table. They stretched from the floor to the ceiling and formed a kind of trapezoidal structure. These and the other banners and tapestries in the space were illuminated with ultraviolet- or blacklights. The iconography on the banners and tapestries comprised a hodgepodge of psychedelic, religious, and science fiction motifs, drawn in fluorescent colours. There were several mandala-type patterns and paintings; depictions of Ganesha and other Hindu deities; and paintings of alien creatures. When I first arrived at 10:30 pm the event was relatively empty—perhaps 50 people had arrived. But at the peak of the event at around 3:00 am, a small group had formed just off to the side of the dancefloor. Sitting on the floor, people in the group were drawing more mandalas and psychedelic images and other drawings.

This syncretistic, hodgepodge appropriation and display of religious, psychedelic and futuristic symbolism at *Homeworld* was not limited only to wall and ceiling hangings. The DJs for the night stood behind two long tables set up at the front of the dancefloors. Hung from the tables were more tapestries, one of them displaying a large, weird-looking alien creature. Sitting on the table were candles and small statuettes of aliens, and more burning incense. At other raves I'd been to, and especially at the *Om*

Festival, a few participants wandered around or sat in circles playing drums. But at *Homeworld*, there were several people doing this, adding to the countercultural, hippie/traveller feel of the event. From 12:30 am on, dry ice was pumped out over the dancefloor, adding to the surrealistic imagery and feel of the space. Even the music itself contained religious and countercultural referents. Throughout the night it was hard trance and goa trance, with the latter's characteristic heavy, monotonous bass beat accompanied by complex, progressive, melodic synthesizer melodies in the higher octaves. As early as 11:00 pm the bass was so heavy and so loud that my nose was vibrating; I actually had to move to a different place in the room because the sensation tickled too much. But in addition to the psychedelic character of the sheer sounds themselves, some tracks contained lyrics and sampled spoken passages with utopian messages and references to religious characters. After midnight, when the really psychedelic trance began to be played, a track came on with the sampled message "Let's live, and let live." A little later, the DJ played another track in which the catchy sample "Jesus was so cool" was repeated every 16 bars or so. I couldn't help but smile at the irreverence (or was it reverence?) and cleverness of the track's producer, and the DJ.

Another event featuring a wide variety of cobbled-together religious and psychedelic imagery was *Red Skywalker*. Held in the oddest of places—a small country and western music bar in the one stop sign town of Bourget, Ontario—in March 2003, *Red Skywalker* was a psytrance event organized and headlined by DJs in the Black Light Activists (BLA) collective. The latter is a group of Toronto DJs and artists which throws parties in the psytrance genre and which, according to Charles, brought psytrance to Toronto virtually single-handedly (for more on the BLA, see Ostroff 2002,

www.blacklightactivists.ca). As at all of the BLA events I attended, the “hallucinogenic clichés – mushrooms, planets, spirals, bubbles” that Saldana mentions as permeating the Anjuna scene were displayed, as well as images of Hindu deities like Ganesha (see Images 6, 11).

The DJ as “Technoshaman”

In “Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies” Takahashi and I also discussed the “DJ as technoshaman” phenomenon within rave culture. The popular literature makes reference to it (Collin 1997:80-81, 192-193, 268; Reynolds 1999:35, 151, 216, 275; Silcott 1999:58-59), and some DJs do indeed consider themselves shamans. Both survey respondents and ravers with whom we casually spoke described a good DJ as leading dancers on a spiritual journey, recalling the metaphor of the shamanic soul flight. Another similarity between shamans in non-state societies and the rave DJ lies in the fact not only do both take their “clients” on a metaphorical or spiritual journey, but both also use specific, bodily techniques to elicit extraordinary states of consciousness either in themselves, their clients, or both. Both are also masters at reading and manipulating emotion to effect “healing”:

“DJ as technoshaman” refers to the way in which the DJ regulates not only the mood, but also the physical experience of rave participants through his choice of music. As many ravers report, a good DJ has his finger on the crowd’s pulse, and maximizes the effect of the music on the crowd throughout the night. Although musical and technical adeptness are necessary for this, Brewster and Broughton emphasize that it is emotional and intuitive aptitude that make a truly great DJ:

The truth about DJing is that it is an emotional, improvisational artform and here the real scope for artistry lies. A good DJ isn’t just stringing records together, he’s controlling the relationship between some music and hundreds of people. ... In a very real

sense his primary medium is emotion—the DJ plays the feelings of a roomful of people (1999:11). (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:86)

We highlighted three other similarities between non-state society shamans and “technoshamans”. Like shamans, technoshamans are powerful individuals who serve specific communities and have followings. For example, DJ Tiesto’s community or congregation comprises fans of uplifting and progressive trance or “trance addicts”,⁴¹ who will travel literally thousands of kilometres for one of his “healing sessions.” Inspired by DJs like Tiesto who play positive and uplifting music, some are even touting a new genre called “Spiritual Trance.”⁴² The DJ’s role as technoshaman “is also reflected in the phenomenon witnessed at many raves where the entire crowd of dancers faces in his direction and displays signs of reverence and veneration, such as prostration, chanting, and adoration, ... and in the fact that at most events the DJ is made clearly visible by being located in an elevated position” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:86) (see Image 8 for an example of this).

The second analogy we highlighted is the intimate relationship between the DJ and the dancer, which together with the former’s “ecstatic” techniques recall the sexual metaphors and imagery used in indigenous shamanic traditions (see also Corsten 1999:120; Reighley 2000:148; Reynolds 1999:274). This intimacy is made real in various ways: in the continuous “builds” and climaxes within certain genres such as epic or progressive trance; in the fact that “ravers are fully participating in the performance,

⁴¹ As members of the popular Toronto-based website www.tranceaddict.com and numerous other sites call themselves, demonstrating just how serious members of raves have become about their culture, and how integral a part of their lives it has become. (Note also the way that the title is spelled on the initial gateway to the page: trancEaddict, incorporating a subtle reference to Ecstasy, as so many art and media forms have done and still do in the culture.)

⁴² <http://www.muzik.com/interviews/tiesto.htm>

rather than being passive spectators watching from the margins” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:86); and in the fact that the DJ literally physically caresses or slams the dancers’ bodies all night—because of the massive sound systems used at raves, just the drop of a needle, flick of the wrist, or press of a button can deliver a wall of sound so loud and so intense that dancers’ abdomens vibrate and clothes literally flutter.

The final similarity between the traditional shamanic role and that of the technoshaman lies in the fact that both are in a sense culture-bearers or culture brokers. As Poschardt describes it, the DJ is the person within rave communities who draws “the boundaries between the underground and the mainstream,” and “decides who’s part of it and who isn’t, what gets worn and what doesn’t, which sound is right and which isn’t” (Poschardt 1998:82, 311). In our survey of central Canadian ravers, Takahashi and I found views similar to Poschardt’s. Over three quarters of those surveyed rated the DJ’s role in the rave as “very important.” Several respondents elaborated upon this with statements that reinforced the conclusion that raving is indeed a religious experience for many:

[The DJ is] the guardian, the person who makes it all possible for us to get to another level. (female, 20-24)

God, non mais c’est proche, ha ha... (male, 16-19)

He is like a religious leader, we face him and praise him. I let him guide us with his music. (male, 25+) (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:87)

The focus of my own research on the central Canadian scene was the content of the rave experience, from the raver’s perspective. My interviews therefore targeted ravers themselves as opposed to rave DJs, although I did interview one well-known Canadian jungle/drum ‘n bass DJ. During my research however, I did observe hundreds of DJs at

work, as well as their relationship and interaction with crowds of ravers. My observations generally accorded with the positive comparison between the DJ as technoshaman and the shaman or spiritual guru in non-state societies, *albeit in a simplistic sense*. For example, the analogy that immediately popped into my mind at such events as *Homeworld*, with its DJ table strewn with candles, burning incense, futuristic alien statuettes and psychedelic imagery, and most important of all, turntables, was of an officiant at his altar, sacred objects before him. Saldana makes the same comparison in the context of Anjuna, Goa:

Most of the dancing crowd faces the speakers. The deejay spins from somewhere conspicuous, always with a whole posse of friends and party organizers. Goa Gil – a dreadlocked American deejay, one of the 1970s originals and Goa trance’s favourite – doesn’t spin without turning the deejay table into an altar: photographs, incense, pictures of Hindu gods, candles and chillum. (Saldana 2002:51)

Saldana also discusses how Anjuna DJs alternate track selections and even different genres of trance throughout the night to match and/or create specific moods and energy levels in the dancers. For example, even though epic and uplifting trance is generally considered too mainstream and uncool by serious psytrance heads, when the dawn arrives at Anjuna parties DJs play uplifting, epic or progressive trance to match the joy the dancers feel as the sun rises. During the 2003 *Om Festival* I witnessed similar track and mood management at the Black Light Activists installation. On both Friday night and Saturday night, the hardest psytrance was played between midnight and five or six o’clock in the morning. “Hard” psytrance generally means increased emphasis and volume in the deep, relentless kick drum, and more minimalism in the mid-range, melody sections. (I also find hard psytrance to be more monotonous, one reason why it isn’t my

favourite genre.) As dawn approached and then broke, new DJs took over the decks and played tracks with increased variation and content in the midrange, melody sections of the songs, and hence the increased possibility for varying moods imparted by the music.

Superstar DJs like Tiesto, Paul Oakenfold, Roger Sanchez, Sasha, John Digweed, and others literally have global followings: people will travel across continents to be there when they spin at an event. While perhaps not exactly fitting the shamanic model, this phenomenon definitely borders on the cultic, with the DJ as guru. Being there, on good E, in a good crowd with a really positive vibe, as one of the best in the world plays a killer set, is nothing short of a religious experience for many ravers. This is easily borne out by some of the slogans on raver clothing that I observed at for example Tiesto @ The Koolhaus, where one raver sported a shirt that read "Tiesto is God." It takes but a few minutes to find similar language of worship directed towards superstar DJs on the Internet, which has rapidly become the primary medium of communication for tech-savvy ravers and entire raver communities. For example, here is a small sampling of comments from some Internet chatrooms and general discussion websites:

Saw tiesto live in edmonton june 5th 2003 all i can say is tiesto is the greatest dj ever. tiesto is goddddddd. armin van buuren, ferry corsten, and george acosta are also unreal djs and my personal favourites but tiesto pushes it to another level. his music is absolutely amazing. i hope to see him again soon it was the greatest nite ever. ("luis figo")⁴³

God made a mistake letting Tiesto exist on earth. Mixing and DJ'ing of this quality is only suitable for gods. 5 stars is not enough to rate this DVD I give this 6 out of 5 stars for god like DJ'ing. ("griffuk from Edinburgh")⁴⁴

Sorry B-Boy, I have to [talk about a Tiesto performance]. It was so amazing to me that it brings me back by talking about it. Never before

⁴³ http://www.gnoosic.com/discussion/dj+tiesto__2.html

⁴⁴ <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/B0000DK4OL/202-5879474-2099832>

have I been to an event where there were as many people that I knew and that were all at the same level of energy and motion as last Thursday. Even in the crowd by the booth, there were so many people I didn't know and we were all sharing high fives, fist pumps, and nods. I have never seen Tiesto live before. I've heard all his live sets but not enough to where I was disappointed in his set like some of my friends were. We've all heard those songs before but he looped them differently and threw us into it in a different way, smiling the whole time as he guided us through his world. I hadn't had that kind of damn near religious experience. It's almost ludicrous for me to get that deep w/ one event. It was almost like a sporting event but that we were all participating and at the same time: winning. The feeling hit me hard and left such an impression, that if I never go clubbing again, I'd be satisfied with having that event as my closure. ("echo four")⁴⁵

After Tiesto @ The Koolhaus, I interviewed Parva and questioned him about the event. As I describe below in "Ravers' Interpretations of the Rave Experience as Religious," he easily drew an analogy between his own spiritual practices and the rave. He also compared the DJ with a chant leader, especially in terms of each figure's *control of the emotional and physical state of the crowd*:

Tim: How did you find Tiesto?

Parva: Tiesto was amazing.

Tim: What did you like particularly about his stuff, his set?

Parva: His toying with the crowd I must say. His being a part of the crowd that was nice and he has, I like to see his smile to see him smile and be happy and dance on stage. Also so you know he's enjoying it and the crowd was enjoying it too. And you know the crowd was really pumped up and like dancing and jumping at that point, and there's not much, you can't improve. Like I couldn't find a single fault in his style at all. Totally amazing, everything flowed so well from beginning to end.

Tim: Do you see any similarities between, between what you saw between him and the crowd last night and let's say a spiritual teacher, and his or her disciples, any similarities?

⁴⁵ http://www.inside-chicago.com/fforum/topic.asp?ARCHIVE=true&TOPIC_ID=1574

Parva: Well I guess you have to have someone in control of the mood itself and he was in control of the mood right, it's the same, like you have different chanting styles and beating of different instruments and whatever so as long as that pattern is set it totally dictates what the crowd is going to do but there is a similarity between him and I guess someone who's leading a congregational chant. (Parva, December 2002)

Despite all of these similarities between shamans in most non-state societies and technoshamans, however, Takahashi and I advised caution in drawing any definitive parallels, a conclusion with which I still concur until further and more extensive research is carried out on these parallels:

While it is clear that there are some striking analogies between the role of the DJ in rave culture and that of the shaman in traditional cultures, a word of caution must be made on this point. Hutson's (1999, 2000) serious anthropological investigation of the spiritual and healing aspects of rave culture are a necessary corrective to the superficial and dismissive analyses preceding it, but we must remember that taking one's informants seriously does not automatically entail accepting their statements as fact. In some instances, Hutson (2000:39), as well as Becker & Woebs (1999:64-65), appear to simply accept ravers' explanations of DJs' techniques as shamanistic, positively comparing them with the techniques of indigenous healers as reported by authors such as Eliade. These authors also assume that what ravers experience during raves is *Ecstasy*, without defining the term or presenting data to allow the reader to gauge whether this is in fact the case. In the end, these analyses lack the precision, depth, and experiential focus needed to draw any definitive conclusions about the rave experience. In contrast, we make no such sweeping claims. While it is clear that ravers *are* experiencing ASC's during raves, determining the exact nature of the states experienced will require more data and a more sophisticated analysis than that presented in any of the studies on rave to date, including this one. One of the present authors (Takahashi) is currently undertaking a deeper analysis of the DJ as technoshaman phenomenon, including the causal relationship between the techniques of the DJ and the precise nature of the experiences had by ravers. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:87)

Ravers' Interpretations of the Rave Experience as Religious/Spiritual

The data Takahashi and I compiled in “Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies,” and my own in depth research in the central Canadian rave scene clearly establishes that some ravers are having extraordinary, transformative experiences. The former also clearly establishes that at least some participants are interpreting these experiences in religious or spiritual frameworks. I attempted to further probe these interpretations during interviews and informal conversations with informants during this research, with mixed results that both refute and confirm my hypothesis. In other words, many informants did feel that raving is or could be a religious experience for many people. However, they found it difficult to articulate *how* or *why* it was religious. Also, when the question was put to them as to whether it is a religious experience for them personally, their first response was usually along the lines of “No. But I’m not a religious person.” These two trends indicate to me the quasi-religious character of the rave experience and the fruitfulness of analyzing it within a developmental or processual theoretical model, which I present in chapter five.

As in “Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies,” I found no shortage of religious or quasi-religious interpretations of the rave experience. However, and as with the religious symbolism and iconography displayed and employed at events, these were more prevalent at events in specific genres or rave micro-communities. Participants in goa or psytrance events and communities in particular were more apt to characterize their experiences at raves as religious or spiritual. This is not surprising because as Saldana and others have illustrated, the birthplace of goa/psytrance—the Goa region of India—

has long been a mecca for spiritual seekers and a place of psychedelic, cultural, and spiritual syncretism and exploration.

Taking the small goa trance event *Homeworld* as an example once more, there were several participants for whom the event and goa/psytrance in general appeared to be a lifestyle and a form of meaningful practice. One young raver I spoke with directly confirmed this. No more than 25 or 26 years old, he was a computer programmer by profession, as were the two friends who accompanied him. Dressed completely in flowing white garments, he told me with complete sincerity and seriousness that raving was his spiritual practice. He viewed it as his form of worship and emphasized purity during practice. Instead of using drugs to stay awake during the rave, he used ginseng and other homeopathic substances, which he gladly offered me. After we had finished our conversation, he put his hands together, bowed, and went back to the dancefloor.

Another psytrance event also mentioned above—the Black Light Activists event *Red Skywalker*—also featured not only religious symbolism and iconography, but also acts that could only be interpreted as ritualized and religious in nature. When I first arrived at the event there was no music playing, only an eclectic and wonderful collection of what can only be described as 21st century hippies and “granolas”: people with long, unkempt hair, dreadlocks, beards, goatees, and other facial hair; people wearing all sorts of loose-knit natural fibres such as robes, shawls, sarongs, etc.; people sporting classic psychedelic designs and tie-dye motifs. After I’d met Charles, Evan, and a few other people from the Ottawa scene and chatted for a while, a young, slender, athletic-looking woman walked to the middle of the dancefloor and invited everyone to join her for a session of yoga that would begin the night (I watched the same woman perform yoga to

psytrance music for several hours later on during the peak of the event). Seventy-five percent of attendees accepted her offer, including me.

The woman led us through twenty minutes of (thankfully) low impact yoga, from which tradition I'm not sure. Just as we were finishing the final postures, a light psytrance or hybrid psytrance/ambient track was gradually introduced and brought up (in volume) over the sound system, so that by the time we finished the final posture, the volume had reached full dance levels. As it did, there were shouts of joy and animalistic howls and growls, and three or four of the most bohemian-looking participants leaped into the air and crawled along the ground like animals.

There were several other indications throughout the night that this event was regarded by participants as serious and meaningful. One of them occurred during the yoga. As the young woman led us through the various postures, on two separate occasions non-participants on the sidelines were chattering loudly enough to be heard. The young woman asked, and then told them to at least be quiet if they were not going to participate. At no other rave did I witness a participant telling other participants that a certain behaviour was not permitted as happened here. Ritual boundaries had clearly been drawn not only around the event itself, but also around what actions and behaviours were taboo within the event. Combined with the explicitly religious symbolism employed (e.g. Ganesha images), as well as interpretations later given me by people present during this and other events, there is no question but that the event was considered a form of worship or practice by some participants. What was terribly fascinating and noteworthy about that evening's worship, and what further leads me to conclude that even such overtly religious raves as this one are still in a state of becoming, was my abstracting myself from the

festivities for an instant and viewing the entire setting. As we were performing the yoga and as the music came on and participants became “feral” (St John 2001d), I noticed what I presumed to be the owners of the tavern standing behind the bar: a couple dressed in jeans and plain collared shirts in their mid-forties who looked French-Canadian. Their facial expressions alternated between cautious smiles and sheer disbelief, betraying their incredulity as they took in the entire scene. Beside them were double-doors leading to what I assume was another room of the tavern hosting a karaoke night, judging from the terrible live-singing emanating from it whenever the doors occasionally opened. As I took all of this in, I too was incredulous at the amazing and ironic juxtaposition of such radically contrasting sets of people, beliefs, lifestyles, and practices. My amazement was all the more piqued when halfway through the night I glanced over at the bar and saw the middle-aged owners bobbing their heads and tapping their feet to the hard and heavy psytrance track being played by one of the Black Light Activists.

In contrast to the psytrance ravers at *Homeworld* and *Red Skywalker* who overtly viewed raves as ritualized gatherings with religious or supramundane significance were ravers such as Marilyn and Sarah, whom I met and raved with at the 2003 *Om Festival*. Both were in their late 20’s to early 30’s, lived in Ottawa and had good jobs, and had some experience in the after hours club scene and very limited experience in the rave scene. After discussing in general some of the best experiences they had had in clubs or raves, I asked them if any of their experiences could be categorized as religious or spiritual. Neither one believed they could, especially since they didn’t know “what a religious experience was supposed to feel like.” Also, both pointed out that they didn’t consider themselves “a religious person”:

Sarah: I don't know. Spiritual? Maybe, I guess if you're talking about feeling connected, being in the moment I guess that is a spiritual thing.

Tim: For you. However you define spiritual.

Sarah: Okay, I see. How you define spirituality. I would have to say no, to be completely honest, because I tend to think of spiritual as being something deeper, with a deeper meaning. Something, more serious, almost, in a way, I mean it could be broader than that, but for myself when I think of something as being spiritual I think in more serious terms, like more philosophical, [a] thinking about life kind of context.

Marilyn: Yeah, umm, I don't know, I find that question really hard, because it's going back to how I define spirituality, and, I'm not a religious person in any way, so spiritual for me would mean maintaining, having some sort of altered state of consciousness I guess, and...

Sarah: Yeah, and I don't know that I've had that.

Marilyn: ...Meaning that you're on top of, just wow. I can't really explain it. Like, I don't know if I've had an altered state experience, like, because I really haven't explored it too much ...

Sarah: Maybe it's because I haven't taken the drugs [laughing].

Marilyn: So I would say no too because, like I've certainly experienced highs, dancing and feeling really euphoric, and I guess I'll just leave it at that. (Marilyn and Sarah, June 2003)

Other informants were more specific about their experiences at raves. While not interpreting them as religious or spiritual, they drew parallels with what they saw as "authentic" or "serious" religious practice. These informants were typically on a religious path of another kind. One of them was Parva, to whom I spoke immediately following the DJ Tiesto @ The Koolhaus event that we attended together. Parva was a special informant. Geographical distance kept me from getting to know him very well, but I would have liked to. Quiet and mysterious but always polite and friendly, he was a devout Hindu and practitioner of Krishna Consciousness and claimed to have special control of his mindstates. Notice the recurring theme, also present in Marilyn and Sarah's

descriptions, of happiness and euphoria when I asked him how he enjoyed the night and how he would interpret the experiences he had during it.

Parva: But the mind body stuff ... basically I was feeling because I hadn't been out in a while so it was a good, it was a good experience for me of I gotta just ... I wasn't thinking about anything else I was just thinking about what was going on at the present time. So it was just like desensitization from the rest of the world and have a good time tonight and feel it tomorrow [inaudible] so I was just happy I guess, I was happy and euphoric.

When I further probed the physical qualities of the euphoria he experienced, Parva compared the sensations with those he felt at the temple during "serious" worship.

Tim: Any strong or unusual bodily sensations when you were dancing?

Parva: Not really, because I basically experience all that stuff ... cause I do dance and chant at the temple and I basically have all those experiences there, so this was basically, it was similar to this but not ... over there it's a different story because it's like it's real serious stuff It's very potent I must say for me. This wasn't to that level but it was close, it was definitely close. And that's why I try to go every Sunday because it sets up my week. If I don't go Sunday I feel like ah whatever, so Sunday I really have to go there and tune in and get that experience which is a really nice experience for me. Tiesto is similar to that actually but not at that level.

Tim: Can you talk about how they're different?

Parva: 'Cause this is basically more like a party scene and everyone there, the consciousness of the whole place was to get loose and free up and whatever, the temple stuff is more spiritual, and the people are ... probably because I understand that more so I have a deeper connection with that. I'm not as connected to this as I am to that, nor do I want to be because I know about this stuff. I know like where it can take me and where it cannot and there's certain worlds ... the feeling I got from the crowd was that everyone was like trying to be happy they were searching for happiness, the so-called happiness but I already think I have that, so there's no searching for me I already have it. (Parva, December 2002)

Several points of significance stand out here. First, Parva's positive comparison of his physical experience at Tiesto with that of the temple. After dancing and chanting at

the temple he has “very potent” physical experiences that are “definitely close” to what he experienced at Tiesto. Later in the interview, he even discussed how he intended to experiment with using trance music as a chanting aid. However, and secondly, his interpretation of the seriousness of both practices differs radically. While at the temple it is “serious stuff,” at Tiesto it was “more like a party scene.” Third, Parva states that he *understands* what goes on at the temple more than what goes on at events like Tiesto @ The Koolhaus and so he has a deeper connection to it. Finally, he believes that everyone at Tiesto was searching for happiness, whereas he already has it.

Later on in the interview, however, Parva seems to contradict himself when he says that for some people he knows, rave is in fact a spiritual discipline. He then goes even further and posits rave as “the new culture” and “the new spiritualization”:

Tim: ... One of the things I’m interested in with this whole scene too is, like I think I’ve seen in it some of the same things you’re talking about where there’s similarities between real spiritual disciplines in the techniques that are used like the music, the beats per minute, the dancing, but I think one of the differences between a spiritual discipline and this whole scene is there’s a lot of, there’s a lot of messages and meanings in a spiritual discipline. There’s a body of doctrine or teachings sometimes whereas in this scene, nothing jumps out at me as the real teachings that come from it, what are your thoughts on that?

Parva: It could be true. Like that all depends on your level of state. If you don’t believe in something then it doesn’t have any meaning attached to it. I know there’s some hardcore ravers that like, they’re really hardcore you know and they treat it as like a ritual actually. They spiritualize it and they, they come to a point where it’s the only thing that works for them. It’s like their food, their medicine whatever, so teachings-wise there’s a lot of teachings out there but you have to really analyze them. You can’t be, you can’t be I guess, ignorant to the fact that some of it, some of the teachings are not meant for this present time. We’re in different times and different circumstances now, so some of it doesn’t apply at this point because we’re in a totally different world right now and it’s changing. It’s changing every day our situation, and it’s true that spiritual life does have certain degree of teachings, background attached to it, but this is a new spiritualization now. This is the new culture that’s being created and you

can see it evolving into something spiritual. That's what's taking place, in my mind that's what's taking place right now. This is like a new religion being brought up because it's what a lot of people are into and it actually gives them joy and it can be, although it's a party or whatever. People say rave so what, but it's the new culture, it's the new trend and that has to be taken into account. It is significant, there is some significance to this whole, 'cause why would it even explode if it's not even relevant today. (Parva, December 2002)

Another informant who displayed this same ambiguity—simultaneously drawing parallels between raving and traditional forms of religious worship and denying rave's "seriousness" as religious practice—was Charles. Charles, like Parva, was already on a spiritual path:

Tim: Would you say that you're a person that was predisposed to that before [personal development and growth]? Like some people are kind of naturally seekers or get into more philosophical ...

Charles: [gestures toward his bookcase filled with books on yoga, the Eastern religions, etc. We both laugh] I guess that's the attitude I'm very into. (Charles, January 2003)

Immediately impressed upon me was the extent to which Charles strove to live a life of conscious intent and purpose. Charles was a very thoughtful and deep person. It was therefore not surprising that he viewed rave as analogous to the religious practices of other cultures:

Tim: Some people ... actually people that I have talked to have said to me sometimes that this is like a religious experience for them. Sometimes if they're at a party and everything is just right it's like a religious experience. Or a spiritual experience because some people don't like the word religious.

Charles: You know you're not really far off there. Because if you look at let's say tribal cultures, cultures that haven't developed cities yet, they're just, say nomadic tribes, drumming around the campfire and taking entheogens is a religious experience for them, that's their religion. That's their culture, like, so I mean for us just replace the drums with a modern

electronic sound system and the repetitive rhythms with modern electronic music. The same entheogens, like magic mushrooms and I guess maybe some modern drugs, but it's the same ritual. Yeah definitely it's spiritual and for some it is religious. (Charles, January 2003)

In this passage Charles exhibits a belief shared by several people I spoke to in the central Canadian scene and permeating rave popular literature: a “composite and often incoherent image of utopialike [sic] small-scale societies ... [and a] romantic and idealized misrepresentation of premodern cultures” (Hutson 1999:65). Despite this slightly naïve view of non-state societies, Charles shared the same view as the author of the quotation above (Scott Hutson) that raves can catalyze healing.

Tim: So would you say it's almost like a healing experience to go to a party?

Charles: [With certainty] absolutely. Not always though, I mean there's times when I've taken too many drugs and I've been balled up in a corner thinking oh fuck I want to come down [laughing]. I mean I don't want to make it seem all angelic and kind of like that. (Charles, January 2003)

Yet for all of the positive things he thought about rave, including how it had changed his life, Charles too found it difficult to consider it a legitimate or “authentic” spiritual practice. For him the difference between the two seemed to lie in their methods of attaining self-knowledge. Interestingly though, and paralleling the interplay of rave and other forms of practice at work at *Red Skywalker*, Charles saw rave and other traditions as complementary:

Tim: How would you say this compares with, like you talked about yoga before but if you want to compare this to almost a spiritual practice, like a practice of self discovery, how would you compare it to some of the things that are in your bookshelf there? Would you say it's the same, like the same as something we already call spiritual practice?

Charles: Well I'd say yoga it is much more, I'd say yoga is much more authentic.

Tim: What makes it that way?

Charles: Umm, it's really hard to describe this, it's really qualitative. Well first of all it's something that, it's something that's sustained through, it's something that doesn't happen through a pill. Now I'm not saying that you can't have quality experiences through a chemical that you take in through your body. Yeah, yoga is just, yoga is just, it's [inaudible] different world in comparison. I mean I approach both of those experiences for different reasons, with different expectations. It's [inaudible] to combine the two, but the philosophy let's say the philosophy of yoga is that mind/body/spirit you know complements what you experience you know at a party. Oh here's a good example. Trance yoga. It's one thing my buddy [removed], do you know [removed]?

Tim: I don't think so.

Charles: Amazing guy. Him and his wife [removed] threw some really some really big parties in Montreal like [removed] like 5,000 people parties. But uh, yeah, [removed] started this thing called trance yoga. And what we would do is get together at the Rama Lotus Yoga center, and we would do like a half hour to 45 minutes of like hatha yoga or something like that. And in the background you'd have somebody playing like chill psy-ambient and then slowly bring it up. So we do yoga for a while and then we'd get into like full-on dancing.

Tim: Wow. What was that like?

Charles: It was great. People really liked it. But we also used it to kick off a few parties, like where we'd have a yoga session. Just to you know like open up the body, just, I found the two just complement each other very well. Also one thing, dancing you get really tired. If you know how to do yoga you know how to re-energize your body. Which is awesome because otherwise you'd be dead on the dance floor. You can just, you know retreat to a quiet corner to re-energize. (Charles, January 2003).

Along with informants who viewed the rave experience as non-religious but extraordinary and euphoric, and informants who viewed it as quasi-religious but inauthentic or non-serious, were those who viewed it as no different than experiences within the established religions of the world. Milos, the owner of a rave-related business in Ottawa, was one of these people. Relatively young (in his late twenties) but self-assured, Milos could claim two things that would make him the envy of just about any

raver: he grew up in the Windsor-Detroit area in the 1980s at the high point of the foundational Detroit techno scene, and he had raved all over the world. Electronic music was Milos' life. Perhaps because of the multi-decade involvement that allowed him to see its several mutations and evolutions, he preferred to speak about "electronic music culture" rather than rave culture.⁴⁶ Rave, he told me, was just one part or development in the wider electronic music culture. Moreover, he believes "we're just at the beginning of electronic music and its culture. It will never stop, it's here to stay" (Milos, November 2002).

On the question of whether some of the things that go on in electronic music culture could be considered religious, Milos was unambiguous, if slightly romantic as previous informants had been:

Tim: Some people have written things, have said that raves can be compared to religious, or spiritual practices. Have you seen that in your experience? Do you think there's a similarity there, or...

Milos: Definitely. You've got people in both, you've got people getting together to dance to music and, you've got people in large groups. People taking hallucinogenic drugs that create, that cause them to have visions. There are religions out there, in South America, that still do this. Our religions don't do those things anymore. But the needs are still there. It's part of who we are. As humans. The more involved I get in it, in the scene, the more I see how it is with hip hop. They say "I don't listen to hip hop. I am hip hop." I see that now, I get it. It's the same for electronic music culture now. It's a way of life. (Milos, November 2002)

Tessa is an example of someone for whom raving serves as a religious practice. She was another veteran of the scene—specifically the Toronto scene. She attended her first rave in 1992 at the age of fifteen. She knew several of the top DJs in Canada, and had actually set up and managed more than one rave production company. Jungle and

⁴⁶ As is increasingly becoming the trend in both rave cultures and their literature.

drum 'n bass are now her favourite genres, although back in 1992 jungle had not yet been invented:

Tessa: Yeah but I mean when we first started there was no differentiation because it all started from hardcore and techno, and things like dividing rooms didn't exist. There wasn't this kind of music or that we just basically would go meet somebody in a parking lot on a Saturday night at around ten and they would give out the flyer or sometimes they would just tell you directions and you would show up at the illegal space. And somebody would have rented a generator. In most cases because they were abandoned warehouses. Or sometimes you would get the odd like nightclub that was under renovation, you know, somebody knew a manager and they'd have something there, which was always a benefit because, like you had a sound system. (Tessa, March 2002)

Like several other informants, Tessa knew about the link between psychoactive drug use and religious ceremonies in other cultures, and she saw a parallel in the rave scene. Just how deep and contextual her knowledge of those other cultures is wasn't clear; I suspect that like most ravers, it derived mostly if not solely from reading the likes of Terrence McKenna. Also like most informants, her value system did not paint experimentation with such substances in the same nebulous moral light as most Canadians'. She had seen the evolution of drugs used within the rave scene and experimented with a variety of drugs herself, and didn't even view marijuana as a real "drug"; smoking it was akin to smoking a cigarette.

Tessa was one of the only informants I spoke with who specifically discussed their religious background. Several seemed to imply that they had been "turned off" established religions such as Christianity, with statements such as "I'm not a religious person," or "raving has nothing to do with religion. It's spiritual." Not only did Tessa admit this, she said that rave had become a substitute.

Tim: You were saying...

Tessa: I was saying that I can't relate to Catholicism. Although I was raised that way. My mom was a Buddhist and I would say the raving is the closest I came to religious experience.

Tim: You're not just saying that because you know that I'm [analyzing rave from a religious studies perspective]...

Tessa: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. And that there were points in certain nights that I will always remember for the rest of my life. That it was the complete trinity. The unity of mind, body and spirit.

Tim: Really?

Tessa: Completely. To the point where I couldn't, so overwhelming that I remember this one party, this one rave And I had to stop dancing because it was just so overwhelming. To see and to feel 3,000 people and to be in the centre of it screaming and it was just, I mean I have goose bumps just talking about it now. (Tessa, March 2002)

Perhaps because I had a good rapport with her, I was able to probe deeper into the nature of these experiences with Tessa than with most informants. The key element in those experiences, as in those of all of my informants, was *connection*—with other people, with the music, with the DJ, with themselves, with the Earth. Indeed, connection and the feeling of connectedness emerged as *the* cornerstone of the rave experience during my research. Moreover, it figures as such in rave literature and personal testimonials around the world. In the next chapter I explore connectedness in the rave experience, using the theories of pioneering anthropologists of religion Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner. But first I set the stage for such analysis, and discuss the often used and misused word *ritual* in the context of the rave experiences I described in this chapter.

Raves, Rituals, and Ritualizing

The notion of experience figures very prominently in this research. It has been the focus of my inquiry; it is the foundation of my methodology; and it surfaces time and again in descriptions of the rave. This is no accident. As Jason Throop points out in “Articulating Experience,” the proliferation of the concept of experience “throughout contemporary anthropological writings is truly remarkable” (Throop 2003). And anthropology is not the only discipline with a renewed interest in experience in recent decades. In the field of religious studies, we need only look as far as a seminal textbook by one of its leading authorities. “The experiential dimension” is not only included as one of the “six dimensions of religion” in Ninian Smart’s *The Religious Experience* (Smart 1996), it also provides the focus for the entire book. Also telling is the fact that “the ritual dimension” is the first one introduced in the text, and the experiential dimension the last, the two of them neatly framing all the other dimensions. This is also an indication of just how popular ritual and action as opposed to text and belief, and indeed the postulation of such a dichotomy at all, have become in studies of religion (see Bell 1992; Bell 1997). Increased interest in scholars of ritual such as Victor Turner; renewed focus on ritual in the writings of foundational figures such as Emile Durkheim; the increase in publications for popular audiences by leading ritual studies scholars such as Ronald Grimes; the flood of do-it-yourself ritual guides in bookstores; the increasing inroads that the concepts and vernacular of ritual studies are making into popular discourse; and the increasingly conscious way that syncretic, countercultural, and New Age religious movements and groups are employing ritual in their practices, are all further evidence of the turn toward

ritual and the experiential dimensions of religion in the past few decades, at least in North America.

As concepts and paradigms become increasingly in vogue and permeate both popular and academic discourses, they inevitably become “watered down” and sloppily employed. Just as there has been a tendency among archaeologists to automatically classify non-utilitarian and otherwise unclassifiable artifacts as ritual objects, the tendency has developed among theorists of popular culture, dating back to the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, to label the practices of any new youth subculture as ritual. The same has occurred with rave culture.

In “Music, Dance and Raving Bodies,” Takahashi and I summarized the “rave as ritual” problem thus:

More specifically, our approach in examining the rave experience is analogous to an increasing number of recent works on rave culture that view raves as contemporary rituals (Corsten 1999; Becker & Woebs 1999; Gauthier & Ménard 2002). However, while raves certainly exhibit features of formal ritual sequences, including ritual boundaries, group performance, symbolic enactment, and transformation, labeling what happens at a rave “ritual” oversimplifies the matter. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:75)

In the four years since that study was conducted, little has changed. More and more authors are labeling rave events formal ritual, yet there has yet to appear a comprehensive study devoted solely to describing and analyzing even a single, “one-off” rave event, let alone an established and regularly recurring performance, as a ritual (the best treatment to date has been Gerard 2004). During the dozens of events I observed and participated in, I continued to note the presence of ritual elements. For example, the establishment of ritual space and boundaries through techniques including dark hallways; tunnels; the erection

of walls, curtains and other dividers; specialized lighting; and employment of sound, especially at extreme volumes. While not all raves that I attended created ritual space through such elaborate techniques, all raves did somehow materialize a space inherently free; free from (most) normally obtaining social codes; free for ravers to explore and engage with their bodies and the bodies of others; and free to explore and experiment with the products, norms, and symbols of their culture.

Another element common to ritual and fundamental to every event I attended was performance. As Brewster and Broughton, in concert with countless other commentators, have put it, raves are fundamentally about “breaking the audience/artist boundary” (Brewster and Broughton 2000:5); it is the sweating, aching, gyrating “massive” that truly comprises the rave. The DJ may hold great power as the “guru” or master of ceremonies, but without the dancers he would be nothing, just a silly man standing up on a stage playing records. A final, but not *the* final, characteristic of raves constituent of formal rituals is transformation. As Sarah explained to me during our interview, raves are not without purpose—people rave for a reason, as does she, even if that reason is only to “blow off steam.” Or as Evan emphatically put it to me repeatedly, “raves are not just entertainment.” People go to a rave to be transformed, even if that transformation is simply from a state of boredom or unhappiness to a state of joy. For some the transformation is from the profane to the sacred, from the mundane to the extraordinary, however they define those terms.

While it is certainly beyond the scope of this project, I maintain the position that the “rave as ritual” thesis has not yet been adequately explored. Whatever one holds the value of postmodern theory and analysis to be, we unquestionably live in a postmodern

world. One element of that world is the seemingly limitless ways that symbols and other cultural codes are mixed, matched, pastiched. Rave is exemplary of this process. The immutable constituents of a typical central Canadian rave can be counted on two fingers: at each one there will be electronic music of some form, and there will be people dancing. Other than that, just about anything goes, and just about anything may be found. There need not be any decorations—just a sound system and a warehouse. There need not be psychoactive drug use—some events are completely drug free. Even the presence of a DJ is not a guarantee—sometimes electronic musicians will play “live” on synthesizers and drum machines. But what disinclines me the most from viewing central Canadian rave practices as ritual is the absence of repeating symbolic codes, and sometimes the near-complete absence of such codes entirely (aside from the music itself). If we view ritual—religious ritual in particular—as the enactment of something, whether that something is as concrete as a text or as abstract as a relationship between things, people, or places (and I do view ritual in this way), then we cannot view raves as rituals, at least not as religious rituals.

After four years of raving and researching rave, all of this variation still has me concluding that if anything, raves are an example of *ritualizing* rather than *ritual*, as Ronald Grimes uses those terms (Grimes 1990; Grimes 1995). As Grimes has demonstrated in his ritual workshops and “manuals,” just about anything can be ritualized by employing certain ludic and performative techniques. This is what I see occurring in central Canadian raves, if not in rave scenes worldwide. What I do not see is the type of repetition, routinization, and tradition-building characteristic of religious

rituals in the most-commonly accepted sense of the term in anthropological scholarship. I would add one caveat to this, however.

In rave micro-communities like the Black Light Activists, WOMP, and the Ottawa psytrance scene, one can increasingly witness the development of more formalized ritualizing behaviour. The Black Light Activists are a good example of this. I began to notice the same symbols employed at each event of theirs that I attended. Also, they possess and display a quasi-cosmology on their website and at events. Image 12, a page from the 2003 *Om Festival Guide*, is an example. Just how serious these cosmological musings are is difficult to tell. My experience with the BLA leads me to believe that they are indeed serious. If that is the case, what we have here is at least the beginnings of a mythological foundation for the ritualized (or ritual?) enactments that comprise a BLA rave. Noteworthy are other such micro-communities that have been reported in the literature and mentioned above with an activist/ecological/psychedelic tinge, such as the Labrats, Ohms Not Bombs, Organarchy, etc. (see Gibson 1999; St John 2001c).

In this chapter I described some of the places, people, and things I encountered during three years of raving in the central Canadian cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. I then illustrated how at some events and for some people, raving was a religious experience. Several themes arose with regard to raving as religious: syncretic appropriation and employment of borrowed religious symbols; the phenomenon of the DJ as technoshaman or spiritual guru; ravers' difficulty in articulating how or why raving was a religious experience; ravers' preference of the term *spiritual* to the term *religious* for describing such experience; and some ravers' difficulty in equating the spiritual rave

experience with the “serious” and “authentic” religious experience of established religions such as Hinduism. In chapter five I explore a key element catalyzing the religious interpretation of the rave experience, and the most frequently reported theme of the rave experience itself—connectedness.

Chapter 5 -

Connectedness in the Rave: A Contemporary Example of Collective Effervescence/ Communitas

“Connectedness”

The following text appears on page seven of the 2003 *Om Festival* Guide:

WHY OM?

Om is the resonant sound of the universe. According to ancient Vedic teachings, it is the one common thing that **bonds** the entire universe in reverberation – **we are all connected** to everything else through it. Like the bass that draws us to the dance floor, **uniting us** in one heartbeat under the canopy of an infinite sky ...

We recognize **this bond** as being the common denominator from which **our connection** is created. We bring ourselves here, we invoke all of you to join us, because we believe in **this connection** ... because we understand the importance of creating a space where **this connection** is not only recognized, but given room to grow and blossom.

This is why we Om ... this is why we ask all of you to join us in Om ... because we believe in the common resonance of **our connection**, because we believe that **this connection** can be the tap root to revolutions in creativity, community and the world. (emphasis added)

No less than 9 references to *connection* are found in these three short paragraphs. Not only do they describe the purpose of the festival, they are metonymic of the most frequently occurring theme in all types of rave discourse, be it tall tales from the early days in London and Manchester, a history of the scene by a seasoned raver/journalist, or the wide-eyed gushings of a new convert after their first E'd up rave. The notion of connectedness—between raver and raver, raver and Earth, or raver and a higher power—pervades and permeates central Canadian rave culture, as well as rave cultures around the globe.

The centrality of the connectedness experience reported in rave discourse was further borne out in Takahashi's and my exploratory study of the central Canadian scene. During our survey of ravers and content analysis of raver testimonials, connectedness was the most often recurring of the seven primary themes of the rave experience:

One of the most often reported features of the rave experience is that of an overpowering sense of interpersonal connection among participants, sometimes described as "connectedness," "unity," or simply "love." This aspect of the rave experience has often been remarked upon in popular sources (Reynolds 1999; Silcott 1999; Fritz 1999; Collin 1997; see also Weber 1999; Lenton & Davidson 1999). For example, Fritz echoes the sentiment shared by countless participants and observers of the rave scene that the fundamental component of the rave experience is the quasi- or overtly religious experience of connectedness:

Although ravers don't feel the need to give their superhuman power a name or personality, when a rave "goes off," everyone has a shared experience of connectedness and hundreds or even thousands of people can feel like one being with a shared purpose and direction (1999:179). (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:77-78)

A remarkable 77% of raver testimonials sampled reported having experienced feelings of connectedness at raves. A variety of terms were used to describe the experience, such as love, unity, and belonging (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Most Common Descriptions of “Connectedness” in Personal Accounts

(N=65, mutually inclusive)

Term/Phrase	Number Using	Percentage
Love	12	(18%)
Connectedness	11	(17%)
Unity	7	(11%)
Friendship	6	(9%)
Belonging	6	(9%)
Removal of barriers	6	(9%)
Acceptance	3	(5%)
Bonding	3	(5%)
Togetherness	3	(5%)

(Reprinted with permission from Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:78)

Survey responses by ravers in the cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City also portrayed connecting with people as one of the primary motivations and highlights of raving. Eighty-one percent of respondents reported generally positive feelings toward others at raves. And when asked to describe their best experiences at raves, “connecting with people” was the most frequently reported answer (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Descriptions of Best Experiences at Raves Among Survey Respondents

(N=121, mutually inclusive)

Theme of Description	Number of Respondents Reporting	Percentage
Connecting with people	24	(20%)
Experiencing altered state of consciousness	21	(17%)
Drug-related experience	17	(14%)
Music-related experience	17	(14%)
Dance-related experience	5	(4%)
Transformation/personal growth	5	(4%)
Did not answer	9	(7%)
Various other descriptions	23	(19%)

(Reprinted with permission from Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:80)

While some rave scholars have acknowledged the centrality of connectedness to the rave experience, none have taken it up in earnest as a primary object of analysis. The closest anyone has come to so doing is Ben Malbon. As I mentioned in my review of the social scientific rave literature in chapter 3, Malbon's *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality* is a groundbreaking work for seriously attending to the experiential dimensions of raving. What *Clubbing* shares in common with a few other analyses of rave (Gerard 2004; Hutson 1999; Hutson 2000; Tramacchi 2000) is its use of Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* as a heuristic device to further explore the rave experience. Gerard's

analysis of a Toronto after hours club night, recently published in *Rave Culture and Religion* (St John 2004), draws heavily on Turner's work and is by far the most competent and nuanced use of it. Hutson's, Tramacchi's, and Malbon's treatments of Turner, on the other hand, are far more cursory, and Malbon ultimately rejects *communitas* as a useful heuristic, favouring instead his own somewhat ambiguous concept of "playful vitality."

In the remainder of this chapter I demonstrate that, contra Malbon, *communitas* (with a slight corrective), is actually an excellent heuristic for exploring in depth connectedness and the rave experience. In addition, I also demonstrate that Emile Durkheim's much misunderstood concept of *collective effervescence* is a similarly useful heuristic. In fact, I go much further than this. Drawing upon an earlier work (Olaveson 2001) in which I demonstrate the equivalence of collective effervescence and *communitas*, I show that connectedness is a contemporary manifestation of collective effervescence and *communitas*.

Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner as Theorists of Ritual

It is no secret that the theories of Victor Turner have been enormously popular in anthropological works on ritual during the past thirty-five years. Outside of anthropology, he has had a similarly wide-ranging and influential impact on a number of disciplines, including history, theology, psychotherapy, theatre studies, literature and art, education, cultural studies, music, tourism and play, classical studies, American studies, and history of religion, although, as Don Handelman correctly notes (Handelman 1993), many of these have poorly understood and used his ideas. Turner's best known ethnographic research was conducted in Africa. Under the tutelage of Max Gluckman, Turner

originally set out to study the political and economic structure of the Ndembu of Zambia. However, he soon became fascinated by their ritual performances and the way in which they affected and shaped community life. Although Turner did later fieldwork in the Middle East, Mexico, and North America, especially on pilgrimage phenomena, he primarily drew upon his African work in the construction of his theories and concepts.

Turner either developed or popularized a number of concepts and theories, including the social drama, the tripartite structure of ritual, liminality, tribal gnosis and the sacra, and *communitas*. His greatest and lasting contribution to ritual studies and anthropology was the way in which his theories viewed ritual as process and performance. Turner ...

emphasized the importance of the middle phase of ritual, the liminal phase, and focused his research on it, examining what he called liminoid phenomena that existed apart from formal rituals and in the interstices of social structure, especially in complex societies. Within the liminal phase of ritual, and within liminoid phenomena, Turner asserted that *communitas* could develop ... a state of equality, comradeship, and common humanity, outside of normal social distinctions, roles, and hierarchies. (Olaveson 2001:93)

Toward the end of his career, Turner studied liminoid phenomena such as countercultural movements and pilgrimages in complex societies, although not with as broad and lustrous an ethnographic brush as in his earlier work with the Ndembu. A number of excellent general discussions of Turner's thought are available (Alexander 1989; Alexander 1991a; Alexander 1991b; Deflem 1991; Jules-Rosette 1994; Manning 1990; Zadra 1984), as are critical appraisals of it (Bell 1989; Grimes 1976; Grimes 1985; Oring 1993; Pechilis 1992; Schechner 1986; Walker Bynum 1995).

Unlike Turner, Emile Durkheim is not typically remembered as a theorist of ritual. Rather, he is usually thought of as the “father of functionalism.” But in fact, like Turner, Durkheim was very much interested not only in religion (particularly toward the end of his life (Nisbet 1965:74; Pickering 1984; Pickering 1994:3)), but in ritual as well. Both played key roles in his thoughts and theories on his lifelong obsession—society. While an atheist himself, Durkheim recognized and was fascinated by religion’s power to move people. It thus formed the subject of what many consider his greatest achievement—*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1995). An examination of *The Elementary Forms* and the insight of some of his commentators illustrates just how highly he regarded religion and ritual.

One of the things that Durkheim had in common with Turner was the refusal to view either religion or ritual as epiphenomena, hallucinations, or neuroses:

To begin with, Durkheim, like Turner, granted ontological status both to religion and ritual (Miller 1996:236; Ono 1996; Pickering 1984:313, 324). Criticizing as untenable the animist and naturist theories of religion, which ultimately rested upon the premise of the delusion and hallucination of believers, he states that from his viewpoint, “Religion ceases to be an inexplicable hallucination of some sort and gains a foothold in reality” (Durkheim 1995:226). For Durkheim “religious forces are real,” and while science is said to deny religion in principle, “... religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in short, it is a reality. How could science deny a reality?” (Durkheim 1995:226, 206, 432). In the same sense, neither is ritual foolish and delusional activity on the part of worshippers: “That is why we can be certain that acts of worship, whatever they may be, are something other than paralyzed force, gesture without motion” (Durkheim 1995:227). (Olaveson 2001:93-94)

He not only believed that ritual was important and served a function, he believed it was *powerful*; it could actually make people *stronger* (Durkheim 1995:229, 419; see also Lukes 1985:473; Pickering 1984:278). It is a well known fact that Durkheim divided

religion into belief and action, a paradigm that still reigns in religious studies today, according to Bell (Bell 1992; Bell 1997). However, few people would ascribe the following statements about ritual to him: “Its true function is to make us act and to help us live”; “... it is action that dominates religious life, for the very reason that society is its source” (Durkheim 1995:419, 421). In the conclusion to *The Elementary Forms*, he continues to argue for the importance of ritual in understanding not only religion but also social life itself, stating that although scholars had focused their attention primarily on beliefs and knowledge, their slighting of ritual was a mistake (see also Wallwork 1985).

Despite the fact that “there has been a notable lack of attention to Durkheim’s theory of ritual and collective effervescence” (Olaveson 2001:94), as William Pickering (one of the foremost experts on Durkheim’s writings on religion) states, “he was convinced of the importance of ritual, something clearly demonstrated in his own work” (Pickering 1984:321). It is statements like these from *The Elementary Forms* to which Pickering refers:

... [T]he effect of the cult is periodically to recreate a moral being on which we depend, as it depends upon us. Now, this being exists: It is society. (Durkheim 1995:352)

[Positive rites] ... are deemed to have an effect on things because they serve to remake individuals and groups morally. (Durkheim 1995:374)

[Ritual] ... is the act by which society makes itself, and remakes itself, periodically. (Durkheim 1995:425)

It is in these effervescent social milieux, and indeed from that very effervescence, that the religious idea seems to have been born. (Durkheim 1995:220)

An increasing number of scholars are reaching the same conclusion (see Alpert 1938; Alpert 1939; Carlton-Ford 1993; Nielsen 1999; Ono 1996; Parsons 1967; Segal 1986;

Segal 1988), and Durkheim's thoughts on ritual, action, change, and the non-rational are inspiring and informing studies of contemporary phenomena, including the present one.

Collective Effervescence/Communitas

In "Collective Effervescence and Communitas: Processual Models of Ritual and Society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner" (Olaveson 2001), I delineated how these two concepts, developed almost a century apart by theoretical giants in sociology/anthropology, are in fact functionally equivalent when employed in studies of ritual and ritualized behaviour. While the one has received precious little scholarly attention and the other went on to make the career of its creator, when closely compared it is apparent that both have several characteristics in common.

First, both collective effervescence and communitas were defined variously and vaguely by their creators. While each makes it clear that the phenomenon is real, not imagined, ontological fact rather than epiphenomenal idea, nowhere does either author unequivocally pin it down. As several authors note and as can be observed in *The Elementary Forms* as well as elsewhere, Durkheim uses collective effervescence interchangeably with such other terms as "moral density," "concentration," "heat," "sentiments," "emotion," and "delirium" (Jones 1986; Nielsen 1999:208; Ramp 1998). Turner also defined communitas in various ways over the course of his writings, including the following: an unstructured communion or community of equal individuals (Turner 1967:99ff; Turner 1969:96; Turner 1982:47); an essential and generic human bond (Turner 1969:97; Turner 1985:233); the quick of human inter-relatedness (Turner 1969:127); egalitarian, direct, non-rational bonds between concrete, historical,

idiosyncratic individuals equal in terms of a shared humanity (Turner 1969:131, 177; Turner 1974:47); a modality of human-interrelatedness (Turner 1979:42, 126); and people “just as they are,” getting through to each other (Turner 1977:36). Highly descriptive and inspiring characterizations, but difficult to boil down to a single definition. In fact, like collective effervescence, it is difficult not to view *communitas* as ethereal epiphenomenon when reading these passages.

A second characteristic of collective effervescence/*communitas* is its embodied, non-rational, ecstatic character. Durkheim describes it in several extended passages worth quoting at length, for reasons I will explain in a moment:

The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousnesses that are wide open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along. And since passions so heated and so free from all control cannot help but spill over, from every side there are nothing but wild movements, shouts, downright howls, and deafening noises of all kinds that further intensify the state they are expressing. (Durkheim 1995:217-218)

The effervescence often becomes so intense that it leads to outlandish behaviour; the passions unleashed are so torrential that nothing can hold them. People are so far outside the ordinary conditions of life, and so conscious of the fact, that they feel a certain need to set themselves above and beyond ordinary morality. ... If it is added that the ceremonies are generally held at night, in the midst of shadows pierced here and there by firelight, we can easily imagine the effect that scenes like these are bound to have on the minds of all those who take part. They bring about such an intense hyperexcitement of physical and mental life as a whole that they cannot be borne for very long. The celebrant who takes the leading role eventually falls exhausted to the ground. (Durkheim 1995:218)

It is quite true that religious life cannot attain any degree of intensity and not carry with it a psychic exaltation that is connected to delirium. It is for this reason that men of extraordinarily sensitive religious consciousness—prophets, founders of religions, great saints—often show symptoms of an

excitability that is extreme and even pathological: These physiological defects predisposed them to great religious roles. The religious use of intoxicating liquors is to be understood in the same way. ... If, for this reason, it can be said that religion does not do without a certain delirium, it must be added that a delirium with the causes I have attributed to it *is well founded*. The images of which it is made are not pure illusions, and unlike those the naturists and the animists put at the basis of religion, they correspond to something real. Doubtless, it is the nature of moral forces expressed merely by images that they cannot affect the human mind with any forcefulness without putting it outside itself, and plunging it into a state describable as “ecstatic”... a very intense social life always does a sort of violence to the individual’s body and mind and disrupts their normal functioning. This is why it can last for only a limited time. (Durkheim 1995:228)

Although speaking in the rather restrained, colonial idiom of his time, it is nevertheless clear that Durkheim is describing intensely physical and emotional scenes and performances in these passages. In addition to using terms like “delirium,” “hyperexcitement,” “exaltation,” and “ecstatic,” Durkheim links collective effervescence to individuals with “physiological defects” and extraordinarily sensitive consciousnesses. He also describes it as putting the mind “outside itself” and as a “disruption of normal functioning.” For his part, Turner stresses the immediate, emotional, and spontaneous nature of spontaneous or existential *communitas* (the type I am concerned with here, as opposed to normative or ideological *communitas*). For example, Turner claims that true theatre is the experience of “heightened vitality” (quoting John Dewey), a complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events. Such an experience can produce a brief ecstatic state and sense of union (quoting d’Aquili et al. (1979)). When this occurs, “A sense of harmony with the universe is made evident and the whole planet is felt to be *communitas*” (Turner 1986:43). As St John notes about Turner’s employment of the concepts *communitas* and liminality, Turner was not an anthropologist of the body,

and “the communions he had in mind tended to be clinically social, not somatic” (St John 2001a:60). It was not until the end of his career that Turner took an interest in the neurobiological foundations of ritual experience (Turner 1983).

But as I argue in “Collective Effervescence and Communitas,” it is clear from Durkheim’s descriptions of collective effervescence and his association of it with ascetic practices involving physical deprivation and pain and the feeling of being invaded and transformed by strange forces, as well as from Turner’s association of communitas with such techniques as psychotropic drug ingestion, rhythmic singing and dancing, meditation, fasting, and physical hardship, that both were theorizing on altered states of consciousness in ritual performance:⁴⁷

I assert that when Durkheim and Turner were discussing collective effervescence/communitas, they were often referring to physiological phenomena occurring both within ritual and outside of it which can result in the production of altered states of consciousness (ASC). ... Durkheim and Turner were discussing phenomena that have been widely recognized as driving mechanisms which can produce ASC. Such mechanisms have been shown to be ubiquitous in religious practices in the majority of known cultures, as are ASC (Bourguignon 1973). Drivers are typically associated with repetitive rhythmic stimuli, sensory deprivation and stimulation, fasting, meditation, ingestion of psychotropics, and communal rituals (for a review of the literature, see Winkelman 1997), and are believed to function by “retuning” the autonomic nervous system and/or affecting the production, synthesis or inhibition of certain biochemicals in the brain (Gellhorn 1969; Laughlin, McManus et al. 1990; Mandell 1980; Winkelman 1986), resulting in the production of what Durkheim repeatedly referred to in *The Elementary Forms* as an experience markedly “outside of normal social life.” (Olaveson 2001:114)

Both authors therefore linked collective effervescence/communitas with ASCs, especially ASCs in a ritual context.

⁴⁷ This is also obviously easily inferred from Turner’s interest in and publication on neurobiology toward the end of his career (Turner 1983).

A third characteristic of collective effervescence/communitas is its fundamentally communal and collective nature. In *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim appears to emphasize this as the most important characteristic of collective effervescence. The mere act of gathering as a group, he stresses, can give rise to intense passions and emotions; it strengthens emotions toward it by “bring[ing] all those who share them into more intimate and more dynamic relationship” (see also Carlton-Ford 1993; Durkheim 1995:212; Mellor 1998; Mellor and Shilling 1997; Nielsen 1999; Ramp 1998; Shilling and Mellor 1998). This gives rise to an important point. Durkheim was criticized by some scholars as simply offering up a theory of crowd or mob psychology, similar to LeBon’s (Douglas 1966:20; Evans-Pritchard 1965:68; Goldenweiser 1915; Goldenweiser 1917). However, while he ascribes collective effervescences to both formal ritual and more loosely organized “assemblies,” one element without which it cannot occur is will and intention. That is to say, a necessary prerequisite for collective effervescence is group focus, especially symbolic focus:

Every communion of *conscience* does not produce what is religious. It must moreover fulfill certain specific conditions. Notably, it must possess a degree of unity, of intimacy, and the forces which it releases must be sufficiently intense to take the individual outside himself and to raise him to a superior life. Also, the sentiments so roused must be fixed on an object or concrete objects which symbolize them. (Durkheim and Mauss 1913:84, qtd. in Pickering 1984:407; see also Carlton-Ford 1993:16-17; Pickering 1984:395-417)

In addition to being critiqued (correctly) for its “clinical sociality” and disembodied nature, communitas has also been criticized (incorrectly) as referring simply to “pleasurable and effortless comradeship” (Turner 1969:138). Turner absolutely refuted this: “Communitas is not merely instinctual; it involves consciousness and volition”

(Turner 1969:188). Like collective effervescence, *communitas* involves conscious will and intention on the part of liminars—participants in a ritual or liminoid event or “happening.” Despite this, Turner too emphasized the sheer force of communion and collectivity as the engine behind the *communitas* experience.

Related to the communal and collective foundation of collective effervescence/*communitas* is its fourth major characteristic, its power and ability to socially transgress, level, and de-differentiate. Because participants in rituals or “assemblies” are removed from everyday life, put into intimate, non-rational contact with each other, and focused on common symbolic foci, normal social structures, norms, mores, and behaviour have a tendency to dissolve. Collective effervescences are “settings of intensely emotional assembly, association and, by implication, breakdown of established social barriers and structures” (Nielsen 1999:208), and may even be viewed as dangerous and destabilizing by authorities and power structures in their host societies. As William Ramp puts it, “Effervescent assemblies are in this light ambiguously dangerous arenas” which present “a transgressive possibility fuelled by a de-differentiating impulse in moments of heightened emotional intensity” (Ramp 1998:147).

Turner, of course, located the *communitas* experience in liminal states and liminoid phenomena, which occur outside of regular social, political, and economic structures—in the “cracks and crevices” of societies. Together, liminality and the *communitas* experience form *anti-structure*. The experience of *communitas* was thus to Turner completely leveling and de-differentiating. Liminars within it lose all previous social markings and become an “essential We,” as opposed to individuals within the overarching social structure, which

causes them to be segmented into roles they must play, ... ultimately limits individuals and society, ... holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions, and ... separates man from man, and man from absolute reality; it attempts to describe the continuous in discontinuous terms. (Olaveson 2001:104)

As well as manifesting ambiguous, dangerous, and “de-stabilizing” arenas for existing power structures, the transgressive and leveling experience of collective effervescence/communitas also represents an enormously creative, fecund, and transformative possibility. Because of its intense possibilities for change and creativity, it is also necessarily a temporary and spontaneous entity. In light of the traditional interpretation of Durkheim as a staunch positivist and functionalist, it seems not only odd but also downright erroneous to mention cultural creativity in the same breath as his name. And yet William Pickering offers a convincing reinterpretation of the concept of effervescence in Durkheim’s work, a reinterpretation that is being increasingly taken up recently by sociologists of the sacred, the non-rational, and sociality. Pickering suggests that Durkheim implied two different types of effervescence in *The Elementary Forms*:

creative effervescence, characterized by intense emotion, and in which the outcome is uncertain and may produce new ideas; and *re-creative effervescence*, in which there is also intense emotion and excitement, and a bond of community and unity among participants, such that they feel morally strengthened. (Pickering 1984:385)

A careful reading of the text actually indicates that Durkheim recognized collective effervescence’s inherently creative nature, as in the following passage:

Under the influence of some great collective shock in certain historical periods, social interactions become much more frequent and active. Individuals seek one another out and come together more. The result is the general effervescence that is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. The result of that heightened activity is a general stimulation of individual energies. People live differently and more intensely than in

normal times. The changes are not simply of nuance and degree; man himself becomes something other than what he was. (Durkheim 1995:212-213)

Much debate has ensued over Victor Turner's basic conception of ritual: did he view it as a homeostatic mechanism for the maintenance of functional equilibrium, or as an agent of social change and cultural creativity? The answer is both. While he did see ritual, components of which are liminality and *communitas*, as the arena in which cultures express and dramatize who they are, therefore reproducing and reinforcing their basic values, traditions, and morals, he also recognized its enormous creative potential and role in social change. As with collective effervescence, Turner recognized that spontaneous *communitas* was necessarily a transitory and temporary entity, intrinsically dynamic and seldom maintained for long periods (Turner 1969:153, 132; Turner 1974:44; Turner 1979:75). He also noted that "Descriptions of *communitas* by members of religious or millenarian or revivalist groups often resemble an Edenic, paradisiacal, or utopian state. It is portrayed as a timeless condition, the eternal now, a moment in and out of time" (Olaveson 2001:105). Part of the *communitas* experience's danger to existing power structures lies in the fact that

In liminality, the state in which *communitas* occurs, culture is analyzed into factors and freely recombined and experimented with. "The novices are taught that they did not know what they thought they knew. Beneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn, through paradox and shock" (Turner 1979:38). Skepticism and initiative are encouraged, as well as scrutinization and questioning of the governing moral order ... (Olaveson 2001:106)

Such free ludic experimentation with cultural symbols, structures, and norms presents an enormous creative possibility, wrote Turner. Like Durkheim, he believed that such major

cultural events as revolutions, new religious movements, and even entire new cultures were born from moments of collective effervescence/communitas (Turner 1974:110; Turner 1979:21, 27, 40).

While it may at first seem odd to be interpreting both Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner as not only important theorists of ritual, but also important theorists of cultural change and creativity, as I demonstrated above and in “Collective Effervescence and Communitas,” such an interpretation is available in the texts. And despite the fact that Turner’s work is now several decades old, and Durkheim’s almost an entire century old, I illustrate below how the connectedness experience in the rave is a contemporary example of collective effervescence/communitas, in its five fundamental aspects.

Connectedness as Collective Effervescence/Communitas

As ephemeral and difficult to put into words as the experience of connectedness in the rave is, my research on the central Canadian rave scene has demonstrated that it is as real as the desk at which I am sitting. Like collective effervescence/communitas, connectedness is not epiphenomenal; it is a real, valid, and important aspect of raving experienced every night at raves, parties, clubs, doofs, and other gatherings all over the globe. Although impossible to truly capture linguistically, as is much of the rave experience, I will use my own and my informants’ experiences at raves to illustrate it in its various aspects.

Electricity, Exaltation, Enthusiasm

As I illustrated in “Collective Effervescence and Communitas” and as I discussed above, Durkheim and Turner were clearly referring to rituals and other phenomena

during which ASCs are induced through a number of techniques that have come to be known as driving mechanisms. Turner himself probably witnessed ritual participants entering ASCs. Durkheim, despite his brilliant theoretical work, was essentially an “armchair anthropologist,” and yet he too recognized the enthusiastic, exalted, “outside the normal” nature of ritual performances. In all of the raving that I did during this research, I would say that I experienced a strong feeling of connectedness on 5 or 6 occasions. During 3 or 4 of these instances I was definitively in a non-ordinary state of consciousness, induced by the ingestion of Ecstasy; extended dancing; extended exposure to trance and other genres of electronic dance music at high volumes; close contact with large, energetic crowds of people; sophisticated, rhythmically pulsating lighting rigs; and/or a combination of a number of these elements. One of the strongest experiences of connectedness occurred during Tiesto @ The Koolhaus, the scene I described at the beginning of this manuscript. There is probably no better description of the absolutely electric and frenzied atmosphere of a good rave at one of its peaks with a world class DJ on the decks than that one. Here’s part of that description again:

A few minutes later, the track comes to an end. The crowd yells appreciatively as the opening DJ leaves the platform, and then there is 10 seconds of relative silence ... Suddenly a synthesizer riff wafts over the crowd from the massive speakers encircling the dancefloor, a bright, uplifting melody with classical overtones. People begin to cheer louder and louder as the melody builds in volume and pace, and after 40 seconds or so, the kick drum comes crashing in with an explosion of stomach-smashing bass at 140 beats per minute and a smattering of syncopated, machine gun high hats.

The crowd absolutely detonates. People are jumping up and down, shaking their bodies, screaming and calling out “Tiesto!” at the top of their lungs. I am too. The excitement and anticipation built up for what seemed like an eternity has finally reached its climax. The dam of emotions, excitement, and effervescence has finally broken. I look around at people’s eyes and faces. They’re totally transfixed by the person on stage.

Although I had not ingested Ecstasy that night, I was certainly “on another plane.” As Tiesto came on and during a good portion of his set, I felt extremely euphoric, intense joy, and intense connection to the people around me, and intense connection with, even adoration of Tiesto. My body felt almost weightless and my skin was electric to the touch. These sensations were very similar to the ones I’d had at previous events during which I did ingest Ecstasy. This reoccurrence of states of consciousness and experience of my body similar to previous occasions during which I had used a psychoactive drug also occurred on other occasions. For example, as happened quite frequently, while listening to trance, drum ‘n bass and other types of rave music at home, I would start to feel the same bodily sensations I felt during ASC experiences at raves. I described one such experience in “Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies,” as well as Takahashi and my hypothesis that interpenetration of driving mechanisms is a key feature at raves, a hypothesis that Takahashi has further researched with convincing results.

Based on these phenomena and our other data, there is no question that some interpenetration of driving mechanisms occurs during the experience of ASC’s at raves, and that previous experiences can be elicited with the aid of a limited subset of the original mechanisms, including in some cases only one. The data also appear to validate statements made by many ravers both in our sample and elsewhere that the most important element in the rave experience is the music. In transpersonal anthropological terms, what this means is that the auditory driving components appear to be central in the production of ASC’s at rave events. (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:83-84)

More than one informant confirmed the same experience. Kim, for example, told me that he “didn’t need to do E anymore, because it’s the music, the music is what gets me there [to the same high]. It’s all about the music” (Kim, November 2000). With

literally 11 or 12 years experience in the Canadian scene and hundreds of raves under her belt, Tessa was able to expand on the point:

Tim: what about the music? Does the music ... some people have also said, I'm talking about the people who have written about raving and the experience, some people have also said that part of it is the music. Like you can rave... But say the first time you do it, you can be doing E or, And then you can go again, and you don't need the E to have the same experience, but the music, you need the music...

Tessa: Triggers?

Tim: What do you think about that?

Tessa: That's interesting.

Tim: In your own experience.

Tessa: Because when I'm in my car and if I put on a tape from a certain party, I start getting butterflies in my stomach, like I, I can take myself right back there.

Tim: Is it the same intensity of experience?

Tessa: Well yeah. But I mean it's like the lights.

Timmy: What do you mean the lights?

Tessa: Well I mean the atmosphere of a rave is so key isn't it? I mean it's dark, and there's flashing lights. Usually the strobes and the music are around your heartbeat. So I mean it's all interconnected to this sensory experience. But I mean if I listen to music I can feel right back there. I don't know if it's the exact same intensity and like I don't ... Some of the physical reactions are the same but I wouldn't say it's exactly the same. I would say that... I would say that it can take me back but not to the same extent as actually doing the drugs and being there. And hearing the music. The music is extremely, I mean it's where it started. It's so... what's the word I'm looking for ... instinctual. (Tessa, March 2002)

In "Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies" Takahashi and I presented convincing evidence that the experience of ASCs at raves is commonplace, in concurrence with all of the popular literature on raves. More than half (57%) of the Internet testimonials we

sampled reported experiencing extraordinary states of consciousness at raves. Our survey of central Canadian ravers elicited similar data with 56% of respondents answering yes to the question “Have you ever had an extraordinary physical or psychological experience at a rave or club?” Of course the term “extraordinary” does not automatically denote an ASC experience. However, in the space provided for elaboration of such experiences on the survey, respondents described physiological and perceptual phenomena typically associated with ASC experiences, including visual and auditory hallucinations, physical experiences of energy in the body, strong affective states, alterations in sensory perception, unity with others and/or the universe, trance states, and release of physical tension and stress. In another question asking respondents to describe their best rave or club experiences, 24% of respondents used descriptors typically associated with ASC experiences, including “euphoric,” “enlightening,” “transcendent,” “indescribable with words,” “pure bliss,” “it was like flying,” “heavenly,” and “religious.” Takahashi and I concluded our discussion with the following statement: “Based on our data and the anecdotal evidence available, it is clear that participants are experiencing ASC’s at raves” (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:83). Little if anything has changed since that research was conducted in 2000. If anything, I expect that people are having even more varied and extraordinary experiences at raves as new synthetic psychoactive drugs are being invented each year, and as DJs and event promoters zero in on the sounds, lighting effects, and décor that have the most electric and enthusiastic effects on the crowds of swaying, sweating bodies.

My own experience of ASCs at raves was mixed. In the initial events I attended, during which I ingested Ecstasy, there is no question that I entered non-ordinary states of

consciousness. Here is a description of one of those moments at one of those events from my fieldnotes:

I remember at one point going into what felt like a light trance in the jungle room. I was dancing and staring at the lasers as they moved and fanned out across the room, and my eyes began to lose focus. I went with the feeling, and they got less focused and I saw double. I felt less aware of my surroundings, and my mind seemed to go blank. But I snapped myself out of it after about a minute ... (*Space Invader*, December 2000)

At the other events during which I ingested Ecstasy, I also experienced mild visual hallucinations. At *Freakin'*, my first rave and my first Ecstasy trip, I definitively experienced synaesthesia as the cavernous bass from the jungle stage caressed and then pounded my body, as I described in chapter 4. Although these and other instances were incredible, transformative moments, I did not personally experience any of the more extraordinary things reported by some ravers, such as vivid and complex hallucinations and out of body experiences.

To close this discussion of the frenzied, enthusiastic atmosphere of the rave are a few descriptions of that atmosphere by informants:

Bella: Do you know what, going to Tiesto is almost like the fun parts of going to an amusement park. I mean maybe it's just because I associate the two but you get this high from being there. ... And I had a good time I had a really good time. (Bella, January 2003)

Tim: You were talking about the one experience that you had like that, but have you had that more than once?

Summer: Oh yeah, but there's just one that I particularly remember and it was on New Year's, and I was in the front and I was dancing and dancing and I turned around and my friend said let's go for a walk and we walked and we stood in the middle and there was probably about 3,000 people in this warehouse. It was an old film, it was an old soundstage in Toronto. And we walked to the middle of the room and the song happened to be this kind of, it was a house tune but it had a lot of, they had basically

sampled gospel singers, like a black gospel choir. So it was this real upbeat tune, This gospel singing came on, and they just played it a capella And we looked round and 3,000 people had their hands in the air screaming like they could not stand it anymore, like it was so intense, it was so powerful, and that was overwhelming. That one I particularly remember because it was new year's too and I thought oh my god if I could just stop time right now and. ... (Summer, June 2003)

Tessa: I mean you're asking me to describe something that you can't learn. I mean if you have a machine that could measure emotion and you could plug it in to me I'm sure they would shine really bright colors when I think or talk about it. To put it into words, I don't know. I mean a lot of Christians actually feel that they can't read the Bible because it takes away from their experience with God.

Tim: Do you still think of it as that type of an experience for you?

Tessa: I don't think about it much but now that you're asking me to, I'm not even thinking, like this is coming straight from my heart, like, I feel like I'm preaching to you. I feel like I'm trying to convince you of something because it's so special for me because I'm so passionate because I'm so sensitive. It's like out of this world, it's like stepping into another dimension really.

Embodied, Non-rational, Emotional

One of my next strongest experiences of connectedness, oddly enough, didn't even occur at a rave. It occurred, as strange as it may seem, on an Ottawa bus on the way home from my part time job in the federal government. By the fall of 2002, I had already attended upwards of 15 raves and clubs. I had raved in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. I had raved with different people, and to different types of music. I had tried Ecstasy and had some very profound and transformative experiences. But one thing that continued to bother me was the fact that I still felt like an outsider in the scene. I knew this wasn't just due to the fact that I was researching it at the same time, and was older than most ravers. I had felt that intense, oceanic connection *to other ravers* at a few

events, especially after ingesting Ecstasy. I just truly did not feel the intense connection to the scene itself, nor to the music. What made me feel worse was that it was obvious to me that I was different than my informants. With the Montreal crowd especially, I could just see their love for the scene, the intense affection, warmth, and relaxation they felt when they raved together. I didn't feel that. One particular rave highlighted this for me. *Access Denied* was held in Montreal in the fall of 2001 (see Image 7). After the rave, we headed back to Dominic's apartment for the after party. We sat around, people did more drugs, and we listened to more trance. This was around the time of Tiesto's meteoric rise to popularity, although I had only heard of him briefly. I remember sitting on the floor of Dominic's apartment, talking to him, Dale, and Jake about the music. All three said that Tiesto was their favourite DJ. They couldn't really explain why, except to say that his tracks just made them feel extremely positive and happy. At that point in my rave career, I still didn't truly understand or appreciate the music and had only begun to sort out the differences between, say, house and trance, and between various forms of trance. I really wanted to appreciate the music and have it move me outside of the rave as it did them. But I was still an outsider looking in.

Then on that fall day in 2002, I was riding home from work on the bus. I had attended a few events in the previous couple of months and so I was listening to more electronic music during that time, although I still didn't feel like I was part of the scene. Over the summer I had downloaded some live DJ sets of Tiesto at various events from the Internet and loaded them onto my MP3 player. As I got on the bus, I selected *Live at Innercity, Amsterdam*, a set that Tiesto played in 2000, just before he became extremely popular. I had listened to the set once or twice before, but it hadn't struck me as anything

special. Up to this point, the only time trance or any other form of rave music really moved me was when I was at a rave, and when the conditions were just right. Also, I had decided to limit my experimentation with Ecstasy to only a few instances and had not taken it for quite a while, so I found it more difficult to loosen up and get into the moment at events.

As *Live at Innercity* played over my headphones, however, I began to feel something. It was joy, and a deep understanding. Whereas before the rhythms and melodies of trance didn't make sense to me unless I was at a rave on Ecstasy, all of a sudden everything just clicked. I found myself smiling uncontrollably. And I suddenly realized two things: how odd it was that I was feeling this right now, and how much that fact confirmed that I had finally become one of "them"—a real raver. I immediately thought of Dominic, Jake, and the rest of the Montreal crowd. I wanted so bad to call them up right away and say "I get it! I get it! I know what you feel, I know why you do it! I know what it's all about now!" There I was, dressed in a suit with a pair of headphones around my head, standing in the middle of a bus jam-packed with middle-aged, middle-class "working stiffs," whizzing our way out toward the suburbs to our single family homes and our 2 car garages. And there I was, the only person on the bus grinning ear to ear, bobbing my head up and down and drumming my fingers against a stainless steel pole to the beat of uplifting trance. I knew that I must have looked funny and out of place, *but I just didn't care*. I felt truly a part of something, I felt for the first time that I truly *got* trance. I just stood there with my eyes closed and let the music take me away on a cloud of positivity and elation. Once in a while the same thought ran through my head that sometimes did during an Ecstasy experience—I wished the

euphoria and joy would last forever, even though I knew it couldn't; in this case, it wasn't drugs that would wear off though, it was the DJ set that would end. When it did, I hit Repeat and played it again. And when I got to my house and realized that I had forgotten my keys inside and could not get in, I was actually happy, because it meant that I could continue listening to Tiesto as I waited for my wife to get home.

Although this was an epiphany and a turning point for me during my raving, it was not the last time that I would feel so strongly connected to the music, the scene, and the people I had raved with. In fact, when I listen to good rave music, especially good uplifting trance, I still get that same feeling every time. What is even more remarkable is that every single time that I listen to *Live at Innerscity, Amsterdam*, even 2 years later, I get goose bumps on my body from the sheer joy, elation, and sense of belonging with which it fills me. Here are some examples from my fieldnotes and field journal of similar experiences I've had while just listening to trance in my home:

As I'm sitting here writing this, I'm feeling an acute sense of longing for this type of sociality, an acute longing to be with those people again [the Montreal crowd]. Those people that I can go and open up with, be myself with. I'm listening to some trance right now (Tiesto-*Nyana*), which I'm sure is catalyzing that longing. I'm also remembering the party, remembering the faces, the people, how kind and generous, accepting, and loving they were. (*Scream*, October 2003)

It's 11:00 am on a Sunday and I'm sitting here working at the computer, listening to *Magik 6*, a live DJ set by Tiesto. The 4th track just played, and when the synthesizer interlude came on at the end of the song, it just took me to another world. I broke out in goose bumps everywhere. I had to close my eyes, I was just too overwhelmed with elation, positivity, happiness, joy. It was incredible. (Field journal, April 25 2004)

Before I started raving I enjoyed a variety of music. Occasionally when playing my favourite artists I would feel happy and cheerful. But no music I have ever listened to

before has ever had such a strong and consistent effect on me, emotionally and physiologically.

Extremely emotional, life-changing experiences like the ones I describe above and below are especially common in the genre of uplifting or “spiritual” trance. The combination of the inspirational and uplifting music, the frenzied, high energy atmosphere, and psychoactive drugs, especially Ecstasy, catalyzes incredibly powerful and emotional experiences. At some trance events there were moments where I witnessed ravers overcome by emotions—some just stood in one spot, hands in the air; some broke down in tears; some began jumping up and down in place screaming and flailing their arms everywhere. There were a few events at which I too experienced such extreme joy, elation, euphoria, and positive energy, that I could not find a way to express it and simply stood there with my eyes closed, transfixed, hands raised to the heavens. Using Tiesto as an example once again, these passages about *Magik 6* [widely considered by the worldwide rave community as the best trance album ever] taken from Internet sites describe how overwhelming the music and the live experience can be:

Although people may say that this is old trance, and therefore it's not as good anymore, I say new trance cannot compare to this. I was amazed by this album. Words cannot express how overwhelming the sound and flow of the music was. To say that it was an exciting and stimulating journey in sound would be an understatement. Every Trance fan should own this album. (“A music fan from Indianapolis, IN USA”)⁴⁸

Hands down one of the greatest trance albums of all time, if not the GREATEST!!! *Magik 6* is certainly an album to lose yourself in, and certainly never gets old. From start to finish the listener is encaptured with hypnotic beats and melodic rhythms, and would definitely make any clubber wish they were on the dance floor (especially at this live set from Amsterdam). Tiesto immediately grabs the listener with Afterburn's 'Fratty

⁴⁸ http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00005NH0I/ref=cm_cr_dp_2_1/102-9040376-4543313?v=glance&s=music&n=507846&vi=customer-reviews

Boy' previewing what is entailed. Before the album reaches its peak half way through with the ever popular 'Silence' by Delerium, its introduced with 'Purple Cloud' by The Swimmer (very hypnotic). Cloud 69's 'Sixty Nine Ways' has one of the best breakdown/buildups I've ever heard, and Push's 'Til We Meet Again' is a track the listener will never forget. Not many other albums can compare to this, with the exception of Disc 2 of Paul Oakenfold's 'Resident: 2 Years of Oakey at Cream' Album!!! Love ya Tiesto!!!! ("djrojo from Marlborough, CT USA")⁴⁹

This clip made me cry. This tune is easily the best ever and I'm sure it'll be played in my city which has almost no trance fans (they'll play it on the pop station). I sure hope so! *dies* ("Dan Szemborski")⁵⁰

Rave and the Body

As I've tried to illustrate throughout this manuscript, raving is an intense bodily experience involving all of the senses. At a rave you don't just see and hear people, you actually touch them. Total strangers will rub your back, your face, your head. No one thinks you strange or perverted if you ask for a massage or offer one. Even if you lacked the senses of vision and hearing, at a rave you would know you were surrounded by masses of active people, because you'd smell them—their sweat, their own unique body odour, the drugs and the cigarettes they smoke. And I have no doubt that some ravers actually taste each other in cuddle puddles and other masses of half-clothed, sweaty bodies. Normally obtaining cultural norms about purity and dirt tend to fall by the wayside at raves. In fact to put it more succinctly, they are symbolically and actually *inverted*, a process that both Turner and others describe as characteristic of ritual(ized) behaviour (Turner 1978). People sit on the hard concrete floor or muddy ground, wet and grimy or not. They leave the rave looking like they've just returned from a 10 kilometre

⁴⁹ http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00005NH0I/ref=cm_rev_next/102-9040376-4543313?v=glance&s=music&n=507846&vi=customer-reviews&show=-submittime&start-at=41

⁵⁰ <http://website.tiesto.com/index1.html>

cross-country hike in a tropical storm, bodies caked with sweat and grime, faces gaunt from lack of nourishment and excessive drug use. Raves, unlike other types of performances like theatre, require the audience to become fully involved in the activities in a corporeal way, as Evan describes:

I can see how there is a parallel there but, you know when you're in a play or in a theater or a movie, you know even when you see some scary movie and everybody jumps at the same time, it's, it's in your head more. Like you're sitting there and you're watching it, and you're thinking about it in your thoughts like listening to a good story, but when you're at the party it's physical too, because your body, you're dancing, and I think the physical, the dancing, with what you feel in your head, what you think in your head and what you feel, plus with what you see, I mean you see everybody doing the same thing too, and you're doing it. You're active at the party, you're passive at a movie or you're passive at a play, so this is much more completely involved, you know with all your senses. Your sight, your sound, even your smell, you know you can smell all the parties. It just uh, because it encompasses all the senses and you feel everybody would feel the same, you know from their ears, what they see, what they touch, as well as what they think and what they feel. So it was quite an overwhelming, all-encompassing unity [inaudible] feeling. (Evan, November 2002)

After my first couple of raves with the Montreal crowd, I was surprised at the fact that showering and cleaning up once they returned to the after party didn't seem like a priority for any of them. Everyone just found a comfortable spot on the floor or on a couch, rekindled their high, and kept on partying. None of them seemed concerned with their filthy, sweaty, smelly appearance when they got back from the rave, and stayed that way for 5-6 hours. It was as if they felt they could extend the rave, extend their stay in liminality if they remained unclean and caked with the stench, smoke, and dried sweat of the rave. Evan also noticed this inversion of dirt and pollution taboos at and surrounding raves. To him, they are the result of an "antiseptic society":

Like there's always a desire to connect with people. And I think what the rave scene is doing is taking the fact that the physical connection with family is so minimal now that it is creating a physical connection. It's a hands-on environment. People touch each other, people hug. People get together like they used to a long time ago, like maybe 100 years ago. It's not virtual. It's physical. And I think that's a big, a big reason for the success of it. I don't think raves will die. Because there's a need, there's a human need for this, for this physical contact. And for someone to just, you know just to hug them, just to hold them and hug them. And I think it's really lacking today. As we get more and more antiseptic. You know, don't want to touch anybody anymore, they wash with antibacterial soap, and uh, with all those things you hear about diseases you know, and uh, don't perform first aid unless you have gloves on, and [laughing] and uh, you know we're very antiseptic. And I think that the rave community is almost like a backlash at that. You know, share food, share water bottles, hug, kiss. You know, forget about that stuff! You're not gonna die. Speak to people like you love them. You know, as if they're a member of your family. So I think there's one of the big things about it, going for it. (Evan November 2002)

Absolutely integral to the rave experience, of course, is dance. No one attends a rave to stand around the edges of the dance floor like a wallflower. As Reynolds so insightfully discusses throughout *Generation Ecstasy* (Reynolds 1999), dance is the *raison d'être* of rave and the engine of musical experimentation within electronica—DJs and producers are always searching for “the perfect beat,”⁵¹ the next “killer track” that will absolutely ignite the dancefloor and take people to “the next level” of euphoria, joy, energy, enthusiasm. McRobbie and Pini's work on women in the rave scene demonstrates that rave opens up new socio-sexual spaces for women; at raves and to a lesser extent at after hours clubs, women escape the objectifying male gaze and can explore their bodies more freely.

⁵¹ As an interesting side note, there are several books on rave and club culture, and actually a scholarly journal, incorporating the phrase—Perfect Beat (Jordan, Hoeckel et al. 2000; N.A. 1993-2004; Reighley 2000).

Yet rave opens up new spaces for the exploration of one's body through dance for men too. One of my key informants, Charles, had a fascinating style of dancing resembling a cross between a martial art and yoga. Rather than stabbing his feet and bouncing his body to the 140-160 bpm of the music, he executed wide, fluid sweeps through the air with his arms, hands, and legs. Aside from being enveloped by a sense of warmth and affectual community, dance was the biggest reason Charles raved: "It's incredibly joyous to dance to music. It just completes you in such a very real way" (Charles, January 2002). Rave had allowed him to explore his body and develop his own unique style of dance. Like yoga, it was one way that he connected with his body and continued to explore who he was.

My informants also reinforced the idea that raving and rave music are directed primarily at the body and sensory organs rather than higher cognitive functions:

Tim: Is it your brain that digests it or is it your body? How important is your body in the experience and in the music?

Tessa: Your body can do things it never thought it could! Ha ha. Like, I've pushed my body to dance for sixteen hours straight. I don't know, is it your brain or your body?

Tim: It doesn't have to be either one, what I mean is ...

Tessa: It's definitely a physical, whether your brain rules it or makes your body do it, it's definitely a physical, your brain definitely takes a vacation and, your body just ... that's what I mean by instinctual, you can't go to a rave and hear the music and not at least tap your feet or not feel something. Like there's a lot of theories about drumming, that it goes back like eons in terms of like bringing humans together. Just to hear that music, like you just can't not move. (Tessa, March 2002)

Communal and Collective

Throughout my research on the rave experience in central Canada, it increasingly appeared that the primary engine of the connectedness experience was, as with

effervescence/communitas, its communal and collective nature. The sheer fact of gathering so many like-minded, and more importantly, *like-emotioned* people into a ritually cordoned off, sacred space, seemed to transform them into something different. And yet, as Durkheim and Turner both warned, this was not enough. There had to be music—good music, and at sufficient volume. With each event that I attended, I was more and more convinced that not only the quality and tempo of the music was key to sustaining the energy of the dancers and forging connectedness between them, but also, *volume* was important. Tessa echoed and confirmed my thesis about volume and power as key catalysts of connectedness: “[T]o hear music at that decibel level, with that bass, with all those people and dancing that hard, is just, that’s why I did it. Because you just feel this connection” (Tessa, March 2002). Here’s one example of an event at which this was demonstrated to me.

In 2003, I attended a trance party at Evan’s house. Since he was well-connected in the Ottawa scene, he actually had DJs playing on turntables at the party. Overall, the party went off very well. It was well attended, and the DJs played a great selection of trance and house.

The atmosphere was very friendly, open, safe, for most of the night. This was also mentioned by other people. Tom and Lisa [two people I met at the party], for example, told me that they were very impressed by how friendly and accepting the people were. This was in spite of the fact that they knew virtually no one at the party. In fact they said that they want to go to more parties because of how great the atmosphere at this one was, and how much fun they were having. Lisa also said that she seldom dances at parties, but she did that night. Other people mentioned to me that everyone was very friendly and the atmosphere was great too. (*Evan’s party, 2003*)⁵²

⁵² I am being less specific with the date for this event for the sake of anonymity of my informants.

While it was a great and generally open and safe atmosphere, to me it seemed to lack something. It took me a couple of hours to put my finger on it, and then I realized: the music wasn't loud enough, wasn't powerful enough. Some of the DJs had brought, in addition to 2 turntables, a portable studio amplifier of the type that musicians use. The turntables were routed through the amplifier and also through Evan's inexpensive and hopelessly underpowered home-theatre-in-a-box. The result was that in one room (where the home theatre speakers were), the music was faint and tinny-sounding; the bass had no impact and couldn't be *felt* on your body at all. In the room where the turntables and amplifier were, the sound was somewhat better, with more punch and volume. But it wasn't evenly spread throughout the dancing area. I remember the point during which I realized this. I was having difficulty dancing and really getting into the music and the vibe, despite the fact that I was really into the tracks being played. There were a couple of people really dancing up a storm beside me though. As I watched them, their movements just didn't seem right somehow. They were well coordinated, athletic, and in time with the music. But they still *stood out*. They stood out because other people weren't dancing, because you could tell that they were conscious of people watching them, and most importantly, because you knew they were dancing by choice. The music wasn't compelling them to dance, it wasn't overwhelming them, or anybody else. It wasn't a force, it wasn't powerful. And therefore we could choose not to listen to it, not to obey its command to dance, to move in time with its relentless, hypnotic beat. In other words, the music provided a symbolic focus (in the sense that it communicated encoded information), but that focus was not imparted with enough force to unite everyone there into a coherent, unified, *connected* mass.

Several other events stood in stark contrast to this one. I'll use two as an example. At both *Red Skywalker* and Tiesto @ The Koolhaus, the same choice of whether or not to succumb to the DJ and his trance set was not available, unless you physically removed yourself from the dancefloor, and *far away* from the dancefloor. During the Tiesto event, at one point I positioned myself exactly equidistant from the four banks of massive speakers framing the dancefloor. As I moved from one end of the floor toward that spot, I could not only hear, but physically feel the deep, deep bass of the kick drum blasting me in the chest. The midrange and treble sounds of the synthesizer riffs and high-hat cymbal attacks were also much louder and more visceral. Talking to someone or not moving some part of my body were simply not an option. I was completely enveloped, bombarded, impacted by the music and the beat. It forced itself into my consciousness even when I tried to drown it out.

The same thing occurred noticeably at *Red Skywalker*. I actually had a headache that night, and so the inability to escape the music was not such a welcome thing. Another raver applied some Tiger Balm to my temples however, and the headache eventually subsided. Near the end of the night when the dancefloor had thinned out a bit, I went nearer the DJ booth, about equidistant from the two large stacks of "bass bins" (large speakers with gigantic woofers, whose sole purpose is reproduction of low frequencies—80 Hz and below). Even though my energy and enthusiasm had waned as the night dragged on, I suddenly felt refreshed. I danced for another hour with a lot of enthusiasm and felt that sense of connection to the music and the DJ again. This was actually the high point of my night. As I reflected on what was different about that part of the night, I remembered that when I changed positions I really felt the peculiar sound of

the archetypal psytrance kick drum beat—very deep and very rapid, but with a more “electronic,” acidic feel. As I moved into position, I literally felt each bass note impact my torso; small ripples appeared in my T-shirt also. At a few points I just closed my eyes, stood there, and let the bass caress my body. It felt wonderful, even though I had been dancing for hours and was dead tired. These two events, in contrast with Evan’s party, illustrated to me just how important not only the quality and character of the music is at a rave, but also *how it is delivered*. After them, I more fully understood why so many early rave flyers touted the power and sheer wattage of the sound systems on hand for the night (see also Silcott 1999). While mainstream, highly commercialized raves in the central Canadian scene tended to display an absence of uniform symbolic complexes, and sometimes an absence of any symbolic complexes, in any rave there will always be a common symbolic focus for participants—which Durkheim and Turner argued was necessary for the emergence of collective effervescence/communitas—electronic music. How effective that focus is, whether or not it actually does catalyze connectedness, depends not only on the content and quality of the music, but also on its sheer volume.

Union with the Crowd

One of my strongest experiences of connectedness occurred at *Space Invader*, a Hullabaloo rave thrown at The Docks complex in Toronto in December of 2000. It was only my second rave and there were still so many things I didn’t understand, such as the variations in rave music genres. I could tell the difference between such obviously contrasting styles as jungle and house, but I had no idea what distinguished the various genres of trance, and I was just beginning to understand how house was different from trance. I had tried Ecstasy once already at *Freakin’*. While it was a life-changing

experience, the set and setting left a great deal to be desired. As the night progressed at *Space Invader*, I found it hard to relax and get into the music and my body. I was also curious about what the Ecstasy experience would be like without the fear and negativity that surrounded my last one.

After dancing and wandering around the venue for a couple of hours, Melanie and I sat down against a wall to rest. We began talking to people as they sat down next to us. I met a young raver named Regan. As we talked I asked him questions about his experience with raves, how long he'd been raving, etc. The issue of drug use came up and I asked him if he felt that Ecstasy was a significant part of the rave experience. He said that it was for him, and that he'd never been to a rave "straight." After a while I asked him if he could "hook me up." He said yes and in twenty minutes I had a small white pill in my hand. After several looks around to ensure no one was watching me, I quickly swallowed it with a gulp from the water bottle I was holding. In hindsight, of course, I realize that buying illicit drugs from someone I didn't know was a dangerous move. Luckily, what I bought did contain Ecstasy and apparently little else.

During no other experience in my 3+ years of raving did I feel a more intense physical and emotional sense of connectedness with a crowd of dancing ravers. I found and still do find it difficult to put into words the sensations, feelings, and thoughts I had that night at *Space Invader*. This is an attempt from my fieldnotes:

I dosed [slang for ingesting Ecstasy] at 3:29AM. At approx. 3:50 I started feeling jaw tension, and at around 4:00 I experienced mild but growing feelings of empathy for those around me. By 4:30 I was feeling lightness of body, euphoria, heightened sensory experience, and stronger empathy. I also began talking a lot. I felt a strong need to communicate, and talked to Melanie almost non-stop. I described what I was feeling to her, and she noted much of it down. I seemed to have clarity of insight about certain things. I also remember feeling, however, a self-consciousness about being

too empathetic, too talkative, or “too insightful.”⁵³ But despite this self-consciousness, I found it hard to stop these behaviours. I also remember feeling a need to get up and dance after a while, which Melanie and I did.

We went and danced in the trance room. I remember distinctly that the music sounded better, it sounded alluring and irresistible. I could not help but dance to it. It was as if I had a need in my body to express rhythm, and the music was an outlet for me. I also distinctly and clearly remember that as I looked at the crowd while I was on the dance floor, their movement made perfect sense to me. I remember thinking, there couldn't be any other way. The movement of their bodies was perfect, was natural. It felt safe, comforting, and right. I wanted to be with them, moving with them. I also felt more at ease dancing, and wanted to dance very much. The way that I danced the whole night was seldom if ever frenetic, was seldom “jacking.” As at *Freakin'* after dosing I wanted to dance and really enjoyed it, but I danced at a slow to moderate rhythm, but keeping tempo with at least some part of the music. My dancing felt blissful, expressive, and relaxing, especially to trance music.

I remember saying to Melanie at one point that raving may not be a religious experience, but it was what a religious experience was supposed to feel like. (*Space Invader*, December 2000)

Like most ASC experiences, this one translates very poorly into linguistic categories. I do not know how to describe what happened to me other than to say that at a certain point in the night, just as I was reaching the pinnacle of the Ecstasy rush, I was dancing in the trance room and one moment the crowd of ravers looked ordinary, and *the next moment it was as if every single dancer in the crowd was moving with perfect, beautiful, fluid motions to the exact beat of the music*. It felt so natural, so right. Then I slipped right into the same perfect rhythm and motion with them, as the last piece fits into a jigsaw puzzle. It was like being welcomed home. It was safe, inviting, *loving*. It was irresistible. I never wanted it to end.

⁵³ Rave literature and participants' personal stories are littered with such stories of people opening up “too much,” running around telling everyone that they love them, etc. Ravers on Ecstasy therefore often apologize to those around them for talking too much or touching other people too much.

Another amazing facet of the connectedness experience at raves, especially connectedness catalyzed by Ecstasy, is the nonverbal and yet apodictic communication that occurs between ravers. As I described in the opening scene of this manuscript, sometimes it is in the form of “the nod.” Other times it’s simply a knowing smile. *Space Invader* was my first experience with both. Once I had peaked and truly joined the raving mass, I communicated with its members differently. As I looked at people’s faces, *I just knew what they were feeling*. There is no other way to describe it. There was a sense of shared emotion, of shared experience that needed no discussion or confirmation. It was simply and completely understood. This is how Tessa describes the experience:

Tim: Is that why you rave?

Tessa: I’ve been dancing since I was 4. So twenty years I’ve been taking jazz, tap, ballet. And dancing has always been a release and a connection to my body at the same time. And I love music I love all kinds of music. I’m into jazz I’m into classical I like rock I like ... And to hear music at that decibel level, with that bass, with all those people and dancing that hard, is just, that’s why I did it. Because you just feel this connection.

Tim: Connection to what?

Tessa: Connection to other people. Without, I mean you’re not talking to other people you’re not touching anybody else. Which is bizarre because normally you think of connection as physical or, and it’s just, you know. And I can’t describe how you know but you just know that everybody in that room is feeling what you’re feeling. And nobody has to talk about it. (Tessa, March 2002)

To end this discussion, I’ll let two of my key informants describe the special sense of community that the connectedness experience produces:

Tim: Can you tell me what kind of thoughts you’ve had on that? Like what is energy what is the vibe? Where does it come from?

Charles: Well I think it’s pretty straightforward actually. You know when we gather in groups like at parties or rock concerts or whatever, our

bodies, you know we are magnetic, energetic beings, right, we have energetic fields, especially when we dance. Like when we dance furiously, like when we do something that's, like even aerobics, all of the, our collective energy fills the space. And it's just, collectively it's different. I find it's uplifting for everyone. Like you can't help but be affected by it. So I guess at that level. And then at the psychological level being connected having a shared experience with other people, like a deep, shared experience with other people, a feeling of community. A feeling of excitement, when a beat, when a really good beat starts playing and you just go wow, this is awesome, you just wanna dance furiously to it. (Charles, January 2002)

Tessa: Walking through the club area [of Toronto] on a Saturday night you would see people going to the regular clubs. And inside you knew that you were part of something way more special and exciting and underground. You know and especially when I got to be, like, it got to be my social life and my circle of friends. We'd be walking into a club and all these people would be dancing to the DJ and we'd walk right up to the DJ booth and hangout in the ... and they were just our friends. And it really made you feel like, even outside in day to day life, you were just part of something. It was family. It didn't mean you liked everybody. ...

Tim: You mean it was family with the DJs or just the whole scene?

Tessa: The whole scene. If you, before I became friends with the DJs, on a Tuesday afternoon you'd be walking down the street and you would hear a song playing from a car window and you would look at that person and you would know. You would just know. You were both part of something. It really is like that. This sense of unity amongst the scene.

Tim: What do you think creates that?

Tessa: Common experience. You can't, it's such a unique experience that, I mean it's not recreated anywhere, I can't think of any other experience, going to a football game? I can't think of anything else that compares. Not that I'm elitist, I'm not saying it's the be-all and end-all but I just can't think of anything else comparable to it. (Tessa, March 2002)

Transgressive, Leveling and Humanizing

As a corrective to previous analyses of (British) youth subcultures which fold these all into the dubious category of "clubcultures" (Redhead 1997; Redhead, Wynne et

al. 1998), Robert Hollands writes that “minority cultural identities in the guise of lifestyles or neo-tribes do not negate the idea that social and spatial divisions, inequalities and hierarchies continue to exist within urban nightlife” (Hollands 2002:167). Saldana’s analysis of the Anjuna goa trance scene in Goa makes the same argument, revealing the existence of distinct factions of “freaks,” “tourists,” “chai mamas,” and others, each with their own style of embodiment and their own priorities and notions of coolness (Saldana 2002). And St John’s revision of Turner’s liminality and *communitas* reminds us that at heterogeneous gatherings such as alternative lifestyle events and techno festivals, there are always competing ideologies and visions (St John 2001a).

Some commentators, like Malbon, reject *communitas* as a valid model for the social spaces and ethos’ created at raves and clubs, partly because “...the notion of *communitas* suggests a process of conformity and a social similarity that is much too neat to be applied successfully to clubbing crowds” (Malbon 1999:186). Malbon does go on to admit that whether or not clubbing crowds were actually diverse before the experience of *communitas* united them matters less in the final analysis than the clubbers’ own *perception* of that diversity (Malbon 1999:186). Nevertheless, he ultimately rejects *communitas* in favour of his own notion of playful vitality as the more accurate model of what clubbers seek and experience in the club:

The vitality experienced through dancing during clubbing is largely emotional in constitution, arises partly through the flux between self and the dancing crowd, and prioritizes atmosphere, the affectual, proximity and tactility, and the here and now. ... Playful vitality is, rather, partly a celebration of the energy and euphoria that can be generated through being together, playing together and experiencing ‘others’ together. Yet playful vitality is also partly an escape attempt, a temporary relief from other facets and identifications of an individual clubber’s own life—their work, their past, their future, their worries. Playful vitality is found within a temporary world of the clubber’s own construction in which the everyday

is disrupted, the mundane is forgotten and the ecstatic becomes possible.
(Malbon 1999:164)

Malbon is to be applauded for writing a serious, 200 page book on the actual experience of clubbing, in all of its emotionality, sensuousness, and “playfulness.” But his abandonment of *communitas* in favour of an even more ambiguous and ephemeral model of the clubbing experience is in error. The caution that he, St John and the others quoted above make against essentializing and homogenizing the diversity of those within the *communitas* experience is a valid one; it is clearly naïve to simply assume that everyone at a successful rave automatically shares the same ideology and politics. However, postmodern theory’s (and postmodern culture’s) fetish with “diversity” and “individuality” and its allergy to anything even remotely smacking of universality or a biological foundation for human behaviour have led it too far down this path (see my discussion of this in chapter 4, “The Need for a New Approach to Studying the Rave Experience”). The old adage that “everything is political” may be true; however, not everything is political *all of the time*. Not only is it extremely likely that the experiences of hundreds of people subjected to the same atmosphere and stimuli at a rave will be very similar *on a physical and emotional level*, modern biology and transpersonal anthropology actually describes why this is so. As I discuss in the conclusion, and as both Durkheim and Turner wrote, this is one of the functions of symbolic ritual enactments—to bind “higher order” neural structures (symbols) with “lower order” ones (emotions, physiological sensations). Rather than simply to foster the expression of diversity and individuality (although this certainly is a part of them) the function of events like raves are to induce common experience at the physiological and emotional level. During those

moments of unspoken and yet unmistakable connection and communication with other ravers, during “the nod” or “the smile,” the last thing on a raver’s mind is ensuring their diversity is being respected. Especially because it is so easily and so often forgotten, it is also extremely important to bear in mind here that the knee-jerk reaction to talk about “universalizing experiences” is a function of an awfully recent intellectual and cultural paradigm, albeit a dominant one. Further, the mere popularity and massive appeal of cultural practices such as rave illustrate to me that the paradigm is already in decline. As my informants stated, “people want to belong to something.”

There is a plethora of evidence to support the idea that the rave experience is a transgressive, leveling, and humanizing one, both in popular and academic rave literature, and from my own field experience. I take one example as stereotypical: the Montreal crowd. Its members lived all over the southern part of the province of Quebec—in Montreal, Sherbrooke, Quebec City, and small towns around these. They were therefore separated geographically and several of them saw each other only when they raved together. They were also in diverse fields. Jean-Claude was a country veterinarian; Dominic was a university student, then an engineer; Jake had no post-secondary education and worked for his father in the family printing business; and so on. There were an equal number of women to men in the group as well, so there was gender diversity. The variation in ages ranged between 18 and 35, with most members in the 20-25 range. All were Francophone, and most could speak passable English. Therefore, aside from ethnicity and language, and to a lesser extent age, this was a diverse group.

Despite this diversity, I never ceased to be amazed by just how close the group was, and by just how well they got along. Jake and Dominic told me on several occasions

that each was one of the other's best friends. But they didn't need to; you could see it. One was an engineer, the other worked in the family business; one had had the university experience, the other hadn't; one lived in Montreal, the other in Sherbrooke. I'm sure they communicated by e-mail and maybe even by telephone, but I don't think they saw each other in person very much. And yet each time I raved with them, it was like they were brothers. They would engage in respectful and deep conversations about life, society, and other topics, despite the gap in education and life experience. Jake also told me that if he hadn't met the Montreal crowd that first time at *Groove* in 2000, he would never have become friends with them. He credited the existence of their friendship entirely to raving.

Perhaps the most forceful argument I can offer for why the connectedness experience/collective effervescence/communitas is in fact a transgressive, de-differentiating one, is the unbelievable kindness, love, and warmth that the Montreal crowd showed to Melanie and me. Despite the fact that we'd only seen them 4 or 5 times over the course of three years; despite the fact that we were both older than most of them; and despite the fact that we were Anglophones from Ontario who barely spoke any French, thus making communication difficult, from our very first meeting at *Groove 2* they took us in like true family. We were welcome at their houses anytime. We were welcome to party with them anytime. At every single rave, they did everything they could to postpone our inevitable drive home, begging us to stay longer with them. To this day I still can't believe how kind and generous they were to us, how they opened their hearts so completely to us. I've never met a group of people quite like them.

This passage from the fieldnotes of my last party with them (at least during this research) sums up these incredible people and how attached I became to them:

One thing that strikes me as I write this is the nature of the type of socializing or sociality that occurs with this group, and likely with several other small circles of ravers. It is short—lasting only 24-36 hours or so, but very intense. They stay up as long as they can, they ingest a LOT of drugs, and they stay in very close physical proximity to each other—sitting on couches, on the floor, on the grass, overlapping bodies, giving massages (regardless of sex), touching each other, sharing intimate thoughts, ideas, feelings etc. ... It was the same with all of them. This type of sociality really seems different or unique to me. Maybe the Montreal crowd act like that all of the time, in the rest of their lives, individually. Or maybe they only act like that when they're together. Or maybe they act like that only when they're partying together. I would have to be around them more or interview them to find this out. The way the Montreal crowd acts together is always the same too—ever since I met them 3 years ago, they haven't changed the way they party together. I see the same openness, compassion, generosity as 3 years ago. In fact, at this event I felt they were even happier to see us when we arrived, and even more sad than the last time when we left. It was like leaving family. It was truly difficult to go.

As I'm sitting here writing this, I'm feeling an acute sense of longing for this type of sociality, an acute longing to be with those people again. Those people that I can go and open up with, be myself with. I'm listening to some trance right now, which I'm sure is catalyzing that longing. I'm also remembering the party, remembering the faces, the people, how kind and generous, accepting, and loving they were. I miss it. (*Scream*, October 2003)

It may be that in terms of longer horizoned, sustainable social and political agendas, the connectedness experience (and therefore collective effervescence/communitas), has not been successful, a question I discuss next. Whatever the case may be, there is no denying the fact that it has demonstrably united large groups of people with widely diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, lifestyles, and ideologies, at least emotionally, for one night.

Temporary, Creative, and Utopian

For the connectedness experience to be viewed as a contemporary manifestation of collective effervescence/communitas, it would have to fulfill one more condition: it would have to be temporary and transient in nature, and it would have to catalyze creative and utopian cultural products and visions. It in fact is/does all of these things.

The temporary nature of raves and rave spaces was dealt with in chapter 3, and needs little elaboration here. Much has been written about it—chronologically, spatially and socially. Phrases like “being in the present moment” and “time stops” are frequently used to describe the connectedness experience, for example by Tessa:

Tim: That’s actually one of the things that I am really the most interested in is that feeling [of connectedness]. You described it as love and powerful. How else, I mean can you tell me more about that feeling?

Tessa: Umm, it’s really hard, I mean for me, I’m a very sensitive and very passionate person So for me trying to put it into words already takes away from it but, I mean it’s inexplicable it’s like the purest form of spirituality And I, it’s just this white light is emanating from you, and that you are clean and you are pure and everybody around you is clean and pure, and you know, and you feel safe and time stops. It’s this moment in life when time stops. Everything else outside of this moment ceases to exist. This is the, people talk about dying and traveling towards a white light then if it feels anything like this then I am not afraid of death. Because it’s this, you’re amidst all this craziness and yet inside you there is this complete tranquility and calmness ... (Tessa, March 2002)

The music itself—especially trance—as so many have noted, plays a special role in simultaneously grounding the dancers in the present moment and removing them from the constraints of time altogether. Trance is really designed to transport dancers to a space in and out of time. With its hyper-extended, repetitively rhythmed, endlessly looped beats, riffs, tracks, and sets, trance and other genres of rave music create a sense of timelessness echoing the eternal present of collective effervescence/communitas.

Simon Reynolds once again provides probably the best description of this in the rave literature:

Timbre-saturated, repetitive but tilted always toward the *next now*, techno is an immediacy machine, stretching time into a continuous present. Which is where the drug-technology interface comes into play. Not just because techno works well with substances like MDMA, marijuana, LSD, speed, etc., all of which amplify the sensory intensity of the present moment. But because the music itself *drugs* the listener, looping consciousness then derailing it, stranding it in a nowhere/nowhen, where there is only sensation, '*where now lasts longer*'. (Reynolds 1999:55)

Back in 1992, before trance had even been invented as a subgenre of the more generic "rave music," Langlois makes the same point about house, actually using Turner's concepts to illustrate his point:

House music 'works' in context because, whilst functioning in a communal ethos (providing mutual support for particular behaviour ('ecstatic' dancing, for example) [sic], each individual is able to concentrate on (withdraw into) their own sensual 'danceworld' – to 'lose themselves in the music'. House events, like other dance phenomena, generate a 'liminal' existence, ritually separating, by various means, the ordinary world from the dance environment. As Paul Spencer puts it in reference to dance as a force of 'communitas', 'It contrasts with normal everyday life, taking the dancers out of their structured routine and into a realm of timeless charm. In their Ecstasy they literally stand outside' (1985, p. 28) (Spencer's own italics). (Langlois 1992:236)

Raves are timeless places, removed social spaces where utopias are both imagined and lived: "With its dazzling psychotropic lights, its sonic pulses, rave culture is arguably a form of *collective autism*. The rave is utopia in its original etymological sense: a nowhere/nowhen wonderland" (Reynolds 1999:248). As I discussed in chapter 3, many authors analogize the rave space with anarcho-mystic philosopher Hakim Bey's "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ). The TAZ, like the rave, is quintessentially liminal or marginal. It occupies the "cracks and vacancies" left by the state, including abandoned

industrial complexes—the detritus of Euro-american post-industrial society. Part of the challenge of throwing (illegal) rave parties has always been finding a large empty space, getting in and setting up the equipment, having the party, and cleaning up and getting out without getting caught. A rave can be and has been held almost anywhere—in warehouses, open fields, shopping malls, pubs, church basements, hotel conference rooms, even the CN Tower. In some ways it epitomizes the postmodern times in which we live—it is cobbled together, a pastiche of light, space, equipment, people, and sound—the latter itself being a pastiche of a pastiche of a pastiche of old disco records and synthesizer riffs. Besides the fact that raves are often held in borrowed or ad hoc spaces, they are also temporary in nature due to their extreme intensity; as it is, you often see “the walking wounded” at certain events in central Canada, especially happy hardcore and jungle events: pale, gaunt, emaciated, and typically young ravers made bone-thin from months if not years of Ecstasy and amphetamine use. Were events such as these to last more than one or two nights, there would surely be more deaths due to raving, and the authorities would have cracked down even more than they have. There is no question that raving is hard on the body, and therefore it cannot be continued for too long for purely physiological reasons.

That raves are spaces and performances of immense creativity is easily observed. While most of it is somewhat simple, the artwork produced at events such as *WOMPER Room* and *Homeworld* evinces the incredibly playful, creative space and atmosphere that many events foster. And more elaborate visual creations, several of which recombine and employ religious and psychedelic imagery, as I described in chapter 4, litter some rave cultures, especially the more psychedelic ones like psytrance. One of the most fascinating

aspects of rave events that I witnessed in central Canada was the accompaniment of the music with large, elaborate visual displays. The most common way this was done was via computerized projection of images onto large screens hung from the ceiling at events. As I described above, one of these screens was present at *WOMPER Room*. Alternated with the usual psychedelic patterns on the screen were “bizarre sequences of video footage of city landscapes, 1940’s and 1950’s scenes of very staid and uptight-looking people dancing stiffly, and other bizarre or out of place scenes” (*WOMPER Room*, November 2002), an ironic and culturally “dissonant” visual display not uncommon at raves. As I danced to the music and looked at the screen, I was strongly impressed by how silly and ridiculous the people in the scenes appeared. This was magnified, of course, by the vastly contrasting patterns of dance, dress, and embodiment all around me at the rave, not to mention the (likely) excessive drug use. It suddenly dawned on me that this was a perfect example of the type of thoughtful reflection upon the traditions, values, and norms of one’s culture through ludic recombination of symbolic representations that Turner described as a key feature of the liminal phase of rituals. To what degree rave promoters consciously strive for such reflection amongst ravers is unclear.

But ludic and creative energies are not only limited to visual outlets in the rave. Entire new styles of dance have been borne of rave cultures, such as “the liquid.” And of course, rave music itself epitomizes the artistic and creative roots of the culture. With the advent of digital technologies, anyone in the world with access to a personal computer can create electronic dance music. While the remix was all the buzz in the mid-1980s when the concept burst on the scene, the terms and techniques of “mix” and “remix” have so flooded cultures of popular music as to be almost meaningless now—everything is a

mix, since almost all music is produced with sophisticated digital equipment that can create, copy, and reshape “any sound you can imagine” (Theberge 1997). There are remixes of remixes of remixes. The sheer concept of an original song is now in danger with the incredible fluidity and malleability of aural material.

In *Rave Culture*, Vancouver raver Jimi Fritz echoes the feelings of many that the experience of connectedness in the rave is catalyzing the creation of new models of community:

It could be said that rave culture is essentially a revolutionary political movement in that it represents the will of a significant portion of society to organize and gather for the purposes of creating a new community model and that these activities are carried out despite fervent opposition from governing bodies. ... A rave makes the political statement that we are all equal, and that no matter how different we may think we are, on a more tribal level, we all have the same basic needs as human beings. In this light, rave culture offers a firm foundation on which to build a new political order which may, in the not so distant future, lead the way to a more humanistic and personal system of government. (Fritz 1999:216-217)

Even though the rave experience had not been particularly transformative for them personally, Marilyn and Sarah also thought that a larger form of transformation was occurring in the scene.

Sarah: Yeah, that’s what I was going to say. For me, I would say it’s more an expression of self-identity and I think there’s a real counterculture kind of element to a lot of rave culture where people are sort of rejecting something that they feel is pushed upon them by the mainstream and it’s almost a way of rejecting something else and sort of trying to create a new, maybe better way of living because I find there’s a sort of philosophical element to go along with rave culture or music culture in general. I think that a lot of people that go to these things are a little bit more socially concerned about different social problems and that kind of thing and I do find that for whatever reason, I mean I don’t know why, it turns out that people that are more interested in that are interested in certain types of music. But I do find that there is a bigger social, political context that’s kind of couched in the culture and the music, and ...

Tim: Would you say that about events other than this one, or just here?

Sarah: Yeah, I would say that about events other than this one as well. You just get the sense from people that it is sort of a rejection of something else, of the status quo.

Marilyn: Yeah, of the status quo. Yeah, like it's sort of a venting of frustration maybe, or a rebellion happening ... (Marilyn and Sarah, June 2003)

Probably the single biggest critique of rave culture, aside from its associated drug consumption, is its perceived failure to effect real political or social change. Leaving that judgment aside for the moment, it must be conceded that the potential for change is enormous.

Like other manifestations of collective effervescence/communitas, the connectedness experience is responsible for utopian and counter- or alternative-cultural undercurrents throughout rave. A good example of this during my research was the 2003 *Om Festival*. Held on the summer solstice each year for the past six, *Om* is an alternative/ecological lifestyle festival held outdoors somewhere in southern/central Ontario. DJed electronic and live music feature prominently at *Om*. At the 2003 festival, there were no fewer than 6 stages/DJ booths, including one organized by the Black Light Activists.

Om appears to be fundamentally about creating a new society, based on ecological values and increased personal and cultural freedom. As I mentioned earlier in chapter 4, *Om* was a culturally diverse and creative space, with all manner of styles of dress, bodily decoration, and notions of personal hygiene. Some participants even chose not to wear clothes for the duration of the festival. With the entrance fee and a food

donation were included three organic meals a day, cooked at the volunteer-run “K.I.N.D Kitchen” (Knowledge In a New Dimension). For participants with children, there was a Kiddie Camp with structured activities, tips on “Ways to Build Confidence in Kids & Friends,” and “community parenting.” There were a smattering of vendors selling organic foods, handmade crafts, and other goods. Each night keynote speakers delivered talks on primarily environmental issues, culminating with Julia Butterfly Hill, who spent 738 days atop a 1000 year-old Redwood tree to protest clear-cutting. On top of all of this, workshops were held on the following topics:

- Freetekno Toronto (free-party collective)
- Reclaim the Streets (direct action protests)
- DIY Publishing
- Anti-oppression
- Meditation (dynamic, kundalini, chakra)
- Source healing, Reiki, stones, and aroma therapy
- Permaculture (sustainable lifestyles)
- DIY culture (bicycle maintenance, first aid for activists, revolutionary knitting)
- DJ Training
- Drumming
- Eco Om (renewable energy and climate change, holistic animal tracking, wildcrafting, deep ecology, naturalization of ganja, forest defense 101, natural history walk, sustainable cities)
- Indy Media (Introduction to Indymedia, video activism, microradio, media jam)
- Yoga
- Nutrition
- Performance arts
- Sexuality
- Spirituality
- Transgender/transsexual
- War & Globalization

With just this briefest of overviews of the festival, it is apparent that there is enormous potential for real social and cultural change at work here. What is not clear to me, due to my limited knowledge of *Om*, is the connection between the festival’s electronic music

and its activism. Did one come before the other, or was it a simultaneous and symbiotic creation? Perhaps that doesn't even matter. The point is that all of the alternatives and efforts for change present over the weekend were set to a constant background of electronic music and people dancing furiously to it. Events combining rave music and dance and activism/alternative lifestyles are not unique to Canada either. Similar events, movements, and collectives exist in several other continents (Gibson 2001; Luckman 2000; Marlin-Curiel 2001; St John 2001c).

So Now What?

In their original formulations, collective effervescence and *communitas* lacked precise definition, as well as a clear sense of their necessarily enfolded and embodied nature. They have also been used somewhat loosely and imprecisely by some scholars, whether or not Durkheim and Turner ever intended them to be used that way. If we bear these limitations in mind, it's clear that collective effervescence/connectedness is still a useful anthropological construct for attempting to map and understand such contemporary experimental and syncretic symbolic cultural practices as raving. The intense sense of connectedness that can occur between ravers, between raver and DJ, between raver and the Earth, and between raver and the supramundane clearly possesses all of the primary characteristics of collective effervescence/connectedness as I've described them here.

But the question remains "So now what?" What does all of this mean? Given that connectedness is a real interpersonal experience and not epiphenomenal, what is its telos? Why seek the connectedness experience? What is its importance to humanity, if any? Sure, it has brought a lot of joy and inspiration to people. But if it can only ever be

temporary and transient, of what use is it? And how can such an ephemeral thing hope to survive for any length of time? Isn't rave going to die out like so many other cultural "fads"?

Chapter 6 -

Conclusion – The Teleology of the Rave

Experience

While the extent to which the value of ecstatic dance and liminality has been incorporated into the mainstream is not at issue here, it is important to note that over the last decade underground dance music events have become a global phenomenon. Perhaps this indicates a more complete and socially recognized ritual incorporation for participants in that the liminal experiences produced by the music-dance continuum are transformative not only at the micro levels of individuals to communitas, DJ to shaman and club to church, but also at a macro level, where popular culture itself has become somewhat infused with the aesthetic forms generated by rave and club cultures. –Morgan Gerrard, “Selecting Ritual,” pg. 180

The question I’ve been asked the most by non-ravers while conducting this research, aside from the ubiquitous “What goes on at those things, anyway?” is “Is it going to last?” It’s a very good question. I don’t have a definite answer. But I suggest some possibilities below. I also discuss the “teleology of rave”—its ultimate purpose, if indeed it has one, and the reason for its existence.

One possibility is that in fact rave possesses no serious reason or purpose for existence. If we accept this postulate, then the telos of rave is simply the provision of entertainment. In this view, rave is nothing more than something to do on a Saturday night. It is purely hedonistic, another ultimately insignificant example in a growing list of shallow and superficial leisure activities pursued by youth bored and disenfranchised by

their generally meaningless postmodern existence. If this view is correct, then so were the early analyses of rave as “ecstatic disappearance” and “meaningless consumption.”

Another, and more likely possibility is that rave is more than simply entertainment, that something serious is going on here. Throughout this manuscript I’ve described how in addition to being intensely pleasurable, for several of my informants and for me it was at times a very meaningful and transformative experience. And while they weren’t quite sure what that meant, some also characterized it as a religious experience. Yet even those who didn’t or those who weren’t sure how to interpret those transformative moments on the dancefloor were clear about one thing: it has a serious purpose and is more than simply entertainment:

Evan: [I]t’s filling a gap. It’s filling a gap that nothing else is filling. It’s not strictly entertainment. If you want strictly entertainment, you could just go to a club. Or you could, it’s more than entertainment. I think it’s filling a gap. So you know, by me saying that, then I could then think what gap is it filling in me?

...

Tim: Is there anything else, have you had any thoughts on it [the rave scene] in the last 3 years that if someone like me were to come along you’d love to tell them about?

Evan: Umm, I really do believe, like I said earlier, that the rave scene is filling a gap in our social structure, and I think it’s here to stay. Like I don’t, I see people that after they do a couple or a few years of raving, they get out of it, but for everybody that’s getting out, there’s other people that are getting in. It cycles through people like anything. ... I think it’s great [that rave is being legislated]. The fact that they’re legislating it tells you that it’s here to stay. ... But I do think that it’s more than just entertainment. I think for people that get into raving, it’s a pretty powerful force, you have to be careful. It can sweep you away. It could change your life.

Tim: Has it changed your life?

Evan: Yeah I think it has. I do think it has. I think it’s changed it in a positive way by allowing me to be more able to relate to people better. I also find that once you’ve gone through the experience, when you’re not

raving, you're more likely to still feel and recognize the same feelings. I guess it's once you've tasted something, you're more likely to taste it in the future without having a full mouthful. (Evan, November 2002).

Tim: Where do you see it going, where do you see this whole scene going?

Parva: Well a couple of years ago, I thought we reached the limit right, but it's, I'm like it just keeps, you just keep setting new trends and exploring new territory. I don't know, I don't know where this is going to go, I'd say, hmm, what I find a lot is, after a major trend is set people try to find the root of that trend. So eventually I'll see this coming back to the root of it all, like why does this all start, why are we looking for something artificial when there's something real out there that's real happiness. So eventually I could see it coming to a point like the whole hippie scene, right. That just totally turned over and people got all into the spiritual stuff then blah blah blah, so I could see it going that way. It can, or it can totally just go into some other direction but it's definitely significant, like it's sort of something to actually contend with and for a lot of people it's hard to accept that it's happening right now but hey a lot of stuff is happening, you know. (Parva, December 2002)

Marilyn: I kind of think sometimes that, we don't really have, like people want to belong, I guess. People want to belong to a group, they want to feel like they belong, they have a sense of identity belonging to a group. You know because a lot of people feel very isolated, or people derive a lot of satisfaction from having that affinity with other people who are interested in similar things, and that cohesiveness of a group, and, like that's my only reason. I think people do it, it's serving a function for people I think. Why, why do people do things like this? Well, because, they derive a lot of satisfaction from it. It provides a purpose for them, or function. It does something for people. And I think it wouldn't exist if it didn't give people a sense of purpose or identity. (Marilyn, June 2003)

Charles: [Rave is] like archaic revival, like to see these things coming back. You know like they've always been there but maybe they've just been suppressed or something but I think there's still the need.

Tim: Tell me more about that, like do you think there is a real need for what we're seeing?

Charles: Absolutely. And that's why it's coming out in the culture. ... (Charles, January 2002)

Although I've only selected a few here examples here, to varying degrees every one of my informants felt that raving was a meaningful experience for them, and that it was a serious and important aspect of wider North American culture. And yet as is evident in the exchanges above, once again they found it difficult to put their finger on exactly why it is serious and important, just as they found it difficult to explain how raving can be a religious experience. If we turn once again to the work of Durkheim and Turner, we can find answers to these questions.

Connectedness and Dialectics

Turner was not alone in viewing both religious life and social life as dialectical—in simple terms, as structural and anti-structural. Both he and Durkheim acknowledged that all societies required social structure and specialization of labour to maintain order and meet the material needs of their members. Both also recognized that “social structure and the constraint that it places upon people is essentially *alienating*” (Olaveson 2001:85), putting them in the company of such thinkers as Marx, Gramsci, and Heidegger. Something is needed to counterbalance these alienating forces and processes. They believed that “something” to be collective effervescence/communitas, a component of both formal (and especially religious) rituals as well as ritualized gatherings of people. Moreover, they believed collective effervescence/communitas, in its ecstatic, enthusiastic, embodied and non-rational, transgressive and humanizing, and creative and utopian dimensions, to be fundamental to religious and socio-cultural revitalization and renewal (see Olaveson 2001 for an extended discussion on this point). In fact, they saw all societies operating according to dialectics of structured, role- and norm-governed

states, and ecstatic, effervescent experiences of collective effervescence/communitas like the connectedness experience:

And so when men feel there is something outside themselves that is reborn, forces that are reanimated, and a life that reawakens, they are not deluded. This *renewal* is in no way imaginary, and the individuals themselves benefit from it, for the particle of social being that each individual bears within himself necessarily participates in this *collective remaking*. (Durkheim 1995:352-352, emphasis mine)

“Societas,” or “society,” as we all experience it, is a process involving both social structure and communitas, separately and united in varying proportions. (Turner 1974:238)

In human history, I see a continuous tension between structure and communitas, at all levels of scale and complexity. Structure, or all that which holds people apart, defines their differences and constrains their actions, is one pole in a charged field, for which the opposite pole is communitas, or anti-structure, the egalitarian “sentiment for humanity” of which David Hume speaks, representing the desire for a total, unmediated relationship between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other but safeguards their uniqueness in the very act of realizing their commonness. Communitas does not merge identities, it liberates them from conformity to general norms, though this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion. (Turner 1974:274, emphasis mine)

I have no doubt that these two theorists would not be surprised were they alive to witness the flourishing of rave culture today; in fact, I would be very disappointed if they were.

Other Dialectical Models of Religion and Society

In this study I focused on the experiential dimension of raving, and on the interpretation of that experience as meaningful, transformative, and religious. However, I want to stress that as with any social phenomenon, this is only one aspect of rave as a social and cultural phenomenon. Raving in central Canada is not transformative and religious for all people, as the data clearly shows. Nor is the analysis of rave’s various

meanings the only valid subject of research within it. There are several other avenues available for rave research, for example on its style, its politics, its economics, etc., although I personally find them to be less interesting and relevant to answering the questions posed at the beginning of this manuscript. I enumerated some of the work done by scholars on these other aspects in chapter 3. I also critiqued several of those scholars, primarily on epistemological and methodological grounds; because so many of them either chose not to or were prevented from experiencing rave themselves and talking to actual ravers, they automatically excluded the rave's potential for transformation and deeper significance, a potential I have clearly demonstrated here.

In addition to choosing to focus on the transformative and religious aspects of the rave experience itself, I chose to employ theoretical frameworks of ritual and social process developed by two well-known figures in the history of anthropology and religious studies. However, I want to stress that even with the focus I chose, other theories could have been profitably employed. Indeed, rave culture and the rave experience fits very well with recent and older theoretical projects within the fields of sociology and anthropology.

For example, Anthony Wallace's work on revitalization movements fits the general pattern I have presented here (Wallace 1956; Wallace 1966). Like Durkheim and Turner, Wallace saw religions and entire cultures following patterns of alternating states of religious and cultural intensity and innovation, and routinization and stagnation. He viewed revitalization movements as conscious and deliberate efforts to construct a more satisfying culture, and saw such objects of social scientific study as cargo cults, messianic movements, new religious sects, and revolutions, as examples (Wallace 1956:265).

Charles Laughlin's Cycle of Meaning and the theory of biogenetic structuralism on which it is based (Laughlin 1997; Laughlin, McManus et al. 1990:214-224) presents a similar yet much more sophisticated model, in what is probably the clearest, most complete, and most multi-disciplinary hermeneutic framework for the explanation and interpretation of all manifestations of religious activities. The Cycle of Meaning begins with a culture's cosmology, which is then reproduced in mythopoeic symbolism (ritual, myth, art, drama, and other symbolic products), is directly experienced by the individual, interpreted by a religious specialist, and then leads to revivification or revision of the culture's cosmology. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's theories of religion and new religious movements employ a similar cyclical or dialectical model (Bainbridge 1997; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Stark and Bainbridge 1987). In brief, as religions and cultures begin to secularize and stagnate (a perennial, evolutionary process), individuals seek out or form sects and cults in the search for more vivid and consistent "supernatural compensators." If and when these groups begin a similar process of stagnation, they are replaced by new ones.

What all of these theories and models have in common is the recognition of social life as incorporating the alternation of existence in social structure—logic-dominated, segregated, institutional, and isolating—and in non- or semi-structured, experience-based collectives—non-rational, communal, intimate, uniting. The terminology may be different, but the essential logic behind each of them remains the same. There can be little argument that social existence in North America today is increasingly dominated by interaction with large, impersonal institutions. Further exacerbating this is the postmodern paradigm of personhood, with its cult of the individual and its mantra

“diversity at all costs.” Attempting to explain the motivations of people who join new religious movements, Lorne Dawson seems to aptly summarize social existence today:

In the private sphere everything is seemingly now a matter of choice. There are no set and secure behaviours with regard to courtship, marriage, child rearing, sexuality, gender relations, consumption, vocation, and spirituality. Consequently, many individuals are left yearning for more guidance. In the public sphere, all are compelled to conform. Guidance is manifest, but in ways which belie the meaningfulness of participation. Institutions are guided increasingly by a strictly formal rationality, geared to the satisfaction of the functional requirements of social systems, with little or no regard for the desires, needs, or even character of the individual members of these institutions. In the face of this social dissonance, the proliferating NRMs provide a more holistic sense of self; a sense of self that transcends the constellation of limited instrumental roles recognized by modern mass society and anchored in a greater sense of moral community and purpose. (Dawson 1998:582)

As scholars of NRMs like Dawson have recognized, modern consumer cultures are ideal hosts for the formation of sects, cults and other NRMs because of such conditions. This may explain the current explosion of cultural and religious diversity and experimentation, of which rave is one example.

In *FreeNRG Culture*, (St John 2001c), St John and other authors view “commercialized,” mainstream rave as an ultimately failed enterprise due to its perceived failure to effect real social and political change. They therefore hold up inherently political and activist-oriented groups like Organarchy and Ohms Not Bombs as more “authentic” countercultural collectives. Accordingly, their focus is also on doofs rather than mainstream raves. It is certainly true that smaller, more specialized sound system collectives and direct action groups are inherently more political and likely to produce observable social change in the near term (although as Iveson and Scalmer (2001) note in the same volume even, cultural and political radicalism is not immune to becoming

“mainstream”—e.g. the popularity of the stereotypical “anti-globalization protester”).

Does this then mean that mainstream rave culture, or that rave culture as a whole, is ultimately useless? Does it mean that my informants are wrong, that rave is merely entertainment?

So many people wonder what the point of rave is. So many historians and observers of the scene marvel at how hungrily new initiates eat up the experience, lusting for more and more until they end up mere shells of themselves, wasted away by excessive and self-destructive drug consumption, poor nutrition, and sheer exhaustion. As Matthew Collin and Simon Reynolds write, these are the “walking wounded” on the dancefloor, the people who dove into rave so deep that they couldn’t find their way back. The key to understanding and harnessing the connectedness experience of even commercialized rave is to view it in its proper context: as one pole in a dialectical relationship, as Jon Marsh, acid house devotee and lead singer of The Beloved explained to Sheryl Garratt in 1990:

“But the matter-of-fact way you’re talking about having to pick people up from the floor is terrifying!” interrupts Marsh. “When I was 16, it was maybe some speed but usually getting paralytically drunk. I’m not saying that’s a good thing, but if you start getting into really heavy drugs at that age – it’s like, what is there after that? You’ve got to get used to the idea that everything can’t be permanently nice because life isn’t like that. You have to treat it as an every now and again type of thing” (qtd. in Garratt 1997:122)

As Durkheim, Turner, and the other authors above describe, social life requires structure, status, and differentiation, but it eventually withers and dies unless it is periodically plunged into the fires of collective effervescence/communitas. As my informants put it, many people sense a gap, sense that something is missing in their lives. In the language of the *Om Festival Guide*, that gap is connection. The connectedness

experience in rave is a postmodern world's spontaneous reaction to its painful awareness of that void; an attempt to fill it, an attempt to imbue life with a renewed sense of meaning and community, a re-sacralization or re-enchantment of the world through non-rational, intense, collective, carnal and re-embodied sociality (see also Maffesoli 1996:xiv; Mellor and Shilling 1997).

What St John and others may be overlooking is that social change is not always measured in the timescales by which we live our everyday lives. When people look to rave as an agent of change, they tend to look for change *now*, in the immediate present. This is likely a function of the globalized and modern world in which we live, where immediate results are what matter. The rave experience, even the commercialized rave experience, has without question had an effect on several thousands, if not millions of people around the world, and as Gerrard states in the opening passage of this chapter, it is doing so on a global level. But that effect may not be noticeable for five, ten, maybe even twenty years or more, when the people raving now get into the workforce and into positions of social, political and economic power. Or when they have children of their own, for instance, and pass on to them some of the things they learned about what it is to be human on those late nights on the dance floor.

The Future of Rave

Now to answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: "Is rave going to last?" No. And yes. Let me explain.

As Chryssides and others have noted about new religious movements, a NRM's teachings are the fuel by which the religion is driven, and without which it would fail (Chryssides 1999). Aside from smaller rave communities and collectives like WOMP and

the Black Light Activists, there doesn't appear to be a central corpus of revelations, teachings, or even beliefs common to rave culture, but rather the emergence of translocal, idealized narratives of the gnostic wisdom inherent in "tribal rituals," "drumming," and psychoactive substances that I sampled above (see also Gibson 1999; Hutson 1999; Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). Since the overwhelming proportion of symbolic communication in the rave is the relatively meaningless (linguistically) electronic dance track, the likelihood of rave culture developing more coherent and efficacious myths/teachings than these appears to me to be quite low. This situation is exacerbated even further with the advent of global communications and the Internet. With regard to rave, this might be impossible due to the geographically diverse nature of rave communities and events, as well as to today's accessible technologies used to make, share and reshape rave's principle symbolic medium—electronic music. The idea of one prophet with one message thus seems an unlikely prospect, as compared with a diaspora of techno-disciples mixing their own gospels and reveling in their own private ecstasies.

The hermeneutic circle of rave—its Cycle of Meaning—thus appears to be incomplete. People are definitely having extraordinary, direct experiences in the rave. But who is interpreting these experiences for participants, in order to ensure they are integrated with their cosmology? Moreover, where are the spiritual guides to interpret ravers' experiences for the wider rave community and then translate them into mythopoeic symbolism for the next round of direct experience? Rave culture seems to be stuck in the direct experience phase of the Cycle of Meaning; postmodern cultures' painful awareness of their lack of intimacy, immediacy, and carnality may have created an obsession with *experience* at the expense of *narrative* and *interpretation*:

Instead of efficiently returning to the mundane world as adults or other elevated social categories, [rave] participants receive their incorporative recognition as valued initiates only by returning to the ritual community itself. (Gerard 2004:179-180)

Ravers are thus left to interpret their own extraordinary experiences according to whatever symbolic and/or religious frameworks are available to them, or whatever pastiche of borrowed and invented symbols happen to be at their next rave.

All of this leads me to conclude that rave culture will not go on to exist in any form more coherent than the present one. I believe what we are witnessing is an emergent culture or an emergent religion, polyphasic in terms of consciousness and heavily based in direct experience. Because of its affinity for high information and communications technology, as well as the postmodern environment in which it is housed, its chances of evolving to the next stage are apparently slim. What will continue, however, is the human need for the type of experience that rave can produce—the connectedness experience. I do predict with full confidence that several hundred years from now people will still be gathering in groups to dance to some form of music, get back into their bodies, and connect with each other at deeply human levels. After all, as chapter two demonstrated this dynamic has been recurring in various manifestations for the past century, continually reinventing and recasting the same three or four fundamental ingredients over and over. How closely it will resemble the extraordinary events in which I participated over the past 3 years, only time will tell...

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Images

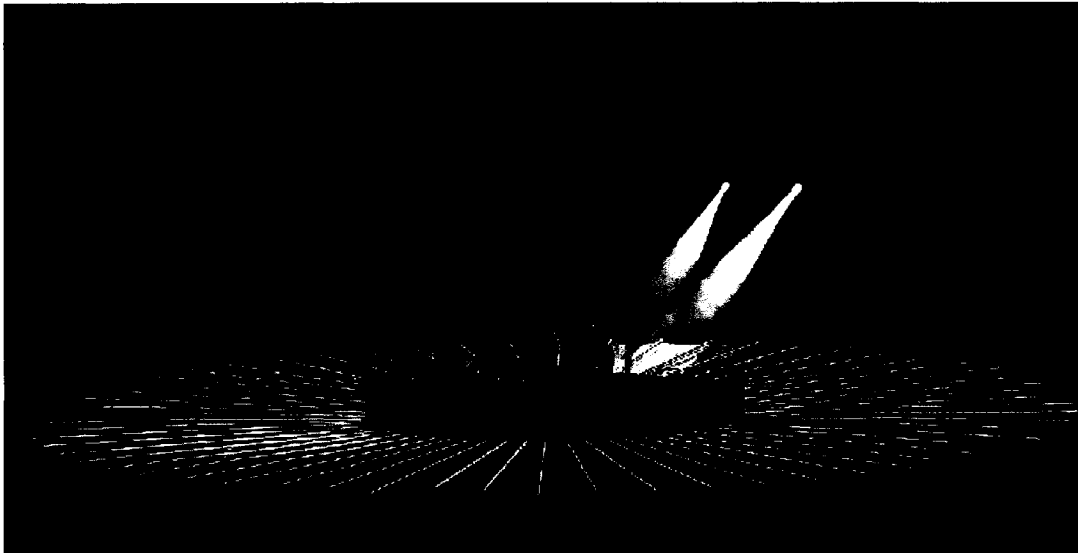


Image 1. The #1 DJ in the world in action – DJ Tiesto. (Photo by P. Bikowski)



Image 2. Candy raver, with face blurred for anonymity. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 3. A Montreal crowd “cuddle puddle.” (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 4. Mistress Barbara spinning at the 2003 World Music Conference in Miami. (Photo by BBC Radio 1)



Image 5. DJ booth, dancers, and psychedelic imagery at *Red Skywalker*. Note the alien head on the booth above the tapestry. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 6. Ganesha image from *Red Skywalker*. The location of the image (wrapped around a speaker) represents an interesting and metonymic fusion of traditional and emergent symbolism. (Photo by T. Olaveson)

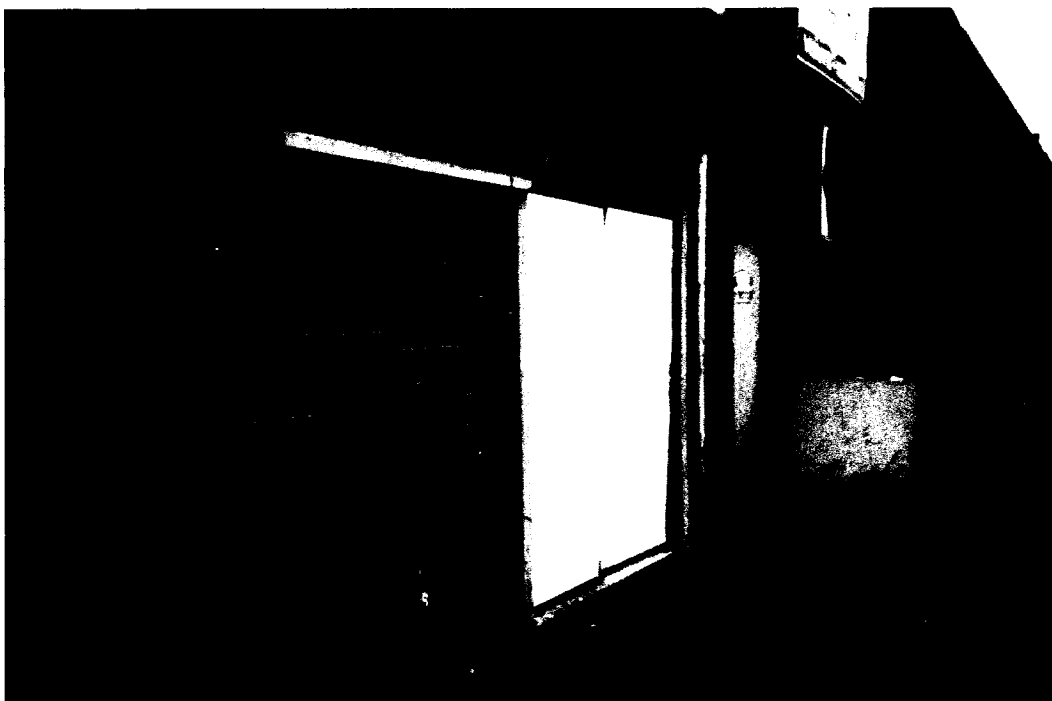


Image 7. Nondescript entrance to *Access Denied*, a typical warehouse rave. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 8. Adoring the DJ. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 9. *WOMPER Room* party. The screen in the background displayed ludic juxtapositions of social and cultural images throughout the night. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 10. PLUR alive and well at 2003 *Om Festival*. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



Image 11. Syncretic religious iconography at 2003 *Om Festival*. (Photo by T. Olaveson)



BLACKLIGHT ACTIVISTS

Welcome to Dreamtime the Zero Hour, the Great Tribulation!!
 Every facet of human existence has been called into question.
 The old anglo-oligarchy is dying and we are at the cusp of
EVOLUTION.

It may appear we are continuing our downward spiral,
 our fall from grace. Our world is polluted with lies, unharmonious
 sound vibrations that distort the human experience and isolate the
 individual. We have forgotten our commitments to one another
NO MORE !!!

Science is catching up, it shows us that only 3% of our
 DNA - the magical double helix - is used for protein synthesis, or
 3-D reality, the other 97% is designated for electromagnetic
 communication. Like it or not we exist in many more dimensions
 then the 3 we currently experience, and now we can no longer
 deny that.

The **ALA** want to reintroduce the sound of the cosmos. By
 smothering the individual with the geometric sonic understanding
 we hope to undo the isolation, purify the land and reconnect with the
 Gaian Mind.



Human kind will exist no longer as cancerous cells, we will harness
 the new frequencies, reminding us we are infinite consciousness
 on a journey of self-discovery.....

In LaK'ech



blacklightactivists@hotmail.com

Image 12. Black Light Activists page from 2003 *Om Festival* Guide.