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# Theatre in Search of a Storyline:

# The Role of the "Technoshaman" in Rave Culture

**by**

**Melanie L. Takahashi**

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**the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, University of Ottawa,**
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**ABSTRACT**

Since its emergence in the late 1980s, the subculture referred to as "rave" has become a significant global youth phenomenon. At the heart of every event one encounters the DJ, the individual accountable for the success or failure of the rave. The DJ is responsible for taking the dancers on a "journey" so that they may experience the feelings of connectedness, spirituality, and a state of what participants refer to as "ecstasy." Given this role, some have labelled the DJ a "technoshaman." Using the survey and interview method, participant observation and the existing literature on raves, this dissertation investigates the precise functions of the DJ as a "technoshaman." Gilbert Rouget's conceptualization of trance and how it is managed in the ritual context, and his framework for the study of possession trance ritual provides the theoretical foundations for this research. The DJ is found to be an expert in knowing how music works and through an analysis of the techniques employed to initiate altered mind states, and his relationship with rave participants, it is suggested that the role of the DJ can be more appropriately compared to the role of instrumentalists in possession trance ritual. The quasi-scripted nature of the rave experience and its parallel to ceremonial possession is also evinced through an exploration of raver psychoactive substance use, driving mechanisms into altered states of consciousness, and the role of participant learning and adeptness. In applying Laughlin's hermeneutic model of the "cycle of meaning" to rave events, it is found that the role of the "shaman" is performed by the participants themselves rather than the DJ. Despite processes that are focussed on the tasks of minimizing physiological harms and bodily discomfort, and maximizing well being, pleasurable memories and a sense of community, it is suggested that the "storyline" underpinning rave culture, lacking any formal or stable content, remains to be told. In contrast to possession

ritual where the storyline binds the dancer to the god or goddess, and what is gained by the dancer is a complex identity, power, moral rules, responsibilities and expectations, participation in a rave stops at the personal and interpersonal level of experiences. It is suggested that it is ultimately up to each individual raver to direct the course of his own path and experience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


**CHAPTER ONE**

**Introduction** . . . . . 1
1.1 What is a "Technoshaman?" . . . . . 1
1.2 The Inquiry . . . . . 5

**CHAPTER TWO**

**A Brief History of the Rave Scene** . . . . . 12
2.1 Music, Dancing, Drugs and the "Underground:" . . . . . 12
The Predecessors of Rave
Northern Soul . . . . . 12
Disco, House & Techno . . . . . 14
Acid House . . . . . 16
2.2 The Globalization of Rave Culture . . . . . 17
2.3 The Birth of Trance . . . . . 19
2.4 The Spread of Goa Trance . . . . . 24

**CHAPTER THREE**

**A Review of the Literature: From the Meaningless to the Meaningful** . . . . . 26
3.1 The Cultural Studies Perspective . . . . . 26
3.2 The Sociology of Moral Panic . . . . . 33
3.3 The Medical Sciences . . . . . 36
3.4 Raves as Meaningful: "The Consumption of Experience" . . . . . 36
3.5 Popular Sources vs Academic Sources: The Epistemological Gap . 39

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**Methodology** . . . . . 42
4.1 Fieldwork . . . . . 45
4.2 The Interview Method . . . . . 46
4.3 Research Subjects . . . . . 48
4.4 Participant Observation . . . . . 51
The Anthropology of the Senses . . . . . 51
The Anthropology of Experience . . . . . 55

## CHAPTER FIVE

**The Field Setting: An Ethnographic Account** . . . . . 60
5.1 Origins of the Term "Rave" . . . . . .60
5.2 "Raves" According to Drugs: From "Raves" to "Parties" . . . . . 61
5.3 "Raves" According to Location: Place vs Space . . . . . 65
Psytrance Parties . . . . . 75
5.4 "Raves" According to Music . . . . . 76
Psytrance Music . . . . . 78
5.5 "Raves" According to Experience and Vibe . . . . . 80

## CHAPTER SIX

**Anthropological Definitions of Trance Ritual** . . . . . 83
6.1 Shamanism vs Possession: The Historical Debate . . . . . 85
6.2 Managing Trance . . . . . 91
Training and Initiation . . . . . 92
The Spirit Repertoire . . . . . 95
Musicians, Instruments & Musical Accompaniment . . . . . 97
6.3 Physiological Correlates of Trance States . . . . . 101
Shamanism . . . . . 101
Ceremonial Possession . . . . . 104
Seizure Triggers in the Ritual Context . . . . . 106
Ritual Control of Seizures: Neural Tuning . . . . . 110

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**The DJ in Action** . . . . . 115
7.1 DJ'ing Becomes an Art-form . . . . . 116
7.2 The DJ's Training . . . . . 121
7.3 Equipment and Turntable Techniques . . . . . 126
7.4 Symbiosis: The DJ's Relationship with the Dancers . . . . . 131
7.5 The Science of Sound: Trance Induction at Raves . . . . . 148

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**Experiencing the Event** . . . . . 163
8.1 Psychoactive Substance Use . . . . . 165
MDMA: Empathogens, Entactogens, Entheogens
& Psychointegrators . . . . . 170
8.2 Additional Driving Mechanisms at Raves . . . . . 176
Dancing . . . . . 176

Sleep Deprivation . . . . . 178
Fasting . . . . . 180
Prolonged Heat Exposure . . . . . 181
Sensory Stimulation and Bombardment . . . . . 182
Dancing Among a Crowd: The Community . . . . . 184
8.3 Learning and Adeptness: Flashbacks and Neural Tuning at Raves . 186
MDMA as the Catalyst . . . . . 189
Flashbacks at Raves: Neural Tuning . . . . . 192
8.4 Empowerment, Self-exploration, Catharsis and Transformation . . 196
Experimentation & Self Exploration: The Body Re-examined . . . . . 197
Catharsis Through Dance & MDMA . . . . . 208
Insight and Transformation . . . . . 212

**CHAPTER NINE**

**The Storyline...** . . . . . 219
9.1 The "Cycle of Meaning" . . . . . 222
9.2 Entheogens and the Rise of "Meta-culture": A Raver Worldview? 224
"Open" System: Redefining "Ritual" . . . . . 234
9.3 The First Shamanic Interjection Point: Controlling the Environment . . . . . 239
"Looking out" For One Another: Informal Initiatory Structures . . . . . 240
Attitudes Toward Drugs: A "Moral" Code of Conduct . . . 246
Motivations for Taking Drugs . . . . . 248
A Hierarchy of Drugs: "Good" vs "Bad" Drugs . . . . . 252
MDMA's Course: Cutting Down and Refraining . . . . . 254
9.4 The Second Shamanic Interjection Point: Interpretation and Integration . . . . . 255
Programming the Nature and Content of ASC's . . . . . 256
The "Re-entry" Process . . . . . 260
9.5 The "Storyline" as Script . . . . . 265

**CHAPTER TEN**

**Conclusion** . . . . . 268

**APPENDIX A** . . . . . 278
Figure 1. The DJ Booth . . . . . 278
Figure 2. A "Happy-Hardcore" Event Flyer . . . . . 279
Figure 3. A "Psytrance" Event Flyer . . . . . 280
Figure 4. An "Industrial Hardcore" Event Flyer . . . . . 281

Figure 5. Entrance to An Underground Rave . . . . . 282
Figure 6. A Modest "Home-made" Event Flyer . . . . . 283
Figure 7. Psychedelic Artwork in "Dego" Paints . . . . . 284
Figure 8. The Carnival Atmosphere: Stilt-walkers . . . . . 285
Figure 9. The "Cycle of Meaning" . . . . . 286
Figure 10. A Raver's View of Corporate America . . . . . 287
Figure 11. "TRIP" / "OATS" Harm Reduction Booth . . . . . 288

**APPENDIX B** . . . . . 289
Consent Form . . . . . 289

**REFERENCES** . . . . . 290

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

---

> DEE JAYS ARE POWER FREAKS! I feel a huge amount of responsibility in this role. If you sense the need to cast yourself in this directing, controlling, position, then try and do it in a clear minded way, without unconsciously projecting too many personal agendas through the prime time of these trance-dance, altered state, sacred spaces. The dancers put themselves in your hands to take them on a journey, its like psychic surgery. Its important to understand the dynamic of raising this energy in the body and psyche, through progressing the various levels of intensity in the music, to make a spiraling progression.
>
> DJ Ray Castle
> (St John 2001a:161)

### 1.1 What is a "technoshaman?"

Since its emergence in the late 1980s, the subculture referred to as "rave" has become a significant global youth phenomenon. Described by Merchant and McDonald as "the most vibrant, popular and visible cultural expression of young people" (1994:16), rave culture has had such an enormous impact on mainstream youth and popular culture that it is now often considered a part of the mainstream. Raves have increasingly become the focus of books, movies, and media coverage, and the culture has been the undercurrent behind some of the latest music and fashion trends. The electronic and rhythmically repetitive nature of the music, the long hours of dancing, the semi-legal secret location and the ingestion of psychoactive substances, differentiate raves from other youth parties. When combined, these features are specifically designed to promote feelings of connectedness, spirituality, and a state of "ecstasy" among contemporary youth. At the heart of these proceedings one

encounters the individual responsible for the success or failure of the event: the Disc-Jockey (DJ). Using equipment to manipulate the rhythm, sound, and lighting, the DJ guides individuals through a psychological journey of what some have described as healing, identity transformation, and spiritual growth.

An influential figure in popular culture, the DJ has been depicted as a cultural broker and creator of culture, as he[1] directs youth trends through his choice of music. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Thornton employs the term subcultural capital to refer to "hipness" or "being in the know" in relation to youth club cultures (1995:11). For Thornton, "being in the know" translates into economic capital, and this is the driving force behind power and hierarchy in club cultures. As one who embodies and determines degrees of "hipness," the DJ profits financially by having the greatest access to and ownership of subcultural capital (1995:12).[2] In the rave context the economic potential of the DJ has been taken to an even higher level as the DJ's career now includes studio work which can entail record producing and song writing. Fikentscher argues that this move has transformed the DJ from "cult figure to cultural hero" (2003:54). Regarded as the "new rock star" (Reynolds 1999:276) it is not surprising that *TRM* Magazine profiled rave DJ Paul Oakenfold as "The World's Highest Paid DJ."

---

1 I will be referring to the DJ using the masculine since most DJs are male. The low representation of women at the level of music promotion and production in the rave scene has been widely noted (see McRobbie 1994; Pini 1997; Reynolds 1999: 274; Brewster and Broughton 1999 376-377). McRobbie cites that nine out of ten DJs are male (1994:171). Fikentscher (2000) observes that male DJs outnumber female DJs by a ratio greater than 10:1 in the New York City scene. From the events I attended during fieldwork, less than 1% of the DJs were female.

2 The DJ's access to subcultural capital is not a recent phenomenon; the bribes accepted by the DJs to promote records resulting in the payola scandals of the 1950's is just one example of the power and influence occupied historically by the DJ.

The DJ's elevated status is partially a reflection of his economic potential, but the DJ's association with the underground, a morally and legally ambivalent sphere of society linked with the anti-establishment, has also allowed him to replace guitarists and the leaders of rock and roll bands as the social and musical role model for today's youth (Langlois 1992: 234). The DJ has historically been an elusive and marginal figure whose ability to work without restriction has contributed to his quasi outlaw title. As Brewston and Broughton have noted, the DJ's recurring conflict with "'establishment forces' has resulted in a history with a rich subtext of power struggles" (1999:16). In the quest for exposing others to the newest underground sounds, pirate radio[3] and raves afford DJs the opportunity to air music from new genres that have yet to acquire categorical titles, and play songs that have been banned from regular programming (Brewster and Broughton 1999: 378-379). Ravers tune into pirate radio, or attend raves for the purpose of hearing these new experimental sounds because this kind of music can't be heard on "Much Music," or legitimate radio stations. For ravers, this is considered a good thing as it is the underground nature of the music that defines its authenticity (Thornton 1994:177). Ravers don't want to purchase CD's at mainstream record shops such as "SONY" and "HMV;" in fact when an artist "crosses-over" into the mainstream, they often lose the respect from their underground devotees and are accused of "selling out" (see Thornton 1994:180). Unlike other artists, the DJ is not dependent or subservient to the record industry and this guarantees him a certain amount of respect, particularly from the youth population. If anything, it is the record companies that

---

[3] A pirate radio station is an unlicensed, illegal station that operates in defiance of the broadcasting laws of the country it is located in. Most pirate radio activity takes place in USB on frequencies above or below ham radio bands.

rely on the DJs, as the success of a song is contingent upon its amount of exposure and air-time. DJs like Paul Oakenfold have been recruited by these companies to make the songs of guitar bands more "dancefloor friendly" (Haslam 1998: 159).

As electronic music gained popularity, the DJ synchronously perfected his craft into an art-form, and the growing recognition of his musicianship is evinced by such newly acquired titles as "soundscape architect" (Fikentscher 2000:8), "digital shaman" (D'Andrea 2004:248), and "harmonic navigator" (Rushkoff 1994: 116). In rave culture and in particular the sub-scene of raving referred to as "Psytrance," the DJ's ability to interact with, read, and take the dancers on what is often referred to as an "ecstatic" journey has also been recognized and his influence has expanded to include the spiritual sphere. Once an anonymous figure hidden away behind the DJ booth, with his status being elevated to such monumental heights, the DJ has seen his role expanded beyond the traditional role of music selector to include technician, performer, artist, producer, musician, and most recently "technoshaman." In tandem with this transforming role, a cult of the DJ has since emerged so that thousands of youths will gather at a rave event to be guided through a spiritual quest under the direction of a "technoshaman." Ravers themselves are cognizant of this responsibility, as DJs are also referred to as kings, leaders, gurus, priests, and gods. Much like spiritual gurus, rave DJs tour internationally and ravers will often travel great distances to hear their favourite DJs perform. DJ booths at raves are frequently designed to resemble altars (see Appendix A, figure 1); the DJ's role as spiritual leader is also reflected in the phenomenon witnessed at events where the entire crowd of dancers face in his direction, and sometimes display signs of reverence and devotion, such as prostration, chanting, and

adoration (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:99). Some DJs consider that their "shamanic function," that is the ability to drive participants to a state of "ecstasy," is a central component of the DJ's craft. It is inscribed in their technique and is a measurement of their skill. DJs are ultimately responsible for the group's consciousness and experience as "they create the state of mind and the buzz for everybody in the room, they can crash it or they can take it up as they choose" ('Alan'02-04-30:12).[4] It is for these reasons that some have referred to the DJ as a "technoshaman" (see Hutson 1999, 2000; ENRG and Castle 2001).[5]

## 1.2 The Inquiry

A small body of recent publications on raves reflects the growing recognition that the rave scene provides a spiritual outlet for many contemporary youth (see Becker and Woebs 1999; Corsten 1999; Fournier 2001; Gauthier 2001; Hutson 1999, 2000; St John 2001a, 2004; Sylvan 2002; Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). The DJ's position within this culture as a spiritual leader and guide has also been noted (Hutson 1999; Hill 1999; Green 2001;Sylvan 2002). What is uncertain however, is the specific nature of this role. Poschardt contends that the DJ's tendency toward "laconic autism" has made him a difficult object of study that has "remained untouched by academic study" (1995:17). Similarly, Fikentscher observes that "[h]is gradual rise in the hierarchy of the music industry has not been accompanied by a corresponding growth in the academic literature" (2000:33). Although similarities have been

---

4 Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of informants. Personal data that could identify individuals have also been removed.

5 Hutson (2000:38) cites Fraser Clark as the individual to first describe the DJ as a "technoshaman." The editor of the underground music magazine *Evolution*, Clark was involved in establishing two famous London dance clubs.

noted between the function of the DJ in rave culture, and that of the shaman in traditional cultures, a precise and in-depth academic analysis of the DJ's work is lacking. For example, Hutson (2000:39), McDonald et al. (1998:242), Hill (1999: 97-100) and Green (2001:11), in addition to Becker and Woebs (1999:64-65) appear to simply accept ravers' explanations of DJ's techniques as "shamanistic," positively comparing them with the techniques of indigenous healers as reported by authors such as Eliade. Treated as a universal homogeneous complex that can be "tapped into" by anyone, the "ancient wisdom"[6] of "shamanism" is described as being imparted to rave participants independent of any historical or cultural context. For example, in reference to the rave movement, Hill states: "This generation in this decade is using the knowledge gained in consciousness expansion and the wisdom of the shaman that was almost lost...The focus of a technoshamanistic ritual of deep power and purpose is rooted in the actual primal experience itself" (1999: 97-100).

These authors also assume that what ravers experience during raves is "ecstasy," but lacking is a definition or thorough investigation of this state of consciousness. Similarly, references to "trance" or "hypnotic" states are also presented as fact but explanations and interpretations of these states and how they are elicited are usually glossed over. As the following statement reveals, some authors appear to be completely baffled by the altered states of consciousness (ASC's) encountered at raves, their position clearly illustrating a very poor understanding of ASC phenomena:

---

6 Terrence McKenna has been mythologized as the "shaman" for the rave movement. McKenna viewed the postmodern era as a period of "Archaic Revival" where humanity is confronted with a drive to return to the values of our ancestors. He saw the "shaman" as the figure who would lead this revival. McKenna personally spread this message at rave events by performing with the popular Psytrance group "*The Shaman*."

> Ravers move in a hypnotic delirium which has been described as a 'trance dance.' It is as if some sort of spell has been cast over them causing the throng to lose themselves in their own thoughts while the pounding of the music remains starkly unobtrusive (MacDonald et al. 1998:243).

Postmodern scholars seem to avoid the subject of ASC's altogether, while acknowledging the ineffable quality of the experience as grounds for its exclusion from academic inquiry. Additionally, with the exception of Fikentscher (2000) and Gerard (2004), the DJ's expertise and the symbiotic relationship he develops with the dancers have also been neglected, perhaps due to the embodied, performative, and intuitive elements under which these processes are informed:

> While the dance music press, insider accounts and testimonials from DJs and dancers suggested a fertile ground for investigation, scholars tended to avoid the dialectical possibilities inherent in performance analyses or phenomenologically inspired investigations by simply treating such interactions as somehow ineffable (Gerard 2004:170; see also Malbon 1999:71).

Another embodied element so central to raving is body movement, that is the dance experience, and as Malbon remarks "I note the reticence and/or inability of both clubbers and academics to discuss dancing" (1999:71). It is probable that this reticence is partially rooted in the limitations of an "armchair" approach. It is obvious that many scholars of rave and club culture have never physically participated in the contexts they are writing about. This armchair methodology is addressed by Gerard and Sidnell who call for an approach that is instead framed in the "immediate:"

> ...rather than attempting to extricate symbolic meanings or covert subcultural agendas, future studies of contemporary dance music would be best served from the dance floor and not the armchair. If as a number of authors have suggested, these music and dance spaces can be likened to ritual events, we should approach them as such-not by severing enactment from text, as Bruce Kapferer has cautioned, but by framing analysis in the immediate

and locally organized contexts of performance (2000:36).

This dissertation is an investigation into the precise functions of the DJ as a "technoshaman" in the rave subculture. This involves an investigation of the DJ's training, of his techniques of the mechanisms involved in inducing altered states of consciousness (ASC's) in the rave context, of the experience of participants with these states, the symbolic process and theological foundation (if any) underpinning the rave culture, and of the relationship between the DJ and rave participants. In the past decade, the study of trance rituals has been revitalized in the west due to a multidisciplinary interest in ASC's. Influenced by the human potential movement, the drug culture of the sixties and seventies, the New Age movement's interest in alternative healing practices and spirituality, and even the rave scene's romanticization of the "shaman," many approaches consider shamanism to be linked to an archetypal psychobiological wisdom. The movement referred to as "neo-shamanism" reflects this interest as the shaman's altered state is adapted into the urban context as a set of techniques for spiritual growth and healing. In light of these developments, the exploration of the "spiritual" capacities recently attributed to the rave DJ, in addition to an evaluation of the legitimacy of the DJ's recently acclaimed status, is relevant to academic inquiry. From this research, we will then be better able to examine the extent to which the rave DJ and his techniques correspond to what anthropologists have defined as "shamanic complex."

Throughout this thesis, the term "shaman" is used according to three different notions. In referring to the complex that conforms to the neo-shamanic perspective-this will include the emic position of the raver- the term will appear as "shamanism." In the midst of

the fervour to reconstruct what is perceived as the common elements among shamanic traditions, features specific to the various shamanic complexes identified in the ethnographic literature have often been overlooked.[7] This contrasting ethnographic use of the term as presented by cultural anthropologists will appear in this thesis as shamanism. Considering shamanism as a performed social role, that may or may not be recognized by the society at large brings us to a third different perspective on shamanism advanced by Laughlin et al. (1992:231-see chapter 9). In considering the shaman as an individual who orchestrates what happens in the ritual context, the variations in techniques among and between shamanic traditions are not overlooked and the methods involved in performing the shamanic principle are assumed to be located within specific cultural contexts. In this model, a shaman is an individual who is perceived by others as having a greater level of knowledge and experience and knows when and how to intervene (Laughlin et al. 1992:231). In referring to this perspective, the term will appear as Shamanism.

The following chapter examines the early predecessors of rave, to situate the rave phenomenon in its historical context. Chapter three outlines the existing literature on raves and the DJ's position within electronic music culture. In light of the multi-sensorial and visceral nature of the rave context, and acknowledging that we experience our bodies and the world around us through our senses, the methodological considerations of a sensorial and experiential approach is outlined in chapter four. The fieldwork locale is delineated in chapter five with an ethnographic account of rave and Psytrance culture. To uncover the

---

7 For example, the use of hallucinogens is common to many shamanic practices but it is not universal. Additionally, in some societies only women can become shamans, in others the position is exclusive to men, while in other cases it does not matter.

extent to which the rave DJ and his techniques correspond to the shamanic complex, the state of "trance" which the DJ is noted to direct, is examined in chapter six. The chapter explores anthropological discussions of trance ritual, starting with the problematic use of the term "trance," and the debates regarding "shamanic trances" versus "possession trances." The physiological and experiential correlates associated with trance states are also addressed. Gilbert Rouget's conceptualization of trance and how it is managed in the ritual context is reviewed, and his framework for the study of possession trance ritual is found suitable as the theoretical foundations for this research. One of the most important elements of Rouget's framework is his discovery that there are two main ways of managing trance: a scripted method that is associated with possession trance, and a non-scripted one associated with shamanism. Chapter seven looks at the DJ in action beginning with the art and culture of the DJ, the training and preparation involved to perfect his craft, the techniques employed to initiate altered mind states, and his relationship with rave participants. These features are compared with the role of shamans and instrumentalists in trance ritual as outlined by Rouget, suggesting that the role of the DJ can be more appropriately compared to the role of instrumentalists in possession trance ritual. The manner in which participants experience the DJ and the event is highlighted in chapter eight. Psychoactive substance use, driving mechanisms, the role of learning and adeptness in attaining extraordinary states of consciousness, and the themes of catharsis, self-exploration, experimentation and transformation are also examined. Scrutinizing these aspects of rave culture further suggests the quasi scripted nature of the rave experience and its parallel to possession trance ritual. Chapter nine presents an analysis of the "storyline" that underpins the rave context. The

notion of a raver "worldview," pre and post-rave activities, the initiatory aspects of MDMA use, and how the rave experience is integrated in the lives of participants is addressed. Framed within the hermeneutic model of Laughlin's "cycle of meaning," my main hypothesis is that the rave subculture as a whole, lacks a complete "cycle of meaning," though the more organized, hierarchical and structured form of practice as evinced in the Psytrance culture, suggests an inherent move in that direction. The varying levels of cycle "completeness" explain the diversity of reported ASC's, reasons for attending events, choice of psychoactive substance, attitudes and patterns of psychoactive use, and intended outcome of experience among participants within and between different rave subgenres. The concluding chapter addresses the implications of the results of this research. Consideration for the possible future that lies ahead of electronic music culture is also touched on, highlighting the room for further research in this area.

# CHAPTER TWO

## A Brief History of the Rave Scene

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> Every now and then a set of circumstances conspires to make sweeping changes that reverberate to every aspect of our lives and ultimately change the way we think. To understand the current rave phenomenon and place it in an historical context, we have only to look back at the last hundred years to see that history does indeed repeat itself (Fritz 1999:10).

### 2.1 Music, Dancing, Drugs and the "Underground": The Predecessors of Rave

***Northern Soul***

Although Britain is identified as the birthplace of "rave," the scene was born out of a tradition of underground subcultures whose music and unique style and philosophy of partying, influenced what was to later become the rave movement. While most music historians credit the roots of rave music to the subcultures of New York's "Disco," Chicago's "House," and Detroit's "Techno," the "Northern Soul" scene of the 1960s is an early prototypical example of what would eventually develop in rave culture almost thirty years later. According to Brewster and Broughton, Northern Soul was "a vitally important step in the creation of today's club culture and in the evolution of the DJ" (1999:77). Like the rave scene, the participants of the Northern Soul subculture were largely working-class youth who would travel to remote locations for a night of drug taking, all night dancing, and a sense of acceptance and community. Like raves, these parties were free of alcohol and the intense acrobatic style of dancing made amphetamines the substance of choice (McCall, 2001:22). These parties were less about visual and auditory effects, and more about tempo,

as songs had the basic requirement of being energetic and fast enough to keep up with the amphetamine driven pace of the dancers. Dancing became the means to "blow off steam" from the rigorous work week and, as for rave, the centrality of dance meant that comfort dictated the stylistic choices of participants. Polo shirts, comfortable shoes, and baggy pants though unfashionable at the time, were worn because of their practical value.

Northern Soul also influenced the development of DJ culture in Britain: the obsession for record collecting, the quest for obtaining rare albums, the value of exposing the audience to records they'd never heard before, and the development of a totally underground scene that operated independent of mainstream approval, all had its roots in this genre (Brewster and Broughton 1999:79). In contrast to Disco DJs who were using computer technology to mix records and create new sounds, Northern Soul DJs were more concerned with maintaining the "purity" of the genre by playing the classics of "American Soul," and Detroit and Chicago's "Motown." Since new records weren't being produced-this music being already considered outdated in the United States-the continuation of Northern Soul in the UK was very much dependant on DJs locating rare and obscure albums that had never been heard by their audiences (McCall 2001:23).[8] As a result, this was one of the first music scenes to place primacy on the DJ, as clubs would frequently advertise the DJs and the music they played on their posters. The record company's reliance on the DJ also had its roots in Northern Soul as many of the first records that appeared on the UK pop charts resulted from club exposure at Northern Soul parties (ibid 1999:77). Foreshadowing the

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8 Northern Soul's inability to come up with something innovative, and its heavy reliance on the old eventually lead to its extinction. The supply of never-before heard songs was limited since the music was dated and no longer being produced (McCall 2001:24).

fate of rave culture, a moral panic ensued, prompting the police to scrutinize and eventually shut down Northern Soul clubs in the UK.

### *Disco, House & Techno*

Before "Saturday Night Fever," and the "Beegees," disco was a revolutionary underground movement; it is credited for the DJ's "coming of age" (Brewster and Broughton 1999:127). The Disco era emerged out of New York's underground clubs frequented primarily by Blacks and gays, where these venues provided a sanctuary for society's ostracized. Such nostalgic remnants from the sixties as the themes of freedom, equality, love, and community, were renewed with the promise of minority liberation (ibid 1999:127). Built up frustration was released on the dance floor, and as Collin suggests, the nature of this extremely oppressed group created "a euphoria born of necessity":

> ...as black people, they were excluded from the economic and social benefits of mainstream America; as homosexuals, they were excluded from its moral universe; as black homosexuals, they were even prevented from expressing their identity within their own communities. This contributed to a powerful pent-up frustration which found its release in the clubs, the only place where they could truly be themselves and play out their desires without fear or inhibition (1997:17).

With the focus being the dance floor, it was during this era that singles were recorded specifically for dancing, and the challenge of maintaining a continuous beat inspired the turntabling techniques of mixing and beat matching. The blueprint for rave-style dancing was also laid out during this era; with the seamless transitions between tracks, dancing alone among a crowd became favoured over partnered dancing, since the removal of the pause between tracks gave little time to seek out a dance partner (McCall 2001:25). Since it was

illegal to serve alcohol in underground clubs, the quest for euphoria, combined with the demand for all night dancing, gave rise to non-alcoholic juice bars mixed with a variety of pharmacopoeia including MDMA (3-4 Methylenedioxymethamphetamine), PCP (Phencyclidine), LSD (Lysergic acid diethylamide), and amphetamines.

Disco became one of the first music genres whose aim was to directly target the body and DJs such as Larry Levan were noted for spending hours experimenting with sound frequencies and the position of speakers in the clubs where they performed. Heavy and continuous bass lines were tuned in such a way that they could be felt with the entire body, and even the lyrics reflected this body focus with such titles as "Release yourself" or "Let the body go!" (Poschardt 1995:114-115). As Disco turned mainstream with the making of "Saturday Night Fever," part of the Disco genre remained in the underground by evolving into "House," and New York DJs such as Frankie Knuckles transported the sounds of Disco into Chicago, the birthplace of "House" music. This music was not a radical departure from Disco and has been described as a "technologically advanced from of disco" (Poschardt 1995: 147). House clubs similarly retained Disco's enthusiasm for dancing as well as drugs. The spiritual aspects of raving and the reverence for the DJ were already present in these earlier genres as many participants regarded these venues as places for worship. Religious motifs were evident in the lyrics of House music and some have described the genre as secularized Gospel music (Poschardt 1995:254). One infamous Disco club called the "Sanctuary" was located in an old German Baptist Church where the DJ and his decks were located at the altar, and drinks were served from chalices. While House music has influenced many of the more recent electronic music genres such as Trance, Fikentscher

notes that in North America, House continues to flourish, remaining for the most part in the urban underground, with followers continuing to be predominantly non-Caucasian and gay (2000:78). House music also has a strong international presence, particularly amongst the gay community. The Greek island of Mykonos for example, is widely known for its gay nightlife and beach parties where the island regularly hosts parties featuring international House DJs.

At the same time as House was taking off in Chicago, another style of electronic music was developing in Detroit's underground Black community called "Techno." Renowned DJ/artists Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunders are considered the forefathers of Detroit Techno. Inspired by European synth-pop bands like Kraftwerk, Techno displayed sounds that have been described as futuristic. Repetitive and lacking lyrics, the hypnotic quality of Techno laid down the blueprint for rave music and the more recent rave genres such as Trance.

### *Acid House*

In the mid 1980's House and Techno were transported to the UK by London DJs who had an enthusiasm for the music. As London DJs and vacationers traveled to the famous party destination of Ibiza, an island located off the coast of Spain, the benefits of combining music with MDMA were discovered, and this was brought back to England. In an effort to recreate the holiday like atmosphere of Ibiza, Danny Rampling returned to London and opened the famous after-hours club "Shoom" in 1987. Like their predecessors, these clubs emerged during a time of upheaval and economic uncertainty in Britain and this laid down

the groundwork for the kind of hedonistic weekend escape referred to as the Acid House movement. Fueled by MDMA and the sound of Chicago House and Detroit Techno, and with its venues moved out of the clubs and into outdoor and illegal spaces, Acid House gradually became known as rave.

While rave culture has had many sources, there are common themes that link all of these subcultural threads together: the context of oppression out of which they emerged, the centrality of dance and drug use as a vehicle of pleasure, self expression and stress reduction, the notion of the underground as a safe haven for community and acceptance, and above all, the use of technology as the catalyst. As Reynolds points out, the underlying question regarding rave music is not "what the music 'means' but how it works" (1998:9). Whereas music genres such as rock are concerned with *relating* an experience, rave music "constructs an experience" (ibid; see Fritz 1999:79). This experience is a multi-sensory encounter, one that has been made possible due to the gradual advancement of computer and sound technology. These advancements have not only revolutionized and altered the way music is created, but they have also radically changed the way people listen to and experience music (Prendergast 2000: 367).

## 2.2 The Globalization of Rave Culture

By the late 1980's, rave had become well established in the UK, and when British authorities were making it increasingly difficult for promoters to hold events, a group of disheartened individuals who wanted to replicate what they had experienced in England

transplanted the subculture to North America in 1992 (Silcott 1999:12).[9] In a time of rapid proliferation and progress of communication technology and increased individual mobility, the technologically oriented nature of the music, and the computer adeptness of participants, have made the rave scene very responsive to the globalization process. The predominantly rhythmic nature of the music, the ability to sample and exchange music from the Internet, and the appearance of website and chat room communities devoted to rave music and culture, have fostered the development of a global scene where linguistic and geographical boundaries have been dismantled. Techno music is often referred to as "the sound of one world shrinking," and in *Rave Culture* by Fritz (1999), the rave phenomenon is described as "by far the most international cultural movement of this century"(1999:263). Rave events can be found in every continent and the burgeoning community of international travelers who orient their destinations around rave parties are supporting a growing tourist industry.[10] Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) anthropological study of rave culture further supports the treatment of rave as a global phenomenon as the study revealed a consistent set of themes found cross-culturally associated with the rave experience.[11] At the same time however, the authors caution against the tendency to portray rave culture as homogeneous recognizing that "raves are characterized by the tension between their expression at localized, socio-cultural particularistic levels, and within larger cultural globalizing tendencies" (2003:90; see also

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9 By 1994 the Criminal Justice act in Britain made it an offence to prepare, host, wait for, and attend a rave event (see Critcher 2000: 150-151).

10 Fritz cites 82 countries where rave culture is "alive and well" (1992:236-252) and this number is undoubtedly growing.

11 The seven central themes that emerged were: connectedness, embodiment, altered states of consciousness, spirituality, personal transformation, utopian models of society, and neotribalism.

Weber 1999:333). This process is not unique to the rave scene; in addressing the implications for religion in a globalizing world, Beyer points out that this change in context does not necessarily result in the move toward a single homogeneous culture, but rather, a situation is created wherein cultures are forced to respond to globalization, but separate identities can still be maintained through this course of transformation (1994:9; see also Robertson 1992).

## 2.3 The Birth of "Trance"

As rave culture continues to spread around the world, each region is confronted with a unique set of circumstances which must be negotiated by promoters, DJs, and rave attendees. The extent of media coverage and the public's response to raves in various locales have promoted regional variations as rave scenes around the world have had to reinvent themselves in response to implemented bylaws restricting rave events. Raves originally maintained an underground status using the traditional secret location of events, and the discreet method of advertising through obscure event flyers or word of mouth (see chapter five). As Thornton delineates (1994), the underground is defined according to its opposing position in relation to the mainstream; for its members, a subculture's authenticity increases as the gap between the underground and the mainstream expands. For an underground subculture, the media is a principal enemy as it is the media who "continually threaten to release their cultural knowledge to other social groups" (Thornton 1994: 178). According to Thornton (1995), the death of rave may very well be its own popularity. Yet,

increased media attention and the focus on MDMA[12] use at raves have resulted in two consistent outcomes: 1) the popularization or "mainstreaming" of raves and their subsequent commercialization, and; 2) the creation of a moral panic and the criminalization and/or regulation of rave events. The response from rave organizers has ranged from transplanting rave culture to countries such as Thailand where raves have yet to be criminalized or regulated, to the more popular solution of relocating into legitimate venues such as night-clubs. In all cases however, in an effort to maintain an "underground" and "authentic" sound, a fragmentation of a unified subculture has occurred giving rise to a number of distinct music genres and expressions of partying. The terms "Techno" or "Electronica" are now umbrella terms that refer to a number of music genres including Jungle, Trance,[13] Ambient, Drum n' Bass, Gabba, Terrorcore, Industrial, Hardcore, Happy Hardcore, and Breakbeat to name a few. Included among these, is the Psy (Psychoactive/Psychedelic)or Goa Trance tradition. It is especially within this particular genre of rave music that the term "technoshaman" is most often applied in reference to the DJ, and nowhere are symbols of spirituality, and references to the DJ as a "technoshaman" or guru, more apparent than at Psytrance raves.

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12 Ecstasy, E, and XTC, are common street names for MDMA. Generally Ecstasy and MDMA are used interchangeably to refer to the same drug, however my informants in Quebec made a distinction between the two. MDMA referred to the drug in its pure form which is normally processed as a capsule, whereas Ecstasy or 'E', referred to MDMA that was cut with amphetamine. Amongst this group of informants, 'E' seemed to be preferred over MDMA.

13 To distinguish the music genre from the state of consciousness, when referring to the music, "Trance" will appear capitalized.

Trance is a hybrid of Techno, Ambient[14] and House (Prendergast 2000:460). Like Techno the music is grounded on repetition, and the continuous four on four meter. The experimental or "psychedelic" qualities of the music are reflective of Ambient, and the energetic tension and release aspect of the music, and the strategic incorporation of positive lyrics are reminiscent of House. Psy or Goa Trance refers to a sub genre of Trance that originated on the shores of the western coastline of southern India known as Goa. Although Trance is a fairly recent offspring in the history of electronic music, as well as one of the most popular classifications of rave music today, its origins precede the rave movement.

While the history of rave and club cultures have been well documented (see Colin 1997; Fritz 1999; Reynolds 1999; Silcott 1999; Garratt 1998), a recorded history of the Psytrance tradition is limited. The earliest beach parties of Goa seem to be associated with the hippies that descended there in the 1960s, with spirituality and the legalization of hashish constituting the general poles of attraction (Cole and Hannan 1997). Before the advent of synthesizers, DAT machines, and Techno music, the core elements of what was to become "rave" style events were already evident in Goa. The use of psychedelic drugs combined with music, dancing, and all night parties, made Goa an ideal location for the birth of Psytrance raves. The "technoshaman" most often associated with Trance music is DJ "Goa Gil," one of the key pioneers and forefathers of this genre. Arriving in Goa from San Francisco in 1970, Goa Gil began DJ'ing almost immediately. When electronic music began to make an appearance in Europe, he returned to the West in the early eighties to

[14] Ambient is a form of electronic music that is characterized by its slow relaxing tempo and its gentle, melodic structure. Ambient is normally played in the "chill-out" areas at raves where individuals can go for a massage, rest, and relax. Ravers will also listen to Ambient upon returning from an event.

sample the developing new sounds. Upon returning to India, Goa Gil and his friends accommodated this new music to fit their own vision, thus laying down the foundation for what was to later become Psytrance music:

> But in those days we collected even from Hi NRG, future dance, also stuff like Depeche Mode, New Order, etc., anything that had some good synth & drum machine parts, but we would cut out the singing, take the good parts, and put the tracks back together repeating the different instrumental parts in different sequences to make our own instrumental "Goa" mix that would fit for our party concept and what we were trying to say and do with the music.[15]

Part of what distinguishes Psytrance music from other electronic music genres is its international character (see Guin 2000; Cole and Hannan 1997). Goa has housed DJs and party-goers from all over the world where the exchange of music inspired from a variety of cultural traditions has been central to the genre's development:

> ...the freaks and the hippies used to collect the most mind-boggling psychedelic dance music they could find and bring it to India and play it at these parties, and we used to exchange this music...It was very obscure and it was very hard to get your hands on. You were a real connoisseur or collector, and Goa was kind of the fraternity of obscure, weird psychedelic music collectors getting together, getting stoned, and getting off on the music: and sharing each other's music, exchanging it, copying it, and then making parties out of it (DJ Ray Castle, cited in Cole and Hannan 1997b).

According to Ray Castle, it is the international nature of the scene which has "flushed out narrow parochial attitudes and tastes" (ENRG and Castle 2001).[16]

Also unique to Psytrance culture is the presence of spirituality that has been

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15 http://www.goagil.com/goatranceinterview.html [date accessed 2001-11-01]

16 It should be noted that some have argued the classless, multi-cultural and international attributes of the culture to be more of an ideal than a reality. Chan points out that Psytrance music producers are "overwhelmingly White, well-educated and middle-class," and the local Goan population is involved "only on the periphery of the parties as either the police trying to shut them down or accepting bribes, or as marginal 'exotica'" (1998:2). Similarly, Guin (2000) notes the presence of an underlying colonial attitude in Goa pointing out that there is a definite "gap between us and them, the have's and the have nots" (2000). Saldanha remarks that in Goa, there is a strong resentment among tourists toward Indians on the dance floor (2002:49).

embedded in Goa parties from the start. Most Goa parties and music tracks[17] conform to the storyline of transformation and the movement from the darkness to the light (Guin 2000; Cole and Hannon 1997). For Goa Gil, Trance music is about the revival of ancient and unconscious tribal rituals, and this entails a psychological journey of transformation where the catalysts are music and dance: "We are using Trance music and the Trance Dance Experience to set off a chain reaction in consciousness."[18] It is not surprising that described as "Redefining the ancient tribal ritual for the 21st Century," the DJ as "shaman" is a recurring metaphor associated with Trance music in particular.

As the birth place of Trance music, Goa has become the "Mecca" of Techno music fans and in the early 1990s, the region witnessed an explosion of pilgrims who traveled to Goa each year for all night parties. In fact by 1997, the number of tourists in Goa during the winter months outnumbered the number of Goans (Saldanha 2002:45). As in other party locations however, a crack down by local authorities in Goa has resulted in a significant decline in such events. Conforming to Thornton's profile of the fate of many subcultures, DJ Ray Castle attributes the deterioration of the scene to its popularization:

> After 1989, the party season in India has been intermittent, because of politics, especially related to drugs and the growing popularity of the scene. This once, secret, *dance-dharma-zone*, became much publicised and the parties more difficult to make and less magical...With its present commercial tourist, treadmill, commodification, and the attention focused on it, via this music fashion, it's now been tamed into a kind of clubby Ibiza, and has lost its raw, out-there, wildness, which the freaks gave it (ENRG and Castle 2001:166).

The 1991/1992 season has been reported by DJs and party-goers as the last important year of

[17] In reference to musical selections, ravers prefer to use the term "track" instead of "song."

[18] http://www.goagil.com/goatranceinterview.html [date accessed 2001-11-01]

events in Goa (Cole and Hannan 1997). In an effort to stop raves and destroy the image of Goa being synonymous with drug use and parties, India's criminal justice system intervened in November 2000 by banning the playing of outdoor music over 45 decibels. Further attempts to cripple the rave scene have involved court orders banning loud music between 10:00 pm and 7:00 am. Since all parties after 10:00 pm are illegal, police and judiciaries are regularly bribed to allow the parties to continue. According to Saldanha, the Goa Trance scene is sustained by "dirty politics at levels unfathomable for most attending the actual parties" (2002:48). In many ways these recent events have made Goa more of a myth than a Mecca as party-goers often long for the "good old days" before the scene became tainted by commercialization and politics.

## 2.4 The Spread of Goa Trance to other Locations

As a result of the music's popularity, in addition to the legal difficulties encountered by promoters to host parties in Goa, the scene spread globally in the 1990s. Because the DJs and party attendees were from international locations in the first place, re-establishing the scene in other countries was an effortless process. The relocation of Trance music has been so successful in fact, that many subcultural insiders prefer to use the term "Psychedelic Trance" over the term "Goa Trance" because the majority of the music is now being made outside of Goa in such regions as the UK, Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada and the US. Since Trance parties began on the beaches of Goa, the scene has tended to gravitate toward and flourish in regions that can accommodate an outdoor event. Coastal subtropical regions such as Australia, Thailand, Greece, and Southern California have become the new centers for

Psytrance events, yet regions such as Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Montreal (Canada) have also cultivated active scenes with outdoor and indoor venues.

# CHAPTER THREE

## A Review of the Literature: From the Meaningless to the Meaningful

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> Much of the academic discourse on raves focuses on the rave as a form of escape from the social order. Writers who support this position argue from a "neoconservative" postmodern perspective which emphasizes the prominence of nostalgia and meaninglessness in modern amusements. Though I find this "rave-as-empty-joy-of-disappearance" thesis both plausible and informative, it is incomplete because it ignores the poignant and meaningful spiritual experiences that ravers say they get from raves (Hutson 1999:54).

Accompanying the proliferation of rave culture has been the appearance of a number of popular and academic sources on rave and club culture. A growing body of work has emerged mainly in the fields of cultural studies, the sociology of moral panic, and the medical and health sciences. The following chapter will examine the existing literature on raves and the DJ's position within electronic music culture. These textual "armchair " orientations have dominated the scholarly literature, consequently what ravers consider to be the most central aspect of raving- the *experience*- is overlooked by most authors.

### 3.1 The Cultural Studies Perspective

With an early preoccupation in youth identity, style, and resistance, and a long-standing tradition of researching the youth subcultures of gangs, mods, punks, and skinheads, cultural studies scholars were the first to examine club and rave culture from an academic perspective. The discourse on raves from this field has tended to center around the dominant themes of rave as a ritual of resistance, rave as an outlet for hedonistic escape and postmodern disappearance, and the accumulation of subcultural capital from the

consumption of rave related commodities. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) founded in 1964 and based at the University of Birmingham, played a significant role in introducing young people as valid subjects of research (Malbon 1999:15). The CCCS located a number of youth cultures as manifestations of resistance and the rave movement was no exception. Akin to the countercultural movements preceding it, many commentators have approached rave and club culture as a rejection of the dominant ideals of a capitalist society (see Russell 1993; Tagg 1994; Tomlinson 1998; Luckman 1998). Scholars from the resistance perspective regard such markers as the philosophy of rave expressed in the mantra PLUR,[19] the notion that all individuals are welcome and accepted at events, and the fashion policy of "anything-goes," as a rejection of the established conventions of status, hierarchy, and authority of the parent culture. Tagg suggests that rave music's departure from the conventional figure/ground relationship (i.e. vocals/accompaniment, melody/harmony), and its non-individualist quality may correspond to a rejection of capitalism and the "degenerate, hegemonic notions of the individual" (1994:219). However, with the exception of the post-rave "doof" or "DiY" (Do it Yourself) phenomenon that has recently emerged in Britain, Australia, and even in Canada (see McCay 1998; Jordon 2001; St John 2001a;2001b),[20] rave culture though it may be covertly rejecting

[19] The acronym PLUR (Peace Love Unity and Respect) has been described by Fritz as the philosophical foundation of the rave movement (1999:204). Although some of my informants argued that the days of PLUR are over, the acronym can be seen on banners at events, and I have observed ravers wearing t-shirts and buttons containing the logo. Some individuals continue to sign off their emails with PLUR, which suggests that some ravers continue to promote and subscribe to it.

[20] Classified as a post-rave development, "doof" culture as it is commonly referred to in Australia, is politically active and aware. Doof parties frequently appear in the form of organized political protests that are accompanied by the rhythm of Techno music. A movement associated with "DiY" culture is the "Reclaim the Streets" (RTS) movement (see Luckman 2001). This refers to carnival type protests that take place in the streets. As described by St John, "DiY activities are

the values of the dominant society has yet to advance a concrete alternative. It has also lacked the politically active presence that has been so apparent with other countercultural groups such as the hippies of the 1960s.[21] The term "countercultural" in reference to raves is also questionable as the commercialization of the rave scene has made the dichotomy between the mainstream and the underground less apparent (see Hutson 1999; Thornton 1994). In his analysis of the Canadian rave scene, Wilson (2002) recommends that the concept of resistance should be reconsidered in reference to rave culture. Although resistance in the classical form as exemplified by punks, mods, and skinheads has not been apparent in rave culture, he argues that ravers are engaging in "alternative methods of empowerment/resistance" (2002:381). He proposes five interpretations of resistance that incorporate a continuum from the passive "weekend escape" view, to the active intentional forms of resistance. The five forms of resistance as outlined by Wilson are: (1) purposeful-tactical resistance; (2) reactive-adaptive resistance; (3) trivial resistance; (4) self-aware and oblivious non-resistance, and (5) reproduction of the dominant culture (see Wilson 2002:399-407). Similarly, Nolan offers an alternative stance on resistance in suggesting that the disappearance of self is exemplary of a politic where resistance is achieved "not through

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consciously engaged in attempts to fuse pleasure with politics through the organisation of events in which social criticism is combined with cultural creativity in what's both a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance" (2001a:128-229). In Canada the annual "Om Summer Solstice Festival" is an example of the DiY movement. While evening events are dominated by music and dancing, daytime activities focus on political and spiritual awareness. At the festival I attended, workshops covered such topics as anarchism, reclaiming the streets, DiY publishing, anti-oppression, renewable energy and climate change, deep ecology, forest defence, video activism, vegetarianism and veganism, yoga, meditation, Qigong, performance arts and crafts.

21 The relationship between music and psychoactive experimentation and the similarities in this regard between rave culture and the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s has been noted (McCall 2001:110-111; Hutson 1999; Reynolds 1999:239; Silcott 1999:58-59; Fritz 1999:138-139; Collin 1977:190-197; Russell 1993).

spectacle but invisibility" (1998:7). Becker and Woebs suggest that the so called "escapism" of rave becomes a political statement "in that it intentionally removes itself from the language of the media as a reaction to political and social grievances" (1999:64).

It is a given in post-cultural studies that the anonymous, disengaged and non-referential qualities of rave have made the culture one of the best expressions of the postmodern subject. In contrast to this resistance perspective, other scholars (see Reynolds 1998; Melechi 1993; Rietveld 1993) view rave as a culture void of meaning and content. According to Reynolds, "rave culture has never really been about altering reality, merely exempting yourself from it for a while" (1998:90; see also Rietveld 1993:66). For these scholars, this notion of disappearance and escape informs interpretations of rave locations, its music, style of dance, fashion, and the popularity of MDMA. For Hutson (1999:57) and Proulx (2001:102-103), the remote locations which take place outside the normal waking hours create a disappearance of space and time; similarly Rietveld (1993:64) and Melechi (1993: 32-33) consider the glitzy surfaces and holiday atmosphere of events as supporting an ideal climate for losing oneself in a world driven by fantasy and pleasure. The sampling, splicing, and blending together of fragments in terms of music production, and the anonymous nature of the music's creators, are also indicative, according to Proulx (2001) and Melechi (1993), of disappearance as the music lacks a point of reference. Proulx highlights Techno music as the principal feature of the rave; the cyclical, repetitive, and pulsating qualities of the music absorb the subjects allowing participants to forget time and move into the mythical state of what she calls "ecstasy" (2001:103-104). For Tagg, this loss of subjectivity has also been associated with the "antiindividualist" style of dancing

(1994:218), however Hutson notes that this is rarely observed at raves (1999:55). My own observations at events would suggest that some ravers do attract attention by fellow dancers through their colourful choice of dress and accessorization. It is not uncommon to observe a circle of spectators gathered around a proficient dancer, or an individual skilfully manipulating glow-sticks attached to a string. The raver's choice of dress has also been interpreted according to the theme of escapism. Tomlinson sees rave as a culture of childhood whose theme of psychological regression is consciously promoted by its members (1998:200). For her, the asexual nature of baggy clothing, and such accessories as beaded jewellery, glow-sticks,[22] pacifiers,[23] stuffed animals, and kiddy backpacks denote a withdrawal from the responsibilities and pressures of adulthood. These stylistic choices have been interpreted by McRobbie as a "culture of avoidance" in response to the AIDS crisis of the 1990s (1994:423-426). MDMA's effect of arrested orgasm and the empathogenic[24] quality that it evokes are also viewed as a retreat into childhood. Rietveld discusses how the use of MDMA "makes one 'return' to a stage in psychological development which is before

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22 The Glow-stick is a rave accessory that has become a symbol of the whole culture. This is evinced by the fact that glow-sticks are forbidden in some school dances because of the connection to raving. Approximately six centimetres in length, these tubular sticks glow in the dark when they are initially bent. Ravers manipulate these sticks while they dance with the trail of light creating an impressive visual display. Glow-sticks can be used to give a "light show" by twirling or spinning these objects in front of a persons's visual field. This display is enhanced by the effects of MDMA and other psychoactive drugs. Proficient users will often attach several glow-sticks to strings and twirl them around in the air.

23 Some ravers suck and chew on pacifiers to alleviate MDMA's negative side effect of bruxism and jaw tension. At the same time, the pacifier has transcended its functional element to become a symbol of the culture, particularly among the "hardcore" and "happy hardcore" sub-scenes. I observed ravers sucking on pacifiers at pre-parties before they had even taken MDMA or felt its effects.

24 A term coined by Ralph Metzner, *empathogen* refers to the unique effects evoked by MDMA and its related class of drugs. Such characteristics include a heightened sense of empathy, interpersonal communication, sympathy, and emotional openness (see Tramacchi 2000:211; Metzner and Adamson 2001:182; Eisner 1994:33-50; Cohen 1998:17).

the acquisition of language, thereby undoing the self that is constituted in and by language and in and by its constructed discourse" (1993:65). For Proulx, the preoccupation and quest for the "ecstatic" state is an agent through which the participants can temporarily escape mundane time (2001:103).

Following the postmodern theme of the loss of the subject, some scholars have emphasized the anonymity of music producers, contrasting the faceless DJ with the star status and spotlight focus attributed to live performance artists. For these scholars rave DJs "are rarely subjectified so eminently: there is no stage, the lights do not focus on anything in particular, and the dancers supposedly do not face the DJ" (Hutson 1999:57). Yet, as Hutson notes, this lack of individuality cannot be so easily applied to the DJ, particularly DJs of Trance music. Many rave DJs, much like rock stars, have touring schedules that span the globe and rave promoters know that the DJ's prominence will determine ticket sales and prices and the overall success of the event. As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of facing in the direction of the DJ (see Hutson 1999:59), and the DJ booth being the visual focal point of the space would challenge the faceless quality of this "postmodern" subject. Also in contrast to the DJ as an unknown Thornton examines the hierarchies within club culture and characterizes the DJ as the "master of the scene," because of his mass accumulation of subcultural capital in addition to his role in defining and shaping it (1995:12). Thornton identifies subcultures as taste, authentic, or underground cultures which can be defined as the antithesis of the mainstream. Rather than view subcultures as existing in isolation, Thornton reveals the media's role in not only covering but also shaping the development of youth subcultures. She recognizes that media coverage often popularizes the underground, forcing

it to trickle up into the mainstream, subsequently causing a loss in authenticity which Thornton describes as the "subcultural kiss of death" (Thornton 1995:6). In the Netherlands for example, when Gabber[25] music and culture became commercially exploited due to its popular demand among adolescents, the media began to portray MDMA and Gabber dance events as positive and "cool." According to Verhagen et al., it was because of this shift from negative to positive media focus that the "gabber culture collapsed under the weight of its own immense success" (2000:163). Due to this constant tension, the DJ's role in locating new underground sounds that have yet to be marketed in mainstream clubs makes the DJ a "guarantor of subcultural authenticity" assigning him the status of an "exclusive owner with discerning taste" (Thornton 1995:60-61). Part of the DJ's task is to acquire white label singles,[26] the ultimate guarantor of underground status (Thornton 1994:179). Poschardt similarly locates the DJ at the top of the subcultural hierarchy being the one who "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" (1995:311; see also Smith and Maughan 1998:222-223). One of the four academic sources that focuses specifically on the DJ (see also Hutson 1999; Fikentscher 2000; Gerard 2004), Poschardt's *DJ Culture* (1995) looks at how the DJ has historically influenced the development of music, and in particular mainstream popular culture. Thornton and Poschardt's treatment of the DJ are valuable in pointing out the DJ's access to subcultural capital and his role as cultural broker; it must be noted however that they do not

[25] Gabber, also known as Gabba, and Hardcore is a subgenre of rave music that is characterized by its extremely rapid beat per minute range that can exceed 200. Compared to other electronic music genres such as House, Gabber also has a minimalist quality to it with a constant and hard 4/4 rhythm, and little melodic variation.

[26] This refers to limited edition singles that are distributed to DJs before retail copies are released. White labels are also highly sought after by collectors.

address the spiritual attributes of the DJ and how the DJ is experienced by participants.

## 3.2 The Sociology of Moral Panic

The fluid and illegal nature of rave venues, and in particular the hand and glove association between rave culture and illicit drug use have made the rave scene a classic example of moral panic as outlined by Cohen (1972; 1973). According to Cohen's model, the mass media sensationalizes and exaggerates rumours associated with a particular group of individuals who become identified as a threat to the moral fabric of the dominant society. Generating a moral panic these groups which he calls "folk devils" are then "manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people" who are expected to come up with solutions to deal with these antagonistic social groups (Cohen 1973:9). The tendency in Euro-American culture to devalue and fear altered states of consciousness, combined with the youth of their target group, provide the variables necessary to fuel a moral panic. According to Winkelman, the Salem witch trials, the classification of mystical states and ASC as pathological, and the war on drugs, are cultural manifestations of the western depreciation of ASC (2000:3). Other key ingredients for moral panic (which have also been linked to rave culture) are outlined by Henderson:

> ...moral panic involving a rogues gallery of 'deviant' sex, drugs and preying 'foreigners', a new youth cult involving a 'love' drug consumed in hedonistic environments would do very nicely as raw material (1997:78).

Raves have also been linked with irresponsible sexual behaviour and the association between sex and drug use has also been used by the media to portray female Ecstasy[27] users as passive

[27] To distinguish the drug from the state of consciousness, Ecstasy in reference to MDMA will be capitalized.

victims, vulnerable to the exploitation of men and sexual predators at raves (Hinchliff 2001:456). As Hopkins notes, these accounts are informed by limited outsider perspectives which focus on risk but fail to examine why young people are attracted to rave culture (1996:13).

McRobbie (1994), Thornton (1994; 1995), Critcher (2000), and Hier (2002) point out additional factors that are not addressed by Cohen. Hier suggests that liability and blame avoidance on the part of politicians can play a role in instigating a moral panic. Analyzing the events that took place in Toronto, Canada,[28] Hier argues that the mayor, police chief, and Ontario's Chief Coroner intentionally fueled the fears of citizens by characterizing ravers as vulnerable youth at risk, in an effort to distance the city from issues related to accountability (2002:37). What the city of Toronto failed to anticipate was the rave community's ability to use the media to express its opposing point of view which resulted in convincing city council to vote in favor of sanctioning raves on city property.[29] Cohen's model has also been criticized by Thornton and McRobbie for underestimating the "folk devils" ability to challenge society, in addition to overestimating the unanimity of media reaction (Critcher 2000:153). With the availability of affordable technology, youth subcultures now have the

[28] The death of a 21 year old male at a Toronto rave prompted Ontario's Chief Coroner to order an inquest into the MDMA related death. This resulted in an effort to consider having raves banned on city property (see Hier 2002).

[29] The main argument presented by the rave community centered around harm reduction. It was suggested that restricting raves would only drive them further into the underground, thus increasing the risk for participants. In the end city councillors and representatives of the rave community worked together and came up with 19 recommendations that formed the basis of a city bylaw requiring promoters to obtain permits and follow specified guidelines to hold legal raves. Viewing raves as a potential public health hazard, bylaws which limit legal raves to establishments meeting the outlined specifications for such factors as ventilation, emergency exits, and running water, are designed to safeguard ravers from the harmful effects of MDMA and other popular rave drugs. Other cities in Canada such as Ottawa, Vancouver, and Calgary, have implemented similar bylaws.

"means to defend themselves and to discuss the issue with a wider audience than themselves" (McRobbie 1994:159). This is often accomplished by using the media to inform the public of their own point of view. The Toronto example is a case in point on both accounts; not only did ravers dispute the rave ban, but the media in this instance served to reduce rather than amplify the moral panic.[30]

The perception of rave culture as threatening also shifts the notion of the disenfranchised marginal group of the oppressed, to a subculture that is actively shaping a space of creativity and power (Szostak-Pierce 1999:142). The fact that Techno artists can produce and distribute their music without the help of studios, managers, and record labels, the notion that anyone can organize an event, and the entire "Do It Yourself" (DiY) concept of Techno culture fosters the theme of empowerment that appears so prevalent in rave culture. Szostak-Pierce (1999) asserts that the coexistence of numerous fashion styles at raves such as the blending together of bought, reconstructed or homemade clothing, and the experimentation with traditional rules of fit ranging from tight to baggy clothing, create conditions of empowerment as individuals are free to express their own unique style. She also argues that a subculture's rejection of the mainstream and its disassociation of the conventional is a metaphor that releases a group "from the authoritative grips of commerce and media" (1999:142). The appropriation of power through subcultural style is argued by Szostak-Pierce to be one cultural indicator of social change (1990:141; see also McRobbie 1994).

[30] The process of regulating raves is a good example of what Foucault (1986) refers to as heterotopias-the creation of legitimized spaces reserved for deviant behaviour (Gibson 1999; see also St John 2001b).

## 3.3 The Medical Sciences

The growing number of publications on rave and dance culture from the medical sciences perspective may be a reflection of the moral panic and increased media focus on drug use at raves. This literature is primarily concerned with the escalating presence of drugs at events, the range and quantification of illicit substance use, the neurotoxic effects of MDMA, polydrug use at raves, and strategies for harm reduction (see Weir 2000; Kalant 2001; Parrott 2002; Measham et al. 1998; Pedersen and Skrondal 1999; van de Wijngaart et al. 1999; Lenton and Davidson 1999; Shewan et al. 2000; Boys et al. 1997; Forsyth et al. 1997; Brown et al. 1995; Topp et al. 1999; Forsyth 1996; Lenton et al. 1997; Power et al. 1996). With the exception of Weir (2000) these studies fail to examine the subcultural context in which these drugs are consumed, and ravers' attitudes and experiences with drugs are rarely solicited (except for Power et al. 1996; Shewan et al. 2000; Lenton and Davidson 1999; and Hinchliff 2001). As I have argued elsewhere (Takahashi 2004), the subjects sampled in these studies generally exhibit over-representation by habitual drug users, and the studies overlook the varying categories of rave participants such as occasional consumers and abstainers. Even though MDMA is frequently the focus of these studies, the numinous, empathogenic, and transformational qualities that the drug is known to elicit are rarely explored.

## 3.4 Raves as Meaningful: "The Consumption of Experience"

In an overview of the sociological studies that have examined the relationship between youth culture and popular music, Bennet remarks that in the early years, researchers

made little effort to "engage with the social actors at the centre of their work using ethnography or other qualitative fieldwork methods" (2002:452). Even after the ethnographic turn observed in the 1990s, Bennet notes that ethnographic studies such as Thornton's *Club Cultures*, ironically exclude the opinions and experiences of clubbers despite the author's painstaking efforts to obtain raw ethnographic data (2002:458). In contrast, Ben Malbon's *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality* (1999) departs from the postmodern hedonistic escape and meaningless simulacra approach, the methods of which exclude the very actors they are studying. For Malbon, germane to club culture is the experience one gets while attending such events. While countless scholars have addressed club and rave culture as practices of consumption, Malbon argues that the narrow and disembodied view which limits consumption to only those tangible objects, has neglected what he considers to be the central element to club culture: "experiential consuming." This refers to the memories and emotions that clubbers take home with them after a night out.

In Robin Sylvan's (2002) exploration of the religious dimensions of music in popular culture, the author concedes that in reference to popular music, "the key to unpacking its religious significance lies in understanding the intense experiential states which it engenders" (2002:80). Scott Hutson's work (1999; 2000) similarly prioritizes the consumption of experience and his interpretation of rave culture is informed by interviews with informants, and testimonials of the rave experience posted on the Internet by members of the subculture. For Hutson, the postmodern approach is inherently flawed because it fails to acknowledge meaning (2000:38). Through an examination of informant claims about raving, the physiological drivers at work in inducing altered states of consciousness, in

addition to the recurring symbols and metaphors that are manifested in rave culture. Hutson concludes that for many, raving is a spiritual practice wherein the symbolic processes embedded in the culture create appropriate frameworks for healing. Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) anthropological study of rave culture similarly proposes raving as a meaningful and spiritual experience for at least some participants, and the themes of connectedness, embodiment, personal transformation, creation of utopian social models, and societal revitalization that emerge from the study's data, are suggested to represent the core elements of new religious and revitalization movements (2003:103). Both Hutson and Takahashi and Olaveson call into question the so called faceless quality of the DJ, noting striking analogies between the role of the DJ in rave culture and that of the shaman in traditional cultures. However, in contrast to Hutson who claims the "DJ acts much like a shaman who, aided by key symbols, guides the ravers on an ecstatic journey to paradise-a presocial state of nondifferentiation and communitas" (1999:54), Takahashi and Olaveson are reluctant to equate Eliade's delineation of the "ecstatic state" or the "myth of eternal return" among shamanic traditions, to the "ecstatic" experience associated with raves. The association between Victor Turner's concept of "communitas" and the features of rave that mimic Turner's delineation of antistructure have been noted by several authors (see Malbon 1999:156; Hutson 2000: 42-43; 1999:66-67; St John 2001); given these circumstances the extensive reports of personal transformation are not surprising. However the precise nature of these states, how they are triggered, and the manner in which these experiences are integrated need to be further researched.

### 3.5 Popular Sources Versus Academic Sources: the Epistemological Gap

Articles and books written by ravers and members of the electronic music scene provide a striking contrast to the academic discourse on raves. Emic texts such as Simon Reynold's *Generation Ecstasy*, Tara McCall's *This is Not a Rave*, and Jimi Fritz's *Rave Culture,* are permeated with captions of ravers' personal remarks about the scene, images of event flyers, rave accessories, and rave parties. The intrinsic limitation of transposing a visceral experience to a text seems to be an underlying recognition amongst these authors, and the pictures and descriptive narratives almost serve as a means of compensating for the constraining nature of the written medium. As Canadian raver Jimi Fritz acknowledges in the introduction to his book, "If you want the real thing however, you will have to try it for yourself"(1999:8). In contrast, the issue of representation fails to concern most academic researchers; in particular, their studies of rave culture ignore the body and employ a textual approach. Even Landau who acknowledges that the overwhelming and ineffable quality of what ravers refer to as "ecstasy" doesn't negate its existence or worthiness for academic inquiry, nevertheless reduces this experience to a text:

> It must not be forgotten, though, that this 'reality' [ecstasy's] is ever and always 'fiction', a 'text' that comes about within a matrix of internal and external discourses inseparable from language, and thus, by extension, ideology, identity, and culture (2004:110).

According to Hutson, postmodern analyses are lacking in depth because "once the surfaces are interpreted as meaningless simulacra, postmodernists often stop interpreting" (1999:60). These analyses frequently exclude the voice of insiders from their inquiry and these accounts as Landau put it "are ultimately linguistic artifices incapable of grasping what they are attempting to describe-ecstasy being antithetical, after all, to language" (2004:122). Rietveld

also alludes to this epistemological gap when she says "participants of any rave event do not seem to be able to describe their experience as anything else than, 'it was wild,' 'absolutely unbelievable, there wasn't anything like it,' 'great,' 'mental' or 'this is not dancing, this is a religion'" (1993:63). It will be seen later that participants can be much more articulate but only under certain conditions. These approaches also tend to overlook the centrality of the experience that is consumed and instead focus on the consumption of commodities (see Malbon 1999), and rarely are these commentaries informed by rigorous ethnographic fieldwork. Even among the works of the few who acknowledge spending time in the field, it is ironically a common practice to omit the views of the individuals the ethnographers spent so much time with. For example, D'Andrea's article on transnational networks of what he coins "alternative lifestyles in utopian spaces" (2004), neglects to include the voice of the "other" in spite of the fact that his article is based on a four year ethnographic study of Techno and New Age experiences of individuals circulating between Ibiza and Goa. Even Sarah Thornton whose ethnographic approach included participant observation at over two hundred discos, clubs, and raves, in addition to the consumption of MDMA "in the name of thorough research," has been criticized by Malbon for leaving out what is of prime importance for the people who actually attend these events: the "experience of clubbing itself" (1999:17). The underlying issue being circumvented is the problem of transposition which refers to the "discrepancy between direct experience and experience communicated vicariously to others using some form of symbolic expression like language, pictures, or mime" (Laughlin 1990:22). Among the exceptions such as Malbon, the issue of transposition is a constant challenge for the researcher. This sentiment is expressed in the

preface of Ben Malbon's *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality*:

> How can words-simple, linear words on a page-evoke this delirious maelstrom of movement and elation? Again and again I arrive at this point in the 'The night out' and I simply cannot describe it any further. How can I convey the deep, thundering bass which is felt more than heard?...The sensation of dancing, of moving without thought, of moving before thought, of just letting go, letting it all out? Words fail me; words become redundant and unnecessary, words become pointless (1999:xii-xiii).

Once the issue of transposition is recognized, rather than avoid the issue of direct experience altogether, the solution according to Laughlin is twofold: "(1) broaden the range of experience of anthropological fieldworkers as much as possible, and (2) become as clever as possible when creating modes of symbolic expression of experience" (1988:23). In short, any investigation into the deep structures and inherent meanings of rave culture requires participant observation using an experiential/transpersonal approach. This methodology and its implications will be articulated in the proceeding chapter.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Methodology

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> A good DJ isn't just stringing records together, he's controlling the relationship between some music and hundreds of people. That's why he needs to see them. That's why it couldn't be a tape. That's why it's a live performance. That's why it's a creative act. Music is a really powerful force, a hotline to people's emotions, and what a DJ does is use this force constructively to generate enjoyment. Obviously his medium is music, but that's just a means to an end. In a very real sense his primary medium is emotion-the DJ plays the feelings of a roomful of people.
>
> (Brewster and Broughton 1999:11)

As the above quotation implies, and as any raver will attest to, the DJ has the power to invoke a full range of emotions among participants at an event. The DJ is the master of ceremony, guiding and shaping the dancers' experience through his ability to intuit the desires of the crowd. The dancers play their role as active participants in the proceedings. More than spectators, the dancers must somehow communicate with the DJ as a group so he may guide them through their "ecstatic journey." Paralleling the assumed bond between a shaman and the community he/she serves, the relationship between the DJ and his dancers at least for the duration of the DJ's set, is described by ravers as an intimate one. This relationship however, is not established through the traditional means of verbal communication. Instead, this dialogue takes place through the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile sensations of the multi-sensorial rave experience. To understand the DJ's role as "technoshaman," one has to investigate that which the DJ directs, the heart of the rave experience. As it was intimated in the previous chapter, this investigation requires an

approach that is cognizant of the textual and visual biases of western epistemology. The developing field of the anthropology of the senses attempts to do just that through its concern with "embodied" learning or bodily ways of knowing (see Classen 1997; Howes 1991; Rasmussen 1999; Stoller 1984, 1989a, 1997; Stanton 2000). Recognizing that we experience our bodies and the world around us through our senses, the anthropology of the senses strives to go beyond just the visual to reorient the focus to include smell, taste, touch, and sound as important vehicles in the transmission of culture. The inclusion of what Stoller calls the "sensuous body" is particularly relevant to the study of the rave phenomenon, as the medium through which the DJ serves and communicates with his fans is devoid of text. The inadequacy of a textual approach to a predominantly aural culture is addressed by Reynolds in the following terms:

> Devoid of text, dance music and ambient are better understood through metaphors from the visual arts: "the soundscape" "aural decor," "a soundtrack for an imaginary movie," "audio-sculpture." But these metaphors aren't really satisfactory either, since they tend toward the static...Dance tracks are less about"communication" in the rock sense and more like engines for "the programming of sensations" (1999:51-52).

Descriptions of the rave environment by insiders tend to emphasize the multi-sensory and visceral aspect of raving and accounts of the rave experience range from trance, bliss and ecstatic states of consciousness, to out-of-body experiences, universal feelings of oneness, transcendental states, and unions with god(s) and the cosmic universe. Ravers also emphasize that electronic music and the experience of raving challenges individuals to develop new listening skills, explore new modes of perception, and entertain unconventional understandings of the body and of pleasure (see Takahashi forthcoming; Fritz 1999:76-79; Hopkins 1996: 13). As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, despite these testimonials,

the existing literature on rave and dance culture has largely ignored these extraordinary encounters and has additionally misunderstood or overlooked the mastery of the DJ in shaping these experiences. This oversight can be attributed in part to the postmodern preoccupation with "text" and a concomitant neglect of the sensory dimension.

Simply being "aware" of the existence of these sensory models as key factors in the organization of experience is a good start, however this is not enough. Any exploration of rave and dance culture must also include learning how to attend to and use these sensory inputs for oneself in the rave environment, in an effort to enter the world of the "raver" and try to approximate that experience to as close a degree as possible (see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:87). This requires an experiential methodology, an approach that is particularly crucial in a context where altered states of consciousness are actively sought out by its members and the "ecstatic experience" for a number of individuals represents the climax and focal point of the event. Although the anthropology of the senses and the anthropology of experience currently exist as two separate sub-fields, the ethnographic context (i.e. ritual) whereupon these methodologies are appropriate and necessary is shared. Additionally, the commitment to take one's informants seriously, to treat consciousness and the structuring of experience from a non-dualistic perspective, to uncover one's personal biases and perceptual limitations in the field, and the responsibility to undergo some degree of personal training are also common to both sub-disciplines. Whereas sensorial anthropology tends to overlook the role of psychoactives in heightening the senses, experiential anthropology recognizes that the knowledge and perceptual systems of many cultures are informed by states of consciousness other than the waking phase. It is this

awareness that fuels the tremendous emphasis placed on the ethnographer's total participation, even to the extent of truly "going native" (see Lindquist 1995; Turner 1993). Sensorial anthropology in turn offers insights where the experiential method falls short, in providing practical concrete guidelines and research strategies that can be employed in contexts that prioritize senses other than vision. A dialogue between these sub-fields is valuable as they are complementary to each other and as such, both have informed my research.

## 4.1 Fieldwork

This research was conducted in two phases. The first part was an exploratory analysis of the rave experience and this was a collaborative effort conducted with another graduate student, Tim Olaveson (for the results of that study see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). Based upon eight months of fieldwork, our research was carried out in the metropolitan centers in southern and eastern Ontario and Quebec, including surrounding rural areas. The anthropological method of participant observation was conducted at 16 events and recognizing the blurring of boundaries between after hours night clubs and raves, we attended both types of venues as both are identified with rave culture (see Wilson 2002:384; Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:76). A total of 121 surveys were distributed to participants through contacts made at raves and through the snowball sampling method. The survey consisted of 20 questions, many of them open-ended and allowing for elaboration by the respondent. The survey questions concentrated around 5 primary themes: the demographics of the subject's experiences at raves and clubs; the content of the respondent's

experience; the music; psychoactive substance use; and the role and nature of the DJ. A content analysis of rave experiences was also performed on 84 personal accounts posted on the Internet by rave participants. The statistical analyses and results of this study informed the second phase of this research which involved an in-depth examination of the DJ. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the results of the collaborative study for relevant quantitative data.

My analysis of the DJ's position in rave culture is based upon 42 months of fieldwork which began in September 2000. The anthropological method of participant observation was conducted at 35 events and this included both night clubs and raves. For the most part, participants remain for more extended periods at raves than in clubs, thus observations at raves generally took place between 11:00 pm and 8:00 am. Observations at after-hours clubs took place during the peak hours of these events ranging between 12:00 am and 5:00 am. Recognizing the importance of pre- and post-rave activities in the culture, I also attended pre-parties and after-parties and this resulted in up to 36 hours of observation per event. In addition to clubs and raves, a three-day outdoor music festival was also attended and this resulted in over 50 hours of observation.

## 4.2 The Interview Method

The semi-structured interview provided the primary source of data for this research. Interviews were conducted between April 2002 and March 2004. Subjects were recruited at rave events and Internet chat rooms, however snowball sampling became a key method of recruiting informants due to the underground and closed nature of the rave scene. Of the

twenty-seven interviewees, ten were acquired using this technique, four were recruited online, and thirteen subjects were recruited at rave events. Interviews were conducted at coffee shops, restaurants, raves, pre-parties and after-parties. The interviews averaged between 1-2 hours and informants who were particularly knowledgeable about the culture were interviewed a second time. Subjects were asked to read and sign a consent form which explained the nature of the research, and how anonymity would be ensured (see Appendix B). Questioning that took place at raves as well as pre- and after-parties were pre-arranged and consent forms were signed before the event. Due to the distracting, and noisy atmosphere of raves, the informal interview method was employed at raves where fieldnotes were taken and references to interviews conducted using this method are referred to in the thesis as "fn." Un-structured interviews took place outside the rave locale and these sessions were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Permission was always obtained in using a recording device, and it was explained to informants at the start of the interview that they could turn the tape-recorder off at any time during the interview. Transcripts from these interviews are referenced according to the informant's pseudonym, the interview date, and the transcript's page number. In considering the informal, unstructured, and impromptu style of rave events, the informal and versatile nature of the unstructured interview was found to be the most appropriate method for this field setting. The quality of spontaneity is highly valued and this informs the lifestyle adopted by many ravers (see chapter nine). I found that most individuals avoided planning social engagements in advance, making the formality of the structured interview and the accompanying interview schedule unsuitable. The casual and versatile nature of the unstructured interview that took place in a natural or "raver-

appropriate" environment was conducive to establishing rapport with informants and putting them at ease (see also Bernard 1988:209). This was particularly helpful in probing some of the more sensitive topics of rave culture such as illicit drug use, sexuality, altered states of consciousness, and spirituality.

### 4.3 Research Subjects

A total of 27 individuals between the ages of 18 and 37 were interviewed, 19 of whom were male, resulting in a 70/30 male/female ratio. The over-representation of males reflects the context of electronic music culture as a predominantly male scene. Weber's (1999) study of ravers in the Greater Toronto Area resulted in a gender ratio of 60/40 male/female. Similarly, the gender split of over 10,000 members of a rave website is reported at 66 male/34 female split.[31] The predominance of males has been attributed to the harsh and physically demanding atmosphere of rave environments. The long hours, fast music, and illicit drug use are features that tend to deter women, particularly in such scenes as Gabba and hardcore (see Verhagen et al. 2000). Verhagen et al., note for example, that the Gabba scene in the Netherlands started out as exclusively male, and even after it infiltrated the mainstream, males continued to outnumber females at a ratio of five to one (2000:150). As already mentioned, the gender gap is even more pronounced at the level of music production: of the events that I attended, less than 1% of the DJs were female. While women are increasingly gaining access to the music industry, this process has been slow as women were originally restricted from DJ'ing roles due to the roots of rave and dance culture

[31] http//:www.technoxvi.com [date accessed 2001-01-23]

in the gay male club scene (Brewster and Broughton 1999:377). It wasn't until the Acid House movement that women began to gain entry into the business side of electronic music culture.

Challenging the media stereotype that profiles the typical raver as a young adolescent, 62% of survey respondents were over the age of twenty, and the median age for interviewees, was 24.7 with the mode being 23. Weber (1999) notes a median age of 22, and the rave website referred to previously cites an average age of 21.6. Seymour and Smith (1998) cite 21-35 as the average range in age of rave attendees. The cost, hours, and logistics of raving make it more accessible to the post-secondary age bracket. Raving is an expensive pastime; ticket prices for large-scale events featuring extensive DJ line-ups, or events advertising an international DJ can sell as high as $80.00. Bottled water, the beverage of choice, normally sells for $3.00-$5.00, and individuals must purchase their water at the event since bags are checked upon entry and beverages confiscated by security at the door. In some cases, water can be re-filled by taps, however I attended two events where a sign was posted in the washroom stating that the tap-water was contaminated. I also attended events where only warm water could be obtained from the taps. In situations such as these, promoters are cognizant of the fact that ravers need to hydrate themselves in order to prevent dehydration that is associated with MDMA use. Forcing participants to purchase bottled water throughout the evening is another opportunity for profit.

Drug-use also increases the average cost of raving; MDMA purchased at events normally sells for $20.00-$30.00, though some clientele that become "regulars" can purchase MDMA from their dealer for approximately $15.00. Transportation to and from the event is

an additional expense. With the exception of Ottawa that has organized "rave-buses," most individuals rely on individuals with cars or take a cab since raves are often located in areas outside of bus and subway lines. Public transportation is often unavailable during the hours when rave events are held. When these details are considered, one night of raving can run anywhere from $60.00-$150.00. For individuals who party every weekend, this pastime can exceed what an individual pays for rent. The exorbitant cost of raving may explain why most ravers are employed, and/or come from middle-class backgrounds.

Twenty-two of the interview subjects were Caucasian, three were of east Asian descent, one was South Asian, and one Black. This is also consistent with the demographics of ravers previously reported in the literature. Weber estimates that in the GTA, at least 90% of participants are Caucasian with the "most frequently sighted minority group in descending order being Chinese, Japanese, or South East Asian; South Asian and Black" (1999:323). This finding is also consistent with my own observations at events in South Eastern Ontario. In Quebec however, the percentage of Caucasians observed at raves was estimated to be between 90-95% likely reflecting the demographics of the Francophone population.

The majority of interview subjects were involved in many different facets of rave culture; some were promoters, music producers, as well as DJs. Others have been involved in sound and lighting crews, and volunteer in harm reduction organizations such as OATS.[32] At the time of the interviews, thirteen subjects were university students, and three were high-school students. The remaining eleven were all employed in full time jobs with the exception

[32] "Ottawans Actively Teaching Safety" sets up booths at many raves in the Ottawa area. Volunteers pass out pamphlets outlining the effects of different drugs, and promote ways of partying safely and responsibly. The "Toronto Rave Information Patrol" (TRIP) is another similar organization based in Toronto (see Appendix A, figure 11).

of two subjects, these individuals had received post secondary education. There were two elementary school teachers, one high-school teacher, two engineers, a veterinarian, a computer programmer, and two private business owners.

## 4.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation involves the researcher's long term immersion and participation in the social world of the "other" being studied. It provides a holistic sense of the culture or subculture being studied and is considered the foundation of anthropological research. In addition to material obtained from secondary sources such as personal accounts of ravers posted on Internet listservs and rave websites, the participant observation method was an essential and appropriate method for this research. Given the visceral nature of raving, and the underground organization of the subculture, it was found to be the most efficient method to gather data. Being a participant observer involved taking detailed field-notes throughout the field work process, dressing like a raver, listening to electronic music at home, attending electronic music events, and going through weekends of fasting, prolonged dancing, and sleep deprivation as ravers often do.

### *The Anthropology of the Senses*

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, a visual/textual approach alone is insufficient in the study of rave culture. The field of sensory anthropology addresses these concerns and provides methodological guidelines for the investigation of cultures that prioritize senses other than the visual. A leading proponent of sense anthropology, Paul Stoller, calls for a

reawakening of the scholar's body which has "stiffened from long sleep in the background of scholarly life" and "yearns to exercise its muscles" (1997: xi). The cultural conditioning that keeps the body dormant dates back to the period of Enlightenment when the body came to represent the microcosm of the predictable mechanistic universe. A creation of nature yet the locus of culture, the separation of the mind from the body resolved the nature/culture dichotomy by making the mind superior and distinct from the body. Not only did there emerge a devaluation of ASC's in favour of the "rational" thought attached to the waking state, but the intellectualism of the Enlightenment era placed vision at the top of the sense hierarchy.[33] The focus on empirical observation confirmed sight as the most reliable tool in the quest for scientific knowledge (Stoller 1989a:8; see also Ingham et al.:1999), and non-Western cultures predominated by the "lower" senses were perceived as uncivilized and less evolved (Classen 1997: 405). Classen even goes as far as to suggest that contemporary anthropologists "have compensated for the sensory racism of many of their predecessors by downplaying or ignoring the role of the 'lower' senses in non-Western cultures and highlighting the importance of audiovisual imagery or of desensualized conceptual systems" (1997:405). Given the embodied nature of the rave environment, any investigation of rave culture must be grounded in a methodology that explores the position of each sense, but also the interplay of the senses in an effort to avoid what Poewe (1996) refers to as the "textualist lock-in." Members of the Concordia Sensoria Research Group, an interdisciplinary research team dedicated to the varieties of sensory experience, Howes and Classen (1991) outline methodological guidelines relevant to sensory research in their article

[33] Synnott notes that the hierarchy of the senses that places vision at the top dates as far back as early Christianity (1991:68-69).

"Sounding Sensory Profiles." One consideration highlighted by the authors is the realization that not all cultures divide the sensorium as we do (1991:257). For example, in contrast to the classic delineation of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, the Javanese outline the sensorium according to sight, sound, smell, *feeling* and *speaking* (1991:257). Credence should also be given to perceptual modes that may be devalued in the west such as the intuitive sense referred to as "extra-sensory perception" or the sixth sense (1991:258). In the rave context, this would include examining the role of psychoactives in stimulating or heightening this sense, in addition to body movement, energy perception and manipulation, body orientation, and non verbal forms of communication. In an environment where the voice is muted by the elevated volume of the music, out of practicality, rave culture has developed so that dance, eye contact, and touch are often prioritized over verbal interaction. Kinesics, proxemics or what Mauss (1935) refers to as "body techniques," refer to conscious and unconscious use of personal space and learned bodily movement (see also Blacking 1977; Hall 1996; Malbon 1999:27-28). In the rave context this would encompass the positioning of participants in relation to each other and the DJ, in addition to patterns of dance and such body techniques as hugging, massaging, and light-shows. Factors which would influence the nature of these interactions and body techniques such as room temperature, strobe lights, fractal projections, the spatial organization of raves, the number of participants, and the music also need to be examined.

Also worth noting is a potential hierarchy of the senses, that is which senses are emphasized or repressed (Howes and Classen 1991:259). What kind of adjectives do ravers use, for example, in describing their experiences, and are some senses referred to more often

than others? The capacity for some senses such as sound and smell to set moods, stimulate memories, and elicit emotional responses should also be considered (Ingham et al. 1999:285). Recognizing that the senses are not static but rather change over time (ibid:259), one would need to investigate if and how one's sensory order changes as a result of continued participation in the rave scene. For example, many insiders refer to a process of learning how to appreciate rave music. Fritz argues that to "benefit from the full effect of rave music we are challenged to develop new listening skills" (1999:76). There are a number of techniques employed by ravers to develop these listening skills and as one becomes adept at "hearing" the music, a progression occurs where an interplay between the senses takes place (see Takahashi forthcoming; Sylvan 2002:129). References to perceiving the music as three dimensional, or such perceptual alterations as synesthesia,[34] bilocation,[35] and OBE[36] (Out of Body Experience) are quite common. Investigation of the sensory specializations of a culture's ritual specialist can also suggest which senses are prioritized by that culture (Classen and Howes 1991:280). In the case of raves, the "technoshaman's" adeptness for musical memory, sensitivity to sound, and the creation and manipulation of energy highlight the aural and visceral nature of the culture. Ravers' admiration and respect for these skills also accentuates the importance of these qualities.

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34 This refers to the shift of one form of sensory experience to another. For example ravers report seeing sound, hearing the visual, and perceiving music with one's body. Although synesthesia is commonly associated with the hallucinogenic experience (see Grob 2002:198), some informants reported synesthesia with the absence of pychoactive ingestion (see also Sylvan 2002:132).

35 This term was coined by Sylvan to refer to the commonly reported phenomena described by ravers where an individual perceives to be in one's body, while at the same time is floating above the dance floor looking down at oneself (Sylvan 2002:132).

36 This refers to a dissociation from the body where perception occurs outside of the body.

### *The Anthropology of Experience*

Since Bourguignon's (1973) groundbreaking finding that over 90% of the world's culture's practice institutionalized forms of altered states of consciousness, the once pathological or anomalous treatment of ASC's has evolved into a "movement in science toward the recognition of the relevance of extraordinary experiences as data" (Laughlin, 1996:1). Identified as transpersonalism, the cross-cultural study of these extraordinary experiences is referred to as transpersonal anthropology and the methodological approach of attaining these states for oneself, the anthropology of experience. According to Laughlin, this method "is really just a natural extension of the grand tradition of 'participant observation' that has made ethnology so unique among the social sciences" (1997:482). The recognition and study of ASC's has presented the anthropologist with an interesting challenge: the methodology of participant observation is assumed to provide a gateway into experiencing the world of the other, however when the level of participation involves states of consciousness other than the waking phase, and knowledge appropriated by senses other than the visual, these experiences are frequently overlooked, devalued or questioned due to the paradigmatic incompatibility with western science. For experiential anthropologists however, the crux of the issue isn't about uncovering the "truth value" of extraordinary encounters as it is about taking one's informants seriously (Young and Goulet 1994:329) through the prioritization of lived experience (see Jackson 1996; Hastrup 1995). Researchers are aware that the accounts of extraordinary experiences related by informants are typically grounded in apodicticity (see Laughlin 1994). This refers to the feeling of absolute certainty that one obtains from a transpersonal or mystical encounter. As Laughlin

explains, this kind of certainty is unique because "it is completely divorced from factual knowledge about the self or external world while yet having a meaningful place in the experience of that world" (1994:117). Although reports of these experiences may be vague, the ethnographer should not make the mistake of assuming an informant's lack of knowledge, as Laughlin points out that "fuzziness and apodicticity co-occur in the lifeworlds of people more frequently than either crispness and apodicticity, or fuzziness and existential doubt" (1994:117). In ritual settings where transpersonal experiences are likely to occur, the process of what Laughlin refers to as "blocked cross-phase transference" may account for the discontinuity and fuzziness of these experiences. Cross-phase transference refers to the process of shifting information between different levels of consciousness (Laughlin 1992: 150-151; see also Tart on "state-specific learning" 1972). Information must move across points of neural transformations between phases called warps, in order to pass to another phase. When this occurs re-entrainment[37] must take place across warps and if this fails to occur, blocked cross-phase transference results. The experience may be remembered as fuzzy or may even be blocked from conscious awareness leaving the individual with a vague memory or sensation of a numinous encounter.

To appreciate these encounters, the anthropologist must first suspend disbelief (see Young and Goulet 1994; Prattis 2002), and recognizing that pure apodicticity "cannot be transmitted vicariously" (Laughlin 1994:119) the ethnographer should attempt to personally arrive at that experience. For Lindquist the nature of this participation is "full and unreserved" (1995:14; see also Turner 1993). Advancing Clifford Geertz's notion of *thick*

[37] This refers to the re-organization of neural networks in the nervous system.

*description*, Brian Given uses the term "thick participation" to refer to the ethnographer's extensive participation in the native system (1993a:141). This kind of approach dictates 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*" as summarized by Takahashi and Olaveson (2003:88). The ethnographer thus becomes her own informant and her own experience should be treated as primary data. At the same time however, the limitations of one's own conceptual frameworks should be recognized realizing that total sharing is impossible (see Lindquist 1995:11; Given 1993a:109). To overcome this built in limitation, training in phenomenology should be regarded as a prerequisite before entering the field (see Laughlin 1990; Prattis 2002). This kind of training directs the mind inward where one learns to focus on internal processes in a disciplined way. It "builds habit patterns that counter the Euroamerican conditioning toward ignoring or repressing internal processes, and prepares the student for the kind of procedures used in many alien cultural situations for incubating and attaining transpersonal experiences" (Laughlin).[38]

Irrespective of the extent to which the anthropologist's experience approximates that of her informants, there are other benefits to be gained from this kind of approach. As Lindquist discovered, in some contexts full participation is "one single precondition for the very access to the field" (1995:14; see also Goulet 1994:26). Lindquist reminds us that an informant's willingness to engage with the researcher should not be taken for granted (1995:31).

In studying rave culture, access to the field was very much determined by my

[38] http://www.carleton.ca/~claughli/tutcont.html [date accessed 1998-07-07].

willingness to participate. One of my informants would only consent to my interviewing him after I had gone raving with him. As he put it "to me, simply conducting an interview kind of belittles the scene because you can't just talk about it, it's something you have to do and be a part of and I want to show it to you rather than describe it to you, after that we'll talk" ('Eric' 02-11-02:fn). Full and unreserved participation is also a means of establishing rapport with informants. Many ravers commented on being impressed by what they interpreted as my "dedication to the research" because unlike their stereotyped vision of a social scientist, I stayed to the close of many events, I attended pre-parties and after-parties, I dressed like a raver, danced like a raver, and many considered me to be "a raver." In many instances I was aware of the fact that I wasn't the only one doing the observing, but I was also being evaluated, observed, and tested by my informants. Some ravers probed me about my knowledge of different DJs and music producers, asked me about previous parties I had attended, or tested my awareness of such insider terms as "sketchy,"[39] and "rolling,"[40] in an effort to safeguard that I wasn't an undercover police officer or reporter. Developing a relationship of trust was very much dependent on my level of participation, particularly when a good portion of my interview questions involved asking participants about illicit drug use. This was also integral in a scene that contains underground elements purposely designed to exclude outsiders. Finding out when raves happen, or being invited to a WOMP (Word of Mouth Party) for example, were always contingent on trust and rapport being established

[39] Ravers refer to feeling "sketchy" during the post-rave period. The term generally describes the mental and physical exhaustion experienced after a full night of physical exertion and sleep deprivation. It also refers to the effect of "coming-down" from the drugs.

[40] "Rolling" refers to the ingestion of MDMA. An individual might ask "Are you "rollin" tonight. It can also denote the state of being high from MDMA. "I was rolling like crazy when the party was shut down."

first.

Finally, from a methodological standpoint the experiential approach enables the researcher to ask relevant and "appropriate" questions (Given 1993:93). As the ethnographer expands her repertoire of encounters in the field, she can compare these experiences with that of her informants and ask a wealth of questions that would otherwise be unavailable as the depth and nature of the discussion can only be informed by one's personal experience. A person's willingness to answer, or the "truthfulness" of the answer may be conditional on the appropriateness of the question. While some postmodernists have placed little value on first hand accounts, concluding that these narratives are inherently vague due to the ineffable quality of the rave experience, I found that many of my informants were able to provide detailed, rich, and articulate descriptions of their experiences. The value of the experiential approach became evident in time as I noticed that as my experience in the field increased, so too did the ease with which ravers were able to dialogue about raves with me.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## The Field Setting: An Ethnographic Account

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> There are gross exaggerations what you hear on TV. There's a rave inside and a reporter outside: "I'm standing outside the rave now and there's loud pounding music so I think they should be starting the virgin sacrifices soon." I mean you know as much as I know that you can't understand a rave unless you've been inside in the middle of the dance floor, you can't even think to understand, you just can't explain it. And it's a shame, people talking about things they cannot even understand ('Greg' 02-04-31:8).

Most ravers have difficulty defining raves because there are many elements that must come together to make an event successful. For insiders, a rave is more than the location or the music, but it is also a feeling and a state of mind. The following chapter will profile the ethnographic context, outlining the essential elements of a rave and how they create what ravers would identify as the perfect rave experience.

### 5.1 Origins of the term "rave"

Before "rave" became a part of the common diction, the term was already present. References to the term can be traced as far back as the 1960s where it occasionally surfaced in the psychedelic music scene. The phrase "All Night Rave" for example, was used to advertize the psychotropic[41] festival featuring Pink Floyd and Soft Machine. (Reynolds

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[41] Psychotropics are plant or chemical substances that are known to cause changes in psychological or mental functioning. This term has been adopted by scholars as a synonym for the more popular term psychedelic (Dobkin de Rios 1984:5). These substances are subdivided into three categories: (i) *psychic sedatives* which include narcotics, barbiturates, and tranquillizers; (ii) *psychic stimulants* which include the amphetamines; and (iii) *psychic deviators* wherein the hallucinogens are classified (ibid).

1999:77; McCall 2001:15). The term also appeared in Jamaica where the expression was used to describe the weekend activity of "letting go" on the dance floor at parties called "ravings" (Poschardt 1998:289). From Jamaica, the term was transplanted to England into the Black British dance cultural scene (McCall 2001:15; Reynolds 1999:77). The roots of "rave" as it is known today however, emerged out of the late 1980's Acid House[42] movement where its fans used "raving" to describe the kind of partying they were doing in clubs (Silcott 1999:35). The "frenzied behavior, extreme enthusiasm, psychedelic delirium, the black British idea of letting off steam on the weekend" made the term "raving" ideal in describing Acid House's wild and extreme form of dancing (Reynolds 1999:77). As its name attracted increasing negative attention from the media and authorities, and as its music changed, Acid House evolved to become known as "rave."

## 5.2 "Raves" According to Drugs: From "Raves" to "Parties"

Though members of rave culture can be identified through their choice of music, jewellery, clothing, and even philosophy, recent media focus has made the raver's selection of drug, the most salient indication of subcultural belonging. MDMA and other synthetic drugs[43] are terms that have now come to identify and even define the rave scene. In locations such as Britain, the United States, and now Canada, this relationship is particularly apparent

[42] Although "acid," the street name for LSD, is often assumed to be the culture's drug of choice, MDMA was actually the drug most associated with the Acid House movement (Silcott 1999:29).

[43] Originally the term "*designer drug*" referred to legal substances that were created to mirror the effects of illicit substances (Saunders 1996:10). Today however, the terms synthetic and designer drugs are used synonymously to refer to illicit drugs that are created to evoke a specific effect. MDMA, MMDA, MDA, and 2C-I are examples of designer drugs. This term is also used for drugs that are considered "new," or old drugs such as LSD which have acquired a renewed popularity (Saunders 1996:10). Designer drugs are also referred to as club or dance drugs, reflecting the popularity of designer drugs in the rave and club cultures.

in the initiatives that have taken place to restrict rave events. The centrality of MDMA to the rave scene is apparent in the number of publications which have incorporated Ecstasy into their titles, including: *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality* (Malbon 1999), *Generation Ecstasy* (Reynolds 1999) and *Ecstasy: Dance Trance and Transformation* (Saunders 1996). The underlying presence of MDMA and its influence on the subculture is also evident at many levels. A number of accessories which have become symbolic of raving are connected to the physiological effects of Ecstasy: glow-sticks enhance the visual, and Vicks Vapo Rub, the tactile effects of MDMA, while suckers and baby soothers alleviate the drug's side effects of bruxism and jaw tension. Additionally, bottled water and the designated chill-out areas at events reduce over-heating and dehydration, effects which can have fatal consequences on Ecstasy users (see Kalant 2001; Malberg and Seiden 1998). Accessories such as infant hair barrettes, "kiddie" back-packs, teddy bears and friendship bracelets have been correlated with MDMA's ability to stimulate an innocence reminiscent of childhood; it was the drug's ability to bring out one's "inner child" that gave it the nickname "Adam" in the late seventies when psychologists realized its potential in therapy sessions (Reynolds 1999:82). The theme of childhood is also reinforced by the drug's elicited sensation of "noetic" feelings, that is the experience of seeing the world in a fresh and novel way as a child would (Eisner 1994:3). Even PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity and Respect), the acronym that has been referred to as the principal philosophy of raving (Fritz 1999:203), an ideology that is intended to reflect the love and connectedness of the rave community, can be traced to the empathogenic effects of MDMA.

As a result of the media fervor surrounding rave culture, today the term "rave"

evokes a number of reactions, stereotypes, and emotions among insiders and outsiders alike. For a number of parents, rave is demonized for epitomizing the ruin of society's youth through blatant drug use, sexuality, and organized crime. For some veterans of the scene, rave became extinct when it trickled up into the mainstream and lost its innocence through commercialization, irresponsible drug use, and the appearance of poor quality drugs. For these individuals the rave scene is dead, and the by-products of rave such as the aboveground move, the creation of new sub-scenes, and the re-invention of pre-existing ones, are all part of the "post-rave" phenomenon. Others prefer to distance themselves from the term because of the negative connotation it evokes: "I don't like to use rave because raves have a negative sound now with the media, everything's blown out, raves are like the anti-Christ" ('Alan' 02-04-30:16). For 'Tom' the media's negative and inaccurate portrayal of rave culture has not only been detrimental to the scene, but it has made it personally difficult for him as a participant:

> I would have to say that the negativity around the whole idea of raves brings it down. It was hard being into it, but having my closer friends who didn't go make fun of me for it was really tough. Although they are available and used, drug use is not nearly as out of control as the media will make it out to be (02–05-06:1).

Flyers advertising events rarely if ever use "rave" but will use symbols to describe the music and the venue that only insiders will recognize to avoid attracting the attention of the unwanted element, namely the authorities. The iconography on these flyers operates as a visual language so that a raver knows, for example that a flyer featuring cartoon characters or children's toys will play Happy Hardcore music and attract the candy-raver[44] crowd (see

[44] Individuals who wear beaded jewellery, furry pants, body-glitter, stuffed animal back-packs (ie cookie-monster, Pooh bear, and Pokemon), and suck on soothers, are referred to as "candy-ravers." The candy-raver's drug of choice is MDMA as the child-like innocence the drug is

Appendix A, figure 2). A flyer displaying mandalas or fractals will attract Psytrance ravers (see Appendix A, figure 3), and flyers with coarse language and violent imagery will attract ravers interested in Industrial Hardcore or Terrorcore music (see Appendix A, figure 4). Some promoters avoid the term "rave" in an effort to legitimize their business and book establishments without generating suspicion and hassle from the police (McCall 2001:15). Even some DJs avoid the term and say that they're playing at a "warehouse party" instead of a rave (Fritz 1999:22). The fragmentation from one "unified" scene to several sub-scenes each with its own unique style of dance, venue, music, and even drug choice,[45] has made the more general term "electronic music culture" preferable as it reflects this blurring trend. It also shifts the focus away from drugs and prioritizes the music which ravers feel is the most fundamental aspect of the culture. Some of my informants favoured the term "partier" to refer to those individuals who frequent electronic music events which they called "parties." At the same time, I did meet a number of people who were proud to call themselves ravers and continue to use the term. Recognizing that some individuals in the electronic music scene prefer some terms over others, for the purpose of this thesis, I will use the terms "events," "raves," and "parties," to refer to electronic music activities, and the terms "ravers," and "partiers," to refer to those who frequent them. Despite the blurring of boundaries, and varying discussions surrounding appropriate terminology, there are nevertheless recurring features that are associated with electronic music culture. These

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known to elicit complements the childish style of dress as well as behaviour; candy-ravers are known to give friendship bracelets and candy to the people they meet at events.

45 LSD has been noted the drug of choice among Psytrancers (Reynolds 1999:176) whereas crystal methamphetamine is associated with Hardcore (see Wilson 2002:393), and cannabis with Jungle and Hip Hop (Weber 1999:327). Similarly, Pedersen and Skrondal (1999) found MDMA use to be highest among House/Techno rave-goers.

characteristics will be discussed in the following section.

## 5.3 "Raves" According to Location: Place versus Space

From the standpoint of law enforcement, there are 3 types of raves: the underground, the semi-underground, and the above-ground rave (Logue 2002; see also Fritz 1999:104-113). An underground rave is an illegal event where permits and controls outlined by municipal bylaws are ignored by the promoters. Typically these venues are held in remote locations where medical and law enforcement resources are distant. Since the police have the authority to shut these events down, the venues are typically held in unassuming locations where they will attract less attention. Often organizers will provide a website location where individuals can coordinate rides and organize car pools since these locations often rule out public transportation.[46] Efforts are also made to limit the number of participants; advertising through word of mouth, or personally inviting individuals who are permitted to bring a fixed number of guests, are methods of keeping the parties small and controlled.[47] Traditional venues for underground raves are abandoned warehouses (see Appendix A figure 5), barns, or open spaces such as beaches or remote wilderness locations. A number of my informants evaluated a rave as being more "authentic" if it is underground. As one interviewee suggests, these venues are appealing because they are less likely to get closed down, and one doesn't have to worry about doing drugs and getting caught:

> If you're going to go to a party and really enjoy yourself, it's going to be on until eleven in the morning, and when it's in the middle of nowhere, no one's

[46] In Ottawa a "rave bus" departing from the downtown region takes attendees to and from events. Buses such as these are also organized to take ravers to events in other cities such as Montreal.

[47] These parties are also referred to as "WOMPS"-Word of Mouth Parties

> going to come and bust it because no one drives by there after eleven at night. Not even Farmer Joe in his tractor. So there's no way you're going to get busted, and it's being able to know, it's the security of knowing you can do your drugs and you're not going to get busted ('Kurt' 02-11-08:5).

Interestingly, events that I attended that were temporarily or permanently shut down, were all located in the downtown region of major cities such as Toronto and Ottawa.

A semi-underground rave is one held in a legitimate facility such as a fairground, an arena, museum, or office building. Permission has been obtained from the owner of the establishment to hold the event and some form of permit or contract has been issued, however, the owner is often naive to the drug issues and the true nature of the event. For example, one of the raves I attended in Montreal was located in the basement of a Catholic Church. I remember as I walked up to the building I thought I had the wrong address until I could hear the stained glass windows vibrating from the pulsating bass. As I entered the Church, I could smell marijuana and cigarette smoke, and when I walked into the basement I was immediately approached by a male adolescent who asked me "if I wanted anything." At first I had no idea what he was referring to and when he saw my confusion he listed roughly ten different types of illicit substances that I could purchase from him for a good price. There were "security guards" present, however unlike aboveground venues, they didn't check my bag or pockets for drugs and weapons, nor did they seem very concerned about the drug deals that were taking place out in the open. As the event continued on into the next day, I wondered what kind of state the building would be in and how the organizers were planning to rid the Church of the exhausted ravers before the parishioners gathered for Sunday morning service. In an instance such as this one, it is likely that the Church assumed the event was some kind of a youth group social, rather than a rave. Since underground and

semi-underground raves typically don't serve alcohol, an "alcohol free youth party" would not have raised suspicion.

Because overhead costs of both the semi-underground and underground raves are relatively low, the average ticket price can range between fifteen and thirty dollars. Organizers tend not to operate as registered companies or hold a business license, operating on a cash-only basis as part of the underground economy (Fritz 1999:104). The motivation behind these events is to promote a good vibe[48] and allow others to have a good time, rather than to make a profit. As a result, freebies such as citrus fruit, candy, and sometimes CD's sampling DJ mixes, are offered to attendees. Individuals can also bring their own bottled water that they can refill in the washrooms and this keeps costs down for the participants. DJs are frequently local, and it is not uncommon for DJs to donate their services as it is often the case that these individuals are new to the business and are looking to gain exposure and experience rather than profit. For many members of the rave community, these non-profit parties capture the true essence of raving. Lacking financial resources, these events are often dependent on volunteers who help with lighting, decorations, and clean up. I went to one such event in Montreal called "Groove 2." This event was inspired by the movie "Groove" which was about a group of people who organized an event for the sole purpose of promoting PLUR. The production company organizing "Groove 2" with the intention of emulating a similar sentiment as the movie, emailed the film producer with the following account which captures the inspiration behind these types of raves:

We are a bunch of people who got inspired by your Great work in the making

[48] Ravers recognize the vibe as a kind of energy, pulse, or feeling that can only be experienced physically. The DJ, the music, and the people attending the event are identified by ravers as factors which contribute to the quality of the vibe

> of the movie Groove! We thank you not only for the movie itself but also for the message sent by it! Now we are throwing a small underground rave party for about 300 people. Everyone who will come to the party has rented the movie to know what kind of rave it will be. All the money involved in the party is actually reinvested in it. In Montreal (Canada) the rave scene has come to the point of being a big business to make money since this kind of event was created to actually give Peace, Love, Unity and Respect to all, we thought we could try to make a difference by trying to educate people to what's the whole point of a RAVE...We think that the PLUR message is too important to be understood correctly by every raver especially with all the terrorism involved in the last past months....All the months of work we gave free of charge to create this unique party that will reflect the PLUR message in every way.[49]

For some veteran ravers, these events were considered rare and even a thing of the past. A sense of nostalgia is evident in the following raver's recollection of organizing these events:

> We were just kids then, we didn't have promoters or anything like that. It came out of our own pockets. The motivation to do it was just to have a good time. Of course we would have liked to make a profit out of it but yeah it was to have a good time with likewise thinkers you know. It was a really tight community back in 94, 95, 96...really tight community there. It was great, it was really good man ('Sue' 03-01-31:1-2).

In contrast to underground and semi-underground raves, above-ground events are held in legitimate club, hotel, or restaurant facilities where alcohol and rave permits have been obtained. Police officers are often on the premises with security guards at the entrance thoroughly inspecting participants for weapons and drugs. At some of the larger events a first aid area is sectioned off where paramedics are on hand, ready to deal with overdose and drug complication issues. At one event I attended in Toronto, there was even an area sectioned off where drug dealers and participants caught possessing illicit substances were questioned and even strip-searched by police. Many ravers feel that having security guards searching their things, poking them, and shining flash-lights in their faces when relaxing in

[49] http://www.sistersf.com [date accessed 2001-11-31]

the chill-out areas intrusive and offensive.[50] Ravers also categorize these venues as commercialized and "mainstream" and as such, less authentic and therefore less appealing. Despite the fact that alcohol use in the rave context is low (see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003; Weir 2000; Weber 1999), these venues are usually licenced. Most of my informants reported that the presence of alcohol destroys the vibe by attracting the wrong type of crowd. For many, it is the absence of alcohol that separates the rave crowd from the club crowd. It was expressed to me that the availability of alcohol tends to attract "clubbers" and "thugs" who would otherwise avoid these events. Ravers typically stay away from mainstream clubs; in the previously referred to study by Takahashi and Olaveson, it was found that 63% of survey respondents preferred raves to clubs, with the most popular reasons being that they preferred the people and the vibe at raves (2003:91). Some informants reported feeling self-conscious or guarded at clubs and many attributed these feelings to the negative vibe that alcohol creates. Evident in 'Jenna's' statement is the notion of having to follow a social script at clubs:

> There's a social script when you go into a mainstream bar, you've got a cigarette in one hand, a beer in the other, and you dance by using your legs mainly. In clubs it's integral that you interact with somebody when you're dancing...dancing in a circle to be assured that you have friends, "oh yes I have friends and yes I am cool" or something. At clubs everyone looks the same with tight tops, long hair, boobs and everything, you go there to primarily pick up and that's not what raving is about, you don't rave to pick up (02-04-14:3).

Many female subjects emphasized the impression of feeling safe at raves (see also Hinchliff 2001:459). This not only involved safety from physical assault, but also the feeling of not

[50] At these events ravers are generally not permitted to sleep. Anyone caught or suspected of sleeping is usually poked by a security guard to make sure that he/she hasn't overdosed from drugs.

having to worry about being approached by males who are interested in "picking up." Most women attributed this atmosphere to the absence of alcohol, as well as the prevalence of MDMA as the drug of choice. One female however, pointed out that MDMA use and this safe environment wasn't a clear-cut causal relationship:

> I definitely think E has played a role in shaping the course of the rave scene's development. For sure the soothers, the candy, you know, the prioritization of friendship over say "sex" and "hooking up," plus the sharing and caring that goes on is related to E. But, E has also been in the scene for such a long time now that I think people would express the values of love, friendship, and concern, whether Ecstasy was a factor or not. For us, these attitudes if you will, are just part and parcel of the Techno scene, and we try to carry these attributes with us wherever we go ('Helen' 02-10-14:8).

Serving alcohol at a rave was also frowned upon by some participants because it seems to emphasize profit as the primary motivation.

The cost of obtaining permits and hiring security guards has also made the average ticket price increase significantly with prices ranging between thirty and eighty dollars. In return participants expect a well-known headliner DJ, and an impressive sound and lighting system. Freebies are rare and ravers are expected to purchase beverages on site; bottled water brought in from the outside is usually confiscated. Just to break even alone, promoters need to guarantee a large turn out so these events are well advertised and individuals can even order their tickets through Ticket-Master. One promoter I interviewed said that the cost of throwing a party is about ten times higher than it was a few years ago before the bylaws came into effect. Renting a legitimate venue in Ottawa for example, can cost up to ten thousand dollars for one night, and prices in Toronto range from twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars. Although the commercialized element of raving suggests that there is money to be made, the promoters I interviewed indicated that the business is

unpredictable, and it entails an enormous amount of time, effort, money and risk. The general consensus was that a promoter is lucky to simply break even:

> If you break even you're really really lucky because getting enough people there to break even is really tough. A lot more expensive than people ever expect it to be and there's always those last minute costs when its's like "oh our sound system blew we'll need to spend about four thousand dollars to rent another one from the guy who has the keys to the sound shop and is going to go rent it illegally" or whatever the case may be. It's always that mad dash around ('Kurt' 02-11-08:2).

Ironically as veterans long for the "good old days," the exorbitant cost of the aboveground trend has prompted the growth of new underground scenes. Because there are only so many acceptable venues where permits can be obtained, these locations are being reused and recycled and the impromptu element which is so integral to the rave experience is lost. Consequently, small underground parties are beginning to reappear as organizers realize it is easier to get the paper work done, the costs are more reasonable, and the impromptu element of raving is maintained. Rather than being hosted by production companies, many of these parties are organized by volunteers and in contrast to the expensive, glossy, eye-catching flyers, there's a return to the small modest photocopied flyer (see Appendix A, figure 6). According to one former promoter, "slowly smaller pockets of people are getting together for smaller events...they're recreating a way better vibe than what exists in bigger parties" ('Alan' 02-04-30:6). These events also screen out the undesirables that have entered into the scene as it became mainstream:

> These smaller venues filter out people like that because there's no way a Hells Angels[51] person could find out about a 200 person party if it's a

[51] In tandem with the commercialization of rave events, the element of organized crime has entered the picture (Logue 2002). There are known after-hours clubs in Ottawa that are owned and operated by the Hells Angels. As one informant related to me "they run the drug trade you know what I mean, so outside drug dealers know to stay away from these clubs cause otherwise you're

> small community and it's through word of mouth. It's supposed to filter people out, you either filter out the little kids that you don't want at your parties no more, or filter out the gross older guys that show up with no shirts or who just want to pick up girls and are really sweaty and meatheads basically because you don't want those guys around you cause they weren't there before. They're just there because they're high or whatever, and they want to meet girls. As long as you don't have that in your environment, it's really to enjoy yourself and have a good time again cause you're surrounded by beautifulness again and those you want to be surrounded by ('Alan' 02-04-30:7).

These events truly are underground. As an "outsider" I found these parties difficult to find, and it wasn't until my second year of fieldwork when I had established a number of contacts inside the scene, that I was able to find out about these underground events and attend them. Another trend that avoids the cost and legal issues, while at the same time maintains an underground status, is the increasing number of elaborate house parties featuring live DJ'ed music. A growing number of people own turntables and record collections because as one DJ related to me: "DJ'ing is the biggest trend I can note by far and large, everyone wanted to be a rock star, now everyone wants to be a DJ" ('Casey' 02-04-13:12). The term "basement DJ" or "bedroom studio" (see Hesmondhalgh 1998) reflects this trend as these are individuals who own the equipment, but are interested in playing at parties and at home for themselves, rather than at larger venues as a career.

Three years after beginning my fieldwork, the rave scene has seemingly returned to the underground as articles and investigative reports on MDMA use and raves are few and far between. In fact, an article in the Globe and Mail reported that "the rave scene is dying a really quick death." (Galloway 2003). Although the rave scene may be "dead" as far as the media is concerned, and fewer are the aboveground commercialized events, the music and

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just asking to get your ass kicked" ('Steve' 02-04-13:fn).

the parties continue to flourish in a clandestine form. The return to the underground is a trend that most ravers welcome.

The spontaneous and temporary attributes of rave spaces could very well contribute to the culture's resilience and continued survival. Rave culture has always operated independent of physical place. Even regions that have become dominant centers of rave culture can be easily transplanted to other parts of the world when laws become stringent. As Ingham et al. note, "by tuning into sound, geography faces a profound challenge" (1999:286). It is the music that binds rave culture together rather than place, and at a rave the sound system is more important than the four walls of the venue. Even when events get shut down by the police, or fire alarms get set off forcing people to exit, it is common to witness groups of people dancing in the parking lot to car stereos. As one informant related, one of his most memorable events took place when there was a problem with the sound system:

> The single most intense time for me at a party was at that Goa party when they lost the power. That was good because the crowd was so good when the music ran out when they lost power and everybody just started playing their jimbays and just kept the party going. They were going to have fun come hell or high water, power or no power. That's one of the first parties where I really felt like everybody felt the exact same really good feeling all at the same time, like everybody was dancing all exactly the same. Everybody played the jimbays and then they got the power on but they only had the high end of the power on so the jimbays were "do do do do do" and you'd hear "ti ti ti ti ti ti ti" and you're still dancing and dancing and then all of a sudden the bass came in and it just filled the room up with this volume and it was like it had been before but because it was new and you weren't expecting it, it just drove everybody crazy and everybody was just like woohoo yeah, wow! Everybody was giving it the best they could and yeah that was pretty well one of the most intense events at a party musically speaking ('Eric'02-11-16:20-21).

"Virtual raves" on the world wide web are also a common practice and these events can

occur spontaneously in chat rooms as DJs and music enthusiasts from around the world will play tracks for individuals in the room. Listeners can give feedback electronically, or ask questions about tracks by posting messages in the chat room and arrangements for downloading music are also frequently negotiated in these forums. These events can also be planned and coordinated where DJs will advertise their set in advance inviting individuals to login at a certain time to participate in a live-set on the Internet. Actual raves can also be accessed over the Internet through live cyber-rave broadcasts.

Hakim Bey's concept of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone" further reinforces the temporary creation of space governed by the music. Bey uses the term TAZ to refer to a kind of political uprising that acquires its potency because of the fluid nature of the spaces in which these gatherings occur. Bey views festival and play as a political act (Gibson 1999: 22) and according to Bey's delineation of TAZ, raves would engender those qualities. Although most ravers are unfamiliar with the origins of the term, or the work of Hakim Bey, the term "TAZ" is used frequently amongst ravers to refer to a temporary space or fleeting moment in time where "you can do what you want to, and be free to be who you are" ('Andy'03-01-31:13). Just as TAZ cannot be pinned down, contained, or made to last (Ingham et al. 1999:290), rave locations are meant to operate the same way. This is one reason why the outdoor setting is considered to be the ultimate party experience; in the absence of four walls and a roof, the space is totally fluid and boundless. Not only are the locations temporary but the feelings encountered at a particular event are temporary and for the following individual raves also operate outside of history:

> Both the rave and the TAZ are temporal events that exist once only. When I think about past raves, I apply aspects of history to them. I think about how

> it looked and who was there. I think about when it happened and where it happened. The rave seems to be a part of history in retrospect, but when I reminisce about the feeling of the rave, I know I can't place it in history. During the rave I may have momentarily recognized these things, but I did not use them to define what was happening. The rave exists as distinct from history; this is why it's so special. This is why it can be considered a zone that is both temporary and autonomous (Thomassen 2002).[52]

This kind of impermanent and free form style of socializing is an example of what Maffesoli refers to as "neo-tribes" (1996). These collectivities are fused based on a shared sense of community, a particular experience and ambience, rather than a particular ideology or institution (Olaveson forthcoming). As Maffesoli and others have noted, these tribes serve to create identity and meaning in a contemporary context that is becoming increasingly diversified and fragmented (Klein 1999:24; Olaveson forthcoming).

### *Psytrance Parties*

With the exception of the large weekend festivals which can attract thousands, Psytrance raves are generally underground events. Smaller venues with fewer people are ideal for creating an intimate environment that is conducive to spirituality, and community building. Psytrance events are also held in spaces that promote spiritual growth and reflection such as churches, meditation and yoga centers, or scenic outdoor settings. The notion of profit is generally incompatible with the Psytrance philosophy. As one informant related to me: "All the food will be free, you donate money, you don't buy a ticket, you donate to the party, just like you do at church; you don't buy a ticket to go to church, you donate to the church to keep it going" ('Eric' 02-11-16:2). At the "Om Summer Solstice Festival" that I attended for example, each participant was asked to donate a bag of food to

[52] http://www.chikinsandowichi/ravedata/sitemap.htm [date accessed 2002-12-19]

the "Kind Kitchen." All meals including snacks were provided throughout the three-day event and the meals were prepared by volunteers.

There are exceptions and this usually has to do with DJs or "technoshamans" that are on tour. Well-known Psytrance groups such as "Hallucinogen" and "Infected Mushroom" have acquired large followings and Psytrance ravers will usually attend an aboveground venue, and pay a large sum of money without hesitation to see these headliner DJs spin.[53]

## 5.4 "Raves" according to Music

Despite the fragmentation of the rave scene, all genres of electronic music have maintained one thing in common: they radically alter the way individuals perceive and experience music. Hopkins even suggests that the technologically driven nature of rave culture has garnered new ways of knowing and feeling among youth, and that these pleasures are about embracing the synthetic and virtual world as natural (1996:13). Although many youth cultural movements, both present and past, have combined music, dance, and psychoactive experimentation, the music of rave culture makes it unique. In many ways electronic music challenges our existing models of traditional music; the music for the most part lacks lyrics,[54] and the tracks are blended together through the DJ's technique of beat matching, making the music cyclical and continuous in nature. The notion of "beginning" and "end" are irrelevant in the rave context as these conventional identification markers are

[53] Ravers use the term "spin" to refer to a DJ at work. When someone asks for example "who's spinning tonight?" the individual is wanting to know what DJ is headlining.

[54] The subgenres of Drum & Bass and Jungle are the exceptions. Although the music typically played by the DJ is lacking in lyrics, frequently featured in these performances is an MC (Master of Ceremonies). As Gerard and Sidnell (2000) demonstrate, this live vocalist collaborates with the audience and the DJ to direct the dancing, sustain the attention of the crowd, and build energy and excitement among participants.

undetectable and unimportant to most listeners. To the untrained ear, the absence of the human voice, and the unfamiliarity of the computer generated sounds, can leave the listener with the overall impression that the music is chaotic, repetitive and even boring. In contrast, my informants could not only discern different tracks, but they could remember where they were the first time they heard a particular song, the DJ who was spinning at the time, and who they were with. Many are so enthusiastic when discussing the music, that they'll get goose bumps all over their bodies from the flood of emotion a particular track can rekindle. The fact that many subcultural insiders admit that they found electronic music difficult to grasp at first suggests that ravers, whether conscious of it or not, train and restructure their senses to "hear" music differently. According to author Jimi Fritz, "to benefit from the full effect of rave music we are challenged to develop new listening skills" (199:76; see also Poschardt 1995:316). A key concept that may be foreign to someone outside the scene is the notion that listening entertainment is only a small part of the electronic music scene. Specifically, the tones, frequencies, and beats of electronic music are designed by producers and fine-tuned by skilled DJs to target the body in precise ways (for more on this see chapter seven). The characteristic low frequency bass that can range between 10 and 160 Hertz, is often beyond acoustical perception because it is designed to be experienced as a physical vibration (Klein 1999:26). Because the music is intended to be physically experienced, many veterans of the scene describe electronica as having a three-dimensional vibrational quality that transcends the traditional way music is perceived (see also Fritz 1999:76). The embodied or body-centered quality of the music is deeply intrinsic to electronic music culture, and this is the common thread that links the numerous classifications of the music

(see also Sylvan 2002:142-143). Fundamentally, electronic music is a vehicle that enables individuals to get out of the head and into the body through the gradual re-tuning of the senses, and for most listeners their relationship with it is one that grows and evolves through time.

***Psytrance Music***

The musical style of Psytrance is particularly conducive to this type of embodied listening as the overall structure of Psytrance music reflects the idea of a journey "both in a mythological sense and as a representation of perceptions of the experience of taking LSD" (Cole and Hannan 1997:6). Tracks are specifically designed to reflect the idea of a psychological journey. Each 8-10 minute work is superimposed over the next by the DJ to create an overall twelve hour experience where the music slowly builds throughout the evening, culminating into its highest energy levels, from which it then gradually resolves. According to one Psytrance DJ "Goa Gil," the cyclical build up in tension and release in Goa music serves a ritual function: after "destroying the ego" with the night's sounds, "morning music fills the void with light."[55]

Like all forms of Trance music, Pystrance is characterized by a 4/4 rhythm. The BPM (beats per minute) range is often used as a measuring stick to differentiate the different classifications and subclassifications of electronic music. For example, Psytrance can range from 140-150 BPM (Cole and Hannon 1997:7), whereas the genre known as "Hardcore" can have tempos exceeding 200 BPM. It is probable that the BPM range underlies the noted

[55] http://www.paradise2012.com/music/djKrusty.html [date accessed 2001-11-01]

relationship between drug choice and music choice. The association between amphetamine use and Hardcore is not surprising given the extreme nature of the music with regard to tempo. As one informant related to me: "you simply can't dance to Hardcore or Happy-Hardcore[56] without the help of crystal meth[57] in your system, you just can't keep up to it otherwise" ('Kate' 03-02-15:fn). Similarly, some individuals when under the influence of methamphetamine perceive Psytrance as being too slow. Often individuals will combine drugs to obtain the desired elements of both substances while at the same time creating a state of consciousness that doesn't conflict with the BPM range. For example, some of my informants combine MDMA with LSD which is known as "candy flipping."[58] In this combination it is the empathogenic and stimulatory effects of MDMA, and the visual and hallucinatory effects of the LSD which are sought out from each drug. For one individual, MDMA masks the negative affective state that LSD would normally elicit:

> I never really did a lot of acid, but mixing it with Ecstasy is a phenomenal experience cause I always found acid to be a very paranoidic experience for me. It's like on acid you'll see some like big demons come out of the wall. "Ahh big demon!" and you'll be scared. But if you're on E, then you're like "awe cute little demon" cause the boundaries aren't there but you're still

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56 Like "Hardcore," "Happy Hardcore" has an elevated BPM range which typically exceeds 160. The music often includes samples of music from cartoons, female or cartoon character vocals, piano riffs, and a strong 4 beat kick drum. The stuffed animal kiddy back-packs, beaded jewellery, body glitter, and pacifiers, are the stylistic features associated with this sub-scene of raving.

57 "Crystal-meth" is the street name for methamphetamine.

58 Capitalizing on the popularity of candy-flipping,,a new synthetic substance referred to as 2C-I (2,5-Dimethoxy-4-odophenethylamine) is rapidly gaining popularity in dance scenes. Synthesized by Alexander Shulgin, 2C-I is classified as a phenethylamine whose chemical structure is similar to MDMA and mescaline. It is known to induce the hallucinatory effects of LSD along with the energy and sociality of MDMA, thus making it the ideal substance for candy-flippers. It is also appealing among partiers as it is less expensive than MDMA, selling for approximately $10.00/hit. To date, in central Canada, this drug is sold in a powder form where it is normally consumed by mixing it with water or juice.

enjoying your time. It's a phenomenal experience ('Kurt' 02-11-08:10)

Combining psilocybin mushrooms[59] and MDMA, or cannabis and MDMA, are other examples of polydrug use which elicit a similar state as "candy-flipping."

Habitués of electronic music in general, are more cognizant of the beats per minute compared to other music listeners, each having a comfort zone that is preferred when dancing. The emphasis on BPM is also demonstrated by the fact that many DJs advertize their average BPM range, and the back of album covers frequently indicate the average BPM for each track.

## 5.5 "Raves" According to Experience and Vibe

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the experience of attending an electronic music event is what ravers emphasize the most when talking about rave culture. Essentially it is the extraordinary experience, the sensation of what ravers describe as "ecstasy" (not just the drug induced), and the bonding between friends and strangers that can occur while raving, that bind the culture together and surpass the localized differences in drug choice, music choice, accessorization, and venue location. Whereas the traditional definition of community has relied on geographical boundaries, ravers unite due to the shared experience they get while raving, and at raves, this common element transcends any affiliation to a particular language, religion, or region. A number of individuals refer to rave as a way of life and a way of thought rather than a particular kind of event, classification of music, or a particular look. This sentiment is expressed in the following raver's statement:

[59] More commonly referred to as "shrooms," 10% of subjects sampled by Takahashi and Olaveson reported taking psilocybin (2003:80). In the central Canadian rave scene mushrooms are difficult to obtain which may account for its relatively low presence.

> You look at people in a rave, and there's people dressed in black with spikes, and there's people dressed like babies, so it's like extreme A and extreme B and everything in the middle. It's a way of thought, its not a look ('Greg' 02-04-31:5).

Reflecting the importance of rave as a way of thought, individuals who argue that raving is a thing of the past, perceive the "vibe" as being destroyed by individuals who lack the raver mentality. One interviewee defines a raver as one who has "the disposition and attitude of a raver and an attitude of a raver is that they don't have attitude about what they're doing" ('Eric' 02-11-16:16). Many will argue that the invasion of the "club" and "thug" crowd, the element of organized crime, and the commercialized element of rave, conflict with and do nothing to promote the vibe and the "raver disposition." This is why some promoters go to great lengths to control the quality of the vibe at events by limiting those who can attend. One WOMP party I attended was based on the premise that each person was permitted to invite one individual that they thought would contribute to the vibe in a positive way. Controlling the atmosphere at a party can also include regulating the quality of the drugs.[60] According to one promoter, when a dealer starts selling bad drugs "it's not going to be long before the whole event has gone weird because everyone's on bad drugs and everyone's going through a bad gut feeling or bad mind feeling and it's really easy for the whole mood

[60] Not all promoters regulate the dealing of drugs at their events with the sole intention of ensuring a good vibe. In some cases promoters will receive a portion of the profit made by "invited" dealers at the event. This creates an interesting role for security who are not necessarily hired to keep the drugs out of the rave. At underground and semi-underground raves, security guards are often hired to prevent uninvited dealers from coming in. Participants are also searched at the door where illicit substances are confiscated, forcing participants to purchase their drugs from the "in-house" dealers. It was also suggested by some informants that security guards protect dealers by alerting them to police presence. As for the illicit substances confiscated at the door, one promoter told me that these drugs can be re-sold to the participants by the "in-house" dealers, or they will be divided up and shared among the security staff at the end of the event. One raver suggested that the level of security is a good indicator of the number of invited dealers. He argued that ravers are known for being a peaceful group thus there is no need to hire security for "crowd control."

of an event to go sour really quick" ('Alan' 02-04-30:7). Another promoter became so frustrated with the "dirty drugs" that entered into his parties that he hired security guards to thoroughly check people's bags, pockets, and even shoes for illicit substances. He then invited his own dealers to come to the party all in an effort to ensure a good vibe:

> So what I used to do is I'd invite a couple of dealers that I knew were really reputable who I'd get my stuff from and it would be "okay, you guys can deal stuff at my party. I don't want any of the money from the profits you make. I just know that you guys bring good drugs to the party." And that's all I want, that's cool, no questions asked. Then I know that the vibe at the party is going to be good ('Kurt' 02-11-08:15).

While the party experience is highlighted by ravers as a defining feature of raves and electronic music culture, the quality of the atmosphere or the vibe, contributes to the overall experience:

> I think the atmosphere is the most important thing. It makes the rave a rave. The fact that you can fall on someone and you can turn around and excuse yourself and he'll excuse himself too, and you won't ask questions. Everybody's your friend there for the while that it lasts ('Greg' 02-04-31:5).

This is where the other aspects of raving such as the venue location, the music, the DJ, the drugs, and the people present are also integral as each element reinforces the vibe. In this way, each characteristic cannot be examined in isolation as each has an important role to play in the overall experience of raving. This is why many individuals including myself, are reluctant to provide a concrete definition of rave that will only set parameters around a phenomenon that is so ineffable in nature. It seems preferable to simply outline the characteristics that make raves unique, why these features are an integral part of the culture, and how these qualities interrelate to create what ravers would label the "ideal" rave experience.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Anthropological Definitions of Trance(s) Ritual

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> Clearly, the word "ecstasy" is used with the most diverse meanings in a great variety of incompatible contexts. A term that has no shared meaning is useless (Bourguignon 2003:7).

Curiosity with the "exotic other" has traditionally been one of the defining preoccupations of the discipline of anthropology. From the beginning, ethnographers have been fascinated with such phenomena as the soul flights of shamanic journeys, the ritual arenas encompassing participant possession by supernatural forces, and those ceremonies involving sleep deprivation, the infliction of pain, rhythmic drumming, and the ingestion of mysterious hallucinogenic brews. Although at one time such states which did not fit into the category of the "waking phase" fell under the oversimplified rubric "altered state of consciousness," recent contributions in psychology, neuroscience, symbolic and transpersonal anthropology, have created a new discourse replete with innovative theoretical and methodological approaches to consciousness studies. Despite these advances, the enduring influence of questionable past ethnographic scholarship and a persistent lack of phenomenological training for researchers underpin a continuing tendency to reduce non-usual phenomena into all-encompassing categories and terms, creating theoretical and methodological confusion and ambiguity regarding otherwise precise mind states. The literature on the states of consciousness referred to as "trance" is a case in point. Scholars

have not only overused the term to refer to a variety of states of consciousness, but many ethnographic accounts expect the reader to know what the author is referring to in his or her use of the term since an operational definition is regularly not provided. The assumption that we are "pre-wired" to experience trance, that it is innate among humans, has also resulted in a tendency to examine trance as an isolated phenomenon, and strip this state(s) of consciousness from the contexts in which it occurs. The rave culture is one of these contexts within which trance must be examined.

There are recurring metaphors, visual images, and references in rave and in particular Psytrance culture, that are associated with shamanism and in particular neo-shamanism. "Trance" has become one of the central subgenres of rave music, the DJ's powers are often described by ravers as "shamanic," the street name for MDMA is "Ecstasy," the style of dancing at raves is often referred to by insiders as "trance-dance," and the rave experience has been described by participants as "ecstatic." Because this dissertation seeks to determine the nature of the DJ's role in rave culture, the state of consciousness that shamans have been noted to manage, namely the state of "trance," will need to be thoroughly examined. Furthermore, this investigation will identify the tools necessary to determine the nature of the altered states of consciousness ravers report experiencing at events.

The following chapter will explore the anthropological discussions of trance ritual, starting with the problematic use of the term, and the debates regarding "shamanic trances" versus "possession trances." A survey of the trance literature suggests a tension between orientations favouring psychobiological medical models (Ward 1980; Neher 1961, 1962; Lex 1976; Gellhorn and Kiely 1972; Winkelman 1986a; Ervin et al. 1988) versus sociogenic or

cultural approaches (Rouget 1985; Stoller 1989a, 1992; Crapazano and Garrison 1977; Bourguignon 1976; Boddy 1989; Comaroff 1985; Lambek 1981). Addressing this polarity, Strathern calls for a balanced approach to consciousness studies, stating that "the phenomena which we study demand that we take both frameworks into account without necessarily giving primacy to either" (1995: 118). Following Strathern's lead, both perspectives inform this consideration of trance. Gilbert Rouget's conceptualization of trance and how it is managed in the ritual context will be reviewed in addition to the physiological correlates associated with trance states. Recognizing that the scripted nature and physiological correlates associated with ceremonial possession in many ways parallel the rave context (see chapters seven and eight), a greater emphasis is placed on possession trance, and Rouget's framework for how this state of consciousness is managed provide the theoretical foundation for this research.

## 6.1 Shamanism versus Possession: The Historical Debate

A variety of mind states have fallen into the general descriptive category known as "trance." These range from meditative states, sleep walking, possession, comas, mystical states, and hypnotic states of consciousness. In his exhaustive historical review of reported trance phenomena dating from biblical times to the present era, Brian Inglis concludes that trance "eludes simple definition" (1989:267). More than a decade later, Inglis' statement continues to be relevant. However, when examined in the ritual context the ethnographic record consistently highlights two distinct classes of trance: spirit possession and shamanism. In reference to these categories of trance, distinctions have been noted at the

physiological level, and more significantly, in the way these states of consciousness are managed. Although some early scholars such as Eliade made the distinction between shamanic and possession states, others (Lewis 1979; Schmidt 1951) have treated shamanism and possession trance as analogous and this tendency continues to be evident in some ethnographic accounts. Although spirit possession had historically been associated with shamanism, the term possession and its connection to shamanism only became popularized in the 1950's with the publication of the monumental works of Eliade and Schmidt, sparking the debate between "white" versus "black" shamanism and the quest for a posited classical form. In *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951), Eliade emphasized the heavenward journey undertaken by the shaman in a state of ecstasy (white shamanism) and he argued that this process was the original and classical form. This contrasted sharply with the claims advanced by Schmidt who in the last four volumes of his twelve volume work *The Origin and Growth of Religion* (1949;1952;1954; 1955) located possession (black shamanism) as the genuine form of shamanism. According to Schmidt, Eliade's model emerged as a consequence of the northward migration of southern pastoral societies who were practitioners of black shamanism. Like Eliade, Schmidt emphasized the state of ecstasy as the defining feature of shamanism but in contrast to Eliade, Schmidt argued that the state of ecstasy is attained through a journey to the underworld where one loses consciousness and becomes possessed. In Schmidt's view, the ecstasy characteristic of white shamanism is an artificial form of ecstasy since it is not accompanied by the loss of consciousness indicative of possession. Thus, the white shaman, being incapable of replacing the self with the supernatural, is prevented from establishing an "authentic"

relationship with the supernatural (Waida 1983:223).

In contrast, Eliade maintained that possession is qualitatively different from shamanism:

> It is possible that "possession" is an extremely archaic religious phenomenon. But its structure is different from the ecstatic experience characteristic of shamanism in the strict sense. And indeed, we can see how "possession" could develop from an ecstatic experience: while the shaman's soul (or "principal soul") was travelling in the upper or lower worlds, "spirits' could take possession of his body. But it is difficult to imagine the opposite process, for, once the spirits have taken "possession" of the shaman, his personal ecstasy-that is, his ascent to the sky or descent to the underworld-is halted (1964:507).

Although Eliade's distinction is warranted, it should be kept in mind that this delineation is closely linked to his theological agenda, wherein possession becomes incompatible with his ecstatic model. Essentially what Eliade is presenting is a grandiose myth of the fall of humanity out of the ecstatic matrix in which humans, in their primordial past, were in direct contact with the divine (Guédon 1999; see also Kehoe 2000). Although Eliade takes into account the shamanic descent to the underworld, he claims this is a secondary motif and focusses primarily on the heavenward ascent, since, for him, it is during this ascent that the lost mythical realm is momentarily restored. Eliade considers shamanic ecstasy as "a reactualization of the mythical *illud tempus* when men could communicate *in concreto* with the sky" (1964:505). Eliade considers the shaman to be privileged because of his ability to "relive a state inaccessible to the rest of mankind" (1964:505) and he highlights the shaman's role as mediator by contending that the first shamans were sent to the earth "to defend human beings against diseases and evil spirits" (1964:506). Therefore, to preserve the shaman's role as mediator any replacement of the self should be avoided since possession

would impede communication between the divine and the natural realms; the shaman's state of ecstasy would cease in a possessive state, thus the shaman's brief exposure to the divine mythical element would also cease. Eliade thus locates journeys to the underworld and states of possession representative of black shamanism as "innovations, most of them recent" (1964:506) and he even equates such innovations with "corruptions" of the genuine shamanic ecstasy (1964:507), concluding that these "corruptions did not succeed in eliminating the possibility of the true shamanic ecstasy" (1964:507). While the unilinear evolutionary approach to the study of human cultures has now been generally discredited, and the debate over the genuine form of shamanism is now considered misguided, it should be noted that this controversy did introduce possession into the vocabulary of shamanism, and it did influence the ethnographic treatment of trance ritual by a succeeding generation of anthropologists.

Another influential classic which also reinforced the view of shamanism and possession as analogous is the work by Ioan Lewis: *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (1971/1989). A British social anthropologist interested in the social significance of ecstasy, Lewis employs a functional approach to the analysis of spirit possession and shamanism. He disagrees with Eliade's mutually exclusive approach and instead argues that "shamanism and spirit possession regularly occur together" (1989:9). Lewis asserts that the only difference between shaman and layperson is that the shaman is a master of a controlled spirit possession. He contends that "we are thus fully entitled to employ the term 'shaman' in its classical arctic sense" and criticizes social anthropologists who are "reluctant to employ the term shaman when they should do so" (1989:9). More than

a decade later, Lewis continues to call for a broader use of the term shaman. In the most recent issue of the *Anthropology of Consciousness* Lewis states:

> Although the term *shaman* comes originally from the Tungus reindeer herders of Siberia and is obviously associated there with the local (but externally influenced) cosmology, I do not see the word as limited to that particular ethnological context, nor despite Eliade's advocacy, does it necessarily exclude possession. As I have argued elsewhere at length, we need a wider understanding of the term (2003:34-35).

Based on his cross-cultural analysis, Lewis concludes that possession cults fall into two categories: peripheral and central. In the peripheral cults, low status oppressed individuals become possessed by hostile spirits and seek out membership in a possession cult. Lewis posits that peripheral cults function to provide the oppressed with a cathartic arena wherein participants revel in the momentary increase in status, and rebel against those who occupy positions of power and domination. Lewis' analysis, if subjected to Victor Turner's framework of structure and anti-structure in the ritual process (1969), presents peripheral cults as representative of antistructure; these possession rituals balance and sustain social structure by keeping power and authority in check. Consequently, Lewis argues that peripheral possession cults are most frequently present in stratified societies and the majority of cult membership is sought out by women.[61] In contrast, central possession cults are integral to society for upholding morality and this is where Lewis situates shamanism. According to Lewis, shamans are the guardians and sustainers of local values; it is during a seance that the possessed shaman seeks confessions from individuals who have broken taboos and have behaved inappropriately. While this kind of functional approach is problematic because it completely ignores the symbolic cultural context, Lewis' work has

[61] Similarly, Bourguignon (1976) notes that incidence of spirit possession tends to occur in hierarchical social contexts (see also Winkelman 1986b).

nevertheless had great influence. Parallelling the controversy between white and black shamanism, possession trance again became identified as a defining feature of shamanism.

Reinforcing the tendency to confuse shamanic trance with possession trance is the lack of an operational definition. Not only are numerous definitions given for shamanism and possession, but the conditions used to define them are inconsistent, ambiguous, and frequently applied to both phenomena indiscriminately. A case in point is the problematic use of the terms ecstasy and trance. Michael Harner defines the "shaman" as a person who carries out his work in what he calls the "Shamanic State of Consciousness" (SSC). For Harner, the SSC is an "ecstatic or altered state of consciousness" which "involves not only a trance or a transcendent state of awareness, but also a learned awareness of "shamanic" methods and assumptions while in such an altered state" (1990: 21). For Eliade, the shaman "specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld" and this transpires during ecstasy (1964:5). In both these definitions, the terms trance and ecstasy are employed synonymously. Rouget however, treats trance and ecstasy as opposite poles on a continuum where ecstasy is characterized by immobility, silence, solitude, calm, sensory deprivation, recollection, and hallucination, whereas trance involves the opposite: movement, noise, group settings, crisis, sensory overstimulation, memory loss, and a lack of hallucination (1985:11). Rouget points out that the term ecstasy is often used out of convenience because it can be used as an adjective; an experience can be described as "ecstatic."

This lexical confusion is further exacerbated by the fact that the English definition of

trance is the definition of ecstasy in French.[62] Thus what one language defines as trance, the other defines as ecstasy. With this kind of ambiguity, it is difficult to ascertain what is being described in ethnographic accounts, particularly when these same terms are also used in definitions of spirit possession. Crapanzano and Garrison describe spirit possession as "any altered state of consciousness indigenously interpreted in terms of the influence of an alien spirit" and the "altered state of consciousness most frequently associated with possession is trance" (1977:7-8). There is little to distinguish the above from those states of consciousness associated with shamanism, as both include the involvement with spirits during an altered state, and in both cases this altered state is named as "trance."

## 6.2 Managing Trance: Shamanic Trance Ritual and Possession Trance Ritual

In *Music and Trance* (1985), Gilbert Rouget views trance as an innate state of consciousness that is both psychophysiological and cultural. As already mentioned, Rouget identifies trance and ecstasy as opposite poles on a continuum where ecstasy is associated with shamanism, and trance with spirit possession. Rouget points out that shamanism and possession are frequently identified with trance but he argues that when one examines the relationship between music and trance, it is evident that shamanism and possession are distinct. He does recognize that these two states can alternate in the same person but they cannot occur simultaneously. Three factors are identified by Rouget as distinguishing features which can differentiate shamanism from possession trance:

[62] In English trance is defined as "a sleep like state, as in deep hypnosis appearing also in hysteria and in some spiritualist mediums, with limited sensory and motor contact, with subsequent amnesia of what has occurred during the state" (cited in Rouget 1985:11). The French usage of the term *extase* is described as "a mental state characterized by profound contemplation accompanied by a loss of sensitivity and motoricity" (1985:11).

> the former is a journey made by a man to visit the spirits, the latter is a visit by a spirit (or divinity) to the world of men; in the former the trance subject gains control over the spirit embodied within him, in the latter the reverse is true; and lastly, the former is a voluntary trance whereas the latter is an involuntary one (1985:23).

With the recent advances in neuroscience, and the mounting interest in altered states of consciousness in the scientific disciplines, the enthusiasm for measuring, quantifying, and recreating "trance" states in laboratory settings has overshadowed Rouget's last point. For Rouget, shamanic trance and spirit possession are inseparable from their contexts. Realizing that shamanism and possession are embedded within a ritual context, Rouget is suggesting that there are really two ways of managing trance: a scripted or programmed approach, and a non-scripted one. When Rouget suggests that compared to shamanism, possession is involuntary, he is not only addressing the involuntary nature of being entered by an outside force, he is also emphasizing the scripted nature of possession trance ritual; it is the learned and prescribed element of possession trance ritual that makes it involuntary. In addition, by locating possession in the ritual context, Rouget is also ruling out those phenomena which have been grouped under the label of possession illness such as hysteria and personality displacement.

### *Training & Initiation*

Possession trance is rooted in a cultural context and in particular a ritual one. Bourguignon describes possession trance as behaviour that is "culturally patterned, occurring within acceptable cultural limits" (1976:46). As a shared cultural belief system, she argues

that these states "cannot exist in societies where such beliefs are absent" (1976:10).[63] Ward observes that the probability of possession induction increases when this form of trance is viewed positively, is desired, and expected (1984:311). Behaviour that is culturally sanctioned and membership in possession cults comprise an institutionalized process of cohort initiation which demonstrates the classic components of the rite of passage outlined by van Gennep (1960): separation, margin, and reintegration (see Besmer 1983:127-133). The entire process can take anywhere from several months to several years. During the early stages of the *vodun* initiation for example, neophytes live in an isolated dwelling segregated from the rest of society. Their invisible yet separate status is marked by their unkept appearance and they are described as "dirty things" (Rouget 1985:53). Novices are subjected to a scarification ceremony signifying their initial belonging to the group. This is only the beginning, as the newly initiated must return to the segregated dwelling every five to seven days for further instruction during which neophytes are only permitted to communicate to those members who hold distinguished positions in the cult hierarchy. A series of coming out ceremonies ensues during which the newest members perform songs and dances which are part of the collected repertoire to be performed in future *vodun* ceremonies and annual feasts (Rouget 1985:55).

Also apparent in the initiation experience is the emergence of what Turner (1969) describes as "communitas," the bonding and comradeship that results from the shared

[63] It should be noted that Bourguignon makes the distinction between what she calls "possession" and "nontrance possession." Mirroring Rouget's discussion, possession occurs within the ritual context and in this way it is culturally patterned behaviour which is sought out. In contrast, nontrance possession is not culturally sanctioned. It usually refers to illness, or "a belief concerning capacities or states of the individual, a belief often held primarily not by the individual but by others concerning him." (1976:46). It is within this second group of phenomena that Bourguignon locates shamanism.

experience of marginality. This learned element of possession trance, and the dynamic of initiate bonding is identified by Rouget as the key purpose of the possession cult initiation process:

> ...initiation has two ultimate objectives, which are complementary but nevertheless distinct. The first is to train the initiates, which means transforming them not only in terms of their internal structure (by conferring a certain knowledge and a certain power upon them) but also in terms of their social relations (by making them members of a brotherhood which, in this case, can be likened to a secret society, since initiation is closely linked with secrecy). The second objective is to create receptacles for the gods, by which I mean individuals capable of becoming possessed (1985:56-57).

Through participation in these rituals, in addition to observing the experiences of others, initiates learn the appropriate behaviour to express when the spirits arrives and "the novice learns the cues which will induce possession trance at appropriate ceremonies" (Bourguignon 1976:17).

In contrast to rituals of possession, the term initiation cannot be so easily applied to shamanism. Institutionalized shamanism is generally absent in most traditions, whereupon an individual undergoes a formal period of training in order to become a shaman. In most cases, it is the personal experience of the shaman which is fundamental, rather than any formalized training (Guédon 1999b:39). Even when training is involved, one does not become ordained by teachers into a shamanic institution. This is one of the reasons why shamanism is so difficult to define; lacking is any single recognized creed, founder, belief system or ceremony both between and within shamanic traditions. This point is illustrated by Guédon's discussion of shamanic training among the Tsimshian:

> Although the help of other shamans is necessary; one has ultimately to learn from one's own experience and one's own dreams. There are no traditions defining specifically the context of one's vision. One may acquire tricks and tools from

> other shamans, but one has to gain access by oneself to one's own powers. This may take several years. The absence of a formal tradition requiring the shaman to follow specific practices or to acquire specific helpers means each individual has to build his or her own worldview... the modes of acquisition of shamanic powers seem to have been as numerous as the shamans themselves-there are no specific lineage traditions to help the novices in their tasks (Guédon 1984:180-181).

Similarly, central Asiatic shamans gain knowledge independently and learn to refine their techniques based on their own personal experience. From the very beginning, a shaman will seek solitude where he can test his powers in singing and attempts to master the drum (Basilov 1997:24).

### *The Spirit Repertoire*

The scripted nature of possession trance ritual is further evinced by the fact that there is a clearly defined protocol for the repertoire of beings that can possess an individual during a ceremony and how they can be represented. This is why the notion of performance is frequently applied to rituals of possession. Described as a form of cultural theatre, "priests become impresarios; mediums are actors; musicians form orchestras; spirit recitations become scripts that are central to the drama of the expression of culturally specific themes" (Stoller 1995:20). The dance is a depiction of the gods, a form of sacred theatre that an individual enacts for himself as well as for others (Rouget 1985:117). As can be seen in the famous ethnographic film *Les maîtres fous* (1955) by Jean Rouch, each Hauka ceremony plays out a different plot that is entirely structured and cued, and the same plot is never enacted more than once. With the aim of expressing and communicating cultural themes, this explains why rituals of possession always take place in the presence of an audience, and

a member of the cult never becomes possessed in isolation; the change in identity can only have meaning if it is recognized by the wider group (Rouget 1985:324-325; see also Bourguignon 1976:41). Furthermore, the spectators can only acknowledge the transformation if the identity of the entity taking over is recognized by the spectators. This is why the beings that are being represented tend to be mythic and of a larger scale. The personalities are socially imposed, coinciding with and reinforcing a culture's cosmology (Bourguignon 1976:38). Furthermore, the prescribed repertoire of beings is integral to the notion of empowerment and catharsis that is so often associated with ceremonial possession. Individuals are empowered as they temporarily assume a status identified with symbols of power (Bourguignon 1976:40). The ritual arena additionally provides a venue for psychological release where participants are able to experience and express a range of emotions without consequence as the locus of responsibility is shifted from self to other (Winkelman 2000:161).

In contrast, the spirits employed by the shaman tend to be more personal in nature; there is no one set of defined spirit helpers that a shaman can employ, but rather through experience the shaman develops an interpersonal relationship with various spirits. According to Rouget "the shaman's adventure is first and foremost an individual affair" that "could even be practiced in solitude" (1985:325). The metaphor of cultural theatre is also less applicable to the shaman who works primarily for a client, on a person to person basis, and spectators are not necessary for the shaman to do his work. [64] Furthermore, unlike possession where individuals must serve the gods, in shamanism there is no worshipping

[64] This is not to say that an audience is never involved. Similar to rituals of possession the theatrical element of the shamanic seance is well documented in the ethnographic record.

involved as the shaman is serving the client and himself (Guédon 1999b). The spirits can thus vary between shamans and can change for the individual during the course of his experience.

### *Musicians, Instruments & Musical Accompaniment*

The scripted nature of possession is also supported through the analysis of the music and specifically the relations between music and trance. Rouget has found that there exists cross-culturally a tremendous variety of musical instruments, rhythmic intonation, key signatures, and pitch found in rituals of possession. In contrast, the shaman's musical accompaniment is generally restricted to the drum, but more significantly, the shaman's relationship to the music is active, whereas the possessed individual is never the musician or musicant[65] of his own trance:

> The most important difference, however is that in every case the shaman is the musicant of his own entry into trance. In other words he goes into trance not by listening to others who sing or drum for him, but, on the contrary, by singing and drumming himself. All the accounts agree on this point. And herein lies the great difference between shamanism and possession. The possessed person is never the musicant of his own trance; the shaman always is. For the shaman, shamanizing and musicating are two aspects of one and the same activity (Rouget 1985:126).

Through time, the relation of the possessee to the music changes as an individual becomes an adept and moves up the hierarchy from neophyte to officiant. Through repeated exposure, adepts become accompanists as they are able to unlearn the effects of music and are less controlled by it. Rouget asserts that "the efficacy of music thus varies according to the

[65] Rouget distinguishes instrumentalists according to their positions in the cult. Instrumentalists who do not experience trance are referred to "musicians" and experienced adepts are referred to as "musicants" (see 1985:104-105).

status of the adept, who can be more or less vulnerable according to age, experience, and position in the hierarchy of the cult" (1985:72). Rouget's work suggests that in possession trance ritual, the music only has an effect on the individual when it is familiar. The melodies must have cultural referents that are meaningful to the listeners and "only insofar as it refers to culture that the musical form affects, and even overwhelms, the listener" (1985:299). These cultural referents are referred to by Rouget as "musical mottos," and these can be expressed linguistically, musically, and choreographically. Invocations inviting the divinity to take possession can be sung or chanted. Some recitations are intended to flatter the gods, while in other instances, possession occurs only after the gods have been insulted. Musical motifs are also associated with specific spirits and the introduction of a particular theme operates as a cue for triggering trance. Ultimately, Rouget contends that these melodies are used for dancing, and the choreography of the dance is dependent on the divinity being summoned as the movement of the dancer is expected to reflect the personality of the god (1985:99). Here he argues that the "effects of music on possession trance are not to be looked for at the 'natural' level, but at the 'cultural' level" (1979:237), and he refutes the assumption that music is "endowed with the mysterious power of triggering possession, and the musicians of possession as the withholders of some mysterious knowledge that enables them to manipulate this power" (1985:325). The importance of the prescribed ritual context is also emphasized by the fact that familiarity with possession music on its own right is also not enough to initiate possession A recognized musical motto will not have the same effect if any on a cult listener when heard outside of the ritual context (Sylvan 2002:35).

To support the primacy of the cultural, Rouget questions Neher's (1961;1962)

research that suggests that there are certain universal patterns and frequencies of sound which can initiate trance states independent of the social context. According to Neher "the behavior is the result primarily of the effects of rhythmic drumming on the central nervous system" (1962:152). With Rouget being an exception (see also Willis 1999:117), few have thought to question or replicate Neher's research and his original study is repeatedly cited as evidence for the physiological effects of repetitive auditory stimuli on trance states (see Winkelman 1986a:178; 2000:148; Castillo 1995:28; Ward 1984:310; Lex 1976:111).

According to Rouget, Neher's research is "devoid of scientific value" for several reasons: (i) the laboratory context and parameters outlined in the study cannot be compared to the ritual context; (ii) the physiological results reported cannot parallel what is actually observed during ritual ceremonies; (iii) if the catalyst for the driving effect can vary from 4 to 8 beats per second, "then the people of sub-Saharan Africa should be in trance from the beginning to the end of the year" (Rouget 1977:234). Additionally, Rouget argues that the musical transcriptions Neher used to inform his theory are connected with ceremonies that have nothing to do with possession. In reference to the cited recordings that are associated with possession music, Rouget points out that he could cite "dozens of others, all with the same rhythms, that are not" (1985:175). The variety of musical accompaniment, volume, rhythm and tempo found cross-culturally in possession trance ritual also questions the universality of an isolated musical trigger. In addition, the contradictory aspect of music on trance suggests that possession music as a trigger is learned; in the ritual context, music is used as an entry to and exit from trance (Rouget 1977:235).

However, Rouget in his rather harsh critique neglects to acknowledge some of the

issues raised in the discussion section of Neher's 1962 study. The positions put forward by Rouget and Neher may not have been so diametrically opposed after all, as Neher does credit the role of learning and social context in trance states while at the same time admitting that his study "has had to neglect many additional questions that are important" (1962:158). In accordance with Rouget's observation on the variety of instrumentation in trance ritual, Neher does acknowledge that not all cultures use drums. The possibility of auditory driving as learned is also suggested when Neher proposes that behaviour patterns may be modified by a culture when exposed to auditory stimuli and that "individuals, to some degree, modify their responses to rhythmic light stimulation according to whether the responses are rewarding or unpleasant" (1962:158). Also implied are the limitations of the laboratory setting as Neher points out that additional factors in the ritual arena are likely to play a role in increasing an individual's "susceptibility to rhythmic stimulation" (1962:156). For example, the addition of varying rhythms that accompany the principal rhythm, the presence of additional auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic drivers that stimulate the senses, and the physiological responses to intense and prolonged dancing such as hyperventilation, adrenaline release, and a decrease in blood glucose (1962:156-157).

At the same time, Rouget after reviewing a wealth of music accompanying trance ritual cross-culturally, concedes that there are features and mechanisms at work in possession music that are employed universally as a means of triggering trance. Although variations in tempo have been observed, Rouget remarks that there is some uniformity with regard to rhythmic breaks or abrupt changes in rhythm, in addition to acceleration of tempo, volume, and general intensity of the music, which operate cross-culturally as catalysts for trance

induction (1985:80-81). It would appear that Rouget is attempting to counterbalance the biological trend by directing primacy to the cultural. However in the opening of *Music and Trance* (1985), he acknowledges the "psychophysiological" as being one of the two components of trance. Moreover, in his discussion of accelerando and crescendo as universal catalysts for trance induction, Rouget recognizes that "in this case we are in the realm of the natural" (1985:324). Although Rouget clearly questions Neher's case for the causal relationship between universal sound patterns and frequencies, and the induction of trance, Rouget may be alluding to the fact that there are patterns of auditory stimuli which, when presented in the proper conditions, prompt an individual to be more susceptible to trance induction.

## 6.3 Physiological Correlates of Trance States

### *Shamanism*

An examination of the practitioner's relationship to the supernatural suggests influences between shamanic and possession consciousness. In shamanism, a journey is made by an individual to the world of the spirits, whereas in possession the journey is reversed: A visit is made to the human realm by the spirits. Compared to possession rituals where participants rely on fixed external cues, emphasis has been placed on the shaman's mastery over the spirits, and control over his entry to and exit from the state of trance. This makes sense since shamans are healers who restore patient health while in an altered state; the ability to heal while in this state would essentially require control and mastery of the altered state. Basilov argues that "the concentration of attention whereby the shaman finds

himself in an imaginary world requires great mental exertion, which is possible only with strict self discipline" (1997:11). Guédon also stresses the issue of control and points out that while shamanic trance can involve a degree of dissociation similar to possession, "the dissociation states used by shamans are both directly experienced and light enough to allow the shaman to retain full control over his body, mind, memory" (1984:182). This is not to say that complete mastery over the spirits is intrinsic to the shaman from the beginning however. Among the Tsimshian, the early experiences or initial visions encountered by initiate shamans may be intense, emotional, and traumatic; the shaman's healing abilities only become efficacious when he learns how to control and operate power (Guédon 1984:183). It has been noted that among the traditions of Siberia, a shaman can acquire the basic techniques in one session of instruction, however, complete mastery can take many years (Basilov 1997:25). There are also exceptions to the directional emphasis concerning the shaman's journey to the spirit realm, particularly during the early stages of his/her career. Among many Siberian cultures, shamans are chosen by the spirits and this is first indicated by the "shamanic illness." In such cases, spirits take possession of the future shaman who can exhibit "fainting spells, and behavior that is inexplicable to the sound mind" (Basilov 1997:6). Similarly, Beck points out that Tlingit shamans are always at risk of losing their own identity by becoming possessed by the spirit whose power the shaman is pursuing (1991:9). Thus while it is possible to observe possession states in shamanic rituals,[66] and shamanic states in rituals of possession, as distinct states of consciousness, one cannot

[66] The Korean tradition exemplifies a case where the boundary between possession and shamanism is blurred. Possession sickness is a pre-requisite for a woman to become a shaman, and a potential candidate must become possessed by mythical gods and goddesses during her initiation ceremony to demonstrate her potential (Kim 1980:43).

experience them simultaneously.

From a biological perspective, isolating a neurophysiological marker that can identify "shamanic trance" has proven to be a futile exercise since shamanism is a non-scripted process. Lacking is a prescribed methodology for trance, and this is the case not only between shamanic traditions but also within. For example, Guédon notes that within the Tsimshian tradition, "the modes of acquisition of shamanic powers seem to have been as numerous as the shamans themselves-there are no specific lineage traditions to help the novices in their tasks" (1984:181). Ultimately, shamanism is an independent, individualistic affair where shamans generally use what works for them (Guédon 2003; personal communication). It is this non-scripted nature of shamanism that underlies the debates surrounding the inability of anthropologists to arrive at a consensus definition of the term. For example, Guédon argues that "there is no such thing as shamanism" and cautions researchers to be aware of the theoretical consequences associated with the selection of any definition altogether:

> Since any definition is necessarily theoretical, coming as it does from classification and comparison, it is fruitful to enquire about the consequences of the choice we make concerning the elements we retain to construct our perspective (Guédon nd 16).

Although she acknowledges that we can recognize a tradition as being shamanic and can compare these traits cross-culturally, she contends that the identification of one unique "shamanic" complex is a myth since theorists who adhere to such formulas "manage to sustain their position by either eliminating the cultures that do not fit their model, or by considering only those traits that correspond to what is needed to achieve their goal" (Guédon nd:16-17).

### *Ceremonial Possession*

In contrast, there are common behaviours that have been observed cross-culturally in ceremonial possession that would suggest an identifiable physiological correlate. Ward remarks that "shaking and trembling, temporary loss of voluntary muscle control, changes in speech and facial expression, pupil dilation and glazed eyes, postural changes, muscular rigidity, and spatial disorientation" are common displays of possession trance (1984:311; see also Ervin et al. 1988: 277; Winkelman 2000:156-157 ). Amnesia, dissociation and fatigue are also noted symptoms. However it has also been suggested that there is some element of conscious control involved preventing the individual from harming others in addition to himself (Ward 1984:311).

Predicated on the symptom of memory loss, in addition to the classic, observable behaviours associated with possession, Winkelman suggests that this form of trance is a result of seizures or what he refers to as a "temporal lobe syndrome" (2000:157; see also Wulff 1997: 98-103).[67] Winkelman maintains that highly stratified societies wherein possession cults are more likely to occur promote seizure disorders that result in ASC's. He suggests that individuals in these societies typically lack "adequate nutrition" and possession "may result from dietary and nutritional deficiencies which can cause behavioral symptoms similar to the temporal lobe syndrome" (2000:158). These dietary deficiencies can lead to alterations in central nervous system functioning resulting in emotional disturbances and seizures. For Winkelman "epilepsy and other temporal lobe syndromes may be acquired as a result of metabolic imbalances such as hypocalcemia and hypoglycemia" (2000:158). While

[67] The association made between supernatural possession and epilepsy dates as far back as Ancient Greece where the term derived from the Greek verb *epilamvanein* -to be seized, attacked or taken hold of (Engel and Pedley 1998:1).

this theory may account for how epilepsy in possession illness or nontrance possession maybe be used as a selection criterion for individuals who become mediums, this does not explain ceremonial possession wherein trance is intentionally sought out. The nutritional deficiency hypothesis would not explain the existence of possession cults in locales where balanced diets are consumed, nor would it account for the implications of temporal lobe activity contained within the ritual setting.

If ceremonial possession is considered to be a learned and scripted phenomenon, and its occurrence is contingent on a cultural belief system that gives credence to this state, to accept temporal lobe activity as the underlying physiological basis for this ASC the possibility that seizures can be triggered and individuals can learn to ritually control seizures needs to be explored. It is well known that epilepsy is not the only etiology of seizures; under the right conditions anyone can experience a seizure, in particular those who have a lower seizure threshold. There is evidence linking a variety of sensory stimuli and environmental factors to the precipitation of seizures, and individuals with low seizure thresholds may be particularly susceptible to these triggers. Since many of these triggers are also present in rituals of possession, it is possible that individuals with lower seizure thresholds are "selected" as potential candidates for possession cult membership. It should also be noted that some of these seizure triggers are also used in the ritual environment as mechanisms for ASC induction. These mechanisms, referred to as drivers (Laughlin et al. 2002:146) are known to produce the characteristic state of parasympathetic dominance, and high voltage synchronized slow wave EEG. Winkelman suggests that individuals with temporal lobe conditions may have greater access to ASC's since "temporal lobe discharges

and other central nervous system conditions associated with epilepsy, trauma, toxicity, and related seizure and disinhibition conditions involve the same basic pattern of brain changes outlined above in the model of an ASC" (1997:401). Additionally, "Epileptic symptoms share underlying conditions of discharges resulting in the dominance of synchronized slow wave patterns in the EEG" (Winkelman 1997:401). Research in the growing field of "neurotheology" has confirmed that the temporal lobes play a key role in religious, spiritual, and ASC experience. Electrical stimulation of right temporal structures in the brain is associated with reports of out of body experiences, hallucinations, and religiosity (Penfield and Rasmussen 1950: 162-181; Penfield 1955; Persinger 1987). Temporal lobe epilepsy and accounts of transpersonal and religious experiences have also been well documented. Included among these are descriptions of near death and out of body experiences (Morse 1992; Devinsky et al.1989), visual and auditory hallucinations (Palmini and Gloor 1992), double consciousness[68] (Mendez et al.1996), and religious conversion (Dewhurst and Beard 1970). Individuals with temporal lobe lability[69] are also more likely to report transpersonal experiences (Persinger 1993a; 1993b; 1984; Persinger and Fisher 1990; Persinger and Valliant 1985; Neppe 1981; Makaree and Persinger 1990)

### *Seizure Triggers in the Ritual Context*

Sleep deprivation is a common precipitant of seizures where its activating effect on the electroencephalogram has been used as a diagnostic tool in epilepsy (Loiseau 1998:93).

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68 This refers to the simultaneous experience of one's own consciousness and the perception of another presence or reality (Morse nd).

69 This term refers to individuals who exhibit minor symptoms associated with temporal lobe epilepsy.

In rituals of possession, cult members are frequently deprived of sleep as these rituals often last well into the night and can continue on into the next day. In many cases such as the *ngulu* ceremonies in East and Central Africa, spirits will only arrive after dark (see Willis 1999:80). As a driving mechanism into ASC, sleep deprivation, irrespective of an individual's seizure threshold can result in parasympathetic dominance, and high voltage synchronized slow wave EEG. The fact that these rituals generally take place at night is also significant since many epileptics only have seizures at night (Loiseau 1998:95) or during daytime drowsiness (Marsden and Reynolds 1988:156).

Although the literature is somewhat controversial, prolonged exercise has also been reported to induce seizures in some individuals and the risk is greater when the activity is continuous rather than intermittent (Loiseau 1998:94). The resulting metabolic factor of hypoglycemia and hyperventilation would also raise one's susceptibility for seizures. Since most ceremonies of possession involve rigorous and prolonged dancing, often combined with fasting, these cues could very well induce seizures among cult members. These factors are also associated with ASC induction; prolonged dancing can initiate slow wave activity in the brain, and stimulate the release of endogenous opiates which are known to elicit the basic ASC pattern,[70] while fasting heightens an individual's susceptibility to driving mechanisms on the EEG (Winkelman 1997:398-399). Hyperventilation which results from respiration that is incompatible with physical effort is another known seizure inducer (Loiseau 1998:94). In ceremonies involving rigorous dancing, hyperventilation is likely to result; Besner for example, identifies hyperventilation as an intentional breathing technique employed by

[70] Endogenous opiates such as endorphins act on the hypothalamus to induce a diminution of fast brain wave frequencies, resulting in an increase in the slow wave states (Winkelman 1997:400).

Hausa cult members as a trance induction technique (1986:143). In addition, a sudden rise in body temperature resulting from prolonged dancing can not only precipitate seizures, but the disruption associated with temperature regulation mechanisms can activate the endogenous opiate system (ibid:399). Cross-culturally, perspiration has been observed to be one of the visible indicators of possession trance. For the Hausa, a rise in body temperature is the single most important characteristic used by cult members and the audience to determine the authenticity of the trance. Perspiration signifies the spirit's presence on the neck of a possessee and thus a person in a "true dissociation state perspires heavily, and his body should be hot to the touch" (Besmer 1983:24). Sweat is also the key indicator of dissociation in possession trance among the Bushmen (see Lee 1968:44).

Visual stimuli in the form of repetitive flashing lights have been known to trigger seizures among some individuals, and electroencephalography of patients exposed to photic stimulation has exhibited abnormality in the EEG of susceptible individuals (Laidlaw et al. 1988:154). Sporadic changes in the intensity of light (i.e. driving a car along a tree-lined road), strobe lights, television,[71] and video games are common photic triggers. In the ritual context, Lex suggests that photic stimulation can occur through "visual flicker effects due to shifts in ocular focus and the movement of dancers between an individual and a light source" (1979:123). Besmer remarks that photic stimulation among the Hausa facilitates possession trance for night time performances "when the brilliant white light of a pressurized

[71] Seizures triggered by the flashing lights of the television screen have become increasingly prevalent, such that the term "television epilepsy" has been coined to describe this phenomenon. In 1997, television epilepsy was the focus of extensive media coverage when 12,950 Japanese children were reported to have suffered from convulsions, nausea, and other seizure-like symptoms after the Japanese television network aired a cartoon episode of "Pokeman" (Sullivan 1997). Similar symptoms have been observed in children playing video games. Nintendo video games now come with warning labels.

kerosene lamp within a few feet of the participating devotees provides a sharp contrast to the darkness of the surroundings" (1986:141).

Auditory stimulation is also associated with seizure activity, paralleling the curious relationship between music and possession trance. Music has similarly been found to provoke seizures, particularly in the temporal lobe (Wieser et al. 1997). Referred to as musicogenic epilepsy, the affective significance of the music is believed to trigger these seizures rather than the sound frequency as an independent variable. Cases have been reported where seizures were triggered in some patients by certain types of music, or specific musical compositions (Marsden and Reynolds 1988:155; Ogunyemi and Breen 1993). In some instances, repeated exposure to a musical stimulus becomes less specific as seizures can eventually be induced by simply entering the environment associated with that music (i.e. church or concert hall), or merely thinking of the atmosphere and the emotions associated with the composition.[72]

Stress and emotional factors can also elicit seizures and individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy are more vulnerable to these inducers (Loiseau 1998:96). For example, research has indicated an association between seizure activity and stressful life events or anxiety states (Mattson 1991). Fear, pain and minor medical manipulation such as blood-letting or dental treatment may also provoke seizures (Marsden and Reynolds 1988:156). Heightened emotional states are likely to be a factor in ritual environments, particularly in ceremonies that are initiatory in nature. Procedures such as scarification, tooth extraction, and blood letting may be implemented to confirm an initiate's strength and dedication to the

[72] http://epilepsyontario.org/faqs/seizures/musico.html [date accessed 2003-05-02]

cult, or the act may be symbolic of the neophyte's new identity and status as a cult member.

### *Ritual Control of Seizures: Neural Tuning*

Possession that is limited to the ritual context supports the notion that some individuals may acquire the ability to control their own seizures through learning and repeated exposure. As outlined, there are a number of elements present in ceremonial possession that are recognized seizure inducers. It is plausible that repeated exposure to these triggers would permanently lower a person's seizure threshold, thus making the individual more susceptible to temporal lobe activity. This process known as neural tuning refers to a "permanent change in the central nervous system (CNS), resulting from repeated experience of a particular condition of the nervous system which makes the individual more susceptible to re-establishment of that same condition" (Castillo 1995:25). Neural tuning occurs when the balance of the sympathetic (ergotropic) and parasympathetic (trophotropic) activity of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) shifts as a result of continued stimulation of one system resulting in an activation response in the other (see Gellhorn 1969; Gellhorn and Kiely 1972). Under normal conditions, these systems are antagonistic to each other, meaning that stimulation of the one will inhibit activation of the other. However, maximal stimulation of either system can produce a kind of spill-over effect resulting in the simultaneous discharge of both systems. Maximal stimulation of the ergotropic and trophotropic systems are associated with "the most intense forms of mystical experience and may lie at the heart of compelling spiritual experiences, meditative states, near death experiences and other types of human experiential phenomena" (Newberg and d'Aquili

2000:256). Many elements present in ritual (i.e. repetitive auditory and visual stimuli, dancing, sleep deprivation, fasting, heat exposure), lead to the simultaneous discharge of the ANS subsystem, which can be expressed as profound alterations in consciousness, and even a reorganization of personality (Laughlin et al. 1992:146).

Although neural tuning can occur after initial exposure to one or more of these driving mechanisms, learning plays an essential role as rituals are usually repeated throughout the life-cycle, fostering the development of new neural network patterns and the reinforcement of existing structures (re-tuning). Ritual tuning supports the view that individuals with temporal lobe predispositions to seizures are favoured for cult membership, particularly when the occurrence of "kindling" is considered. This term refers to a permanently reduced seizure threshold for neural excitability as a result of previous induction of repeated excitatory electrical stimuli excitation (Winkelman 1997:401). At the cellular level, neural tuning in reference to seizures indicates that once a convulsion takes place, new synaptic pathways are formed, or some of the already existing synapses in the seizure pathway are strengthened. Kindling is the best existing animal model of epilepsy, and if induced in the limbic structures of the temporal lobe, it is thought to mimic the equivalent seizures present in human temporal lobe epilepsy (such as complex partial seizures), and once established, is thought to be in a permanent state (Racine 1978). Once again, this is believed to be a result of the strengthening as well as the formation of new synapses.

Once the seizures have been evoked "there is a change in central nervous system 'tuning' that makes the individual more susceptible to reestablishment of the central nervous

system conditions" (Winkelman 1997:401-402). This would account for the ability for some people to trigger their own seizures by thought or will (see Marsden and Reynolds 1988:157). Some photosensitive patients can learn to induce their seizures by waiving their hand across the visual field in front of a light source (ibid). Similarly, musicogenic epilepsy is another example of neural tuning and the affective and associative aspects of the music which trigger seizures seem to support Rouget's claim that music in possession is a learned trance inducer. Further evidence of neural tuning and seizures is put forward by Persinger who suggests that cognitive kindling resulting from repeated meditation practice is associated with increased indicators of complex partial seizures (1984; 1993a). Epileptic-like symptoms and a sensed presence were the strongest correlations between extent of meditation experience and phenomenological reports (Persinger 1993a:81). Incidents of temporal lobe seizures, in addition to resulting limbic motor disorders were reported by some transcendental meditation (TM) teachers who consequently reduced or halted TM practice altogether (ibid 1993:81).

While the symptoms associated with seizures in epilepsy are regarded from the position of illness within the biomedical framework, Castillo emphasizes the point that in some cultural contexts dissociative episodes are voluntary and sought out and therefore categorized as nonpathological (1997:219). He maintains that these states serve many functions including providing access to spiritual forces, maintaining social harmony, and offering healing, comfort, and a sense of meaning in life (ibid). In contexts such as these, learning programs biological development, and ritual triggers culturally programmed neurological systems (Winkelman 2003 personal communication). Among the Navajo for

example, seizure disorders referred to as "moth madness" are recognized as illness. It is believed that sibling incest is the cause of epilepsy and the Navajos classify illness based on cause rather than symptom (Levy et al. 1987:3). For this reason diagnosticians play an important role in identifying the causal agent which can then be removed by performing the appropriate ceremony. Diagnosis is performed by shamans referred to as "hand tremblers." These are individuals who spontaneously manifest seizure symptoms, who learn to access that state during ritual to diagnose disease. The fine line between gift and illness is evinced by the fact that hand tremblers must participate in a ritual that initiates them into the hand trembling role as soon as initial symptoms appear, otherwise the seizures can become uncontrollable and in this case, the seizures would then be classified as illness (Levy et al. 1987:2).

Neural tuning and ritual control have also been suggested by Ervin et al. (1988) and Ward (1984) among individuals participating in ceremonies of the Thaipusam festival. It was found that as novices progressed through the training ceremonies, their dance patterns became more coordinated and individually specific, and affective displays became more controlled (Ervin et al. 1988:278). Participants also recognize that it is easier to fall into trance as they become more experienced (Ward 1984:321). Biochemical indicators of stress such as corticoids and ELI's (endorphin-like immunoreactivity), also varied between experienced and novice participants, suggesting learned ritual control. Experienced trancers had lower readings than novices, however as individuals progressed through the Thaipusam training rituals, these values decreased for both groups (ibid 279). Despite these physiological correlates, the authors emphasize that individuals who participate in these

ceremonies arrive "with a set of culturally defined expectations and learned techniques for narrowing and focussing attention" (1988:281). This reinforces Bourguignon's and Rouget's assertions that this form of trance is learned, and it can only occur in contexts where beliefs in possession are present. These cultural expectations are then reinforced and extended through ritual driving mechanisms which stimulate temporal lobe activity and the accompanying neurochemical, neuroendocrine, and autonomic changes.

This chapter examined the state of consciousness referred to as "trance." When trance is rooted in a ritual context, it is clear that there are scripted and non-scripted methods of managing trance. The scripted process associated with spirit possession is supported by the fact that membership in possession cults is initiatory, the repertoire of spirits that can possess a cult member is culturally prescribed, the performance must take place in front of an audience, and the music and dancing are learned trance-inducing cues. At the same time, additional ceremonial components such as fasting, sleep deprivation and auditory stimuli, are inducers for ASC as well as temporal lobe activity, and these factors, in addition to neural tuning, may operate as mechanisms which preselect potential candidates for cult membership. As will be discussed in the following chapters, trance in the rave context is a somewhat scripted process, and the role of the DJ in many ways mirrors the role of instrumentalists in possession ceremonies. Chapter seven will spotlight the DJ, examining his training, the relationship between the DJ and the participants, and the techniques employed by the DJ in inducing and managing trance states.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## The DJ in Action

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**"God is a DJ"**

This is my church
This is where I heal my hurts
It's a natural grace
Of watching young life shape
It's in minor keys
Solutions and remedies
Enemies becoming friends
When bitterness ends
This is my church
This is my church
This is where I heal my hurts
This is my church
This is my church
This is where I heal my hurts
It's in the world I become
Content in the hum
Between voice and drum
It's in the church
The poetic justice of cause and effect
Respect, love, compassion
This is my church
This is where I heal my hurts
For tonight
God is a DJ
God is a DJ

(Lyrics to the famous Techno hit by 'Faithless')

As scholars begin to take seriously the rave experience as meaningful, and as the above lyrics of the well-known rave anthem[73] imply, the electronic music dance floor has transcended its function as a space for youth leisure activity. A place for transformation, healing and spirituality, the dance environment for many has become a "pseudo church," and

[73] Ravers use the term "anthem" to refer to a popular or "classic" track.

the DJ profession is beginning to border along the divine. In this chapter the art and culture of the electronic music DJ will be explored through an examination of the DJ's training, his equipment, the DJ's relationship with the dancers, and the manner in which the DJ manages trance in the rave environment. Conforming to the scripted nature of the trance process as outlined in the previous chapter, the manner in which participants learn to anticipate and respond to the DJ's cues will also be addressed. While it is recognized that there are a number of trance-inducing agents present at raves, this chapter will focus on the music and the procedures used by the DJ in triggering ASC's in participants.

## 7.1 DJ'ing Becomes an Art-form

Much of the DJ's elevated status and recent success has to do with the artistic license and technological innovations in music production that afford today's DJs with seemingly limitless opportunities for creative development. Prior to the 1970's, the DJ profession involved simply playing one record after the other, and the DJ's craft consisted of knowing what record to play when, and in what order. According to Poschardt, the techniques of mixing, scratching, and cutting that emerged out of the disco era, provided the "crucial breakthrough to an artistic use of turntables and records" (1995:32). As Brewster and Broughton remark, "without his artistry in selecting music, in knowing when to play a record, what to precede and follow it with, how to mix it, how to sonically enhance it, and- if he's skilled enough-how to remix it live in various ways, the experience of dancing to records would never reach the transcendent peaks it so often does, and many of today's dance records would seem as dull as dishwater" (1999:13). Today, DJ'ing is considered an

art-form and the turntable is regarded as an instrument where new sounds and compositions are spontaneously produced by the DJ for the crowd. Among the DJs I interviewed, many felt that the creative process of what they call "turntabling," provides them the means to express themselves through their music. The fact that they view the turntable as an instrument, most DJs prefer to work with vinyl despite the invention of the record's modern day counterparts: the CD and MP3. Although many DJs incorporate the use of computers and compact discs into their performances, the turntable continues to dominate as the preferred medium and many DJs favour the term "turntablist" over DJ. For most, it is the "hands-on" aspect of the turntable that establishes it as an instrument rather than a piece of equipment, and it is the physical element that makes the turntable appealing:

> I enjoy playing vinyl a lot more simply because it's a lot more hands-on, it has a lot more of the traditional aspect, but it's also a lot more fun for me because I can manipulate stuff with my hands. I actually get to use my hands to feel so I have more control over the music ('Casey' 02-04-13:2-3).

Some also prefer the sound quality of vinyl over the CD:

> Vinyl has got the warmth of the mechanical absorption of the sound through the vibration of the needle that you cannot otherwise replicate. You can get a depth of sound that you cannot get on a CD (Mark Finkelstein, president of Strickly Rhythm Records, cited in Fikentscher 2000:56).

Turntable mastery also illustrates a DJ's skill as an instrumentalist as such techniques as beat matching are much more difficult to master with a mixer and two turntables. As one DJ relates:

> It's much easier and essentially more precise using CD's to beat match. The downside to this though is you don't get to appreciate the DJ's artistry. There's no show if you know what I mean cause it's the technology that's doing the work. That's why DJs use turntables, you wouldn't be respected as a DJ otherwise, so if CD's are used, it's always combined with the turntable ('Evan' 03-06-13:fn).

The move to the turntable as an instrument is also demonstrated by the recently developed style of notation designed for turntable artists, that incorporates a set of symbols referred to as "articulations" which direct the position of a DJ's hands throughout the musical score (see Webber 2000).

A paradoxical artist, the DJ then is a meta-musician whose performance is based on prerecorded music. The profession thus questions the traditional notion of the live performance and as Poschardt states, "questions the traditional concept of the artist, blows it apart and re-establishes it in overhauled form" (1995:15-16). An emblematic figure of the postmodern era, the DJ has been likened to a writer, an editor, and even a weaver of mosaics and tapestries. This is largely due to the techniques of mixing, remixing, and sampling, procedures that make each performance spontaneous, unique, unexpected, and thus "live" as opposed to prerecorded. Combining two records is referred to as mixing, remixing involves altering and therefore reinterpreting an existing song, and sampling consists of inserting any sound, musical passage, or rhythm into an existing track at any desired point. This is where the creative element and metaphor of the DJ as writer is relevant:

> I love the idea of continuous sampling: like remixing everything as you go so writing is like that. Just like you're probably going to do edits, cuts and splice when you're editing this tape, I mean you do that with language, even when you're speaking, you're always picking and choosing what words you're using, the way you're going to describe something so everything is a mix. I'm mainly a writer, DJ'ing to me... every DJ is a writer, you're using the urban landscape as your book, as your novel as your text, so everything is writing ('DJ Spooky' in Reiss 1999).

The ability to create new sounds and sample virtually anything also emphasizes the freedom of the artist and for this reason, 'Greg' sees Techno as the ultimate musical form:

> You're not limited to 6 strings and 21 frets like you are on the guitar. Think

> of having an instrument that can make any sound you want, you are only limited by your imagination (02-04-31:14).

Authorship and performer identity are of less concern in dance music culture and many musicians will release records using a number of pseudonyms to generate confusion over their identities (Hesmondhalgh 1998:238; see also Hemment 1997:37). Additionally, the lack of vocals combined with the techniques of sampling, mixing, and remixing make dance tracks generally anonymous; the original producers and composers are often so far removed from the various tracks that the DJ ultimately receives the credit for the performance. The following DJ's statement touches on the irrelevance of the original source, instead prioritizing the finished product that the DJ weaves together during his live performance:

> I don't distinguish between samples from groups that I consider good and those from groups that I don't consider good. The samples serve to create a new unit, independent of any ideological judgement on the source material. I don't judge a sound based on the person who created it. The tenet of rave is to dissolve the works in each other and to destroy them as works. The tracks are totally meaningless in themselves and achieve their temporary meaning only in the mix when the dj uses the material in its context and re-processes it. Only then you can perceive the sound ('DJ West Bam' in Huegli 2002:23).

The use of the term "set," which refers to the DJ's total performance, also reinforces the DJ's "authorship" over the music. A DJ is evaluated according to his "set," which comprises the complete ensemble of tracks. Listening to a track implies recognizing the original artist and producer of the music, whereas dancing to a "set" acknowledges the DJ as the principal artist (Thomassen 2002).[74] The removal of the original artists, and the ambiguity between the notion of "live" versus "prerecorded" music has also created a multitude of difficulties with

[74] http://www.chikinsandowhichi.com/ravedata/sitemap.htm [date accessed 2002-12-19]

regard to copyright. DJs who play at "aboveground," legitimate events are required to record the percentage of play time appropriated from the artists they play so that the original artists can receive royalties. This creates several problems, and for 'Evan' the issue of copyright is one of the drawbacks of playing at the larger commercialized events:

> Like sometimes I'll only use the bass from one track, mix that with the vocals of another, then add a synth line from something completely different there again. The question is where do you draw the line between what's mine and someone else's? You can't...that's what I hate about these festivals, the paperwork is so bogus because you can't even predict what you're going to play and how you're going to mix it. Everything depends on your mood, the crowd, there's just so many factors involved. At least with the underground events you don't have to go through that bullshit (03-07-08:3).

At the same time, in electronic music culture the boundaries between artist, producer, and DJ have become blurred since in addition to sampling and remixing the works of others, many DJs record and produce their own tracks often through their own record labels (see Smith and Maughan 1998:222-223). According to DJ Tiësto, the number one ranked DJ in the world for 2002, his international acclaim and recent DJ ranking was the result of him writing his own music:

> In general, the whole DJ thing has changed. Nowadays, you can only break through as a DJ if you also make your own music. That's why I broke through. DJ's are now artists; they're not just DJ's (in Ostroff 2003:60).

All the DJs I interviewed compose their own music, and this activity was not only restricted to DJs. Many rave participants spend much of their time experimenting with different sounds, putting compositions together at home. Recognizing the talent, skill, and musicianship of the DJ, the DJ's repertoire of "gigs" has gone beyond radio broadcasting, wedding and club performances, to include nationwide and world tours.

## 7.2 The DJ's training

While there are "DJ schools," information resources on the Internet, and technical manuals available to those entering the DJ profession, most DJs are self-taught and the process of learning and refining skills for oneself seems to be the ultimate rite of passage into the trade. For the most part, DJs seem to frown upon professional schools that offer courses in DJ'ing, feeling that these schools are no more than the product of a recent fad. Most seemed to agree that experience and intuition are the greatest tools for learning available to an amateur, and these cannot be acquired in an academic institution. Most DJs acknowledged that perfecting their trade took many hours of solitary practice in their basements, and many could also relate several disastrous performances early on in their careers. With the exception of one DJ who received formal training at the institution "DJ United," all of the DJs I interviewed started out as "basement DJs." For one individual, the development of a unique personal style is a key benefit of learning the craft on your own and "when you're doing it yourself it's a little more special for you personally"( 'Casey' 02-04-13:2-3). This not only reflects the DiY (Do it Yourself) theme of the electronic music scene, but the affordable nature of DJ equipment has also made the profession more accessible so that individuals can essentially "do it themselves." It has also given young people the resources to create employment opportunities as the more "traditional" careers increasingly disappear (McRobbie 1994:162). The lowered cost of equipment has also had an empowering effect on musicians who are able to retain control over the production and distribution of their own music:

> When digital technology became cheaper and accessible, it enabled all of us to go out and like for not many pounds or dollars, to be able to buy a tiny little studio set up and start recording yourself and techno music. In a sense when it really kicked off maybe seven or eight years ago, really empowered people again. It empowered a lot of young kids to be able to put their own records out and ignore the major labels and think "we can press 2000 white labels and sell them in a week" ('DJ Scanner' in Reiss 1999).

The ability to produce and release one's own records (a process referred to as "microlabelling"), independent of a record company illustrates Wilson's concept of "purposeful-tactical" resistance. As Wilson points out, active forms of resistance are not always "meant to garner attention from those outside the rave scene" (1998:400). The rave scene's exclusion from the formal economy at the level of event organization, music production and distribution, reveals the extent to which young people are active producers of culture rather than passive consumers. As noted by Smith and Maughan, this level of involvement on the part of young people in steering the course of a culture's development has not been witnessed since the 1960s (1998:218). Furthermore the authors challenge the view of rave as a meaningless and hedonistic escape, arguing that "dance culture is not about the losing of the self in the 'trance dance' but the making of the self in the culture" (Smith and Maughan 1998:218; see also Hopkins 1996:12). The underground release of micro labels has gone beyond simply posing a threat to the dance music industry; 12 inch vinyl record releases by the independent music sector have significantly surpassed the number of records released by "legitimate" record companies. According to the 1994 official statistics in Britain, there were 3892 singles released by the corporate sector compared to an estimated 15 000 singles released by the underground sector (Smith and Maughan 1998:219). Because these singles are distributed directly to DJs whose decisions determine the success of tracks,

the nature of the DJ system in dance music culture "operates to limit the power of the corporate sector over that of the micros" (Smith and Maughan 1998:225).[75] As McRobbie points out, these subcultural commercial ventures are not as "far removed" from resistance as they appear:

> They are also expressions of change and of social transformation. Deindustrialization, class de-alignment, the changing place of women, and the consolidation of black people at the bottom end of the labour hierarchy, have all affected young people during the 1980's (1994:161).

When asked what was the motivation behind becoming a DJ, "the love of the music" was the typical answer given by most DJs I interviewd. A passion for music combined with affordable equipment, implies that most individuals didn't set out with the intention of becoming a DJ. For most, the career grows out of a passion for record collecting and the desire to share and expose others to a much loved genre of music: "For me, the only reason that I ever wanted to play at a party is just because I have a collection of music that I think is just outstandingly beautiful, and I want to share that with people and have people be moved by it" ('Andy' 03-01-31:19). Even among those who do make a living out of DJ'ing, many held the view that for them DJ'ing was still a hobby, and there was a general feeling of gratitude and luck for being paid to do what one loves.

The notion of "DiY" doesn't mean that DJs aren't influenced by others or have not had their careers assisted along the way. Fikentscher characterizes DJ'ing as an oral

[75] In contrast Hesmondhalgh (1998) while recognizing the decentralization of the dance music industry in the UK, also notes that there are other forces present that limit the underground labels from being totally independent from the corporate sector. The dependence of the dance music scene on crossover hits and compilation albums, the relationship between independent and corporate partners, and the pressures placed on microlabels to support the development of a star system are factors that challenge a DJ's total independence from the corporate sphere (see also Reynolds 1999:276-278).

tradition where knowledge is passed down to new artists from the DJs that come before them (2000:44). Many amateur careers have developed out of the networking that came about through involvement in various levels of the music industry such as radio broadcasting, music production, sound and lighting crews, flyer design, working in record shops, and event promotion. Like raves, DJs on the rise develop a following through word of mouth and the circulation of their music. It is not uncommon to encounter DJs selling copies of their CD's at events, or even distributing samples of their music for free. At clubs and raves, the local and unknown DJs are given the opportunity to spin in the chill-out areas and smaller peripheral rooms while the headliner DJs spin in the main room. Through this kind of exposure, a DJ can develop a following and eventually graduate to the central room which houses the best lighting and sound equipment. DJs have also been known to collaborate with other musicians in producing records, and even tour with other DJs thus picking up techniques and styles along the way.

All of the DJs I interviewed agreed that formal training in music is not a necessary requirement for DJ'ing, however there was a general consensus that an ear for music, a sense of rhythm, and musical memory are essential. A DJ must have an extensive knowledge of tracks and remember such details as the rhythm, the vocals, and key structure, so that the current song will be complementary to the track it is being combined or sampled with. Just as many ravers note an alteration in the way they perceive Techno music through continued participation in the subculture, DJs also identified a change in their musical perception that orients toward the more technical aspects of the music (see also Poschardt 1995:379). Evidence for this kind of neural entrainment is supported by the finding that the analytic left

brain tends to dominate musical processing in trained musicians, whereas for the untrained, it is the right hemisphere that dominates (Wilkinson 2000:1). As 'Kayleb' intimates, prioritizing the mechanical aspects of the music over the visceral is one of the drawbacks of this shift in musical perception:

> I know though for a fact, my listening has changed a lot since I began learning to DJ. Sometimes it's a pain because instead of listening to a mix and having fun, you're actually listening to detect the subtle changes, anticipating beats, checking if the beats are properly overlapping or not, and if the speeds are same and more...and the process is irreversible. My mind turns into a judge mode instead of the audience mode (03-06-20:1).

While there has been considerable discussion surrounding MDMA use as a prerequisite for fully understanding and appreciating electronic music (see Reynolds 1999:85; Takahashi forthcoming), in contrast to the majority of rave-goers who advocate drug use to "get into" the music, all of the DJs I interviewed disagreed with this view. Although the majority had tried MDMA or other dance related drugs, the sentiment that the music combined with the skill of the DJ in its own right were enough to elicit an ASC appeared to dominate. The DJ's adeptness for musical perception and producing musical triggers for trance states could explain the incongruity between DJs' and participants' views concerning drug use. All subjects interviewed performed their sets without taking drugs, the reason given being that these substances would negatively affect the concentration required to perform a live show. One DJ reported that drugs had the effect of making him "turn inward" and this outcome is counterproductive when observing and "reading the crowd" is such an important part of the DJ process.

Instrumentalists of possession rituals are reported to not ingest psychoactives or enter into trance during performances for similar reasons. According to Rouget, "to do so would

be incompatible with their function, which is to provide for hours on end and sometimes on several consecutive days, music whose execution must continuously adapt itself to the circumstances" (1985:103-104). Rouget argues that these musicians must therefore be external to the cult, such that they are not vulnerable to the music, or they must be experienced adepts who are able to withstand the effects of the music (1985:104).

In contrast, shamans typically carry out their work in a state of trance that may or may not be induced by psychoactives. In the DJ's case, there are other reasons for avoiding psychoactive substances. Many expressed health concerns from being continuously exposed to poorly ventilated, smoky environments, and others were concerned about the potential for long term disruption to the circadian rhythm from the profession's nocturnal hours. With these worries already in place, some individuals were therefore reluctant to ingest further toxins through drug or alcohol use. Energy beverages such as "Red Bull," or products containing "ephedrine"[76] or "pseudoephedrine" are occasionally consumed by DJs as alternative measures to stay awake, while others become so accustomed to the nocturnal lifestyle of the trade that even these stimulants are not needed: "I'm just so used to sleeping every second day that going a night without sleep has become almost second nature to me" ('Karl' 02-11-04:1).

## 7.3 Equipment and Turntable Techniques

The typical DJ set-up consists of two turntables, a mixer, headphones, and an

[76] Since concluding my fieldwork, ephedrine is now a restricted substance. Diet pills and energy pills containing ephedrine are now banned in both the USA and Canada.

extensive collection of records.[77] The equipment is standardized as most DJs will use the gear provided by the venue-referred to as the "console" or set" (Fikentscher 2000:36)-with the exception of headphones and records. Using the available equipment is particularly important at raves where DJ line-ups can be fairly extensive and it is essential for the transition from one DJ to the next to be seamless. In addition, at no time does the music stop to accommodate equipment set up and changes. When additional equipment is being employed, the following DJ will normally start setting up while the current DJ is concluding his set. From my observation at events, individuals who use elaborate equipment tend to work in pairs or groups; one individual will start the set using the traditional turntable, while the other members set up the remaining equipment.

The most widely used turntable is the "Technics" turntable and as the industry's standard, these turntables are used in the majority of clubs. Many DJs will purchase and practice on a Technics knowing that while on the road, this is the brand they will most likely encounter. These professional turntables differ from regular record players in that DJ turntables are geared toward the techniques of mixing and beat matching, and therefore include a separate on/off switch and start/stop buttons, pitch controls, and faster start-up times (Webber 2000:17). The mixer combines the sounds from the two turntables allowing the continuous flow from one record to the next. Most DJs and participants agreed that the process of "beat matching" is the most important and difficult technical aspect of DJ'ing that should be mastered. This involves the perfect synchronization of two records so that the

[77] Some DJs are beginning to incorporate additional technology to the standard set-up. Computers, samplers, and synthesizers are used by some in tandem with the turntables. To distinguish these performances from a DJ's set, musicians who combine live music with pre-recorded are being increasingly referred to as "Live Performance Artists" or "PA's."

transition from one song to the next is smooth and undetected by the listener. DJs must therefore develop a keen memory for music and select tracks with similar or complementary themes, key structures and rhythms. DJs also need to remember the tempos of their records as records with similar or complementary BPM should be selected. As mentioned previously, DJs are very aware of tempos as it is the BPM range that determines a particular genre of Techno music, and DJs often advertise their BPM range on their albums and event flyers. Some participants are also conscious of BPM and know what range they prefer for dancing: "For me an optimal range for dancing is 140-160, when I go out to a club, I know exactly what beat is the comfort zone and it's fairly constant" ('Eric' 02-11-16:26-27).

The pitch adjustment control found on the turntable is frequently used for beat matching as it enables the DJ to speed up or slow down a song. Most pitch adjuster controls can match tempos that are within 10% of each other's BPM range. The headphone jack located on the mixer is also helpful in beat matching as the DJ is able to prepare the next track- called "cueing up"- without the spectators being aware. By placing the mixer's cross-fader in the middle position, the DJ can hear both records being mixed and once the beats are synchronized, he can continue moving the cross-fader so the suceeding song dominates (the master tune), smoothly replacing the preceding song (the preview tune). Such devices as the metronome can quickly determine the BPM of a track, and some mixers have built in metronomes, or "beat lights" that flash the timing of the beats allowing the DJ to see when two tracks are synchronized together. Some mixers have "beat offset lights" that survey how close together the two tempos are and show when the mix is dropping out of time. Although these devices are helpful when starting out, it was agreed that a DJ shouldn't rely

on them since a DJ could encounter a mixer that lacks these features. It was also suggested that the response times on these devices may be slow and slightly inaccurate and for styles of music with complex rhythmic patterns, these devices are of less use. It was generally accepted that a DJ should gradually move away from the technical and develop an intuitive approach. Once this occurs, the DJ's ear becomes the most reliable tool for beat matching: "When I started, I counted the BPM's of all the tunes I was going to learn with, just to give me a leg up-then, once I was competent at mixing with known BPM's I stopped counting and used my ears."[78] Just like any instrumentalist, the mastery of turntable techniques can only be accomplished through many hours of labourious practise. Even experienced DJs admitted to practising regularly at home to keep their skills up:

> I try to practice at least a little bit every day. Before a gig, I'll practice at least two whole days. Pretty much all day for two days. When I'm doing all these other projects, I have to cut out two days before a show and make sure I have turntables in the hotel room before the performance ('DJ Qbert' in Webber 2000:98).

One of the biggest technical blunders a DJ can make at an event is fail to beat match successfully; ravers refer to this as a "train-wreck:"

> The beats always have to mesh together. It doesn't matter what style of music, otherwise you just get chattering or what people call a train-wreck, which is really noticeable with aggressive styles of music like hard trance or something where's there's a steady thump thump thump. You get the thumps out of order and it's just awful, its just so noticeable and everybody just stops dancing ('Andy' 03-01-31:19-20).

What's key is that all transitions must be gradual and this is essential so that the dancers will not lose a beat, but more importantly in sustaining the individual/group's mood or altered state. Many participants found sudden abrupt changes in the music, or a DJ's failure to

[78] http://www.recess.co.uk/beginning.html [date accessed 2003-06-10]

segue from one record to the next is disconcerting:

> The worst thing is when you've just entered that state of what I call "being in the zone." It's almost like being in a dream state where your body feels so relaxed almost like you're floating. You just feel totally relaxed, carefree and like part of the music and the crowd and vibe around you. Then along comes a friggin' train-wreck, or a problem with the sound system, or the event gets busted by the cops. It's like being woken up suddenly in the middle of a good dream. It's friggin jarring you know. Like I've been to events where the drugs are just kicking in, then the cops come and we'd have to leave all of sudden. You go home and you're like "what the hell." The night just feels incomplete. I guess what I'm trying to say is the experience is a process from start to finish... each part of it is important, and it just can't be rushed or cut short ('Ian' 03-03-24:fn).

Gerard (2004) highlights the importance of flow by framing the dance experience, and the process of mixing, as conduits for "liminality" as defined by Victor Turner (2003:176). The DJ employs what Gerard coins as "techniques of liminality" (i.e. EQ'ing, mixing) which create periods of uncertainty for the dancers followed by resolution. When the flow is interrupted by poor mixing "the flash of spontaneous communitas is potentially threatened; dancers are often drawn out of their ecstatic state; they return to an increased awareness of both setting and self, and sometimes abandon the dance floor" (Gerard 2004:176).

Remixing, the technique of modifying an existing song can also be performed live with two turntables and a mixer. More complex forms of remixing are carried out in the studio, and these studio remixes of mainstream tunes by such artists as Madonna and Brian Adams have not only offered rave DJs significant economic opportunities, but such DJs as Paul Oakenfold, Fatboy Slim, and DJ Tiësto, have become household names in the music industry. As many ravers have noted, it is the spontaneous and unexpected aspects of raving that makes these parties attractive, and these qualities are not only expected of the location, but also of the music. DJs are constantly frequenting record shops to find the newest

underground sounds and ravers go to parties with the expectation of hearing a blend of anthems as well as unfamiliar tracks. It is not uncommon for a part-time DJ to spend his monthly DJ earnings on records, and one DJ commented that he spent as much on records as he did on his rent.

The standard method of live remixing involves adding additional layers of beats over an existing tune and this is accomplished when the cross-fader dial is set in the middle so that the existing song and what's being added to it are heard simultaneously. Sometimes DJs will increase the volume of the new beat to enhance the remixing effect. "EQ Mixing" is another popular method of remixing which involves adjusting the equalizer (EQ) to enhance the different frequency ranges of a track. Most mixers contain EQ's that can adjust three ranges of sound: the bass range (100 Hertz), mid range sounds (1000 HZ) and treble sounds (above 10000 HZ). Switches that eliminate entire bands of EQ are called "kills" and most mixers have "kills" for each low, middle and high frequency band.

Although it is less common in Trance music and more frequently employed in the genres of Rap and Hip Hop, "scratching" is another method of remixing that enables the DJ to recreate live music through his instrument. Scratching is the result of pushing the record back and forth by the hand and most DJs become ambidextrous and scratch with both hands. The pitch of the scratch can be adjusted depending on the speed of the dragging: the faster the push or pull, the higher the pitch.

### 7.4 Symbiosis: The DJ's Relationship with the Dancers

As I alluded to in the previous chapter, raves-style events in many ways parallel

rituals of possession as outlined by Rouget. One of the more striking similarities is the DJ's relationship with the dancers, and as will become apparent, an intimate and symbiotic relationship between the DJ and his participants is a prerequisite for trance induction. The dancers' ability to achieve what they call an "ecstatic" state is very much dependent on the DJ's stage presence, his proficiency in intuitively "reading" and responding to the crowd, and his ability to form a temporary bond with the dancers. Without these skills, the techniques of trance induction on their own right are generally inadequate for eliciting what participants call the "ecstatic" state. The DJs I spoke with recognized that mastery over mixing, remixing, sampling, and scratching are useless if the DJ is unable to relate to and connect with the crowd, and negativity concerning "DJ schools" centred around this point. While these institutions develop an individual's mastery of turntabling techniques, the emotional, intuitive, and interpersonal elements of the craft can only be acquired through the experience of performing live sets. The primacy of the DJ's interpersonal skills is also confirmed in a recent experiment that put Hewlett-Packard's artificial intelligence DJ called "HPDJ" to the test of a London club's live audience. The sophisticated program was designed to select dance tracks and work out the best sequence in which to play them based on the BPM range. Like a human DJ, the device can also mix tracks by altering the tempo and even stretch out the beats to make them perfectly synchronized. A biofeedback system also allows the HPDJ to respond to the crowd as sensor equipment placed on the dancers transmits signals to the computer letting it know when the dancers are less enthusiastic about the music. HPDJ is designed to respond to these signals and then "try to improve the music, experimenting with different beats and bass lines, or speeding up the tempo in a bid to coax

more people back on to the floor" (Graham-Rowe 2001:1). Despite HPDJ's technical prowess, the majority of the spectators were able to distinguish HPDJ's music from the human DJs, and all members of the expert panel (professional DJs) were able to correctly discriminate between the two.[79]

It should also be recognized that these interpersonal skills can only be developed when the technical aspects of DJ'ing become second nature. DJs who are unable to keep participants on the dance floor are usually so preoccupied with the equipment and focussed on what their hands are doing, that they forget to observe the participants and are thus unable to anticipate their needs. Many DJs were able to recount their first experience doing a live set and the theme of the young confident DJ who was quickly humbled when the dancers walked off the floor, seemed to be very common. An inexperienced DJ will quickly learn that there is an enormous difference between playing at home and playing for a crowd:

> Anyways, on recent mix tapes, I have been able to hold mixes for about a minute, which I am pretty proud of. So you can imagine that I felt myself ready to throw down in front of a crowd. But unfortunately, three hours of great mixing in my room turned to shit pretty quickly in front of people... I was yanked, and the party died, and god...I wanted to sell my decks.[80]

> The first show I ever did, it was one of the worst emotions I've ever had. Yeah cause it sucked, I should have known what to expect but I didn't. That was the biggest crowd, there was a crowd, and it was over the radio, and unfortunately it was a dynamic that I didn't understand the mechanics of. I wasn't appropriately prepared and that's why it sucked ('Casey' 02-04-13:6).

In ceremonial possession, the notion of performance is a central element to the ritual. Instrumentalists perform for an audience, and irrespective of an individual's familiarity with

[79] http://www.newscientist.com/news/print.jsp?id=ns99991563 [date accessed 2003-06-10]

[80] http://www.recess.co.uk/diary9.html [date accessed 2003-06-10]

the music, the trance state is only induced within the ritual context in the presence of others. Although ravers listen to Techno music at home, and some have commented that certain tracks of music can elicit ASC's similar to the ones experienced at raves (see chapter eight), for the most part individuals when listening to Techno at home are not consciously seeking out an ASC. Furthermore, additional aspects of raves that are paired with the music (i.e. lighting, psychoactives) are generally absent at home, and as will be shown in the following chapter, these learned or scripted elements play an important role in trance induction. Also absent outside of the rave context is the interpersonal relationship between the DJ and the participants. Similarly on the subject of possession rituals, Rouget emphasizes the importance of the connection between the instrumentalists and the dancers, stating " in order to induce trance in a particular person the priests and musicians establish a special relationship with him, 'surround' him, make him the object of their 'solicitude,' address themselves to him in an exclusive way, and become at the same time very attentive to what he himself is feeling" (1985:112). At raves, participants recognize certain qualities that a DJ must possess in order to establish this special bond. Lengthy references to the selfless DJ who prioritizes the needs of the crowd over his own were made frequently by ravers. DJs who go to events with a rigid, pre-selected play list and refuse to alter their selections based on how the dancers respond were referred to as selfish, and most ravers had little patience for these individuals:

> I don't understand those DJs that are playing to an empty floor. One minute it's packed and then the next it's sparse. What's going on in a DJ's head that they just don't see. A good DJ will be able to read the crowd and be able to pull tracks out of their little record box based on how the crowd is reacting instead of saying "okay this is my set, next it's this track, next it's this track, screw everyone else" ('Sue' 03-01-31:20).

> I think that's a selfish DJ who says I'm going to this party and I'm going to play this track and this track. This is my set ('Andy' 03-01-31:20).

> There's two kinds of DJs. There's the DJ who's selfish who goes to an event, he'll walk up to an event, full room and he'll play what he wants to play and he gives out the vibe that he wants to give out, and that's a selfish DJ. And what happens is, normally that kills the dance floor. Then you have some more aware, DJs who are there for the people, and that DJ goes in with a big crate of records ('Alan' 02-04-30:11).

This explains why many DJs feel it unnecessary to practise before a show or arrive with a planned set in mind. There is a general attitude that it is pointless to get "attached" to a specific set by repeatedly practising prearranged mixes because the crowd could want something totally different. Although most DJs have a general idea of the style of music and the songs they will play, it is accepted that flexibility is more important, and this is particularly relevant for touring DJs who must also adapt to regional differences in music taste:

> I know the records that are good to start an evening, but I don't prepare my set in advance. I watch and I react. I try to adapt. Every city is influenced by the people who initially created the scene. You have to adapt and still be true to yourself. In Germany, I play techno. In Belgium and Switzerland, it's more funky tech house. In Spain, it's predominantly techno, except in Barcelona and Ibiza where it's house ('Jack de Marseille' in Huegli 2002: 69).

The active role of the crowd in shaping the mood and atmosphere of the party also favours a more spontaneous approach, and recognizing this, some DJs felt that they need a crowd and perform best during a live set:

> I never planned my DJ set until I get the vibe from the party. Otherwise you are the same with bed room DJ. DJs need to get the feed back from audience (Dancers), DJs never exist if there are no feed back. It's much more interactive music experience than rock music approach (DJ Tsuyoshi).[81]

[81] http://www.racio-v.com/main/beam/features/djspeaks/ [date accessed 2003-10-21]

One DJ I spoke to would arrive before his set to watch other DJs perform in an effort to "read the crowd" in advance so that he could start his set already prepared. Other DJs will scan the room and pick out a person who they feel is completely absorbed and captured by the music, and they will choose to play for that one individual who on a larger scale, also represents the entire room:

> They'll be going up and down with their record selections to make that one kid happy, the kid will never have known of course, but that one kid represents that whole community in the room and they keep dancing harder and harder and that means the vibe is pretty good. It's a really interesting method ('Alan' 02-04-30:11).

'Dave' recounts what it was like being the recipient of this kind of process and the profound impact this experience had on him:

> My biggest experience that really got me into music was with Eric Morillo [DJ]...And like I am really getting into this music, and the music is going and I'm like yeah! And you hear this guy come out and sing and dance while he was playing like this guy was playing with him. And I started like yeah! Yeah! Bring it up! And then Eric's looking at me and he's nodding his head and he's like "that guy's saying give me something that will make it work," you know, and then I started working with the DJ, you know and the DJ you know you see the DJ moving his head. And when I was doing something wrong I could tell and when I was doing something right the music would go the way I want it. And I was like WOW! Changed my life. That experience. Definitely changed my life (02-12-04:10).

It is also believed that DJs who prioritize the tastes of the crowd over their own, are humble DJs and that this quality is a precondition to a 'people's DJ' (see also Brewster and Broughton 1999:11-12). Cues indicating a DJ's humbleness that were remarked upon, are gestures suggesting appreciation and gratitude toward the crowd such as bowing, clapping, eye-contact, and smiling.[82] These gestures also play an important role in breaking the

[82] In contrast, Reynolds suggests that successful DJs must also carry with them a certain amount of arrogance, and a disposition that favours leadership and authority (1999:275). Considering the DJ's role as music educator, a DJ has to take risks by exposing the crowd to new sounds,

artist/spectator barrier and this strengthens, and reifies the connection between the DJ and the dancers. When discussing their favourite DJs, often it was the interpersonal qualities that ravers referred to the most, rather than the artist's technical skill or musical style. For example, after seeing her favourite artist "DJ Tiësto" perform, one informant kept referring to his "infectious smile" and it was evident that she wasn't the only one who noticed it. In reference to that same DJ, another informant stated: "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" ('Mike' 02-12-16:8). Additionally on Tiësto's website, I observed a number of emails that referred to his smile by individuals who had attended that same performance. Another crowd pleasing behaviour of this particular DJ that I observed was the signing of autographs during his set. DJ Tiësto has also been known to play 8 hour sets that go beyond the average playing time that a DJ is normally hired for. These qualities, in addition to his technical abilities have made DJ Tiësto the highest ranking DJ in the world. Another informant recounted how his favourite DJ is notorious for jumping out of the DJ booth and joining the participants on the dance floor. Breaking the barrier between artist and participant is another reason why DJ booths are centrally located at raves. It is important that the DJ see the dancers so he can respond to them, and it is equally important for the participants to be in close physical proximity to the DJ, so that his personality and presence are able to come through:

> I don't feel like I have to hide and say, "No one should see me when I dj. It's all about the music." Bullshit! People always need someone they can connect to and they can identify with. I always felt that I could bring the music across in a more convincing way by using my personality. Because

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sometimes at the expense of playing exactly what the crowd wants to hear (1999:274).

> I give people an honest feeling. The most important thing is to see people standing happily on the dance floor in the end (Sven Vath in Huegli 2002:18).

In reference to local DJs, one informant felt that a DJ should "be a part of the whole community" ('Tom' 02-05-06:4). This implies educating, and promoting the development of a music scene in one's own region. Ottawa's "Graham J" is a good example of a community DJ. Many ravers consider him to be the forefather of the Ottawa electronic music scene as he is the founder of "xvi," a website that provides a forum for individuals to go online and learn about the local scene, find out about upcoming events, and chat with DJs as well as other ravers. Graham J has also been known to donate his time free of charge at local parties, as well as provide equipment for local house parties.

All of these factors are conducive to breaking the barrier between the DJ and the dancers. The communication that occurs between the two is much more than the music, lyrics, and the dance movements, or what Rouget refers to as the "level of the code" (1985:113). In reference to possession rituals, communication is established "at the personal level, the emotional level of direct person-to-person relationships" (Rouget 1985:113).

The active role of the dancers also reinforces the dismantling of the barrier between the performer and audience, and this is where the concept of the feedback loop between the DJ and the participants is relevant. As 'DJ Spooky' puts it: "the DJ/audience relationship is like a symbiosis you know, it's like a biological structure you know, I mean it's like you are sending out information and pulses that the crowd in a way then sends back to you, and like you're like a focal point of the energy of these gathered people" (in Reiss 1999). I observed that most individuals in the electronic music scene refrain from using the term "audience" and prefer the term "crowd" or "participant." It was related to me that terms such as

"audience" and "spectator" imply a distinct separation between the DJ and the dancers, and at raves the two should operate as one unit. The dancers must therefore give constant feedback to the DJ, which the DJ in turn responds to and builds from, and this explains why dancers generally face the DJ at raves.[83] There is also an emotional element involved in this symbiotic relationship and most ravers interviewed acknowledged that the DJ is responsible for the emotions of the crowd of dancers. They also recognized that the DJ's emotional state can get transmitted to the crowd through his music and this consequently impacts the affective condition of the dancers:

> He is the music man, he decides what you're going to feel that night. I would imagine that if a DJ isn't feeling particularly well, it will show up and you'll feel it ('Greg'02-04-31:15).

A DJ's seeming lack of enthusiasm, his failure to make eye-contact, smile or dance, are indicators suggesting that he isn't having a good time, and this has consequences on the crowd. Put simply by one DJ: "If I'm not having fun, they're not having fun and this is why essentially I come excited, so they can feed off that immediately" ('Casey' 02-04-13:7). While the crowd is sensitive to these nonverbal indicators of the DJ's affective state the DJ's mental state can also influence his choice of music, and this too will impact the experience of the dancers. While electronic music has been accused by some of being repetitive, bland, and even minimal, there is a strong correlation between genres of Techno music, and affect. For example, Terrorcore,[84] Industrial Hardcore,[85] Jungle,[86] and Drum n' Bass[87], are noted for

83 Gerard notes that in the Toronto scene, failing to observe this convention (i.e. dancing together in a group facing each other) is an indicator of "novice status" (2004:175). Circle dancing is common among mainstream club-goers, where the grouping together of females for example, serves to discourage males from making unwanted advances (Gerard 2004:181).

84 Terrorcore is a branch of Hardcore featuring a faster BPM range of +160. It is intended to be the antithesis of the uplifting positive tone of Happy Hardcore and is thus characterized by darker synth melodies, bass lines and vocals. Terrorcore is also commonly referred to as Speedcore, Darkcore, Extremecore, Doomcore, Demoncore, and Deathcore.

bringing out aggressive and negative emotional states in some individuals. Bold, militant rhythmic patterns, sounds of machinery, people screaming, and vocals with coarse language, are the kinds of sounds attributed to some of these music styles. One informant described Drum n' Bass as "very disturbing and it really takes you over almost, and you become that person, you almost become what you're listening too and it's not good for the [rave] community" ('Alan' 02-04-30:10). Some informants were reluctant to include these genres as part of rave culture and as 'Sue' emphasized in reference to Jungle music: "I want to emphasize that it's a tiny little corner of rave culture, one that we specifically avoid" (03-01-31:11). It was generally felt that the people who are looking to experience negative and aggressive states seek out these types of events. In contrast, Trance, House, and Happy Hardcore, are generally characterized by warm melodic styles and positive lyrics that are noted for engendering such feelings as love, a sense of well-being, connectedness, and spirituality among participants:

> When you go to a Happy Hardcore rave, everybody knows the tunes, there's always classics that are played in every Happy Hardcore party, and everybody will have a big smile, and everybody will look like a little Care Bear. Everybody will smile and run and jump everywhere ('Will' 02-04-31:15).

Similarly in reference to Trance music:

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85 Another offshoot of Hardcore, Industrial Hardcore is rhythmically fast but distinct from other Hardcore genres for sampling sounds of machinery.

86 Jungle is noted for its highly syncopated and rapid rhythm. Unlike Trance and Hardcore which are characterized by one predominant bass rhythm, Jungle tracks can include a number of overlapping rhythmic patterns. Jungle developed in the UK and the Black music traditions of Reggae, Rap, Hip-Hop, and Breakbeat are considered to be its influences. Outside of the UK, Toronto is considered to be the leading Jungle scene (Saunders 1996:175).

87 Also known as "D n' B," Drum n' Bass is a minimalist form of Jungle. It is rhythmically similar but uses less vocals.

> There's the reinforcement of positive image or self-image. Like reinforcing a positive image and building up someone's confidence. Like some of the lines...you hear lots of "I want to love you" and "you're wonderful to love" and "I want to be with you in the morning as long as I can be with you in the evening" and things like "you're so special" and "you're shining" and "you're my bright." So that's the feel good aspect of the music and when you hear the words... you can't help but feel good ('Eric' 02-11-16:24).

Thus, depending on his mood, the DJ can choose tracks with vocals and melodies that accentuate positive themes, or tracks with sounds and lyrics that concentrate on the darker aspects of life. This is where a participant's sense of trust in the DJ is so important. One informant seemed uneasy with the DJ's proficiency at mind control, particularly due to the fact that this informant finds himself open to suggestion while under the influence of MDMA. Also evident is a feeling of uncertainty arising from the inability to pinpoint the DJ's intentions:

> I think it's to a point where the DJs are as efficient or even more efficient than people marketing some products. I could try and imagine very precise control over mind. Interesting but scary. Very good advertisers of a different sort but then we don't really know what they're advertising...scary. I know I feel completely spineless, very prone and open to suggestion when I'm on Ecstasy. I usually allow myself to get into this state but for some uninformed, with some kids, it could be a problem for sure ('Brad' 02-04-31:6-7).

A similar sentiment is expressed in the following raver's statement:

> I realized that the DJ had POWER over me. I was basically prostituting for the DJ: I was a slave to what he had (the promise of the climax) and he was flexing his power and tweaking with me to see how much I could stretch myself out for it. It really scared me...I think some DJs definitely hold the power of a cult in their turntables and in their speakers, and it's really not something that I want to get down on my knees for. Just a thought, I'm not bagging here. I still think rave is one of the best things the 20th century has to offer, but I think that if left unchecked, it could turn on us (cited in Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:86).[88]

[88] http://www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirt/technoshaminism/Techno_Orgasm.html [date accessed 2000-12-07]

At raves, the trance state is very much dependent on the individual's willingness to let go and trust the DJ in allowing him to guide the nature of his/her experience:

> Tiësto's kind of cute, maybe in a gay way, so it was a bit sexy to think that Tiësto the babe was controlling me. I wanted to be under his control, under his spell. I trusted him, the way you would let go of your senses in certain moments of supposed passion. ('Kate' 03-04-16:1).

One DJ regards the dancers as having a responsibility to meet him half way: "As long as they are open for a while and let themselves go, they have the opportunity to feel things the way I intended them to" (Heiko Laux, in Huegli 2002). Here again, the similarities between possession rituals, and rave are apparent. Rouget characterizes the relation of the possessee to the musicians as "the submission of the former to the latter" (1985:112). The following description of the *ndop* ceremony highlights many of these striking resemblances including the instrumentalist's ability to observe and respond to the dancers' movements, and the bond established between the two:

> In fact, a close interpersonal relationship develops at this point between drummer and possessee. The drummer takes charge of her, so to speak. Keeping very close to her, never leaving her side, concentrating on her slightest movements, incessantly observing her behavior in order to: speed up the tempo, or, on the contrary, relax it; select the necessary types of beat; and adjust the intensity of the stroke. Communicating the rhythm of the dance to her, he holds the possessed woman in his sway and leads her into the ever more violent whirlwind of his music. But if he is able to lead her in this way, and finally guide her where he wishes, it is because he has been able to establish a close understanding with her. It is because he can follow her that he is able to dominate her and impose his will upon her. He is the master of the game, but within a dialogue. He speaks music and she replies dance (Rouget 1985:112).

The theme of submission is also apparent in possession ceremonies in relation to the spirit beings that possess cult members. In the case of Haitian vodou for example, Bourguignon highlights extreme passivity as one of the prerequisites to trance induction:

> However, one aspect of submission-dominance seems of importance in relation to possession trance: the person, as we have seen, is said to be "mounted" by the spirit, to be his "horse." The personality of the individual, one of his souls called "gros bon ange," is displaced and the body is taken over by the spirit. In other words, there is total subjection to the spirit and total submission to him (or her). The spirit, as a powerful superhuman entity, can do as he pleases, both with the horse he has mounted and with other human beings present. We thus have an expression of extreme passivity in this interpretation of possession trance (1976:40).

At raves, references to the power of music in directing the body are reminiscent of possession's horse and rider metaphor. According to Sylvan, these accounts of submitting to the music "suggest a trance state very similar to possession, in which the music becomes the rider and the body becomes the horse, but without reference to any specific possessing spirit" (2002:129). The theme of submission is also reflected in some ravers' attitudes toward drugs. "First-timers" are often prepared ahead of time by veterans to avoid fighting the effects of the drug as this can often result in a bad trip and minimize the positive benefits:

> You need to be ready to give yourself away to the buzz that you gave yourself since normal ceases to exist once you've swallowed the pill. It is the only way to fly, to appreciate the buzz, you're not doing it so everything can stay normal ('Greg' 02-04-31:4-5).

Some felt that onset of nausea that is frequently experienced with MDMA ingestion, is a physical reaction to the psychological attempt at fighting the drug. Some believed that once the individual comes to accept the new reality, the nausea will pass.

In the rave locale, the DJ is equally influenced by the emotions of the crowd, where participant feedback is transmitted at the visceral level. While I've observed participants demonstrating their admiration for a DJ by whistling or repeatedly chanting his name, for the most part, crowd feedback is nonverbal. Occurring as sets of coordinated body techniques

that all ravers seem to intuitively know, and all DJs no matter what their country of origin, can follow, these moves are acquired at the corporal level and most ravers seem to be unconscious or unaware of these movements. The responses to the DJ are well coordinated from an observer's point of view. When I first started attending raves, I thought that the dancers were performing a predetermined pattern of steps because the movements were surprisingly ordered, synchronized and even predictable (see also McCall 2001:95). Fikentscher calls the sum of individual dancing bodies the "collective performance" wherein the bodies of the dancers can potentially unite to form "one musical instrument" (2000:58-59). As McCall suggests, this process is mediated by dancers' observation of subconscious cues:

> People are helping each other dance without knowing it, feeding off the collective anticipation for that moment of synergy where it feels like utter madness: cheers, claps, whistles, hands in the air. Suddenly everyone is dancing in unison (2001:93; see also Fikentscher 2000:80-81).

When the dancers are in sync with one another, the boundaries between individuals seem to vanish as the crowd appears to function as one organism (McCall 2001:95). This process of synchronization known to insiders as "phase locking," also encompasses the entry into a collective psychic space. Referring to the crowd as a "sea of dancers" is another commonly used description that suggests the merging of dancers into one: "Crazy you know, like 15,000, 20,000 people and the underworld is spinning and you look at these people and it's like a sea, it's like a literal sea of people moving together as one" ('Kurt' 02-11-08:7). Upon attending her first event, one informant felt a little intimidated because she didn't know what the gestures meant, or when and how to use them. As a newcomer her observations and thoughts regarding these movements are quite exceptional:

> I looked ahead and between myself and the DJ, there was a group of people, a bunch within sight that had their hands raised and you know, they had them raised I guess because that's the rave language and they were bowing down and you know, that's kind of the god like aspect I guess. I could tell by their hand language, how they were...what was it again..there's two hand movements that I learned that night cause I'm new to this so, there's one where they said "yeah yeah yeah this is so good," the little lasso there. It's like keep going keep going cause we're really enjoying this, this is so good." That was when everyone was really into it and the beat was the strongest and then when it dropped, it lowered, that was obvious too because then their hands are both..you know one's up in the air or no no maybe both of them, no no just one I think, and then it's going up and down, up and down in the air and that's when they're saying "hey come on come on we want more, more more, come on, we can take more." I'm still learning the hand movements but it seems to be just a universal line that ravers just know. I mean it seems instinctual, yet it's not, it's just learned" ('Kate' 03-01-01:1-2).

The interesting element about these movements is that the learning seems to take place at the corporal level rather than intellectually, and as a newcomer to the scene, 'Kate' seemed to perceive this. In contrast, when I asked seasoned ravers to talk about these movements, they seemed to be unaware of these patterns and insisted that there were no steps or "choreography" at a rave. It was regularly contended that the movements came naturally and intuitively and that these movements were not informed by thought or intentionality, although one informant did acknowledge that "you'll only have that communication when you've danced a lot or when you can really appreciate the intricacies of electronic music" ('Kurt' 02-11-08:11). This is not to say that rave dancing is coordinated or by any means restricted. On the contrary, the freedom to dance any style without being judged is what attracts a number of individuals to the scene. The coordinated movements being referred to are intermittent, only occurring during certain intervals in response to specific changes in the music. Through my observations, I was able to note that these movements were predictable in relation to what the DJ was doing with the rhythm as many of these gestures

were in fact learned bodily responses to the DJ's trance induction techniques.[89] As dancers become increasingly familiar with Techno, they memorize the melodic and rhythmic structures built into each specific track and can precisely coordinate their movements to subtle changes in the music. When these familiar segments of music are introduced during the DJ's climactic build-up, the dancers not only anticipate the DJ's increase in BPM, pitch, and volume, but familiarity and the emotional connection to specific tracks fuel the fervour:

> So at first you don't know what's going on you don't know and slowly especially as it becomes familiar to you, you hear a track and you hear it again and you'll recognize it. And then you remember where the bass drops you remember where it climaxes and what's going to happen next. And so it becomes much more emotional because you have emotionality tied to it. But yeah it takes some getting used to, it takes some time to sit back and listen to it, and listen to the layers, and yeah pay attention to what it's doing to your feelings and especially what it's doing to your body so you can move to it ('Sue' 03-01-31:2-3).

Some ravers acknowledged using psychoactives to help them with their dancing. One informant felt that MDMA helped him to relax thereby enabling him to dance with total abandon, free from the constraints of worrying about how others might "evaluate" his moves. This kind of freedom gives dancers the opportunity to block out external inputs and focus directly on the music so that the dancing naturally becomes more precise. The tendency for psychoactives to enhance and heighten the senses also works well for music interpretation. In reference to Psytrance music, 'Andy' reports that "on LSD I feel like I just plug into the music and just all of my moves are just bang on, like I feel like I've become this

[89] Gerard also remarks on the proficiency of dancers in the Toronto scene by comparing the movements of novice dancers to the more experienced ones. While I have referred to these movements as learned bodily responses to trance induction techniques, Gerard refers to similar displays as responses to the DJ's "techniques of liminality." Although Gerard employs a slightly different lexicon, the DJ's techniques result in transformative experiences which both "liminality" and ASC's are noted to produce.

instrument and everything is right on time, right when it's supposed to be and you're really high off that sort of precision" (03–1-31-5). There are also specific styles of dancing in rave culture that are acknowledged by ravers as movements accomplished by only the adepts. Break-dancing is common at Jungle raves and on-lookers illustrate their appreciation of talent by forming a circle around skilled break-dancers. The form of movement referred to as 'liquiding'[90] is also held in high esteem as not all ravers are able to master it. According to 'Andy' in reference to 'liquiders': "those guys are like totally getting off on that kind of connection with the music and just being incredibly fluid and logical and precise" (03-01-31:5). Also evident is the development of regional differences, and variation in dancing styles between the different sub-scenes of electronic music culture. As McCall points out, "As rave transgresses from its original path, movements have begun to become codified" (2001:95; see also Fikentscher 2000:78). For example, the vigorous, choreographically homogenous style of the vertical hopping two-step is typical of Hardcore events, while break-dancing tends to be specific to Jungle music. 'Andy' observes a style of dancing unique to Toronto: "there's Toronto kick step which is the typical, you know like one hand on the cap, one hand behind the back, big fat pair of pants, and that rolling thing that looks like your sort of floating" (03-01-31:9). Similarly another informant observed that in the UK, the use of the forearms and upper body tends to predominate, and she refers to this as the "London muscle dance." The divide between an experienced and inexperienced

[90] This is a style of dancing where the focus tends to be on the hand and arm movements rather than the feet. "Liquiders" will often wear white gloves which glow under the black lights that are frequently present at raves and clubs. Liquiding can also be done using glow-sticks where the interaction between the glow-sticks or gloves gives the appearance that an object or energy is being manipulated by the hands. This style of dancing is meant to flow like liquid such that the body appears to merge with its surrounding environment. All of these movements are coordinated in time to the music.

dancer becomes very apparent when observing novices. Dancers who are unfamiliar with tracks and the structure of a DJ's set will often look confused, hesitate, stop, and/or look to others for guidance (see Gerard 2004:178). The movements are often disjointed and lack the ease and flow of the veterans.

## 7.5 The Science of Sound: Trance Induction at Raves

In *Music and Trance*, Rouget emphasizes that rituals of possession are embedded within rich cultural traditions wherein trance is a learned and culturally patterned process. In these traditions the musical motifs, instruments, and dance steps are localized referents to specific gods and myths, and thus the music operates as "the principal means of socializing trance" (1985:323). Rouget argues that it is the possessee's ability to identify emotionally with the music and dancing as signifiers of cultural knowledge, that enables him to enter the trance state. This is where electronic music departs from possession music. Although raves are emotionally charged events, the music and dance movements are not rooted in a specific cultural tradition other than rave. There is no specific context, and there are no referents to anchor the component parts of the music. A DJ's set is comprised of varying fragments of melody and rhythm sampled from a variety of cultural sources and music genres. In reference to Goa Trance, Guin suggests that sampling cultures at will has created what she refers to as a monoculture:

> At its best Goa Trance expresses an inclusive gesture that recognizes the groove across cultures, but what is rarely recognized are the costs of sampling other cultures at will. Lifting rifts from sacred songs, taking religious icons out of contexts, taking exotic cultures into curios, decorations that are just assimilated into the mix of a global monoculture. Goa is in danger of being sampled to death (Guin 2000).

As one individual relates, one of the consequences of this sampling is "you don't have a very clear feeling anymore, that's what's happening with the music, you know it's just all spliced up, it's all watered down and I mean it's a kind of dried up old feeling" (in Guin 2000). While these referents are lacking, there is nevertheless an inherent power in the music to evoke extraordinary states of consciousness and this is where the universal agents involved in triggering trance are paramount DJs have not only utilized these mechanisms to induce trance among participants, but the available technology in sound and music production have given artists the means to refine these practices into a science of precision. To a certain extent, these technological advancements compensate for the lack of cultural signifiers, as DJs have access to a range of equipment that is clearly absent in ceremonial possession.

Reynolds attributes the "DJ-godstar phenomenon" to MDMA use, suggesting that the overwhelming emotions that the drug elicits often get transferred to the DJ (1999:275). However, in appreciating the DJ's developing aptitude for music and crowd interaction, it is more plausible to argue that the "godstar" phenomenon has more do to with the DJ's accuracy in technique, since MDMA use in clubs predates raves, stemming as far back as the Disco era when DJs were only beginning to emerge from their anonymous position. Furthermore, some ravers who worship DJs have never taken MDMA. Electronic music producers are creating works that are intended to elicit specific states in the brain, and advancements in sound and visual effects at raves create the optimal listening environment for these tracks. Even though the sophisticated scripted process of initiation as observed in ceremonial possession is lacking at raves, these features when combined with the DJ's proficiency in track selection and crowd interaction, and the learning on the part of

participants in recognizing and responding to the DJ's cues, account for the ASC's people are reporting at raves.

Many DJs as well as experienced rave participants have developed their senses in such a way that they perceive Techno music differently than those who have never been exposed to it. This shift in musical perception is a learned by-product of repeatedly exposing the auditory system to new stimuli, and this transition is a key part of the scripted process as well as a prerequisite to ASC induction. These individuals are fanatical about sound quality, and as such, give tremendous attention to such details as the equipment used, the positioning of speakers, and the settings of equalizers. For DJs and their fans, listening entertainment is only a small part of the electronic music scene. Specifically, the tones, frequencies and beats of electronic music are designed by producers and further refined by DJs to target the body in precise ways. Electronic music is intended to be physically experienced and this is evinced by the fact that many veterans of the rave scene describe the music as having a three-dimensional vibrational quality that transcends the traditional way music is perceived (see also Fritz 1999:76). In reference to this quality, 'Kurt' describes the music as being "all around you rather than just going in your ears, the music is being absorbed by your body because it's energy" (02-11-11:12). The embodied or body-centred quality of the music is deeply intrinsic to electronic music culture and this is the common thread that links the numerous classifications of rave music. It also makes the music easier to dance to and the visceral quality makes individuals more responsive to the altered state:

> The bass is set in such a way that you can literally feel it penetrating your body. It's constant and it's always there so you can't escape it. Eventually the music just envelopes you and at that point you can't fight it anymore. You've no choice but to forget your problems...just shut the mind off and away you go

('Helen' 02-10-14:20).

As Gauthier remarks, "Techno becomes a *presence* that cannot be ignored-more, it is a shock whose intensity is only matched by the body's urge to give in to it, an aggression made positive through the festive context" (2004:75). The dominance of the music is also supported by the high volume of the music. According to Fikentscher, this ensures the authority of the DJ as the music establishes "absolute priority over other acoustic phenomena: conversation, handclapping, footstomping, yelling, whistling" (2003:85). This presence and the power of the bass can continue to impact an individual even after the conclusion of an event:

> Even though it's repetitive, every beat makes you move your foot and it's hard to get it out of your head up to a few days after even. Especially after the first few parties you go to and you're walking around and you look up because you feel happy because the sun is shining on you and the background you hear: "Shiboom boom boom boom" and even you'll hear birds that will be going on a rhythm, and then breaks in cars and you'll be going "yeah!," and you'll be just getting into it again ('Kurt' 02-11-08:7).

The scene's preoccupation with sound quality and the creation of the ideal acoustic environment has been developing for many years and this accounts for why the music is able to target the dancer's body so precisely today. Larry Levan, one of the earliest examples of the DJ as a "technoshaman" (Reynolds, 1999:35) collaborated with an engineer in the late 1970s in customizing the sound system of the legendary night club "Paradise Garage" where he was the resident DJ. Levan was known for spending hours adjusting the position of the club's speakers to create a sound that was "physically overwhelming yet crystal clear" (Reynolds, 1999:35). He would use three record decks instead of the standard two to improve the quality of the mix and was one of the first DJs to recognize the importance of

building the music into a gradual climax as a means of getting the dancers into a complete frenzy. He would begin the evening using average audio components (such as phono cartridges), saving the high quality equipment for the climax of the evening. He was also known to turn out the lights including the exit signs to build up anticipation and intensity in the club. Levan was also a pioneer in developing the multisensory potential of the club experience. He would regulate the lighting and even the air conditioning according to the music, and had selected perfume scents released into the air during specific songs.

Sound and lighting systems have come a long way since Levan's era. The aforementioned three-dimensional quality of rave music is partially a result of "surround sound"[91] technology that most club and rave venues now house. This technology allows the listener to become a part of the music as the sound appears to resonate from all points surrounding the listener, creating movement in the composition and a perception that surpasses the auditory to involve kinesthetic and spatial perception: "I think the music just really really embraces you, it completely surrounds you...it's sort of a cushion around you with all these different effects" ('Sue' 03-01-31:3). Surround sound has also provided a number of creative opportunities for musicians as new parameters such as the location of sound, its trajectory, and direction, can be incorporated into compositions (Galloway 2003).[92] Some individuals who mix in surround sound have noted that they can integrate a greater number of sounds without obtaining the muffled result that often occurs in stereo sound. With these enhanced capabilities, artists can incorporate complex textures into their works.

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91 This refers to any recording, playback or amplification system that utilizes more than two speakers positioned around rather than in front of the listener.

92 http://www.ovenguard.com/omnicetera/issue2/vance.html [date accessed 2003-10-21]

At the same time, it is increasingly possible for the listener to detect these subtle nuances of sound and detail what would otherwise go unnoticed in mono and stereo formats. This innovation accounts for the consistent manner in which many ravers describe electronic music. In addition to the three-dimensional aspect, a number of informants commented on the melodic and rhythmic complexities of electronic music as well as its many layers:

> At first it's [the music] just annoying cause there's so much to it. It's so intricate with the beats. There's so many layers and it isn't until you start picking out layers, you get the bass line down okay, and then you start hearing other melodies within it ('Sue' 03-01-31:2).

Laser, lighting and visual technology are additional features of the rave environment that enhance the overall physical experience of electronic music. There are software programs, for example, that allow users to input audio tracks into computers running a fractal-generating program. The overall effect is the projection of fractal patterns on screens that move in time with the music. The recent rise of the "VJ" (Video-Jockey) profession also reflects the important role of visual effects at raves. Similar to music and the art of DJ'ing, VJ's can sample and mix various forms of imagery that can range from fractals, film loops, digital animations, and live recordings. The production company "Space Dub Vibrations" frequently records the dancers and DJs at raves and uses a software program that inputs these images into the computer, where they are superimposed to create fractals which are then projected onto screens. Avery Runner, a technician at Space Dub Vibrations, envisions using visual imagery to provoke specific emotional and bodily states among the dancers. He hopes to use coloured lights at parties to harmonize and balance people's chakras and open "the door to higher spiritual experiences" (Berko 2003). These visual projections are further enhanced by lighting equipment referred to as "Intelligent Lighting Fixtures" that move

lights in patterns that are projected through different coloured filters. Similarly, computer programs can also transform lasers into shapes, patterns and even logos. VJ's and lighting technicians will often work with DJs to create tension and excitement in the crowd by running these systems during peak moments at an event.

Although not all DJs refer to themselves as "technoshamans," most are aware of the fact that music can operate as a catalyst for an altered state of consciousness. In fact many individuals involved in the electronic music scene, and in particular the Psytrance scene, are interested in "consciousness expansion" through psychoactives, yoga, meditation, and various New Age practices. It is therefore not surprising that some DJs have researched the perception of sound, and its relationship to various brain states and ASC's. Computer technology has provided the DJ with the power to totally control the means of perception at raves. Whereas "the tonalities and structures of traditional music are limited by the parameters of the instruments on which they are played" electronic music "sets tonality loose releasing creativity from the *discipline*-and exclusivity-of musicianship" (Hemment 1997:29). With the computer's capacity to create sounds that cannot be produced in the natural environment, and present melodies and rhythms so rapid and complex that they go beyond the human ability for performance, our perceptual systems are being exposed to completely new stimuli. The intentional experimentation with sound on the part of music producers accounts for the emotional and physiological responses that Techno music has been found to elicit in the laboratory. Listening to Techno has been correlated with an increase in heart rate and systolic blood pressure, alterations in levels of neurotransmitters, peptides and hormonal reactions, in addition to changes in affective states (Gerra et al.

1998). Some electronic musicians are even experimenting with sounds that go beyond the human auditory range. Fritz argues that sounds that vibrate through the body without being heard "may be partly responsible for the powerful emotional response people have when listening to rave music" (1999:78). DJs are thus experimenting with these technological innovations to create the optimal listening experience and brain state.[93] For example, Mike Adamzek, a DJ/artist uses brain scan equipment to test various drumming patterns in an effort to create an ideal "state of mind and connect it with the heart."[94] One artist who refers to himself as DJ 'EEG' chose his stage name because " I was interested in the positive effects of alpha waves on the psyche."[95] Similarly, world-renowned DJ 'BT' has an electrode brain scan machine called a "dual hemisphere electro encephalograph" that records brain wave activity. 'BT' wears this head set and records his own brain states while he listens to music to test the relationship between musical stimuli and mind state. Eventually he hopes to use this head set to coordinate additional sensorial elements with the music to induce specific brain states among participants:

> I've actually been experimenting with using it as a midi-controller because all of the parameters in it are...you're able to output as continuous controller message in real time so I eventually want to use this head set to control lighting rigs, to control visual imagery, to control sensor sweeps... it's more about learning how to use it if you know what I mean, it's like experimenting and training certain brain states (in Reiss 1999).

This DJ has also researched auditory and photic driving in indigenous cultures and is

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93 The effect of music on the brain is not only being studied by DJs. Researchers at the University of Toronto are using biofeedback technology to help patients suffering from insomnia. Computers and synthesizers are used to create sequences of notes that are customized for each patient. Music that triggers brain states associated with sleep (theta and high-amplitude delta) are recorded for patients to listen to at home (Wilkinson 2002).

94 http://www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/techno-shamanism.html [date accessed 2000-12-07]

95 http://www.emeraldreels.com/monte-interview.html [date accessed 2003-06-10]

cognizant of the theta waves these driving mechanisms produce in the brain. He also recognizes that these driving mechanisms are present in club and rave culture:

> I've done a lot of research on photic and auditory driving which are, which are two really interesting naturally occurring things that happen in loads of different indigenous music. It's continual stimuli of a certain frequency, and it's always very small frequencies, and what people do is they entrain to that particular brain state. If they're being stimulated with either by photic flashing or by auditory sound...I mean this goes back to indigenous rituals performed by the shaman in the Peruvian Amazon and stuff. They would beat a drum at a certain number of wave cycles per second. Usually four to six wave cycles per second or something...which is in brain state...theta brain state which is the very creative brain, and then they'd have someone else while the shaman was beating the drum, flaming or fanning the flames on a fire at the same time, at the same speed, and people would all eventually entrain in this brain state. In modern club culture, and in seeing modern club events and modern rave events and things like that, you're seeing people entrain into the same brain state. You've got strobes, you have lighting that everyone's taking in, you have big time photic driving, the music is auditory driving (DJ 'BT' in Reiss 1999).

While the majority of DJs are not necessarily versed in the scientific literature on trance states, or use scientific language to describe what they do, there is an underlying intuitive knowledge of what works with the crowd at raves, as listeners can expect to hear certain tracks at events that all DJs play, and different DJs will consistently employ the same techniques to stimulate the crowd. Rouget observes that an interruption in the music's flow is used cross-culturally to induce trance. Such catalysts as the acceleration of tempo, an increase in volume (crescendo), the use of polyrhythm, rhythmic changes such as syncopation, and even a brief cessation of the music, are techniques that interrupt the music's flow, triggering trance (1985:80-84). Rouget notes that most possession ceremonies begin slowly, gradually intensifying throughout the evening with the onset of possession being the climax of the event (ibid). The methods implemented by instrumentalists in interrupting the

music's flow function to intensify the sound and atmosphere of the possession rituals. With electronic music, the idea of tension and release is a built-in characteristic of all classifications of rave music. Thus while Trance, Jungle, and House may differ with regard to average BPM, meter, instrumentation, and use of lyrics, the same techniques of building tension are employed by DJs in all three genres. The notion of peak experience and climax is also a central part of the rave and this is one of the reasons for the extended hours of events. Ravers are well aware of the fact that the peak hours for raving generally occur between 2:00-6:00am and knowing this, drug ingestion is precalculated so that the drugs' effects will peak during these hours. Headliner DJs are normally slotted to spin over this period and as the evening progresses, the music gradually becomes harder, faster and louder. Coinciding with the music, the visual effects are often more intense and spectacular during this period as well. Since possession is not the ultimate objective for participants at raves, there is no singular climax point of the event but rather, the process is built around a series of tension-building episodes that are resolved, with each subsequent cycle of tension and release being more intense than the previous one:

> I will start off very very down tempo, pick it up, throw it back down a little bit . Pick it up, throw it back just a little bit, and then jack it right through the roof ('Casey' 02-04-13:6).

While the sets of headliner DJs are the climactic foci of the event, preceding and succeeding DJs perform tension-building sets that are juxtaposed within the larger framework of the peak experience, and each track within the set follows the same thematic pattern. With the average set being 2-3 hours, a DJ will frequently start playing tracks with slower tempos, gradually increasing the BPM range. Trance DJs for example, will typically begin with an

average BPM range of 160, gradually increasing this to 180. DJs refer to this as "peaking the floor" and as well-known DJ 'Frankie Knuckles' put it, peaking the floor creates a church-like environment (Fikentscher 2000:42). This is why the metaphor of "the journey" is so often used to describe the rave experience: the music's constant cycle of tension and release is accompanied by a range of emotion and bodily sensations that only get heightened with MDMA. As one informant related to me, "going to a rave is like living through an entire year's worth of emotion all packed into one night" ('Greg' 02-04-31:fn). One DJ I interviewed organizes his "storyline" according to the following parameters:

> From what I have to say a set for a DJ is like a story. Like all stories the beginning has to be catchy, relatively simple beated/plotted for the dancer/reader to enjoy. After the first hours, move on after the crowd is fullish, and the energy is high. The music is no longer the same, now it is like an 'anthem' and the tribal instincts of people kick in because there's so many in the crowd. Now is the time to put something hard, to sort of satisfy them for what they have been waiting for-loud floor thumping hard bangs. This is the part of the story where the intro is over, and the characters are beginning to shape in our minds...At the end it comes back to simple beats again, not as trippy as the beginning, but much harder, but simple-not so synthy-music. That you can remember, dance to...and by this time he's playing something that's pretty popular too...and alternate that with something hard again. If that is not really hard...and sometimes you just wind up begging for more. You are now the DJ's slave. Additionally, like all interesting stories, sets must have surprises...the odd old favourite, the sudden climax...the sudden hard beats you never expected ('Kayleb' 03-10-30:3).

Some informants described the music as being sexually charged comparing the cathartic properties of the much anticipated bass, to reaching orgasm. Leaving out the percussive elements and/or removing all musical inputs (including visual and lighting displays), with the exception of a vocal or synthesizer line, is one way the DJ builds tension in the crowd. Gradually the DJ will re-introduce the musical components one at a time with the bass being the last element added. Before the bass is introduced, the DJ will often further

increase the tension by accelerating the music, increasing its volume, and pitch (see also Sylvan 2002:128, 138). The DJ's equipment offers technical opportunities that are unavailable to acoustic instrumentalists. For example, a DJ can increase the tempo to a rate that exceeds human ability, and the volume of sound can clearly exceed the range of an acoustic instrument. Although Rouget (1985) does not mention an increase in pitch as a possible provocation of trance, this is likely due to the fact that increases in pitch have not been observed ethnographically because acoustic instruments are unable to perform this.

When the bass is finally introduced it is often accompanied with a synchronized display of lasers and fractal projections, as well as overlapping rhythmic patterns often presented in syncopated time. While the bass is "being dropped,"[96] DJs will often strategically introduce a well- known rave anthem so that accompanying the adrenaline of the anticipated beat is a flood of emotions elicited from the memory of past rave experiences that these songs carry with them:

> A skilful DJ will be able to bring different levels around and especially when it's a song that you recognize and you really like, and you can associate it with a past experience and he's got some other mix on it. You know he's got some crazy scratching or top fit or something, and you're like "wow where did this come from" and then like you can just all of a sudden you'll remember. You'll hear a line and you'll be like "this is that song" and the moment you're like "this is that song" you don't hear that scratching part that's new anymore. You're just pulled backward to this other time and it's the most extraordinary feeling ('Kurt' 02-11-08:12).

At this point a surge of energy is released by the dancers who exhibit their approval and gratitude by jumping up and down, screaming, whistling and shouting. The introduction of the bass is consistently the sought out resolution and it is here that the sexual metaphors of

[96] "Dropping in the bass" refers to the DJ adding in the rhythm (bass) after it has been withheld from the dancers. This technique is used by the DJ to build excitement and tension in the crowd.

the music are particularly evident:

> The DJ will play with me. Like he'll go to give me and then he'll be like "oh no" and I'll just be like...and he can tell like we'll have eye contact even and I can tell that he's keeping it from me and I'll be like "give it to me give it to me" and he'll be like "no no" and I'll be "come on drop it in" you know... fallin on my ass or something like that. When it [the bass] finally drops I'll be rushing so hard. ('Kurt' 02-11-08:11).

A similar sentiment is expressed in the following account:

> The music was reaching a crescendo, rising higher and higher, building until the entire house was screaming and jumping up and down in a frenzy of near complete body consciousness. The mind was no longer important and the body was merely a receiver for the music. Suddenly, the music stops, for a split-second, and then BAM! It's back harder and faster than ever, now freeing the minds and spirits of the dancers in an ecstatic explosion of joy. It was like a hive-mind having an orgasm.[97]

Visible in these accounts is a similar kind of psychological manipulation that often occurs in possession rituals (Rouget 1985:180). DJs will often intentionally withhold the bass from the dancers, or torment them further by indicating cues that the bass is coming, but instead extend the vocal line thus prolonging the dropping of the bass. As Reynolds notes "rave music has always been structured around the delay of climax" and the anticipation of a "plateau of bliss that can be neither exceeded nor released" (1994:56). For one DJ, removing the percussive elements and adding a well-known vocal line serves to unify the crowd and seize their attention so they can be taken to a higher level of consciousness. Once this occurs, he teases the crowd with the anticipation of the beat:

> Stuff like ole-ole...or Sweet Surrender by Sarah McLachlan...or trancey tunes... and then plain synths with no percussion, drums or beats...that gets you to feel the music in a collective way with the rest of the crowd. Basically at this point you're at union with the crowd, the DJ, the producer, the floor and your inner self. You reach a new point since you can feel the absence of the drums.

[97] http://www.chikinsandowichi.com/data/culture/voices/shaman.html [date accessed 2002-12-19]

> The tune is "dancey" but there's no drum for you to catch your anatomy into to so you're eagerly waiting for that beat as you're being teased every second. Every second before the drums begins adds to your tease, and you reach another level, probably because of your increased sense of anticipation. It gets even wilder inside you when you hear the buildup of a drum begin and then the buildup finishes with those hard kicks, thuds coming in and everyone bouncing. You reach a next level, you get high ('Kayleb' 03-10-30:2).

In addition to being aware of these tension-building procedures, a good DJ must be able to intuit when and how to resolve the tension, which is referred to as "pacing." As Fikentscher observes, pacing is very much dependent on performance time (2003:84) as well as the overall structure of the DJ line-up. At one event I attended, some informants felt the DJ was too extreme and sudden in using these techniques. 'Mike' for example got "pissed off at the second DJ" because "he was bringing it high and dropping it [the bass] like sirens and that was totally killing it" (02:12:16:7). He also felt the DJ's use of silence in the form of "30 second breaks" was overly excessive and rather than build the energy up it resulted in bringing it down. Knowing how much tension an audience can handle, and resolving the tension at the appropriate time is underscored in the following raver's statement:

> Like they have to know how long you can keep it at 155 beats per minute and if you slow it down too fast too quickly it just screws everybody up and they leave the dance floor or they just stand there scratching their heads. I mean music is all about creating tension and resolving tension and a really good DJ especially with this Techno music can create tension but there's a point where you create too much tension like that drum beat that goes "cho cho cho." You can only do that for so long before someone goes "get this drum beat over with." But if you do it just right you'll get people right at the height of the tension and then you resolve it and people go crazy. And the DJs that can feel the tension in the crowd and resolve it appropriately can just keep you going for hours and hours and they're good DJs ('Eric' 02-11-16:18).

This chapter examined the role of the electronic music DJ, and how DJ'ing has evolved into an art-form as well as a science. Technology has played a pivotal role in

shaping the development of rave culture. At its core, the music that binds this global culture together is created, exchanged, performed, and experienced through computer- mediated technology. It is probable that rave culture could continue to thrive without the glow-sticks, the kiddy back-packs, the soothers, the underground venues, and even the drugs. Throughout the course of my fieldwork I have already observed regional changes in rave toys and accoutrements, clothing, drug preference, and venue locations. What has remained constant is the culture's total dependence on technology, and the rapid push toward technological advancement. According to Wilson, "a reverence to and celebration of technology, and an implicit and explicit belief in 'progress through technology,'" is one of the underlying doctrines of rave culture (2003:386). As Gauthier remarks in reference to rave culture, "technology is synonymous with *possibility*, and stands as a prerequisite for creation, gathering and effervescence" (2004:71). Raves would be crippled without technology and this reinforces Reynold's point that rave music is not about "what the music 'means' but how it works" (1998:9). The DJ is the expert in knowing how electronic music works. His expansive knowledge of repertoire, his aptitude for musical memory, his technical prowess at the turntable, his charismatic presence on stage, and his uncanny ability to interact with, read, and manipulate the crowd, have awarded him the power to take his dancers on what participants have described as an "ecstatic" journey. Chapter eight will spotlight the participant, examining how ravers experience electronic music events. Psychoactive substance use, learning and adeptness with altered states, dancing, as well as emic accounts of identity transformation, healing, catharsis and spirituality will be investigated.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## Experiencing the Event

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> That's why people get so excited at rock concerts and tear up their seats. It's nothing to do with the fact that they like Elvis. It's because their metabolism is being governed by the bass, the rhythm and the light, and that's what it's all about, and that's what's interesting about rave and techno culture. It has reduced down in the west, for the first time, what is so called popular music and youth culture to a ritual which admits to, and utilizes the most arcane and ancient methods for achievement of altered state, and a celebration of that contact with other ('Genesis P-orridge' in Reiss 1999).

> I think the hidden aspect of MDMA is the transcendence you feel from the mundane ('Andy' 03-01-31:18).

Researching altered states of consciousness is fundamental to rave and club culture and as Malbon notes, for some participants it is the "*raison d'être*" of the clubbing experience (1999:105). Artists such as "Hallucinogen," "Ayahuasca," "Infected Mushroom," "XTC," "Prana," "Psychotrop" and song titles such as "Jump a Little Higher," "Euphoric State," "Flying High," and "LSD," reflect the scene's fascination with ASC's and the use of psychoactives. In Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) content analysis of 84 personal accounts of the rave experience, 57% reported having experienced an ASC at an event. Survey results of that same study suggested a similar pattern as 56% of respondents indicated having experienced an extraordinary physical and/or psychological experience at a rave. Descriptions of these experiences included visual and auditory hallucinations, physical experiences of energy in the body, strong affective states, alterations in sensory perception, a sense of unity and connectedness, and the release of tension and stress. When subjects were asked to describe their best experiences at raves or clubs, 20% used descriptors typically

associated with ASC experiences such as "euphoric," "enlightening," "transcendent," and "pure bliss," and 17% referred to drug-related encounters. Among the informants I interviewed, all reported having experienced an ASC at an event, and this included ASC's that were not drug-induced. The previous chapter looked at how the DJ uses the music as a catalyst for ASC induction. In tandem with the music, there are additional driving mechanisms for ASC's occurring at raves, many of which are also present in rituals of possession. To better ascertain the class of ASC's occurring at raves, these drivers and their neurophysiological implications will be discussed in this chapter.

As suggested in chapter six, in the possession context, ritual drivers preselect potential candidates for cult membership; these individuals display a predisposition for temporal lobe activity, and learn to control this activity through the process of neural tuning. While the drivers present at raves can and have induced seizures among participants, unlike the possession context, individuals who are predisposed to temporal lobe epilepsy are not preselected for the rave environment as seizures and possession are not intentionally sought out. Furthermore, individuals with epilepsy are recommended to stay away from club and rave environments. A different form of neural tuning, however, takes place in the rave environment. Drawing on recent studies of the flashback phenomenon, in addition to Gellhorn and Kiely's work (1972) on autonomic nervous system tuning, in this chapter I examine participant learning and adeptness for trance induction at raves. I suggest that exposure to a psychoactive substance at a rave can produce neural tuning such that a similar state can later be reached "naturally" while in the rave environment. Finally I present emic accounts of ASC where the topics of transformation, dissociation and catharsis are

addressed.

## 8.1 Psychoactive Substance Use

As discussed in chapter six, the temporal lobe discharges associated with possession involve the same basic pattern of brain changes that many ritual drivers are known to elicit: parasympathetic dominance and high voltage synchronized slow wave EEG. This accounts for why many of the inducers for ASC are also triggers for seizures in the temporal lobe. Winkelman suggests that individuals with temporal lobe conditions have greater access to ASC and in the case of possession ceremony, learning programs biological development, and ritual triggers culturally programmed neurological systems. Though many of these ritual drivers are present at raves, possession trance as outwardly expressed in the form of shaking, loss of muscle control, alterations in speech and facial expression, glazed eyes, muscular rigidity, and frothing at the mouth, is not typically witnessed at raves and certainly not intended. When convulsive behaviours are observed at raves, these symptoms are normally attributed to drug overdoses and without an EEG reading, there is no way of knowing if the etiologies of these incidents are the result of temporal lobe activity, a drug reaction, or a combination of the two. There is evidence to suggest that psychoactive substance use may protect individuals from temporal lobe discharge, and this could explain why more incidents of seizures haven't been reported at raves (see Winkelman 2000:158-159). Hallucinogenic use has a strong negative correlation with temporal lobe activity and this may be the

underlying reason for their absence cross-culturally in possession ceremonies.[98] Furthermore, societies incorporating the use of hallucinogens into their institutionalized ASC, "preclude seizure disorders associated with their practitioners" (Winkelman 2000:150).

Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) study found that psychoactive substance use is prevalent in the central Canadian rave scene. Among those sampled, 81% reported regular drug use at raves, 6% reported occasional use, and 13 % indicated that they abstain. Among the informants I interviewed, 87% had used psychoactive substances at raves, and among those 70% were active users at the time of interviewing, and 17% were psychoactive abstainers. Thirteen percent had never tried psychoactives. Among the active drug users, 65% were regular users who acknowledged doing some form of one or more illicit substances for each attended rave. Thirty-five percent were occasional users who frequently attended raves without taking drugs and reserved the use of drugs for special occasions such as a New Years event, or a party featuring an international DJ.

Takahashi and Olaveson (2003) found that while a variety of substances were reported, MDMA was the most frequently reported substance at 67%, followed by cannabis at 64% and crystal methamphetamine at 34% (commonly referred to as "speed" or "crystal meth"). Ecstasy, LSD, and the amphetamines appear to have the most consistent international presence. A number of other studies illustrate that regional variation exists in the patterns of drug use at raves. For example, Power et al. (1996) cite MDMA, LSD and

[98] Bourguignon advances a sociocultural explanation for the absence of chemical mediation in possession trance induction. Bourguignon stresses the theatrical and performance elements of the ritual and contends that as a public event, the possessed individual must remain cognisant of his surrounding environment to react to the audience cues. The intrapersonal tendency of the psychoactive experience would counter the required interpersonal interactions (1976:41).

amphetamine sulphate as the drugs of choice among a group of London youths examined. Amphetamine and MDMA use are also cited as the drugs of choice by Forsyth (1996) in the Scottish dance scene. Forsyth lists nitrates or "poppers" with amphetamines and Ecstasy as the most prevalent drugs among London youths, whereas "poppers" seem to have a very minor presence in the Canadian rave scene to date. In Canada, references to a homemade concoction of MDMA combined with LSD or heroine, referred to as "peach," have been reported by ravers sampled in Quebec (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). From my own fieldwork, I observed that ravers in Montreal make a distinction between what they refer to as E (Ecstasy) versus MDMA. These ravers coin MDMA tablets that are mixed with speed as "E," and pure MDMA that appears in a capsule form as "MDMA." Dealers are also aware of this distinction as "MDMA" and "E" are sold as distinct products. Comparatively, the informants I spoke with in Ontario did not make such a distinction and an individual's "control" over the level of purity of the drug seems less apparent when purchasing drugs from dealers. Pure forms of MDMA were referred to as "Pure E" or "Pure MDMA." Most of the time it was recognized that when purchasing Ecstasy, the buyer really never knows if the tablet is mixed with another substance or not. A particular "batch" of MDMA in tablet form can be recognized by the colour, the logo (ie. "Red Bull")[99] or icon (ie. cartoon characters, shapes) imprinted on each tablet. Some informants when faced with an unfamiliar brand, will ingest half a tablet first to avoid any potential adverse reaction from concealed chemicals that may be mixed with the MDMA. Although some ravers insisted that they could tell the "quality" of the pills based on the level of bitterness, the only way for

[99] This popular energy boosting beverage imported from Thailand is frequently consumed at raves.

participants to really know the content of each pill is to test it with an MDMA test-kit. These kits can be purchased online. Some individuals own these test-kits and only ingest drugs that they have personally tested first. For these informants, obtaining MDMA in its purest form was considered rare and valued. Many individuals would buy large quantities of the drug when they encountered a dealer who sold it in its pure form. In contrast, my Montreal informants seemed to prefer MDMA mixed with amphetamine. These individuals felt that MDMA on its own was a much stronger or more "potent" drug. Some felt pure MDMA was hard on the stomach, and preferred combining the drug with speed because the nausea associated with MDMA could be avoided, and the amphetamines helped them to stay awake for prolonged periods. As mentioned previously, a new drug that appeared in the rave/dance scene in the summer of 2003, referred to as 2C-I (2,5-Dimethoxy-4-odophenethylamine) is rapidly gaining popularity. In some underground circles, it is replacing MDMA as the new drug of choice. One informant explained to me that 2C-I is appealing because it is significantly less expensive than Ecstasy, and it seems to lack the adverse after-effect of serotonin depletion that ravers refer to as "sketchiness."

Variations in drug choice were also observed according to the music scene (see also Wilson 2002:393-394). Here the desired affective states and BPM range expected seem to influence the choice of drug. As I indicated earlier, the use of amphetamines is more prevalent amongst participants in the faster music genres that fall under the general title "Hardcore." Here the excitation and acceleration of muscular responses associated with amphetamines enables participants to keep up with the rapid and extreme style of dancing required for tempos exceeding 200 BPM. Among the Hardcore genres that are known to

induce negative emotional states such as Terrorcore and Industrial Hardcore, amphetamines are often combined with cocaine. In contrast, MDMA is often coupled with amphetamines at Happy Hardcore raves as the empathogenic characteristics of the drug conform to the music's message of hope and optimism, as well as the subcultural themes of love and sociality. At Psytrance events LSD, and more recently 2C-I seem to be the most prevalent drugs and informants claimed that the hallucinogenic properties of these drugs complement what is often described as the "psychedelic sounds" of the music, as well as the "psychedelic" artwork that permeate these events (see Appendix A, figure 7):

> When you're on a good hit of acid it's like it just comes alive and it's just sort of like something you just connect with. Somehow the music and the artwork all make sense and everything just seems to come together. The drugs just connect everything ('Andy' 03-01-31:3).

Combining MDMA with LSD, mushrooms or marijuana, are popular polydrug combinations among ravers, especially the Psytrance crowd. Marijuana also has a central presence in post-rave activities as it helps ravers to "unwind" and the process of "sharing a joint" with friends seems to further ritually unify a group after a night out. Globally, MDMA remains the most prevalent drug and the manner in which it is combined is dependent upon the music scene and region. Wilson (2002) suggests that tempo and its corresponding drug choice is correlated with age and duration in the scene. In his study of the Canadian rave scene, some informants noted that the older, more experienced ravers tended to listen to more subtle music styles and preferred using Ecstasy, whereas the younger (14-18) inexperienced crowd, tended to prefer the faster "straightforward" genres (i.e. Happy Hardcore), with the less expensive drug "Crystal Meth" being the substance of choice (2002:393). The issue of practicality is another factor of drug choice and level of drug consumption. It was related to

me by one informant in his mid-thirties, that the body and in particular, the aging body can only tolerate so much drug use before it finally burns out. He felt that in order to remain in the scene he had to reduce his level of drug consumption, as well as the frequency of events. The possible "burn-out" resulting from excessive[100] drug use and frequent raving may account for the finding that the average "shelf-life" of a raver is approximately 2 years (Weber 1999).

### *MDMA: Empathogens, Entactogens, Entheogens & Psychointegrators*

Even though MDMA was patented in 1912[101] as an appetite suppressant, it was never marketed commercially and remained largely unknown. It re-surfaced in the 1970's when some members of the psychiatric community, recognizing the drug's therapeutic potentials, began implementing it into therapy sessions (Cohen 1998:7).[102] By the 1980's the drug began to surface in the underground club scene, where its amphetamine-like properties, combined with its euphoric effects made it the ideal "club-drug." By the late 1980's MDMA had become so closely identified with the rave scene that the well-known symbols of rave

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100 Opinions varied among my informants as to what constitutes "excessive" drug use. For ravers, doing drugs in "excess" seems to have more to do with the frequency of ingestion rather than the quantity of drugs taken through the course of one event. For example, among one group of friends, the combination of 2 MDMA's, 2 Speeds, Ketamine, and Marijuana was a common "recipe" ingested within a 24 hour period. For these individuals, this pattern of drug use would be considered excessive if it was repeated every weekend. Thus ravers usually attribute "burn-outs" to those individuals who make raving and drug-use a habitual weekend practice.

101 I have noted a discrepancy regarding MDMA's patent date. Beck and Rosenbaum (1994), Saunders (1996), and Cohen (1998) report MDMA as being patented in 1912, however Eisner (1994) cites 1914 as the patent date.

102 Preceding the appearance of MDMA was its chemical cousin MDA (3-4-methylenedioxyamphetamine). MDA emerged in San Francisco's "Haight-Ashbury" drug subculture in the mid 1960s (Beck and Rosenbaum 1994:13). Like MDMA, MDA is noted for its empathogenic effects, however to a lesser degree than MDMA (Eisner 1994:4).

culture such as the happy face logo, the pacifiers, and glow-sticks, were symbols directly associated with MDMA's physiological effects.

The accompanying affective states associated with the drug are mediated through activity on the serotonergic and dopaminergic pathways in the brain (Weir 2000). MDMA is a serotonergic agonist because it releases serotonin and blocks its reuptake in various regions of the brain (Cohen 1998:15). Because MDMA shares properties common with the amphetamines and the hallucinogens,[103] it is frequently referred to as a hallucinogenic amphetamine.[104] While the drug shares properties common to both categories, it also involves elements that are atypical to both, suggesting that MDMA should be categorized in a class of its own (Eisner 1994). Since MDMA's chemical structure is a derivative of amphetamine, users typically experience an increase in energy. However, distinct from the amphetamines, agitation and restlessness are generally not reported by Ecstasy users. Instead, MDMA seems to have a paradoxical effect as users after experiencing an initial surge of energy or "rush," users will report feeling relaxed and tranquil. Even though MDMA is known to enhance the senses thus complementing the highly visual and auditory nature of the rave environment, some have questioned the accuracy of the term "psychedelic" or "hallucinogen" in reference to MDMA since visual and auditory hallucinations are rarely associated with the drug when a typical recreational dose is ingested.

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[103] This refers to the class of substances that are known to evoke visionary experiences and visual distortions. Mescaline, peyote, psilocybin mushrooms and LSD are the most common substances in this class of drugs (Winkelman 1997).

[104] Hallucinations are rarely associated with MDMA consumption. According to Cohen, hallucinations associated with MDMA usually involve many contributing factors such as the user's mental health history, polydrug use, and the purity of the MDMA (1998:17). Hallucinations resulting from MDMA consumption were rarely reported among my informants. One individual reported visual hallucinations after taking 3 MDMA tablets, however he associated the visual effects to the MDMA combined with sleep deprivation.

"Entheogen," another term often used synonymously for hallucinogen or psychedelic, is most commonly associated with vision-inducing plants. Its literal meaning (creating the god within) has made the term applicable to synthetic substances including LSD and MDMA, psychoactives whose spiritual potentials have been well documented (Grob 2002; Beck and Rosenbaum 1994; Saunders et al. 2000). Some prefer entheogen as an alternative to the term "psychedelic" because of the latter's negative connotations associated with the hippie counter cultural movement of the sixties (Winkelman 2003).[105] The term "entheogen" is also favoured over psychedelic because it emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual, emotional, and therapeutic motivations for taking the drug over the purely recreational. Yet despite MDMA's noted spiritual applications, it remains distinct from other entheogens in the specificity of its elicited effects (Eisner 1994:3). Whereas substances such as LSD are "non-specific" amplifiers that can enhance all aspects of the mental experience, both positive and negative, the effects of MDMA have been found to be reliable and consistently positive (ibid). It has been reported that at least 90% of individuals who try the drug will experience these positive effects (Eisner 1994:xxxviii). This is one of the reasons why many ravers will combine the less predictable psychedelic drugs such as LSD with MDMA; it is felt that one has a greater measure of control in ensuring a "good trip" by combining these substances with MDMA.

One such positive effect of MDMA is its ability to provoke a feeling of empathy. It is this unique characteristic that spurred Ralph Metzner to question MDMA's psychedelic label and instead suggested classifying MDMA and other related drugs such as MDA, as

[105] http://www.sidestreet.org/sitestreet/winkelman/winkelman1.html [date accessed 2004-01-13]

"empathogenic." It is the empathy-generating aspect of MDMA, combined with the loosening of inhibitions that has made it useful in drug-assisted therapy since "the experience of empathic contact offers the strengthening, deepening, or revitalization of existing relationships as well as helping in the formation of new ones" (Eisner 1994:34). Facilitating interpersonal communication makes MDMA the perfect social drug for the club and rave experience. Ravers often describe feeling love, kindness and compassion toward friends as well as strangers at raves. Being "opened up," or "unlocking the heart," are common sentiments expressed, with these feelings often being the most profound during the first encounter with MDMA. One informant recounted how MDMA enables her to be more expressive and demonstrative toward her friends. In most circumstances, she described feeling "uncomfortable" and "awkward" when communicating her emotions and, in general, preferred to avoid physical displays of affection such as hugging. On Ecstasy, the situation for her is quite different: "I crave physical contact, I enjoy getting hugs and giving hugs, I love the massages, I can tell my friends how much I love and appreciate them and everything is just so natural" ('Helen' 02-10-28:fn). MDMA's noted effect of enhancing the sense of touch is also conducive to socialization and interpersonal interaction. At raves, it is common to witness seas of bodies referred to as "cuddle-puddles" in the chill-out areas where individuals will hold, hug, and massage each other in time to the music. Ravers will often use scented oils or Vicks Vapo Rub when administering a massage to enhance the sensorial experience of MDMA.

Though less talked about, MDMA can also have the opposite effect of psychologically turning an individual inward. David Nichols has coined the term

"entactogen" to describe MDMA's ability to facilitate intrapersonal modes of perception. As Eisner points out, the interpersonal and intrapersonal are intricately linked:

> When a person feels better about others, he or she also feels better about herself or himself. Feeling better about ourselves is the inward side, and feeling better about others the outward side, of the same experience (1994:51).

In so far as individuals can become more open and talkative on MDMA, the reverse effect is also common at raves. 'Helen' for example expresses feelings of guilt for those instances where she isn't overly sociable at raves:

> Sometimes I feel bad cause I know I'm not the best company. As much as I'm energized on E, sometimes I just don't have the strength to talk you know. Instead I prefer to be on my own, dance on my own and just enjoy my own company so to speak. I'm lucky enough to have friends that understand this and they're cool about letting me go off and do my own thing. They'll look out for me and come looking for me after a while to make sure I'm okay and that's nice (02-10-14:21).

The empathogenic and entactogenic aspects of MDMA are also manifested in the following raver's statement:

> I like the social aspects of it, sometimes I meet nice people once and a while and sometimes I get the urge to talk and talk for hours, but mostly I'm looking for the spiritual aspect and doing it by myself. Being alone among a crowd ('Brad' 02-04:31:2).

The shift between the inter- and intrapersonal may be enhanced by MDMA but there are other factors of the rave environment such as dancing that are also conducive to the empathogenic and entactogenic. This may be the underlying motive for the nature of dancing that occurs at underground clubs and raves (see also Malbon 1999:98-101). While ravers usually dance on their own, it is recognized that a crowd is necessary so that the "dancing body engages in a private language in a public sphere" (Fikentscher 2000:75). On one level, dancing plays a role in unifying the group and some ravers remarked that the sense

of connectedness and unity is felt the strongest while on the dance floor:

> I think if everyone's dancing to the same beat, that's a collective right there. Everybody's dancing to the beat of the same drum. It's sort of a collective ability because everyone can hear the same thing and dancing to the same thing and it's a sense of identity in a group of people that are doing the same thing. Being able to listen to music with a bunch of people who appreciate the music with you, it just brings everyone together ('Jenna' 02-04-14:506).

This kind of interpersonal connectedness can also occur at a person to person level on the dance floor:

> One experience that really stands out in my mind...it was my first time doing E. I was dancing and my eyes just met up with this guy who was also dancing. I didn't know who he was but it was weird because the entire time our eyes never parted. We just kept starring at each other and smiling. It sounds cheesy but I felt like I really knew him, like I could see right into the depths of his soul and he could see into mine. It was like we were the only two people in the room and nothing mattered. It was all innocent, there was nothing sexual about it, there were no expectations. I think it was really about enjoying that particular moment. There was no need to say anything and it was like we both knew that words would have ruined it ('Ally' 02-10-14:18).

At the same time dancers also report turning inward and retreating from the external world around them:

> 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...I was happy and euphoric ('Mike' 02-12-16:5)

'Greg' describes a similar experience:

> When I dance I shut off my brain and go. I just listen to the music and let my body move. In a way it's like meditation because when you meditate you're trying not to think of anything and when I dance I don't think about squat (02-04-31:9).

The oscillation between the private and public realm is also mediated by the DJ. DJs will strategically use catchy lyrics, familiar passages from rave anthems, will alter the rhythm, remove the beat, or increase the pitch and volume, to bring dancers out of their own private

worlds to experience the collective:

> Stuff like ole-ole...or Sweet Surrender by Sarah McLachlan...or trancey tunes... and then plain synths with no percussion, drums or beats...that gets you to feel the music in a collective way with the rest of the crowd. ('Kayleb' 03-10-30:2).

Irrespective of the controversy surrounding the classification of MDMA, like all the entheogens, Ecstasy can induce powerful emotional and therapeutic effects that are the result of activity on the serotonergic neurotransmitter systems. Winkelman has suggested the term "psychointegrator" to refer to substances which stimulate integrative information processing and enable access to lower structures of consciousness:

> Psychointegrator implies the stimulation of the mind, emotions, soul and spirit to integrative development in that they stimulate mental and emotional catalyzing processes, and encourage a holistic developmental integration of the mind, spirit and soul.[106]

Many ravers are indeed aware of MDMA's psychotherapeutic effects and it is this awareness that governs the context for its use (see chapter nine). A wide variety of agents including hallucinogens, amphetamines, cocaine, opiates, marijuana, and MDMA like many ritual drivers (fasting, sleep deprivation, auditory stimuli, intense exercise) produce slow-wave synchronous discharges (Winkelman 2001).

## 8.2 Additional Driving Mechanisms at Raves

### *Dancing*

Analogous to the dominant role of dancing in possession rituals, dancing is "the mainstay of the rave community" (McCall 2001:82). A crowded dance floor is a good indicator of an event's success and ravers generally take dancing more seriously than

[106] http:www.sidestreet.org/sitestreet/winkelman/winkelman1.html [date accessed 2004-01-13]

mainstream club-goers. Dancing is less about attracting the opposite sex and more about a vehicle for self expression and losing oneself to the music. Compared to mainstream clubs, dancing at raves is generally more vigorous, physically demanding, and prolonged. To illustrate the intensity and stamina that some ravers exhibit, I observed one individual dance for 8 consecutive hours during which time he did not leave the dance floor once. He would only stop momentarily to drink bottled water that his concerned friends would bring to him on the dance floor. Admittedly not all ravers exhibit this kind of dedication to dancing; on a given night, some individuals may be more interested in socializing with others in the chill-out areas, however the number of people on the dance floor always significantly outnumbers those in the peripheral zones.

In Takahashi and Olaveson's ethnographic study, 63% of personal accounts of the rave experience referred to the theme of an embodied awareness where "vibe," "energy," "flow," "energy rush," "life force," "energy surge," and "primal energy," were among the common words used to describe this sensation (2003:81). This kind of perception almost always takes place on the dance floor suggesting that music and bodily movement are the catalysts for this knowledge that is so prominent among ravers. Additionally, many of the ASC encounters occur on the dance floor, in particular those that reference the overwhelming sense of connectedness (see Olaveson 2004).

As Rouget remarks with regard to ceremonial possession, dancing "undoubtedly brings about modifications in the dancer's state, both at the physiological and psychological level" (1985:117). It is therefore not surprising that it is one of the most powerful triggers for trance, as well as the most widespread cross-culturally in the setting of trance ritual. The

activation of the endogenous opiate system resulting from prolonged dancing and other common ritual procedures (ie. the infliction of pain, fasting, sensory bombardment, social contact) has prompted neuroscientists to consider that endorphins "may indeed be at least one link in a chain of events that brings about states of altered consciousness" (Henry 1982:396). The pharmacological effects of opiates can precipitate a sense of well-being, analgesia, euphoria, and alterations in affect (Henry 1982:239; Prince 1982:306).

***Sleep Deprivation***

As previously mentioned, sleep deprivation is a known driver into ASC as it can result in parasympathetic dominance, and high voltage synchronized slow wave EEG. In Techno culture, fatigue and drowsiness are unwelcomed physiological processes that ravers attempt to combat. A great deal of preparation takes place prior to an event where most ravers prefer to socialize in the form of what they call "chilling out " (for more on pre-rave activities see chapter nine). This is a time when ravers rest, relax, drink stamina boosting fluids, and conserve their energy for the long night ahead. During events, I observed that some informants interpreted fatigue in others as an indication of not having a good time. Among one group, I noticed that individuals were always cognisant of my level of "alertness" and seemed disappointed if I appeared drowsy. It seemed important to them that I have a good time and they would frequently ask if I was having fun, assuming that being tired was an indication that I wasn't. On one occasion, when I was exhibiting signs of exhaustion, one informant picked me up and lifted me above his head and told me to close my eyes and allow the energy of the music to enter my body and re-energize me from that

unique vantage point. Sometimes if I was caught napping in a chill-out area, I would be invited to the dance floor by a concerned raver in an effort to wake me up. I was also regularly offered chemical stimulants such as MDMA and speed, in addition to a variety of legal energy enhancing products. I observed individuals go an entire weekend (over 48 hours) without sleep and in such instances MDMA and amphetamines were regularly consumed throughout the weekend. Ravers who are more conservative with their drug patterns will often take "over the counter" decongestants containing ephedrine (which is now banned) or pseudoephedrine. While some rely exclusively on legal agents to stay awake, others combine these substances with MDMA or speed in an effort to avoid excessive use and reliance on the illegal substances:

> See I used to do ephedrine before I'd do E. Lots of ephedrine, yup and especially if you do four of those, you'll feel your head crawl and tingle and you'll be like "wow." Cause you just don't want to be tired when you're going to a rave ('Kurt' 02-11-08:16).

Consuming ginseng in tablet and liquid form, and energy beverages such as "Red Bull" are other more "natural" methods of staying awake. Some ravers from personal experience noted that drugs would have a more potent effect when an individual is sleep deprived and some would ingest substances after missing a night's sleep in order to get "really messed up" as it was frequently put. As ravers become more accustomed to the nocturnal lifestyle, the issue of staying awake seems to be less of a concern. Some commented that after a period of raving, upon entering an event, or even listening to Techno music at home, alertness and increased energy were reactions that were interpreted as a type of conditioned response. I too noticed that as my fieldwork progressed, I became less preoccupied with fatigue and found it easier to stay awake for prolonged periods.

### *Fasting*

Fasting can induce and enhance an altered state of consciousness and so it is not surprising that fasting is the most common of the practices associated with physiological deprivation and religious experience (Wulff 1997:70). The physiological imbalances resulting from nutritional deprivation can increase an individual's susceptibility to trance states (Winkelman 1986a: 178). For example, hypoglycemia, an expected outcome of fasting, can heighten auditory driving and increase vulnerability to parasympathetic dominance and cortical synchronization (Winkelman 1986a: 178). Food deprivation also provokes the release of endorphins (Henry 1981:230). Research on individuals with anorexia, and rats deprived of food have indicated that opioid activity increases in various regions of the brain (Lee & Spector 1991). It is well known that the release of endogenous opiates can elicit the basic pattern of ASC (see Prince 1982; Morgan 1984; Henry 1982; Winkelman 2000). In rave culture, there are many motivations for limiting one's food-intake. Some informants found that taking drugs on an empty stomach increased the rate of absorption, and prolonged and increased the intensity of the drug's effects. A common side effect of MDMA is nausea and ravers who experience this will often avoid food to prevent vomiting at raves. It was also remarked that digesting "heavy" foods curtailed energy and agility required for dancing, and the combination of physical activity and a full stomach could result in stomach cramps. Speed, Ecstasy, ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine are also appetite suppressants so the desire to eat is generally not a factor for most ravers anyway. Ravers are conscious, however, of replacing fluids and are well aware that many of the

complications said to result from MDMA use are related to overheating and dehydration. Bottled water, Gatorade, and the aforementioned energy beverages are regularly consumed throughout the night.

***Prolonged Heat Exposure***

The endogenous opioid system can be activated by extreme physical trauma and stress; exposure to temperature extremes such as prolonged heat thus results in the release of endorphins (Winkelman 2000:150-151). Environmental conditions at raves vary depending on the location (outdoor versus indoor), the ventilation system, the weather, and the number of participants present. With the exception of outdoor events, most indoor venues attended during fieldwork were humid, warm, and some were stifling hot. In spite of bylaws that outline regulations for air ventilation at raves, there is no way to control air quality and temperature at underground parties. Promoters, in an effort to break even financially, will aim to sell the maximum number of tickets which often exceeds a building's capacity, resulting in overcrowding and sweltering heat. At some events, the air was so hot and humid that condensation from the ceiling would be dripping down on the crowd and the constant presence of steam would eventually leave one's clothing and belongings damp and even drenched by the end of the night. These conditions would be exacerbated by the physically demanding style of rave dancing that raises one's body temperature and surrounding environment. Most informants were surprisingly unconcerned with and almost indifferent toward these uncomfortable conditions. Though I often had difficulty breathing, these circumstances never seemed to deter those individuals intent on dancing as the dance

floor at raves was always crowded if the DJ was skilled. I observed many individuals, both men and women, take off their tops, drink water, or pour water over their heads and bodies as a means of cooling off.

### *Sensory Stimulation and Bombardment*

Sensory deprivation, isolation, and the reduction in motor activity have been well established as driving mechanisms into ASC (see Gellhorn and Kiely 1972; Winkelman 1997:399; Winkelman 2000: 149-150; Wulff 1997:75-76). The opposite conditions in the form of sensory bombardment can also result in the same effects as sensory deprivation. This type of sensory stimulation is described by Winkelman as "extensive," "prolonged," and "intense," and this includes physical as well as psychological stimuli often of a "distressing nature" (2000:149-150). This delineation of sensory bombardment accurately describes the nature of stimuli that assault the senses at raves, the most notable being the music which is loud, repetitive, and conceivably distressing to an outsider. As discussed in the previous chapter, the music on its own has been shown to induce alterations in consciousness through rhythmic auditory driving. Fractal projections, psychedelic artwork, strobe lights, lasers, and smoke machines are visual stimuli that can provoke unusual disorienting effects on individuals, particularly those on the dance floor. Some ravers will deliberately heighten these effects by experimenting with bodily movements:

> I usually spin a lot and I can spin for hours. I like trying out different styles of dancing like slowing down, going backwards, sometimes just stopping. You kind of get a bit physically disoriented so that makes the dancing....it extends your experience ('Brad' 02-04-31:3)

> I was with a girl and we were holding hands and were swinging around in a

> circle. These guys had these really long ropes with lights on the end of them but they were about 10 feet long, and they were swinging them around and we were swinging around in a circle going faster and faster and faster...it was a really weird physical sensation of being dizzy, spatially dizzy as well as the weirdness of the sound. It was very strange, it was fun ('Eric' 02-11-16:22).

Tactile bombardments can include heat exposure and body massages where the sensation is intensified by rubbing scented oil or "Vicks Vapo Rub" on the skin, often by a raver who is wearing textured gloves. There are also a variety of aromas which permeate raves including perspiration, incense, "Vicks Vapo Rub," cigarette and marijuana smoke. Some ravers will even wear surgical masks lined with "Vicks Vapo Rub" to heighten the olfactory sense. Some will adorn themselves with glow sticks, glitter gel, fluorescent body paints, textured brightly coloured clothing, and flashing lights which further enhance the visual displays at raves. Giving light shows to friends with glow sticks, ingesting flavorful candies, or wearing goggles that project fractal patterns and flashing lights are other ways ravers heighten the multisensory experience. In essence, raving is all about subjecting and assaulting oneself to extremes and pushing the body to its limits:

> It's like things you would never imagine happen and when they happen you're like "turn this whole thing down it's too much." But it's great. It's always fun though and every time it's like "ah my god I can't believe I'm still alive, I'm never going to be able to do it again" and then you're doing it again and then it's like "oh this is so good." Like how much, you know your senses are so stimulated. "How much stimulation can I take before I blow up like I self destruct or something." I'm sure those people that all of sudden combust are probably ravers. "I've reached my intensity level threshold...POOF!" ('Eric' 02-11-16:22).

Also underlying these sensorial elements and behaviours is a sense of fun, creativity, the outlandish, and even the ridiculous where nothing is shocking at raves and participants can expect to see the unexpected: "There was this one girl who was all dressed in white like a

princess with broom handles extended from her arm, and draped from those were these long white shear curtains, or pieces of material so it looked like she had wings ('Eric' 02-11-16:22).

During my fieldwork, I observed everything from individuals walking on stilts (see Appendix A figure 8), girls blowing bubbles into the crowd, a guy wearing nothing but a g-string bikini, ravers playing with Lego blocks, to individuals gathered on the floor drawing pictures with crayons and fluorescent poster paints. Even DJs and PAs are beginning to incorporate sensorial elements of the bizarre and the unexpected into their performances:

> There's one act called Rabbit in the Moon, it's from Florida and it's two really specialized acts. It's one gentleman who does records and live stuff. He'll have like samplers, and he creates all music live, and his partner who's the "rabbit" he has a different costume for every track her partner plays, and the stuff he does is just mind blowing. He'll put a cage to his face, a chainsaw to his face, barks everywhere. He'll come out with this costume of a big rabbit and he'll give it to the crowd. You can either watch his partner creating the music or you can watch this guy, it's just incredible eye-candy for everyone in the crowd ('Alan' 02-04-20:13).

This carnivalesque, sensory driven atmosphere of rave underpins the postmodern perspectives that regard rave as nothing more than a synthetic, pleasure-principled, hedonistic culture void of meaning. When the underlying biological mechanisms behind these glittering surfaces of rave are considered, it becomes increasingly evident that the politics of "pleasure" may do much more than provide youths with a temporary escape from reality.

### *Dancing Among a Crowd: The Community*

While the drivers outlined thus far are enough, whether in isolation or in tandem to

induce trance states, a rave wouldn't be considered successful or the experience complete without the presence of the crowd. Becker and Woebs suggest that there is less individual hesitation to "let go" in a group setting as individuals are free from the constraints of "deeply rooted habits" that are more difficult to shed in one's home environment (1999:65). The crucial role of the "collective" in contributing to ASC's has also been found to have a neurophysiological base. There is evidence to suggest that opioid systems become increasingly active during social interaction such as play (Panksepp and Bishop 1981). At raves, the presence and enthusiasm of the crowd can have an uplifting and energizing effect on participants and some will intentionally use the crowd for this purpose:

> If I go into a room and there's a type of music that I don't particularly like, I can actually walk into the center of the room where everyone's around you, all the people that are enjoying the music all heavy duty into it and stand there. I'll literally be standing still and then after seconds I feel like I take in the energy of the crowd even if it's the type of music that I don't particularly like and I can kind of, I can feed off the energy of the crowd and within minutes I'll be dancing and I'll be right part of it. So I can certainly see the help of the vibe of the crowd to get into the dance and the atmosphere as opposed to just the music you know itself, if I were to just listen to it in a room by myself ('Eric' 03-02-31: 4-5).

Just as social bonding and attachment facilitates trance induction through the activation of the endogenous opioid system, Frecska and Kulcsar (1989) propose that this process is bi-directional such that "brain opioid systems should be reasonable candidates for providing neurochemical mediation of social bonding" (1989:74). Community rituals and the catalysts that provoke the opioid system support and reinforce social activity and bonding which d'Aquili and Laughlin argue to be "the theme running through the myth of most human ritual" (1975:38). It is therefore not surprising that of the seven central themes reported in

Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) study of the central Canadian rave scene, the theme of "connectedness" was the most frequently cited among rave participants. Connectedness is often experienced by participants during peak moments of events and insider descriptions of altered states of consciousness often involve references to an overpowering sense of unity with the group, all life forms, and the universe (see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:77-79). Akin to the way the music can continue to impact an individual after an event, Malbon notes that the crowd can "resonate long after their dispersal" as "specific times, memories, paraphernalia and even others" of the gathering participated in can be easily identified with later (1999:72). Simply put, being a part of a crowd can evoke powerful emotional responses (Malbon 1999:72) and this complements the psychological manipulation employed by the DJ. The centrality of connectedness to the rave experience has propelled a growing number of scholars to examine its resemblance to Victor Turner's "communitas" (see Hutson 1999:66-67, 2000:42-43; Tramacchi 2000, 2004:139; Sylvan 2002:146-147; Gerard 2004: 176; Olaveson 2004; Fikentscher 2000:60). The theme of unity has also been viewed as emblematic of a raver doctrine or worldview (see chapter nine; Sylvan 2002:148-151: Fritz 1999:203-206; Wilson 2002:384-386).

## 8.3 Learning and Adeptness: Flashbacks and Neural Tuning at Raves

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that the role of the DJ in rave culture, resembles that of instrumentalists in rituals of possession. If this is correct, Rouget's classification of possession trance as learned and scripted, should also apply to the rave locale. The previous chapter outlined the procedures employed by the DJ to induce and

control altered states among the dancers. While the science behind these techniques was delineated, it was also emphasized that the dialectical relationship between the DJ and the crowd underscores the active involvement of the dancers in communicating with the DJ. Through experience, the dancers intuitively learn how to respond to the DJ's techniques, and this is manifested in a series of predictable and ordered body movements. As overwhelming and inherently powerful as the music may be, Rouget maintains that the music can only have an effect when it is familiar to the individual. At raves, the DJ's strategic implementation of familiar anthems is a reliable trigger for ASC, however, electronic music is grounded on the primacy of rhythm over melody. Mixing and sampling results in a bricolage of sound where it is commonly the percussive elements of a particular track that are recognizable, and ravers are experts at quickly identifying songs after hearing only a few bars of a rhythmic introduction. This is to be expected in a subculture that is oriented around dancing; it is the bass that directs the movements of the dancers, thus individuals would naturally entrain their senses to rhythm. Thus in the case of raves, where spontaneity and the unexpected are so highly valued, and subsequently no two performances are ever alike (even with the same DJ), the "musical mottos" embedded therein are characteristically different. These mottos are not only structured around metre, but also include the dancers' awareness and anticipation of rhythmic change, the DJ's manipulation of tension and resolve, or what Gerard refers to as the music's "performance aesthetics" (2004:178).

Just as dancers learn to actively interact with the DJ and utilize the music, participants also learn how to facilitate trance induction through the use of the other drivers present at raves. While these mechanisms in and of themselves can induce alterations in

consciousness, ravers do not attend events as passive bystanders that simply wait for something extraordinary to happen. Through repeated exposure, ravers learn to actively engage with these drivers to prolong and intensify drug-induced states, as well as acquire "natural highs" that they claim mimic states normally acquired through psychoactives. This process is referred to as neural tuning.

What has been commonly referred to as the "flashback phenomenon" can be grounded within the framework of neural tuning. Recent publications on psychedelic drug flashbacks have departed from the classical biochemical and pathological explanations to suggest that the spontaneous re-experiencing of sensations originally associated with a previous drug encounter are the product of learning, environmental context and personal expectation. Ecstasy, in addition to other synthetic drugs associated with the rave scene, has been reported to induce flashbacks among its users (see Batzer et al. 1999; Leikin et al. 1989; Lerner et al. 2000; Matefy et al. 1978; Metzner and Adamson 2001; Seymour and Smith 1998). It can be argued that psychoactive ingestion (specifically MDMA), in tandem with additional driving mechanisms present in the rave context, may produce simultaneous discharge of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system and subsequent neural tuning. Continued participation in the rave environment, and repeated exposure to the rave event's driving mechanisms such as dancing and repetitive auditory and visual stimuli, strengthen and develop previously tuned structures such that participants through time become adept at re-attaining these states naturally. Previous experiences can therefore be elicited with the presence of a limited subset of the original driving mechanisms, including in some cases only one. The reported change in perspective, and the indication that after a period of raving

one can eventually attend events and "tap into" a previously drug-induced state naturally, is consistent with what has been reported cross-culturally among societies where ritual and the experience of multiple realities is integrated in the culture's cosmology.

***MDMA as the catalyst***

Despite the presence of "natural" driving mechanisms at raves, MDMA continues to have a dominant role in the subculture and this may be due to the fact that the altered experience being sought can thus be achieved with little effort. While over 90% of the world's cultures recognize and seek out altered states of consciousness (Bourguignon 1973), Euroamerican society has tended to discount ASCs in favour of "rational" thought as represented by the waking phase of consciousness. The failure to explore these states of consciousness in our culture has led to what Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1992) label "monophasic" consciousness. Individuals socialized in a monophasic culture are not trained to attend to or develop their own personal phenomenology. For the monophasic individual, psychoactive experimentation provides an easy and immediate access to an ASC, and these substances have the ability of tuning and retuning the autonomic nervous system with little effort (Laughlin et al. 1992). According to Seymour and Smith, "when one takes a psychedelic drug that conditioning breaks down and one is aware of a whole new range of sensory material" (1998:241). This kind of new awareness was described by one informant as "a key that opens you up to new ways of seeing things, it doesn't expand your mind but rather places you in a higher position from which you can see the world" ('Greg' 02-04-31:fn). Some ravers who have taken psychoactives describe being "on the same wavelength"

with other psychoactive users (see also Malbon 1999:132), and this kind of mutual understanding implies a level of shared neural tuning among users. Statements such as one informant's illustrate this: "When I meet someone who has raved, we don't even need to say a word to each other, we just know how the other feels" ('Greg' 02-12-06:fn). In addition to the frequently reported feeling of connectedness, the shared understanding of the "vibe," and the phenomenon of synchronized dancing, are indicative of neural tuning. Ravers not only referred to other members of the subculture as "family," but the opinion that one is better understood by another raver as opposed to a family member or friend who doesn't rave, was frequently expressed:

> I have a childhood friend who doesn't take drugs, doesn't drink alcohol, doesn't rave. I know him very well but he doesn't know me very well. He knows me in a way, but there's a whole aspect of emotions and experience that he has no idea I have ( 'Will' 02-04-31: 28).

Similarly, one informant remarked on perceiving a distance between himself and his friends who are not a part of the scene, commenting that "all of my close friends now either have the potential to be ravers, or were ravers, or are ravers" ('Eric' 02-11-16:15).

Research on trance states suggests that learning and past experience are fundamental to ASC induction and this process is also alluded to by rave participants. Many informants were aware of the fact that the music and dancing alone are enough to produce an ASC, however they also emphasized that one must learn to attend to these natural driving mechanisms and MDMA can accelerate and facilitate this process. As I mentioned earlier, a number of informants pointed out that after a period of taking psychoactives, drugs were no longer required to achieve an altered state. This sentiment is expressed by 'Alan' in the following statement:

> Once you're done experimenting, you've done this for 2 years of your life,

> once you've done that, you don't have to search for that, you can go to events sober and still have just as much fun as you did when you were messed up 5 years ago, it's not necessary to find that state of consciousness through drugs (02-04-30:9).

A similar view is shared by 'Kurt':

> Like honestly, I'll have more fun now when I'm not high, cause I like being cognitive and I like being able to be aware of myself and I find that I can dance better and enjoy the music better when I'm not high now (02-11-08:10).

While many have found a way to experience "highs" without the need for drugs, it is clear that an initial drug encounter is a prerequisite for many:

> If you've never done the drugs you can't be raving, but I believe once you've done the drugs you can be raving without having to do the drugs. If you haven't experienced it to begin with you can't appreciate it without doing it on the flipside. It's just like once you're sensitized to something, you're sensitized to it whether you're fully doing it or not. Once you learn to appreciate something you can appreciate it without having to specifically do it ('Eric' 02-11-08:16).

Neural tuning is not only implied in these statements; some participants are very precise about how MDMA and other psychoactive substances operate in their systems. In referring to his own personal experience with Ecstasy, Simon Reynolds suggests that an appreciation for, and bodily reaction, to the music can only be attained through an initial encounter with MDMA:

> Could you even listen to this music 'on the natural', enjoy it in an unaltered state? Well, I did and do, all the time. But whether I'd *feel it* if my nervous system hadn't been reprogrammed by MDMA is another matter. Perhaps you just need to do it once, to become sens-E-tized, and the music will induce memory rushes and body flashbacks (1999:139).

As mentioned earlier, to an outsider, Techno music can sound repetitive, monotonous and incomprehensible as it defies the characteristics of conventional music. Characterized as a three dimensional sound specifically designed to penetrate the body (Fritz 1999:76), according to many participants, MDMA facilitates the ability to grasp the music such that

musical receptivity transcends the auditory to include all the senses. The natural outcome of this embodied musical awareness is expressed through dancing, and MDMA's role in this kind of learning sheds light on the consistent finding that music and dancing outweigh drugs as the dominant appeal of raves. Although the relationship between Techno music and Ecstasy is noted by Reynolds to be one that has evolved into a "self-conscious science of intensifying MDMA's sensations" (1999:85), it would seem that the reverse is also true: MDMA functions to intensify sensations already evoked by the music. The embodied experience of musical perception, and MDMA's facilitation in acquiring this knowledge, is evident in the following respondents' statements:

> Like you can listen to a Techno song and get shivers down your spine, but if you've never taken Ecstasy, you'll never get those shivers. You don't know that it's possible, it opens like a certain kind of love that you won't have before ('Greg' 02-04-31:24).

> My first indication that I was rushing was the beat of the bass from the techno began to fill my brain and I was unable to sit still any longer on the couch. I reached the middle of the dance floor and let the music take me to heights I never dreamed imaginable. I lost all self consciousness, and felt in tune with the music, as though the bass was a life force and I was connected to it. My movements became fluid and I was able to dance along with it in utter freedom and abandon.[107]

### *Flashbacks at raves: neural tuning*

The term "flashback" most often refers to a spontaneous re-experience of images, physical sensations, or emotional states associated with a previous drug encounter (McGee 1984:273). Although the etiology of flashbacks has long been a focus of debate, I argue that the association between the flashback phenomenon and a psychoactive substance is our culture's way of explaining and categorizing the process of driving mechanisms and neural

[107] http://www.ecstasy.org/experiences/trip58html [date accessed 2000-12-07]

tuning. Generally it is the individual who experiences psychological disturbances with flashbacks who seeks out medical attention (Seymour and Smith 1998:247), and this has introduced a sampling bias which has supported the tendency to regard flashbacks as pathological. Analysis of flashback occurrences among a random sample of psychedelic users however, suggest that most individuals characterize flashbacks as positive and non-threatening in nature (see Batzer et al. 1999; McGee 1984; Matefy 1980; Matefy et al. 1978; Schick and Smith 1970; Wesson 1976).

Examination of the triggers known to elicit flashbacks reveals parallels with a number of agents present at raves. Environmental stimuli, which resemble the context in which the original experience occurred, may trigger a flashback (see Matefy 1980; McGee 1984; Heaton 1975) and this has led some to view flashbacks as learned phenomena. Stimuli associated with specific experiences operate as memory cues which can trigger the re-experience of emotionally salient encounters that may or may not be associated with a particular drug. According to McGee, "the more similar the contextual stimuli are to those conditions prevailing at the time of the original storage of memories, the more likely the probability of their retrieval" (1984:277).

While the location of rave events vary, there are a number of "contextual stimuli" that are consistently present at raves. The electronic music, crowds of dancers, glow-sticks, projections of psychedelic imagery and elaborate lighting systems can be expected at every event. These environmental factors are also conducive to this phenomenon since flashbacks are more likely to occur in conditions known to induce ASCs such as stress, fatigue or reduced sensory input (Heaton 1975:157). Whether the association is connected to a past drug encounter, or previous exposure to a naturally occurring ASC, the sensorial components

of raves seem to trigger memory recall. Many informants noted immediate shifts in physical sensations and/or mind state upon entering the rave environment:

> 14,000 people jumping up and down and all you could hear was the banging of the floor, it was absolutely incredible. You walk in and all you see was this sea of people and all they had was 2 glow-sticks each, so 28,000 glowing objects jumping up and down, and just bang, that's all you could hear. You couldn't even hear the music cause the banging on the floor was so loud. Absolutely incredible, I'm shivering just talking to you about it, but yeah it was phenomenal, it was an incredible feeling to walk in and just see this mass of people going nuts. I literally have goose bumps just talking about it ('Casey'02-04-13:7).

> Sometimes when I walk into a rave and smell the familiar scent of incense, the sight of the glow-sticks, and feel the overpowering beat of trance, I get this light-headed sensation and sense of weightlessness in my body that reminds me of the first experience I had on E. It's awesome ('Helen' 02-10-14:17 ).

Similar sensations have also been reported by ravers when exposed to only one of the variables present at raves, such as listening to Techno music at home:

> It was 3:00 in the morning and this DJ played this song called 'Air Tight' and it's an incredible track, unbelievable song and the mode of response just listening to it at home, it still elicits the same response that it did that night when I was listening to it, and I have that experience every single time ('Casey' 02-04-13:7).

Personal expectation is also correlated with flashback experiences (see Matefy et al. 1978; Heaton 1975), suggesting that flashbacks are often sought out by drug users. According to one DJ, people attend raves with the expectation of reaching a transcendent experience. It is this anticipated physical and emotional ordeal that distinguishes a rave from a night club:

> When you're going to a rave, you're going there particularly to experience a certain type of event. That's what you're going there for. You're going there to get this particular emotion, this particular sensation in this particular environment that you're looking for. You're going there to get it. ('Casey' 02-04-13:10)

Heaton (1975) found that by attending to relevant stimuli and blocking out external inputs,

subjects were more likely to become aware of a broad range of psychoactive sensations. Some informants attributed their ability to recreate MDMA-like experiences by focussing on the music and bodily sensations while dancing.

> I believe that there's a very strong conditioned response when you take music and the pleasure that Ecstasy gives you, so I think that the mind can very easily extend that feeling of pleasure if you just focus on the music. I think lots of people don't take advantage of this, cause there is a way to extend the experience without drugs ('Brad' 02-04-31: 13)

Some ravers described experiences involving the dissolution or disappearance of the ego through the process of dance. As recounted by one male raver "like I'm dancing, feeling empty, I cut all input from my senses and not physically, but I'll close my eyes sometimes and once all the perceptions are gone, it's like being dead, like I don't exist anymore ('Paul' 02-04-31:14). This also supports the notion that ravers are likely more proficient in inducing flashbacks, since flashbackers have illustrated greater adeptness than non-flashbackers in being able to lose themselves or "relinquish personal control for the sake of a peak experience, and altering of consciousness" (Matefy 1980:552).

Finally, there is an association between flashbacks triggered by marijuana, particularly in conjunction with LSD (see McGee 1984; Wesson 1976). This may shed some light on its widespread use in the Canadian rave scene; the underlying effects of state-dependent learning may encourage users to quit the class of synthetic drugs favouring marijuana for its potential to induce MDMA flashbacks. Similarly, one informant noted that alcohol, when consumed at raves, has a completely different effect on her than when it is consumed outside the rave context. At raves, and in particular while dancing, she finds the alcoholic "buzz" resembles the MDMA high.

## 8.4 Empowerment, Self-Exploration, Catharsis and Transformation

The driving mechanisms at raves produce tuning of the central nervous system through the stimulation of the sympathetic (ergotropic) system. Recognizing that rave drivers are numerous, and exposure to these procedures extensive, it is probable that many individuals reach the third stage of CNS tuning outlined by Gellhorn and Kiely (1973). In this stage of tuning, the otherwise antagonistic relationship between the ergotropic and trophotropic system is suspended by the simultaneous discharge of both systems, resulting in trophotropic rebound. The perceptions of unity, holism, connectedness, and the momentary suspension of time, space and linear thought so frequently reported during peak experiences at raves, is evidence for the first two stages of tuning. Initial ergotropic activation occurs by such procedures as sensory bombardment, auditory stimuli, and extensive motor behaviour, which block information processing of the left hemisphere, allowing for temporary right hemispheric dominance, wherein the outlined reported phenomena are consistent (Lex 1979:144-145). Continued stimulation of the ergotropic system promotes the excitation of both systems which is manifested at raves as alterations in consciousness and in transformation. This too is compatible with what is known to result from the simultaneous discharge of both the excitation and relaxation systems (Laughlin 1992:147). Catharsis, exhaustion, and even collapse, are further suggestive of trophotropic rebound where a new trophotropic-ergotropic balance is established. The formation of a new central nervous system balance is indicated by ravers' ability to reach alterations in consciousness without psychoactives, in addition to reports of spontaneous ASC recurrences with the presence of only one of the original drivers. The emic perspectives on how these various stages of tuning are experienced by ravers through the vehicles of empowerment, catharsis and

transformation will now be examined.

### *Experimentation & Self-exploration: The body re-examined*

Thus far, it has been suggested that the DJ's control over the music and the dialectical relationship he establishes with the dancers, the driving mechanisms at raves, and the methods through which dancers learn to facilitate trance, share many commonalities with rituals of possession. While possession trance is not an expected outcome at raves, many of the psychosocial factors, themes, and therapeutic outcomes of possession rituals are apparent in the rave milieu. Possession rituals are regarded by many as agents that temporarily empower the participants who would otherwise be denied access to status and prestige (Ward 1984; Bourguignon 1976; Lewis 1989). It is for this reason that possession cults are most often associated with the marginalized and the oppressed. Here the trance environment operates as a kind of vehicle for self expression and experimentation with alternative roles where "the impersonation of powerful spirits, acts as a mechanism of compensation, of balancing the neglect they experience in everyday life" (Bourguignon 1976:23). While possessed, the cultural prescriptions for acceptable behaviour are momentarily suspended thus allowing individuals the freedom to conduct themselves in ways that would normally be deemed inappropriate without being held accountable:

> Women assume the roles of males and men those of females. Thus, we might translate this observation as follows: Possession trance offers alternative roles, which satisfy certain individual needs, and it does so by providing the alibi that the behavior is that of spirits and not of the human beings themselves (Bourguignon 1976:40).

In this manner, possession rituals can serve as an outlet for stress relief, and emotional catharsis (Ward 1984:316).

The roots of rave and club culture have been similarly associated with the marginalized, specifically women, gay men, and the African diaspora (Gilbert and Pearson 1999:83). McRobbie (1994), and Pini (1997) have argued that the dance floor offers an autonomous cultural space for young women. Dance which has been traditionally regarded as a feminine activity has become in rave the "motivating force for the entire subculture" and this provides women with a sense of confidence and authority (McRobbie 1994:169-170). Rietveld, in contrasting the male experience which she regards as a rite of passage that resolves the identity crisis of a "vulnerable sense of masculinity," remarks that, "women at rave-related events seem to embrace androgyny as a perceived liberation from femininity" (2004:59). For example, one female informant stated that the rave scene has made her more aware of her own gender, while at the same time, the male atmosphere has influenced her to explore the more "masculine" aspects of her own personality:

> Being with male company makes me more aware of my gender as being female. I try to not stand out, so I'm trying to be a bit more guy-ish, and less stereotypically gal-ish. Oh I've got to fix my hair, nails, whatever. There are more guys around, and I'm making new friends with guys. It's empowering in a sense of bringing out the man-side in me ('Jane' 04-01-08:1).

The freedom to deviate from socially conditioned, expected or imposed gender roles and the gravitation toward a more androgynous self is touched on in the following statement, as is the sense of pride in being female in a male environment:

> They're [raves] harsh and demanding and you know, "Good girls" aren't really supposed to frequent these places, they're not supposed to do drugs, stay out all night. I kind of like the fact that I can keep up to the boys, both in drugs but especially in the dancing. Sometimes, by the end, I'll be one of the few women left on the dance floor and that makes me proud. It also makes me laugh cause this kind of "non-feminine" behaviour is so not me, or at least that's not how my parents and a lot of my friends know me. If they had any idea, they'd completely freak!

('Helen' 02-10-14:8).

The dance floor as Pini notes, has also questioned the traditional image of femininity by dismantling the "traditional cultural associations between dancing, drugged 'dressed-up' women and sexual invitation, and as such opens up a new space for the exploration of new forms of identity and pleasure" (1997 154-155). Many women perceived a greater sense of freedom while on the dance floor, knowing that men are not staring at them as potential victims to "hit on." Others remarked that the absence of the perceived pressure to conform to the typical "club attire" of high heeled shoes and tight and revealing clothes allows for stylistic preferences oriented toward physical comfort with the added benefit of reducing self consciousness.

The "no picking up" taboo and supposed non-sexual atmosphere at raves however is subject to more than one interpretation. As my research progressed I began to notice an incongruity between the accepted and promoted code that "you don't go to raves to pick up," with what was observed in the field, in addition to what some informants were to later disclose upon further questioning. My observation of sexually suggestive behaviour, eroticism, flirting, and in some cases the formation of what would develop into committed relationships, implies that it is possible to "pick up" or meet one's "significant other" at an event. Some informants, however, were reluctant to discuss the more ambiguous interpretations of the "pick up" taboo, and in particular the topic of sexuality at raves. This could be due to the fact that many partiers are frustrated with the negative media coverage of rave culture, and the media's perpetuation of false information, most notably that raves promote promiscuity and unprotected sex. On this matter, one individual felt that some of the conventions, codes, and behaviours at raves could only be understood by insiders, and

divulging this knowledge could result in fueling these negative stereotypes.

It was acknowledged that flirting is quite common at raves, however the techniques used to attract a person's attention are less overt, more subtle, and more innocent than at clubs:

> Although lots of people say they don't go raving with flirting in mind, I would definitely say that many of them are lying, or ...twisting reality is nicer. It may just be that they disregard the more conventional ways that they consider the "clubbers' ways" which from what I understand is the main difference between raver and clubber. They certainly use other seduction techniques that are indeed very creative and clever in avoiding being labeled as "hunters." What could be less harmful than a toy? ('Paul' 02-04-12:1).

Also implied in the following, is the influence of MDMA in this kind of flirting:

> You'll blow bubbles in someone's face at a rave to try and get their attention. At the start you're not shy at all, there's nothing to make you shy, and so you like, you just go up to a person, well I did, but I still don't know how that works. It's a lot more juvenile, you're not the brightest person when you're on Ecstasy as I told you ('Greg' 02-04-31:9).

Most women still preferred these alternative techniques over the more obvious club methods. This type of socialization is generally regarded as being more respectful, less aggressive, and some appreciated the creative efforts involved in attracting one's attention. The other difference between flirting at raves versus clubs is the idea that flirting doesn't always have to evolve into something that gets carried outside of the rave. Compared to mainstream clubs, there's less of an expectation that socialization has to lead to something concrete, such as the attainment of a phone number, a relationship, or sex after the party. This concept is consistent with the attitude shared among many that raves are all about living in the present

and making the most out of the "here and now:" [108]

> For 12 hours you'll be thinking of nothing but what's in that room. Thought about anything else is almost impossible. It's like a little bubble of fun, another universe. You're in another reality for that time ('Will' 02-04-31:9).
>
> It's a sense of we're blitzed out of our skulls and it's all about having a good time. It's not about worrying about tomorrow, or anything like that. It's like let's just do this now, it's all about now now now now ('Kurt' 01-8:7).
>
> Everything is carefree, and I love the idea that we can all live in the moment. It's sometimes more freeing to live in just that moment. You're in a small world that's become relatively exclusive, and any notions of wars, SARS, any boy/girl troubles, anything negative is basically subsided ('Jane' 03-16:04).

Thus going to an event with the intention of "picking up" defies the concept of living "moment to moment," as does the expectation that the relationship will be explored further after the event. This is intimated by the following male raver:

> But speaking from personal experience, when I "chat up" a girl I'm usually flirting outrageously (as I hope they are), with no intention of taking it further. But I'm also Meeting New People, which is another raison d'etre of the whole movement...**BUT I DON'T GO TO SCORE.** And I hope nobody else does either.[109]

Some women find this lack of sexual expectations empowering because they can flirt at a rave without being accused of leading a person on if a relationship doesn't ensue. The possibility nevertheless remains that the interaction could evolve into something more and it is this freedom to choose, without consequence that both men and women find appealing. Comfort with this level of ambiguity was not shared by everyone however. One female informant after her first rave communicated that one of the things that impressed her the

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108 MDMA also plays a role in promoting and reifying this concept as MDMA is known to induce the experience of what Eisner refers to as the "eternal here-and-now" (1994:58).

109 http:www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/testimonials/Raving_and_Sex.html [date accessed 2002-08-14]

most was the fact that "other people weren't eyeing me with those desperate things in mind" ('Kate' 03-01-01:3). Almost a year later, that same individual expressed some disillusionment after having attended several more events, claiming that some men do take advantage of women who are on drugs because their "guards are down, or it's assumed that their guards are down" ('Kate' 03-11-21:1).[110] She also suggested that some men use this ambiguity as a safety net to hide, protect or deny their true feelings which she found frustrating:

> It's when a friend calls me "lovely" that I feel weird. It's like I have some sort of pom-pom on my head and he reaches for it after some apparent hesitancy. This new male friend of mine, seems partly interested in me as a friend, and partly kind of horny girlfriend hungry, but it's hard to tell. It is subtle, yet if you're sensitive to signs, you will get vibes from this kind of logic, and then of course if you confront the person, things have been so ambiguous they can just deny it ('Kate' 04–1-09:1).

The ambiguous nature of human relationships and the emphasis placed on the present also introduces the opportunity to explore gender, sexuality, and relationships in ways that may fail to conform to mainstream norms. For example, men have the freedom to express themselves through dancing, an activity typically regarded as "feminine." It is acceptable and quite common, for a heterosexual man to hug his male friend. Volunteering or accepting a massage from a male friend and/or stranger by a male is also observed at events. At one event in Quebec City, one male informant started to massage another male who entered the cuddle-puddle. The newcomer showed signs of discomfort as he appeared startled when he

[110] Some ravers remarked that going with the intention of taking advantage of a person on drugs is a recent trend, and yet another example of how the scene has become tainted. Wilson (2002) describes in detail the tension between upholding raver social mores and the declining idealism in the scene. While some embrace the increasing influx of newcomers into the scene viewing the greater potential for social change, others are less tolerant feeling that this recent wave of newcomers are failing to uphold the values and philosophies of rave (Wilson 2002:390-391; see also McCall 2001:62-63).

realized he was being massaged by another man and consequently walked away. My informant was quite offended by this and claimed that the individual was not a "true raver." It was also pointed out that the individual's overly muscular build was another indicator of his outsider status since someone so preoccupied with their physique "could only be a club-goer." Regional and cultural differences were also apparent in the comfort level of heterosexual male to male contact. In regions such as Montreal and Quebec City, heterosexual men seemed to be more at ease in demonstrating affection and physical contact toward other men Independent of locale, MDMA is an influential catalyst facilitating both same and opposite sex social interaction. However, compared to outsiders, ravers are generally more emotionally demonstrative with each other even outside rave events, suggesting that this ease of interaction becomes encoded through time.

The removal of social and cultural barriers is commonly reported at raves and when the categories of gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status become meaningless, individuals are perceived as equals where bonding and interaction take place at a human level:

> When at a rave or rave type party, whether on E or not, I see the crowd as a collection of beautiful human beings, not male or female, not gorgeous or ugly. Just a bunch of beautiful people...When on E, I like to hold hands and cuddle with men AND women-and I am as heterosexual as they get ('Amy').[111]

Jimi Fritz, an author and self-professed middle-aged raver, offers a similar sentiment from a male perspective:

> Personally speaking, as a highly sexed man, I find it a unique and wonderful experience to dance with complete abandon in a sea of ravishingly beautiful, scantily clad, nubile young women and think only of universal love and

[111] http:www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/testimonials/Raving_and_Sex.html [date accessed 2002-08-14]

beauty (1999:164).

The absence of gender distinction is also apparent in the common disregard for "male" and "female" washrooms as ravers will frequent either one with ease. When these categories lose their importance, as one raver remarks "the lines between gay, bi, and straight are a little more blurred" [112] and this underlies the suspension of otherwise "acceptable" conduct in addition to accountability for one's actions.[113] Therefore according to some ravers, an "attached" individual is free to attend an event and socialize, massage, hug, and flirt with another person of the same or opposite sex. This blurring of boundaries informs much of the controversy surrounding the topic of sexuality at raves. Analogous to the principles governing "picking up," most ravers would agree that you don't attend raves with the intention of having a sexual encounter, although sexuality is nevertheless present. The DJ's continuous "peaking" of the dance floor as 'Eric' notes, "instills and creates a sexually charged environment" 02-11-16:25), and some ravers report feeling highly sexual when under the influence of MDMA. It was emphasized however, that the sexual energy at raves is qualitatively different because it is less goal-oriented:

> It's not sexual, it's just that there are no boundaries so it can lead to sexual stuff. But it's not that you are like "I want to have sex, I want to have an orgasm." It's, "I'm enjoying myself so much I want to show you how much I'm enjoying myself" you know, in giving people massages and all that kind of caught up in the moment stuff ('Kurt' 02-11-08:12).

Most ravers thus find the term sensual to be a more accurate descriptor because it implies an experience that is less goal-oriented, it prioritizes the stimulation of all of the body's sense organs rather than just one, and it reflects the ideology of living in the moment. This term is

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112 http:www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/testimonials/Raving_and_Sex.html [date accessed 2002-08-14]

113 Although not all ravers agreed, some felt that being "messed up" on drugs made one less accountable for one's actions at a rave.

also preferable in describing the experience of MDMA since the known physiological effect of delayed orgasm, the desire for physical contact, and the heightened sense of touch, make it less of a sexual experience and more of a sensual one (see Eisner 1994:46; Fritz 1999:163). Also echoed is the DJ's technique of peaking the dance floor, and the continuous withholding of the bass throughout the night.

Thus, through various procedures (the sensory bombardments, drugs, dancing, massaging, and elaborate rave toys) using Pini's words, "a radical reframing of the body" (1997:118) enables participants to experience pleasure from the body in new ways, that again may oppose mainstream values. One of the outcomes of this kind of reframing is a comfort level, pride and celebration of the body. Many ravers adorn their bodies with piercings, tattoos, or body paint. During the peak hours of an event, individuals both male and female will often remove their tops while on the dance floor. Absent are feelings of embarrassment and modesty as even the un-endowed who would in ordinary circumstances exhibit signs of self-consciousness concerning body-image, are included among this group. Our society's preoccupation with hygiene and cleanliness is also overlooked during these periods as individuals will often share their bottled water with friends and strangers. There are also no signs of discomfort in being drenched in sweat, nor disgust in being covered in other people's sweat as over-crowding on the dance floor, hugging, and massaging, are consistently observed regardless of the event's temperature.

Given that the normative categories of gender and sexuality are temporarily suspended, and the body is celebrated rather than demonized, raves can become a nonthreatening environment where individuals can explore alternative modes of pleasure and intimacy without the fear of being labeled a "homosexual," "heterosexual," "cheater" or

"pervert." According to Fritz, "the rave movement has done more for gender relations than any other popular movement in history, and continues to this day to provide a bridge between the words of gays and straights" (1999:162). Ravers crave and find comfort in physical contact, and as 'Eric' suggests, raves are essentially filling the void created by what he calls an "antiseptic society:"

> The hands-on part of it is a big thing because with such an antiseptic society, you know, wash your hands, wash your hands with antibacterial soap. The drugs and the people and the environment brings you together more...more of a touchy feely way and I think that's a key thing. This physical interaction is... I think that the scene is replacing the lack of it in our day to day society, which is why there's so much of massages, cuddling and this kind of stuff because I mean let's face it, it feels good to be held tight, to be cuddled, I mean everybody loves it. It doesn't make babies "goo goo goo gaa gaa" for nothing. It's our biggest sense organ in our body, our skin and we cover it with clothes and never let anyone breathe let alone touch it. Imagine how that has an impact on people after a while, you know you touch someone today and they jump like you've scared them. It's become a foreign thing to be touched. I think people look forward to going to raves so they can be touched and it's okay. It's not bad right, it won't make you feel guilty because that's what you do when you go to raves (02-11-16:6, 8).

Perceiving the atmosphere to be a safe one, it is much easier to lose onself in the body and become "so immersed in inner travel that you don't give a damn who is around hugging, massaging, kissing or lifting you up" ('Paul' 02-16-04:1). One informant described this process of allowing your structuring mechanism to break down so that your moral code of conduct can momentarily vanish. Pini echoes this emic analysis in referring to the self as losing its individuality and "subjectivity is restated in terms which do not reproduce traditional distinctions between mind and body, self and other" (1997:118). These moments are often cited as moments of total abandon or flow, and accounts of these experiences will often allude to the dissolution of the ego, or a fusion of the self with the surrounding environment:

> Remember the moment when you were dancing and experienced complete connection between yourself and everyone in the room. When you lost your mind and found it a the same time. When you became so enraptured by the rhythm that "you" no longer existed, you felt the bliss of transcending your physical body and you BECAME the DANCE.[114]
>
> The best way I could try to explain it would be to say that it was like every smallest of my components lost any form of specific link to any of the others and it did not matter. I guess "Paul" was there when others wanted him to be, otherwise this whole concept of "Paul" did not relate to anything. It's like a neutrally static empty silent unexistence, that doesn't pose any challenge nor reward ('Paul' 02-11-02:1).
>
> This total abandonment, this shedding of the ego and allowing one to have pure enjoyment is a very special thing in itself. It implies the dropping of barriers, and it implies acceptance from the others.[115]

When barriers between self and other dissolve in this way concern and in some cases, even awareness of the identity and gender of the individual one is connecting with is disregarded:

> One time, this guy whose finger, then hand crept onto my thigh. Things progressed to a massage, then things felt sensual, even though my friends were right near by. The appearance of his face didn't even matter. When I saw what he looked like later on in the evening, it didn't matter. I was done bonding with him. I didn't want to sleep with him, I got something that I was curious about out of the way. How many people can say they've had such an unusual experience when the appearance of the face, or even his regular personality, didn't matter? ('Jane' 04-01-26:2).
>
> When you're at a rave you're massaging people and hugging people and you don't really care if they're guys or girls ('Eric' 02-11-16:7).

It is also during these peak moments that some of the more shocking behaviours can be witnessed. It is not unusual for example, to find two heterosexual females kissing in a cuddle puddle while their boyfriends are within visual range. I observed this bisexual experimentation more often between women than men (see also Fritz 1999:162). This is not

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114 http://www.greenspun.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg.tcl?msg_id=000Zid [date accessed 2003-03-12]

115 http://www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/technoshamanism/Techno_and_Raving.html [date accessed 2000-12-07]

to say that jealousy at raves does not occur. This kind of liberal attitude must be agreed upon by both parties forming the couple, and the level of openness seems to depend on the degree of experience in the scene; with increased exposure these "structuring mechanisms" can lose their strength and a formed mutual understanding is grounded in the knowledge of having experienced these encounters before. What is clear, is that the codes of acceptable conduct are context specific to the rave. These same behaviours exhibited outside the rave environment would be interpreted differently even by ravers.

It is probable that the states being referred to in the above descriptions are comparable to the state achieved by possession devotees just before the spirit presence enters the body: a neutral and empty space providing an ideal "receptacle" for the gods. According to one veteran raver, one of the goals of promoters and DJs is to create an empty space, or a temporary autonomous zone where distinct from "organized religion" that imposes specific paths to be followed, it is up to each individual to decide how this space will be used. For some this space is nothing more than fun, a temporary escape, and a holiday. For others, it is an outlet for the cathartic release of repressed emotion, a place for healing and transformation.

### *Catharsis Through Dance & MDMA*

Paralleling possession rituals, the therapeutic release of repressed emotion through dance, is a recurring theme in rave culture. Just as raves provide a safe atmosphere for self exploration and experimentation, they are also a secure outlet for stress relief and emotional catharsis. For some, the dance floor is a space where one can temporarily escape from one's personal problems:

> It is an outlet [the dance floor] in which one can get away. Am I really caring about the details of my job while there? Am I worried about any family/personal matters, while there? No!, I'm too distracted, in a positive way usually ('Jane' 03-11:21:1).

Liberated from the constraints of societal pressures and personal issues, ravers become fully engaged with the music where they can express themselves through dance as well as probe dormant facets of the self such as creativity:

> That's one thing that's so acceptable within the scene is that you can completely lose yourself in the music and leave yourself in dancing and you completely close your eyes and whatever's coming out of you comes out of you, and you'll be covered in sweat and it's 4:30. All that dirt will be half way up your shin and you don't care and it doesn't matter, you just have this big grin on your face and yeah. Like your body is just the most beautiful physical expression of the music, the scene really promotes creativity and individualism ('Sue' 03-01-31:5-6).

> Dancing is like taking that step to be in the spotlight long enough to become oblivious of the people around you, and then as soon as you hit the state once again, it's liberating, you feel free. Dancing's great because when you move your body, it's like a form of artistic expression of how you feel and it's a good way to stay in shape and get rid of stress and interact with other people ('Eric' 02-11-16:08).

The dance floor is not only a space for escaping life's stressors, but it can also be a space for dealing with and relieving stress. Implied in the following account is the therapeutic aspect of the cathartic release of emotion:

> Sometimes you've got so many drugs in you you're just, you're just a dog, you're just into the music and stuff. Everything's blurry, you don't care what you look like. There's sweat just running down your face and like I think internally you're just shaking out all that crap you have to deal with in life. You just dance you know and just close your eyes and just freak out to it. Then in the morning you're just like "ah okay it's all gone now" ('Andy' 03-01-31:6).

The chill-out room is also conducive to emotional release. These spaces are designed for socializing, thus the location is generally peripheral to the dance floor so that

conversation isn't muted by the music. The more relaxed genre of music "Ambient," is often featured where the lighting is dim, and cushions may be placed on the floor so ravers can rest, relax, and interact with each other. Although MDMA isn't required, it does facilitate socialization by lowering one's inhibitions, increasing verbal fluency (Eisner 1994:58), and generating a sense of empathy and well-being. As those psychiatrists who have used MDMA in drug-assisted therapy are well aware, MDMA can weaken an individual's psychological defenses, thus bringing memories of past psychological trauma, and repressed emotions to the fore (Eisner 1994:42). Individual problems are not only discussed but sometimes worked out in chill-out rooms where the non-judgmental and open atmosphere can help individuals feel safe in disclosing personal information. The ease at communicating with a stranger was also remarked upon:

> You start a conversation like that and you end up solving a problem in that person's life. You're a stranger and he can tell me his problems all day and I won't judge him, I don't know him. I know one side of the story and I can well... maybe he can look at it from this angle, and you have that a lot in raves cause you can talk to anybody about anything ('Greg' 02-04-31:9).

I was frequently privy to the personal details of many ravers' lives in these chill-out rooms. For example, one homosexual male who acknowledged taking MDMA, read selected diary entries and letters written to him by his boyfriend and talked about the struggles he was faced with in his long distance relationship. The idea that "people will tell you stuff they wouldn't even tell their parents" ('Will' 02-04-31:9) is grounded in the view that the "rave scene does provide a home for many people that don't have it" ('Eric' 02–11-16:9). Ravers frequently refer to the scene as a family or community made up of "like-minded people" and this supports a sense of trust that ravers have toward others. Most individuals feel secure in

leaving their belongings in chill-out areas knowing that they will remain safe there. Ravers will frequently invite strangers from the event to their homes for an after-party without hesitation. Women who have been socialized to protect themselves from date-rape by guarding their drinks and declining beverages offered by strangers, will frequently leave their bottled water unattended, or accept water from strangers. The knowledge that an individual can share their secrets with a friend or stranger without being judged also garners an atmosphere of trust. In this environment, individuals can express acts of kindness and compassion without the fear of being ridiculed. For example, one raver 'Sue,' recounted how distraught she was over her mother's reaction to a post card she sent to her from England. The card as she put it "was full of lovely things, it was as if liquid love was coming off the paper" (03-01-31:12). 'Sue' felt that her mother didn't appreciate the card; her reaction was "what's this crap" ('Sue 03-01-31:12). In contrast, 'Sue' isn't afraid to communicate her feelings to others at raves, for her it is a chance to be a good person without being questioned for it:

> Whereas at a party you speak like that [in reference to the card] to people all the time, you say beautiful things to each other all the time from the heart. And so it's where I would go to be comfortably a good person, to be really open and not be afraid of someone saying "what are you on?" It is so nice being free through being positive and saying really nice things to people (03-01-31:12).

As 'Eric' notes, gestures of kindness are not questioned for a hidden agenda and this is what enables individuals to feel at ease in displaying acts of kindness:

> You're not questioned for being nice at a rave like you are day to day. Like if you were to take the words that you said to someone at a rave and say it to someone on the street corner at a bus stop, they would say "What do you want from me, what are you up to?" There would be an air of you trying to get something, setting them up or something (03-01-31: 13).

While the role of MDMA in facilitating communication has been noted, a number of ravers stressed that the feelings experienced on Ecstasy are genuine, and that the drug simply gives one the courage and desire to express them. This awareness is also evident while individuals are under the influence of the drug, as the statement "I'm not just saying this because I'm on E," was frequently uttered to me at events. An individual's state of mind while on MDMA can also operate as a safety valve for the release of negative or repressed emotion:

> Like on E., you can talk about stuff that's bothering you. Normally it would dredge up all these negative emotions like resentment, anger, bitterness, rage. But when you're on E the difference is, you can talk about stuff without all that negativity. So it kind of makes you more level headed about things, you can see things differently because you're calm and almost detached in a way ('Helen' 02-10-14:9).

For men in particular, the rave environment is a space for unlearning the conditioned response of suppressing one's emotions. Put succinctly by one male: "I cry if I feel like crying, I will not stop myself from crying" ('Greg' 02-04-31:25).

### *Insight and Transformation*

Ritual through the inculcation of cultural knowledge, is a society's way of directing initiate transformation in a controlled setting. As Laughlin et al. have noted, "Participants in ritual commonly come to see aspects of their society, cosmology, environment, conditions, even themselves in a new light" (1992:145-146). Autonomic nervous system tuning can result in shifts in both knowledge and perception (ibid:147). The resultant flashbacks and "natural highs" as discussed earlier are the product of perceptual changes resulting from the entrainment of operating neural structures. Insight or what ravers sometimes refer to as "epiphanies" can inform knowledge about self and worldview. Not surprisingly, the results

of Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) content analysis found that well over a third of the personal accounts sampled from the Internet made reference to personal growth or a life change as a direct result of the rave experience. The elaborate effort made by some to physically modify appearance in preparation for an event implies an intentionality towards transformation as an expected outcome of the rave experience (for more on this see chapter nine). As Gauthier observes, this "particular attention to vestments and corporeal ornaments" is exemplary of a "strategy at deconstructing and reconstructing subjectivity" (2004:73). As will be shown in the next chapter, this expectation not only prescribes the context of drug ingestion for the rave setting, but it also favours the selection of drugs toward those substances which the individual believes will enable the obtainment of new knowledge or awareness from the experience.

All of the subjects interviewed acknowledged personal change and growth as a result of raving. For many, changes in attitude were the product of a gradual process of enculturation. Acquiring a positive attitude and being more open-minded were the most frequently cited changes resulting from raving. The influence of MDMA in instigating these transformations is evident in the following raver's testimonial, as is the sense of good fortune in being exposed to rave culture during a vulnerable period in her life:

> I think rave as a lot to do with making me the person that I am. Even just my attitudes, but Ecstasy had a lot to do with it too. It opened me up to just being so open-minded and so positive. And just being surrounded by beautiful people while I was in a really vulnerable period in my life. You know when you're 17, 18, 19, and you're defining who you are. You know if I had been in the Booty Hip Hop scene I would have been very angry. So I'm so thankful that I was a part or that the rave scene was a part of my life and it still is, and I want it to be for a long time ('Sue' 03-03-31:14).

Others remarked that the impromptu nature of rave events encourages a person to become

more flexible and resilient as one is quickly forced to adapt to a new set of circumstances each night out. Events do get cancelled, re-located or shut down at the last minute so ravers who remain in the subculture also gain a sense of personal responsibility for determining the outcome of one's evening:

> The nice thing about the raves is they're planned at the last minute, you don't know where they're going to be held, you don't know who's going to show up, how long they're going to last. You learn to expect that you shouldn't expect much, that it's going to be exactly what you make it, not what you expect. I mean you don't go there to be entertained, you don't go there to watch television, it's not like going to a movie. It's not predetermined how much fun you'll have so once you experience that a few times, your attitude is different. If you expect it to be perfect, on time etc, then you'll be disappointed. But if you go there and think what can I bring, I can bring a good conversation, I can bring a pleasant smile to someone or whatever, then it can be a lot better. I think the rave scene teaches you to carry this sort of... yeah I guess it's the power to control your environment as opposed to expecting it to be a certain way and then being disappointed or something like that ('Eric' 03-01-31:15-16).

These attitudes of being open-minded, positive, and taking responsibility for one's experiences do get taken outside of the rave scene as ravers make an effort to implement these attitudes in everyday life. Paralleling revitalization rituals, some individuals felt that regular attendance at raves helped to reinforce those values that often get lost or forgotten due to mainstream society exposure:

> I like coming back because sometimes I forget the lessons that I've learned. I forget what's inside of me, I forget how to be a really open, accepting, loving person. You get caught up with being cold and closed up and worrying about what's going on and so instead of being concerned with what you're putting out you're concerned with what you're getting. So you have to get back in and walk away feeling wonderful so yeah I like to get back into the scene for that reason. It's a refresher ('Sue' 03-02-11:2).

Being less critical and more accepting of others was also repeatedly touched on. One male recalled being somewhat homophobic before he started raving. After being in the rave scene

for two years, his comfort level with gay people is such that he now frequents gay bars, has gay friends, and is no longer offended or uncomfortable when a guy is hitting on him. This individual recalls how the dismantling of stereotypes is a liberating process:

> It breaks down your stereotypes and your biases, it helps you to unlearn all those things that you learn. It's a liberating feeling to get rid of biases that you didn't ask for when you were growing up that certain people in society felt that you should have ('Eric' 02-11-16:7).

In looking at the intrapersonal side of clubbing, Malbon sees the club and dance experience as an opportunity for "a reflexive exploration of the self." Addressing those critics who regard raves as a form of escapism, 'Sue' contrasts the "truth" of raves, with the escapism of mainstream society: "It's funny because to me it's television, it's the 9:00 to 5:00 job, that's the escape... but inside a rave it's about getting to the truth of who I am, the purity of the being that's in me" (03-01-31:18). Self knowledge in the form of being in touch with one's emotions is another outcome which is also closely intertwined with MDMA. After her first encounter with MDMA, one woman writes "I feel more in touch with myself and my feelings. I feel like I know where I am heading in life." [116] Another raver observed that his emotions are now more intense and that he has gained an appreciation for a range of emotion including the negative:

> Every emotion is stronger. I enjoy my emotion much more. Even if I'm sad, I will be sadder, but in a way I'll enjoy it because it's there. Why not enjoy it while it's there because later you will not be sad anymore for that particular thing ('Will' 02-04-31:3).

The property of MDMA as an entactogen, and the open and friendly atmosphere of raves can also raise one's self esteem. Learning how to accept and love oneself through raving is a consistent theme among ravers, as is the interconnection between the intra- and

[116] http://www.ecstasy.org/experiences/trip58.html [date accessed 2000-12-07]

interpersonal. One informant recounted how the ability to love herself through raving, gave her the ability to love her boyfriend in what she considered to be a much healthier way. Put in another way by one male after his first encounter with MDMA: "I think the greatest contribution I gained from the experience was to learn that truly, I Love myself and that is the route to Loving others."[117] For 'Andy,' MDMA gave him insight into one of the emotions that drives his interactions with people and helped him to realize how this has limited his relationships from developing:

> Like revelations into myself, you know like just seeing how I interact with people while I'm on MDMA. It's just so free and easy and so lacking in fear, and it's that polarity that's helped me to understand the reverse end. If I'm so lacking in fear right now, does that mean I'm living in fear most of the time and is that preventing me from advancing in relationships and whatnot (03-01-31:18).

'Will' also notes a similar emotional insight gained from MDMA:

> Still I've grown a lot from E...The emotional vision, becoming wiser, becoming more aware of yourself is far more important than what E takes from you. You take from drugs and they take from you too. I always say that I took more out of drugs than drugs took from me (02-04-31:17).

Other commentaries have focused on the theme of experiencing happiness for the first time in one's life at a rave. The ability to "tap into" this sense of happiness and peace can anchor an individual during difficult periods and for the conflicted, this awareness can radically transform a person's life:

> I was never so happy in my life! I had finally found a place, that I felt I belonged...Raving has changed my life for the better, and everyone I knew before says the same. I have not been depressed in years, when previously, I had been diagnosed as a Manic Depressive and was on all sorts of anti-depressants. I am no longer on these drugs, and my doctor's cannot believe it. I attribute it all to the wonderful people I met that night most specially to my friend to the end Franco. I believe that the rave saved my life, I now have

[117] http://www.ecstasy.org/experiences/trip21.html [date accessed 2000-12-07]

something to look forward to besides fear, resentment and loneliness ('Zoe').[118]

Shifts in worldview have also been reported by ravers. For example, one informant upon experiencing at a rave the sudden realization of his interconnectedness with all living things, was propelled to become environmentally more aware and has since adopted vegetarianism, yoga, meditation, and Tai Chi. MDMA can also mediate experiences of the numinous and help an individual gain an understanding of one's place in the world:

> I understood without question what god was, to a better understanding at any other point in my life. I understood what god was and I understood what I was in the universe and what the universe was. Very often it can be these brief fleeting moments that just pass by and there's a lesson you take from it. I think the hidden aspect of MDMA is the transcendence you feel from the mundane ('Andy' 03–1-31:19).

Andy's final thought not only touches on the hidden aspect of MDMA, but it also captures the underlying motivation for rave attendance. Raving is all about experiencing transcendence from the mundane and this is accomplished through the variety of driving mechanisms into ASC that are integrated into the events' proceedings. Like rituals of possession, participants have an active role to play in the facilitation of trance and this is substantiated through flashbacks and "natural highs" that are indicative of neural tuning. It is through the process of transcending the mundane that an ephemeral space that ravers call the temporary autonomous zone (TAZ) is created. Like the possession milieu, status, hierarchy, and normal societal codes of conduct are momentarily abandoned as this space gives participants the opportunity to explore alternative modes of being and sociality. These transcendent experiences can have a tremendous impact on the lives of participants. The transformations that take place go beyond the intellectual, for many alterations in self

[118] http://www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/testimonials/My_First_Rave.html [date accessed 200-12-07]

knowledge and worldview can influence an individual's relationships and life choices. Chapter nine investigates the "storyline" that underpins the rave context using the hermeneutic model of the "cycle of meaning." The notion of a raver "worldview," pre- and post-rave activities, the initiatory elements of raving, and the manner in which these transcendent experiences are integrated into the lives of participants is addressed.

# CHAPTER NINE

## The Storyline...

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> One of the important lessons of rave is to be able to assimilate and incorporate this type of heightened experience into our every day lives. This is one of the areas where some ravers fall short of the total benefits of the experience. The powerful or transforming activity of the night before is lost the next day, becoming a separate reality to be put aside until it is recreated at the next party. If this division between the ritual and daily life continues for too long it can create a situation where we can become dissatisfied with our normal lives and become dependent on the ritual in the same way we can become dependent on a drug. What looks and feels like salvation can begin to turn into a dangerous trap (Fritz 1999:46).

The driving mechanisms present at raves in the form of the music, psychoactives, dancing, sleep deprivation, fasting, prolonged heat exposure, sensory bombardment, and social setting, as explored in the previous chapters, are there to produce an experience. The similarities between possession ritual and rave-style events as touched on throughout this thesis are located at the experiential level; they include the DJ's musical techniques for trance induction, and the dancers' proficiency in reading cues from the DJ and the other dancers, often resulting in a display of synchronized movements. The DJ may then appear equivalent to the master of ceremony in the possession rituals. The methods through which ravers actively engage with these drivers to prolong and intensify drug induced states, in addition to inducing natural highs, seem to allow raves to be a vehicle for self expression, empowerment, emotional catharsis, and transformation for those involved, and these expressions, may also be seen as similar to what happens in possession rituals. Possession rituals, as found in traditional societies throughout the world are dramatized by specific role-playing and storylines. It is necessary to investigate the nature of the storyline played

out at raves, that is provided there is such a storyline.

While ASC's are a central component of rave culture, the manner in which these ASC's are expressed and interpreted by participants is tremendously diverse. For some raving is nothing more than a leisure activity whereby drugs are ingested "for fun" and the objective is to get "messed up," whereas for others, raving is taken very seriously and treated as a spiritual practice. However, even among the latter group where the approach to raving is shared, the range of reported experiences are wide in scope and this is one aspect where rave deviates from possession. In possession rituals the repertoire of spirits that can possess an individual during a ceremony is culturally patterned and therefore the manner in which ASC's is expressed are predictable and consistent. This is one of the reasons why the notion of performance has been so frequently applied to possession rituals. Translated into the medium of cultural theatre, "priests become impresarios, mediums are actors; musicians form orchestras; spirit recitations become scripts that are central to the drama of the expression of culturally specific themes" (Stoller 1995:20). In rave culture, it can be said that the impresarios are the event promoters, the dancers become the actors, the DJs become the orchestra, and the music serves as the script. What is unclear in these musical scripts however, are the storylines that narrate these culturally specific themes. As Jimi Fritz intimates in the quotation opening this chapter, integration of the extraordinary encounters of the night before into one's everyday life is a challenge for ravers. The failure to unite the two worlds, and the resulting dangers that Fritz alludes to, are indicative of a culture lacking a consistent and coherent narrative. The body of scholarship that renders rave as a culture void of meaning and content (see Reynolds 1998; Melechi 1993; Rietveld 1993) may well be encouraged by the ambiguity of these cultural referents. We might then conclude that,

implied in the references that depict rave as a "cult of acceleration without destination," a movement geared toward creating "fervour without aim" (Reynolds 1998:86), is a culture that lacks a storyline.

The summation of rave as symbolically empty and meaningless, as presented by some scholars, is a rather abstract and incomplete conclusion that does little to explain Techno culture's endurance, or its significance for those who participant in it. Rave events are the antithesis of empty voids. They are pregnant with symbols wherein cultural themes collide and overlap with one another. In the rave space, Happyface logos, glowsticks, and the symbols of childhood, intermingle with painted mandalas, alien and UFO imagery, and representations of the Buddha and numerous Hindu deities. An event can begin with a smudging ceremony, the reading of a poem or prayer, a yoga class, a guided meditation, a collective ingestion of the "holy sacrament" (MDMA), or a group recitation of the Om mantra. As an open system, rave culture operates at a pan-cultural level welcoming and encouraging cross-pollination with other symbol systems,[119] including the revival of symbols from the ancient past. Consequently the issue concerning rave culture is less about uncovering its narrative, and more about sifting through its massive collection of overlapping storylines. This is where the cycle of meaning may fail to complete itself; there is no clear and consistent single narrative that binds the complex symbol traditions together in such a way that the symbols can operate in concert with one another. The malleability and plurality of the narrative, can result in the "dangerous trappings" of rave that Fritz is referring to as ravers are often left to their own devices in interpreting their own transpersonal experiences. Some members appear cognizant of these dangers as smaller subgroups of rave are in the

[119] The appropriation of a traditional Balinese musical group into the San Francisco rave scene is one such example (see Fatone 2004).

active process of navigating and negotiating rave's destination in an effort to counterbalance this notion of "fervour without aim." This tension between an open and limitless system, and the drive toward creating borders, is visible in the aforementioned scripted techniques that are involved in controlling the means of perception by DJs, promoters, and attendees. It is also manifested in recurring themes that imply some conformity regarding a "raver" attitude toward life or "worldview" which prescribes many of the behavioural codes and practices of participants. The storyline of rave needs to be evaluated. In order to do so, we will use the model presented by Laughlin et al. (1992) referred to as the "cycle of meaning." This model is useful because it provides the theoretical tools necessary for evaluating this "storyline." How this storyline informs the structure of rave practices, the nature of transpersonal experiences, and the manner in which these extraordinary encounters are interpreted and integrated by participants are all questions that are part of this evaluation.

## 9.1 The "Cycle of Meaning"

According to Laughlin et al. (1992), the "cycle of meaning" refers to the process through which religious systems evoke and interpret transformative experiences among their devotees. In this model, a society's worldview or cosmology[120] is manifested symbolically in its mythopoeia through the vehicles of myth, ritual, art and other symbolism (see Appendix A, figure 9). Direct experience and memories that are evoked as a result of participating in the mythopoeic process are interpreted in such a way that the society's worldview is "verified and vivified" (Laughlin 1997:481). What Laughlin et al. (1992) coin

[120] Laughlin et al. define cosmology as a "culturally conditioned, cognized view of reality as a systemic, multicameral, dynamic, and organic whole" (1992:214-215). A cosmology delineates the position of an individual/group relative to the universe.

"the [S]hamanic principle"[121] refers to the "points of interjection" in the cycle of meaning where the Shaman's influence is critical. The Shaman not only structures the symbolic expression of the mythopoeia by controlling the ritual context, but also helps to interpret and integrate an individual's insights arising through direct experience in a manner that reifies the culture's cosmology. Living cycles of meaning are associated with polyphasic[122] societies since profound reentrainment of the conscious network resulting from extraordinary states of consciousness, is integral in confirming a culture's worldview. Stories and images that are initially understood vicariously through the experiences of others become vivid and real through ritual enactment, and the memories obtained during these transpersonal experiences will continue to resonate long after the initial encounter. According to Laughlin et al. (1992) this path of knowledge comprises three stages, and full entry into a culture's cosmology is considered incomplete if knowledge fails to extend to the third stage. The first level of knowledge is referred to as *belief*: this represents the most common and rudimentary form of knowing, where awareness about the cosmos is founded through experiences described by others rather than through direct personal experience. The second level, *understanding*, occurs when symbolic expressions of the cosmos transcend the intellectual and begin to become informed through direct experience. It is at this point that "the cosmos appears to be a total system of knowledge, rather than bits and pieces of memorized material" (1992:228). It is in the final stage, that is, *realization,* that the cycle of meaning completes itself as the cosmos is described as being "*real*" and participation in it as "*full.*" At

121 In this instance, the position of an experienced adept vis a vis an initiate is being highlighted, rather than shamanism as a specific "complex." Ritual specialists, elders, or "anyone who is recognized by an initiate as a model of spiritual development, growth, or wisdom is in a shamanic position relative to the initiate" (1992:231).

122 These cultures integrate knowledge garnered from experiences obtained in all phases of consciousness within a single worldview (Laughlin 1997:479).

this point, one's experiences "make sense" in relation to the cosmological views that stimulated the experience in the first place (1992:228). The following sections examine each of the component parts that form the cycle of meaning in relation to rave culture, beginning with worldview. The Shamanic interjection points will then be discussed so as to verify whether the cycle of meaning completes itself. Locating rave culture within the framework of the "cycle of meaning" may shed light on the harmful aftermath of raver "casualties" or what some have termed the "dark" or "ugly" side of rave (see Reynolds 1998:87; McCall 2001:126).

## 9.2 Entheogens and the Rise of "Meta-culture": A Raver Worldview?

For many, raving is a "way of life." Weekend activities are planned according to event schedules, and the ramifications of an intense weekend of partying can continue to impact one's mood, sleep patterns, and work habits into the proceeding week. Most participants have an extensive network of friends who also rave and many consider other party-goers as their closest friends. The influence of Techno culture is prominent in the homes of ravers as many have created spaces conducive to house parties, pre- and post-rave chill-out parties, complete with stereo equipment, surround sound speakers, mood lights (i.e. fiber optic lights, lava lamps), scented candles, incense burners, floor mats and pillows. A wall displaying flyers and memorabilia from past attended raves is also common in many homes. One apartment I visited even featured a mural created with "Dego" paints that glowed under black lights. The mural was painted by an informant and his friends after a party they had attended together, and the images depicted on the wall were modeled after the hallucinations they were experiencing from the drugs they had ingested that night. Thus,

undeniably for some, raving is a life-style, and this implies the possibility of an emergent raver "worldview." A worldview operating within a cycle of meaning that completes itself is contingent upon congruity among its members in relation to mythopoeic composition, its experience and interpretation. The irony of rave is that the only congruent theme that could constitute a raver "worldview" precludes the development of one. Informants remarked that they go to raves to be with other "like-minded" people. For these individuals, this does not entail socializing with others who hold similar religious beliefs, share the same cultural or linguistic background, favour the same sexual orientation, or hold similar political views. Ravers attend raves to be in the company of individuals who uphold the value of spontaneity, the importance of "living in the moment," who are open to, and actively seek out new experiences, and who are peaceful, loving, non-judgmental, and accepting of diversity:[123]

> Electronic culture is about randomness, breaking rules, originality, personality, individuality...it's all about being who you want to be when you want to be them. It's about doing things that haven't been done before; reaching higher states of consciousness, where no racial, cultural, or socio-economic boundaries exist. In essence it is about a theoretical utopian community that will someday hopefully be. ('Aaron').[124]

These themes are fairly consistent and widespread among ravers: "It's revolution, like having an open consciousness, being accepting of others, I guess just trying to be true to yourself and I see these concepts in parties in different cities, in different people, different places and stuff...I see these values continually" ('Andy' 03-01-31:14). While this core set of principles may inform the personal worldviews of participants, they at the same time, preclude any kind

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[123] This last group of characteristics captures the essence of PLUR. While there has been much discussion surrounding PLUR in reference to a raver doctrine, philosophy, or worldview (Wilson 2002:384-385; Sylvan 2002:148-149; Fritz 1999:204; Hutson 2000:40), many ravers consider PLUR to be a trend of the past. Nevertheless remnants of this acronym persist as ravers continue to subscribe to PLUR's ideals in varying forms.

[124] http://www.pulpfiction.com/rave/groovinkim/writings.html [date accessed 2004-04-09]

of coherence regarding mythopoeic expression, and how this is experienced since what is being promoted is an open, flexible, and random system. The concern for spontaneity and "living in the moment" dictates the impromptu, unexpected and "anything- goes-atmosphere" of rave parties. The concept of DiY also fuels the unrestricted and unpredictable quality of raves as anyone can organize a party, anyone can produce and distribute rave music, and there are no credentials imposed on DJs, thus anyone can become a DJ. Because there is no ownership involved or form of regulation over parties (at least for the underground events), raves are ideally not meant to be controlled and this supports the continued existence of rave as an open system. When the commercialized mainstream events that were bylaw-regulated were at their height, many ravers boycotted these events due to the very fact that they were being controlled and profited by "the majors." The openness of rave is also a way of thought where the anticipation of the rave environment always being fresh and new promotes experimentation with alternative modes of thinking and being. This concept underlies the widespread use of mind-altering substances, and as one electronic music artist notes, it is even built into the music in how it is created: "there's obviously a potential in samplers for cutting up reality and building new reality that never existed before and it teaches you and encourages you to understand the malleability of reality" ('Genesis P-orridge' in Reiss 1999). Hutson sees this drive toward seeking out alternative actualities advanced in the juxtaposition of primordial and futuristic imagery that features so prominently at raves. More than a meaningless "superficial play of postmodern cultural expression," Hutson suggests that these contrasting themes "share a distance from and disdain for the present age and reveal an attraction to alternative possibilities" (2000:41).

These themes such as the malleability of reality, the quest for alternative modes of

thinking and being, the contempt for the present age, the romanticization of the ancient past, and the ideological vision of an open global culture that transcends national and cultural barriers, are not exclusive to rave culture but they also converge with the philosophies of the psychedelic and New Age movements. Ethnobotanist, philosopher, and advocate of psychedelic substance use, Terrence McKenna has been tagged as the spokesperson or the intellectual voice of the rave movement (Lindemann 1995; St John 2004:214). McKenna views the postmodern era as a period of "Archaic Revival" where humanity is witnessing an increasing intuitive drive toward a return to the values of our ancestors as individuals prepare for what he believed to be the impending Eschaton. For McKenna the rediscovery of psychedelics provides the path for re-entry into the paleolithic realm as well as being the instigator of an awakened consciousness:

> What psychedelics do is they dissolve boundaries: and in the presence of dissolved boundaries one cannot continue to close one's eyes to the ruination of the Earth, the poisoning of the seas and the consequences of two thousand years of unchallenged dominator culture, based on monotheism, hatred of nature, suppression of the female and so forth and so on.[125]

McKenna celebrates the rave movement for playing an instrumental role in the witnessed psychedelic revival and is quoted as saying that "the new rave culture is the cutting edge of the last best hope for suffering humanity" (cited in St John 2004:216). This conviction fueled his active participation in the underground dance music scene. In 1992, he collaborated with the Psytrance group "*The Shamen*" by writing the lyrics for their famous song "Re-evolution" where McKenna explains the relationship between rave culture, the return to the ancestral realm, and the role of the "shaman" in leading the archaic revival. Not only did McKenna perform live with "*The Shamen*," but he also appeared at many Psytrance

[125] These words written by McKenna appeared on the leaflet accompanying the CD single of "Re-Evolution" by Psytrance group "*The Shamen*."

events around the world as a guest speaker. Accompanying McKenna, the work of Nicholas Saunders is also familiar to many ravers as he was one of the first to write about the spiritual potentials of MDMA use in dance/rave culture. With the passing of both individuals. their work and vision have almost been mythologized by some, particularly among Psytrancers whose culture has been overtly influenced by and even considered a part of the psychedelic community. Their writings have provided ravers with valuable resource material on the benefits of psychoactive use, safety precautions for drug ingestion, and an ideology wherein "drug" culture is legitimized. Although not all ravers are familiar with or have read the works of these "gurus," the position of ravers regarding the nature of society, and the codes of conduct with respect to drug use such as Leary's theory of "set and setting," overlap with the psychedelic literature suggesting that rave culture has been both directly and indirectly informed by the psychedelic community (see also Gauthier 2004:76).

Expounding Victor Turner's views of ritual, Laughlin et al. assert that all ritual is organized around a central symbol or core group of symbols "that imparts coherence to all activities composing the ritual, a coherence that forms its most expansive intentionality in a culture's cosmology" (1992:214). Ritual is therefore patterned and standardized with the purpose of preparing an individual's consciousness for optimal penetration of a particular symbol (Laughlin et al. 1992:196). When these symbols are paired with ritual drivers, the autonomic nervous system is tuned in precise ways resulting in a cognitive organization that is fairly predictable (ibid 277). The interjection of Shamans, specialists, or elders, in the interpretive realm of ritual experience further increases the predictability of the resulting cognitive organization. The relationship between symbol, ritual, and experience in a living cycle of meaning translates into the controlled structuring of personality. This point is

emphasized by Burns and Laughlin who contend that one of ritual's main functions is social control:

> While ritual may serve a variety of human needs, one of its main functions is to structure actors' perceptions and orientations decision procedures, and action opportunities...ritual operates intentionally or unintentionally as a social control device, contributing to the creation and maintenance of patterns of collective action and social structure (1979:264-265).

Coming from an open system, ravers are suspicious of mainstream society and establishments as these institutions represent for ravers, social control, conformity and everything that diametrically opposes the valued qualities of freedom of thought, speech, lifestyle, and the celebration of diversity: a number of informants were reluctant to use the descriptor "religious" to characterize the rave experience due to its connection with organized religion and instead preferred the term spirituality for its nonspecific, personal, and de-institutionalized connotations (see Takahashi and Olaveson 2003:84-85). Rave is also seen by some to be distinct from organized religion in that it offers an easier access to the numinous (Hutson 2000:38). For many, the difference between religion versus the kind of spirituality that can occur at raves, is that the former is associated with dogma and belief, and the latter is associated with direct experience. For these individuals, doctrine stands in the way of direct experience:

> Raving is about spirituality. This is a loaded term because so many institutions have taken true spirituality and hid it, and replaced it with dogma. These institutions will tell you all about it, they will sing hymns and prayers devoted to it and they will promise it to you IF you follow their rules. But, they never give it to you. They keep it hidden behind symbols and language. The rave scene, however, has no language. Because once you experience that feeling, once you feel true spirituality get into your soul, no words can describe it. It just is. The feeling is nothing less than heaven. Where as the other institutions promise you heaven after you die (if you have obeyed their dogma), the rave scene simply gives it to you.[126]

[126] http://www.saturn5.com/tsheets/so-cal.html [date accessed 2002-07-5]

The appeal of rave therefore is its undefinable nature:

> Some of us have already stated that the undefinability of rave philosophy is part of what's so good about it. Likewise, I feel that this undefinability is what allows more people to naturally experience it without having to conform to any labels or specific dogma about it. What I find exciting is that people are discovering their own spiritual sense *without* needing to know about a guru's teachings or religious dogma. The experience itself is the teacher ('Lee').[127]

Direct experience taking precedence over belief and the view that dogma acts as a barrier to direct experience, is compatible with what McKenna envisions for a psychedelic society. For McKenna, this involves a society that would "abandon belief systems for direct experience " (2002:39). In psychedelic circles and for the majority of ravers, psychoactives provide the most direct path toward this kind of direct experience. Both McKenna and Saunders believed that humans have an innate curiosity and drive toward experiencing altered states of consciousness (McKenna 1992:xix; Saunders et al. 2000: 30-31) and this position was also shared by a number of my informants. The view of society and the "mainstream" as mediums of control and the symbols of corporate America as conformity pressurizing agents was fairly widespread among ravers:

> I think society is a society because of some level of uniformity. If there wasn't any uniformity then there wouldn't be anything that we could identify as being society. There's always pressure to conform to that uniform nature. We constantly see that every day with Nike and Coke, and MacDonalds and all that bullshit. So I think we live in a pretty repressive society in a number of different ways...Society sucks, society sells shame...lies for sale ('Andy' 03-01-31:13).

A powerful visual display of this cynical view appeared at the "Om festival" where posted on the doors of the out-houses were the signs "Corporate America," "Britney Spears" and "Million Dollar Club" (see Appendix A, figure 10). One group of informants referred to the

[127] http://www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/culture/Xtianity_And_Raving.html

quintessential conformist lifestyle as the "lawnmower life." For this group of friends, people leading this lifestyle are individuals "living with little emotion, working in Walmart, come back to your husband, wife etc., see the kids, put them to sleep, cut the grass" ('Will' 02-04-31:3). Living like an "automaton" or a "lock-head" were similar descriptors used by informants to characterize this chosen path. There was the common belief that society has a vested interest in creating predictable "automatons" who can be easily controlled. These individuals uniformly go about their day in an "auto-pilot" kind of mode, accepting convention and rarely questioning the way things are. This lifestyle coincides with McKenna's portrayal of North American society and the "business-as-usual" attitude that he calls "the dominator inheritance" (1992 xix, xxi). In *Food of the Gods* (1992) McKenna outlines the history of "dominator society" and concludes that in an industrialized capitalist society, specific socially approved drugs combined with television and the mass media, are essential in maintaining societal stability and functioning. These drugs have become more or less socially sanctioned because some serve to pacify or neutralize (cannabis, alcohol, narcotics), some provide entertainment (alcohol, sugar), and others (caffeine, tobacco) keep people alert so they can work long and demanding hours. These views were similarly echoed by some ravers who felt for example that what they believed to be the routine use and abuse of Prozac was society's way of cultivating children from an early age to "behave" in the typical automaton-like fashion. The ease with which individuals can now obtain tranquilizers and antidepressants was also believed to support the "business-as-usual" mode of functioning. Many ravers regarded this kind of lifestyle and mentality with disdain and the following statements reveal how some ravers identify themselves as opposed to this way of life and thinking:

> We wouldn't be who we are if there weren't people living their lawnmower life. We identify ourselves because we are different, but we identify ourselves that way. I have no problem, I feel lucky to be different from the majority cause I don't want to fit in the majority that I don't really like...If I hadn't started taking drugs as I do now I probably would have a been a career oriented ambitious person with a lawn mower, with a god damn lawn mower! I would be a responsible adult, but I wouldn't be that nice and I wouldn't accept people for how they are ('Greg' 02-04-31:4, 29).

> I think a good example that supports the idea of society and how the rave scene is counter to that, is just the conversations that take place at a rave compared to the ones that take place day to day. When you meet someone day to day there's this standard set of questions that we ask to try and define and put people into a box. What's your name, where do you work, where do you live. We all try to categorize people and put them into boxes and when you're at a rave, you don't ask those types of questions. You're not trying to place someone in a certain situation. I mean people don't care where you're from, how old you are, you know, what you do, what your education level is. These types of questions don't crop up ('Eric' 03-01-31:14).

> There's an openness in people, there's the desire to transcend the mundane human culture. Trying to open yourself to new concepts and not being one of these lock-heads that eats at MacDonalds and drinks Coca Cola and watches 5.5 hours of television every day ('Andy' 03-01-31:14).

It was also recognized that MDMA and other psychoactives have a far lesser potential for addiction compared to such socially sanctioned drugs as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol. This opinion is also widespread in the psychedelic community (see Saunders et al. 2000:43).

In contrast to these socially approved substances, psychoactives have the potential to go beyond the medical and recreational. McKenna argues that psychedelics are a "red-hot, social/ethical issue" because these "deconditioning agents" can dismantle the dominant belief system and as such threaten the very fabric of society (McKenna 2002:43). The perception that society's motivation to regulate and even ban raves goes beyond the desire for harm reduction was common among ravers as some intuit that raves pose a threat to the social order:

> They [law enforcement] know that there's an inherent danger of people understand and appreciating alternate ways of being which is that they could turn around and laugh them out of existence. So if you have people gathering for whatever reason in one place in a semi-legal way, which means that they have a different bond, and they've already chosen to step outside the rules of those in control, then you have at least, a potential breeding ground for alternate ways of being and a refusal to accept that imposed from above ('Genesis P-orridge' in Reiss 1999).
>
> At raves, we get to redefine ourselves, and redefine reality, and for some people, this is much more meaningful than a temporary feel-good state. For some, raving represents the potential each of us has to redefine the universe in the absence of the artificial rules imposed on us by all the authorities who are forever tying to tell us what is right and wrong, true or false. It is no wonder that the powers-that-be fear raving; they fear any challenge to their ability to define the "objective" good in their attempt to control our "subjective" little worlds.[128]

According to 'Sue' the demonization of raves is fueled by fear and the perceived loss of control over a subgroup of empowered individuals:

> When people suddenly have the power within themselves to be so positive, happy, free, society's got to get control of that. The only way to get control of that is to institute fear. So the rave scene is killing our children, the drugs are out of control, electronic music is evil (03-01-31:17).

When individuals engage with alternative views and have the means to empower themselves, these people become less manageable and predictable and thus society has a vested interest in controlling and limiting these gatherings:

> The values and the essence of rave culture's openness and freedom are like the essential values that lead to happiness and the integrity of a culture and a peaceful society. But our culture is not an integral peaceful society, it's run by dominators who decide and are trying to manipulate and control people into becoming automatons that are predictable who will go to the stores and spend money and I think that's society right now. So like those same people run the media and the media controls the minds of people and so people get the ideas that you know raves are evil. Raves are whatever the media tells people raves are and the people who are experiencing these things see it from a very different side and we know the value it has for us, we know

[128] http ://www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/culture/Xtianity_And_Raving.html [date accessed 2002-03-13]

> the positivity it has for us. As long as the dominator culture is in place, there's always going to be issues. There's always going to be working towards you know banning venues, creating bylaws and all the bullshit that stops these things from happening ('Andy' 03-03-31:17).

***"Open" systems: Redefining "ritual"***

When ritual is considered as a social controlling device, and the doctrines upon which ritual is embedded are seen as barriers to direct experience, it is not surprising that rave has yet to develop one central symbol system and this absence explains why rave has yet to appear as ritual in the academic sense of the term. Addressing ritual as a continuum of actions, Catherine Bell outlines formalism, disciplined invariance, traditionalism, rule-governance, sacral symbolism, and performance, as the major attributes of "ritual-like" action (1997:138). While Bell recognizes that these categories are neither exclusive nor definitive, they are useful in providing guidelines in analyzing how cultures ritualize and more importantly, why we should re-examine the application of the term "ritual" to rave-style events (see also Olaveson 2004). While raves exhibit some of the features of formal ritual outlined by Bell, such as group performance and sacral symbolism, in addition to other noted elements such as ritual preparation (see Tramacchi 2004:134-135) and the creation of a ritual or sacred space (see Tramacchi 2004:135-136), other features of "ritual-action" outlined by Bell cannot be so easily applied to rave-style events. Formalism, which is the most frequently cited characteristic associated with ritual, can be expressed as a set of limited, and predetermined expressions, gestural and linguistic codes. Implied in formality is the characteristic of invariance which can be marked by "the careful choreography of actions, the self-control required by the actor, or the rhythm of repetition in which the

orchestrated activity is the most recent in an exact series that unites past and future" (Bell 1997:150). In contrast, raves function on the premise of informality and variance, underscoring the widespread view of spontaneity and "living in the moment." Ravers are opposed to having venue locations repeated as part of the excitement of attending a rave is the thrill of the unknown and the idea of being exposed to something different:

> The whole experience of going to a party is to find a new environment, to be stimulated by new things. If you keep partying in the same venue there's only so many ways of recreating it and it becomes dull after a while, and unless you're new to the scene you don't want to keep going to the same venue again ('Alan' 02-04-30:2).

The love of the unexpected is one of the reasons why the locations of events are posted on information hotlines at the last minute.[129] Acquiring the party's address only a few hours before prevents individuals from planning ahead as there is little time to coordinate transportation and obtain directions. With parties frequently held in remote locations, ravers will often get lost on the way and almost every raver can recount an incident where they were unsuccessful in finding the event's location. For many, it is the sense of adventure that makes a party a success and some will cite their most memorable event as the one that was the most difficult to find. There is also the constant threat that the party can get shut down, postponed or re-located at any time during the night and ravers accept this as part of the rave process as this further contributes to the sense of adventure and excitement. It is the anticipation of the unknown that ravers crave and it is precisely the informality of rave that makes each party experience unique and memorable:

> There's no rush, rush I mean there's no rush to get to the end of anything. It's gonna happen. The party will happen, maybe not that night but it will happen. Your favourite DJ will go on, you will see them, if you miss them

[129] The secretive and last minute posting of event locations have the added benefit of warding off the police.

> no big deal, you're gonna have to go and see some other DJ in another room and be exposed to something completely different that you didn't think you would see. In other words every experience you have is unique and special ('Kurt' 02-11-08:13).

This does not mean that there are no expectations or predetermined aspects to rave. One could for instance, interpret informality, creativity, and new experiences as an expected feature of the event. The fact that ravers recognize particular rhythms and other features of the music, or the fact that there are recognizable objects worn by participants nuance the perception of raves as form of ritualized behaviour.

Rave-style events also depart from ritual in the unstructured and informal nature of the program. As was discussed in chapter seven, DJs make spontaneous track selections based on the "vibe" and energy of the crowd; thus no two performances are ever alike. There are also no predetermined gestures or codes imposed on participants as they are always free to enter or exit the dance floor at will. While the notion of coordinated movements in relation to the DJ's cues has been remarked upon, these intermittent periods of synchronization are unconsciously learned responses to the music, thus inexperienced dancers who have yet to intuit these cues are generally unnoticed. Newcomers are thus not ostracized or even expected to learn these nuances as ravers consciously promote an open environment where all styles of dance are welcomed.

Ritual is also associated with tradition or custom where a link with the past is evoked through the near identical repetition of former activities. The preservation of social customs is a powerful measure of the enactment's authenticity (Bell 1997:145). Evident in rave and in particular the Psytrance scene is a nostalgic drive to return to the primordial past or what Eliade refers to as the "myth of eternal return" (1954). Fourteen percent of the personal

accounts sampled by Takahashi and Olaveson alluded to rave's connection to an ancient wisdom or ancestral past (2003:89). The association of the DJ as a "shaman," events celebrating the winter and summer solstice, full moon parties, and drumming circles are suggestive of the conception of rave as part of an ancestral lineage tradition. The informal nature of rave and the rapid fragmentation of a unified scene into several subscenes however, may be seen as problematic for the application of the notions of custom and tradition to rave-style events. Furthermore, novelty and freshness rather than tradition is a measure of an event's success and authenticity.

Rule-governance, or the codification of normative rules that define the limits of acceptable behaviour is another common feature of ritual activity (Bell 1997:155). Although there is an underlying code of conduct with respect to drug use that many insiders subscribe to (see following section 7.2), these guidelines are not imposed or meant to constrain the activities of participants. In addition, as it was discussed in the previous chapter, according to ravers the boundaries for acceptable behaviour are suspended rather than defined at raves. This does not mean that there are no boundaries, rather the boundaries are not perceived by the ravers themselves.

Much more useful than Bell's approach in my opinion is the perspective provided by Grimes (1995) on ritual as process and the formation of ritual. In this light in considering the casual and improvisational organization of parties, Olaveson (2004) is opposed to applying the term "ritual" to rave-style events as others scholars have done (see Becker and Woebs 1999; Trammacchi 2000, 2003). Instead, Olaveson adopts the approach of Ronald Grimes (1995) and conceptualizes rave phenomena as "instances of *nascent* or *syncretic ritualizing* rather than formal rituals" (2004:86). As Olaveson notes, the "advantage of

framing raves in this way is that it captures their nascence, their self-conscious creativity and their definitive place on the (often stigmatized) margins of society-elements highlighted as characteristic of ritualizing phenomena" (2003:86). This approach also complements the kind of impermanent and form-free style of socializing that marks what Maffesoli terms "neo-tribes" (1996). In considering rave as a neo-tribe, the paradox of rave can be addressed and the question of what unites individuals who belong to a culture that is based on the premise of an open system resolved. Rather than being structured around custom, tradition and belief systems, in considering Maffesoli's practices of "neo-tribe" sociality, rave gatherings are instead based upon demarcated modes of interaction defined around common emotions, sentiments, and the notion of what is, rather than what has or will be (Malbon 1999:26). The following raver's statement reinforces this kind of sociality:

> When we rave, we let go of the principles and beliefs that separate us-afterall, we come from different backgrounds and believe different things. We concentrate on what brings us together, the shared joy of music, dance and the way our consciousness is altered in the rave environment. The music doesn't have any obvious principles and we are liberated by this.[130]

In chapter seven, it was argued that the DJ's task is equivalent to the role of instrumentalists in possession rituals. In possession rituals however, as we have seen the instrumentalists are directed and controlled by the priest or priestess. Could the DJ be both "priest" and "main drummer?" The dialectical relationship established between the dancers and the techniques used to induce trance are similar in both environments. While ravers champion the DJ for his musical and social mastery and recognize his extensive knowledge and experience in electronic music culture, it is my contention that the DJ fails to assume significance in relation to the cycle of meaning's points of interjection.

[130] http://www.hyperreal.org/raves/spirit/culture/Xtianity_And_Raving.html ( 2002-03-13).

## 9.3 The First Shamanic Interjection Point: Controlling the Environment

According to Laughlin et al. (1992), there are two points of interjection when the Shaman exerts his/her greatest influence. The first one involves control over the ritual setting. It is the event promoters rather than the DJs who determine the location of the event, the lighting and the equipment used. During the course of an evening's DJ line-up, each DJ is only responsible for his own 2-3 hour set, thus in contrast to the cycle of meaning's Shamanic principle, the DJ is completely removed from organizing and overseeing the proceedings. Excluding the actual performance, there is also little if any interaction between DJs and dancers before or after a performance. Most DJs avoid the crowd by arriving and exiting through back doors, and most show up shortly before their set is scheduled to start, and leave directly after its conclusion. Thus although the DJ is influential in instigating transpersonal experiences at raves, he is completely detached from interpreting these experiences when they arise which is the second point of interjection in the cycle of meaning.

Instead this role is performed by the participants themselves who are proud to acknowledge that ravers "look out" for each other and veterans of the scene tend to feel a personal obligation in attending to those who are less experienced, particularly in the matter of drug use. Experienced ravers thus perform the Shamanic function in the style of DiY, where newcomers to the scene learn acceptable codes of conduct particularly regarding drug use. In as much as participants can come to expect a certain standard for sound, lighting, and music, as an open system, the remaining elements that make up a rave such as the attendees, the location, the artwork, the symbols, the environmental conditions, and the layout, can never be anticipated or controlled. In psychedelic culture (as well as rave culture), the

concepts of "set" and "setting" are widely recognized as the two most important factors that can influence the nature of a psychoactive experience (Stolaroff 2002:96). I suggest that the inability to fully control the setting is compensated by the rave community in three ways: (i) inexperienced drug users and individuals who may be having difficulty with a "bad trip" are guided by seasoned ravers as part of an informal initiatory system; (ii) the promotion of PLUR and the expectation that individuals contribute to the vibe in a positive way assures that the atmospheric setting will be positive when the physical setting cannot be controlled; (iii) the development of a code of conduct concerning drug use, and knowledge pertaining to drug "set" further increase the probability of a positive psychoactive encounter. These factors provide some controls and safety checks for those less experienced individuals who may be experimenting with psychoactive substances, often for the first time.

***"Looking out" for one another: Informal initiatory structures***

Among the seasoned partiers, many acknowledged feeling a sense of responsibility toward those less experienced. This sense of responsibility also extended beyond the individual level to the rave community at large as many commented that educating newcomers helped to preserve the core principles of raving and prevent contamination of the scene:

> We are here to spread the vibe, to educate, to feel, and to dance. Ignorance should not be outcasted, it should be isolated and explained. All of the young ravers out there who don't understand should be educated, and helped. We are the guardians of an ancient rite in modern times. Our perception...is our gift. Our motive...is pure and uncut passion...which is stronger then any drug on this planet. You want to get high? Guide someone from the darkness into the light of the vibe. Then, and only then..will you understand why we are here ('Subrusa').[131]

[131] http://www.livingart.com/raving/articles/article02.htm [date accessed 2004-04-09]

Most veterans could recount more than one individual who guided them through a bad trip, or helped them out in some way at a rave, and so many welcomed this role as a process of "giving back to the community." One informant became an active member and consultant to the harm reduction organization OATS (Ottawans Actively Teaching Safety) and evident is the satisfaction he now gets from helping others:

> I get more of a high making sure that everyone else is okay than doing drugs myself now. Cause I feel like Yoda sometimes, you know the amount of Ecstasy I've consumed. I'm just like this little wise kind of you know guru kind of thing. I'm the guy who walks around at eight in the morning handing out 5-htp because I know they're going to go home and sketch and be all in a mad mood and blah blah blah. I'm like "here try this, this chemical basically is a building block to serotonin, take a couple of these" ('Kurt' 02 -11-08:14-15).

Another informant in his early thirties, felt that "there's a lack of proper orientation and there's a lot of confusion" ('Brad' 02-04-01:1) in the rave scene and realizing this he welcomes ravers into his home after a night of partying so they have a safe place to go. He even hosts after-parties to events that he cannot attend himself because of his hectic work schedule. Another informant regularly hosts elaborate house-parties for members of his local rave community recognizing that as a working professional and home-owner, he has the financial means and resources that many ravers don't, and he feels he can contribute something to the community by offering a safe place to party that is free of charge. Another seasoned raver and promoter organizes a non-profit event once a year as a way of giving back and saying thanks to the rave community at large.

However, the degree of responsibility and extent of action varied; one informant felt no obligation to newcomers or young ravers but then stated "now if I take any responsibility it would be to model how to have fun...or how not to" ('Dave' 02-12-04:5). One individual

was somewhat reticent in partying with first-timers as he felt his commitment to supervise them often reduced his own level of enjoyment as he felt he couldn't relax and really get into the music. He felt more at ease and preferred partying with experienced ravers because he did not have to worry about them in the same way, but would nevertheless take on the role of mentor and guide when it was necessary. Another raver commented that he preferred partying in smaller groups for the main reason that it is easier to look out for one another and deal with complications that may arise from drug use:

> One of the reasons we're not scared of what we do is that we have each other, and if you have good friends around you, you will never have a bad trip. All you need if you're feeling bad is encouragement. Like on Ecstasy you need to feel that you're loved, if you have like a down or something. If you have someone to take care of you then you're okay and we take each other. If god forbid, anything were to happen we will know how to react. We're a close knit gang and that's why I think we should be raving in smaller groups ('Will' 02-04-31:21).

Ravers also recognize that an individual's first rave, and in particular one's first experience with MDMA is a special one. Every interviewee could recount these experiences and remember such details as where they were, who they were with, what DJ was playing, and even specific tracks that were played that night. Many described their first encounter with MDMA as a life-changing experience and as such the most memorable. It was repeatedly acknowledged that no subsequent MDMA effect could recapture or match that first encounter. Knowing this, ravers will normally go out of their way to ensure that their friends in addition to strangers, have a good time recognizing the causal effect between taking Ecstasy under the watchful eye of friends and the quality of the experience:

> Like if you do your first Ecstasy with us it'll be a really special time. But if me and him had never raved and we said "let's go rave" and we go to rave and we buy Ecstasy off "John Doe," a nobody at the entrance who goes "Speed, E" and whatever you might possibly want, you don't

> really get the experience. To get the full experience of the rave you have to go with someone who's raved before ('Greg' 02-04-31:10).

Thus neophytes are closely monitored and often strangers who are made aware of a first-timer's status, will offer candy, massages, or light-shows to the newcomer in an effort to show that person a good time. As I have already stated previously, it is widely accepted that MDMA facilitates a deeper appreciation and understanding of electronic music, and the loosening of inhibitions and its empathogenic qualities, enable individuals to fully comprehend the loving and open atmosphere of the rave environment. In many ways MDMA is the catalyst that enables neophytes to process the esteemed values of rave (i.e. PLUR, openness) according to the cycle of meaning's three stages of knowledge: *belief, understanding* and *realization*. For these reasons, MDMA is treated as an initiatory drug (see also McCall 2001:118). Even though the choice to abstain from psychoactives is respected, there is still some degree of peer pressure to take the drug as the opinion that you can't understand the music or the culture without trying MDMA at least once, is fairly widespread. Once an individual takes the drug, he or she is often regarded by other ravers as an "insider" or member of the club, and many individuals reported feeling a sense of true belonging to the subculture after taking MDMA:

> I felt like I belonged more to the scene after taking E because I was physically able to experience what it was like to stay awake past my usual time among other things. I now see that it's not crucial to take E to be part of the scene, but drugs are definitely a part of it so to have had that experience puts one on equal ground with other peers who are also in the scene ('Jane' 04-01-26:4).

Experienced ravers also play a role in educating newcomers about harm reduction strategies for drug ingestion and the resulting pharmacological knowledge of the average raver is quite extensive. Much of this awareness education is made available through

organizations such as OATS that are both run and operated by volunteer ravers. These groups however tend to target the larger publicized events such as the "Om Festival" (see Appendix A, figure 11) thus those individuals who frequent the underground venues are primarily educated through other partiers. For example, through word of mouth, ravers are informed of the amphetamine-like properties in decongestants such as Sudafed, and beverages such as "Red Bull," which provide less expensive legal alternatives for staying awake. Individuals also learn how to combat the negative side effects of MDMA through the methods of "pre-loading" and "post-loading." Pre-loading refers to the measures taken prior to the event to reduce the neurotoxic and negative side effects of MDMA, and ravers learn these "advanced" techniques at "pre-chill-out" parties. During these pre-parties, neophytes learn the value of purchasing their drugs before the event from a "trust-worthy" dealer that comes highly recommended, and are cautioned from purchasing drugs at raves since the "reputation" of the dealer is unknown and the price is usually doubled. First-timers are also encouraged to take half an MDMA tablet and wait for its effects before taking the other half. This can prevent a severe allergic reaction and the overwhelming sensation that can accompany the initial onset of the drug is reduced, thereby avoiding a potential panic reaction. The risk of tablets being cut with heroine or other unwanted substances is also minimized by taking a half tablet when the dealer or logo on the drug is unfamiliar. Newcomers are also tutored on safe places to hide illicit substances (i.e. bras, underwear and pants with hidden pockets, shoes), and for aboveground events many will "dose"[132] prior to entering the rave leaving all illegal substances at home or in the car where they may be accessed later.

[132] A term used by ravers that refers to the process of ingesting a psychoactive substance. "Roll" is also used to connote the same thing.

Common pre-loading recommendations include magnesium, vitamin C, 5-htp (5-hydroxtrytophan), and vitamin B-6. Magnesium supplements are believed to reduce MDMA's negative side effect of jaw clenching, as well as minimize cramping precipitated by dehydration. As an anti-oxidant, Vitamin C is believed to reduce MDMA neurotoxicity by counteracting the resulting oxidized free radicals, in addition to boosting the immune system. 5-htp can be purchased in health food stores, and as a precursor to serotonin, pre-loading with 5-htp is thought to increase serotonin levels thus preventing total serotonin depletion that results from MDMA ingestion. Some ravers will start taking large quantities of 5-htp a few days prior to the event (a process called "stacking") with the assumption that the MDMA will have a more dramatic effect due to the increased amounts of available serotonin in the brain. It is also well known that grapefruit juice can enhance and lengthen the effects of MDMA and other drugs by interfering with how these drugs are metabolized. Individuals may pre-load with grapefruit juice, or bring citrus fruit with them to the event. At some events attended, grapefruit and other citrus fruit were available free of charge.

While the intention of pre-loading is oriented around harm reduction, post-loading is aimed at repairing and restoring the damage and imbalance caused from MDMA and the physical exhaustion ensuing from a vigorous night out. The post-loading regime mirrors the pre-loading recipe with some additions. Drinks such as "Gatorade" that replace lost electrolytes are usually consumed. Many ravers will also take Tylenol to alleviate the severe headaches that can often result from dehydration, loss of sleep, and excessive drug use. As ravers become increasingly familiar with how their systems react to different drugs, combined with a trial and error form of experimenting with pre- and post-loading substances, each raver comes to fine tune these methods according to what they feel works best for them.

### *Attitudes toward drugs: A 'moral' code of conduct*

In a culture where drug use is prevalent, there is always the potential for harm, particularly when there is no way of controlling the quality of the substances ingested. In addition to the physical harm that can arise, there are always psychological dangers involved with psychoactive substance use. Since the initial moral panic sparked by the death of a Toronto raver in 2000, raves have been excluded from media focus to the point where many now assume that the rave scene is dead. Given the causal relationship between MDMA related deaths and media focus, the recent wave of media calm seems to suggest that there have been relatively few cases. This could be due to the fact that the majority of ravers are well versed on harm reduction strategies, and as members continue to participate in the culture, they become educated toward a certain protocol and code of conduct regarding responsible drug use which has reduced the number of complications. Although newcomers may be initially preoccupied with the drug component of the culture, they are expected to value the other aspects of rave culture over the drugs. This attitude provides the foundation for the rave community's seemingly ambivalent and paradoxical position toward drugs. On the one hand, psychoactive substance use is undeniably widespread among the rave population; at the same time however, respondents emphasized that the rave experience and culture is fundamentally about the music, the people, the dancing, and the vibe, rather than the drugs. Those who attend raves for the sole purpose of buying and ingesting psychoactive substances were perceived by some as "phoney" ravers who frequent events for the wrong reasons (see also Lenton and Davidson 1999; Weber 1999). As one informant articulated:

> I don't use drugs, I don't believe they are necessary. I think they make your night fake. Sadly it's necessary for some people, but to each his own. I just don't like people who don't have a clue about music, just use the venue for

> drugs ('Tom' 02-05-06).

Individuals who rave "clean" were even admired for demonstrating a greater commitment to the music and the culture. According to 'Kate:'

> Even though I usually dose at raves, I really respect people who can rave without drugs because these people are really devoted to the music, I mean they can get high just from the music and the dancing and that's pretty cool (02-09-10:21).

Even among those who periodically use drugs, many were aware of the shift in mental state that can result from prolonged dancing and the merit of this kind of natural high:

> I can have the same response whether taking the drug or not. In fact even better, there are times when I will go and dance for 15 hours straight and feel like I'm brought to a state of consciousness on par if not greater than those who had popped 15 pills ('Casey' 02-04-13:8).

The sentiment that these naturally induced altered states embody the core principles of the cultures is illustrated in the following raver's statement: "But there is the respect, the liberation, the space to simultaneously be an individual and part of a group. This natural high, not the chemical sort, is the true allure of a rave" (Park 2001). These attitudes accord with the finding that only 8% of the subjects surveyed by Takahashi and Olaveson (2003) mentioned drug use as the primary reason for attending raves, compared with the 92% who referred to either the people, the music or dancing as the main attractants. This finding is supported cross-culturally as two-thirds of Australian ravers surveyed by Lenton and Davidson deemed the music, lighting and dancing to be the primary appeal of raves (1999:154). Similarly, van der Wijingaart et al. concluded that in the Netherlands psychoactive substances are only part of the larger rave context, with music and dancing having the dominant appeal (1999:701).

***Motivations for taking drugs: Drug "set" and transformation as an intended outcome***

An individual's motive and subsequent synthesis of the drug experience into his or her life were additional themes of concern voiced by subjects. It was suggested that adolescents will often lack the maturity to integrate their drug encounters for spiritual and psychological growth and in this way fail to respect, emulate and contribute to the PLUR edict. Underlying these sentiments is the suggestion of a code of acceptable conduct; there is a difference between individuals who attend raves to "get high" and those who choose to integrate a psychoactive experience with personal development and transformation, the latter being consistent with the philosophy of raving. Ravers have even developed the derogatory term "E-tard" to refer to the former group who consume Ecstasy for the wrong reasons. Many emphasized that obtaining a level of maturity and self-awareness is key before entering the rave environment, particularly when ingesting a psychoactive:

> Well you have to know yourself. You have to know exactly who you are when you go into a rave. The drugs, they can open up like ideas and possibilities in your head that you never knew you could possibly have. And for some people who have a hidden dark side like everybody does, it can be very traumatic if you're not ready for it. If you have some mental instability weaknesses, its not the right time ('Will' 02-04-31:3).

> Not everybody can be a raver. Ecstasy will heighten who you are and that's probably why some people snap, cause there are things that they try to hide or are not aware of themselves, and they'll be shown. There's going to be a big light projected on it so that's why it's not for everybody. You have to have a certain maturity ('Sean' 02-04-08:3).

In psychedelic circles, what 'Will' and 'Sean' are referring to is drug "set" and the realization that the content and nature of a drug experience is a function of the "set." Stolaroff defines set as "the contents of the personal unconscious, which is essentially the record of all one's life experience" (2002:96). Also included are an individual's

expectations, and motivations for taking the drug (Metzner 2002:169). Realizing the importance of "set" some informants acknowledged that there are conditions under which individuals should abstain from doing drugs and the rave environment:

> Like if you feel down or something, it's not the right time. Like if you just broke up with your girlfriend, you don't go to a rave that night. It's to celebrate happy occasions not to forget ('Greg' 02-04-31:3).

It was also noted that the ability to make these kinds of decisions combined with the presence of an inner strength and self-knowledge requires a certain level of maturity that is lacking among adolescents, and for this reason young ravers should refrain from doing drugs:

> I don't like seeing 15-year-old kids at raves, I just don't. You have to have a reality base before you escape it. I believe that you need to know who you are, you need to have ground rules in your head before you take any drug. You need to have a footing of knowledge and I had no clue what the hell I was when I was 15...I don't think you should be taking Ecstasy when you're 15 ('Greg' 02-04-31:19).

'Alan' expresses how drug use is often motivated by competition, and pushing the body to the limits, impulses which he feels are counter to what raving should be about:

> Some people go out with the mind frame of wanting to get f**ked up and will do anything under the sun and will see how retarded they can get, and see how far they can push their system and that's not what raving's about. That's really about someone trying to push their limit basically or someone who's trying to think they're cool by outdoing someone else: "you did 3, I can do 4, you did 4, I can to 5"... People like that, and it's a game, but it's like a very childish game to do stuff like that. It's immaturity, I think a lot of kids experiment when they're younger as a lot of kids do, 15, 16, 17...they're pushing their limits, hopefully when they hit 18, 19, 20, 21, they'll know what their limits are and they can still have fun at an event like that without having to reach those levels you know what I mean (02-04-30:8).

In the following excerpt, 'Sean' attributes his transition from taking drugs to "get high" to taking drugs for personal growth as a combination of maturation and involvement in the rave scene:

> When we were young, we got high much less productively. I didn't grow really out of it. I had wonderful stories to talk about, weird stuff I saw in the sky, but I never really grew from my experiences with drugs. You learn something but you don't necessarily grow, and now I realize you do always like to keep something after a rave if you did it properly...When you leave a rave you have to be more than you were when you came in ( 02–04-08:4).

'Alan' observes that immaturity is also reflected in making poor choices in drug selection. Young people will often purchase higher quantities of poor quality substances, rather than purchase the more expensive mood enhancing drugs like MDMA:

> So bad things like that have entered the scene and what's really bad about those things is they're negative buzz wise, they're very negative but they're maybe half the price or sometimes 5 times cheaper than pro-enhancing drugs. So a kid comes with 20 bucks to a party and he's like "wow I can spend 20 bucks and get one thing that I might enjoy the night, or 5 bad things." And they don't understand the equation that 5 bad is still not as good as 1 good thing you know what I mean. So they'll purchase 5 bad things and basically have a shit night, or have a very negative night by choice. I think that's just immaturity or lack of knowledge of why you're there and what you're doing there (02-04-30:8-9).

This kind of division in terms of intended outcome of a drug experience was noted by Beck and Rosenbaum (1994), who discovered that MDMA users tend to be either spiritually/therapeutically focused in their pursuits or recreationally oriented. Among the recreational users, the benefits of MDMA rest solely within the experience itself, whereas the therapeutically oriented individual feels that positive experiences and insights gained from MDMA could and should be incorporated into everyday life (ibid:83). Again, this view overlaps with the vision of how hallucinogens should be approached in the psychedelic literature. According to Andrew Weil, in his article *The Psychedelic Vision at the Turn of*

*the Millennium*, "the challenge in our culture is not to have this vision over and over again, it is really to see how the vision can be put into practice. How can you implement it into this sphere of life in which you are involved and produce change in that sphere, whatever it is" (2002:129). Thus there is an expectation placed upon ravers to apply the knowledge gained from MDMA and the rave experience outside the rave context to make a difference in the lives of others and make the world a better place. In Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) content analysis research, 29% of the personal accounts linked rave and hope for the future through the creation of a utopian society based on the ethos of rave (2003:89). Ravers for example discussed taking the energy out of the rave to create a better world, spreading the vibe through the application of PLUR, and talked about rave as a vision for the future. This theme is evident in the following statement made by an anonymous raver who implores others to think about their motives for taking MDMA, and encourages users to promote the insights gained from Ecstasy outside the rave environment:

> To all you E-heads out there, please, please, take the time to consider what you are doing to yourself, how it affects you and why you do it. E should be held as a sacred thing, not just something to do when you're bored. Get into the music, or something else, invite your passions to entrance you. Express what you've felt on E in the "real world." Make a difference in people's lives.[133]

Similarly:

> Raves have indeed changed my life, and lucky as I am I have many wonderful friends with whom to share those changes! As I see it there wouldn't be any point to have been raving and living the whole rave experience without being able to extend those feelings and changes with my friends outside of raves ('Sean' 02-04-08:3).

[133] http://www.ecstasy.org/experiences/trip82.html [date accessed 2001-08-08]

### *A Hierarchy of Drugs: "Good" versus "Bad" Drugs*

A hierarchy of drugs and substance users is a further indication of an underlying standard of conduct in operation. Many ravers emphasized the point that the ingestion of MDMA and other related substances is reserved for the rave environment, and it is this pattern of use which distinguishes ravers from drug addicts. A number of individuals claimed that they could stop taking drugs at any time without experiencing the effects of withdrawal: "I've done MDMA 30, 40 times, never with a pattern of addiction, I could go a year without doing it, then I could go 2 times in a row" ('Andy' 03-01-31:19). As 'Greg' put it "I'm more attached than I am addicted because if I don't have pot in my apartment and I don't have money to go and buy some I will not go nuts, and if I don't go raving for 2 weeks and I don't take mush, or E., I will not go nuts and I won't have stomach cramps and I will not throw up" (02-04-31:19). The reference to Ecstasy as a "holy sacrament" reinforces the view that the rave experience contains elements of ritualization wherein MDMA use is appropriate only in that ritual or sacred space (see Saunders 1996:112; Malbon 1999:119-120). 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" (00-09-16:fn). In accordance with transformation and growth as intended outcome and motivation for using drugs, those substances exhibiting the potential to elicit a change in perspective such as Ecstasy, cannabis, LSD, and mushrooms, are deemed by some ravers to be more "acceptable" than the "feel-good" drugs such as heroin and cocaine. Heroin and intravenous drug use are often considered socially unacceptable and taboo in the rave community (Power et al. 1996; Topp et al. 1999). According to one individual "heroine and cocaine are for stupid people with too much money" ('Megan' 02-04-31:fn). Takahashi and Olaveson's findings were consonant

with these attitudes as only 4% of survey respondents reported using cocaine at raves, and none of the subjects reported heroine use (2003:80). Nitrous oxide[134] was also viewed negatively by some subjects: "Some people will inhale nitrous oxide but that's just pure stupidity" ('Helen' 02-10-14:8). It was commonly expressed that the addition of these recent substances into the scene have contributed to the contamination of the culture because these drugs are inconsistent with the rave ethos:

> And those certain drugs they're not party drugs, they're not emotion drugs as we'd say. There are certain enhancer drugs that really enhance someone's spirituality or enhance someone's mood to be more talkative or engage in conversation, or engage in dancing or engage into anything that's uplifting. But then you have other drugs that are very depressive almost and they make you stick out of a crowd, they're very negative almost you now what I mean. Like ketamine[135]... ketamine's a tranquillizer, why would you take a tranquillizer at an event because it puts you down or puts you out you know what I mean, so I don't understand ketamine to be very honest with you. It's the complete opposite of what you're trying to reach at an event ('Alan' 02-04-30:8-9).

In addition to MDMA being compatible with the rave edict, the perception of the drug being harmless and "innocent" may also be a factor in its popularity. As McCall points out, because it comes in tablet form, in a pretty colour sporting a cute logo that makes it psychologically "as easy as taking your Flinstones vitamins in the morning" (2001:118). This kind of rational is apparent in the following raver's excerpt:

> Taking a pill is inculcated, it's normal ...taking Tylenol, aspirin, acetaminophen.

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134 Used as a dental anesthetic, this gas is inhaled from balloons or metal cylinders containing the drug and is known to cause mild euphoria that lasts for about 5 minutes (Knowles 2001:54). Although most ravers were aware of the drug, it is not a popular rave/club drug in the central Canadian scene. Among the 121 ravers sampled by Takahashi and Olaveson , nitrous oxide was never listed as a substance used at raves or clubs (2003:30).

135 Known among ravers as "Special K," ketamine hydrochloride is commonly used by veterinarians as an anesthetic for short surgical operations (Knowles 2001:5). In the underground drug market, it is processed from its original liquid form into a powder where it is normally snorted or mixed with water. It is known to elicit hallucinations, out-of-body and dissociative experiences, and feelings of weightlessness (Knowles 2001:5). Of the 121 ravers sampled in by Takahashi and Olaveson, 14% reported using ketamine at raves (2003:30).

> Never smoked pot but I took E why, because it's a pill. It's not ugly, it's round and all evenly shaped. It takes nothing to do it ('Will' 02-04-31:19).

The manner in which MDMA is purchased also fosters the perception of it being in a separate class, distinct from the illicit substances associated with drug addicts:

> Ecstasy wasn't the type of drug that you bought off a seedy dealer in a back alley. It was a drug that you bought from a friend who had bought 10 extra hits from another friend who happened to know a dealer. Nothing about [E]cstasy and how it was initially distributed and bought seemed comparable to drugs like heroin or cocaine (McCall 2001:118).

***MDMA's course: cutting down and refraining***

A pattern of drug use that was evident among experienced ravers was the trend toward reducing MDMA consumption and in some cases refraining altogether. The decision to limit or discontinue Ecstasy use has a physiological basis; frequent and excessive ingestion of the drug will gradually deplete serotonin levels in the brain, meaning that the empathogenic and "euphoric" qualities of the drug will eventually cease, leaving only the amphetamine-like properties (Reynolds 1999:86; McCall 2001:119). Some noted that subsequent MDMA encounters were less satisfying as the novelty of the experience would get lost through continued use. While some ravers attempt to preserve MDMA's core properties by resorting to polydrug use, many others opt to limit MDMA consumption, and some elect to discontinue drug use altogether. I encountered a number of individuals in the latter two groups throughout the course of my research, particularly among the experienced ravers who had been raving on an average of more than 2 years. The opinion that "Ecstasy can teach you things, force you to see things differently, but there's a limit and once you've reached it, you're better off letting it go and preserve your neurons" ('Kate 02-08-04:1) was a common sentiment. It was often expressed that MDMA was no longer needed, as many

through the process of what I've called neural tuning, discovered that they could attain similar experiences naturally. Others observed that accompanying the process of maturation is the realization that there are consequences to one's actions:

> Now I think about the repercussions. I think the halo effect diminishes over time, I mean when you're young you think nothing's going to happen to you and we've all been there. But when you're older, you're thinking, oh you've had a few close calls, it's maybe not worth it anymore. Like I worked with a guy who I bumped into at a rave and he's done over 500 hits of acid...he said that his emotions are completely blunted, like he's not as emotional anymore. So to me it's not worth it for 5 minutes of pure Ecstasy is not worth a life time of being emotionless. But a lot of kids think they're invincible and nothing's going to hurt them, especially if you've had drugs, you feel so good, nothing's gonna hurt you, and that to me is you know, something that concerns me ('Jenna' 02-04-14:4).

These health concerns prompted reductions, abstinence as well as a shift from the harder "synthetic" drugs to the "softer" natural substances such as cannabis and psilocybin mushrooms that were perceived as being less harmful to the body.

## 9.4 The Second Shamanic Interjection Point: Interpretation and Integration

The second interjection point in the cycle of meaning involves the Shaman's role in helping the initiate interpret and integrate the transpersonal experience. The centrality of the "after-party" as an integral part of the rave process implies a partial recognition among ravers for the need to integrate and make sense of the ASC's encountered from the night before (see also Malbon 1999: 170-179) and as for the first point of interjection, this is facilitated by the participants themselves rather than the DJ.

Ravers refer to this stage of partying as the "come-down" phase and for some individuals, the after-party is nothing more than a method of extending the night out in providing a place to do more drugs and socializing after the rave's conclusion. For others

however, this can be a period of vulnerability and for these individuals the after-party is an outlet to come down from the drugs in a safe environment, and a place to sort out one's feelings and experiences through the help of caring friends. Earlier I mentioned the individual who welcomed ravers into his home after a night of partying, even when he himself could not attend the rave. When I asked him to discuss his reason for doing this manifested in his response is the awareness of the importance of integrating the previous night's experience:

> I'm always delighted in meeting all those enthusiastic people even though I must admit it is pretty demanding sometimes to ponder one's will to observe and understand, while obviously but subtly caring for youngsters at a critical moment which is *the day after*. In my mind this could possibly be a very crucial time in the sense that it represents a state of restructuring transition between A and B. I try to put great care in witnessing without endorsing possibly harmful or even rewarding choices ('Brad' 02-04-28:1).

A similar kind of awareness is exhibited in the following raver's statement:

> You need to have the background to handle the how should I put it, the afterlife of the rave. How to interact with other people than in a rave because like I said, it's a bubble. When you get out of the bubble, you must know how to live and assimilate what you did because it's a lot to handle. That's why we stay together after ('Will' 02-04-31:18).

***Programming the nature and content of ASC's***

In chapter eight it was suggested that the driving mechanisms at raves produce tuning of the central nervous system through the stimulation of the sympathetic (ergotropic) system, and in some cases third stage tuning. It was argued that the resulting simultaneous discharge of the ANS subsystem, can be expressed as profound alterations in consciousness and a reorganization of personality, and emic descriptions of catharsis and transformation corroborate this. Given all the physiological changes and their psychological impact, in

addition to the resultant condition of physical and emotional exhaustion, it is not surprising that some ravers feel vulnerable and seek out the company of other ravers after an event. In a living and complete cycle of meaning, ritual drivers are controlled agents designed to de-structure the ego whereupon these mechanisms are paired with culturally prescribed symbols that evoke predictable transpersonal experiences that are concordant with that culture's worldview. The reliability of these transpersonal encounters is further assisted by an outlined regiment of ritual preparation and training that preselects ideal candidates whose egos are then primed for the impending ritual ordeal. Although ravers go to great lengths to condition the *nature* of ASC's (i.e. preventing a bad trip) through the various efforts of harm reduction, awareness education of "set" and "setting," principles governing appropriate drug choices, and expected codes for attitudes and motivations for taking drugs, the *content* of ASC's can never be controlled or predicted when there is no single cultural framework to draw from. This is where raves clearly depart from those ideational cultures wherein drug induced visionary experiences are culturally patterned and structured (see Dobkin de Rios 1984:197). A common motif isolated by Dobkin de Rios in her cross-cultural analysis of the ritual use of hallucinogens, is the critical role of personal expectation in fostering the evocation of culturally specific categories of visions such as heros and mythic figures (1984:197). Given that in these contexts, visions are culturally coded, Dobkin de Rios concludes that "cultural identity is learned and reaffirmed by psychic productions under drug experiences in many traditional societies of the world" (1984:198). In reference to psychoactive use in Western society, Dobkin de Rios argues: "Lacking specific cultural traditions of drug use which program their experience, Westerners often report idiosyncratic patterns which actually are, in themselves, worthy of study" (1984:9). This is also the

driving force behind the tremendous range of transpersonal experiences reported by ravers. There are no imposed guidelines that prescribe who can participate in a rave, there are no prerequisite training procedures required to prepare newcomers for participation; when these factors are combined with the random appearance of drivers and the symbols they are paired with, the resulting outcome is a myriad range of responses.

The only aspect of the event handled by the DJ is the music. Is there a "story" in the music? There is a progression but what about process and a landing point. As it was indicated in chapter seven, some DJs are aware of the physiological changes evoked by sound and will experiment with different vibrational frequencies when creating tracks. Others through the process of trial and error come to realize that some tracks work better than others in inducing ASC's but are ignorant of the science behind it. In addition to the vibrational quality of Techno music, as it was illustrated in chapter seven, other components of the music such as the lyrics, volume, BPM range, and rhythm are also at work in producing ASC's. Whether the music is targeting specific energy centers in the body, or eliciting changes in brain wave activity, the point to be emphasized is the causal relationship between the "cut and paste" manner in which these elements are presented and the resulting range of ASC's. In contrast, cross-cultural analyses of music accompanying the ritual use of hallucinogens suggest that the function of music goes beyond simply creating ambience, but more significantly its involvement in the social management of ASC's. (see Dobkin de Rios 1984;2003; Katz and Dobkin de Rios 1971; Dobkin de Rios and Katz 1975). The manner in which music shapes the orientation of the visionary experience in these contexts is twofold: On one level, music can influence the *nature* of the ASC by alleviating distress in providing "the drug user with a series of paths and banisters to help him direct his visions during the

actual experience, instead of becoming disoriented by the change in ego structure, anxiety, fear, and somatic discomfort brought on by the drug" (Dobkin de Rios 1984:11). In addition to reducing the potential for a "bad trip," Katz and Dobkin de Rios further suggest that music more specifically serves to program the actual content of visionary experiences (Dobkin de Rios and Katz 1975; Katz and Dobkin de Rios 1971). Using the metaphor of the "jungle gym," the authors suggest that the mathematical precision of music's structure functions like the children's architectural play structure with one exception. In contrast to the jungle gym where the paths for climbing are selected by the child, the music in ritual functions more like a computer software that is already preprogrammed to instruct specific pathways to be followed. While the ritual arena being examined by these authors differs from the possession context in that the former involves the use of psychoactives, the function of music in both contexts is similar. Also accented in both is the scripted aspect of music and the role of personal expectation, a point reiterated by Rouget.

The metaphor of the jungle gym can also be applied to rave culture. The uniformity of DJ techniques in manipulating the music through accelerando, crescendo, polyrhythm, dropping and withholding the bass, and the incorporation of familiar rave anthems at expected intervals, make the structure of the "jungle gym" familiar enough for ravers to negociate their way around without injury. In addition to the music, other elements such as pharmacological instruction, awareness of "set and setting," and the consistency of the "vibe" foster congruity in the engineering behind the play structure's construction. However, the impromptu style of rave parties and the patch work construction of its music means that unlike programmed computer software, the paths to be followed are not already mapped out.

Instead, like a child on a jungle gym, it is up to each individual raver to navigate his or her own way.

### *The "Re-entry" Process*

As the Shaman interprets the initiate's experiences, he is also remolding the ego in culturally appropriate ways, and this includes preparing individuals for re-entering society after experiencing the transitional "betwixt and between" stage that Victor Turner called the liminal phase (1969). For ravers, the re-entry process is often sudden rather than gradual and many recounted experiencing difficulty in re-adjusting to life outside the rave. For some, the sudden shock of re-entry is felt immediately upon leaving the event:

> I remember walking out of a rave on a Sunday afternoon and there's a mass of people everywhere and you walk out and it's like people are in their everyday lives. You feel like you're in a separate existence you know what I mean. They have no idea how many hours you were there and you walk out and it's like back to reality boom ('Lisa' 02-04-13:15).

Some noted difficulties in interacting and relating with individuals who were not at the rave which is why ravers are reluctant to go directly home afterward:

> You never want to be alone after. There's nothing I'd rather do than this right now, cause we understood what happened last night. People who weren't at the rave do not understand what's going on, and you can't explain it to them and you don't even want to try to get them to understand. They weren't there they're not allowed, and that can be hard to handle the day after ('Greg' 02-04-31:18).

One individual commented that coming home from an after-party or rave, he would seek solitude finding the company of others irritating as he perceived their activities and conversations trivial and mundane compared to what he had been through the night before. Similarly, coming home from an event attended in Montreal, the group I was with stopped

for coffee at a Tim Horton's and it was remarked on how strange it felt sitting in one of Canada's largest restaurant chains listening to "elevator music" as everyone else went about their day (see also Malbon 1999:173). The group described the sensation of being an invisible observer watching life go by without actually being a part of it. In the following narrative of the post-rave experience, 'Lisa' describes the sensation of what she calls a "state of flux". Although what is being referred to is the physiological process of "coming down" off of MDMA, what is salient in her recollection of this state is the emotional impact associated with this transition phase.

> When I start coming down it's kind of like sinking. I wouldn't know what to do with myself and I'd usually just like sit there...ten, fifteen minutes at a time just not moving a muscle. It's like being in a state of flux, like you're sitting there and you don't want to be sitting there doing what you're doing and then you don't really want to be doing anything else either. You can't think of what else you want to do so you just sit there and you're hating sitting there but anything else you want to do you're hating too. You're hating doing everything, you don't feel comfortable, you don't feel right doing anything. I'd come home I'd still have my jacket on and just be like sitting, not knowing what to do with myself and you can't sleep and there's just this sadness that's just stuck in your stomach and I can't shake it for hours. It really traumatized and it happened quite a few times (02-04-13:15).

Unlike most ravers, 'Lisa' would skip the after-party and go directly home after an event where "I would go into my room and I wouldn't want to be around anybody" (02-04-13:16). By excluding herself from the post-rave activities, Lisa's night would be abruptly cut short compared to that of her peer group, and it is likely that the "come-down" phase could have been alleviated had she participated in the full process. For 'Lisa' it was the negative experience of the "come-down" phase that impelled her to stop MDMA and leave the scene. Also worth noting is the emotional response that the memory of these experiences continues to evoke:

> That feeling that I just couldn't get rid of and that's why I can't go anymore because of it. It's resonated and it's like, I get little almost flashbacks of that feeling sometimes. Like even when we're talking about it and thinking about it I get this feeling. Just talking about coming home after and chilling out, my stomach is getting all nervous. Just the whole come down thing, I don't ever want to experience that again. Like the last time I was like "okay I'm never doing this again" because at first you'd see the good outweighing the end. Like I knew it was coming but I had so much fun, but then that balance started shifting toward the end. It's not worth it anymore, and it's too bad cause I used to love it. I loved it that much. It might turn back around but I don't think so (02-04-14:16).

In his analysis of the post-clubbing phase, Malbon suggests that these patterns of socialization help clubbers resolve the concerns arising from the "socio-spatial disjunctures" between the club and outside world (1999:177). Apparent are the striking differences between the two realms of experience and the struggle that confronts participants in coming to terms with one's involvement in such polar social spheres. Some ravers talked about "leading a double life" in keeping family, friends, and co-workers in the dark regarding their weekend activities, and the challenge they faced in returning to the "other life" of school or work on Monday morning. Malbon suggests that taking more drugs during the chill-out phase serves to prolong the night out into the following day and "deny the responsibilities of daytime and the jobs and routines that daytime represents" (1999:173). The tension between the rave as a perfect utopian world versus the harshness of reality outside of the rave is another factor that ravers can have difficulty coming to grips with. Many experience the state of depression as they leave the utopian world behind them and reluctantly return to reality. This sadness and despair not only accompanies the come-down phase, but it can continue into the week with depression often being the most profound during what raver's refer to as "sketchy-Tuesday" "terrible-Tuesday" or "suicide-Tuesday." While this depression is attributed to the physiological effects of MDMA and the resultant drop in

serotonin levels, ravers also reported experiencing depression during the post-rave period (including "sketchy-Tuesday") when drugs had not been ingested suggesting a psychological component. McCall suggests that the MDMA's experience of "heaven-on-earth" may inadvertently instigate suicides as its users feel that there is nothing left for them to live for (2001:120). One raver attributed his friend's suicide to his inability to process the "come-down" phase until the series of post-rave depression finally took its toll and he took his own life. MDMA is also noted for bringing unconscious material into consciousness and Seymour and Smith postulate that MDMA-induced anxiety syndromes are caused "by the lack of resolution and integration of now-conscious and often emotionally potent materials" (1998:248). Despite the efforts designed to prevent a"bad trip," complications do arise. Unanticipated spontaneous factors such as the artwork, the venue's location and even the temperature can influence the content of an individual's ASC experience. One informant attributed a "bad trip" replete with hallucinations of demons, spiders, and monsters, to the "dark" and "sinister" nature of the rave locale. She found the venue (an abandoned warehouse) to be physically cold, uninviting and dismal, and felt that these factors contributed to the negative ASC she experienced that night. Her experience was exacerbated by the fact that she was alone at the time and lacking physical coordination and external mental awareness, was unable to communicate her need for help to others: "I was literally in my own little world, completely absorbed with the visuals...I was desperate for help but too messed up to ask for it I guess" ('Megan' 03- 02-24:fn). This individual reported experiencing a series of night-mares containing imagery consistent with the hallucinations encountered that night and now prefers frequenting clubs for the very reason that the environment is familiar to her. One informant equated her first MDMA experience

as a "flood-gate of emotions" that she released to an acquaintance that in normal circumstances she would never have divulged such personal information to ('Helen' 02-10-14:10). She described feeling vulnerable, emotionally drained, and embarrassed about the entire incident and regretted her lack of discretion:

> At the time it felt good to talk about my problems. I remembered things I hadn't thought of in years and I put in words for the first time things that I wouldn't even face myself, let alone divulge to another human being. Now I'm totally embarrassed about the whole incident and I remember the next day feeling really ashamed rather than relieved. I just didn't even know what to do with myself. Suddenly all those so called issues were starring me in the face and I didn't know what to do about it. I couldn't even look my friend in the eye after that and I've avoided him ever since cause I'm sure he thinks I'm a total nut-bar. I mean I even scared myself ('Helen' 02-10-14:10-11).

Reynolds summarizes MDMA and the raver lifestyle as "literally falling in love every weekend, then (with the inevitable midweek crash) having your heart broken" (1999:248). I repeatedly heard ravers utter the rhetorical question "why couldn't life be like this all the time?" or "wouldn't it be nice if life were always like this?" Some expressed disenchantment by the realization that most individuals in our society need chemical stimulants to feel loving, happy, free, open, and accepted. This is where the post-rave experience becomes such an integral part of the rave process as it is during this time that ravers attempt to resolve the tension between two opposing realms. A common theme that often emerged as raver's reflected on the night's experiences was the realization that part of what makes the rave experience special is the fact that it doesn't happen all the time. Put succinctly by one raver "you can't appreciate the highs without the lows" ('Sean' 02–04-08:6), or "Nothing can be happy all the time, if it was you'd stop noticing" ('Greg' 02-04-31:25). As 'Andy' observes, one of the dangerous trappings of rave and MDMA is that desire to prolong the experience:

> That's the one thing about E, you have to understand that these moments are fleeting and they're temporary. You know a lot of people try to prolong that experience, they keep taking more E and more E, and eventually they get into this pattern of self destruction because they can't just experience the bliss for 4 hours and let it go. I've seen some otherwise incredibly intelligent people fall into that trap (02-01-31:18).

Often resorting to polydrug use, these individuals are unable to establish a balance between partying and work and the central preoccupation becomes the weekend and the next encounter with a chemically induced high. According to Reynolds the process of crossing over "into the 'dark side' seems intrinsic to any drug culture (1998:87). This dark side of rave is depicted by Reynolds in the following terms:

> Suddenly the clubs are full of dead souls, zombie-eyed and prematurely haggard. Instead of togetherness, sullen moats of personal space reappear; smiley-faces give way to sour expressions, bitter because they've caned it so hard that the old buzz can't be recovered. For some, any old oblivion will do; they become connoisseurs of poisons, mix'n' matching toxins to approximate the old high (1998:87).

For others this tension is resolved by extending the ethos of rave outside of the party environment by living and applying PLUR. Some ravers will dilute the contrast between the two spheres by blending them together by listening to Techno music at home, staying in touch with their raver friends, or developing hobbies and economic opportunities in the scene such as DJing, and event promotion.

## 9.5 The "Storyline" as Script

In applying the model of the "cycle of meaning" to rave events, this chapter examined the progression of stages structuring the development of rave events. The "storyline" underpinning rave culture remains to be told. This storyline, does not seem to have any formal or stable content. First of all it is not worded as music constitutes its core.

With the exception of the music, it was argued that the Shamanic principle in this instance is performed by the participants themselves rather than the DJ. The umbrella of ideals that loosely constitute a raver "worldview"-many of which overlap with the psychedelic community- informs the informal, impromptu, unpredictable, and flexible orientation of raves.

An event constructed on an open system that abandons doctrine and belief in favour of direct experience will have no structure on which interpretation can be articulated. Moreover, the content of ASC's can never be controlled or predicted and while this accounts for the range of reported ASC experiences, it points out to the gap left between the personal experience and a shared meaning that could be attributed to it. Often participants leave the event feeling emotionally vulnerable and even depressed, and this is where the post-rave activities are designed to help counter the depression associated with the "come-down" phase as well as help individuals interpret and integrate their transpersonal experiences. While some manage to balance the diametrically opposing spheres of work and partying, others are less successful. In applying Dobkin de Rios and Katz's model of the "jungle gym" to rave, what becomes apparent is that in the end, it is up to each individual raver to direct the course of his own path and experience. The "integration" and "interpretation" processes are focused on the tasks of minimizing physiological harms and bodily discomfort, and maximizing well being, pleasurable memories and a sense of community. The participants who were interviewed did not or could not address such issues as identity, and healing processes. Acquisition of knowledge statements about the outcome of the rave process such as "I am a nicer person," "I am more open," do not reinforce the

idea that the DJ- or the participants themselves- provide a script or simply an agenda for a transformation process.

In a posession ritual, the script binds the dancer to the god or godess. What is gained by the dancer is a complex identity, power, catharsis, and moral rules and responsibilities coupled with a new set of expectations which are shared by the society which recognizes the individual's new identity and confirm it through a new behaviour. In contrast, participation in a rave stops at the personal and interpersonal level of experiences. PLUR is an emerging landing point, but it has not been fully integrated into the process itself.

# CHAPTER TEN

## Conclusion

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> Is there a certain age that you have to be to be enjoying the music, and to be having fun, and to be loving and respectful and peaceful? Is it something that you can grow out of? If in fact you grew out of it, then yeah the scene would by dying. So the rave scene is alive but probably for individuals it dies because they might grow out of it. I mean we all go through phases of being ideal. I mean when you're 18 years old you're more ideal, you have more of an ideal outlook than when you're 30 years old. When you're 60 years old you're probably so pissed off with the way life has gone and cynical and you'd never be able to be with people that aren't semi-cynical. So for them it dies just as we all change and get older I guess. I think the scene is still alive though, it's still alive for me ('Eric' 02-11-16:13).

*The art of giving structural form and the rhythmic pattern to combinations of sounds produced instrumentally or vocally.* It is hard to dispute this Webster's dictionary definition of music, yet there is something very unsatisfying and incomplete about this impassive analytical account. To compare, a raver's definition of music would take on a very different tone beginning with how music has the power to elicit a range of responses in an individual, particularly at the bodily level. In describing electronic music, evoked in the raver would be a flood of emotions rekindled from the memories of past events, and the resultant physical reaction of shivers and goose bumps triggered by these memories. Isn't this what music is really all about? That despite one's efforts to dissect music into its component parts of melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, and pitch, music is ultimately more than the sum of its parts. There is an intangible element embedded within music's ordered structure, and that is its curious ability to move, inspire and even transform the listener. My interest in this hidden and ineffable quality of music has been the undercurrent propelling this inquiry.

When I began this research almost four years ago, my understanding of music sadly approximated the Webster's dictionary definition. Having studied classical piano since the age of six through the Royal Conservatory of Music, I thought my understanding of the discipline was broad, encompassing such areas as music theory, history, composition, harmony, analysis and counterpoint. Even though I considered myself a music enthusiast, I was always struck by the level of passion exhibited by ravers in the way they referred to their favourite DJ's, the precision in which they described their favourite tracks, their physical responses to the music, and the way electronic music occupied such a central place in their lives. I began to wonder if maybe I was missing something, that perhaps these ravers were "hearing" and experiencing things in music that I clearly was not. As an outsider, my ears were not yet "tapped" to the underground so I initiated my research at what seemed to be the most logical starting point: The "CD Warehouse." I found my way to the "Electronica" section and randomly purchased a CD of "rave anthems." I started listening to electronic music at home and like many outsiders' first impressions of the music, I didn't understand what all the fuss was about. There were no reference points that my classically trained ears could relate to such as lyrics, a beginning and end, and sometimes even a melody. Realizing the limitations of this armchair approach, I left the comforts of my own home and began seeking out underground rave events along with a fellow graduate student Tim Olaveson. It was in the field setting that I discovered the critical link in understanding my informants' enthusiasm for the music, and the requisite path to what they called "ecstasy:" It was the DJ.

Throughout this thesis I have concentrated on the music or more specifically, the DJ's control and mastery over the music, as the most critical trance-inducing mechanism present at raves. While other key ingredients intrinsic to the rave experience have been

pointed out in the course of the discussion-the drugs, location, dancing, lighting, and vibe-these elements would be meaningless without the DJ, the turntable, and Techno music. In fact most ravers would agree that these added features only serve to enhance and contribute to electronic music's overall "ecstatic" effect. With the centrality of music, dance, and "Ecstasy," the context for this research raised some important methodological considerations. Recognizing that all experience is embodied, this research required a methodological approach that was free from the visual and textual biases of western epistemology. Through its concern with "embodied" learning or bodily ways of knowing, the developing field of "sense anthropology" provided a good methodological starting point. In reorienting the focus of inquiry beyond the traditional modes of perception, it was demonstrated that sound, smell, touch, and body techniques, are important vehicles in the transmission of rave culture. The symbiotic relationship established between the DJ and the dancers, the synchronicity that occurs among the dancers in response to the music, and the precipitation of flashbacks through familiar environmental cues such as sound, smell, and movement, are all non-verbal corporal techniques that are acquired at the bodily level.

A natural extension of sense anthropology is the experiential approach and this method involved taking my informants seriously, suspending disbelief, and surrendering myself to the culture through full participation at rave events. Although I chose not to include personal accounts of my own transpersonal experiences in the field, this did not preclude becoming my own informant; not having the same right to anonymity that my informants had, I elected to adopt a more conservative approach in keeping my own experiences in the background. I also wanted to avoid the trap that some transpersonal anthropologists have fallen into, that is being so over-zealous with their own experiences,

that the focus of inquiry suddenly shifts from an investigation of the "other," to become an ethnographer's personal account of self-exploration. Nonetheless, the questions I asked of my informants, and the paths of inquiry developed in this thesis were constantly informed by my own experiences in the field. Not only did my full participation in rave culture authorize entry to an underground world, but it allowed me to develop a sense of trust with my informants as well as ask appropriate questions through which a wealth of data was obtained. The strength of this methodology was particularly apparent in researching some of the more hidden elements of the culture that ravers were often reluctant to discuss such as gender exploration and sexual experimentation. When considered an "insider," the ethnographer gains access to information that may be divulged based on one's ability to relate to the "other," and the confidence of a perceived mutual understanding. I refer back to the following raver's statement presented earlier: "There's nothing I'd rather do than this right now, cause we understood what happened last night. People who weren't at the rave do not understand what's going on, and you can't explain it to them and you don't even want to try to get them to understand. They weren't there they're not allowed"... ('Greg' 02-04-31:18). This interview was conducted during an after-party, and alludes to the requirement of mutual understanding for acquiring access to the field. While some scholars have neglected the transpersonal elements of rave by accepting the epistemological gap between informant and researcher, being satisfied that what insiders describe as "ecstasy" is ultimately ineffable, others have excluded insider accounts claiming that these narratives are inarticulate and "incapable of grasping what they are attempting to describe" (Landau 2004:122). One cannot help but wonder if this lacking depth of knowledge being referred to is a consequence of the lacking depth of experience of the individual asking the questions. In contrast, I

found my informants to be very articulate, and the narratives of their experiences detailed and rich. For this reason, a number of interview excerpts were included throughout this thesis.

Recognizing the controversies surrounding the terms "trance," "ecstasy," and "altered states," I relied on the work of Rouget and his delineation of scripted and non-scripted methods of managing trance, and the influence of music in orienting the entry to and exit from the trance state. In suggesting that the role of the DJ in rave culture approximates the role of instrumentalists in possession ceremonies, three underlying questions were raised: To what extent is the rave context similar to the context of ceremonial possession? To what extent is rave different? And, finally, why has rave taken on the expression it has and what are the implications of that expression? Before the first question could be addressed, I needed to establish the DJ as an instrumentalist, and "DJ'ing" as an art-form. In chapter seven, the creative techniques of mixing, re-mixing, sampling, beat-matching, EQ'ing, and scratching were outlined, emphasizing the DJ's performance as "live" wherein the turntable serves as an instrument. One of the more striking similarities between the two contexts is the fact that contrary to what happens in shamanic practice, in rave and in spirit possession, being a dancer precludes one's participation as an instrumentalist. In other words, the dancers are never the musicians of their own trance. It was also stressed how the notion of performance is central to both possession and rave locales, and the trance state contingent upon the presence of others. The importance of breaking the barriers between "audience" and "performer" and the symbiotic relationship established between the two parties was also shown to be a key ingredient in both contexts. We saw how this intimate relationship is enacted by the instrumentalist's stage presence, his proficiency in reading and

responding to the crowd, and his ability to gain the dancers' trust. Equally important is the active role of participants in responding to the instrumentalist's cues, through dance movement and emotional feedback.

The common techniques of accelerando, crescendo, silence, abrupt changes in rhythm, and the introduction of familiar musical motifs, to induce trance or initiate an emotional state conducive to trance was also explored. It was suggested that this realm of the "natural" has been pushed to further heights with rave culture's enthusiastic adoption of technology and the subsequent refinement of these techniques. The replacement of acoustic instrumentation by electronic technology has enabled sound effects that go beyond the human ability to perform, including the gradual increase in pitch which I argued to be an additional trance-inducing cue. Further, the use of surround sound, visual projections, and lighting technology optimize the effects of auditory driving on the central nervous system. Rouget's insistence that music serves to socialize trance was also supported by the rave milieu, as the efficacy and one's responses to the music were shown to vary according to one's level of experience in the rave scene. The following driving mechanisms into ASC were also found to be present in both environments: prolonged dancing, repetitive rhythmic stimuli, photic driving, fasting, sleep deprivation, prolonged heat exposure and sensory bombardment. The additional driving mechanism of psychoactive drug use in rave has altered the expression of trance through inhibiting the temporal lobe activity that the aforementioned ritual drivers are known to produce. Neural tuning is a factor in both contexts; in spirit possession it was suggested that neural tuning is expressed as a ritual control of temporal lobe activity, whereas at raves neural tuning is indicated by flashbacks and a natural "high." While "possession" as such is not an expected outcome at raves,

many of the psychosocial factors, and therapeutic outcomes of possession rituals were apparent. Both provide participants access to temporary empowerment, as the cultural prescriptions of acceptable behaviour are momentarily suspended allowing for self expression, emotional catharsis, identity transformation, and experimentation with alternative roles and modes of sociality.

As scholars begin to recognize rave as a globalized spiritual practice, an obvious starting point would be to compare the core features of rave with other shamanic and ritual trance traditions, and the spiritual practices of ideational cultures cross-culturally. While it becomes obvious that rave does not fit the ethnographic model of shamanic traditions, it borrows from neo-shamanic traditions. However an equally important path of investigation, one that has been largely overlooked, involves exploring how the rave scene is different and why. For example, in spite of the numerous instances of ritualizing phenomena enacted at events, rave has yet to appear as a formalized ritual. Despite the emergence of informal initiatory structures aimed at enculturating and guiding the experience of newcomers, there are no credentials imposed on those individuals who assume the role of ritual specialist, mentor, and guide. Aside from being clued into the underground, there are no prescriptions regulating access into the subculture or procedures aimed at filtering potential candidates for participation. In the previous chapter it became evident that compared to ceremonial possession, and cultural contexts involving the ritualized use of psychoactives, the range of ASC's experienced at raves is broad in scope, and in spite of efforts aimed at controlling the nature of ASC's, their content can never be predicted often resulting in an individual's personal conflict at the level of integrating material from the night before. To interpret these differences and address the question of "why," I referred to the "cycle of meaning" where we

saw how the "open" and fluctuating "storyline" or script underpinning rave culture influences the expression of rave parties, how these events are experienced by participants, and the manner in which ASC's are interpreted. Also apparent was the role of personal expectation in mediating the expression of ASC's. For example, when the goal of one's psychoactive activity is the pursuit of fun, then the experience is coded as leisure or entertainment (see also Laughlin et al. 1992:230). It is not surprising that rave has been accused of being a culture void of meaning and content because the storyline of rave is not intended to be uncovered or "pinned down." It is the undefinable quality of rave that attracts participants and binds the subculture together. This is a storyline that distrusts social control and authority, and rejects conformity, doctrine, and belief, the perceived appendages of social control. Instead the narrative of rave promotes self exploration and experimentation through alternative modes of sociality, being, thought and fashion. It advocates peace, love, unity, respect and consciousness expansion through the primary vehicles of psychoactives, dance, electronic music, and the vibe. A close examination of rave culture offers a greater understanding of expressions of spirituality in a postmodern globalizing world because these themes are not exclusive to the rave. York, for example characterizes the "New Age" as a decentralized movement, "one built around not doctrines or particular belief systems but an experiential vision" (1995:39). As it was apparent in the case of rave, there are complications that can arise out of a culture that rejects doctrine in the quest for direct experience. There are fewer structures in place to help individuals interpret and integrate the content of their experiences. Left to their own devices, anxiety disorders and depression may ensue. The potential for similar issues arising in New Age practices is probable as people appropriate ritual from other contexts and tinker with ritual drivers that

evoke ASC's. As Sylvan notes, part of what makes these "hybridized forms of popular religiosity" so attractive is that the "depth of 'content and substance' tends to be sacrificed in favor of breadth and 'intensity of transmission'" (2002:220). This trend has already been witnessed in the developing science behind the DJ's precision in technique and the point that Reynolds makes when he contends that the underlying question regarding rave music is not about "what the music 'means' but how it works" (1998:9).

If we refer back to the early precursors of rave, we can assume that it is likely that rave is here to stay. It will undoubtably be called something else, as well as involve an entirely new generation of young people. Nevertheless, the music, the dancing, the drugs, the togetherness, and the blending of the sacred with the profane will have a continued presence in varying forms. For this reason I agree with Sylvan who suggests that the investigation of these new expressions of spirituality will be at the "cutting edge of twenty-first century religious studies scholarship" (2002:220). In reference to psychedelic use, Lyttle characterizes the psychedelic movement as a "school without walls" (1996:249). The same can be said about rave culture and the many new forms of New Age spirituality that are proliferating at a very rapid pace. These temporary, fluid, and flexible gatherings are resilient because they are not defined around place. These groups can set up shop virtually anywhere (Lyttle 1996:24) as well as disband and relocate with ease. They're popular because the "tuition" is affordable, there are no tests, the students are promised a "quick-fix," and for the duration of the event, the participants can feel connected with each other and the world. But is there a cost? Classical composer Edgard Varèse, once said " I have been waiting a long time for electronics to free music from the tempered scale and the limitations of musical instruments" (cited in Machlis 1990:514). Although he died in 1965 before

electronic music technology really took off, Varèse, saw electronic instruments as the first step toward the liberation of music. Interestingly, the cost of this freedom from tradition was perhaps forecasted more than two centuries ago by a true visionary, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart who said: "Without tradition, art is a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Without innovation, it is a corpse."[136] In rave, with the innovation of electronic music and the developed skill of the DJ, the body has been awakened and rediscovered, yet with a storyline in the state of flux, and its destination still up for grabs, we will have to wait and see what happens to this flock of sheep.

[136] http://www.thinkexist.com/English/Author/x/Author/_4500_1.htm [date accessed 2004-04-20]

# APPENDIX A

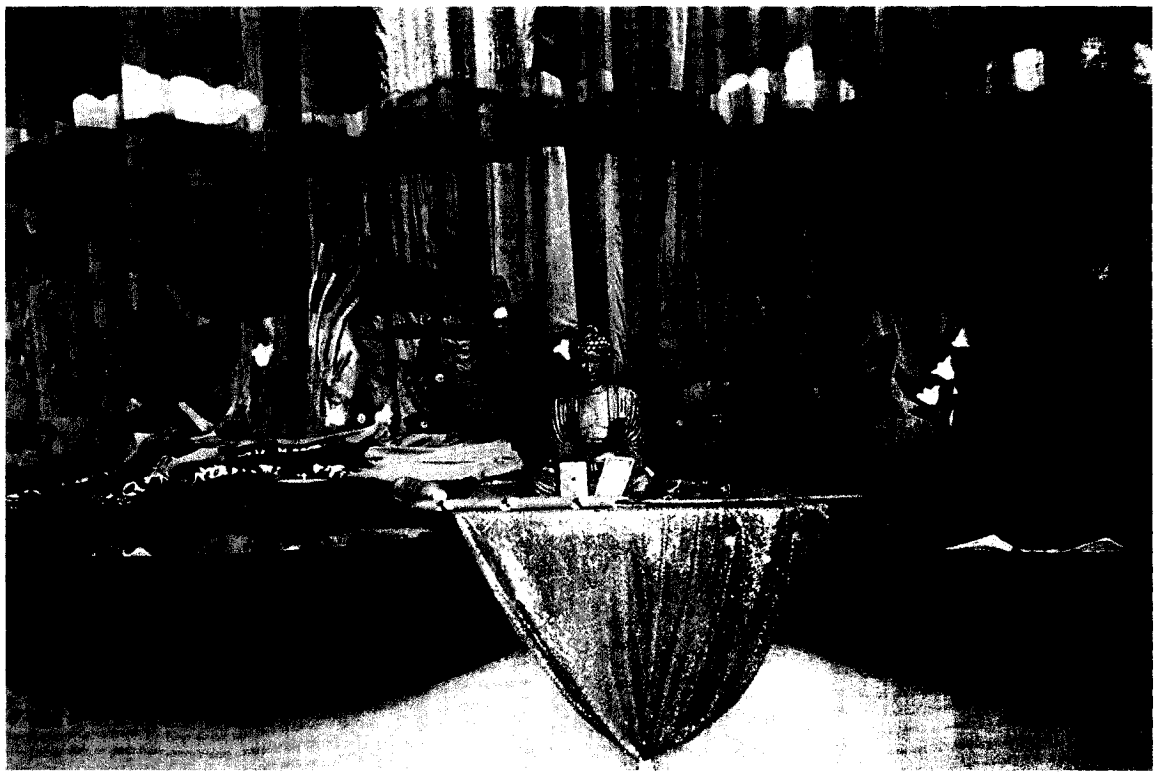

**Figure 1.** The DJ Booth at the "Om Summer Solstice Festival" (June 2003)

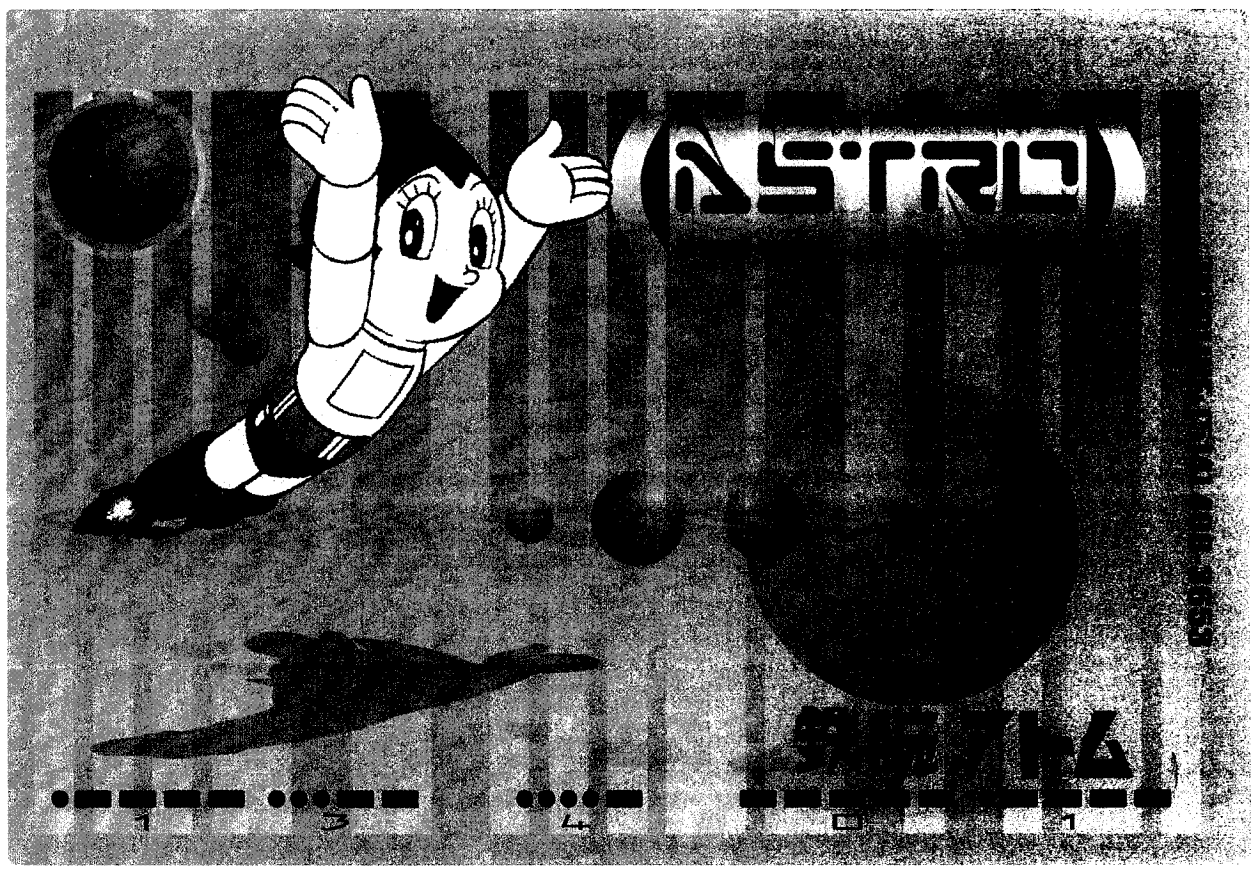


**Figure 2.** A "Happy-Hardcore" event flyer

**Figure 3.** A "Psytrance" event flyer

**Figure 4.** An "Industrial Hardcore" event flyer

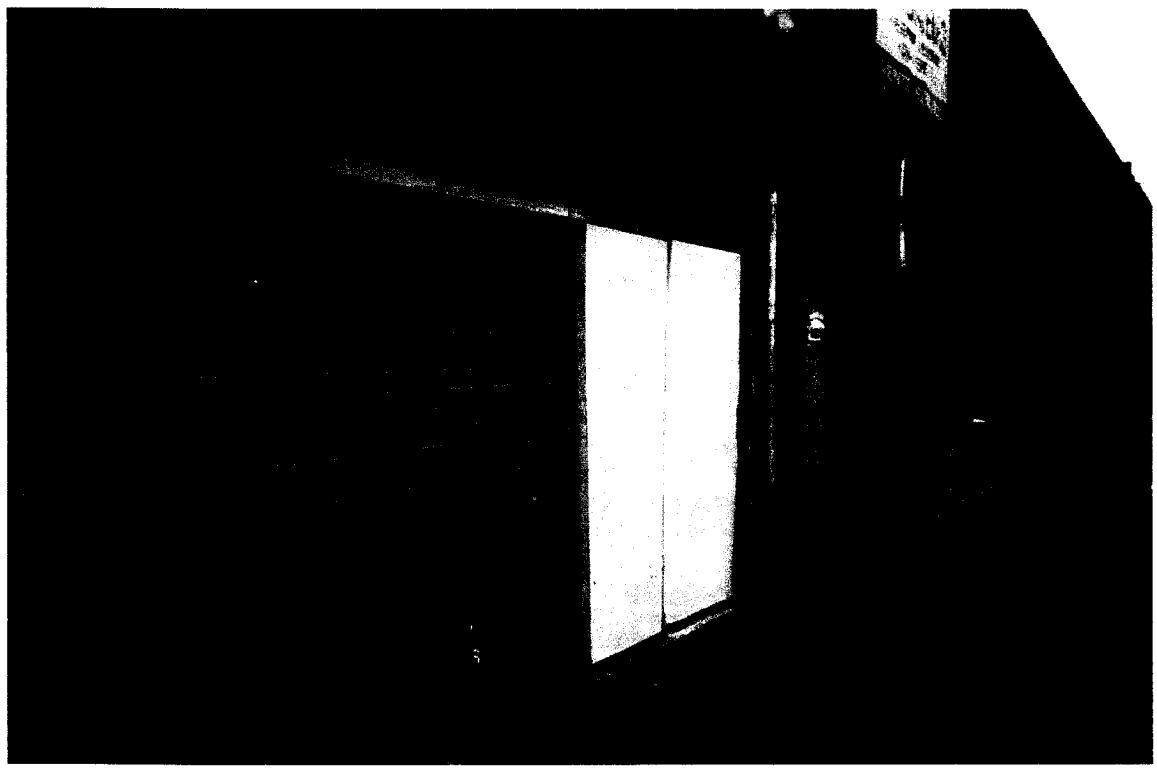

**Figure 5.** The entrance to an underground rave held in a warehouse located in Montreal's industrial district.

**Figure 6.** A modest "home-made" event flyer, indicative of an underground event.

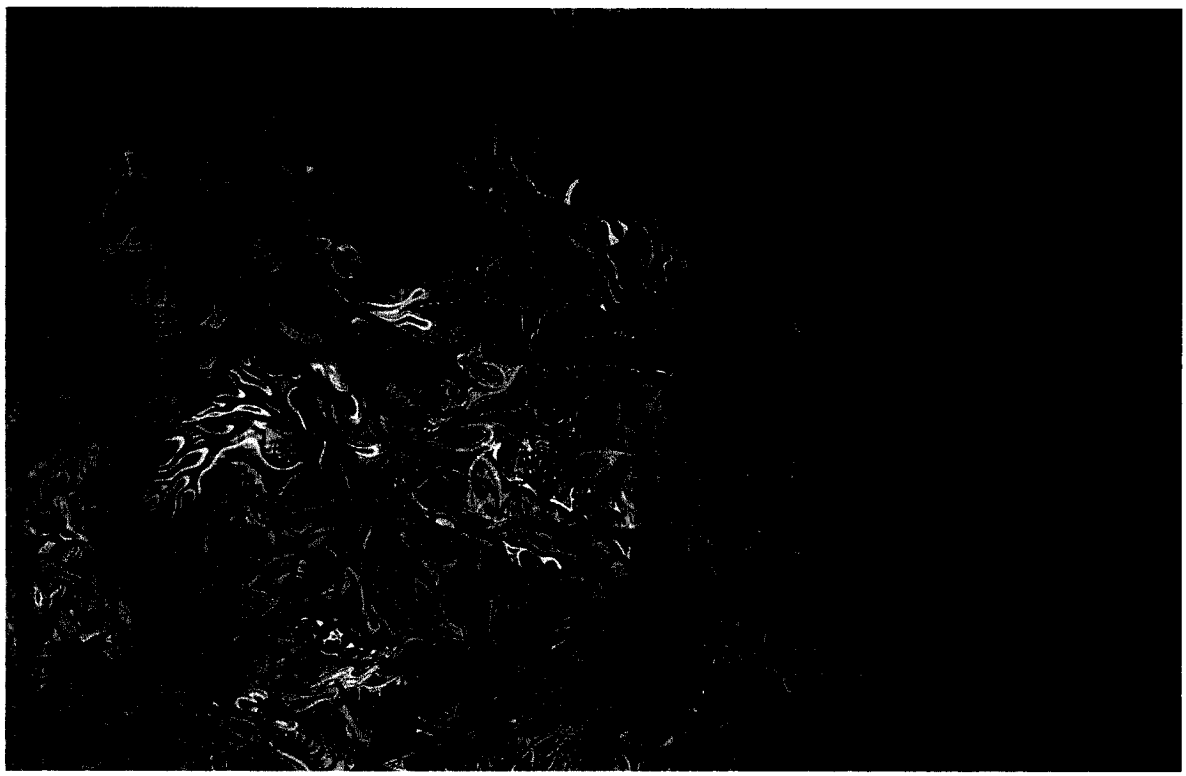

**Figure 7.** Psychedelic artwork in "Dego" paints at a Goa Trance rave.

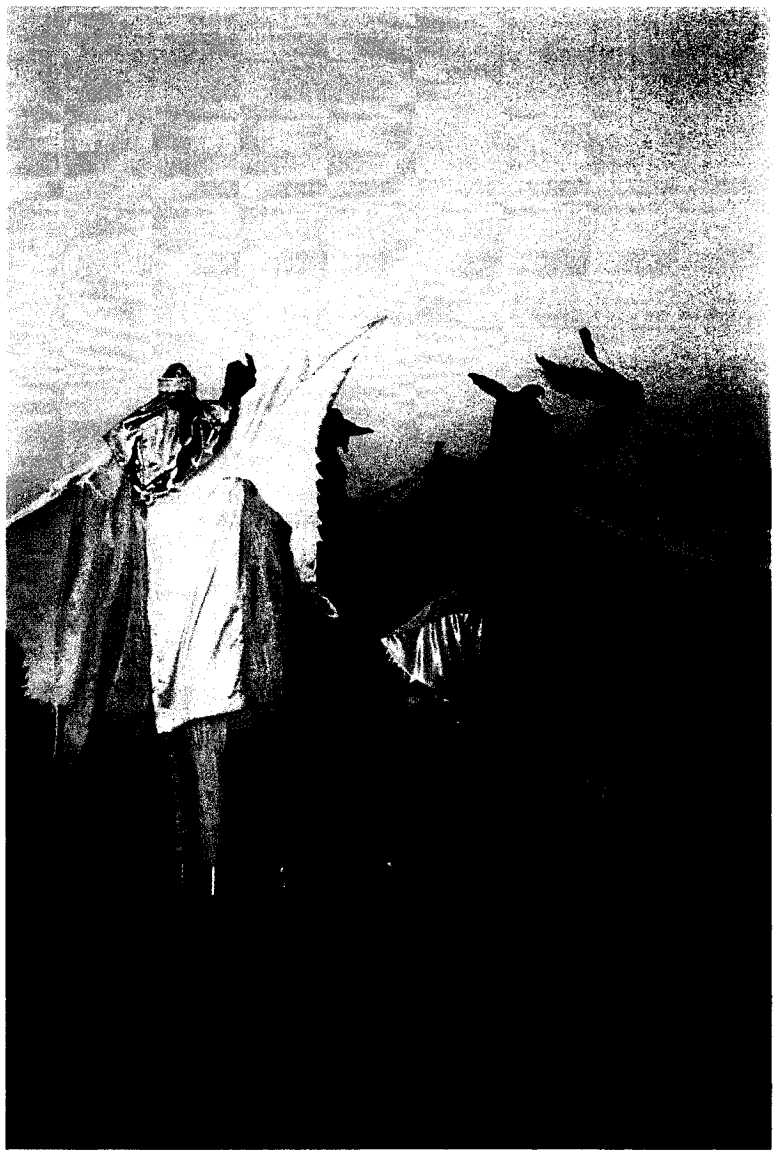

**Figure 8.** The Carnival atmosphere of raves. Stilt-walkers at the "Om Summer Solstice Festival" (June 2003).

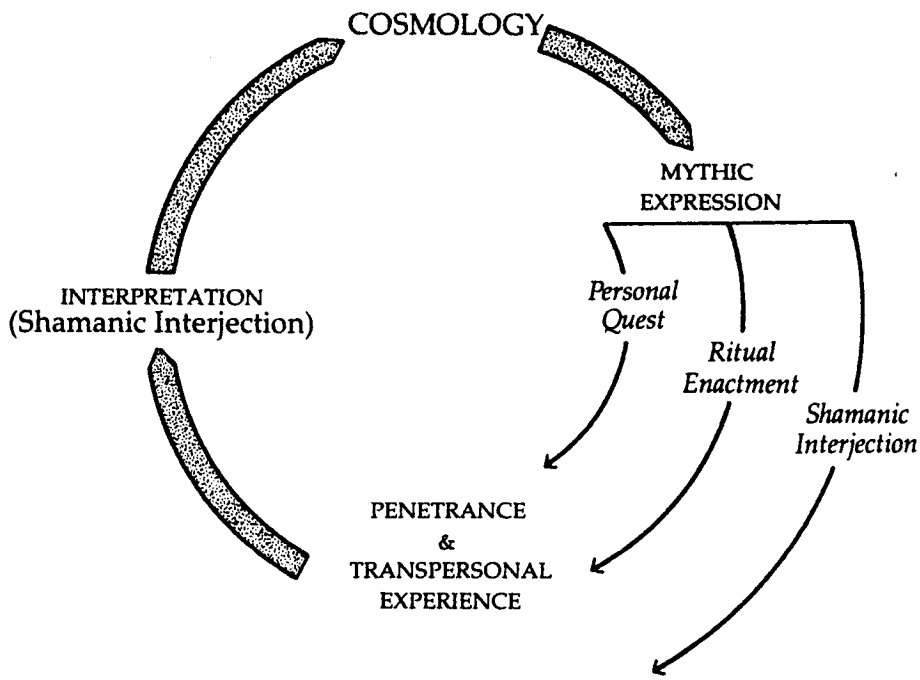


**Figure 9.** The "cycle of meaning"

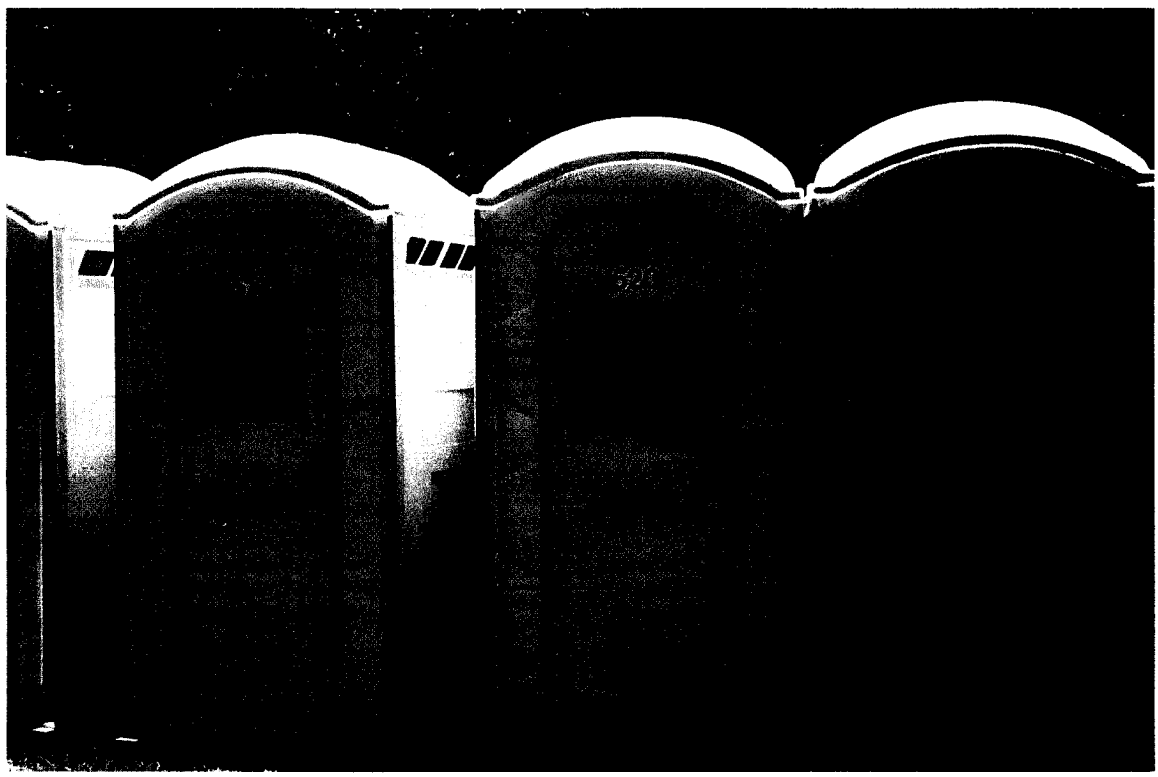

**Figure 10.** A raver's view of corporate America. ("Om Summer Solstice Festival" June 2003).

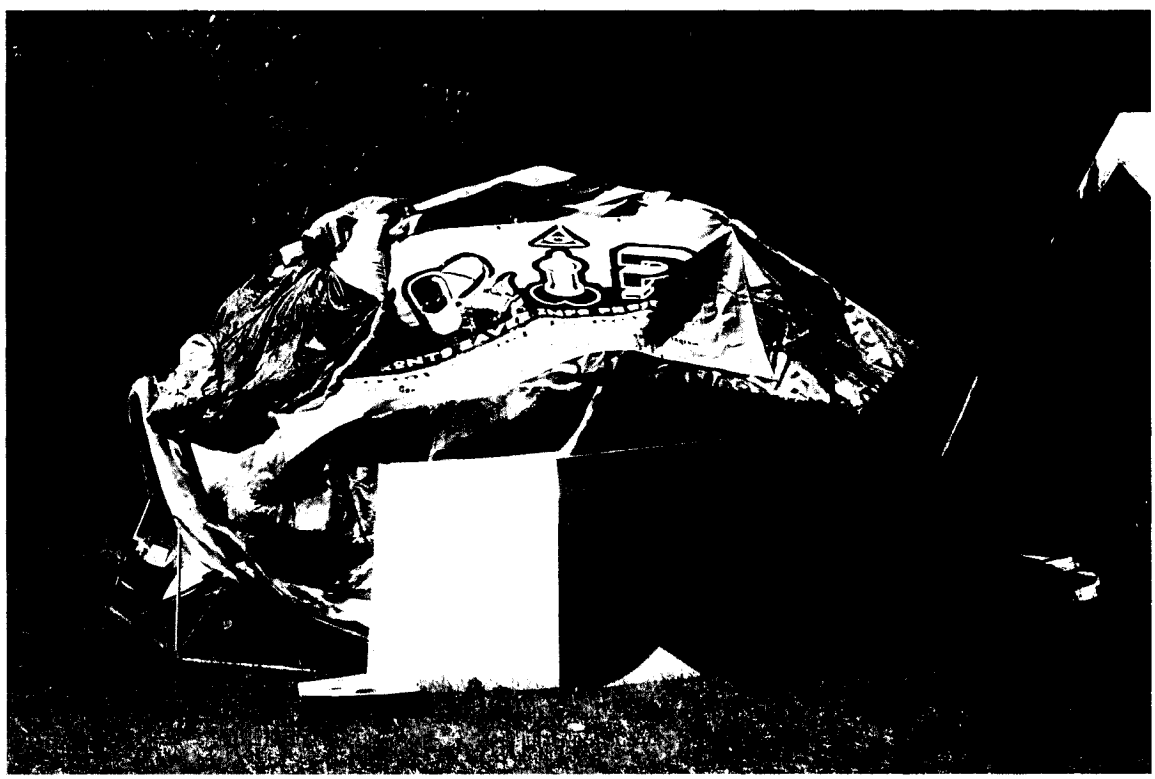

**Figure 11.** "TRIP" (Toronto Information Rave Patrol) and "OATS" Booth (Ottawans Actively Teaching Safety). Harm reduction organizations at the Om Summer Solstice Festival (June 2003).

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