

Experiencing Electronic Dance Floors

A Comparative Research of Techno and Psytrance in Melbourne

Botond Vitos

MA (Cultural Anthropology)
ELTE University, Budapest

MA (Dutch Studies)
ELTE University, Budapest

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School of Media, Film and Journalism
Monash University, Melbourne

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Abstract

Prior research recognises the dance floor as the ‘ground zero’ of electronic dance music (EDM) cultures. However, due to the irrational nature of the dance experience, researchers tend to describe the all important dance floor vibe as a black box that short-circuits further analysis. This analytical obstacle can be overcome by acknowledging that this apparent void comes from a mixture of mediations that are applied in particular ways within the various genres and scenes. This thesis explores this argument through the comparative research of the techno and psytrance scenes in Melbourne, Australia, emphasising the necessity of careful differentiation between EDM genres and cultures and addressing the translocal influences of local scenes.

The in-depth, qualitative exploration of the electronic dance experience carried out in this project relies on the results of ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation, focus groups and individual interviews. The data collection is primarily focused on participant descriptions of the mediations of dance floors, incorporating sonic structures, chemical effects, environmental arrangements and partygoer interactions. This methodology is adopted to fit a broader theoretical scope: the empirically based exploration of Baudrillard’s media theory. To pursue this goal, the technological embedding of the dance floor experience is juxtaposed with the everyday mediations of urban consumer culture. It is revealed that the chemical and musical object of EDM is capable of a hyperreal transformation of both the environment of the party and the everyday life of the subject.

After defining the methodological and theoretical framework of the research, this thesis addresses the two Melbourne scenes, focusing on the media ecologies of their dance floors as well as the reconfigurations of their constituents in the subgenres of acid techno and dark psytrance. The machine aesthetics of EDM cultures is shaped by the exploitation and exploration of accidents and malfunctions, or the perversions of technology for other uses, with the rediscoveries of misdesigned and obsolete technologies impacting upon the early development of EDM just as much as the embracement of the latest innovations. Downstream from these ‘dysfunctional’ beginnings, techno and psytrance in Melbourne are still engaged in the explorations of such ‘flip sides’ of technologies. The analysis concludes with the comparative evaluation of the two scenes, revealing divergent socio-aesthetic trajectories within the virtualised environments of EDM parties. Both pathways are paved with creative engagements with anomalies that extend the operational potential of the Baudrillardian virtual. It is suggested that ethnographic exploration of such social practices provides a useful contribution to the broader field of media studies.

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Botond Vitos



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Introduction

This introduction gives account of my personal motivations and academic interest in this PhD project. During the past ten years I have been an avid visitor of both electronic dance music (EDM) clubs and outdoor parties associated with different subgenres including – in the order of my involvement – Goa trance, drum and bass, dark psytrance, minimal techno, tech-house and ‘just’ techno, in various countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Greece and Australia. In 2004, while living in Hungary, I unexpectedly became a casual visitor of psytrance parties in the Czech Republic, which later provided the inspiration and research topic for my MA thesis. My earliest subliminal feeling of a deeper understanding of an EDM genre was during an exchange studentship in Athens, Greece, on the morning of a dark psytrance party organised on university territory.¹ The second such understanding came to me several years later at a Hungarian outdoor techno party, when I was having an engaging conversation with a partygoer high on ecstasy about the particularities of the music and its influence on the crowd. Increasingly interested in techno while still finishing my MA on Czech psytrance, I was hoping that the former would constitute a topic of subsequent research. I was also curious about the ways in which electronic dance floor experiences are constructed in various parts of the world, being especially interested in the influences of a non-European socio-cultural context.

My PhD research addresses these issues by means of comparative research of the techno and psytrance scenes in Melbourne. Choosing two EDM genres I am already quite familiar with allows me to take advantage of the benefits of an ‘insider’ perspective outlined in the Methodology chapter of this thesis. While EDM scenes are frequently associated with illicit drug use, my aim is not to focus on the pathological aspects of such behaviour. Rather, I am interested in a micro-level, qualitative analysis of the electronic dance experience of which drug use is a significant dimension. Prior research recognises the dance floor as the ‘ground zero’ of EDM interactions, but due to the irrational nature of the experience, researchers tend to consider it as a black box and fail to recognise and explore genre-related peculiarities. Conversely, I take the dance floor as the starting point in order to reveal new levels of meaning in the theoretical context of a socio-aesthetics embedded in contemporary simulation technologies. I argue for the application of Baudrillard’s media theory, contending that the

¹ Many Greek EDM parties which often involved recreational drug use were organised on university campuses which authorities were not allowed to enter.

chemical and musical object of EDM is capable of a hyperreal transformation of both the party environment and the subject's everyday life. My focus on insider accounts of these virtualisation processes is conducive to the close investigation of the dance floor 'vibe' in the context of consumer culture.

1. Electronic Dance Music (EDM) Genres and Scenes

This chapter explores two concepts that recur throughout my discussions: genres and scenes in popular and electronic dance music. The intersection of particular EDM genres with local music scenes serves as a point of departure for discussing the mediations and socio-aesthetic sensibilities surrounding the experience of the electronic dance floor.

1.1 Genres in Popular and Electronic Dance Music

In his deliberately broad definition, Fabbri (1982: 52) considers a music genre as “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules”. In the discussion of his definition Fabbri (1982: 52-59) takes into account the plurality of subgenres and the possibility of overlapping of genres, the codification of rules regulating the relation between expression and content, and the mutable character of the social acceptance and understanding of various rules with respect to the diachronic development of genres. Each musical genre has its typical formal and technical rules, either written or unwritten, defining the genre’s stylistic elements and performance techniques. Another group of rules is the semiotic, concerning the narrativity and the communicative functions of genres, the spatial contexts of the musical events and the gestural-mimical codes involved. The study of behavioural rules is often aimed at the psychological and behavioural reactions of musicians and audiences, and the valuation of the performer’s sincerity, while that of social and ideological rules concerns the social functions and meanings of genres, and the ideological nature of the participants’ knowledge and evaluation of genre rules. Finally, scholars are expected to demonstrate an open but cautious awareness of the economical and juridical rules which are most often subject to ideological concealment. These rules may bear different weight from one genre to another, and it is possible to formulate ‘hyper-rules’ establishing their hierarchy or the ideology of the respective genre.

Fabbri (1982: 60-63) also emphasises the musical community’s awareness of genre rules and their (use or analytical) competence in their (de)codification. By providing an understanding of how pre-existing rules are sometimes opposed in favour of new ones, he also discusses the transgressions of genre boundaries which may lead to codification of new genres. Despite this awareness of genre mutability, Negus (1999: 25-26) considers Fabbri’s

work overtly deterministic, claiming that his stress on genre rules results in a rather static picture emphasising constraints rather than possibilities. Reflecting on Fabbri, McLeod (2001: 66) also argues that particularly in EDM communities, genre rules are often contested, which may usefully generate creative criticism. Such arguments warn against overlooking the flexibility of (de)codification: for Negus (1999: 26), even though one may be well aware of the rules, “there always seems to be something more”, contributing to a less rule-bound and more dynamic experience of music genres.

The focal concern in the work of Negus (1999) is the interconnectedness of genre cultures and the music industry through a reciprocal process in which industry and culture are shaping each other. In the spider web of the recording companies, “ongoing dynamic genre practices continually confront their translation into codified rules, conventions, and expectations” (Negus 1999: 28). Negus explores the primary influence of the music industry on three major popular music genres: rap, country and salsa. However, in EDM the music-making processes are, if not immune, less affected by corporate strategies because electronic music production requires relatively accessible tools and therefore is often carried out entirely by the artist/producer, and, moreover, the prominent artists are often running their own recording labels. For example, this relative independence from major recording companies is evident during the first wave of Detroit techno, one of the foundational genres of EDM (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 322-330).¹ It will be revealed that in this case the music industry is only one of several influential sources contributing to the crystallisation of (sub)genres.

This argument is supported by McLeod (2001), who calls attention to the proliferation of EDM subgenres which is unequalled within other types of music,² a phenomenon not only related to the rapidly evolving nature of electronic music, but also to several other factors ranging from political-economic influences to cultural processes such as group identity formations. Through these processes, both on a wider scale, for example through EDM magazines and on the internet, and at the localised level such as the record store, a multitude of subgenres are generated, which in turn denote varying production and consumption

¹ Still, the term techno was first employed internationally as part of a music industry marketing strategy, although following the local Detroit musicians who had already been using it as an adjective (Butler 2006: 45).

² McLeod (2001: 60) provides an edited list of almost 100 different subgenre names, and also refers to a 1998/1999 media analysis that revealed more than 300 names.

patterns. Drawing on McLeod's discussion, Lindop (2010: 116) notes that the main reason for this excessive taxonomy is that DJs, the central figures of EDM cultures, in most cases need as exact a categorisation as possible in order to string together similar tracks in their performances, and this very same categorisation will inform their audiences of the type of music played at events. The work of Negus, McLeod and Lindop uncovers a range of possible sources which may contribute to the proliferation of genres in EDM.

The orientation within this abundance of genres may be facilitated by means of a vertical classification system, constructed along the categories of meta-genre, genre and subgenre (or even sub-subgenre). Shuker (1998: 122) defines the meta-genre – such as progressive rock or world music – as a loose amalgam of various styles, the purer forms of which crystallise into genres, which can then be further divided into subgenres. According to Pachet and Cazaly (2000), a similar categorisation is used by the music industry and internet music retailers, resulting in somewhat arbitrary taxonomical systems which are not unified and suffer from numerous flaws. For Lindop (2010: 117), the main characteristic of most meta-genres is that unlike actual genres, they can primarily be defined in terms of extra-musical elements, meaning that these formations are less united by sonic elements and more by attitudes, values, ideologies, or marketing strategies. However, in his discussion of the U.K. psytrance (psychedelic trance) EDM genre, Lindop (2010: 128-129) uncovers the coexistence of both actual and meta-genres within the same category by showing how foreign EDM (sub)genres are incorporated and “psychedelicised” at psychedelic trance festivals. The picture is further complicated by the variability of these classification systems and the dynamic nature of genre rules, as underlined in the first part of this discussion. One possible EDM taxonomy is illustrated on the popular webpage *Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music* (see Figure 1 on the next page), where the diachronic development of EDM is explored along seven genres, the borderlands of which are scattered with subgenres overlapping into other genres (for example, from techno to house).

At this point I have considered three issues relating to genres in popular music and particularly in EDM. The first involved the codification of rules embedded in the socio-cultural environment of music communities, and the flexibility of these rules. Second, I have argued that a range of possible sources may contribute to the emergence of a plurality of interlinked

subgenres. Finally, I have considered a widely used genre classification model and illustrated it with a possible taxonomy of the EDM genre of techno.

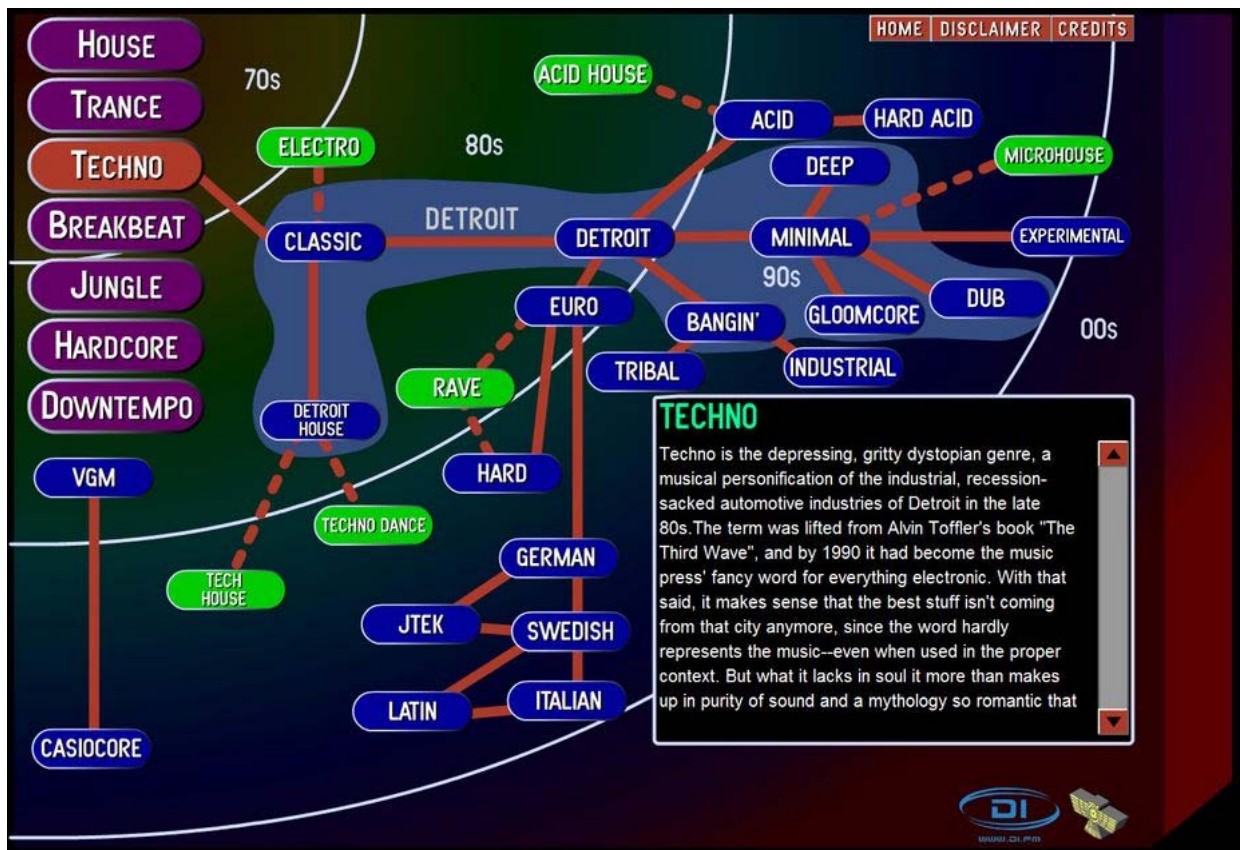


Figure 1: Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music on Techno.org (Taylor 2013)

1.2 The Early Development of EDM and Techno

The following section provides a short overview of the early history of EDM and particularly of techno, an 'archetypal' EDM genre that constitutes one of the focal points of my research. The first decade of EDM is extensively covered in literature, for example, by Reynolds (1999), Brewster and Broughton (2000) or Sicko (2010). A commonly acknowledged fact is the importance of the disco era in the development of EDM, with the appearance of New York garage music and the formation of house music in Chicago both regarded as disco's heritage (Butler 2006: 36-40).

House music had originally been popular among the gay black community of early 1980s Chicago, pioneered by DJs Frankie Knuckles and Ron Hardy, who played their increasingly raw, drum machine-based music for drug-fuelled dance floors of clubs such as the Warehouse, from which the name of the genre also originates. House later spread beyond its origins and became

a widespread phenomenon among non-black youth as well: with the global release of the first house tracks, a distinct music was in development. The genre gained increasing popularity in the U.K., especially with the advent of acid house, a subgenre invented by accident and built on a specific sound determined by the irregular noise of the Roland TB-303 synthesiser (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 292-319).

Techno was invented by the more intellectually oriented middle class black youth of 1980s Detroit, relying on influences such as Kraftwerk, funk, European synthpop, and the post-industrial cityscape of decaying Detroit. The first incarnation of the genre is connected to Belleville Three, a group of producers paying increasing attention to instrumentation details in their tracks, influenced by sci-fi imagery and stark European synthesiser music. The first use of the term 'techno' was connected to the U.K. release of a Detroit compilation album, which was branded as such to emphasise the difference from the massively popular house genre of that period. The media played an important part in the early formation of techno, as producers quickly realised that the intellectualisation of the genre was also a way of promoting their music and differentiating it from Chicago house (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 320-332).

In the early 1990s, in the second wave of Detroit techno, DJ/producer collectives such as the Underground Resistance and +8 developed a harsher sound inspired by electro, UK synthpop, industrial music and electronic body music, partly as a counter-reaction against the mainstream entertainment industry (Reynolds 1999: 219-220). With the increasing commodification and globalisation of EDM, Detroit techno started to be regarded not only as a specific subgenre of global techno but also "became equated with any serious artistic productions that had a more conceptual focus" (May 2006: 343). After the second wave, techno music lost popularity among the black inhabitants of Detroit, and due to influences of global EDM culture and geographic/cultural shifts, it ceased to be 'black' music – although certain Detroit DJs did not even want it to be defined by race in the first place (May 2006: 345-349).

Germany became one of the most significant bastions of global techno, with illegal parties proliferating in Berlin amidst the legal uncertainty after the fall of the Berlin wall, representing a promise of liberation from ideologies. With the development of a Berlin-Detroit axis, a number of Detroit DJs were moving to Berlin, and significant record labels were founded such as Tresor. In the mid-1990s the institutionalisation of techno in Germany triggered the resistance of 'underground' crews such as Mille Plateaux and the U.K.-originated

Spiral Tribe (Robb 2002), the latter being one of the founding crews of the ‘teknival’ movement promoting illegal and free techno parties all around Europe (St John 2009: 28-64).

With the dramatic increase in the number of EDM genres and subgenres since the 1990s, techno became a diversified phenomenon including numerous crossovers to other genres. In my research however, I intend to focus on its more purist incarnations that employ a harsher sound, traceable to the second wave of Detroit producers and their European counterparts.

1.3 Scenes in Popular and Electronic Dance Music Research

The second significant theoretical concept from which my analysis unfolds is the scene. Within the context of (post-)subcultural studies, its emergence is connected to the criticism and revision of the term ‘subculture’ since its 1960s and 1970s adoption by members of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Subculture had been primarily applied to British post-war, working-class youth groupings such as skinheads, teddy boys and mods, which – according to the CCCS – created imaginary solutions to class-related problems by providing cultural space for collective expressions of subcultural identities through patterns of consumption and style (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 4-6). The term has been severely criticised on the grounds, among others, that it unqualifiedly equates post-war patterns of youth consumerism with notions of working class resistance, it fails to recognise local variations in youth’s responses to music and style, it fails to provide accounts of female involvement, and it downplays the role of musical taste in the formation of contemporary youth cultures. To deal with these shortcomings, theorists have either reworked the concept of subculture or introduced alternative terms such as lifestyle, neo-tribe and scene, with the latter being also extensively used in the everyday discourse of (popular) music followers (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 6-13).

Straw’s (1991) account is among the first considerations of the term scene within the context of popular music studies. After showing how musical localism is being shaped by international industrial and cultural contexts, and discussing processes of internationalisation as reproducers of complex diversities from one urban centre to another, Straw introduces Shanks’ (1988) notion of the scene, and considers its usefulness “for the relationship between different musical practices unfolding within a given geographical space” (Straw 1991: 373).

Unlike musical communities rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage, scenes are bound to processes of historical change occurring within a larger international culture, and produce senses of community within the conditions of cosmopolitan music practices.

In a more recent introductory text on scenes, Bennett and Peterson (2004) point to the increasing popularity of the concept in research on the production, performance and reception of popular music. As opposed to the multinational music industry, where relatively few people create music for mass markets, scenes provide space for the interactions of performers, and support facilities and fans in the collective creation of music for their own enjoyment. A relationship of interdependence exists between scenes and the music industry: while the latter needs the former in fostering creativity and providing the veneer of authenticity, scenes in turn take advantage of technologies created by the industry. Music scenes can also be responsible for the development of a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) industry, which, unlike the corporate music industry – with which however it is interdependent – is the domain of small collectives, fans-turned-entrepreneurs and volunteer labour. EDM-related phenomena such as local entrepreneurial music production and often illegal party organisation constitute a significant body of work in the literature focusing on DIY industries – the flourishing of which has been greatly facilitated by the 1980s digital revolution, the development of sampling technologies, the easing of access to inexpensive but high-quality recording equipment, and the rapid expansion of internet use from the mid-1990s (Bennett and Peterson 2004: 3-6).

Bennett and Peterson (2004) distinguish three general types of scenes. The local scene, in which particularised sensibilities are constructed through interactions with global patterns, can be defined as

a focused social activity that takes place in a delineated space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local (Bennett and Peterson 2004: 8).

Besides music, the appropriated lifestyle elements may include styles of dancing, the range of drugs used or styles of dress. In my research I aim to use this definition for designating the elements through which the local experience of the electronic dance floor is constructed. In

addition to the local scene, Bennett and Peterson (2004) also consider the interaction of translocal scenes through the exchange of recordings, performers, fans and fanzines, by means of which affective communities and senses of belonging are created without the need for the face-to-face interaction of members. Finally, virtual scenes based on internet-mediated communication enable widely separated fans to come together and influence the scenes' development according to their needs and interests, often censuring net-based media that attempts to influence them.

In journalistic discourses music scenes are often defined in terms of their 'underground' distinctiveness from the 'mainstream' (Bennett and Peterson 2004: 2). According to Chatterton and Hollands (2003: 5), within the urban nightscape the mainstream can be broadly defined as being profit-oriented and less focused on accessibility and creativity, in addition to pertaining to corporate ownership whose branding strategies target affluent groups of consumers. This can be opposed to the "independently run and alternative nightlife spaces which cater for more specific youth cultures, identities and tastes, some of which are self-organised, such as free parties, unofficial raves and squatted social centres" (Chatterton and Hollands 2003: 5).³ Of course, the accuracy of these labels is problematised by shifting boundaries and the continuous infiltration between the two entities. For instance, the meaning of the underground is often exploited and rebranded by mainstream organisers (Chatterton and Hollands 2003: 215); and while EDM incorporates both underground styles preferred by narrower audiences and also more profit-oriented or mainstream subgenres, the referents of these signifiers may shift according to local contexts. Moreover, these categories can be applied to both music styles and spaces, and underground DJs (playing 'unpopular' music) may perform at a mainstream festival (driven by commercial interests), or mainstream (highly popular) music can be played at an underground party (where creativity should be emphasised). Of course, the meanings of these terms are frequently discussed and contested by partygoers. Thornton (1996: 5) finds the ideological relevance of the underground in the protection of cultural identity and the reaffirmation of its value through the formulation of discourses against a mainstream mass culture, which is perceived and condemned as derivative and superficial. While Thornton provides a general classification of the discursive dichotomy of the underground/mainstream, as I argue elsewhere (Vitos 2012: 20) in EDM the rebuking of the

³ A third category identified by Chatterton and Hollands (2003: 5), which is less relevant for my research, incorporates the increasingly disappearing, residual community spaces such as traditional pubs.

stereotypical mass culture is not necessarily articulated in the way she suggests, and her emphasis on negative identification as the main source of identity overlooks the centrality of the vibe or the dance floor experience, particularly in smaller scenes.

An example of EDM research that makes use of the concept of scenes is Spring's (2004) account of the rise and fall of the rave⁴ scene in a working class satellite city near Detroit, Michigan. Spring aims to reveal the complex, interconnected mechanisms sustaining the scene by focusing on the particular urban setting, the actors involved, and the socio-political structure providing capital and power. Similar to the previously mentioned functioning of small-scale DIY industries, Spring's rave scene is maintained by various local actors such as partygoers, DJs, promoters and drug dealers, but also politicians, fire marshals and police, with the 'golden age' being marked by a fragile balance sustained through social networks and agreements. The emergence of the risk-free environment necessary for the flourishing of the scene is influenced by factors such as the community support behind the revitalisation of a run-down area, the maintenance of translocal networks with other DJs and promoters in the music industry, agreements between party promoters and dealers providing high quality drugs, and the official blind eye to illegal activities. Conversely, the loosening of social networks and the collapse of mutually supportive agreements leads to the irreversible decline of the scene.

In another, recent work from the field of EDM studies, Hunt, Moloney and Evans (2010) discuss, similarly to Bennett and Peterson (2004), the ways global cultural practices are borrowed, developed, and modified in various local scenes around the world according to social and cultural contexts. At EDM parties worldwide, the vibe emerges from the synergy of certain constituents including music, drugs, environment and crowd. Hunt et al. (2010: 62-70) illustrate the importance of considering local characteristics by comparing two case studies conducted in Hong Kong and Rotterdam. The discussion is primarily based on the evaluation of demographic patterns and the comparison of statistical data, with little mention of EDM genre names in the description of the Hong Kong scene. The research does not attempt to provide in-depth accounts of the user experience emergent from the amalgamation of music, drugs, environment and crowd.

While Spring's analysis is mainly engaged in mapping out the mechanisms of infrastructural/institutional frameworks regulating the lifespan of scenes, and Hunt et al.

⁴ Rave is a widely used term for EDM parties often held in abandoned warehouses or other evacuated areas, associated with illegal activities such as drug use.

discuss the influence of global factors influencing local peculiarities without investigating the emergent experiences and sensibilities on the micro-level, I am specifically concerned with the ways in which the interplay of local and global factors shape the experiential dimension of the dance floor constituting the 'ground zero' of the EDM scene, not forgetting that such factors are connected to local and national networks and organisations within the scene. My comparative research of two distinct local scenes concerns various levels of analysis. First, by focusing on the differences I aim to reveal how dance floor experiences vary according to genre characteristics, for example by differentiating an 'archetypal' experience of the techno dance floor according to its characteristic music/drug/environment/crowd ensemble. Second, by finding out what is common in the two Melbourne scenes, I am also interested in local contexts. Finally, I address some of the translocal relations and influences.

2. Methodology

This chapter addresses the epistemological and theoretical background of the research, considers existing methodologies in EDM studies and outlines my methodological agenda. My project adopts a Baudrillardian perspective in the interpretation of dance floor experiences, arguing that the chemical and musical object of EDM is capable of a hyperreal transformation of both its immediate environment and the everyday life of the subject. Considering previous methodologies of EDM research and emphasising the merits of insider fieldwork, I contend that my focus on insider accounts of mediation processes is highly beneficial for the investigation of the dance floor ‘vibe’ in the context of an affluent (Australian) consumer culture. My investigations are based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2011 and 2012, including participant observation at 17 parties, eight focus groups and five individual (one in-depth and four follow-up) interviews. Yet Baudrillard’s writing is often hyperbolic, deliberately adopting an anti-empiricist perspective, which questions the suitability of such fieldwork. This tension is resolved by considering a critical reading of his work that allows an empirically based exploration of his concepts.

2.1 Epistemological Concerns: Tracing Futuristic Knowledge

In *Baudrillard and the Media* (2005), Merrin reflects on the anti-empiricist methodologies of Baudrillard and McLuhan. For both thinkers, innovative theory cannot be based simply on empiricism because processes of cultural transformation are concealed by the familiarity of the observed phenomena, just as the apparent content of a medium blinds us to its transformative capabilities (McLuhan 1964: 9). Such theory is raised through speculation and escalation; in an accelerated world that seems to overcome our ideas, thought itself must become extreme and confrontational (Merrin 2005: 61-62). Baudrillard describes the emergent ‘semiotic system’ of contemporary complex societies as a means of social control, culminating in his theory of simulation. Yet as Merrin (2005: 99-100) contends, theory for Baudrillard also provides a site of resistance against this semiotic system through the identification or awakening of resisting ‘symbolic’ processes derived from the Durkheimian tradition of social anthropology. In this sense, theory is a “process of invention and inversion” aimed to be “not simply a descriptive statement of the real but its critique and transformation” (Merrin 2005: 158). The following

discussion addresses the ways this theoretical position from the late 20th century can be reconsidered in the context of my research.

Baudrillard himself was subject to severe criticism and accusations of denying the ‘real’ casualties when he described the overwhelming and mediated military offensive of the Gulf War as a ‘non-event’ in which the absence of direct confrontation and the controversies around the victims were overshadowed by the production of a media model of the war.¹ However, by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, similar accounts of ‘virtual wars’ became popular clichés or parts of the canon of media analysis (Merrin 2005: 96). Thus the danger of such provocative thought is not that it is deemed wrong, but that it is deadly accurate and subsequently justified by the world. Yet once realised, radical thought also loses its edge, and in this way Baudrillard himself could be “eclipsed, reduced to the ghost of his simulacra” (Merrin 2005: 159), as in his following, anecdotal interview account:

There was an erudite Japanese who had come to interview me and I asked him why for a number of years he had been translating my books I had not received any word of it. I had been translated there several times before, and I had been told at that time "Ah, simulation and the simulacrum! In Japan you are an important spokesman." So I asked him why I no longer heard about readers' reactions and he told me, "But it is very simple, very simple you know. Simulation and the simulacrum have been realized. You were quite right: the world has become yours ... and so we no longer have any need of you. You have disappeared. You have been volatilized in reality, or in the realization of hyperreality. It is over. In terms of theory, we no longer need you, and there is no longer a need to defend your theories." That is the paradox of utopia made real; it clearly makes every utopian dimension perfectly useless (Baudrillard 1995).

For the purposes of this chapter it is insignificant whether contemporary Japan provides such complete realisations of hyperreality, or even if the conversation with the “erudite Japanese” actually occurred.² If Baudrillard’s writing is not necessarily based on empirical evidence but

¹ As Merrin (2005: 83-86) points out, far from being a nihilistic denial of casualties, Baudrillard’s critical position is on the side of the symbolic, in opposition with the semiotic system that is deemed responsible for generating the media model of the ‘non-event’.

² The invention of quotes is not foreign to Baudrillard. His influential essay *The Precession of Simulacra* starts with a made-up motto attributed to the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament: “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (Baudrillard 1994a: 1). This forgery, however, corresponds to the logic of his text and to his methodological agenda. For Baudrillard, writing is legitimated not by an underlying truth but

develops a prophetic theory similar to that of science fiction to which the world is then elevated, and this elevation has indeed been accomplished in various aspects of contemporary consumer culture, then his thoughts are highly relevant for the analysis of a heavily mediated, remix-laden culture, the central focus of which lies in the experiential transformation of its dance floors into fantastic environments through communal consumption of cutting edge sound and drug technologies (Chapter 3). Just as for Canadian science fiction writer William Gibson (2001) the Japanese “[ha]ve been living in the future for quite some time now”, my starting argument is that since the 1980s, EDM parties have been generating psychic conditions for experiencing a chemical/musical object bleeding into or conquering urban realities, driven by a logic of consumption that can best be understood through the concept of simulation.

If post-utopian dreams of Japan seem far away from the context of this research, a quick stroll through Melbourne’s CBD reveals snapshots of the simulacrum. In the *Cliniquelly*³ clean spaces of most distinguished malls, glamorous shopkeepers are selling the luxurious magic of ‘scientifically proven’ beauty products for clients from a population struggling with obesity (Pink 2011) yet competing with the pin-up girls: such is the magical thinking governing consumer culture (Baudrillard 1998: 31-34).⁴ Shoppers are checking the inexhaustible succession of Facebook posts and notifications pumped out by their phones with an intensity that puts Baudrillard’s (1998: 122) mass media programme analysis into the next gear. During a May night in 2012, partygoers smoking a cigarette in the outdoor designated area of Melbourne’s Club Freedom⁵ are being harassed and directed to stand straight under the street lights by bouncers sustaining the fantasy of order at all costs, as part of a general project of over-protection feeding the “rationalist paranoia of our social systems” (Baudrillard 2002: 99). Yet there’s a flip side to this: once descending into the darkness of the club, the order is turned inside out. Behaviour that is criminalised overground becomes the norm underground (ironically, Melbourne bouncers tacitly encourage drug consumption by preventing access for

by its credibility received from the world, as he later contends that: “Even an entirely made-up quotation from Ecclesiastes receives official corroboration by the fact of its being published” (Baudrillard 1997c: 8).

³ Clinique is a world-renowned skincare and cosmetics brand that shrouds itself with the aura of science in terms of its marketing strategy.

⁴ This concept of magical thinking is addressed in Chapter 3.3.

⁵ All venue names have been altered.

those intoxicated with alcohol).⁶ Partygoers are ‘losing it’ as their senses are bombarded by flashes, lasers and thick layers of simulated sounds within the “ordered disorder” (Featherstone 1991: 82) of the techno party. Such underground encounters of the futuristic present tend to avoid the gaze of the mass media or appear distorted in their simulations.⁷

Baudrillard’s concepts are particularly useful for addressing the dance floor mediations and related questions of authenticity in two key ways. First, I contend that while it is indeed useful to set it out from Baudrillardian logic, the discussion of clubbing should also develop this model. Instead of reduplicating everyday media processes, the EDM phenomenon is capable of altering the simulacrum in particular ways. Second, this alteration is best understood through the close investigation of the mediations framing the dance floor experience and their relations with everyday life.

By drawing on the paradox of established utopias, I employ a critical reading of Baudrillardian theory in the identification of an essential thread interweaving the fabric of EDM culture,⁸ no longer utopian but theorising the experiential object still seducing its subject. For Baudrillard (1997d: 14-15), the (consumer) object has become a “strange attractor”, a vertiginous organising principle that seduces the subject in a world that is now invented for its assimilation by media and advertising. From this perspective, products are imposing their presence on consumers, sacrificing ambiguity and illusion to the technological perfection of models broadcast through mass (and social) media. A typical symptom of this process is the profusion of digital photographs transforming the lived experience of the consumer into a mere reflection of techno-cultural trends. Photographed, broadcast and consumed: the subject’s identity is conjured away and reconstructed through a web of technological mediations. Baudrillard depicts a system where fetishised objects are devouring the identities of their subjects as sacrificial masks, problematising identity in a world that is now modelled through simulations. Such perspectives are uncomfortable for social analysis that tries to defend the human subject by designating value to human agency. Yet in media studies Baudrillard’s work can be considered particularly useful because, by emphasising form over

⁶ The cultural distinction of “E-heads Versus Beer Monsters” in the night time economy (Moore 2003) does not come up in my fieldwork, yet ironically it is often sustained by bouncers enforcing strict venue regulations.

⁷ Antonio Melechi’s portrayal of early U.K. acid house discusses one such “disappearance” of the subcultural subject within the “cyber-space” of the party, which is followed by a distorted and “hysterical re-inscription” in the mass media (Melechi 1993: 33-35).

⁸ In Chapter 3.2 I trace the history of EDM focusing on the allegories it provides for the simulacrum.

content, it investigates the medium as a transformative means of social control, providing an historical and philosophical foundation for this process through the theories of simulation and virtuality (Merrin 2005: 154-156).

Keeping this in mind, my intentions are far from saving the subject, yet I am still using ethnography to provide analytical depth and a nuanced investigation of local contexts. My research is not carried out under a positivist agenda, and I contend that there are differences and reversals in EDM consumption that need to be addressed. In underground scenes, drug/music technologies are used with reflexivity, and deliberate goals of aesthetic fulfilment are to be achieved. Instead of functioning as a secretly attached, external medium in the object's intriguing reproduction (Baudrillard 1997d: 14), here the body coexists in a more conscious symbiosis with the object, leading to both stupefaction and movement, channelling and interaction. An historical context for this perspective could be provided by the development of the 'controlled de-control' addressed by Featherstone (1991) developing the work of Elias (1978) and Wouters (1987). Featherstone (1991: 78-81) traces the process of controlled de-control to the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1968), arguing that the grotesque bodily processes of the medieval carnival are first excluded from the civilising process of modernity involving the formation of the middle classes, only to return in the spectacles of consumer culture promoted by its theme parks, malls and tourist brochures. Drawing, among others, on Featherstone (1991), Race (2005) describes recreational drug consumption as "excessive conformity to contemporary consumer culture" while also highlighting the regulatory intentions of the state in its attempt to secure a "distinct moral position in the field of pleasure".

An interplay between subject and object that is reminiscent of Featherstone's (1991) concept of controlled de-control is addressed by Gomart and Hennion (1999) who link both music and drug 'addiction' to consensual forms of self-abandonment or 'active dis-possession' performed through the mechanisms of arrangement. The emphasis falls on the particular mediations employed to reach a state of passivity possibly leading to transformative moments of passion. Through this mix of activity and passivity, object and subject are instantaneously co-producing each other. From a methodological perspective, Hennion (2001: 5-6) employs an ethnographic approach in which attention is drawn away from the interviewee's self-assessments relating to musical taste, and emphasis is placed on investigating the pragmatic ways of interaction with the musical object. Similarly, my project uses ethnography based on

participant observation and interviews for gathering a broad range of data relating to technological mediations and local contexts. Following Clifford (1986b: 117-118), my interviewees' accounts belong to narratives of cultures that are repeatedly producing textualised meanings through articulation, classification, oral literature or inscription in ritual acts. Yet I am more interested in the contexts of consumption and the ways and reasons of appreciating the scene-specific music/drugs/environment/crowd ensemble constructing the dance floor, and less in the convictions or subsequent interpretations about the nature of the experience. As participants interact with (pseudo-)scientific terminologies in their everyday lives, this is to follow the suggestion of Hennion (2001: 5) of “de-sociologizing the interviewees by asking them to talk not of their determinisms but of their ways of doing things”. The narrative flow of these interviews provides one main layer in my empirical data, complemented with my own memories and reflections recorded in field notes. My observations are not limited to the space of the party, and the perceived contexts of consumer culture may offer such illustrations for the main arguments as my recollections from the cityscapes of the Melbourne CBD at the time of the fieldwork. Moreover, my status as a foreigner provides a valuable means of witnessing EDM scenes of Melbourne in the light of my past Central European experiences.

To sum up, the three complementary sources of knowledge used in this project are the interview data, my own accounts, and the theoretical background primarily relying on a critical reading of Baudrillard's texts. This fits with the general program of anthropology as understood by Geertz (1974): grasping the experience-near, inner rhythm of culture, and explaining it in terms of experience-distant concepts. Anthropological theory, particularly of Durkheim and Mauss, was one of the preferred sources of Baudrillard, and contrary to his anti-empiricist methodology, in my research his work, stripped from its utopian aura, is returned to the discipline by being applied in the discussion of futuristic field encounters of the EDM kind. The methodological concerns of my research are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

2.2 Approaching the Field: Ethnography

My research design draws upon the investigation of key methodological aspects of prior EDM research projects. In the following sections, setting out from the methodological questions raised by the research of a global culture profoundly associated with illicit drug use, I address

the prospects and possibilities of a 'partial insider' research position. I illustrate the effectiveness of such a position through the discussion of several EDM research projects adopting partial insider methods. I also identify certain drawbacks that are inherent in outsider approaches. Finally, I outline the methodological agenda that is appropriate and applicable to my research.

Parties, Drugs and the Benefits of a Partial Insider Perspective

Although my research addresses EDM parties held both in urban venues and the Australian bush, with the former being more relevant for techno and the latter for psytrance, much of the literature addresses clubs as the common venues for hosting EDM dance floors. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on texts addressing the methodological concerns of club research, yet the lessons learned from these sources can be applied to the research of both urban venues and bush festivals.

According to Demant, Ravn and Thorsen (2010: 241), nightclubs hosting EDM events provide contexts for the recreational drug use of partygoers who consider clubbing and drug use as a leisure activity. Consequently, a club study approach should focus on both club and drug cultures, combining cultural studies and drug research. Demant et al. (2010: 242) highlight the importance of exploring the natural habitat of a hidden population engaged in illegal activities and often reluctant to answer questionnaires. By pointing to the deficiency of survey-based epidemiological club research, they call for the application of ethnographic methodology, which may form the basis of later quantitative analysis. The strength of quantitative methods lies in their suitability for statistical generalisation that opens up a macro-level perspective on night time economies. For instance, the survey research of Measham and Moore (2009) reaffirms the strong prevalence of illegal drug use among EDM audiences in comparison with bar customers and shows that the various music profiles attract distinct patterns of drug use. In this quantitative study the sampling process was facilitated by the partial insider status of the authors (Measham and Moore 2009: 445), which enhances the reliability of the findings. Similarly, in the exploration of rave and club scenes in the San Francisco Bay area, Hunt et al. (2010) opt for the adoption of both epidemiological and cultural studies perspectives. However, this project, based on 300 qualitative interviews, can be criticised for the lack of emphasis on ethnography and participant observation. Ethnographic

methodologies may situate the researcher in a self-reflexive (partial) insider position (Demant et al. 2010: 243-245), the advantage of which will be discussed later on.

Within the field of EDM studies, this position is problematised by the sensitive nature of illegal drug use that is widespread in EDM events and the researcher's possible involvement in this activity. While it can be argued that the researcher's drug use and its subsequent, reflexive analysis facilitates the understanding of the full range of the drug experience in clubbing contexts where drug consumption is often normalised (Sanders 2006, Demant et al. 2010: 243-244), such activity can be nevertheless constrained by two main factors. First, according to Measham and Moore (2006: 23), the researcher can simply be accused as biased in favour of drugs. However, this argument can be contested by claiming that even when engaged in drug taking activities with informants, (s)he does not obtain the same insider position as clubbers, but preserves her/his analytical stance necessary for academic purposes (Demant et al. 2010: 245). Second, and perhaps more importantly, the legitimate, recognised and publicly funded status of EDM research strongly discourages the acknowledgement of illegal drug use, resulting in an "understandable but unfortunate 'reluctant reflexivity' among researchers of dance clubs and dance drugs" (Measham and Moore 2006: 23).

The (partial) insider position of the researcher is often evident in the broader area of (post-)subcultural⁹ studies which encompasses club research. Indeed, recent authors in this field (Kahn-Harris 2007, Hodkinson 2002, Muggleton 2000) are often avid participants of the respective subcultures or scenes. Even though the idea of an absolute insider perspective with total proximity to the research field is problematised by the complexity and fluidity of contemporary identities and groupings, it can still be stated that insider participants of youth cultural groupings and EDM scenes are generally committed to relatively distinctive sets of tastes, values, activities or other characteristics (Measham and Moore 2006: 16). Hodkinson (2002: 4-5) calls attention to the methodological advantages of adopting such a position by the researcher: by gaining access to the respondents' world and understanding their experiences, (s)he is provided with valuable material for a more distanced, critical analysis. Drawing on postmodern theory which blurs the boundaries between the research subject and object, a similar, dual position of the insider/researcher is propagated in the work of Demant et al. (2010:

⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1.3., the term 'subculture' has been severely criticised since its 1960s and 1970s employment by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Recent authors either rework it (Hodkinson 2002, Muggleton 2000) or use alternative concepts such as 'scenes' instead (Kahn-Harris 2007, Stahl 2004).

245). Here, the participant observer is situated “in between” insiders and outsiders, allowing reflection on shared experiences and further evaluation of ethnographic data. Measham and Moore (2006) also consider partial insider knowledge a fruitful resource for the researcher, and draw attention to the necessity of its cautious and reflexive use.

EDM Research Examples

Within EDM studies, authors often gain benefits from the intimate understanding of their respective fields. For example, in the feminist work of Pini (2001), the fundamental academic interest in the role of girls and women within club cultural criticism is supported by the author’s extensive, decade-long participation in London-based dance events. This mixture of personal involvement and observation serves as reference point for the unfolding research, facilitating the analysis of interview data by recognising similarities and differences when weighed against the researcher’s own experiences and understandings. Drawing on Grossberg’s (1988) ethnographic model of “nomadic wandering”, Pini’s poststructuralist ethnographic practice relies on a “self-reflexive form of movement through different cultural contexts” (Pini 2001: 91). Another example is Butler’s (2006) musicological study that also relies on field research, making use of the wider perspective of a cross-disciplinary methodology. Butler’s previous, intimate/insider involvement in EDM cultures grants him immediate access to sources of information hidden from the general and scholarly public, and broadens his understanding of the studied phenomena (Butler 2006: 27-28). One immediate benefit of such knowledge is at least a partial understanding of the ramification of (sub)genres in EDM: for fans, it is of crucial importance to make distinctions between the sometimes loosely defined (sub)genre names, as this provides a way to define their position within the plethora of taste-based communities.¹⁰ Certain scholars however, as Butler (2006: 46) points out, are rather inconsistent with genre names, or apply vague umbrella terms such as ‘rave’ instead of getting into the details. Indeed, fan pages such as *Ishkur’s Guide to Electronic Music* (Taylor 2013) seem to take the issue of genre names and EDM genealogies more seriously than the scholarly works mentioned by Butler.

This concern is apparent not only in fan publications but also in journalistic works such as Reynolds (1999), which traces the development of subgenres and scenes from EDM’s 1980s

¹⁰ The abundance of subgenres in EDM is acknowledged in Chapter 1.1.

roots in Chicago house, Detroit techno and New York garage, until the late 1990s proliferation of subgenres such as happy hardcore, tech-house or speedcore. Reynolds' fascination with the continuum of the "hardcore" within drug-oriented EDM is embedded in his own drug-fuelled experiences of the dance floor (Reynolds 1999: 5). Even though such popular press works may well be criticised for the lack of academic rigour or the insufficiency of referencing (Butler 2006: 7-9), Reynolds' decade-long affiliation with EDM from the position of both fan and critic results in a detailed exploration of the meta-genre's historical evolution which has become a relevant point of reference in recent scholarly works (Hunt 2010, D'Andrea 2007, Butler 2006, Brewster and Broughton 2000).

The attempt to make proper distinctions between EDM subgenres is also crucial because the amalgamation of global EDM culture – incorporating local scenes built around particular subgenres – is scattered among not only musical, but also stylistic, socio-demographic, behavioural and pharmacological distinctions (Measham and Moore 2006: 19). According to my understanding as both researcher and partygoer, different subgenres and local scenes may give birth to very different experiences of a complex EDM phenomenon. To confuse, for example, a large-scale progressive house event with a hard techno club night, would lead to a misunderstanding of their cultural peculiarities. Therefore, the reluctance to make a difference between genre characteristics may undermine even such thorough explorations of the EDM experience as Malbon's (1999) work on clubbing, which chooses the loosely defined category of "Time Out-style clubs" as the common denominator through which the processes of the crowd's experiential consumption are explored. While Malbon (1999: 79) acknowledges the primacy of the music in the clubbing experience, he deliberately refuses to deal with any (sub)genre-specific traits of dance floors, and from a socio-aesthetic point of view his analysis merely scratches the surface of a diverse and fractured cultural phenomenon. Reading this work, one cannot help but imagine the figure of the author wandering in randomly selected art galleries exhibiting rich and varied materials, and trying to discover common traits in the visitors' routines without paying too much attention to the actual works themselves. Apart from overlooking the deeper layers of experiential structures embedded within the very particular clubbing contexts pertaining to the specific subgenres, such an approach also blurs distinctions, which may lead to analytical inaccuracies. For example, Malbon's (1999) work discusses, among other aspects, the engagement of EDM partygoers with dress codes and strict door policies (Malbon 1999: 68), or certain normative capabilities of

the spatial segmentation in clubs (Malbon 1999: 94). Yet these aspects may only be integral to audiences of specific subgenres performed in the overly regulated “pleasure prisons” (Reynolds 1999: 364, 382) of the more commercial venues.

Thornton’s *Club Cultures* (1996), considered by numerous scholars (Demant et al. 2010, Hunt 2010, Butler 2006, Malbon 1999) as one of the influential classics of EDM research, emphasises the significance of “subcultural capital” – following Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital – in the formation of the alternative world of youth club cultures based on shared identities. According to Thornton (1996: 98-115), such communities foster the elitist ideology of the underground which acts as a libratory tool for subordinate youth, defining it against a stereotyped mainstream culture which can only be revealed in the internal discourses of club cultures (and not in the socio-cultural reality). While this line of thought can be contested by arguing that Thornton offers a one-sided approach based on ideological grounds which largely neglects the experiential dimension of EDM cultures (Vitos 2012), my aim here is to focus on the methodological aspects of her research. In her exploration of British clubscapes, the Canadian Thornton occupies the standpoint of the detached observer, feeling separated from the crowd by her age, nationality and work ethic, and considering herself “a stranger in a strange land” (1996: 2-3). Promptly stating that she is worried about her brain cells, Thornton also distances herself from drug use, but admits taking ecstasy on a night out, apparently in order to win the trust of her interlocutors, and also “in the name of thorough research” (1996: 89). However, after stating this she not only fails to give any reflexive account of the consequent drug or dance experience, but ignores the whole topic altogether, and this ignorance is characteristic of the whole book. Gilbert and Pearson (1999: 18-20) rightly note that her research, carried out under the agenda of “the eye is all” reflects a positivist school of sociology clinging tightly to the rational/discursive elements of clubbing, and overlooking its central dance/drug experience. In this way, her work offers a thorough exploration of an exoskeleton of discursive/ideological traces which circumscribes the club culture and distances it from the outside world. This remains hollow without considering the dance floor experience fundamental to EDM cultures.

Such shortcomings can be avoided by occupying the reflexive stance of the partial insider, an approach that delivers an in-depth yet partial understanding of the respective scenes. The main restriction here concerns the generalisation of results: a qualitative (ethnographic) approach to EDM research would take into account influences and

subjectivities through the evaluation of “partial truths” (Clifford 1986a: 7) pertaining to the researcher and the informants derived from one particular section of the scene. Focusing on ethnographic research of contemporary dance music scenes, Bennett (2003) acknowledges the prevalence of such a position among recent music researchers, yet also draws attention to certain pitfalls associated with this approach. Fan-researchers who wish to use insider knowledge or previous experiences to facilitate exploration of ‘cool’ places such as the nightclub should proceed cautiously and self-reflexively, avoiding the taken-for-grantedness of familiar environments, conducting the research with academic rigour, keeping the necessary distance from the field and allowing the fieldwork to be co-produced by researcher and respondent. My previous fieldwork in Central Europe provided me with a good foundation for conducting cautious and rigorous research. My personal and professional background resulted in familiarity with not only the investigated genres but also some of the research methods. Encountering a different socio-cultural context helped me to keep distance and discover nuances that differed from my earlier experiences.

2.3 Researching Local Scenes: A Methodological Model

I have so far discussed on the methodological concerns of researching EDM cultures, particularly focusing on the benefits provided by the (partial) insider position of the researcher. I also highlighted the significance of the music in the dance floor experience and the importance of discussing the particularities of distinct EDM (sub)genres and local scenes. It is now time to address my research methodology. My approach draws on the “socionautic” method proposed by Demant et al. (2010: 248), which is based on a “foray into the atmosphere of clubs, drugs and nightlife, both in the actual presence of the club, the thick descriptions of it and the discussions of the experiences with informants”.

These concerns were apparent during my previous MA research of the Czech psytrance EDM scene, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted primarily at outdoor parties (which most of my interlocutors regarded superior to indoor club events). Participant observation and the subsequent interpretation of experiences constituted the first layer of my fieldwork, aimed at the construction of subjective meanings through the investigation of field experiences within the contexts of my personal knowledge of the psytrance scene and the literature review. These meanings and interpretations were then measured against the accounts and

narratives of partygoers through the employment of individual and focus group interviews, an additional online survey and further in-depth consultations with my key informant.

My comparative research of techno and psytrance scenes in Melbourne employs a similar, qualitative methodology, involving three overlapping stages:

1. Participant Observation

As a starting point, after the literature review, self-reflexive participant observation is conducted at regular techno events held in Melbourne clubs such as the Kronos,¹¹ which often serve as home to underground techno crews. The psytrance research targets the most important bush festivals around Melbourne, together with a few notable club nights such as the ones held in Evermore,¹² a club suitable for small-scale psytrance parties. The aim is the close investigation of the interplay of music, drugs, environment and crowd on the dance floor. This requires maximum proximity to the field, which calls for participant observation. The journeys are followed by evaluation of the insider perspective, facilitated by keeping a field journal in which experiences and reflections are recorded. Through such understanding of “the native’s point of view” and by focusing on both to the particular and the general, the researcher is capable of grasping “experience-near” concepts and placing them “in illuminating connection with experience-distant concepts that theorists have fashioned to capture the general features of social life” (Geertz 1974: 29).

2. Partygoer Interviews (Focus Group and Individual)

The focus groups and individual interviews provide access to histories and experiences of the local scene. This data assists in revealing the mediations of the dance floor and the discursive formulations of the scene. The discussions make use of the results of the participant observation, following the methodology proposed by Demant et al. (2010), where the

ethnographically informed interviews should be based around experiences that are shared between interviewer and interviewee . . . to emphasise the social dimension of drug

¹¹ All venue names have been altered. See Appendix 4.

¹² See Appendix 4.

experiences as central in the club study as well as the active role of the researcher in the production of data (Demant et al. 2010: 248).

The preferred interview format is the focus group, with supplementary follow-up and individual interviews strengthening the results. In both scenes I pay closer attention to four groups of regular partygoers consisting of three to six people. I acknowledge that qualitative research cannot provide statistical generalisations; still, for providing variation in the responses and revealing a broader range of narratives, I aim to address not just one's immediate social network but several groups of friends arriving from various age groups. Purposeful sampling is used to obtain participants, who are either personal field acquaintances who appear to be in possession of valuable insider knowledge, or their knowledgeable friends reached through snowball sampling (by using personal referrals). The focus group environment is invaluable in obtaining information about dance floor particularities, and encouraging debates concerning the similarities and differences of opinion about genres, scenes and related experiences. The participants of the focus groups may reveal differences in musical tastes, partygoer attitudes, substance consumption patterns and degrees of affiliation. The aim is to reach some general agreement beneficial in mapping out the dance floor experience, and possibly to reveal alternative versions of scene histories.

A standardised set of semi-structured interview questions is asked of every focus group, yet the order and probing of questions varies according to the group dynamic. To facilitate and improve the analysis, the interview data is coded in NVivo qualitative research software by categories mainly relating to music, drugs, environment and crowd. The interview guide and the coding categories of the focus groups can be found in Appendix 1.2.

3. Stakeholder Interviews and Media Analysis

The primary concern of the research is not the analysis of infrastructural or institutional frameworks regulating the scenes, but an in-depth analysis of the dance floor experience, which is thoroughly discussed with the selected participants. However, to gain a wider perspective, the interviews sample also includes event organisers and performers. These figures play significant roles in creating and manipulating the atmospherics of the dance floor, and some of the probing questions are engaged with the ways their interventions may shape

the experience. Additionally, some of the (online) media representations of the relevant dance parties are also examined.

The list of the 31 interview participants (including each interviewee's pseudonym, age, gender and involvement in the scene) can be found in Appendix 1.1.

Ethics

To ensure the anonymity of the participants pseudonyms are used throughout the data collection and analysis. Anonymously collected interview data offers the best support for uncovering drug-related mechanisms of EDM scenes. While field notes aid the analytical process, first-hand illustrations of drug experiences would overcome the “reluctant reflexivity” (Measham and Moore 2006) of insider researchers adhering to ethics clearances and funding policies that follow state regulations. Race (2005) identifies an exemplary form of power at work in the governmental regulation of recreational drugs. Exploiting the authoritative discourse of harm minimisation and attempting to control a “medico-moral imagery of the self”, the state stigmatises non-medical drug consumption through the example of the junkie whose life is ruined by drugs (Race 2005). Review boards extend a similar medico-moral discourse to the field of club/drug research in social science. This can be traced to the early history of institutional ethics regulation, when risk minimisation policies of clinical and biomedical research were extended to the humanities and social sciences, although their transferability and adaptation has often been questioned by social scientists (American Association of University Professors 2000, Cribb 2004).

The ethics requirements of conducting EDM fieldwork in Melbourne would not only require the participant-observer to leave the club and cooperate with health professionals if illegal drug consumption is observed, but also demand professional risk and safety assessments of the interview locations and the provision of optional counselling services to interview participants in order to minimize any discomforts deriving from the mere discussion of party drug use. Such guidelines of excessive risk minimisation convey the ignorance of field realities. With respect to club/drug research, institutional ethics committees are comparable to club bouncers in Melbourne, safeguarding little more than the images of their own effectiveness and accountability. Such perspectives are not beneficial to the understanding of

EDM cultures,¹³ pertaining to a hyperrealist discourse of overregulation that is detached from the lived experience of the partygoers; although it has proven to be a distinguishing factor in generating moral panics (Chapter 3.3).¹⁴ The ethical prescriptions of review boards have little to do with the reality and norms of the field, and this disconnection between institutional codes and lived experience can be understood in terms of Baudrillardian simulation through deterrence and branding. This is not dissimilar to recent anti-drug campaigns in Australia employing manipulative media images which are received with bewilderment and ridicule by recreational drug users (Chapter 3.3).

By the application of this multi-method approach and the careful investigation of its results, I aim to deliver an understanding of the respective scenes that is versatile enough to prepare the ground for comparative analysis. The recording of field experiences constitutes the first act of writing up and a key method in building up this understanding, as discussed in the concluding part of this chapter.

2.4 Fieldnotes

If the making of ethnography is indeed an artisanal process, “tied to the worldly work of writing”, its inherently partial – committed and incomplete – truths are determined by powerful ‘lies’ of exclusion and rhetoric (Clifford 1986a: 6-7). Ethnographic texts deliver a culture emergent from the intersection of specific discourses, the negotiated reality of which is multi-subjective and betrays relations of power (Clifford 1986a: 14-15). During the fieldwork the researcher is confronted with amalgams of (textualised) meanings inherent in the field.¹⁵ These are transcribed into allegorical texts from which a range of historically bounded and coercive meanings are available to the competent reader (Clifford 1986b: 110).

The transcribing process consists of multiple steps, of which the first and closest to the actual fieldwork is the production of fieldnotes. This stage is interconnected with ethnographic participation or immersion into others’ lives through which the researcher constructs multiple

¹³ Of course I am not referring to the basic principle of respecting and not jeopardizing the participants of field research but to the practical requirements of procedural ethics.

¹⁴ For the sake of simplicity I refer to Chapter sections as Chapters throughout the thesis.

¹⁵ Clifford, referring to Derrida, claims that cultures “are always already writing themselves” by repeatedly textualising meanings through articulation, classification, oral literature or inscription in ritual acts (Clifford 1986b: 117-118).

truths and meanings (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 1-3). To keep the productive dialectic between 'doing' and 'writing' tight, it is important to document social and interactional processes close to the moment of occurrence, which facilitates detailed processual interpretation or Geertzian (1973) "thick description" that grasps the active doing of social life in its context (Emerson et al. 1995: 11-14). Jotting fieldnotes becomes the primordial process of textualisation prefiguring the final text, during which the researcher is already engaged in transcribing field experiences through interpretation and sense-making (Emerson et al. 1995: 16).

The need for the relative contemporaneity of writing fieldnotes with experiencing the field poses a number of methodological questions. First of all, the researcher must decide how, when and where to make jottings (Emerson et al. 1995: 19-26). Writing materials may include small notepads or folded papers, and the writing technique may employ private systems of abbreviations or formal transcribing systems which are also useful for protecting the confidentiality of the material. Depending on the context of research, one can write notes overtly in the presence of field participants, establishing a note-taker role already early in the research. Another option is to tactfully opt for private jotting to avoid disturbing the research process by retreating to private places or writing notes immediately after leaving the field. Above all, fieldnotes should be used as mnemonic devices, and the researcher should develop his or her own jotting style targeting easily forgettable features and qualities (Emerson et al. 1995: 31-35). This may include key components of observed scenes and interactions such as immediate fragments of action or key quotes from conversations. Close descriptions should be favoured instead of generalisations and rushed conclusions, paying particular attention to easily forgettable sensory details. Jotting can also be used to signal general impressions or feelings often relying on intuition, which may later give way to more profound and exhaustive analyses in the final text (Emerson et al. 1995: 31-35).

The occupation of either insider or outsider status has direct consequences on research practices, including the production of fieldnotes. As discussed earlier, my research makes use of the advantages of an insider position; consequently the informal behavioural codes of insider clubbing should be respected. This involves a certain duty to party or obedience to the dance floor: the necessary and socially expected direct experience of a continuous flow of mediating technologies impedes not only verbal communication or one-on-one data gathering, but poses methodological problems to recording practices as well (Bennett 2003: 190-192).

Therefore, fieldnotes recorded on the spot can only be compact, relatively superficial and fragmented in time; continuous and detailed recording of insights would be extremely problematic.

My fieldwork is conducted predominantly in nightclubs and at festivals, where the dance floor provides context for recreational activities often accompanied by the use of drugs. Overt note taking would not only breach the above mentioned behavioural code of insider clubbing; it would also make explicit the formal recording of potentially illicit activities and should be therefore considered intrusive and inappropriate in such settings. Instead, important and easily forgettable insights may be recorded privately, for instance in the 'chill out' zones and smoking areas of the venues. Lavatories should not be used when they are overcrowded, which is quite likely to happen at popular events. A reasonable simultaneous note taking-method is the textual or vocal recording of key issues into a mobile phone, which can provide the basis for later fieldnotes. Short textual notes may be quickly recorded on the dance floor, while the smoking areas of the venues may provide sufficient silence and privacy for vocal recordings. Speaking into the phone for approximately two to three minutes while smoking a cigarette does not disrupt the flow of the party and neither does it attract much attention. Indeed the results of recent British fieldwork (Moore 2006) suggest that mobiles in clubbing environments appear as familiar technological artefacts signifying safe and private spaces.

During my previous fieldwork in the Czech psytrance scene I often noted down experiences and insights privately in the morning hours, preferably immediately after leaving the dance floor. The participant observation is often an all night long, continuous and organic process, and its retrospective evaluation can be particularly productive. The musical journeys of psytrance dance floors, for instance, may lead through various subgenres, traversing through night and day. Prolonged participation generates valuable insights and feelings of understanding, which should be jotted down as soon as the process is over and while the experience is still fresh in memory.

Issues to be recorded instantly on the spot include striking details of technological mediations, or spatial and temporal organisation. Personal impressions relating to changes in music and environment should also be recorded, together with the observed social interactions. For example, during my previous psytrance fieldwork the mornings occasionally captured participants high on psychedelic drugs, still not fully aware of their surroundings and

trapped into a nonsensical flamboyance of intoxication which I quickly noted down as the “attractions of an alien zoo”. Such jottings have led in the final analysis to the assertions that

the working mechanism of the psychedelic drug assures that each participant acquires a different (alien) perspective on the performance, the only unifying point being the common sense of uncertainty. The dancer is seduced by a system which seals up and devours meaning; its rules describe the absence of rules (Vitos 2010).

While participant observation in clubs is not targeted at conducting on-site interviews, engaging conversations may occur in the designated smoking areas of the venues – which serve as practical chat environments – and in this case key phrases may be recorded (of course, such data would exclude non-smokers from the sample). The chill out rooms may also be suitable for conversations, although in small clubs the loud music of the main dance floor may interfere.

To sum up, when making jottings particular care should be taken to ensure that recording does not hinder participation on the dance floor. More thorough field notes should be taken immediately after the party is over, when the events are still fresh in the mind. With the help of a mobile phone, strikingly relevant observations may be quasi-simultaneously voice recorded in the smoking or resting areas of the parties, or recorded in short textual notes straight on the dance floor. This particular method also illustrates the researcher’s role in the generation of empirical data, referring back to the partial insider approach discussed earlier. To maximise the efficiency of data collection, the fieldwork should be started from a blank slate (which is actually half-blank, displaying vague imprints of the researcher’s background), and let meaning creation and theoretical development be influenced by local particularities and voices from the sampled sub-section of the field.

3. A Research Perspective on EDM Parties

The musical attributes of EDM (sub)genres are interconnected with various socio-aesthetic sensibilities, which St John (2009: 103) situates along a spectrum of interrelated vibes. As suggested by the term *vibe*, the archetypal dimension of EDM cultures is rooted in the communal dance experience. This experiential component is closely related to drug consumption, an indispensable link in the drug-music-visuals-dancers ensemble of dance floors (Gore 1997). Numerous concepts have been offered for a somewhat loose description of the drug-induced party experience, such as the “oceanic experience” (Malbon 1999), “desubjectification” (Landau 2004) or the “experience of a transcendental universality” (Rietveld 2004). However, these concepts are more useful in discussing EDM dance floors from a broader perspective, and fail to notice crucial differences between the distinct party experiences characterising the various EDM genres and scenes. Another approach resides in the discussion of the discourses and ideologies inherent in EDM cultures, and revealing the power relations betrayed by these dimensions. Such issues are addressed in Thornton’s (1996) influential work, which, among others, focuses on the relevance of the accumulation of prestigious “subcultural capital” among British club cultures. However, Thornton’s work largely neglects the experience of clubbing itself, and leaves little room for the exploration of events on the dance floor (Malbon 1999: 17).

Setting out from the intersections of particular genres and local scenes, my project addresses the central experience of the dance floor from which the *vibe* of the local party emerges, exploring the ways in which this experience is interrelated with the contemporary “digital aesthetics” which, instead of focusing upon an eternal idea of art or beauty, is engaged in the endless transformation of our sense of perception through technology (Murphie and Potts 2002: 84). This differential aesthetic acquires a multi-dimensional depth in EDM: not only is the sound and the music under continuous manipulation by means of various effects and remixes, but the effects of sound systems and visuals at EDM parties are further transformed by the medium of psychoactive drugs, the consumption patterns of which may vary from scene to scene. The ontological embedding of this aesthetic can be understood by means of the Baudrillardian concept of the hyperreal, emerging in this case not from the media’s impregnation of everyday life, but from a conscious submission to mediating technologies at parties. This chapter offers a perspective on music and drug consumption in the broader

context of EDM and explores its specific relevance in consumer culture. Consequently, this chapter is conceptually dense, and it aims to build up a theoretical framework that provides entry points for the analysis of the techno and psytrance scenes in Melbourne.

3.1 Theorising the Electronic Dance Floor

The inherent meaning of dance events resides in the embodied experience of dancing (Ward 1997), the ritual context of which is often devoid of referential messages or at the very least detached from textual explanations, as indicated by the frequent lack of lyrics and the scarcity of ideological references in EDM tracks. Another characteristic of EDM is its obsession with the raw material of the sound and the application of effects. The latter is also reflected in the prevalence of drug consumption, the vibe being broadcast through the drug-fuelled medium of the electronic dance floor. These elements seem to carry McLuhan's (1964) thesis "the medium is the message" to its extreme by the eradication of the content-message from the formula, and point towards Baudrillardian simulated territories. Similar to science fiction, Baudrillard's work can be considered hyperbolic and futuristic, and his work from the 1970s and 1980s can be regarded more as visionary theory than conventional social science. Considering that these past visions are crystallised in contemporary cyber-cultural phenomena, particularly with the development of new media and mobile communication technologies (Wise 2013), and the inherent concern of EDM resides in the application, exploitation and exploration of various media, many of Baudrillard's then-futuristic concepts can be usefully applied in the discussion of EDM-related phenomena evolving from the 1980s to the present.

Of course, this in itself is nothing new: already in the early 1990s Baudrillard's concepts were used in Redhead's (1993a) edited volume. In this volume early U.K. raves allowed partygoers to disappear into technological dreamscapes of sound (Melechi 1993: 34) or surrender to a complete void of meaning (Rietveld 1993: 65). In these texts there is less concern about the actual music played or the discussion of the experience itself, except for treating the latter as a black box of complete ambiguity or semantic void, which puts an end to any further discussion through short-circuiting analysis. I contend that while it is indeed useful to set it out from Baudrillardian simulational logic, the discussion of the electronic dance floor should also expand this model – especially when taking into account genre peculiarities and

processes of technological reappropriation. Instead of reduplicating the working mechanisms of mass media or Disneyland, the EDM phenomenon is capable of altering the simulacrum in particular ways.

In this section I outline some of the Baudrillardian terminology that, in addition to the epistemological considerations of Chapter 2.1, provides a context for the semiotic analyses of this thesis. In his work *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard (1993a: 50-67) distinguishes between three orders of simulacra, exemplified through three historical periods. His semiotic theory sets off from the assumption of a rigid symbolic order in caste-based and traditional societies, determining “reciprocal obligations between castes, clans or persons” (Baudrillard 1993a: 51). Here the production and circulation of signs is restricted and their mixing is punished as an offence against the symbolic order of things. This order is loosened in the Renaissance, where the obligatory signs are counterfeited through first-order simulacra operating on the natural law of value. The stucco angel is born. Baudrillard subordinates such Renaissance characteristics as the illusionist stucco interiors of the Baroque or the theatricality of the social life to a metaphysics of the counterfeit. The introduction of stucco as a material replaces the natural with a synthetic substance and is capable of mirroring all other substances, reflecting the political aspiration towards an “earthly demiurgy” (Baudrillard 1993a: 51) or universal control, exemplified in the tactics of the Jesuit counter-reformation (Baudrillard 1993a: 52).

The second order appears with the Industrial Revolution, where the serial reproduction of objects and signs is no longer tied to caste traditions, and the simulacrum evades the earlier reference to the natural, operating on the market law of value (Baudrillard 1993a: 55). Signs circulate within their own immanent contexts, and instead of the analogy between original and counterfeit, the only relationship at work is that of equivalence between identical objects. The McLuhanian message of the foundational technology does not rely in the use value of the produced objects but in the medium’s capability of “serial repetition” (Baudrillard 1993a: 56), which obscures the natural referent: rows of angels on the conveyor belt. This phase of reproduction transfers to the third order, where technology as a medium (rather than a Marxian productive force) becomes “the form and principle of an entirely new generation of meaning” (Baudrillard 1993a: 56), and simulation carries out the production of the real according to the generative core of the model or the code. Operating on structures and binary oppositions, the code provides a grid-like determination of potentially mobile meanings and

values, which are not synchronous with the categories of a 'natural' system, and transcendental finality is substituted by (hyper)operational modelling (Baudrillard 1993a: 57-58). Such models as the genetic code overwrite reality as simulacrum of objectivity, continuing in fact the Jesuit project of social control: angel in the incubator.

Through these three successive forms, with each blossoming out from the previous one, the simulacrum gradually passes from a universe of natural laws to one of structures and binary oppositions. As Merrin (2005: 32) contends, this historical division is not the only one offered by Baudrillard, and according to certain objections it provides a historically suspect or nostalgic perspective. My project is aware of this criticism and is not focused on exploring the historical legitimacy of this genealogy; rather it draws on Merrin's (2005: 32) claim that Baudrillard's exploration of "how our experiential reality has become a modelled, precessionary, semiotic production [is] among the most important contemporary contributions to social and cultural theory". The second section of this chapter considers an analogous development in EDM production from the counterfeit of a natural referent to the simulation based on the precession of the model. In some of his later writings Baudrillard designates a fourth order of simulation, the fractal stage, in which "there is no point of reference at all, and value radiates in all directions" (Baudrillard 1993b: 5). This infinite proliferation of the sign is generated by models as in the third stage and can be considered a variant of the third order (Hegarty 2004: 64). The fractal form is not addressed in this chapter but will return in Chapter 10.

In the genealogy of the simulacrum the development of the three orders is successive in time, although they can coexist with each other. In the final phase, under the metaphysical principle of digitality, the simulacrum operates through trajectories such as genetic engineering, binary code and mass media. When the real reduplicates enough, it collapses into the hyperreal, a realm of self-referential, generative simulation that brings forth the aesthetic hallucination of reality (Baudrillard 1993a: 74). Here the aesthetic pleasure is not derived from locating the natural within the artificial or through art's contemplative and critical distancing from the real, but "by its elevation to the second degree" in the midst of a fascination with special effects within an environment saturated by travelling signs (Baudrillard 1993a: 75). Reality becomes inseparable from its own image and is dominated by simulation, "a schizophrenic vertigo of serial signs that have no counterfeit, no possible sublimation, and are immanent to their own repetition" (Baudrillard 1993a: 75). The result is therefore an artificial

code which demolishes external references and critique, or simulates these through duplication. A typical example provided by Baudrillard is mass media which broadcasts any array of news, fictional programs and advertisements imperturbably and in arbitrary order regardless of their content. This indifference towards the content-referent points both to the equivalence of signs derived from their referential emptiness and to the assignment of values by the medium.

While Baudrillardian terminology may provide a broader semiotic framework for situating the electronic dance experience, its closer, micro-level social analysis may be assisted by Hennion's discussions of taste. Rather than following social theories which consider aesthetic experience an illusory byproduct of social negotiations or collective activities based on non-artistic principles, Hennion (2003) calls for an investigation of taste and aesthetic pleasure as described and experienced by actors themselves. This is facilitated by focusing on the agents of mediation from which the appreciation of art emerges and investigating the social contexts interrelated with the productive moments of aesthetic pleasure. Mediations are integrated into the music itself, and provide rich and "empirical means for identifying the progressive appearance of the work and its reception" (Hennion 2003: 85). Music can be thus viewed as "a ceremony of pleasure" (Hennion 2001: 17), the productive structure of which is meticulously prearranged, reliant on various mediatory practices, body techniques, consumption patterns and discursive elements.

What role is assigned to the subject during the evaluation of aesthetic experience? According to Hennion (2001: 12), the mere act of listening to music arises from a mixture of passive and active states reliant on both control and surrender. Listening is an activity aimed at giving up control to its object, an employment of various mediations prospectively carrying out the loss of the subject in passion. For the scope of my research, it can be stated that the arrangements of the electronic dance floor allow similar, embodied experiences, which are reliant on agents of mediation such as the carefully constructed musical/visual/social environment or the consumed drug. In prior research on clubbing, Malbon (1998: 271-276) discusses the sensuous experience of the dance floor dependent on factors such as the potentially transformative music (which is mediated through technology), the pleasure of being together with (selected) others, recreational drugs acting as catalysts, the light effects used and the darkness that facilitates escape from the everyday world. The result is a temporary state of self-abandonment which Jackson (2004: 135-139) describes as an intensified

and socialised form of pleasure fluctuating through three interconnected channels. Jackson discusses physical abandonment, of giving oneself to the music through body techniques and dancing, emotional abandonment, of savouring or expressing intensified emotions through a drug-affected body, and social abandonment, a leaving behind of some of the formal constraints and anxieties of the everyday.

3.2 Music and Mediation: “I Love Acid for the Way It Changes Flow”¹

In the analysis of the dance experience, a primary investigation should be engaged with the musical object, which is already shaped by various mediating agents during the production process. Hennion outlines the following flow through which much of popular music is produced. The studio as a “mechanical octopus” (Hennion 1989: 410) extracts raw material from the structured networks of society, which is then rearranged and reconstructed through the work of producers and artistic directors, who are in fact mediators of the public or capable of predicting a potential public and thus “recomposing it in miniature, inside the artist” (Hennion 1989: 414). The musical object emerges as an isolated product only during the final meeting of artist and audience; apart from this, both music and public are continuously shaped by mediations. In many cases, EDM performances are improvisational, and the music undergoes constant transformations during the performance, influenced by the interaction between DJ and audience. At many parties, tracks are significantly altered through effects and subordinated to the flow of the mix, which is not predetermined but reliant upon the public’s responses. The public in this way is indeed incorporated into the music, but not through the mediating agent of the artistic director (EDM production, requiring relatively accessible tools, is often carried out entirely by the artist/producer) but primarily through a flux of interactions within the environment of the club.

EDM production deviates from the workflow outlined by Hennion at another important point. At the beginning of the production process raw material may indeed be extracted from the world, yet the reconstruction does not necessarily reconcile these components with the discursive contexts of the everyday. Similar to a musical meta-language, much of EDM is explicitly concerned with the qualities of the medium into which it is embedded; the ‘content’

¹ Lyrics fragment from acid downtempo track “I Love Acid” by Luke Vibert (2003).

of most tracks is generally very limited or subordinated to this primal concern, and lyrics are either non-existent or applied as atmospheric effects reinforcing the sound. Seen through a Baudrillardian lens, EDM production has been governed by simulation from its earliest years, when artists started to ‘misuse’ synthesisers and drum machines – which were originally designed to substitute for ‘real’ instruments as counterfeit or representation – as simulacra. In the case of such instruments of which the operation is not based on playback of recordings – such as acoustic instruments, but also the electric guitar – the sound material pre-exists before the performance as a potentiality within the sphere of the imaginary, being actualised in the ‘original’ moment of the performance. By using a synthesiser as fake instrument, a first order (counterfeit) simulacrum is produced that refers to this original. Most DJs, however, manipulate with artificial sign sequences stored within a non-imaginary data bank (drum machine, vinyl, computer storage device, etc.) where this referentiality has been eliminated, within a context prescribing their operation as copies without originals.²

The intention of many early EDM producers was not to create replicas but ‘machinic’ sounds, rhythms and effects never heard before, and to put them into circulation within their immanent techno-aesthetic contexts, with this creative misappropriation of technology being carried over to contemporary hybrid sound production methods incorporating the use of computers (Butler 2006: 67-70). Moreover, the inexhaustible manufacturing of repetitive sound patterns in EDM, traceable to the working mechanisms of the drum machine, is reminiscent of a possible modality of simulation evoked by Baudrillard (1993a: 72-73): the serial form of models generated in infinite chains, which carries out the murder of the original through its infinite diffraction into itself. This process can be originally reproduced in the historical-cultural context of an art movement, such as Warhol’s early production series of soup cans through which he “attacked the concept of originality in an original way” (Baudrillard 1997d: 11). Similarly, much of the characteristic ‘machinic’ sound of EDM is derived from a series of sound patterns returning into themselves and generally aligned with a repetitive flow of bass. This diminishes temporal referentiality and contributes to the illusion of a timeless progression at parties. Such structural mechanisms and the possibilities of their disturbances will be discussed in detail in the context of psytrance and techno. For the scope

² Or alternatively, the copy becomes the original in the context of a simulated system of codes.

of this chapter, it is enough to state that this structural particularity produces a second modality of simulation in the music.

These mechanisms were already apparent in the early years of EDM in its first manifestations such as house and techno. House music had originally been popular among a hedonistic, gay black community of early 1980s Chicago, and later gained increasing popularity in the U.K., especially with the advent of acid house, a subgenre developed by the accidental misuse of the Roland TB-303 synthesiser resulting in peculiar quirky and squelchy noises (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 292-319). This highly influential acid sound, praised by an interviewee of this project for its hallucinogenic capabilities when simultaneously consuming drugs, was not only able to change the flow of sense perception but also the sound of several EDM subgenres subsequent to acid house. As outlined in Chapter 2.1, techno was invented by middle class black youth of the late 1980s Detroit, yet after its second wave it ceased to be 'black' music. However, some of the Detroit artists did not even regard it as a race-bound phenomenon (May 2006: 345-349). A similar detachment from black realities is discussed in *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, a work by Eshun (1998) on the musical manifestations of black science fiction sensibilities. Eshun situates Detroit techno within the aesthetic movement of Afrofuturism, and explains that in contrast with, for example, the street reality of mainstream hip hop, the genre is engaged with the unreality-principle of a sonic science developing the "alien discontinuum" of machine music. With the abstraction of techno, according to Eshun (1998: 107) "the machine goes mental", it "turns the soul into sound-fx" and burns out colour. Eshun notes that there was a general confusion about the skin colour of the first Detroit techno producers: "Nobody escapes the way machines scramble identity. . . . The sampler doesn't care who you are" (Eshun 1998: 123).

The development of this machine aesthetic can be seen in fact as an organic development in the historical context of 20th century Western popular music. Hennion (2003: 88) suggests that the passage from rock to rap coincided with a conflict between different media, with the performance being transferred from the mythical stage of the rock concert to the familiar environment of the black (ghetto) neighbourhood, making use of previous reproduction mediums such as record decks as instruments in their own right, providing a cheap means for local creation. In a different way EDM continues this shift through a further emancipation of the medium at the expense of human agency. It not only makes use of the

turntable – and, later on, the computer – as a musical instrument, employed according to the principle of simulation, but also disintegrates the aura of urban realities within the sparks and flashes of a (predominantly) nocturnal party environment.

This hyperreal transformation is enabled by the additional mediating technology of the recreational drug. The following section discusses the particularities of the drug as a medium that becomes the message by profoundly transforming its socio-cultural context (McLuhan 1964: 9). I employ the interchangeable terms of technology and medium with their physical validity in mind, relating to the drug's mediation of neurotransmission, which is outlined in Chapter 4.6.

3.3 Drugs and Consumer Culture: "Take a Trip. There's Acid in My Fridge"³

In various traditional societies, the consumption of psychoactive drugs, such as hallucinogenic plants among Native Americans, not only disturbs the categories of everyday reality but also takes place in a highly structured, ritualistic framework inseparable from cultural and religious systems (Davis 1985). At the symbolic level, traditional rituals provide access to “a world beyond process”: by leaving the mundane world behind, the participant can be part of a permanent, life-transcending entity (Bloch 1992: 3–4). At EDM parties the modified context of consumption dissolves the universality of this content-referent, often leading to a nonrepresentational engagement with the medium of the drug, which is aligned with the flow of the music. The consensual ‘code’ of contemporary Western culture defines the possible effect mechanisms in terms of a molecular process of interaction with neurotransmitters within the body. This is the point where the adaptation of a Baudrillardian framework proves useful. My argument is that party drug use⁴ can be understood as a particular form of consumption that is both generated and condemned in consumer culture, and evades the category of the transcendental. In the discussion of this statement I refer to the text of Van Ree (2002) that draws on sociological theories of consumption, including those of Baudrillard and Featherstone.

³ Lyrics fragment from minimal tech-house track “Acid in My Fridge” by Dinky (2005).

⁴ Redhead (1993b: 7) distinguishes between frequent or daily drug use, which notably includes the consumption of opiates, and the less frequent, recreational use of party drugs such as MDMA, which typically occurs during the weekends without significantly affecting one's ability to work.

Recreational drug use is an extremely potent product of consumer culture, capable of fulfilling the aesthetic hallucination of consumer reality to its extremes. However, it is rather detached from more mainstream social trends which criminalise or pathologise it, or resimulate it through media panics. At this point it should be noted that this thesis adopts a constructionist perspective, which suggests that it is discourses on drugs that produce drugs as a social problem (Redhead, 1993b: 7). Throughout the history of EDM, party drug use often contributed to emerging moral panics associated with subsequent criminalisation and legislative incorporation of parties. Media coverage of new "folk devils" (Cohen 1972) were in this way influencing restrictive legislations including sections of the 1994 *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act* in the U.K. (Gore 1997: 56-57), the 1997 *Draft Code of Practice for Dance Parties* in Australia (Homan 1998: 72) or the 2002 *RAVE (Reducing America's Vulnerability to Ecstasy) Act* in the U.S. (St John 2009: 9-10). Criminalisation is, however, not applied to substances such as alcohol and tobacco, which are also consumed for their taste or smell: Van Ree (2002) argues that this practice may render their use apparently more useful and therefore more acceptable. The consumption of illegal drugs is detached from practices of tasting and smelling, and hence can be deemed more wasteful. It ultimately provides an intensified self-image of consumer culture, something which the very same culture strives to conceal. This is reflected in the criminalisation of recreational drugs, which, however, renders their use even more desirable for the consumer, since it reiterates the consumer trend of individualism. "Defiant consumption", Van Ree (2002: 352) concludes, "has become an established aspect of the Western consumer society".

I will expand this argument in the context of EDM parties, also touching on divergences from more mainstream trends of consumption. Baudrillard (1998: 31) employs the metaphor of the Melanesian cargo cult to explain the continuous need for consumption generated by Western societies. Observing the air cargos arriving for the whites, the Melanesian natives built a simulacrum of an airplane and designated a landing ground, waiting for the aid of their ancestors to arrive. According to Baudrillard (1998: 31-34), consumer culture cherishes a similar premise of abundance as natural right, being governed by a form of magical thinking that overshadows the use value of its products and leads to the consumption of hyperreal fantasies mediated through mass communication technologies. Through the proliferation of objects and signs, consumers are presented with the myth of affluence; it is the abundance of fantasies

trapped in consumed signs that is aimed “to conjure away the real with the signs of the real” (Baudrillard 1998: 33). The fantastic quest for pleasure, thrill and hallucination is addressed by mass media in general and advertisements in particular. The advertisement is of interest to Baudrillard (1998: 127) because it is potentially situated “beyond the true and the false”; the craft of the advertiser is not of deceit but synthesis of immanent truth, a hope-promoting, “self-fulfilling prophecy” that is ratified by the customer. The advertisement effaces the anterior truth of the ‘real’ reflected in the use value of the product and overwrites this referential dimension with simulated fantasies. This “turns the object into a pseudo-event, which will become the real event of daily life through the consumer's endorsing its discourse” (Baudrillard 1998: 127). The discourse of the advertisement becomes tautological, subordinated exclusively to the image of the brand (Baudrillard 1998: 128).

The fabric of consumer culture is thus interwoven with layers of simulation. This contributes to the overall aestheticisation of everyday life, the carnivalesque character of which can be historically traced back to the Middle Ages (Featherstone 1991: 125). Indeed this process is strongly reflected in the working mechanisms of recreational drugs:

Remarkably, in works on consumer culture drugs are almost never treated, though the thesis that this culture produces dream-worlds with a hallucinatory quality simply cries out for that. Once again, drugs are *the* product of consumer culture. Drugs *are* dream-worlds. In contrast to supermarkets, theme parks or even ‘virtual reality’, drugs create an inescapable, real dream-world within our own minds. A culture, which invests so much effort to construct ever more complete dream-worlds, is almost bound to be fascinated by drugs (Van Ree 2002: 351-352).

At the same time, party drug use differs from the consumption of more mainstream products not just in its legal but also in its ontological status, which extends beyond mass media simulations. The hyperreal effect of the intensively advertised products involves the replacement of the object’s practical use value with fantastic qualities sustaining the consumer myth of affluence. In contrast, for partygoers the foremost truth of drugs resides in their use value which in itself fulfils the promises of pleasure, thrill and hallucination by altering the perception of surroundings synchronously with the musical structures. It is not the sign of the phenomenon that is consumed, but the phenomenon itself; the brand is eliminated from the advertising formula and the prophecy is replaced by instant effect. Instead of circulating in the semiotic domain, the simulacrum is ‘downloaded’ into the physical space. Of course, the

intimacy of the physical connection is also different, the drug being absorbed by the consumer's body.

This difference can be illustrated with the banal advertisement of a convenience store signboard I recently spotted at Bondi Beach, Sydney, stating that ice cream makes you happy. The statement has been reinforced in mass media such as the online *Guardian* (Adam 2005) referring to a recent scientific study – funded by an ice cream distributor. By consuming signs of happiness distributed by various advertising agents, the myth of affluence is thus efficiently sustained and also connected to the discourse of science, which circulates as an additional myth ratified by the consumption of the product. Yet considering the use value of products, several hours of long lasting intensive pleasure and indeed 'happiness' is caused not by ice cream but by MDMA, the recreational drug also known by the street name of 'ecstasy', used predominantly in dancing/clubbing contexts (Malbon 1999: 117). In contrast with the hyperbolic advertising message reinforcing the myth, the truth residing in the use value of MDMA is endowed with the savage overflow of instant happiness, with pharmacological effects of the drug including feelings of euphoria and a heightened sense of well-being, and the intensification of sensory stimuli and perception, sometimes to the point of hallucination (Reynolds 1999: 83). Not only the need for happiness, but also the need for thrill, adventure and engagement with the exotic Other (Said 1978) targeted, for example, by travel agency advertisements is satisfied by the drug-infused experience of EDM parties and festivals, from the post-apocalyptic urban environments of techno squat parties to outdoor psytrance festivals employing Oriental iconographies. These experiential encounters with the fantastic Other are often connected to the use of psychedelic drugs such as the widespread 'acid' (LSD).

Yet drugs in Western societies, as discussed earlier, are generally criminalised and sometimes resimulated in deterrence campaigns employing mass media images and narratives. A recent example from Australian media is the Face the Facts campaign including billboards and posters showing an imaginary drug lab equipped in a toilet in a disastrous condition ("Made using drain cleaner, battery acid or even hair bleach. Then popped in your mouth. Ecstasy. Face facts."), complemented by a design competition for T-shirts to be distributed at festivals. The campaign reiterates well established advertising formulas by attempting to convey itself with the aura of factuality in terms of its marketing strategy. This particular example of simulation as strategy of deterrence (Baudrillard 1994a: 7) only has the potential to reconstruct realities external to recreational drug users. Obviously such images have very little

in common with the knowledge and experiences of partygoers who are probably more educated in this topic than assumed by experts.⁵

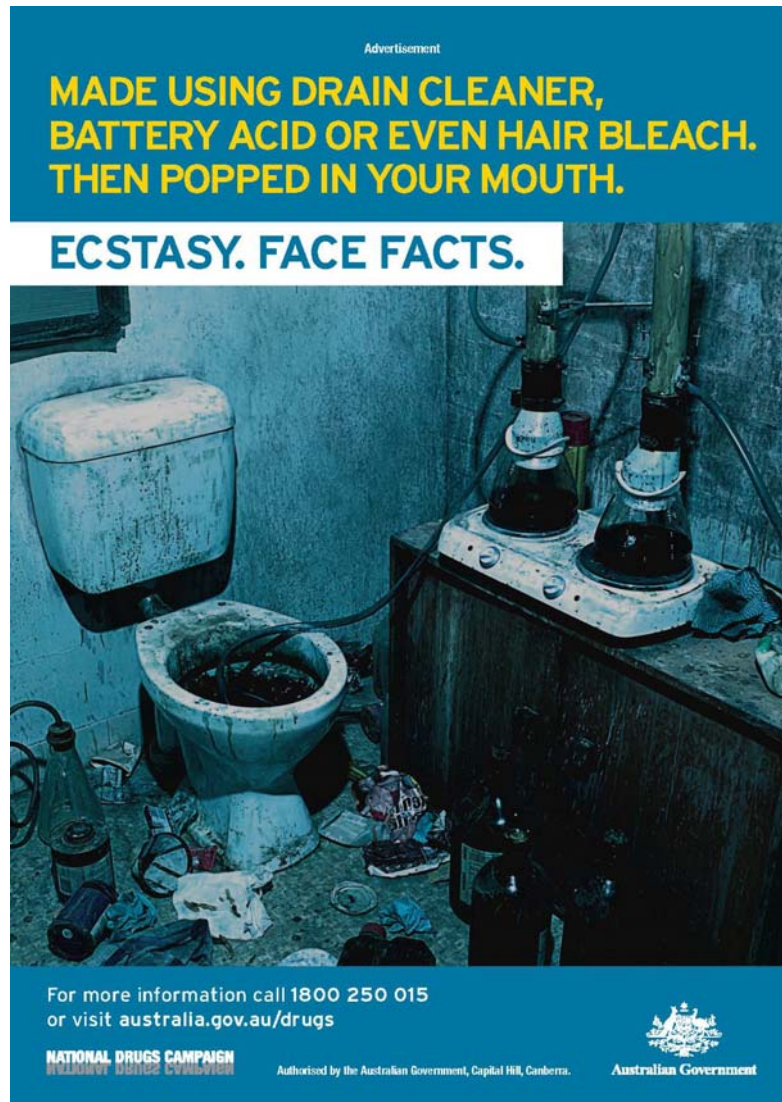


Figure 2: Ecstasy. Face Facts Campaign (Australian Government Department of Health 2012)

⁵ Reactions to the campaign by posters of an Internet forum include: “I believe whoever is cooking the MDMA in Australia would have a MUCH nicer toilet than that!”
“I wonder if these people have actually tried MDMA.....”
“Don't take ecstasy, use tobacco and booze, we can tax that!”
“Was this advertised to primary shool [sic] students or something?”
“That guy David Nutt, was fired from his lucrative [UK] Government position for publishing the results of that study [suggesting the relative harmlessness of cannabis, LSD and MDMA compared to alcohol and tobacco].”
(Bluelight Forum 2012)

The experiential effect of the drug overshadows the efficiency of the images employed in the semiotic offensive of the policy-makers, leaving the campaign to seem ridiculous to partygoers. Therefore the campaign is inefficient for its alleged scope, but can still contribute to the distancing between drug use and more mainstream consumption practices, which may enhance the drug-product by boosting its Otherness-potential or its efficiency as a vehicle for sustaining consumer culture's myth of individuality and independence (Van Ree 2002: 352). Here the Baudrillardian code simulates the possibility of leaving the system behind by means of a social meta-language (the legislative criminalisation and mass media stigmatisation of a normative function cherishes the perceived independence of the music scene), reduplicating its critique and twisting back to its very own (amplified) categories (individualities constructed through hedonistic consumption).

Consequently, the potential of drugs as simulacra is enhanced by both legislative and ontological detachment from daily practices. Colourful pills and white powders stand out from the greyness of their everyday environment, potentially reconfiguring the context of surrounding reality according to their internal (molecular) codes. While in traditional societies the drug effect not only disturbs the categories of the everyday but also flows into the permanence of a symbolic system such as a religious belief system, the consensual code of contemporary Western culture prescribes the possible effect mechanisms in terms of a molecular process of interaction with neurotransmitters within the brain. Psychedelic drugs such as acid deserve a special designated place in the consumer's fridge because the acid 'trip' potentially triggers a series of 'hyperillusory' (Vitos 2010: 162) hallucinations continuously overwriting the use values of surrounding objects.

Contrary to most contemporary simulation processes that naturalise consumer reality and sustain its myths, the powerful psychotropic effect tears up this cover as it spectacularly disturbs and overwrites the sign systems of the everyday. This was suggested by the interviewees of my previous research on the Czech psytrance scene, who claimed that the psychedelic effect of drugs produced the illusion of a 'deeper' reality only in the first phase of their 'career' of drug consumption. After more prolonged use, the attentive user may realise the artificiality of the process, which, however, at this point turns the objective reality of his

everyday world into simulacrum (Vitos 2010).⁶ Reflecting on the saturation of the world of consumption, Baudrillard (2002: 97-98) discusses drug use as “both apogee and parody of the same consumption”. Rather than being linked to disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, recreational drug use arises in cultures strongly affected by simulation as a “communal reflex of misbehaviour in the face of universal normalization, rationalization, and programming” (Baudrillard 2002: 99). This overregulation is carried out not by the political absolutism of a repressive regime but by the invisible penetration of the code, which determines the hierarchy of signs and suspends symbolic relations. As discussed however, the drug acts as a particularly potent simulation technology capable of tearing its own cover of objectivity apart.

3.4 The Dance Floor Experiment: “Welcome to My Laboratory”⁷

At EDM parties, drugs are thus effectively employed as technologies of pleasure, thrill and hallucination, with their catalytic effects emerging from careful arrangements. Gomart and Hennion (1999) discuss both drug and music ‘addiction’ under the same terms, relating them to the employment of individual strategies for reaching transformative states of passion. The drug is not a goal in itself, but rather, as also suggested by my research in the Czech psytrance scene (Vitos 2010), a catalyst that assists in the emergence of certain highly valued states.

To further understand this process of drug-induced transformation, I first consider Baudrillard's (1994a: 100-102) reflections on the ontological implications of “psychotropic” drug use. If body modification in the mechanical age was exotechnical, then present “soft technologies” (Baudrillard 1994a: 100), such as genetic or mental software, are acting internally. Abstract molecular codes such as DNA act as original models and supply meanings for the body which, in this de-individualised manner, becomes a serial reproduction of cybernetic codes. As long as the technology is employed instrumentally to preserve the consensual-discursive representation of the body or to repair an organ, the (Western) model of the body is not radically altered (Baudrillard 1994a: 101). This model can, however, be disturbed

⁶ Of course, the subjective interpretation of this effect may vary. In recent research on U.K. clubbing (Rief 2009), some respondents regarded drug-influenced encounters in clubs as not real or of illusory character, while others connected these to genuine or real feelings. The responses commonly expressed reactions to a blurring between the boundaries of reality and illusion, and the disturbance of categories of authenticity and reality (Rief 2009: 110-131).

⁷ Lyrics fragment from electro track “Welcome to My Laboratory” by Anthony Rother (2008).

by transfiguring the body into a psychotropic formula through an internal modelling without respect to the external perspective of representation.

Recreational drug use involves an internalisation of the medium that is reminiscent of Brian O'blivion's statement from David Cronenberg's (1983) movie *Videodrome*: "The television screen is the retina of the mind's eye, therefore the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain". Similarly, Baudrillard (2002: 179) defines the computer not as an external object but as a "true prosthesis" standing in intersensory relation with the user, who becomes "an ectoplasm of the screen". However, the offline physical space wedged between the screen and the human body is capable of disturbing the transmission and points at the hyperbolic nature of this statement. In the case of party drug consumption this physical distance is eliminated, the mechanism is intensified and can be taken quite literally, because unlike the screen phosphors or pixels, the molecular formula of the drug penetrates the structure of the human body in its empirical verifiability. The object, not applied for medical purposes and no longer prosthetic, is physically internalised by the subject. The effect is operational (the intake of the drug is analogous with the push of a button) and continuous with very limited interruptibility (partygoers are seldom in possession of antidotes that could neutralise or alleviate the effects). The whole process involves the internalisation of a component of the external world, the effects of which are then experientially projected outside (the perception of reality is remediated according to the chemical effects).

Baudrillard (1994a: 101-102) portrays a complete isolation of the individual psychotropic body – which, I also argue, is disconnected from 'non-psychotropic' external perspectives. For instance, the paranoid disturbances of the 'bad' acid trip may evade the watchful eye because the turbulences of the reconfigured self/environment remain camouflaged to external observers. Such is the impotence of the external gaze, including camera footage, at electronic dance floors. Through insider immersion, however, the participant is integrated into the network of a crowd governed by similar internal codes aligned with the music. Bodies are welcomed and transformed within a laboratory producing and measuring multi-sensory aesthetic hallucinations.

In this way music and drug, together with other agents of mediation, give rise to the aesthetic experience. Taste becomes an accomplishment conditioned by the contexts of pleasure: "a strange activity, the conditions of which are continuously discussed by [music]

amateurs themselves" (Hennion 2003: 90). Partygoers undergo a constantly evolving experiment shaped by the mediatory agents building the party environment. At music events, the state of being overwhelmed or carried away is preceded by strategies of preparation; initial scepticism and resistance needs to be overcome by the arrival of the sublime moment (Hennion 2001: 13-14). The qualities of such moments are dependent upon agents such as (sub)genre characteristics, the drug used, environmental arrangements and audience interactions, with each being filtered through personal dispositions.

Jackson (2004: 17-20) approximates the gradual build up of this process in clubs with a model involving five stages. The first is a pre-dance stage where the punters, still anxious about the success of the night, are talking, drinking, scanning the crowd or waiting for the drugs to take effect. As they become more relaxed and grow in numbers, the second stage may commence with would-be dancers conglomerating around the dance floor and the first separate groups of people starting to dance. Gradually the music gets louder and the temperature rises, attracting more punters to the dance floor and signalling the arrival of three successive stages of dancing: the warm-up stage when the party deepens; the period of maximum intensity in which the clubbers lose themselves by moving together in "a critical mass of bodies"; and the final stage where the crowds have already thinned out, but the hard core or the "energetic heart" of the dance floor still carry on until the lights come on (Jackson 2004: 19).

An important phase of the experiment is the evaluation of feedback and the application of results. I have already noted that similar to the studio serving as a laboratory in which the public is mediated through the work of producers and artistic directors, electronic dance floors encourage interactions between public and performer, which directly influence the production of music. The party provides a particularly dense space for a "collective redistribution of creation" (Hennion 2003: 91) involving the active influence of mediators through which such actors as the public or the generative code of technology are manifest. As part of this interconnected network, recreational drugs influence mechanisms of reception which in turn are transferred back to music production. Accordingly, one of my past interviewees from a short investigation of the Dutch gabber techno scene (Vitos 2007) gave account of the early development of the extremely fast gabber techno subgenre under the straightforward

principle of a need for harder and faster music by a public enjoying amphetamines (and other stimulants).

3.5 Conclusion: EDM and Simulation

Baudrillard's concept of simulation provides a fruitful means for understanding the EDM phenomenon. This chapter considered the emergence of musical simulations that signalled the emancipation of the medium in late 20th century popular music and addressed recreational drugs as potent products of consumer culture that may amplify and, in the case of psychedelics, disrupt some of its naturalising and conditioning processes (Brandt and Passie 2012: 539). The two ingredients are mixed together and channelled into the embodied experiences of the dancers during the "ceremony of pleasure" (Hennion 2001: 17) that unfolds in the laboratory of the EDM party.

As a conclusion I will address the significance of EDM parties in the context of contemporary consumer culture and their deviation from traditional rituals, with references to Baudrillard's term of the 'symbolic'. Merrin (2005: 12) shows that the symbolic can be derived from a Durkheimian tradition built upon the concept of the sacred: a state of the divine actualised in traditional rituals that produces the experience of a profound reality which has a transformative power on everyday life. This symbolic, forming the basis of social interaction and communication in traditional societies, provides the ground for Baudrillard's defence of the real (used here in the sense of a grounded reality), which he situates as a critical foundation against the simulacrum (Merrin 2005: 42). This juxtaposition pervades his whole oeuvre: for example, in a genealogy of the simulacrum alternative to the one already outlined in this chapter, Baudrillard (1994a: 5) derives the "metaphysical despair" of iconoclasts from the realisation that the power of the image extends beyond the mere distortion of the Platonic Idea. Here the image became monstrous as it potentialised the dissolution of its original (divine) referent, suggesting "that deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1994: 5).

Disregarding, for the moment, the structural particularities of the various subgenres and focusing on the sequential experience of machinic sounds and rhythm, a journey through

the soundscapes of an EDM dance floor could be visualised as a *gaijin* (foreigner) wandering the neon canyons of Tokyo without a native language compass. What prevails here is the fascination with the pattern variations in the sensory overload of neon lights where the advertised messages are inexistent in their incomprehensibility or merely add atmospheric effects to the trip. The special effects of EDM generate an instant ‘high’ while on drugs, providing entrance to a hyperreal environment governed by semiotic codes and technological mediations. Such futuristic visions of the urban nightscape lack divinity: as science fiction writer William Gibson (2012: 44) contends, the “capital-F Future”, which has been a cult for many science fiction aficionados in the 20th century, is now perceivably over. Contrary to the utopian mindset or even religious sentiments of the older generation, 21st century youth are consuming events (or non-events according to Baudrillard) in the mediated context of an “endless digital Now, a state of atemporality enabled by our increasingly efficient communal prosthetic memory” (Gibson 2012: 44).

While the EDM party is lying in the realm of the semiotic, it may also compensate for the sense of lost sociality and shared meaning retrospectively associated with the symbolic rituals of non-Western societies, not unlike other simulated rituals of consumer culture (Merrin 2005: 26).⁸ Thus the weekend warrior of EDM could be compared with the sports supporter or the consumer of community-forging TV shows and internet forums. Yet for Baudrillard, such mediated communities simulating collective meanings serve as artificial defences of a social system still haunted by symbolic demand, and are inadequate to counter the possible revenge of the symbolic through events such as riots and terrorist acts (Merrin 2005: 27). Baudrillard (2002: 96-99) situates the emergence of recreational drug use alongside such violent events: the “psychedelic violence” of drug use might have represented a symbolic reaction against the excessive normalisation and rationalisation of the semiotic system. Yet again, drugs have developed into an anomaly, no longer heroic or subversive, but becoming institutionalised and losing its violence (Baudrillard 2002: 100) – thus reincorporated into the semiotic system of consumer culture. The remaining question concerns the role of drug consumption after having lost this symbolic edge.

As revealed in the commentaries on techno and psytrance dance floors in the following chapters, the drug-enhanced EDM phenomenon is not only capable of offering a paradoxical

⁸ While Baudrillard’s discussion of the symbolic does betray nostalgia, he also defines this traditional mode of social relations as sustained by rituals that are inherently violent.

“escape from the objective drudgery of life” (Baudrillard 2002: 99), but it may also contribute to a particularly effective substitution of the symbolic that the various (sub)genres accomplish in different ways. The experience in its drug-mediated intimacy still moves beyond the simulations of consumer culture, with the brand being abolished, the sign value being substituted by the use value of drug/music technologies, enhancing the simulacrum and transferring it into the bodily experience. Of major concern for the partygoers is the experiential incorporation of this “machine-made music that turn[s] you into a machine” (Reynolds 1999: 17) through the programming of sounds within their own bodies, a process that is often considered inseparable from actual or recalled drug experiences. The paradox of this mediated immediacy triggers, in the words of an interviewee (focus group, November 2011), the experience of a cybernetic “avatar . . . in a physical space” (Chapter 4.6) that, as my analyses will suggest, seems to be potent enough to reflect a transformative profusion of the semiotic that in the Durkheimian tradition is characteristic only to the symbolic, thus effectively negating the indispensability of the symbolic in this cultural context. Of course, by referring to the role of simulation processes in the production of the symbolic in traditional rituals, one can also argue that “the symbolic was itself only ever a simulacrum” (Merrin 2005: 38, 41).

4. Techno: The Synergy of Music and Drug

4.1 Introduction: The Detroit Roots of Techno

This Introduction addresses the Detroit techno subgenre and its sonic aesthetics as a starting point for the discussions of this chapter. As outlined in Chapter 1.2, Detroit techno was one of the founding genres of EDM, produced predominantly by black DJs. In a recent paper Pope (2011) discusses the ways its development was organically embedded in the bleak, post-industrial cityscapes of a Detroit affected by recession, with one of its primary venues in the early 1990s being “the Packard auto plant, once proud manufacturer of luxury vehicles” (Pope 2011: 25). As opposed to U.K. punk that announces the end of history through its ‘no future’ ethos (Savage 1991), Detroit techno “blips, bleeps and grooves” (Pope 2011: 35), or moves further by initially accepting the end and exploring dystopias similar to the science fiction of Afrofuturism, which portrays worlds after the occurrence of the disaster (Pope 2011: 32).

Afrofuturism is an artistic movement encompassing various media such as music (jazz, funk, hip hop and tecno), literature (science fiction) and visual arts (graffiti and comics). As an aesthetic mode, it is closely related to science fiction, uniting artists “by their shared interest in projecting black futures derived from Afrodiasporic experiences” (Yaszek 2006: 42).¹ According to Eshun (2003), Afrofuturism designates the “founding trauma” of slavery as the very condition of the Enlightenment, suggesting that its humanist project is fundamentally flawed. From this destabilisation of humanist discourses, running against Western derogatory descriptions and predictions of Africa, Afrofuturist artists traced fantastic counter-histories and futures “in moments where any future was made difficult for them to imagine” (Eshun 2003: 294). A recurring hyperbolic trope of the movement is the extraterrestrial alien, employed allegorically “to explore the historical terms, the everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation, and the constitution of Black Atlantic subjectivities” (Eshun 2003: 298-299). Eshun (1998) portrays the development of techno as a recent Afrofuturist engagement with music: in a Detroit affected by racial and economic tensions, techno artists abandon the representation

¹ The term Afrofuturism also denotes the scholarly discourse mobilised in the late 1990s to investigate the influences of technology on black cultural production (Yaszek 2006: 42), which is not the meaning in which it is used in this thesis.

of street realities (which is, for example, evident in traditional hip hop) and become engaged with the unreality-principle of a sonic science developing the “alien discontinuum” of machine music.

Related to this is the engagement with a ‘forever war’ in second wave Detroit techno, most apparent in the military aesthetics employed by the collective Underground Resistance (UR), a kind of covert musical operation established for the cleansing of the genre in a time of its perceived exploitation by the music industry, considered by one of its founders to be an “electronic continuation” of war (Sicko 2010: 105). Eshun (1998: 120-123) suggests that if civil society is the low-end research-and-development unit of the military, Detroit techno retreats from the streets, from the field of representation traditionally owned by hip hop, and becomes stealthy, acting from the covert dimension of high-end technology, thus militarising pop life and mythifying the military. This signals a distinction between representation and simulation: if hip hop represents the street reality of the black neighbourhood (Hennion 2003: 88), Detroit techno simulates by developing “Sonic Fictions” embedded in the Afrofuturist conceptual framework of the vinyl record (Eshun 1998: 178-179) in order to capture the real. Accordingly, the UR cultivates a sonic “MythScience” (Eshun 1998: 125) which synthesises and mutates elements from the fields of technology, science fiction and comics. This is reflected in the conceptual arsenal employed, with DJs appearing on stage in hooded masks, vinyl sleeves including sci-fi and high-tech imagery relating to the electronic warfare, and concept albums employing narratives of military infiltration tactics and sci-fi tropes such as space exploration. Through this technological imaginary conquering the unknown, the techno record metaphorically becomes “a piece of another planet manufactured on Earth” (Eshun 1998: 135), with songs being replaced by “waveform transmission” (Eshun 1998: 136) which is then broadcast – and received – at parties.

A possible origin of the war rhetoric that is then overturned into its electronic continuation in techno is expressed in the childhood recollections of UR founding member Jeff Mills² relating to the 1967 Detroit race riots. Following the police raid of an illegal night club, the riots destroyed parts of the city over several days, and resulted in 43 deaths, thousands of injuries and severe damages to race relations (Bledsoe et al. 1996: 509).

² See Appendix 2.1.

Mills: Well for me, maybe one of the most influential things that happened was during the riots in Detroit in '67. My parents decided to pack the family up and take the family out of the country because it was too violent in Detroit – it primarily happened in our neighbourhood in Detroit, where all the bombings and all the police and the army came in, and they declared martial law. You could not leave your house. It was the summertime, there was no way you could keep six kids in the house in summertime, it was just impossible. So they decided to make a vacation, and they took all the kids to Expo, in Montreal, an exhibition on Futurism – architecture, technology. And I must have been six or seven at that time.

In Detroit, you had to keep all the shades down, because there were snipers. If army men thought they saw something in the window that was pointed at him, [they] had the right to shoot at it. So we had to keep the shades down, in a dark house, in the middle of the summer, we had no air conditioning. There were no supermarkets, they were closed. It was like a warzone. The army was using the school ground for landing helicopters. And they were marching down the middle of our street, tanks were coming down our street, going to the worst part of the riot.

We stayed [in Montreal] for a few weeks. It was maybe most impactful because you go from one very bleak, very bad situation, to something very bright, very promising. For a kid, six or seven, it was like Disneyland, these big installations, big exhibition halls. . . . It was all about the future. That had to be the impactful thing, that pushed me towards the future, and space travel (Walmsley 2009, Pope 2011).

These evocative recollections reflect the privileging of the simulated futuristic (“like Disneyland . . . all about the future”) against the representational present.

Downstream from these mythical Detroit origins, the testing grounds of harder techno parties still give way to such futuristic expansions of urban realities where the partygoer is overwhelmed by the effects of a medium which in this case is explicitly the (only) message. The dance floor, similar to the technological and psychedelic fantasy of Coppola’s (1979) *Apocalypse Now* in Baudrillard’s (1994a: 59) interpretation, becomes an "extension of war through other means". This happens in a form of a “sonic warfare” (Goodman 2010) inherent in simulation technologies: a subliminal martial art governed by the flux of special effects and rhythmic energies, mirrored in the regulated choreography of the dancers. This is a collision

with no opponents or targets on post-apocalyptic landscapes defined by a rigorous soundtrack, an actualisation of the man-machine interaction through careful programming of the body according to technological codes. The affective dimension of this collision is explored by Goodman (2010), who addresses the complexities in the application of sound as cultural weapon, ranging from the repulsion to the attraction of bodies. Goodman discusses, among others, the use of high-volume sonic weaponries in the Vietnam War that inspired the infamous Wagnerian fly-by scene of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (Goodman 2010: 19) and the employment of infrasound for very different goals during military operations and in popular music. His work explores the trajectories of a convoluted nexus where “[t]he military makes nonstandard use of popular music, while underground music cultures make nonstandard use of playback technologies, communications, and power infrastructures” (Goodman 2010: 194).

In his discussion of *Apocalypse Now*, Baudrillard (1994a: 59-60) argues that the film transplants totalitarian governmental power into media mechanisms, with both war and film acting as testing grounds of cutting edge technology and special effects. Coppola's (1979) work releases a cinematic power that overshadows military complexes and culminates with the victory of America, as the medium overtakes reality through its irresistible and invisible impregnation of the everyday, and thus, with respect to its analogous use of special effects and exertion of social control, the film becomes the extension of war. Detroit techno is engaged in a similar process of (sonic) expansion, yet instead of radiating the omnipresence of governmental power, it is connected, in the words of Eshun (1998: -2), to “the secret life of machines which opens up the . . . coevolution of machines and humans in late 20th C Black Atlantic Futurism”. In other words, instead of acting as an extension of the consensual semiotic code (Baudrillard 1993a: 57) conditioning reality, it shows that the real is unreal as it “builds Sonic Fictions from the electronics of everyday life” (Eshun 1998: 104) or migrates machinic processes to simulate abduction by an alien agency inherent in Afrofuturist machine music.

A common trait of techno tracks is their excessively loop-based, linear and static design, with their basic shape often lying unformed, awaiting sculpting by the DJ by means of mixing and effects (Butler 2006: 232). The emphasis falls on the evolution of multi-layered textures with their own rhythmic values, and musical texture is always intertwined with rhythmic and metrical processes. Within a rigorous, seemingly restrictive context of pure-duple meter,

complex dissonances are created, for example, by repeating non-congruent loops over long spans of time, ultimately generating metrical dissonance that does not need to resolve (Butler 2006: 166-175). The music-governed ecstasy of the techno dance floor is therefore restricted and controlled, not being dominated by dramatically articulated formal features or obvious climactic builds which may be characteristic of other EDM (sub)genres such as trance or progressive house (Butler 2006: 226), but following a modular flow of percussion-based, interlinked textures which may gradually progress toward high levels of intensity and complexity, but are always directed by the rumbling ground level of minimalistic rhythmic interactions. Through its structural minimalism and focus on percussive elements, the music opens the doors to a Warholian repetition factory, where metrical processes are produced and programmed, comprising of simulated sound patterns arranged into continuous loops of interlinked textures.

It is on the level of these sonic interactions that harder techno genres worldwide collide seismic (sound)waves towards an inward explosion, reflecting on the ways the reality (of the urban context) is overtaken by the simulation (of the futuristic). For the drug-fueled partygoer, this may happen through gradual aural assaults or the stereophonic interlocking of minimalist textures of sound and visuals, where each pixelated layer simulates a divergent sensation of space/time. In the broader socio-cultural context, if present everyday reality tends to collapse into the hyperreal as a consequence of extensive mediatisation, the creative combination of powerful modules such as music and drug technologies may open up the seductive, multi-sensory perception of an environment developing the complexities of Baudrillardian simulacra. The DJ manipulates the revolving techno record in order to turn the listener, in the words of Eshun (1998: 79) “into its own obedient satellite” – and on the dance floor this gives rise to the aesthetic experience. Moments of passion are thus reached through strategies of “active dis-possession” (Gomart and Hennion 1999), with partygoers partaking in the evolution of human-machine interactions.

The Detroit heritage serves as origin and aesthetic influence in my discussion of techno. It is important to note that the Melbourne techno crowd, similar to other local nightlife crowds, is predominantly white (with a non-white minority that is mainly of Asiatic origin), in accordance with the racial distribution of the overall population (ABS 2013). This is also reflected in my

interview sample, with 13 white Australians and two Asian-Australians out of 15 interlocutors. While the focus groups encouraged the free discussion of the feelings or emotions delivered by the music and the comparison of the Melbourne scene with overseas scenes, the racial identities of techno performers and audiences did not come up even when talking about black Detroit producers. Although race was not explicitly addressed by the questions, its absence in the discussions implies that it was not considered a primary axis of cultural identification. This suggests that the Melbourne scene borrows certain musical and cultural signs from its Detroit ancestor, which will be investigated in this work, while being disengaged from the racial politics of Afrofuturism (the discussion of the latter is beyond the scope of this project).

The dissemination of such signs is particularly prevalent in EDM, where the shortage of lyrics and the use of sampling and remixing facilitate the placeless decentralisation of scenes, although (sub)genres often coalesce in specific locations (Connell and Gibson 2002: 260). As outlined in Chapter 1.2, Berlin became the European capital of techno in the 1990s, while Detroit started to represent “idealized concepts of techno’s musical integrity and authenticity” (May 2006: 343-349). Particularly with the development of a Detroit-Berlin axis, the production and consumption of techno became a hybrid and disseminated process. My fieldwork signals that Melbourne is connected to this global discourse and to its mythical origins in Detroit as a fan of both global and Detroit techno. The latter is suggested by the frequent headlining of Melbourne parties by Detroit DJs, the mentioning of Detroit techno tracks during the focus groups, as well as the recent performance of a Melbourne DJ in Detroit.

The remainder of this chapter is based on a loose collection of interview excerpts conducted with Melbourne techno partygoers, performers and organisers (see Appendix 1.1). The fragments pinpoint the stations of a journey that is modular and impressionistic, similar to the music itself. The intention is to let the voices from the field be heard first, and commence with discussions after each thematic collection. The excerpts are drawn from four focus groups including a ‘specialised’ acid techno focus group conducted with acid techno performers/organisers and regular partygoers. Importantly, my research focuses on the more purist incarnations of techno, loosely defined along an acid-Detroit-hard-industrial techno axis. These ramifications are rhythm-based, sonically intense and with fewer crossovers into other EDM genres, employing a harsher sound that is traceable to the second wave of Detroit artists and their European counterparts.

4.2 Fragments from the Field: Sounds like Techno

My first exploration leads through the soundscapes of techno, addressing its most significant attributes discussed by interviewees. These are ranked in the table below according to their number of occurrences in the focus groups. All interviewees agree that techno is extremely danceable, yet in my analysis danceability is not a separate attribute; rather, it is regarded as the potential bodily expression of some of the listed qualities. The coding system was developed dynamically and manually³ in the NVivo qualitative research software during the transcription and evaluation of interview data to facilitate the identification of relevant topics addressed by the participants. The table shows the number of times each category was addressed, generally in a few sentences, by any participant, relating to any question. The full list of coding categories and the interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.2.

1: Alien or Psychedelic	∇	23
2: Challenging or Surprising	∇	22
3: Repetitive	∇	19
4: Hard or Intense	∇	14
5: The Bass	∇	7
6: Unpopular or Underground	∇	7
7: Crescendo	∇	6
8: Abrasive	∇	5
9: Loud	∇	5

Figure 3: Music Attributes

Alien or Psychedelic

Most interviewees explain the music in terms of an alien sentiment.

Q: How would you describe good techno? What are the main feelings and emotions it delivers?

Curtis: For me, good techno music is a combination of sounds and feelings which are actually very removed from normal, um, human based kind of sentiments I think. The whole concept of techno music is quite alien and quite foreign for me. So one of the feelings it gives me is unlike feelings that I get from really anything else. Because it's very machine-like, very electronic based, um, it gives me a quite an alien kind of emotion (focus group, July 2012).

³ The careful manual coding of data improves the reliability of the findings (Welsh 2002).

Andrew: I think people like that this is indescribable. I've never spoken to anyone about techno and haven't sounded like a bit of an idiot because you always end up: it's sort of, um, am, and you can't get the words out. . . . It's sort of uncomfortable and sort of not what you'd ... Oh yeah, it raises up some really weird feelings.

Stan: Yeah, weird feelings. And it's not straight up happy or sad.

Andrew: Yeah, it's always this strange, awkward, uncomfortable. I really like awkward, uncomfortable techno like lot's of it. You hear Traversable Wormhole,⁴ and then you hear a sound, and then what the fuck is that sound? Like: yiiiiiii (focus group, November 2011).

This “alien kind of emotion”, related to the emergence of these “weird feelings”, is also defined as psychedelic in a way that is different to the psychedelic trance (psytrance) EDM genre:

James: I find techno fairly psychedelic. I think it's one of the most psychedelic genres you can get maybe. I guess that relates back to the repetitive nature of it. . . . Your mind is just allowed to wander while you're listening to it. I end up hearing things that don't exist in the song, or you know, two harmonies may just create something that should be there but you are not hearing it, 'cause your mind's just been allowed to wander.

Q: So you say psychedelic, but I reckon not in the way that psytrance is psychedelic.

James: Yeah, psychedelic more in a personal way I guess, not in the sound but in the nature of the music. What it does to you, not what you hear.

Christina: Psytrance has a narrative. Techno doesn't. So you have more space to move ... in your brain [laughs]. You have more gaps to fill in, and it can be more fun if you are adaptive (focus group, November 2011).

Repetitive

Particular combinations of repetitive structures may give rise to the psychedelic effect:

⁴ See Appendix 2.2.

Andrew: I found out when I discovered techno, I realised that I like rock and I like dubstep and things like that as long as it's repetitive, but repetitive in a good way, so it's still psychedelic. I used to listen to psychedelic rock when I was younger, and I was really drawn to it. Like a 40 minute thing that just built up, it was strange, took weird twists, and I still like that in music. I really think it needs repetition, one strong idea at a time, and some sort of surprise. . . . Jeff Mills is really good at it. Like a song like I9 (Mills 1996), it just has these really-really-really bashing repetitive things, and then maybe the hi-hats will go slightly lower, and it just messes with your head because the space that the song created slightly changed, and yeah, you get that [psychedelic effect] (focus group, November 2011).

Moreover, loop-based music has the potential of locking the user into the virtual space of a “zone”, the reaching of which is facilitated by drugs:

Cooper: Looping music and repetitive music, as much as people don't admit it, you know, you constantly see people that don't understand the thing that coming for first time, they're tapping their foot and bobbing their head, and they don't know why. Especially if you start taking any hallucinogenic drugs, looping sounds, you know, and repetitive sounds are almost ... I hate to use clichés but it's hypnotic, it really is like you put yourself in a mindset or a zone, and from this zone you get out this whole layer of stuff that most people miss on their own (focus group, January 2012).

The physical manifestation of being locked into the “zone” is, of course, dancing, with Curtis also emphasising that techno is among “the purest forms of dance music” (focus group, July 2012).

Challenging or Surprising

Good music attracts attention by posing a challenge to the mind, and in techno this challenge is primarily connected to subtle structural changes:

Jack: Well the thing that I find about it [is] that it seems to be constant and yet it's always changing ever so slightly, and what I really like about it is that you have to appreciate the little changes. I feel like, if people don't listen to enough techno music, they just hear this repetitive sound, and yet you listen to this sound, and you hear something different every ... Like, you

hear changing through a song, that's like you're appreciating the subtleties of it, and that can sort of translate when you're dancing in the club to it, you still hear all these subtleties to it, even though from the outside world it sounds as it's basically just four beats (focus group, November 2011).

Jack contends that these gradual changes in the music, which are appreciated and enacted by dancers within the environment of the club, are almost incomprehensible to outsiders.

Surprising or unpredictable use of music elements is opposed with the conceived triviality of less challenging EDM:

James: When I like [music] most, it's because I heard something that's unexpected. And I guess with trance and you know all that kind of music the build-ups and the releases are all fairly generic, and you can tell when they are gonna happen, you can tell how many bars it's gonna take to happen. But with, I don't know, with good techno it's hard for me to say. Like, something good would be something that would remove me from the situation (focus group, November 2011).

Crescendo

Both in the track and the DJ mix the loop-based or modular elements are combined in ways that increase the 'surprise' effect, with the harder subgenres being able to trigger the sensation of an ever-intensifying ride that rushes the body and leaves boundaries behind:

Stan: Good techno, I guess, keeps it interesting, and keeps pushing you through the set, you feel like you're moving forward somehow, like the build ups get a little bit more frenetic, more ... heavier, um, and when you think that you've sort of experienced what it is all about, it goes a bit further, that's really a nice feeling (focus group, November 2011).

While the previous three attributes (repetitive, challenging/surprising and crescendo) are primarily related to the structural particularities of the music, the following four (hard/intense, the Bass, loud, abrasive) describe the instant affective qualities of the sounds, operating in synergy with drug effects at parties.

Hard or Intense

The perceived hardness or intensity of techno triggers a powerful bodily sensation that extrapolates to dancing:

Cooper: [Hardness refers to] how it sounds rather than how fast it is. . . . And for some instances I wouldn't even say techno is like music to me. I hate saying this because it's kind of cliché. Music to me [is that] I like a lot of bands and stuff like that, but the only thing that actually gives a physical response to music, regardless of, you know, drugs or no drugs, is techno and acid techno (focus group, January 2012).

Lucas: And the only thing about the hardest side of techno for me is that there's nothing else that moves you as hard as just a big, fuck-off kick drum (focus group, January 2012).

The Bass

Techno is primarily percussion music that drives the dance floor and is driven through the bass line that stays in the foreground for most of the time, facilitating the instant bodily internalisation of the music. Undoubtedly, the bass also contributes to the intensity or hardness of the music.

Jake: Like I said before [about] the frequency ranges that electronic music covers, what Cooper was saying, it is more of a feeling when the DJ brings something up and brings the bass drum in. And the whole dance floor feels it at once, because of the air movement throughout the low range speakers. It's not something you're hearing, like your brain's analysing it, going: I like that bass sound. You're feeling it, you're feeling the bass in your body, you're feeling it within (focus group, January 2012).

Loud

Especially on lower frequencies, the bombardment of the body with loud vibrations triggers a physical feeling of the music which is compared to the subjective perception of the raw power of fighter jet engines by Lucas, who once served in the air force.

Lily: You can physically feel it. You actually feel the vibration, it's that loud.

Lucas: It's like when I used to test F 111 engines in the test cell and it just went: whroom-whroom-whroom (focus group, January 2012).

Abrasive

The use of abrasive effects and industrial sounds reaches back to the machine aesthetic of Detroit techno.

Sophie: My dad used to joke that the music I listened to sounded like when he used to work at the factories [laughs]. Like the machinery.

Cooper: Yeah, and a lot of people say that about Detroit [techno] (focus group, January 2012).

Unpopular

Finally, notions of unpopular or underground are not intrinsic qualities of the music, but related to the restricted size of the Melbourne scene and the music's evasion of mass media.

Curtis: My experience is that the Melbourne scene in dance music generally is very small, um, this doesn't mean it's not good, it just means it's much less often that you can go out and hear the music. . . . The music that I thought was completely unknown and underground here was completely commercial and mainstream in Europe, you know, and it was quite a surprise to hear that a lot of the time, because to me it didn't sound like my understanding of what commercial music was at all, in Australia, you know. Because it's just not music that you'll ever hear on the radio or TV here, you know, whereas it's very common, you know, you'd say everywhere. So this geographic isolation is something which changes the perception of the music that we hear here, and causes us to kind of listen to it and experience it in a different way, you know (focus group, July 2012).

4.3 “Hearing Things That Don't Exist in the Song”: The Psychedelic Effect in Techno

The perceived psychedelic effect of techno (4.2: Alien or Psychedelic) is created by grouping distorted, machinic sounds and samples in specific ways. The music becomes ‘psychedelic’ by

restricting itself to a minimum amount of interesting information, giving just a few appealing hints of a non-existent musical structure intensified by repetition (4.2: Repetitive), and then disturbing that structure in subtle yet surprising ways (4.2: Challenging or Surprising).

Andrew: Yeah, interesting samples and sounds are really good. Um, interesting structure. Like, Robert Hood⁵ is really good at doing it. Things that sort of sound disco-ey, but then they are just repetitive, so you think it's gonna be like a pop sort of disco song that just repeats-repeats-repeats-repeats, and then it just gets hard. I just really like being surprised (focus group, November 2011).

Andrew appreciates when Detroit techno producer Robert Hood takes an existing (“disco-ey”) structure, finds a good groove and locks it down or deepens it by repeating it. The repeated groove focuses only on certain elements, defining an underlying rhythm, which is then intensified or weakened by effects and EQ-ing as a musical meta-text. Historically this references the ways in which early techno producers programmed repetitive music on drum machines and synthesizers.

From another perspective, a repeating loop, minimalist and abstract, is a fragment of something broader, something that is unheard, residing in the realm of the imaginary. In the works of certain Detroit techno producers this is connected to an Afrofuturist imaginary; for example, many of the Jeff Mills albums are explicitly concerned with space travel and alien encounters. While none of my interviewees mention Afrofuturism as an aesthetic mode and instead appreciate the loose musical structure of techno in which “the mind is just allowed to wander” (4.2: Alien or Psychedelic) and personal associations are thus encouraged, techno is still most commonly described as music that triggers “alien” and “weird” feelings. In the fragments of Chapter 4.2: Alien or Psychedelic, Curtis defines good techno as sonic catalyst for inhuman feelings, whereas Andrew praises the frequent delivery of “awkward” and “uncomfortable” sentiments. In a similar manner, by “loving the alien” (Sinker 1992), Afrofuturism is an aesthetic mode that embraces anxiety and fear. From this position Eshun (1998: 96) draws the connection to drug use, and states that “[a]ll black electronic musics have their Darkside” by incorporating the alienating effects of drug consumption and triggering

⁵ See Appendix 2.3.

paranoid states of disruptive virtualisation that are nevertheless highly appreciated on the dance floor.

But let us return to the repeating loop. Because this is the only information provided, the mind treats it as the single most important fragment carrying a bigger musical unit. This equates with the essential, organising principle of techno tracks: the rhythm. Contrary to most rock and pop music where drums establish the meter of the track while remaining in the background, in techno “drums *are* the music, to the extent that the few melodic elements that are present (e.g., the riffs) frequently assume a percussive role as well” (Butler 2006: 93). Similarly, in the words of Jake:

Jake: The music that I'm into is a bit challenging, [meaning] that if you show it to people that aren't into it, they don't hear the same things that I do. They don't hear that the tiny little high-hat sound that goes tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk is actually carrying the whole tune. They just hear a high-hat sound that goes tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk and that's where the bottom line ends. It doesn't register in their mind that that's counting the pattern along to the next change or, you know, to the next sequence, or to the next track, which is mixing in (focus group, January 2012).

Techno just repeats-repeats-repeats: the focus deepens with the potential creation of a surrounding imaginary space. Then it disturbs this imaginary structure either by adding or taking something away, sometimes by completely altering it. The repetition of the minimum required information gives birth to the imaginary; yet a different repeating texture or effect may terminate it. As Jake states, this modular shift corresponds to the way DJs mix tracks into each other. The disturbance of repetition through repetition attacks the preceding structure and creates confusion. By always returning to the next repeating beat, that is, by designating this differential repetition as the key governing principle, techno celebrates continuous destruction of the deepened imaginary structure.

Unlike psytrance, the fractal soundscapes of which are generated through a pornographic⁶ proliferation of sounds aimed at revealing everything, techno is cunningly seductive: it accentuates certain underlying forms and lets the imagination do the rest of the

⁶ My use of the term is resonating with the way Baudrillard (1997a: 8-9) considers the “pornographic” nature of contemporary (popular) art forms such as high-tech cinema, where the excessive use of special effects generates a tautological over-proximity to the intrinsic qualities of the medium.

work. The result is a psychedelic journey that, contrary to psytrance, leads through imaginary soundscapes or musical ‘gaps’ that the listener then ‘fills’:

Andrew: I prefer techno when I go to these sort of things. Psytrance is a bit busy for me. And it suggests, it takes you on a journey, but it's a really strict and regulated journey. I think that techno is constant mood changes. The mood always changes, it's a bit more impressionistic. And it's up to you to determine [its meanings] (focus group, November 2011).

Techno music produces *impressions*: the partygoer's body is marked sequentially by sonic pressure, becoming the equivalent of the revolving vinyl groove into which an electronic tattoo is engraved and then cleared by a delicate move to the next pattern. As James states, “really good techno . . . just clears my head” (focus group, November 2011). Without this element of disturbance, the tracks would fall back to the constant rhythm of the conveyor belt or the sounds of working machinery – a raw material that returns in the abrasive repetitiveness of techno (4.2: Abrasive). This underlying rhythm is prescribed by the industrial simulacrum where the act of copying the copy sustains the principle of serial repetition (Baudrillard 1993a: 55-56). Yet with subtle diffractions the structures are almost unnoticeably eliminated or morphed into one another (4.2: Challenging or Surprising). Each musical structure needs to be itself strong and further reinforced through repetition in order to create the surprising effect of incongruence that is strikingly actualised in the mind when the partygoer consumes drugs (4.2: Repetitive).

The music thus performs a continuous, imaginative play with technology: at parties, intensified by drugs, it “just messes with your head” (Andrew, focus group, November 2011) as a continuously morphing electronic *trompe l'oeil*. In the context of the mix, the journey progresses onward through the intensification of the surprising effects (4.2: Crescendo) while keeping its structure loose and abstract, creating further gaps to be filled by the listener's imagination. It is important to note that this psychedelic structure is modulated through the affective qualities of the employed sounds (4.2: Hard or Intense, The Bass, Loud, Abrasive), which are discussed by Goodman (2010) as part of the sonic manifestations of the military-industrial-entertainment complex. Goodman focuses on sonic intensities that are situated on the peripheries of the auditory sensorium, addressing loud or quiet sounds, infra- and ultrasounds, as well as noise. Resonating with Jake's comments (4.2: The Bass), Goodman

(2010: 9-10) suggests that the affective dimension of powerful and mobilising sonic weapons such as infrasound (sub-bass frequencies that are not so much heard but felt) precedes cognitive processes and is ontologically prior to linguistic or cultural representation. Their creative exploitation in music is directed at the powerful, undefinable potential inherent “in their subpolitical, tactical and aesthetic dimensions, as opposed to being primarily based on belief or ideology” (Goodman 2010: 194).

4.4 Fragments from the Field: Drug Consumption Patterns

Illegal drug use is common among the focus group participants, with only one of them, Lucas restricting his substance consumption to alcohol, although in considerable quantities. As he states humorously: “Mostly I drink a few beers at a party and ... a few bottles of wine” (focus group, January 2012). Drugs are often seen to provide access to or at least amplify the psychedelic potentiality of the music. The following diagram shows the various substances discussed during the focus groups, ranked according to the frequency of occurrences. The participants were urged to discuss any drugs that they considered relevant for enhancing the experience.



Figure 4: Drug Frequencies

Allowing a 10% leeway for coding errors, the strong dominators in the drug palette are acid (LSD) and MDMA (or ecstasy pills), followed by speed (amphetamine) and pot (marihuana). These are the four drugs to be addressed in the following sections. Particular attention will be given to acid and MDMA as I will argue that speed and pot, in accordance with the diagram, are far less relevant for my research. Although both LSD and MDMA are classified as psychedelic substances (Brandt and Passie 2012: 539), in this thesis I follow the terminology of my

interviewees who commonly categorise the hallucinogenic tryptamine LSD, and not the empathogen MDMA, as a psychedelic drug and its effect as a “psychedelic experience”.⁷

Another diagram shows the most frequently discussed effects that could be related (or not related) to the use of these four drugs. Some of these effects will be considered in details below.

	MDMA or pills	Acid	Speed	Pot
1 : Bodily response or energy altering	17	14	13	8
2 : Sound enhancing	24	23	13	8
3 : Emotional response or happiness	25	13	8	1
4 : Social Bonds	11	5	4	1
5 : Psychedelic or Second Life	4	10	0	0
6 : Inappropriate or bad quality	12	16	5	9

Figure 5: Drug Effects

Again a 10% leeway allowed for coding errors could contribute to the slight dominance of MDMA (or ecstasy pills) in the number of conversation units addressing the particular effects, as opposed to the slight dominance of acid in the previous diagram that addresses any drug-related topics.

Pot

Marihuana is not considered a party drug due to its fatiguing effect and its unsuitability for keeping up with the rhythms of techno:

Jake: I would say that pot and dubstep is an amazing combination. But typically for acid techno, you don't go out and smoke a hell of a lot of pot, and just stand on the dance floor with your eyes closed [laughs] (focus group, January 2012).

It is more of a drug suitable for daily use, home listening, or coming down from other drugs when finishing the night:

Susan: I think people are smoking joints at parties because they smoke all the time. They don't smoke joints to listen to the music or feel different at a party. They just smoke all the time.

⁷ The core group of psychedelic drugs is commonly divided into two cohorts: hallucinogenic tryptamines such as LSD; and empathogens or entactogens such as MDMA (Brandt and Passie 2012: 539).

Thomas: Yeah. I used to start off the night with a joint, and not like it, being pretty tired when I got to the venue (focus group, July 2012).

For Curtis, a suitable option during a techno party is to combine it with MDMA:

Curtis: I used to sometimes start off the night with a joint, if I had a lot of speed on me, and as soon as I did speed, forget ... You can forget whatever you did before that, because it becomes completely different after that [laughs]. . . . But if I had MD[MA] I could smoke weed all night also. 'Cause what I find with MD[MA], if I've got some reasonably strong MD[MA], the weed can actually amplify it. So for example, if I'm going to, not so much now, but years ago when I would go to a festival for example, and I knew I was gonna be for like six-seven-eight hours or something, I would have usually like four-five-six joints already rolled, with my cigarettes, and also while I had the MD[MA], in between have a joint as well. It wouldn't have the normal marihuana effect; it would have more of this amplifying of the ecstasy effect. That was the way how I'd use marihuana (focus group, July 2012).

Speed

Speed (amphetamine) is a more reliable option, delivering energy for the night, but still less relevant for my research than acid or MDMA. Speed enhances the appreciation of the music by helping to focus on it from a distance, from the perspective of aesthetic criticism.

Curtis: So from my experiences with MDMA or ecstasy, I kind of internalise the music a little bit more. It's always like I take the music internally and feel it more internally. Whereas with speed I would say, it's kind of the opposite, it's almost like my attention goes way outside my body. . . . It's much, much more around me, not within me. I still really can get into it, but it's in a less emotional way, and much more just in an aesthetic way. So with speed it becomes more just focusing very distinctly on certain sounds, and still getting a bit of rush out of it. . . .

Q: So let's say with speed you'd be more separated from the world, and with MD[MA] you'd become one with it.

Susan: Exactly. And if the music changes, if I take speed and the music changes, I am more affected because I'm concentrating on the music. So I'm more reflective to the music, but not to the crowd or the dance floor or whatever. Yeah, and it's like the music is in front of me, and

I'm following the music, wherever it goes (focus group, July 2012).

The perceived lack of significant sensory alterations during the experience may devalue the drug, especially when considering its street price:

Jack: I'm trying to stay away from speed. I used to [take it], I went through the phase with that. Like buying bags and stuff of that, and then just having that, but I don't really like the feeling. It's too much energy, it doesn't make you feel different [in] any way. At least acid, pills, K[etamine], [with] all those things there's like a psychological thing that's happening to you, whereas with speed I don't find anything psychological happening to me, it's just making me more sort of awake. And I can have a Red Bull and have the same sort of effect anyway.

Q: It's quite pricey for that [laughs].

Jack: Yeah, exactly (focus group, November 2011).

In the light of my past Central European fieldwork, speed in Melbourne seems to be an appropriate drug for heightening the appreciation of techno music at an inappropriate price, especially when compared to MDMA, which is itself a modified or 'designer' amphetamine with mild hallucinogenic effects. For the approximate street price of one gram of MDMA (\$350) one can get less than two grams of speed in Melbourne, while in Central Europe the much lower street price of the same quantity of MDMA (\$70) would be roughly enough for five grams of speed. This clearly makes a difference, keeping in mind that I did encounter anecdotal evidence of the past availability of very high quality speed, providing better value for money, distributed several years before my fieldwork by bikie gangs. Indeed Groves and Marmo (2009: 421-422) acknowledge that outlaw motorcycle gangs had an influential role in methamphetamine (a more potent form of speed) production and distribution in Australia.

Similar to Jack, some other interviewees also distance themselves from the drug, and even the more regular users agree that while speed serves its purpose well for increasing attention and providing energy for the night, it does not alter the music much or does not lead to significant distortions in the perception of surroundings. In my research I am particularly interested in the ways drugs contribute to the simulation of the technological "dreamscape" (Melechi 1993: 34) adapted to the particularities of the music. This interest has been shared by

most of the focus group participants providing rich and detailed data of their experiences with MDMA and acid, drugs considered conducive for inducing fundamental alterations in the perception of music and environment.

MDMA

Perhaps the most common substance associated with techno parties worldwide is MDMA or ecstasy, an empathogen (or entactogen) that, according to Reynolds (1999: 83), enhances the receptivity to house and techno music by generating sophisticated feelings of synaesthesia, immersing the dancers into a fluid medium of sound, and locking them into the groove.

Availability and Dosage

MDMA is the desirable active compound in ecstasy pills, although the quality of ecstasy pills in Melbourne has been constantly questioned during my fieldwork. A common hit of MDMA crystals or powder is approximately one point (0.1 grams); a similar or probably lesser amount would be measured in capsules by club dealers. This is roughly equivalent to the MDMA content of a good pill⁸ that can provide slightly better value than a cap – provided that one can find a good batch.

Q: Are there any good pills though?

Hugh: No. We had some good caps actually on the weekend. I think there are good caps. Pills, I think it's kind of an eternal thing, everyone always says that pills used to be better. I don't know if they've always been crap. But I think they used to be better. When I was 18, actually I had [good ones] (focus group, November 2011).

Interaction with the Music

All drug-using participants agree that MDMA (or good ecstasy) works well with EDM, amplifying and internalising the music in the body in a pleasant way, and urging the partygoer to dance:

Thomas: For me, first time experience ... supposedly it was this strong kind of MD[MA], and I was just, I took it some time before, and just asking a friend: when's it gonna kick in, when's it

⁸ For variations in the MDMA content of ecstasy pills see Parrott (2004).

gonna kick in. Then I said all right, I'm gonna go get some water, I was still very-very sober. As I turn around with two bottles of water, away from the bar, it's just this ... wow, I'm on a cloud, I'm on something, and wow, it was pretty amazing. And then I think that was the first night I found my groove as well because at most of the gigs I went to before, prior, I was just standing there, sort of not really doing much, but then, then and there I found my groove, and yeah, dancing and getting into the music, for the first time, yeah (focus group, July 2012).

It may also contribute to the synaesthetic visualisation of the music:

Curtis: For me a lot of the time it helped me to visualise, like literally visualise the music. And I remember one, it was actually a rave party, it was many years ago, at the tennis centre, Rod Laver arena. It was a big DJ, I can't remember who. It was probably about six years ago or something. And there was a point where I actually stopped dancing, and I sat down, on one of the stands inside the arena, and listening to the music, I was really getting into the music. And I just closed my eyes, and there was a very strong visual hallucination. Closed eye visuals, and the music completely guided what was happening in my, you know, visual experience. And I stayed there for an unknown amount of time, and then when I came out of it as well, after it was just this reconnection of reality that I've never experienced before. One particular experience. For me it was connected to the drug being a visual kind of catalyst. Very strong MDMA (focus group, July 2012).

Empathy-Inducing or Empathogenic Effects

The empathy-inducing (empathogenic) effects of MDMA facilitate connection to the music and crowd, heightening the experience of the party:

Hugh: Yeah, I remember when Marcel Dettmann and Ben Klock⁹ played a few months ago. We had some pills that were crap, and they wouldn't do anything, and then we got some MDMA from a guy that we knew there. And like the first half of the party compared to the second half of the party, it made a real difference. So I think when I arrived, I sort of thought the crowd was too pushy, and I didn't feel so connected to the music, it wasn't loud enough. Then after [taking the MDMA] I felt warm feelings towards my fellow dancers, and yeah, it improved the experience, I felt more connected to the music. I guess we went up closer to the front, and had more energy obviously, and it made a big difference. It saved the night, I feel (focus group,

⁹ See Appendix 2.4.

November 2011).

Yet in certain cases the heightened emotions seem inappropriate, as the intimate interactions with the crowd and environment could steal the attention away from the music:

Curtis: When I take MD[MA], I find it difficult to concentrate on the music much, like I would concentrate on the music, and I would enjoy it when I get into it, but then I would be interested in hugging my friends, and you know [laughs] ... Dancing, and just rubbing people's backs, and you know, just having these conversations with strangers, you know, and forget about the music (focus group, July 2012).

Acid

Academic psychology discusses the psychedelic state triggered by LSD consumption as a profound ASC or altered state of consciousness (Ludwig 1969). The pharmacological list of the commonly perceived effects of such states include alterations in thinking; distorted sense of time; (temporary) loss of control; change in emotional expression and body image; perceptual distortions; change in meaning or significance; sense of the ineffable; feelings of rejuvenation; and hypersuggestibility (Ludwig 1969: 14-17).

Availability and Dosage

In the context of my research, considering the limited availability of good pills and the exceptionally high prices of MDMA and speed in Australia compared to global prices, acid provides a viable alternative to these drugs for a fraction of the cost. Its psychedelic effect, over eight to twelve hours, works well with the music and is suitable for keeping up with long nights out:

Andrew: Last year when I was going out, I was studying, and I didn't have much money, so I'd always take acid before I went out, 'cause it was cheap. You spent 15 bucks and had the whole night, you don't have to buy any drinks and don't have to get anything else. Just have like water, maybe spend 10 bucks on the ticket, and then get a tram back home as you stay up to eight AM no matter what. And that was great. At every gig I had so much fun. As long as you don't get into any trouble, nothing's too weird to freak you out, then yeah ... Doing acid, I just had so much fun. I did go to a lot of events that weren't amazing, but I just took acid, and it was

still really fun (focus group, November 2011).

It is important to note that most participants restrict their consumption to half or quarter a tab (one tab may contain approximately 100-200 micrograms of LSD) to avoid ‘freaking out’. Especially with higher doses, the psychedelic effect characteristic of acid may trigger highly disturbing confusions in sensory perception: thoughts are potentially ‘realised’, and impressions are amplified or distorted. Regulated urban environments such as city clubs and, particularly, commercial venues or festivals are thus not considered appropriate for higher doses.

Andrew: I have done that. I did it on Plastikman¹⁰ at Future Music,¹¹ ‘cause I got a free ticket. It was really difficult. Like I saw people I knew from high school and I never really spoke to, so I didn't really like them, and then I saw like dickheads with their shirt off that were really drunk ... It was really fucking terrible. Everybody was trying to leave at the same time, it was really full. And no one wants to speak to random people there. They just sort of want to get drunk with their own sort of friends. But in the end at one point of the night everyone was like ... girls falling over and guys trying to fuck them, and it was just pretty fucking terrible. I did it and I would do it again, but only [with] a small amount, ‘cause you need to stand on top of things at that sort of party (focus group, November 2011).

Susan: I can't imagine that I would take acid at a techno gig, maybe because I prefer acid in outdoor places, so I can't imagine myself taking it in a CBD club or somewhere ... Yeah, I never took acid at an outdoor techno festival, so maybe that can be different. But for acid I need more place to move around.

Thomas: Yeah, exactly, you do need an escape if something was bad to happen, which nearly did for me, and yeah, by now I realised that not so much in an indoor, closed environment, yeah (focus group, July 2012).

The Psychedelic Experience

Especially with higher doses, acid is conducive to ‘tripping’ or getting away from reality in

¹⁰ See Appendix 2.5.

¹¹ Future Music Festival is a large-scale, commercial EDM festival that takes place annually in most Australian capital cities.

terms of one's personal, virtual adventure. It also attracts attention on musical subtleties and aligns the trip to this enhanced flow of the music.

Cooper: First time you take acid is different for different people, you know, people [react] differently, but for me acid brought out all these layers in the music that I didn't notice. And it's almost like they don't leave you afterwards either. Like you know, you hear the music in a different way, after that, when you hear it. I basically took acid at a lot of early raves, and it was almost like ... You know, in every culture, everyone has a release, whether being drunk on the weekend, or you know, just to get over how hard work was during the week, or whatever. But acid was like, like you're basically taking a week on another planet [laughs]. And you felt like you're getting way more out of your weekend, 'cause you're up all night, and you're on an adventure, it's like being on holiday (focus group, January 2012).

The drug may enhance the experience of the music and the party not just temporarily but also on the long term because it increases sensibility towards 'weird' or intentionally displaced sounds and visuals, and it helps focus on observed phenomena and facilitates reflections:

Q: Does it add something to this effect of, so to say, strangeness in techno that we were talking about?

Andrew: Yeah, I think, when I went to that party I was talking about, in Japan, I thought this is really strange, it's the sort of place I've never been before. Then when I was on acid I realised that I'm in a fucking aircraft hangar. And then just wondering why they would have it in an aircraft hangar, like why? 'Cause they had visuals too, which were really good: [British video artist] Chris Cunningham. And just wondering why, like, in this clip someone would beat the fuck out of someone else. I think I think about the strangeness more, which is good, like whereas if I'm not on drugs at that time, then that's weird, and just forget about it, I don't interact with it at all (focus group, November 2011).

The experience is generally considered 'individualistic' and more about oneself, triggering reflections on one's personality and life narratives, in synergy with the music:

Hugh: The music can influence the experience quite a lot, but it's like you think about yourself when ...

Stuart: It's a soundtrack to the experience, I think, with acid. For me, with acid, it's a soundtrack for myself, rather than focusing on the music. Whereas pills and MDMA and speed are particularly more ... I mean [with] speed, to a certain extent, you know, the music is very much the focal point, whereas with acid you go into your own head (focus group, November 2011).

This corresponds to the academic view that the nature of each LSD trip is highly dependent on the dosage, the personal predisposition or expectation (set) and the actual environment (setting) (Pechnick and Ungerleider 2004).

4.5 Fragments from the Field: Participant Evaluations of Drug Effects

Losing Bits of Control

The participants give accounts of a functionalist or purposeful use of drugs, self-consciously employed as technologies of controlled de-control (Featherstone 1991: 78-81) in order to enhance the experience of the party.

Q: Do you think that there are two ways of taking drugs: one is explosive, in whatever direction you can take or can think of, and the other the opposite?

Andrew: I definitely think that. You can either take three trips of acid, you can take three trips and you've lost control or you have to keep yourself up to the drug, or you can take like bits of speed, bits of acid, and try dictating your night. And you don't really lose control, it's not quite the same, but you just lose bits of control. I think you have to plan it beforehand to sort of see what you want for the night.

Q: Can you control acid in higher quantities? You can't ...

Andrew: No, exactly, you can't. Yeah, I've been out before and took lots of acid, and you just can't control it. So I've stopped taking quite so much. Unless I'm in the bush or something (follow-up interview, November 2011).

Complete submission to drug technologies is thus considered inappropriate in urban venues where most Melbourne techno parties are held, and the clash between subject and object is

kept on the borderline of “just losing bits of control”.

Flashbacks and Formative Aspects

Most participants agree that during their early partygoer history the LSD or MDMA experiences had ‘switched a switch’, and they could reach back to the previous experiences at later parties in the form of flashbacks:

Q: Can you experience or appreciate EDM in the same way if you’ve never tried drugs?

Jack: I hate to say that, but my initial gut reaction is to say no, and I have told a couple of my friends that they won't be able to experience music that way that I'd listen to without trying out something.

Hugh: Yeah, I would say that even just ... It's helping if you just had drugs. You don't have to be on drugs to enjoy it the way that you [should], but you need to have experienced it on drugs to understand, I feel.

Stuart: Yeah, I 100% agree with that. ‘Cause it's almost as if it switches a switch in your brain.

Hugh: Yeah, it creates a deeper connection with the music.

Stuart: That you can always access at a later stage, when you are sober (focus group, November 2011).

Drugs are considered to have a positive influence on the party in particular and on life in general, improving attention on one’s surroundings or opening up new perspectives especially during the first few years of consumption.

Q: What’s the gain from drugs?

Christina: You know, if you are a teenager, it can give you more, you are more affected, you become more open, make more friendships. And your humour can change. You can have the feeling of understanding things better. Simple things, but if you are young and take drugs, it matters.

James: I guess maybe in the sense that some substances remove yourself from the situation a little bit, and then you're a bit more receptive to sounds and whatever, and make you

appreciate, or make you listen a little closer to what you're hearing. And in that sense maybe that builds up to the point that you're more receptive, in a general sense. And then that leads up to kind of being open to different things, which may be techno or may be whatever (focus group, November 2011).

Deviations from the Real

The drug effect is generally considered fake as opposed to the conceived reality of the sober state:

Cooper: [Ecstasy] is almost like plastic in terms of you're really happy, everything's great, but you know, afterwards it really is just a kind of a false state of mind you're in, and it wears off. . . . Proper MDMA, it almost gives you a feeling of like, you know, you really do, you're one with everyone. You don't hate your enemies. It really does give you this empathy, whether it's false or not. For the time you're on it, you really just, you can't understand why people fight in the world, you can't understand, you know. And it really shaped the scene, and it really did have a lot to do with the type of people that went there, and you've got to give it credit. You know, it's the reason why there were so many nice people there, and not any fights. But unfortunately, with any kind of amphetamine, there's gonna be a time when it wears off, and people get cranky, and the after-effects [laughs] (focus group, January 2012).

Curtis: It's like, for example, looking at something with your normal eyes, and then looking at something with red sunglasses on or something. It just changes the appearance or the perception of what it is, but it doesn't make it better, it just makes it different, you know. But I also understand that it's in a sense an artificial perspective, that is gone once the drugs are gone. So then it becomes a little bit fake for me, as well, it becomes an artificial insincerity as well, that is attached to the drug, and then the experience. Not just the music, but of everything that I experience through the drug, you know (focus group, July 2012).

Perhaps it is best to use the metaphor of a second life in order to define the effect as an augmented virtual space that differs from daily life:

Stuart: It's like a second life kind of ... it's almost like a performance that I can fall back on, as a kind of release.

Hugh: Yeah, 'cause it's pretty different to day to day life, when you're going to university, when you're going to work.

Stuart: I think . . . that you're out at that second life thing. Like I was saying to Boti [the researcher] as well, like my friends at uni, if I told them what I did at the weekend, they almost wouldn't believe me, because the performance I give to them is very much academic and intellectual, the side which they know about. They'd go: wow, how the fuck can you be doing this on the weekend? You know, it's like an intrigue kind of thing (focus group, November 2011).

When it comes to the potent psychedelic acid, none of the interviewees define the effect in itself as providing entrance to a grounded reality or a transcendental state.¹² Only Thomas, a physics PhD student, gives account of experiencing oneness with the Universe, yet only for the duration of the trip, questioning its legitimacy afterwards. In the second example provided by Thomas, the reality of the drug effect is self-reflexively questioned already during the trip, although such questioning could become problematic with higher doses:

Thomas: Acid and MD[MA] ... I think in both instances I still love the music, but especially with acid though, this is completely off the music, but I feel oneness with the Universe. That's a very weird phrase, but like, I feel [laughs] I'm just chilled. On trips the Universe is just amazing. I'm not spiritual in any way, so I think with drugs it's the altered mindset, it's for me to only feel a spiritual connection with the Universe, other people, or something along those lines. But I feel really-really cool on trips.

Q: Is it different to MD?

Thomas: Yeah, definitely, definitely it's different to MD. Trips can make you do, like they can play with your head and make you do ... Not make you do things, but just focus on a few things. I had some moments where the music just died down all the sudden, and I could just hear everyone's conversation, like really distinctly, and the music just dies down. I just focused and just chattering everywhere. I'm just talking to a mate, like why is there so much chattering? [He says:] Ah, it's probably the trips or something. And I'm like: ah, yeah [laughs]. And it goes on for a good 20 minutes, and finally the music comes back again (focus group, July 2012).

¹² The idea of LSD providing entrance to a transcendental state, which had significant influence on the 1960s (hippie) counterculture as well, is originally rooted in the experiences of Aldous Huxley, who, in the mid-1950s, defined taking LSD (and mescaline) as a mystical/religious experience (Novak 1997: 93-95).

4.6 “Pushing Boundaries in another World”: The Augmented (Un)Reality of the Drug Effect

A recurring topic in the fragments addressing drugs (4.4 – 4.5) is that of reality and the deviations from this conceived reality. In my discussion the definition of reality is based on Baudrillard’s use of the term. As it can be inferred from the previous chapters, the term may convey to meanings:

1. The reality situated as critical foundation against the semiotic production of the simulacrum; with the groundedness of this real being discovered in the symbolic relations of traditional societies derived from a Durkheimian tradition built around the concept of the sacred (Merrin 2005: 16, 31, 42). I refer to this as the symbolic/real.
2. The reality of Western consumer culture, where the extensive semiotic production and mediatisation permeates and transforms the lived experience of the everyday with the possibility of overturning it into the hyperreal (Merrin 2005: 32). This is the more frequent use of the term in my project, and I simply refer to this as the real or the everyday (reality).

In the previous chapter I described drugs as mediating technologies, the effects of which are as integral to the dance floor vibe as musical structures and environmental arrangements. Indeed, club culture can be succinctly defined as a “heady combination of dance music . . . and drugs” (Moore 2003: 138). Yet the presence of illegal substances separates clubbing from many other recreational activities or hobbies. Accordingly, my interviewees commonly note that letting others know about their drug consumption habits would be received with bewilderment or stigmatisation in many everyday environments. Even so, consumer culture does promote inversions and transgressions through its institutionalised techniques of controlled de-control (Featherstone 1991: 81-82). As suggested in Chapter 3.3, party drugs ironically fulfil the promises of happiness, adventure and hallucinatory enchantment that permeate the mediatised context of everyday life. Contrary to mass media, where advertisements distribute tautological imperatives coded in the discourse of the brand as self-fulfilling prophecies ratified by the purchase of the customer (Baudrillard 1998: 127), widely used recreational drugs such as ecstasy and acid instantly deliver their promise by replacing the sign value of the media with the use value of the chemical effect. Additionally, they cause an intensified and temporary change in the perception of the world that may disturb the more subtle conditioning

mechanisms of everyday media. The drug-infused atmosphere of the party can permeate everyday values, and for punters such as Stuart this gives rise to an intriguing sentiment (4.5: Deviations from the Real). Clubland thus constitutes an intriguing site within consumer culture for leading a covert 'second life' that is shared with fellow partygoers.

Attempting to address a possible ontological status of drug worlds, in one of the focus groups I asked about Second Life, the online virtual world where users interact with each other through 'avatars'.¹³ The expression had been spontaneously applied to techno parties by Stuart, and subsequently adopted by other participants of the same focus group.

Q: So you've mentioned Second Life, is [clubbing] like an online video game?

Stuart: Yeah, for sure. You're literally like . . . an avatar but in a physical space (focus group, November 2011).

Tom Boellstorff (2008: 19) notes in his ethnographic monograph on Second Life that online virtual worlds are dependent on the gap between the virtual and the actual. Boellstorff (2008: 105) emphasises that the existence of this gap "is critical: were it to be filled in, there would be no virtual worlds, and in a sense no actual world either". Stuart's words suggest that the consumption of party drugs enables a temporary state of self-virtualisation where this gap is indeed eliminated, triggering the paradoxical awareness of a mediated immediacy that meshes together the sensory experience of the immediate environment with the consumer experience of mass and online media contents. In the context of the techno party the augmentative effect of a cybernetic or virtual Second Life is conflated with the embodied experience of the dance floor driven by pulsating music effects (4.2: Hard or Intense, The Bass, Loud, Abrasive). In the second fragment of 4.4: MDMA. *Interaction with the Music* Curtis evokes a "reconnection of reality" that he "never experienced before", which also signals that the dance floor experience may traverse through multiple drug-mediated (un)realities (in this case from the synaesthetic journey within the music to the heightened and unique perception of the actual physical

¹³ Second Life is a Web-based virtual world run by Linden Research, Inc. The online environment is shaped by its residents represented by user-customisable avatars, who are able to buy land, build properties, run businesses, sustain relationships and participate in various other social and economic interactions. Real world businesses and institutions such as nightclubs, restaurants, fashion stores and university campuses may also have a presence in Second Life. The economy of the world is based on the Linden Dollar, which can be exchanged into real world currency (Descy 2008).

environment).

A closer look reveals the role of the real in the evaluation of the drug effect. During the waking states of sense perception, the external sense organs (detectors) collect information from our surroundings which are then transmitted to processing within the brain. MDMA and LSD affect neurotransmitter activities, acting as internal filters (as the “red sunglasses” mentioned by Curtis in the second fragment of 4.5: *Deviations from the Real*) that alter the experience of the surrounding reality, deviating from non-altered or everyday sense perception. From the current perspective of neuroscience, LSD increases general responsiveness to sensory stimuli by triggering an effect of sensory overload in the neurons, and particularly increases responsiveness to stimuli previously of little significance (Passie et al. 2008, Key 1965) leading to dose-dependent distortions in the audio-visual perception (second fragment of 4.4.: *Acid. The Psychedelic Experience*). As for MDMA, its street name ecstasy refers to its mood-enhancing psychological effects that are primarily mediated by its interactions with serotonin and dopamine transporters (Liechti and Vollenweider 2000). The drug is consumed in recreational settings for its empathogenic or pro-social qualities (Bedi, Hyman, and Wit 2010) (4.4: *MDMA. Empathy-Inducing or Empathogenic Effects*). MDMA also internalises, intensifies and converts the music into heightened bodily sensations or movements, or even synaesthetic perceptions (Reynolds 1999: 83) (4.4: *MDMA. Interaction with the Music*).

The production of these drug-altered audio-visual effects and feelings takes place in the human brain, and their ‘real’ referent is the everyday sense perception that is commonly experienced in the sober state or during the ‘normal’ functioning of the nervous system. The reality of consumer culture is shaped or conditioned, among others, by the media processes that impregnate everyday environments. By altering the transmission of the message, the drug acts as a medium that affects the perception in such a way that it temporarily overwrites the real referent, impacting upon the subject’s engagement with the surroundings. Particularly with psychedelics such as LSD, in certain contexts this disruptive effect may raise awareness to the cultural conditioning of reality and trigger insightful reflections (Brandt and Passie 2012: 539). The fragments in 4.5: *Deviations from the Real* suggest that during the experience the effect is either accepted or lived as real (Cooper: MDMA “really does give you this empathy, whether it's false or not”) or self-reflexively questioned as fake (Thomas: “Ah, it's probably the trips”). This is dependent on substance/dose, set and setting. Following the experience, the drug-influenced perspective is generally considered artificial or fake by my interviewees, as a

paradoxical actualisation of virtuality (Stuart: “an avatar but in a physical space”) that is strikingly different from everyday environments. In this manner the internalised drug-medium creates a disruptive augmentation of the real (everyday sense perception), with the latter already being conditioned by media images and discourses. In my research the theoretical relevance of these findings resides in the possible connections to Baudrillard’s theory of simulation and particularly to his related concept of virtuality.

For Baudrillard (1997a), virtuality pervades everyday reality, where it is often undetectable. In consumer culture, lived experience is necessarily raw material that feeds the virtual. The potential virtualisation of all aspects of life places the virtual camera in our head: we have “swallowed our microphones and headsets” in the obsession for operationalising the world and trapping the real into its hyperreal model (Baudrillard 1997a: 19-20). By the application of this metaphoric imagery Baudrillard highlights the almost invisible influence of mediatisation and virtualisation on the immediate context of everyday life. Yet he warns against the possibility of complete virtualisation: a perfect, high-def doubling of the world would render the non-virtual useless, effectively eliminating us from the formula or forcing us to retreat into extinction. Baudrillard (1997a: 23) illustrates this process by referring to the fable of sci-fi writer Arthur C. Clarke (1966): after accomplishing an assignment received from the Monks of Tibet regarding the computerised transcription of the 99 billion names of God,¹⁴ the protagonist computer technicians leave the Tibetan site at night just to see the stars above dying out one by one, a prophecy in which they did not believe. At the end of this text Baudrillard (1997a: 27) reflects on the hyperbolic nature of his statements and concludes that a complete fulfilment of virtualisation is, fortunately, impossible.

Drug use at techno parties involves the internalisation of an external object that fully accomplishes the mediatisation of the surrounding reality and enables the temporary, high-def virtualisation of the self. The direct or lived experience of the party is formed and transformed “real time” (Baudrillard 1997a: 25): the flow of the (non-)event is mediated immediately by the drug. Chemical catalysts actualise the “waveform transmission” (Eshun 1998: 136) of techno tracks; togetherness is found in the alienating sensation channelled through the music. The repetition of the night out in terms of clubbing leads not only to momentary departure from the actual environment, but creates a prolonged distancing from the everyday as well – which

¹⁴ The original short story counts 9 billion names.

is further intensified by the unpopular or underground status of techno in Melbourne (4.2: Unpopular).

Stuart: Telling people: wow, I'm going to Japan to the most amazing techno festival in the world. They're like: what the fuck are you talking about? . . . That's not the reason I like the music, but I'm sure it contributes something to that feeling that you're finding and exploring something new. Exploring in another life, like pushing boundaries in another world. Probably on the subconscious level it works more like that for me.

Hugh: Yeah, it's funny that the word techno has sort of bad associations. . . . Yeah, people wouldn't understand. Yeah, it's kind of like a second life. It sort of works together, you still can't have one without another.

Stuart: Well you can, and then you're like Darrel and Percy [Stuart's acquaintances] who are just fucking ghosts of men.

Hugh: Yeah, it's not a good way to live, either one or the other (focus group, November 2011).

The fragment suggests that the perceived stigmatised status of the drug-infused music scene increases the distancing of the experiences from the everyday. Moreover, resonating with Baudrillard's (1997a: 27) previously mentioned assertion, Stuart notes that the existential fulfilment of virtuality would force the real to withdraw completely, emptying out the partygoers into "ghosts of men" (which is also related to the physical effect of excessive drug use). Instead, the interviewees give accounts of a regulated and purposeful application of drugs as vehicles of virtualisation at parties (4.5: Losing Bits of Control).

In his essay addressing the possibilities of aesthetic illusion, Baudrillard (1997a: 7-8) criticises contemporary art that restricts itself to the recycling of previous forms or remains entrapped in the tautological fascination with its own technological perfection. For Baudrillard, this implies aesthetic disillusion, for example in instances of cinema that are determined by the abundance of high-def, special effects and intertextual quotations. Instead of being focused on the proliferation of forms and techniques, illusionary art implies interaction with a 'void': it does not attempt to reproduce the world microscopically, in all its details, but subtly hints at the presence of missing yet significant dimensions. This enchants the work with a mysterious aura, facilitates contemplation and enables aesthetic distance. The *trompe l'oeil* painting, for

instance, delivers the power of illusion by stealing away a dimension from real objects, an act which “highlights their presence and their magic through the simple unreality of their minimal exactness” (Baudrillard 1997a: 9). The possibilities of such aesthetic illusion are jeopardised particularly by the fulfilment of a virtuality that simulates the real in all of its dimensions and surrounds the consumer subject with the profusion of (media) images.

Rex Butler (1997: 51) notes that much of Baudrillard’s writing revolves around the tension between the original and the perfection of its copy. From the moment of its technical perfection the copy constitutes a simulacrum that only resembles itself (the relationship is no longer of resemblance but of two distinct originals). Baudrillard’s category of the symbolic/real signifies the “very difference between the original and the copy, what the original and the copy both resemble and what therefore allows them to resemble each other” (Butler 1997: 53). This is the distinctive essence of the original that permits resemblance and is therefore lost during the act of copying, becoming an internal limit of simulation. This creates a paradoxical situation because at its best, theory itself constitutes a simulacrum that tries to approach this original/real that resides outside its grasp. In other words, in this epistemological model “any attempt to speak of [reality] can only turn it into a simulacrum, and . . . reality is the limit to all attempts to speak of it, to turn it into a simulacrum” (Butler 1997: 54). While culture itself is impregnated with simulation processes, Baudrillard suggests, in accordance with his critical position on the side of the symbolic, that traditional cultures attempted to sustain a symbolic balance with the “unconditional simulacrum” reflecting the reality or the “radical illusion” of the world (Baudrillard 1997a: 18). Elsewhere Baudrillard (1997b: 49) addresses this illusion by hypothesising an unexplorable, enabling condition where “nothing is itself, nothing means what it appears to mean”. The possibility of illusion is, however, jeopardised with the emergence of the “conditional [or] aesthetic form of the simulacrum” growing out from our current socio-cultural conditions that seeks to replace the real with its hyper-operational model (Baudrillard 1997a: 18). In conjunction with his critical position, Baudrillard expresses a hope to return to the “primitive scene of illusion”, an act that could reproduce the symbolic groundedness of reality and rejoin us “with the rituals and phantasmagories of symbolic cultures” (Baudrillard 1997a: 18).

Techno offers a different alternative, being aimed at an exploration of the virtual that is profoundly illusionary yet lacks the nostalgic concern for rediscovering a lost (symbolic/real) condition. As discussed in this chapter, the music gives hints of missing dimensions and

designates 'gaps'. The subject is then seduced by this alienating void and falls into a zone of pure potentiality (4.2: Alien or Psychedelic) that is constantly open to (re)interpretation (by filling the 'gaps'). Yet at the same time the aesthetic experience derives from the fascination with a heavily mediatised, virtual environment. James (focus group, November 2011) states that for him techno is more architecture than music in the sense that its effect is an organisation of abstract spatiality rather than narrative temporality – intensified at parties by drugs. Recreational drugs are effective catalysts for the intimate and enhanced appreciation of the music (4.4: MDMA and 4.4: LSD) by coalescing with the psychedelic structure of techno (Chapter 4.3) and amplifying the affective qualities of the sounds (4.2: Hard or Intense, The Bass, Loud, Abrasive). A good party allows the experience of a musical *trompe l'oeil* that challenges media processes by inexplicably evolving from their blind spots, transforming the depth perception of virtuality by augmenting it with illusionary, missing dimensions.¹⁵ The music itself is the essential projection of this expanded, illusionary entity.

Distinct from parties, home listening would constitute an in-between phase, appropriate for actualising the qualities of the music and possibly delivering flashbacks of the music/drug experience (4.5: Flashbacks and Formative Aspects). Something is brought back to the everyday from the party, and this also relates to the enduring effect of taking drugs in general, as the perception of everyday reality undergoes alterations. The interviewees commonly suggest that especially in the case of LSD, sensibilities are raised and attention directed toward surprising associations stirring up the contexts of the everyday. As if the naturalising processes of consumer culture would lose from their aura of objectivity and become more prone to a game of illusions after the drug experience, with participants frequently mentioning an opening up of everyday environments (4.5: Flashbacks and Formative Aspects) – which is then conceived as maturation:

Q: So there's something that, generally speaking, drug use adds to your personality.

Christina: Yeah, exactly, it's not only about the music and the gigs.

James: Yeah, maybe I'd say as a whole package.

Christina: A package to grow up [laughs] (focus group, November 2011).

¹⁵ It is as if the glowing skyline of the embossed techno-soundscape would be burst into pieces by the extrapolation of dark crepuscular rays. The process involves the rigorous programming of the body in order to access gaps in the code which are then complemented by the subject.

5. The Techno Party

This chapter continues the investigation of techno along the lines laid out in the previous chapter, adding the environment of the techno party into the mix. After an initial exploration of the scene based on field journal recordings, the perceptions of the focus group respondents are considered. This is followed by the main analysis describing the ideal setting for techno and discussing the sensibilities revealed in Chapter 4 in the context of this environment. The aim is to provide a close analysis of the party in its urban setting that relates back to the theoretical framework of my research.

5.1 Field Recordings: Exploring the Melbourne Underground

Between August 2011 and August 2012 I conducted participant observation at 10 techno parties complemented by field journal recordings. I did not start the fieldwork as a complete foreigner to the scene as I had already been attending techno events in Melbourne since July 2010. Documenting the steps of an explorative journey, the field notes confirmed some of my early impressions and were also influenced by the focus group discussions that were conducted parallel with the participant observation from November 2011. The participant observation provided me with numerous memorable experiences – such as Oscar Mulero’s¹ relentless techno set played in the dungeon environment of Kronos club² or the blurred view of the Melbourne skyline through the grating fence surrounding an illegal acid techno party held under a highway bridge.

I arrived at the venues at around midnight, occasionally alone (especially in the earlier stages of the fieldwork), mostly in the companion of interlocutors. As a general rule, the soundtrack of the first hour is provided by the warm-up DJ, and this period of the night is ideal for having a chat with a drink or a cigarette in the smoking area (which can be the edge of the dance floor in the case of squat parties where indoor smoking is not prohibited). Once the near-dark venue gets packed at around one o’clock, the visibility on the dance floor is drastically reduced – especially when the smoke machine is frequently used –, only allowing a

¹ See Appendix 2.6.

² See Appendix 4.

fairly fragmented and impressionistic observation of events. As the tunes become harder, the more frenetic punters conglomerate in the first rows, close to the speakers. Yet this area is still quite easily accessible, and this is where I often find myself during the later stages of the night. Despite the intense movements, there is no moshing and barely any physical contact, just an almost stoic, focused appreciation of the music interrupted by occasional climaxes. Complementing the druggy hedonism (Reynolds 1999: 6) of some punters driven by the loud, banging tunes and the flash of lights, the performance has an almost geekish character, with the techno audience jacking (Pope 2011: 40) into its often drug-mediated environment similar to William Gibson's (1984) description of sci-fi hackers jacking into the cyberspace of the matrix. After some time of dancing and almost getting completely lost in the music, I suddenly switch into 'self-reflexive mode': thoughts hit my mind, and I type a few key phrases into my mobile phone.³ Such jottings, together with subsequent voice recording in the smoking areas or when the party is over, form the basis of my regular field journal entries. What follows in this section is a series of descriptions of the techno party primarily based on my field notes.

Environments and Crowds: An Overview

The majority of techno parties in Melbourne are low in numbers. An attendance of 200-300 partygoers contributes to their underground feel. Despite the small crowds, the scene enjoys a quite frequent (at least fortnightly) appearance of noteworthy international headliners whose home bases range from Berlin to Detroit. After my experiences in Europe where techno parties tend to attract significantly larger crowds, it was pleasantly surprising to see major players of the global techno scene playing for such small crowds. For the perspectives of ethnographic fieldwork, a smaller scene provides a better 'laboratory' for investigating the all-important vibe that is more reliant on the partygoers' drug-infused field experiences (Vitos 2012: 20-21) and less related to the accumulation of "subcultural capital" (Thornton 1996) and the associated reproduction of scene identities (see also Chapter 2.2). One significant drawback of the restricted size is that the bigger and more profit-oriented Melbourne venues tend to shut down parties – and thus put an end to participant observation – prematurely when local DJs are unable to attract suitably large crowds. For instance, if the international headliner played from one to three o'clock, followed by a local DJ whose crowd was considerably thinning out,

³ I use a smartphone that has a physical keyboard for the quick recording of key impressions.

at a larger club like the Passage Club⁴ the room would often be shut down at four o'clock even if the original lineup ended at six in the morning.

The locations recorded in my field journal are either inner city (CBD) venues or, less frequently, abandoned urban spaces occupied by an acid techno crew that is active mostly in the harbour area. At many CBD clubs the gratuitous harassment by bouncers is quite common, who would for instance supervise and instruct punters when having a cigarette in front of smaller venues without a designated smoking area, or engage in conversations with them in order to identify intoxicated patrons and deny them access to the club – ironically encouraging to drop the drinks and drop pills instead. Avoiding licensing regulations and the occasional annoyance of bouncers, the squat parties provide a raw atmosphere and deregulated environment for a crowd that is keen on getting a bit loose. One typical example from my field journal is an early winter (June 2012) party organised in a graffiti-covered, desolate building residing in an industrial area close to the harbour. Upon arrival one would first enter a dark room where attendees would be chilling or sorting out their drugs on the barren floor, separated by a grating from the main dance area where dancers would 'lose it' to the harsh sounds of hard acid techno and the occasional flashes of a rotating searchlight fitted behind the DJ decks. Of course, the main disadvantage of such events is that they are frequently shut down by the authorities – as in the case of two out of five illegal parties I visited.⁵

In Melbourne only a few legal venues provide shelter for uninterrupted partying until the morning hours similar to squat parties. My personal favourite is the Kronos, a club that is frequently praised by the focus group respondents as well. Literally underground, located in a basement near Melbourne's inner-city market, upon arrival it offers little transition or preparation for the night ahead, with punters having to descend a narrow staircase that is devoured by a boisterous black pit enclosed within barren walls. Once down, partygoers find themselves on the edge of the only dance floor, near the bar, shaken by the rhythms of the night ahead. Indeed, when it comes to techno parties, my respondents particularly appreciate the inescapable presence of the loud music and the post-apocalyptic aesthetic reminiscent of disused bomb shelters. This is very different to the flamboyant design and associated behavioural codes of more mainstream venues. Accordingly, after visiting the after-party of a

⁴ See Appendix 4.

⁵ The first interrupted party was held in a warehouse and the second under a highway overpass, among the sheds of the harbour. The music was stopped immediately yet the punters were not harassed by authorities in any way.

commercial EDM festival (Future Music Festival 2012) held in an upmarket CBD venue (Dorothy Parlour),⁶ one of the respondents, Christina, expressed her concerns regarding the unnecessary rituals of wardrobe queuing, buying drinks at separate bar areas and mingling in the chill out room in terms of their deviation from the more purist approach of techno crowds both in Melbourne and Budapest, Hungary.⁷ Indeed, Kronos has no wardrobe at all and only one bar right on the edge of the dance floor. Moreover, its two chill out areas consist of just a few sofas that are very close to the dance floor – which effectively inhibits ‘chilling’ and urges punters to join the heat of the party. Even lavatory drug taking is de-ritualised at Kronos: while during the first few hours of the Future Music after-party punters would queue up at the toilets waiting for their turn to sort themselves out, Kronos features a single, graffiti-laden male toilet in a cramped area that does not really fit this purpose – although I did spot once an international headliner DJ using that toilet in a rush and leaving an empty drug bag behind.

The crowds at techno parties are relatively unspectacular compared with other EDM genres. One example is provided by the above mentioned after-party where many of the punters would probably be attracted to the more commercial genres such as euro-trance or (tech-)house corresponding to the main profile of the large scale festival. The majority of this audience are trendy youth under 25, with the girls constituting approximately one-third of the crowd. The females are dressed quite elegantly, many of them in heels and short dresses, and the boys a bit more casually, in T-shirts and often jeans, some of them looking quite muscular. In contrast, techno crowds are dressed very casually, mainly in jumpers and sneakers, sometimes in darker colours, with a lower ratio of girls and a higher age bracket, generally ranging to mid-thirties. As stated in Chapter 4.1, my fieldwork is focused on the more purist incarnations of techno with fewer crossovers into other EDM genres, loosely defined along an acid-Detroit-hard-industrial techno axis. In my experience these subgenres appeal to the fairly unspectacular crowd described above with slight variations. For example, an older crew who often plays harder subgenres after midnight attracts relatively older punters, and many of the acid techno regulars have a more rugged, punkish look.

⁶ See Appendix 4.

⁷ Having arrived from Budapest a year before the time of the interview, Christina was relatively new to Melbourne clubbing yet provided useful remarks, comparing it with Hungarian techno parties she had been visiting for over 10 years.

Crowd Behaviour Patterns

The general schedule of a night out is similar to the observations of Jackson (2004: 17-20) that were outlined in Chapter 3.4: after the possible consumption of pre-drinks or pre-drugs outside the venue, the party begins with a warm-up period,⁸ with dance floors being filled after midnight, traversing through a period of maximum intensity a few hours later, and their “energetic heart” (Jackson 2004: 19) carrying on until the lights come on at around dawn. In Melbourne, some of the more stereotypical actors of this progression would include: dancers persistently marching on with the flow of the music; less active punters bobbing their heads on the edge of the dance floors; a few drugged-up dancers bouncing maniacally in the first rows; inactive partygoers buying their drinks at the bar or mingling in the smoking or chill out areas; and, to a lesser amount, a few girls teasing with voluptuous dance movements and some drunk guys trying to attract their attention.

In accordance with the casual outlook of most partygoers, the techno party lacks any crystallised choreography or spectacular display of bodies. In any case, this would be inhibited by the general darkness that is, however, particularly suitable for immersion into the music. In Chapter 4.6 I argued that the drug/music synthesis is conducive to a game of illusions and psychedelic structures through a conjuration of missing dimensions or ‘gaps’. Perhaps one’s personal dance style is to be found in these gaps: as stated by a respondent, Thomas, drugs help finding one’s own groove, doing whatever feels comfortable and focusing on it (focus group, July 2012). Dancers would generally follow the tight rhythmic structures of the music, with its flow of tensions and releases being channelled into their muscles. The body thus becomes the uninhibited, functional attachment of music and drugs, and intensive movements would not signify clever choreographies but, more often than not, levels of drug consumption. This is not to say that everyone is high every time, yet drug consumption has a clear imprint on the vibe (also retrospectively in one’s self-narratives) and is discussed in the focus groups as a normalised ingredient of the scene. Accordingly, my investigation of the dance floor experience is focused on the interactions of music, drug, environment and crowd.

This general behaviour is exemplified in the following field journal fragment from Oscar Mulero’s excellent 2012 DJ set at Kronos:

⁸ Many punters who arrive in the late hours avoid this warm-up period and jump right into the heat of the party.

The music is gradually getting harder; I recognise some Detroit tunes before it eventually morphs into hard techno. People are immersed in the music and there's hardly any contact; still, they pay attention not to obstruct each other's movements. As the set gets more intensive some of the more drugged-up punters in the first rows start snarling, without any hostility though. The party is unspectacular in the sense that most punters are not overdressed, with a dominance of darker colours; in fact, one bloke in the front is under-dressed as he took off his T-shirt. There are no frills and no smiles: dancers keep on focusing on the sounds and the rhythm above everything else, with occasional whooping during the more intensive sections (field journal, March 2012).

Techno DJs are rarely showmen, although those with high levels of expertise, including the cream of the Melbourne DJs, cherish intimate relationships with their crowds by means of interaction through the music. A receptive crowd reacts accordingly when the DJ drops well-known or well-suited tracks in the mix or uses mixer functions such as the equalizer, the crossfader and the volume control in creative ways. Consequently, technical imperfections may ruin otherwise exceptional progressions, and the effects of trainwrecking⁹ for example are instantly felt on the dance floor. One such unfortunate event recorded in my field journal is from Detroit house/techno DJ Mike Huckaby's 2011 Melbourne performance. The set was undermined by some technical issues that generated subsequent discussions on internet forums as well.¹⁰ Indeed partygoers – including the majority of the focus group respondents – prefer to express their engagement with the techno scene in terms of their knowledge of the music and their appreciation of production and mixing techniques. At parties this often happens in the designated smoking areas, which provide effective contexts for such discussions.

⁹ Incorrect or off-beat mixing of vinyl records. It is worthwhile to note that many of the techno DJs are still using vinyl, a vintage medium requiring mixing skills, which are esteemed by most partygoers.

¹⁰ Huckaby's skills were eventually defended in forum posts as the following:

it looked like maybe huckabys needles were old because they were jumping all over the place. either that or the turntables weren't isolated properly. i find it hard to believe it was huckaby himself unable to beatmatch as every other mix i've heard from him has been completely spot on. dude has been around long enough to keep two songs in time (wush 2011).

5.2 Interview Fragments: The Melbourne Context of Techno

Complementing the previous observations based primarily on my field journal entries, the following section reviews the interviewees' perceptions of the ideal techno venues and crowds. The aim of these fragments is to set the scene for the analysis in the concluding section of this chapter.

Environment

The following table shows the 15 respondents' perceptions about the environment types that were most frequently mentioned during the focus groups. The questions of the interview guide were open ended, and the respondents were encouraged to discuss whatever they considered important. The figures in each cell indicate how many times the environments listed in the columns of the table are described using the attributes listed in the rows.

	Smaller underground clubs ▼	Occupied urban spaces ▼	Bigger mainstream clubs ▼	Weekend festivals (outdoor) ▼
Unexpected or Special ▼	4	16	2	1
Post-industrial or Grimy ▼	5	12	0	0
Hidden or Secret ▼	2	10	0	0
Sense of freedom ▼	2	6	1	4
Adventurous ▼	1	5	1	3
Familiar or Underground ▼	9	4	0	1
Sombre or Dark ▼	4	0	0	0
Uncomfortable ▼	2	0	7	0
Total	29	53	11	9

Figure 6: Environments and Attributes

According to the descriptions, the most discussed (53 instances) environment is similar to the abandoned urban spaces occupied by the Melbourne acid techno scene. Even if the smaller, underground clubs come only the second (29), these are the venues that are home to the majority of the techno parties recorded in my field journal. The figures in the 'Occupied urban spaces' column tend to be higher because they are derived from both the descriptions of actual environments in the acid techno focus group, and the idealised depictions in the others (the atmosphere of the ideal underground club is similar to that of a squat environment). The least discussed environments are the bigger, mainstream clubs (11) and the outdoor/weekend festivals (9). Unsurprisingly, the more commercial, mainstream clubs have a very bad reputation among the venues. Weekend festivals around Melbourne are less related to techno

and more to psytrance; therefore, they are seldom discussed, although considered adventurous and free as their deregulated environment is suitable for substance consumption.

Post-industrial Spaces

For most participants the ideal setting for techno is some sort of repurposed (perhaps squatted) industrial or urban environment:

Stan: Anything where you feel like it's temporary, or ephemeral, or you're getting a bit lost, so I do like the ones where you ... It's sort of a warehouse or something, you have to sort of go down to back alley, and you can hear a bit of, sort of, industrial noise, a train, or a highway in the background (focus group, November 2011).

Curtis: Yeah, these old factories, or these converted, purposefully made [structures].

Susan: For me this just means more freedom.

Curtis: I like the less formal venues that are not [just a] dance floor setup. . . . I think this kind of music is suited to this slightly deconstructed environment, for me anyway. That's got a bit of a raw feeling, and it feels a little bit out of place as well, for me. But again a lot of Melbourne parties are not really in all of these places, in my experience those places I like are more in Europe, you know (focus group, July 2012).

The participants of the acid techno focus group give accounts of their general preference of urban squat environments. There is a strong feeling among the veteran acid techno organisers that nightlife regulations have become considerably stricter during the years and that the relatively small scene does not generate enough bar sales to allow extended opening hours at city clubs.

Jake: I think also with the way society come in, like it was mentioned about security and sort of more people going out and looking for a good time, there are obviously stricter laws and more enforced time curfews on a lot of clubs, and nowadays it's even more. . . . And dealing with the club owners, as we still do it now, it's very black and white for them. They want to see, once again, sales over the bar, and that's it. So you need to be able to bring in a concept that will

bring a lot of people. Now at four in the morning we might have 50 people on the dance floor, but they won't even realise that there's a bar over there, 'cause they are on the dance floor. So that's why a lot of our scene has shifted now to doing free parties and stuff that's away from club nights (focus group, January 2012).

City Clubs

In the absence of squat environments, most participants prefer small underground clubs with a familiar atmosphere, relaxed door policies and longer opening hours – unsurprising given the restricted size of the Melbourne scene and the highly regulated nightlife in the CBD.

Andrew: I prefer to go to the Kronos because it's small, it's like 200 people maximum I think, it's loud, it's really good sound, the bar staff are nice, they are not dicks, they don't charge you for whatever. The security doesn't try to kick you out all the time, and it always has got this smoke machine on really high, and no fucking lights on. And the best party we went there . . . maybe six months ago, it was really good because it was just ... everyone was in the same mindset, it was six and half hours of straight techno and it was still probably 70% full at seven o'clock when the security guards kicked everyone out saying, like, that's enough, everyone has to go home. And yeah, it's also better than going to ... I don't know, lots of parties in Melbourne die out at three AM. The international headliner plays, and then about 20 minutes later everything shuts down 'cause everyone goes home, which is for a bunch of reasons I guess (focus group, November 2011).

The Kronos Club, also coined techno dungeon by some organisers and punters, employs a desolate aesthetics that is praised during the focus groups and resembles squat venues.

Stuart: For me hands down [it's] the Kronos. It's the best venue. Best, for me I think, just good sound, good room, good flow of people. . . . There's nothing flashy about it at all. And very small, very intimate. And you're forced to take part no matter what you do, you know. You can't time out for more than five minutes for a cigarette upstairs, or ... even when taking a piss, you're still on the dance floor basically, you know [laughs].

Q: If you can, you know, if that dodgy urinal is not full [laughs].

Stuart: Yeah [laughs]. So yeah, that's my two cents (focus group, November 2011).

Hugh: The Kronos. . . . I would say [it] is one of my favourite venues also, 'cause I like the size, I like it being small. Also it's a basement, and the basement kind of adds to the character, sort of going down the stairs, it's kind of fun, it's like going down to another world. And also 'cause it's very simple, it's just a dark room, um, with good sound (focus group, November 2011).

Even the participants of the acid techno focus group praise the Kronos for its raw feel and underground aesthetics.

Lily: There is a place I really like, near the [city] market, and it's probably my favourite. . . . just because it's actually downstairs, it's perfectly blacked out, and it's just, I don't know, the feel of it, with the music, it's so easy to get into it, it's almost like a wobble (focus group, January 2012).

The Darkness

As raised by Hugh and Lily in the previous fragments, the austerity of darkness – combined with just a few light or laser effects – is considered conducive for techno (as opposed to other electronic genres such as house and disco).

Andrew: I like dark rooms, but I think that is because I get distracted. And I really like the Passage Club because it's got that top room, with blinds on, and there's nothing to look at. It's just pillars, stage, speakers. And I like that. I like not saying all that much. . . . Neo Loco¹¹ looks really nice, it's got a forest look I guess, like a storybook forest, where there's like trees and a gazebo. So it's got a cool look, and I don't mind that, but I think I just prefer it when it's dark ... like the Kronos [laughs]. And there's nothing to concentrate on, there's just one or two lights, a strobe every now and then I enjoy.

Q: Would you say that for different music Neo Loco would be better?

Andrew: Yeah, actually. 'Cause I've been to Neo Loco before when it was more house and disco, and I think that's more fun. You walk around, you get messy, you're wandering, [one part] looks

¹¹ See Appendix 4.

like a kitchen, sort of go there for a bit. It's, yeah, more fun when you're at a house party, which complements the music I guess, when it's house and disco. But when it's techno, yeah, it's just the Kronos, more solid (focus group, November 2011).

Outdoor Events

As opposed to commercial festivals and mainstream clubs, bush parties and underground weekend festivals are seen as appropriate sites for getting a bit more 'loose' or 'wasted', yet are not connected to techno, but predominantly to psytrance. Perhaps because of the restricted size of the scene and the increased regulation of nightlife and area permits (as mentioned in the last fragment in 5.2: Environment. *Post-industrial Spaces*), there is currently no Victorian bush alternative to the European freetekno scene.¹² Among the acid techno partygoers arriving from an older generation, earlier editions of the Earthcore bush festival are nostalgically praised for serving as an adventurous, outdoor environment for techno acts.

Thomas: Psytrance is definitely somehow connected to outdoors, yeah, the music is just perfect for the outdoors. So you have different genres for different places.

Q: So it would be less urban than techno?

Thomas: Yes, exactly (focus group, July 2012).

Cooper: Like, as soon as you go to your first Earthcore [Festival] parties, you get this 'holy shit', you know. You need to get away from the people: you just walk in one direction. Really, like, I find it hard to say what my favourite party was in Melbourne, like there's [sic] so many big ones and little ones, but the main thing I used to look for, you know, I started taking acid before trying any other drugs really, and the thing you liked the most or you craved the most was adventure. . . . Earthcore used to play acid techno. And it makes me sad, you know, Earthcore is finished obviously. Not never again, but it really makes me sad to go there, because you think that it would be awesome if it just played acid techno somewhere. And every style is played except for the ones that, you know, you went there for when it started (focus group, January 2012).

¹² The European free techno or freetekno EDM scene is responsible for the organisation of costless parties in illegally occupied outdoor environments, promoting the harsh aesthetics of the European teknival (St John 2009: 28-64) movement.

Crowds

Age and Size

My own observations support the view that especially the harder techno subgenres attract a relatively mature scene in Melbourne that is restricted in numbers, with most punters arriving from an age group (mid-twenties to mid-thirties) that seems older compared to most other EDM scenes.

Christina [originally from Budapest, Hungary]: Yeah, I know better the Budapest scene of course, but it's more or less the same [here]. I mean there are not too many people, and the real techno parties are more or less the same. The amount of the people, the behaviour. . . . One thing about the scene here, maybe there are not so many young people at techno parties, I mean under 23 or so. We were at that illegal party the other day, and most of the young people went to the dubstep stage, and the bit older went to the techno.

Andrew: If you see someone who's 20-21 you're like: you look young. You spot that out, and it's pretty strange.

James: Sometimes I feel young at parties, and I'm 24.

Andrew: On the Melbourne Collective [an older group of organisers] parties I feel young, it's gross. Everyone's old as shit, it's awesome. I went to a dubstep thing on Friday [before going to a techno gig]. Everyone was so young, a few people looked older than me, everyone was really well dressed, it was strange. It was very, very strange (focus group, November 2011).

Due to the restricted size of the scene, the atmosphere of the big techno 'arenas' only comes up in comparisons with overseas (European) scenes.

Curtis: The crowd [in Melbourne] doesn't go so crazy, necessarily. Like people enjoy the music here, but people don't go mental like, you know, jumping, and ...

Thomas: And generally they play to a smaller crowd or audience compared to Europe.

Susan: Yeah, and maybe a DJ, for example Oscar Mulero, in Europe has a big hall to play to, and here just the Kronos, which is a small place with 100 people.

Thomas: Yeah, but he definitely enjoyed it though.

Susan: Yeah, definitely.

Curtis: And that would be a good experience for him as a DJ because you can play the big one, but you lose something when you can't see everybody in the room (focus group, July 2012).

While a figure of 200 would better approximate the Kronos crowd size at the Oscar Mulero gig, this would still be a fraction of the numbers of a European arena crowd. Lost in the big one are, of course, the familiarity of the party and the possibility of more intimate DJ-audience interaction through the music.

Dress and Behavioural Codes

The style of techno punters is remarkably unspectacular, especially when compared with the multi-coloured whirl of psytrance dance floors with its characteristic costumes and fashion elements:

Curtis: I think techno people are a lot less aesthetically homogeneous, so it's not so much the same, but there is more, you know, more of an aesthetic that these people are there more for the music, and so the type of people that are there would be a little more varied, it's not going to be just one type of hairstyle, or one type of, you know, look for the girls.

Thomas: I have definitely noticed that. Yeah, and everyone's from all over the place, from all walks of life, and yeah, generally very friendly and . . . terrific.

Susan: Yeah, and at a techno party you can see that the people came to the party, but generally they have another life, a normal life. But at psytrance parties you'd see that for some people psytrance is all their life, they are living in that. They are dressing up all the time, it's really important for them. And all the decorations ... so psytrance is different. As for techno, it's somewhat simpler (focus group, July 2012).

According to all focus group participants, the main behavioural code at techno parties is simply

getting into the music instead of making efforts in expressing group solidarity or showing off.

Lily: I've seen other girls that are young, they're probably my age, but, you know, people would come in, a female of my age, and casually some of them would be taking off their top while dancing, you know, they want everyone around to look at them, but for me it's just ...

Cooper: There are a lot of people that have [also] been to [mainstream] clubs, and that's a different environment, you know, people are there to be seen.

Lily: It's just that when I go to clubs I won't feel comfortable with people like that around (focus group, January 2012).

Jack: They used to have that place ... Went there on one night and it was just so weird, it was not techno based though, it was like stupid disco and stuff like that. But everyone just sort of moving on the dance floor, but they can't see each other, so they all just look like fake, and acting out on the music. So yeah, I don't know, I prefer somewhere where it doesn't have so much smoke and crap going on. And I like it to be dark, but I don't like this (focus group, November 2011).

In accordance with the relative lack of dress codes, none of the participants consider dance techniques to be important, or mention particular dance styles.

Susan: Dancing isn't important for me. Even if the music is really good ... I just, sometimes I just stand there, and I just make small movements, and that's enough.

Curtis: It's still dancing [laughs]. It's minimal dancing.

Susan: I know, it's really minimal [laughs]. But I don't think that everybody dances, you can just stand and bob your head a little bit and enjoy the music. You don't have to dance.

Thomas: But you know, like you've mentioned that as long as you see people that are bobbing their heads ... they're really into that music, and that is a very important ingredient.

Susan: Yeah, at techno gigs, dancing is really different, it's much easier and simpler, just little movements in comparison with other genres like drum and bass.

Curtis: Oh yeah, that's completely different (focus group, July 2012).

In addition to this, at some harder techno parties I did witness the very sporadic adoption of the 'Melbourne shuffle'.¹³

This concludes the presentation of the interview findings. It should be noted that perceptions of the ideal venues and crowds are remarkably consistent throughout the focus groups, and correspond with my own observations from the field.

5.3 Post-Industrial Covert Operation

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the techno party in its urban context, drawing on the perceptions of the focus group participants and developing some of the arguments laid out in Chapter 4.

Undetectible

Following the term used by Detroit techno collective Underground Resistance, Eshun labels techno as 'undetectible'. His proposal for techno fans: "You are participating in a mystery. Play the track. Transmit the tones. Become imperceptible." (Eshun 1998: 120). In this subsection I argue that the Melbourne scene exhibits a similar 'undetectibility' through its camouflaged presence in the urban nightscape (environment), the synaesthetic and kinaesthetic displacement of its sonic architecture (music) and its unrecordable, chemical virtualisation (drug).

When asked about the physical venues conducive to the ideal vibe, most interviewees prefer the post-industrial (in the sense of pertaining to the industrial afterlife) squat structures (5.2: Environment. *Post-industrial Spaces*) and the city clubs that resemble such environments, such as the Kronos Club (5.2: Environment. *City Clubs*). These provide a suitable context for the experiential engagement with the psychedelic 'gaps' or missing dimensions within the illusionary project of the techno party (Chapter 4.6). Of course, such relics of the industrial wasteland provided inspiration for parties and clubs throughout the history of EDM – examples are numerous, such as the Warehouse and the Power Plant house clubs in the late '70s and

¹³ The Melbourne shuffle is the characteristic dance style of early EDM parties or raves in Melbourne (Siokou, Moore and Lee 2010: 196), described by Rietveld (2004) as "as a speeded-up mix of Irish and jazz dance steps".

early '80s in Chicago (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 290, 296), the defunct Packard Auto Plant hosting techno parties in early '90s Detroit (Pope 2011: 25), the mushrooming of occupied warehouse locations during the heyday of the U.K. rave phenomenon (Reynolds 1999: 56-79) or the high temple of contemporary Berlin techno, the Berghain club, residing in a former power plant.

In the following quote Stan discusses the squat venue of an acid techno gig he recently visited:

Stan: A kind of theatre/factory sort of structure with no purpose, just kind of sitting there with no reason in the middle of what is quite a dynamic and industrial area. It's quite good to see this relic type of artefact [that looks like] the '50s or '40s factory that's sort of fallen on hard time[s]. But I'm not sure what they did there, it's a mystery what they did there. It's not quite a theatre, not quite a factory; it's quite enigmatic as a venue. . . . There is something very artistic about a disused industrial building. It just seems like a place in incredible flux, which is on the cusp of being demolished, but in that sort of transition between what it was and what it will be, in a sort of limbo (follow-up interview, June 2012).

Just as early techno producers explored the 'gaps' in technologies outside of their intended or 'useful' applications (Chapter 3.2), such places "in incredible flux", as the one evoked by Stan in the fragment, are discovered as gaps in the industrial landscape to be filled with the technological imaginary and retuned into the industrial wasteland when the party is over. Such corroded environments carry the connotations of familiarity and freedom to the interviewees, as opposed to the 'shinier' but severely regulated commercial clubscapes of the Melbourne CBD.¹⁴ These settings conjure a shroud of uncertainty that separates the techno phenomenon from daily urban reality by both contributing to the effect of the drug/music interplay (Chapter 4.6) and disguising the party from the gaze of the wider public and the authorities. Their ephemerality reinforces the undetectable character of techno that can be traced to the early history of the genre.

¹⁴ It should be noted that this transience is less evident when it comes to well established underground clubs that in fact imitate squat environments and constitute a compromise between the adventurous atmosphere of squat venues and the convenience of repeatedly organising legal events at the same place.

Techno emerged in a Detroit shattered by racial conflicts and economic recession. As Pope (2011) explains, the city's post-industrial landscape with its defunct factories and abandoned skyscrapers was inseparable from the formation of the music, with a deep sense of dystopia influencing the early evolution of this EDM genre. This ambivalent relationship with technology can be linked to an Afrofuturist tradition that depicts imaginary worlds after the occurrence of the disaster. By creating "alien music", Detroit artists "reclaimed their outsider status to highlight the incongruities and injustices of world as they saw them" (Pope 2011: 32). Their covert retreat from street realities, dramatised during the stage performances of Detroit techno collective Underground Resistance (Chapter 4.1), was accomplished by hijacking technologies and developing an abstract musical language conceptualised by Eshun (1998: 103-104) as "technofication" (term borrowed from the lyrics of Detroit proto-techno band Cybotron) that "grasps the migration paths of machinic processes". Finally, Detroit techno was undetectable also in the sense that it did not receive considerable attention within American culture where it remained relatively intact from the influences of subcultural markers and did not create a new style (Pope 2011: 36). Pope contrasts this with the spectacularity of global rave cultures which were musically influenced by techno – yet as Melechi (1993: 35) points out, the original spectacularisation of the rave phenomenon in the U.K. was predominantly a product of mass media as the subculture became mainstream.

Techno in Melbourne is currently sustained by a small-scale yet healthy scene attracting a considerable number of international DJs. Many of these performers arrive from Berlin, which focus group respondents identified as the European epicentre of techno. While European techno parties attract considerably larger crowds (which is also why many international techno producers have historically moved to Berlin), for the focus group participants the charm of Melbourne gigs lies in their underground character, as emphasised by Curtis in the second fragment of 5.2: *Crowds. Age and Size*. The standards of living in Australia allow the funding of nights headlined by internationally acknowledged performers such as Oscar Mulero, who are often invited into small, undetectable basements such as the Kronos. Indeed, punters can generally afford the relatively high costs of a night out in terms of party entries and substance consumption:¹⁵

¹⁵ For a comparison of Australian MDMA and amphetamine prices with their European counterparts, see Chapter 4.4: Speed.

Andrew: I worked at KFC when I was younger, and I still had enough money to buy drugs when I was going out. I don't know anyone who didn't have enough money for drugs (laughs). It's something you find money for, I guess. 'Cause you can stay with your parents as long as you want, or most people [can]. It's not expected that you move out at a young age, so ...

Christina: Yeah, I also spent my pocket money on drugs (laughs).

Andrew: It's expected in Australian culture to spend a lot of your income on alcohol. If I said to my parents that I went out on the weekend and spent 200 dollars, they'd be like, whatever, that's stupid, but whatever, at least you were not doing something 'bad'. But if I had said I spent 80 dollars on drugs, they'd worry about it. So it's not looked down on to: look I went out on the weekend and spent a shit load of money on alcohol, like it's sort of expected, and that's acceptable. The fact that it is on drugs has to be hidden away (focus group, November 2011).

According to Andrew, considerable alcohol consumption is “expected in Australian culture” yet drug use, which is normalised within the scene, is stigmatised and “has to be hidden away”. Contributing to its undetectability, recreational drugs are thus inextricably linked with the techno phenomenon and its intriguing separation from day to day urban realities – as discussed in various parts of Chapters 3 and 4. In what follows, I reflect on the interaction of music and drug in the context of the party.

As mentioned in Chapter 4.6, for James (focus group, November 2011) techno lacks the narrative temporality of many other popular music genres, and instead it is engaged in an architectural organisation of spatiality. Drawing on this argument, the drug may act as a medium that virtualises and amplifies in “high definition” (Baudrillard 1997a: 25) a spatial organisation that follows the structures and mixing of a pre-recorded music that is continuously and obsessively refined by producers. For DJs, producers and audiences the technological perfection of sets and tracks is paramount. For Jake, an acid techno producer/DJ who also works as sound engineer and performs in a punk band, this inextricable fusion of engineering, production and performance roles constitutes a decisive difference between live (band) music and techno – and in a broader sense electronic – parties.

Jake: Electronic sounds are formed in a frequency range through a sound system, and what is different to a band, you know, is that the tones that a band can cover across the EQ is [sic]

gonna [be] heard in different spots at different levels. So you can listen to a band for an hour, and it sounds amazing, but if you listen to it for three hours, it will start to grate on your ears a little bit. Because the way that the tones are interacting with each other is not set out in the way in that electronic [music] is, where ... Obviously they still meld together and still join together to make the song, but with electronic music, it's a lot of production to make it what it is. So this is purely in the live sense, I'm not talking about band CDs because there's a lot of production there. But [at an electronic party] there's something about the way that, for example, a kick drum can use a sub-range in the frequency which below a certain range isn't even audible to us, but it's a feeling. And that feeling is what will drive you and keep you interested. And also, it's not grating on you 'cause you're not ... you can't hear it so to speak. So you can always listen to the bass line and feel the bass line even if you're not listening to it (focus group, January 2012).

According to Jake, the fact that at EDM parties DJ sets are being enjoyed for extended periods of time that often exceed 6-8 hours has to do not just with the structural particularities of the genre but also with the proficiency of sound engineering. While Jake might understate the level of sound engineering at certain high-profile live gigs, his words highlight the significance of technological perfection at EDM parties. In Baudrillard's (1997a: 25) interpretation, the "high fidelity" of the technical model of the music, when pushed to its extreme, leads to the loss or disappearance of music: the closer the record resembles the original, the less one can speak about resemblance and more about the loss of the original and its reduplication as simulacrum. Baudrillard's analyses of popular culture generally assess the limiting potential of this technological perfection, yet as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, this process is exploited and expanded in particular ways in EDM and techno.

Jake does not imagine an actual musician playing an original kick drum but considers the functional employment of an electronic instrument over the periphery of the audible frequency range for triggering certain bodily responses. As mentioned in Chapter 4.3, Jake's thoughts (also in the fragment of 4.2: The Bass) resonate with certain ideas in Goodman's (2010) work on the application of sound as a cultural weapon. Goodman (2010: 9-10) notes that the affective dimension of powerful and mobilising sonic "weaponries" that are situated on the peripheries of the auditory sensorium precedes cognitive processes and is ontologically prior to linguistic or cultural representation.

The drug/music fusion at techno parties may trigger a synaesthetic and kinaesthetic virtualisation: one's body is feeling without listening, stupefied and less focused on the sense of hearing. "In a strange way, your ears start to see", writes Eshun (1998: 180, 181), "and the skin starts to hear for you". Relating to the break from live (band) music addressed in the interview fragment, in the context of the techno party, music does not just disappear in the perfection of its reproduction as in Baudrillard's investigation, but also resurrects into a high-def medium that transfers the partygoer to an illusionary environment, where one's body is pervaded and seduced by the ever-changing game of meticulously polished frequencies.

The vibe overflows one's drug-mediated inner senses yet offers little to the eyes of the external observer: the pitch black darkness of the techno party is impregnated with austere visuals comprising of just a few lights, a strobe or a smoke machine. As Eshun (1998: 120) contemplates: "Nothing to see, so much to feel. Nightvision awakens new senses". The techno dance floor extends into an imaginative void that is unrecordable: the final, embodied process of chemical mediation leads to the undetectible internalisation an experience that cannot be grasped or represented by external audio-visual equipments.

The remainder of this section investigates the complexities of this undetectible, covert operation by developing an analogy of electronic tattooing in two phases: first by zooming in on the intimate perceptions of music and drug experiences; and second by broadening the perspective and situating the techno party within the Melbourne nightscape.

Techno and the Body: An Electronic Tattoo

As argued in the previous subsection, the post-industrial relics and dungeons of squat venues and underground clubs serve as often ephemeral mediators of a communal experience that is hidden from the wider public or sustains a vague appearance in dominant discourses. Yet this is not to say that such parties do not create lasting memories for the participants, in which the music is often inseparably moulded into its post-industrial surroundings:¹⁶

¹⁶ Van Veen (2003: 95) evokes a similar interplay of twisted bass lines and warehouse rumbles in the sonic synthesis of the rave dance floor.

Cooper: Yeah, there's [sic] certain sounds that I'm missing now that I know I'll never hear them again. Like the Docks, you know, Docklands, that's now been redeveloped and is all apartments and all down there, but they really just used to be drydocks, you know, docks where they were boarding all the goods for Melbourne ships, and sheds. And fortunately, like fortunately I guess, the way that those venues came about, you know, it was just people who had friends in hot places, and there might have been a bit of corruption and stuff like that, but luckily it worked out for us [laughs]. And those sounds you just don't think you'll ever hear again. Like standing outside of one of the big sheds of the docks, and hearing the kick drum inside, but just the rattle of the metal, like whoom-whoom-whoom. And it's the kind of thing where you just start thinking about whether you're going to hear it again (focus group, January 2012).

Pervaded by the sense of transience, this improvised obituary evokes a remarkable period of the Melbourne techno scene, when aided by “a bit of corruption”, dock sheds were appropriated as rave venues at night and returned to the city at day. Cooper and his companions date the heydays of Melbourne raves to the 1990s, when the attendance at illegal warehouse parties was considerably larger than at the time of the interview – yet even in the 1990s, the use of squat environments had the potential to ‘camouflage’ the scene.

The regular organisation and attendance of such parties follows a pattern of immersion and release that resonates with the rhythmic flow of the music. As outlined in Chapter 4.3, techno is both loop-based (repetitive) and impressionistic: it produces circular impressions by sequentially rewriting the partygoer's body and cleaning its marks as an electronic tattoo. Sweetman (2000: 68-69) in his discussion of contemporary body modifications argues that tattooing, apart from providing visual marks of self-identity, assists in the construction of self-narratives by creating permanent reminders of certain life events or periods. Within the virtual space of the techno party, attachments are created by creating a sense of depth that, similar to the contemporary tattoo in Sweetman's (2000: 70-71) interpretation, is less connected to the affirmation of group identities and more to personal experiences and narratives of the self. The unspectacularity of this attachment is discussed in the fragments of 5.2: *Crowd. Dress and Behavioural Codes* that promote, in the words of Curtis, “an aesthetic that these people are there more for the music” (focus group, July 2012) and express a relative lack of interest in subcultural markers and affiliations, which is reminiscent of Pope's (2011: 35-36) take on Detroit techno. The neglect of visual or stylistic signifiers is part of the (undetected) anti-aesthetic

evoked by Curtis that is also evident in the preference of darkness at parties (5.2: Environment. *The darkness*).

For most interviewees, the drug contributes to the experience and also has a pivotal role in the channelling and intensification of a long-lasting attachment to a musical form that is, according to Pope (2011: 37-40), “post-human, though funky” as a result of its captivating or “jacking” repetitiveness, enabling “one’s co-imbrication with technology”. At techno parties the drug-affected body becomes a canvas for the metallic pleasures and pressures of rattling intensities with a potential for leaving permanent marks.¹⁷ In the following fragments Cooper and Stuart call forth their memories of MDMA and LSD-fuelled party experiences:

Cooper: The music I can honestly say is something that will grab you when you're on ecstasy, and everything obviously is amplified in the way it feels. So if something's enjoyable, you know, it's a hundred times more enjoyable [laughs]. And there's just been moments where I've been ... the memories are etching [sic] in my head forever. Like you know, just when ecstasy's starting to hit in, it's like a cool breeze blowing over your whole body, and it's like with every breath there is a really fresh breath of air. And then just, yeah, without you having noticed, the DJ's built up something, and you hear the kick drum coming. And it's like, yeah, like a rush that goes through your body. And everyone around you that [has] got that same experience at the same time, looking around at each other, and going: did you just get that? (focus group, January 2012).

Stuart: I remember, I mean even at Dettmann,¹⁸ the acid, I still have very vivid memories of tracks that were played, that I recognised. And moments. But I think also that . . . your attachment, your recollection is of a feeling, not of a song. Yeah, the feeling is very much dominant, and if you hear a song afterwards, it will trigger the feeling, not so much the song. It's almost like nostalgia for me. . . . The music triggers, it helps me, you know, it's like the music affects my drug taking more than my drug taking affects the music, in that sense. So my mind is altered, but according to the music. Yeah, the music sets the tone to my mind when I go out, and whatever drug it is. . . . It's like a soundtrack, 'cause you put an album on, you know, and it will still influence how you feel. So it's a mutual relationship, it's not that one dominates the other, but they both work on one another in a very unique way for me, you know. In a certain

¹⁷ Yet as Sophie (focus group, January 2012) emphasises, getting too ‘wasted’ on drugs could also cause one to forget everything.

¹⁸ See Appendix 2.4.

setting, that's not my day to day life, which is what I enjoy.

Q: Do you bring the experience back to your day to day life? Does it influence it?

Stuart: Yeah, for sure. It helps. It makes me feel part of something. It's rewarding, it feels like I'm part of something that's rewarding for me, personally, and yeah, it doesn't feel banal. You know, my reality is very mundane, so when I have that feeling and take that feeling to everyday life, it feels less mundane (focus group, November 2011).

Both Cooper and Stuart frame their experiences in terms of a drug/music interplay within the environment of the party (Cooper: “you hear the kick drum coming . . . like a rush that goes through your body”; Stuart first considers the “vivid memories of tracks”, then states that the music and drug “both work on one another”). Similar to other EDM genres, the body is the arena of this clash of mediations, yet the externalisation of the experience through dancing is highly unspectacular in techno, defined as “minimal dancing” (where any movement would suffice, even small body movements or just bobbing the head) by Curtis in the last fragment of 5.2: *Crowd. Dress and Behavioural Codes*. Defying subcultural representation and removed from day to day contexts, in a sombre coexistence of physical and virtual (Chapter 4.6), drugged bodies are flickering in the immersive darkness of the techno party. For Cooper, such moments of high intensity are “etching [sic] in [the] head forever”, and for Stuart listening to music channels vivid memories of feelings that feel “less mundane” than his day to day reality. Potentially triggering flashbacks, the electronic music conserves the formative experience, just as the visual image of the tattoo is the memento of the life event in Sweetman’s (2000: 69) discussion.

Techno and the Urban Body: Hollow Sounds Writing the Night

I conclude this section with a semiotic analysis of the techno party situated in the urban nightscape. I start with a slight detour and leap back in time to consider, for the sake of comparison and inspiration, Baudrillard’s (1993a) investigation of the early 1970s New York graffiti. According to Baudrillard (1993a: 76), early New York graffiti offered a symbolic weapon for the repressed black and minority ethnic youth of the ghettos against the disempowering and neutralising semiotic system of the heavily mediatised urban spaces. As the movement

widened, an increasing number of graffiti 'writers' started 'bombing' public transport vehicles and urban structures with tags that were often inspired from underground comics, merely consisting of a pseudonym (such as SUPERKOOL) and the number of the street one was arriving from (such as 223). As Hegert (2013) emphasises in her work on New York graffiti, Baudrillard's analysis addresses a particular period and style, a formative early epoch of illegal writing or dissemination of anonymous tags that happened before graffiti's attempted neutralisation and repackaging as canonised art of the galleries. The latter identified and propagated the inspirational figure of the 'graffiti artist' and opposed it with the 'graffiti vandalism' of the unidentified street writer.

In Baudrillard's (1993a: 76-84) semiotic analysis, the early street writers engaged in a symbolic ritual running contrary to the dominant mass media processes of its time, by scrambling the flow of media signs designated through the channels of production/consumption. While producing senses of community for the writers, the anonymous tags circulated as dysfunctional, empty signs for the rest of the city, conflicting with the "cold bustle" of its advertising channels and their one-directional, functional and obtrusive messages (Baudrillard 1993a: 79). Traversing the borders of their ghettos, the writers hijacked and altered pre-existing media channels, such as subways, trains and walls, only to disseminate anonymous messages without any overt political or mainstream cultural content. Such circulation of 'empty' tags questioned the sovereignty of the semiotic system – albeit for a short period – by dismantling its 'full' signs, evading instant reincorporation into mass media and recklessly overwriting city structures regardless of their functions. By disregarding dominant codes, this overwriting designated a new functionality of the medium that reinvented the city as a body: a symbolic, living entity defined and sustained by the ritual of tattooing. Baudrillard (1993a: 82) highlights the liberating potential of this *tattooing of walls* (and trains) in terms of an imaginary return to the symbolic systems of traditional societies.

In the conclusion of Chapter 3.2, I reflected on Hennion's (2003: 88) investigation of the changing use of media in 20th century popular music. If the passage from rock to rap signals the first step in the emancipation of the (recording) medium in the history of popular music, this is expanded in early EDM's and techno's technological fascination that breaks with earlier forms of urban representation. This argument is apparent in Eshun's (1998) discussions of both underground hip hop and techno, which also situates the early descendant of the graffiti movement discussed by Baudrillard in this conceptual framework. In early 1980s New York,

graffiti became associated with the then emergent hip hop culture that encompassed rap music as well (Hegert 2013). After quoting graffiti artist Bando: “Graffiti is not vandalism but a very beautiful crime”, Eshun (1998: 30-31) recognises the highly encrypted New York Wildstyle graffiti as part of an Afrofuturist conceptual arsenal employed in the media ecology of underground hip hop. Here graffiti evolves into a “pictogrammatology” that “turns the message into the medium” (Eshun 1998: 73) and plays with the illusionary effect of the missing dimension through its *trompe l’oeil* imagery. Yet this engagement with the medium becomes excessively enforced in techno, where the textual message is not just encrypted but dissolved in a musical form that is devoid of lyrics. While in Eshun’s discussion of Detroit techno the musical form is embedded into the Afrofuturist conceptual background of the works, the Afrofuturist conceptualisation of techno was neglected in the focus groups of my research, signalling a further abstraction or immersion into the medium.

Techno parties in Melbourne provide a specific context for the consumption of this excessive mediatisation, which also relates to recreational drug consumption, conceptualised by Race (2005) as “excessive conformity to contemporary consumer culture”.¹⁹ Melbourne techno grows out and leaves the semiotic system of day to day consumer realities through an employment of ‘empty signs’, similar to early 1970s New York graffiti’s transformative tattooing of the urban body in Baudrillard’s (1993a: 76-84) discussion. Drawing on Pope (2011) and Eshun (1998), in Chapter 4.1 I asserted that Detroit techno’s ambivalent relationship with technology fuelled an Afrofuturist imaginary proposing one’s ‘abduction’ from the system of urban reality. In Chapter 3.2 I discussed the early development of both techno and house with respect to their (mis)use of mediations, where the hi-jacking of (drum) machines led to the emancipation of the recording medium as opposed to its nostalgic subordination to live music instruments. The assessment of musical structure in Chapter 4.3 signalled that in techno the medium unfolds from the circular motion of the vinyl loop and, detached from narrative temporality and through a psychedelic actualisation of a sonic architecture, its differential repetition draws attention to gaps or missing dimensions of the music that empties out inherent signification. In these instances technology is being hijacked again in order to put empty signs into circulation.

¹⁹ For more on the way drug consumption intensifies consumer sensibilities, see Chapter 3.3.

Consequently, the interlinked ephemerality of music, drug and environment contributes to a dissolution of signification in the context of urban reality that is similar to the one evoked in Baudrillard's investigation of graffiti. Yet the techno phenomenon is also responsible for a virtualisation that draws the line between them. While the tattooing of New York walls and vehicles by night was leaving physical marks that intruded upon the daytime urban environment (even if later removed by authorities), Detroit techno electronically launched a "covert operation" that "grasp[ed] the chance to recede from the visible" (Eshun 1998: 120). Historically, its machine aesthetic grew out of a dystopian perception of urban reality (Pope 2011) while neither being directly aimed against it nor leaving physical marks on the urban body. With techno the tattoo becomes electronic, and in Melbourne its pulsating lines designate the covert dimensions of the night-time 'second life' (Chapter 4.6) that feels "less mundane" (Stuart, focus group, November 2011) than the everyday, being withdrawn from the daytime cityscape into underground venues and squat environments.

In its present context, Melbourne techno remains undetectable among other local EDM scenes. The limited size of the scene, the relative unspectacular nature of its partygoers and the austerity of its visual effects, with just a few lights or a strobe penetrating the immersive darkness of parties, help retain its underground character. The restraint of expressions and emotions on its dance floors is nonetheless a celebration that denies the signs of celebration. Similar structural restrictions are apparent in the music (Chapter 4.3), with the employment of a differential repetition that adheres to the tight rhythmic and metric confines of EDM (Butler 2006: 116) while continuously attempting to traverse these limits. Reminiscent of a reverse tautology, instead of repeating the same idea through different words, a variety of musical ideas are delivered within a continuously repeating structure. Hollow sounds are writing the night in relentless progression, signalling the covert, internal revolt of a self-consciously restrictive rhetoric.

5.4 Conclusion

Having traversed a long road from its Detroit roots, certain aspects of the Melbourne scene can be traced back to the historical project of Detroit techno. This is besides the obvious differences: the context of a decaying Detroit affected by racial conflicts and recession is

replaced by an affluent Australian consumer culture that feeds on the myth of abundance (Baudrillard 1998: 31-34); the Melbourne scene is disengaged from the racial politics and conceptual framework of Afrofuturism; and the influence of Afrofuturist imaginaries on the transformation of the alienated environment is substituted by the chemical mediation of recreational drugs. At this point it should be noted that certain early Detroit artists and critics perceived the interlinking of the techno genre with recreational drugs from the onset of British rave cultures as degrading. For instance, May (2006: 342-343) contrasts certain early descendants of techno that were employed at “populist, amphetamine-driven raves” with Detroit techno’s musical potential that equated it “with any serious artistic productions that had a more conceptual focus”, whereas Sicko (2010: 80) mourns that the European association with drug-using groups drew attention to the “functionality” of the music and hence away from its “artistic merit”. Yet my research of Melbourne techno suggests that the prevalence of drug use does not necessarily lead to the commodification of the genre or to the loss of interest in musical qualities. For many interlocutors, particularly acid – a drug which, admittedly, was not the preferred chemical of the mainstream rave culture (Sicko 2010: 79) – is considered suitable for increasing attention and receptiveness to the music itself.²⁰

Andrew: Actually, I only started liking techno when one night I went to a party to the Passage Club, where everyone wanted to see Stephan Bodzin²¹ or something. But when I went downstairs, I was on acid, and because I was on acid, I went downstairs, and it was just so full, like fuck this, I'm staying upstairs and go for Robert Hood. . . . I didn't want to go downstairs, 'cause it was really packed, and musically it wasn't great. And I really didn't want to go around, I was on acid, I was sort of stuck where I was, and I ended up listening to a full, good, hard, long techno set. And that's what got me into it (focus group, November 2011).

²⁰ Reynolds (1999: 228-230) notes that British-Canadian producer Richie Hawtin or Plastikman (Appendix 2.5), who played a leading role in the second wave of Detroit techno, acknowledged the influence of acid on his work in the early 1990s yet criticised the excessive ecstasy use among rave crowds.

²¹ German minimal techno producer whose work often entails a fusion with other EDM genres such as electro or house. It is interesting to note that his set is confronted with that of Robert Hood (Appendix 2.3), a Detroit producer who is considered to be one of the inventors of the minimal techno subgenre and had started releasing records more than a decade before Bodzin. Hood’s rawer and more purist set attracted a considerably smaller audience at this multi-room party, yet turned out to be decisive with Andrew’s involvement in what he considers “good techno”.

Just like the ‘misuse’ of antiquated bass and drum synthesisers by Detroit producers (Pope 2011: 38), the rediscovery of pharmaceutical drugs as recreational can be regarded as a technological appropriation, with both MDMA and LSD being invented as pharmaceuticals first and then appropriated for other uses (Redhead 1993b, Russell 1993). Similar to how Afrofuturist imaginary helped dismantle and aesthetically expand the urban environment of Detroit (Pope 2011: 32-33), in its Melbourne context the consumption of drugs contributes as an institutionalised anomaly (Baudrillard 2002: 100) to the augmentative effect of an intriguing second life that is both strikingly separate from and infiltrates the ‘mundane’, day to day realities of the participants.

Techno in Melbourne is connected to the mythical Detroit origins also in the sense that a significant section of this small EDM scene is primarily concerned with the music and its effects at parties (with my interviewees giving detailed descriptions of their perceptions of techno) and less with subcultural codes or affiliations. While most of my respondents are reasonably satisfied with the ‘seriousness’ of Melbourne punters, some of the participants, who have visited techno parties in Japan, criticise the Melbourne scene by claiming that Japanese audiences “are more knowledgeable about the music” (focus group, November 2011). For better or worse, this perception demonstrates the importance my respondents attribute to the engagement with the music itself. Additionally, the raw, military aesthetic Detroit performers such as Underground Resistance propagate is reflected in the post-apocalyptic setting of some venues and squat environments. As Zuberi (2007: 286) puts it, a similar engagement with “ghostly” mediums has formed musical Afrofuturism’s history with respect to its resurrection of disused technologies and dead sounds.

The local practices and particularities presented in the past two chapters also situate techno in the broader context of multimedia arts. In Chapter 4.6 I proposed that at techno parties the musical structures build up a pulsating soundscape that can be approached through Baudrillard’s concepts of simulation and virtuality; yet as I argued throughout the past two chapters, some of his proposed restrictions on these concepts, such as the necessity of aesthetic disillusion, are not applicable here. Zurbrugg (2000) identifies a similar tendency in 20th century and contemporary multimedia arts, where the technologically enhanced body works of performers ranging from Marinetti to Stelarc both develop on and depart from the conditions proposed by theorists such as Baudrillard and Virilio.

This chapter closes with the convergence of two stimuli from the broader pathways of

the Berlin-Detroit axis. If Berlin industrial band Einstürzende Neubauten (2000) remind us in their lyrics that “beauty remains in the impossibilities of the body”, techno follows this imperative by exploring the impossibilities of the human and the urban body. For Detroit techno producer Jeff Mills, technology both provides producers a determining source: “The machines mould themselves, giving their own character to a track”; and defines the limitations of their artistic expression: “It's a translation from my hands to the machine. And that's usually where it gets lost” (Kunzru 1998). Such struggles to translate from the body to the machine, and vice versa, are generating states of uncertainty that are conducive to aesthetic illusion, and for the techno partygoer it is the hollowed out medium, haunted by the loss of its messages, in which pleasure resides.

6. Case study: Consuming Melbourne Acid

The previous two chapters explored the ways Melbourne techno is shaped by the intertwined factors of music, drug, environment and crowd. This chapter zooms in on a subgenre in which specific characteristics of the wider genre are crystallised and developed in particular ways. Acid techno encompasses a unique sector in the Melbourne techno scene due to its frequent use of the Roland TB-303, an iconic instrument of EDM, and its preference of urban squat environments, which again reaches back to the early history of EDM. These particularities are considered below with references to a ‘specialised’ focus group conducted with acid techno performers/organisers and regular partygoers.

6.1 Riding the Acid Tracks

As outlined in chapter 3.2, the early history of EDM and techno was shaped by the reappropriation of drum machines and synthesisers that were originally designed to substitute for ‘real’ instruments. A prominent example is the accidental misuse of the Roland TB-303 synthesiser, which gave birth to the acid sound and led to the development of acid house (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 313). The TB-303 bass line generator was unsuccessful for its designated scope because it produced ‘unauthentic’ sounds, and its design made it incompatible for playing, yet suitable for programming music (Butler 2006: 68). By applying its built-in effects in the ‘wrong’ way to its programmed sound patterns, certain EDM artists – most notably Chicago house producer DJ Pierre (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 315) – overdrove its musical potential, creating extremely resonant and distorted sound layers. In a more technical definition:

[1]ts sound is very resonant, emphasising a rich palette of overtones (the sawtooth is one of its waveforms), and its envelope is constantly in flux (because producers use the knobs to quickly diminish and replenish the range of partials) (Butler 2006: 69).

In acid techno this modified bass line (which is very far from the sound of the bass guitar) is used in conjunction with the abrasive grooves of hard techno, contributing to an intensity that is often further amplified by drugs. As explained by Jake, an acid techno producer/organiser:

Jake: Acid techno is, you know, my passion, hard techno and acid techno. Hard techno, I guess, is more just full [of] drum noises, very abrasive, metallic sort of sounds, you know, quite repetitive. It doesn't stray away too much from the concept; it doesn't, you know, change into something completely different and then come back into techno. Typically a lot of the tracks are written in the same sort of layers; they've got the same sort of tones. Yeah, the sound of the 303 in acid techno was something that really caught me in the music. . . . The birth is where the bass line is, which is what the 303 is, it's a bass line instrument originally, if the knobs are turned down. So it's more just a bwoh-bwoh-bwoh-bwoh, a bass tone. It's not a frequency that catches in the high range; it's more the feeling, the sub-feeling. But once you start to turn up the cut off and resonance [knobs], it really takes your body with you. And if you have acid or hallucinogenic drugs, once you hear acid techno, your body rises with it, your mind travels with the tone (focus group, January 2012).

Jake's short introduction of the hallucinogenic potential of the 303 resonates with the descriptions of cultural critics. Although the exact etymology of the sonic attribute 'acid' is unclear, anecdotic evidence links it to LSD consumption in the early Chicago house scene (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 314), and its first appearance in EDM discographies is dated to the "Acid Tracks" (1987) single released by Chicago-based group Phuture, the inventors of acid house (Sicko 2010: 72). Acid house, together with Detroit techno, was exported to the U.K. in the late 1980s, where acid would mistakenly become a buzzword for predominantly ecstasy-related moral panics during the heyday of the rave scene (Sicko 2010: 78). Nevertheless, the hallucinatory or LSD-like qualities of the acid sound are commonplace. For instance, Brewster and Broughton (2000: 314) evoke its perfect synergy with the "LSD induced frenzy" of early Chicago clubbers, whereas Sicko (2010: 72) describes the TB-303 as emitting "aural equivalents of liquid mercury – the sounds of psychedelic hallucination".

In a later stage of the focus group Jake evokes his first realisation of the psychedelic qualities of the sound:

Jake: Basically the particular tone, and the way it changes frequency, and the way it rises and drops, on certain drugs can really take you to, for the lack of another term, take you to another world. I took a lot of LSD at one particular event to see one particular acid techno artist, and I was, like, the drunk guy at the party. I could barely stand up straight. I was stumbling all over

the place. Two of the weirdest guys that I would usually be looking at, I saw at the corner of my eye, going: look at this guy! Looking at me, tapping each other, laughing: look at this guy! But it really opened up my perception to sound and frequency range. Hearing this particular tone from speakers higher than the roof, and, you know, your mind grabbing onto different parts of it, that you wouldn't usually zoom in on when you would go to a party 'straight' (focus group, January 2012).

A similar account of becoming weirder than “the weirdest guys” will return in the discussion of LSD use among psytrance partygoers in Chapter 7. From a musical point of view, experiencing acid (sound) while on acid (LSD) is a decisive experience for Jake, opening up his “perception to sound and frequency range”. The two corrosive components are thus inextricably linked in the formation of a dance floor experience inherent in this expanded flow of frequencies, the linguistic definition of which is problematic (“for the lack of another term”). Furthermore, both terms relate to the diversion of technologies from their original designations: the TB-303 is no longer a counterfeit instrument; LSD is no longer a pharmaceutical drug.

This fusion of sound and drug is the driving force in Eshun's (1998: 93) paranoid critique of what he calls “The Toxic Drives of the Drug <> Tech Interface”. For Eshun, who listens to the early acid house records of Phuture et al., the sound of the 303 synthesises the Afrofuturist embracement of fear. Acid is the chemical disruption of reality where the “drug-tech interface” (Reynolds 1999) sucks the user in like a swirling black hole, with the sound of the 303 producing a “wavering sense of panic as the ear fails to resolve this slippage of overtones” (Eshun 1998: 95). In acid techno this destabilising, sinister conjunction is mounted into the industrial framework of hard techno music.

Cooper: Something that grabbed me and will always grab me, it's probably the most emotional response I get, a set that I've got by Julian Liberator.¹ And there's just one part in it where it really has drawn you into this kind of low, like muffled music slightly, and it's really kind of dark and eerie. But then it starts like a train, on train tracks, and it builds you up, and you know, just when this build up can't get any higher, it's been high, low and all these whooshing sounds, bringing you up to this crescendo, and then when it drops, this really low gutted bass line comes in. And it literally feels like you lose control of your bowels. . . . That's why I can't stand

¹ U.K. acid/hard techno producer, one of the inventors of acid techno. See Appendix 2.7.

minimal [techno], no offence, people like minimal, but it's almost like minimal is the opposite of what I like in techno. It builds up, and then it gets back to what it was doing (focus group, January 2012).

Resonating with my earlier findings presented in Chapter 4, Cooper's words signal a highly functionalist approach to techno, where the music is praised for its rhythmic and sonic qualities that trigger kinaesthetic impulses in the listener. The ever-intensifying bodily drive evoked in the fragment is one of the main appeals of hard/acid techno.² Cooper depicts a train ride departing from an eerie environment and accelerating into a series of twists, climbs and dives. Extending this logic to the DJ set, the unrelenting progression of tracks at parties triggers an extended, drug-mediated roller coaster ride that rushes through thrilling musical loops shaped by mixing techniques and effects.

The metaphor of the roller coaster ride is worth further investigation because it conveys a particular meaning in media studies. Harley (2000: 77-78) compares the immersive experience and the 'mobile subjectivity' enabled by old and new media (such as TV, cinema and the internet) with the kinetic experience framed by mechanical forms of transportation such as the freeway car and the roller coaster. The freeway provides quick access to points of strategic importance by designating a new geometry to the landscape, and at the same time it encapsulates the driver in its vehicle (Harley 2000: 78-79), transforming the direct experience of its surroundings into a mediated image that is "flattened out and confined to the plane of the travelling car-windows" (Harley 2000: 81). The first American roller coaster appeared in the late 19th century as a parodistic intensification of existing modes of transportation such as the tram and the train. Its significant upgrade to tubular steel tracks in 1959 launched its passengers into a gravity-defying "kinaesthetic vortex" that tapped into the technological sublime of the space age (Harley 2000: 88-90). The ride assimilates the passengers into a skeletal machine of fantastic proportions and releases them in successive packages onto complex trajectories that physically do not lead anywhere (the start and endpoint are the same) yet trigger extreme bodily sensations that are frivolously entangled with the mythology of the disaster (the ride simulates risk but avoids 'real' danger). The roller coaster straps

² Cooper contrasts this bodily drive to the experience of minimal techno, a subgenre whose contemporary ramifications tend to be sonically less intense than the techno (sub)genres addressed in this thesis.

human bodies into a convoluted yet closed circuit of consumption, reminding Harley (2000: 91) of the entangling web of consumer culture. As “a particular apex of kinaesthetic simulation” (Harley 2000: 92) it creates an abstract space of man/machine interaction designed to trigger participatory bodily sensations, providing an analogy to the consumption of immersive media products that limit the physical involvement of the consumer yet push the sensory experience to its extremes.

The embracement of both thrill and fear during the mediated flow of the dance floor experience opens up a similar analogy toward the roller coaster ride. Moreover, if the kinaesthetic simulation of the ride produces a convoluted, abstract space, then the physical experience of this abstract space can be juxtaposed with the curious intermingling of the physical with the virtual during the drugged experience of the techno party.³ At the same time, certain elements of the roller coaster ride return in reversed form at acid techno parties. The long queues in the front of the convoluted machinery (which can take hours) followed by the short ride (just a minute or two) is substituted by instant entrance (enabled by the relaxed door policies of squat parties) and an intensive journey of several hours. Moreover, while in Harley (2000) the tubular steel of the roller coaster track is winding into the backbone of ecstatic consumption, the musical ride in the interview fragment involves the consumption of a very specific excess, leading through a shattering backbone of electronic minimalism in which Cooper senses the ghostly interference of post-industrial machinery. This is hardly surprising because, as discussed in Chapter 5.3, techno is plugged into the flip side of consumer culture, with its early history growing out from a reappropriation and retrofitting of technologies similar to other Afrofuturist resurrections of defunct mediums (Zuberi 2007: 286). Furthermore, the consumption of recreational drugs indicates a spatial reversion: during the roller coaster ride the body is encapsulated in the medium, whereas at parties the medium of the drug is assimilated by the body.

Finally, the above described skeletal ride is ‘psychedelicised’ by the TB-303, which releases a series of fluctuating frequencies that drill through the pounding rhythms of hard techno. This acid sound is described by Eshun (1998: 93-96) as a vehicle of fear incorporating the destructive potential of drug use. Similar to roller coasters, recreational drugs simulate relatively safe engagements with extreme risk: their consumption is normalised at parties yet

³ As suggested by the “avatar but in a physical space” metaphor (Chapter 4.6).

at the same time potentialises the extinction of day to day life-worlds through abduction or addiction. Yet this vertiginous potentiality is adjusted to the tight rhythmic and metric restrictions of techno (Chapters 4 and 5), with a strict adherence to the 4/4 beat that always stays in the foreground:

Cooper: With acid techno it's funny that a lot of it does kind of, I guess, sound the same, but what the brilliance is that people can do something unique within that formula, yeah, really, I'll say strict formula. . . . And yeah, it's impressive that it really does kind of stand out, and grab you, and you know, it's been said that there's [sic] more possible patterns in the TB-303 than there are stars in the Universe [laughs] (focus group, January 2012).

6.2 Corroded Environments

I now turn to the environment of the music/drug experience. Earlier I argued that the history of acid techno is interwoven with technological appropriations, such as exploring the acid sound of the Roland TB-303 drum machine, or the rediscovery of pharmaceutical drugs such as LSD or MDMA as recreational. This is complemented by a third repurposing of predominantly industrial spaces, such as abandoned squat warehouses and factory buildings used for dance events. While this practice has been relatively commonplace throughout the history of EDM and particularly of raves, the focus group participants claim their heritage to punk music.

Jake: The acid squat scene, which is, I guess, sort of one of the flags that we fly by doing squat parties. And you know, the concept that we have in the music that we play, it's stemmed from punk, stemmed from things like the Sex Pistols where there was that anarchist [ethos] that we don't care about authority, we're going into this place and playing our music, you know. It's not like that now, because obviously if the police comes, we're quite respectful of their weapons [everybody laughs], but you know, at the same time, it's a very punk sort of righteous concept, to go somewhere that's, you know, abandoned or something, and put sound in there, and expect people to dance. It's a punk concept (focus group, January 2012).

The continuity with punk is undertaken to the extent that the organisers identify their audiences (and themselves) with “tekno punks” in promotional materials. In the context of the

Melbourne scene the term primarily refers to the DIY ethics and the raw, underground aesthetics of the illegal and non-commercial parties organised within repurposed urban environments, and it does not indicate either active resistance to the authorities or the dissemination of explicitly political or activist messages. The scene is not organically connected, for example, to the techno-activism of Sydney's "techno-punk" crews of the 1990s, which directed the angry aesthetics of techno/punk toward protests focused on ecological, anti-corporate and indigenous justice issues (St John 2010). Rather, the lack of social activism is reminiscent of the way in which Pope (2011: 35) evokes early "punk's break with meaningful history, as manifest in the scene surrounding the Sex Pistols in 1976". Pope (2011: 35) also suggests that Detroit techno further developed early punk's outburst against the end of history in its sonic exploration of a dystopian condition that follows the occurrence of the disaster (Chapters 4 and 5). Downstream from Detroit, this aesthetic mode is still at work in acid techno, together with the more obvious, "righteous" DIY ethics of the punk heritage highlighted by Jake.

This emphasis on the inherent sonic aesthetics, instead of the proclamation of a message for the medium, is evident in the following fragment:

Cooper: A lot of people think hard music is aggressive or, you know, there's something unsocial about it, but really, for me it's like, you can't say a sports car is evil or aggressive, but you know, it must be really enjoyable to drive on because it's powerful. And the music basically is just the only thing . . . that's caught me (focus group, January 2012).

In Melbourne, the organisation of squat parties was an international import first and became a necessity later, with a loss in popularity, increasing regulation and security measures pushing the subgenre to the margins of urban nightscapes. This process is similar to the mid-1990s events in Sydney, where particularly from the onset of the national moral panic triggered by the death of a partygoer in 1995 (Homan 1998), police interventions forced free and illegal raves to relocate to regulated clubs. Unsurprisingly, the ensuing door policies, time restrictions and expectation of alcohol consumption (as the main source of profit for the venue owners) effectively reshaped the Sydney scene (Chan 1999: 70-71). This is how Cooper recalls the Melbourne equivalent of this process:

Cooper: Originally most big raves were [for] money laundering pretty much, for organised crime, or whatever. It was a way in which you could just lose and run that loss, that'd be laundering money. And then you just can't do that now, like you can't run parties to that quality, and make your money back, if it's legit money. . . . There's none of that, [neither are] the bouncers dealing drugs on the side, and you know, if you don't make money on the bar, then you don't get the club, and you pay for that from your own pocket, and that's pretty much [where] the Melbourne scene has got to now. If you want to do exactly the way you like it, you pretty much have to do it yourself. Plus we're really good at it anyway now [laughs] (focus group, January 2012).

In present day Melbourne, acid techno parties do not attract significant bar sales even compared to other, relatively underground subgenres of techno, with the appearance of international headliners (a significant selling point for club nights) being relatively infrequent in the scene. The use of clubs is only necessary when inviting internationals (predominantly from the U.K., the home of acid techno) because in these instances it would be too risky to throw a squat party for fear of being shut by authorities. This would sometimes result in a club gig and a squat party on the following weekend⁴ with the same international performer(s).

The eerie atmosphere of the squat environment is, of course, a good companion to the squeaky frequencies of acid. As Jake explains, the party ideally repurposes warehouses “into something that is completely out of left field” (focus group, January 2012). The interviewees provide several examples of such transformations from Melbourne’s early raves to the present day squat parties, and similar accounts are plentiful in the EDM literature as well. Van Veen (2003: 92), for instance, evokes the hyperreal conversion of warehouses into “spaceships, dark cyberpunk haunts of circuitry and fantastical and mythical places of ritual” by North-American organisers. As suggested by my interviewees, the consumption of drugs (in particular acid and other psychedelics) may greatly increase the appreciation of such retrofitted environments. Apart from warehouses, the parties may transform other urban spaces such as disused areas under highway overpasses or car parks:

Lucas: For example, New Year’s Eve, two years ago. Underground car park, literally, underground, circular car park, um, in the middle of ...

⁴ In December 2012 I witnessed one such encore performance of a U.K. artist organised under a highway overpass, which was stopped prematurely by the police during the main act.

Cooper: In suburbia, in a rich area.

Lucas: And yeah, we went on all night. Two sound systems, heaps of people.

Cooper: And this is an underground car park that's probably eight storeys down and the bottom six storeys filled with water. That's why it was, you know, too expensive to demolish, because of all the water in there.

Lucas: They have done it now, but that's why it all remained interesting in the memories, 'cause we'll never ever get to use that joint again. It was just fantastic.

Lily: And they had all that graffiti there, and there was so much room.

Cooper: Yeah, we looked at it, we looked at this place on Google Maps, and it's just this big black hole [everybody laughs]. And that's basically the entrance to this, where the building used to stand, you know (focus group, January 2012).

Referring back to the previous section, the emergence of the party from the post-industrial afterlife of the urban wasteland can be captured in the ghost image of a derelict amusement park where one last ride, the electronic roller coaster, is still miraculously under operation, and its immersive virtualisation twists into an extended journey that evades mainstream (mass and social) media trajectories (just as the location evoked in the fragment is situated in the blind spot or “black hole” of Google Maps). This is certainly not the only way to approach the squat party,⁵ yet this metaphor synthesises the kinaesthetic simulation of the party with its engagement with the ghostly relics of technologies.

For Sophie, the afterlife of such industrial mansions is of special relevance:

Sophie: I [explored] abandoned warehouses just as a pastime thing, and I loved it. Like being somewhere that used to be populated and used to be used for something, and then this space is now not used for anything, and you've got, like, little triggers of past life, and things like that. And I think that adds to the whole ambience of it, and holds up that sort of feeling. And it just, yeah, it adds to the feel of the music I think, it adds that, sort of, more underground feel, that dirty, hard core feel to it (focus group, January 2012).

⁵ Van Veen (2003: 95-96), for example, discusses the exploitation of disused environments in the actualisation of a “sonograph”: a performative, sonic milieu that is alienated from its urban surroundings.

Abandoned ruins often confront partygoers with cultural waste that, as I will discuss this in Chapter 8, may act as mnemonic device, signalling a past that is now forgotten and reminiscent of decay and transformation (Hawkins 2006). Sophie's words suggest that such encounters frame the music and the vibe in two ways. First, the transitional state of the residual environment (Hawkins 2006: 132) with its "little triggers of past life" is a good companion to the psychedelic effect of the music because the latter, in a similar way, hints at the (non-) presence of a wider imaginary by offering just a few clues intensified by repetition (Chapter 4.3). Second, it contributes to the "dirty, hard core feel" of the music, which is a feeling of encountering (cultural) waste and getting wasted, and also refers to the pounding rhythm of the machineries infused in the music.

In this manner, from the afterlife of technologies and environments, the ghostly ride of the acid techno party invokes machinic encounters that are sometimes brought back to haunt the everyday as well:

Sophie: My mum has caught me dancing to the washing machine before [laughs]. And the other day at work, I'm like: someone's playing really good music, who is that? And I'm wandering around the offices, trying to work out who it was, who is playing good music, and I realised it was a dot matrix printer. It was like: oh god, I need help [laughs] (focus group, January 2012).

This chapter concludes the separate examination of techno in Melbourne by focusing on its ramifications for acid techno. The appeal of this subgenre resides in its heavy employment of the iconic TB-303 aligned with the pounding grooves of hard techno music, and the experience of the dance floor can be captured in the metaphor of the drug-mediated roller coaster ride within the post-industrial afterlife of the urban wasteland. The acid techno party intensifies certain sensibilities inherent in the wider techno genre through its emphasis on sonic intensities and its repurposing of industrial spaces, which will be of particular relevance in the comparative analysis of Chapter 10.

7. Psytrance: The Synergy of Drug and Music

7.1 Setting the Scene: Goa and the Development of Psytrance

The psytrance or psychedelic trance EDM genre, which now encompasses several subgenres, is derived from and sometimes even identified with the earlier and narrower Goa trance genre in popular and academic discourses alike (Greener and Hollands 2006). The emergence of Goa trance is explained by a narrative that is well known in psytrance culture, with the roots of the genre tracing back to the 1960s psychedelic and hippie countercultures. After the decline of the counterculture many of its disenchanted representatives became cultural exiles, and finding their way to the province of Goa, India, started organising party gatherings of progressive and psychedelic rock during the 1970s. Affected by local Indian contexts and Oriental symbolism, by the 1990s the genre of Goa trance would emerge, with musical influences such as 1970s psychedelic music, 1980s electronic post-punk, and the emerging EDM (Rietveld 2010: 71-77). The evolution of the Goa music scene from the 1970s until the 1990s has been shaped by “shifting musical aesthetics/technics, drug trafficking and increased flows of interest” (St John 2012: 53) until Goa trance as EDM genre received international acclaim in the mid-1990s, triggering the large influx of club tourists to Goa, and influencing the emergence of a globally dispersed psytrance genre (Rietveld 2010: 71) by 2000.

The 1960s counterculture was already seen as a carrier of “spiritual technologies” (St John 2011) before the exodus on the hippie trail to India, which were bequeathed not only to the emerging Goa trance, but often to psytrance as well (Greener and Hollands 2006: 395-396, Taylor 2001: 165-200). In the case of the hippie movement, Willis (1975: 112-115) considers religious and mystical experiences as building blocks of a symbolic world in which entry is provided by the LSD experience: among hippies the psychedelic effect of acid was regarded as a mystical experience and played a key role in the internalisation of a system emerging from the metaphorical image of Eastern religion and culture. Similar elements were apparent in the Oriental imagery and iconography of Goa trance labels, albums and events appearing in the mid-1990s and spreading around the world. Over the next decade, certain branches of the emerging and proliferating global psytrance scene would expand this concern with the appropriation of both symbols and psychedelic pharmacology of Amerindian native cultures.

These elements rendered psytrance “a repository for those practicing and experimenting with alternative spiritual dispositions who are open to traverse human/spirit boundaries outside mainstream religious practice and faith”, with festivals often becoming “spiritual technologies” themselves (St John 2011).

The spiritual technology thesis in psytrance is explored in St John’s (2012) work *Global Tribe: Technology, Spirituality and Psytrance*. Yet as St John (2012: 69) notes, the uniformity of the Goa scene had already been problematised by diverging engagements and expectations, including adherence to pacifist and ecological values; escapism; reckless drug consumption; the search for an authentic mystical experience; the ignorance of indigenous populations; rituals of engagement with the Other; and rave tourism. Some of these cultural complexities were still apparent during my personal visit to India in January 2013, where I witnessed a highly commercialised Goa scene with mixed party crowds mainly consisting of backpackers; Russian tourists; drug tourists; hippies from various generations; (mostly) male Indian punters; and Indian vendors. I also encountered an Indian venue owner who, mourning the good old days, claimed that he witnessed the early evolution of the scene, showing photographs of beach parties which lasted several days from the posthumous album of a white dealer friend who had the looks of an early raver, and explaining how drug trafficking has shaped the scene in the 1980s, influencing the emergence of a highly danceable music genre.

As a successor, psytrance is more dispersed than Goa trance, both musically and geographically, and consequently in a wider cultural sense as well. The (Amer)Indian influences and Oriental iconographies may be complemented, modified or expelled by other cultural ingredients, leading to a variation within the global culture of psytrance, or enabling diverging paths within one particular local scene. My suggestion is that, apart from the appreciation of the music, the widespread availability of recreational drugs and particularly psychedelics is the common denominator across the various scenes and social aesthetics, and the diversity of local contexts and meanings may lead to diverging explanations of the drug-infused experience of the party. For instance, my research in the Czech Republic (Vitos 2010) signals the intensification of carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1968) sensibilities through the playful overturning of cultural and linguistic systems during the psychedelic experience. This, I was informed, contributed to the ‘madhouse atmosphere’ characteristic of such parties. While the expression was used metaphorically by Czech partygoers, psychedelic ‘madness’ had in fact been a controversial issue in psychological research concerning LSD during the 1950s (Novak 1997: 90-

92). Although early researchers had concluded that their subjects endured a temporary psychosis, the psychedelic state should not be confused with a psychopathological condition (Noll 1983: 454). Later LSD experiments gave diverging results. An alternative approach, which had significant influence on the 1960s hippie counterculture as well, was rooted in the experiences of Aldous Huxley, who, in the mid-1950s, “redefined taking mescaline and LSD as a mystical religious experience” (Novak 1997: 93-95). While LSD may be treated as a spiritual technology in popular discourses, researchers had challenged this view in the 1960s, arguing that the results of the drug experiments were influenced by the different circumstances and preconceptions of the subjects. According to the contemporary academic view, the nature of each trip (LSD experience) is highly dependent on the dosage, the personal predisposition or expectation (set) and the environment (setting) (Pechnick and Ungerleider 2004). Therefore, the drug is not a spiritual technology in itself, and the narratives embracing its use may vary according to the local contexts.

This is reinforced by my research of Melbourne psytrance, with many of my interviewees delivering less idealistic narratives to psytrance than those of “the new generation of spirituality through evolution of music” (Greener and Hollands 2006: 403) or “the merger with cosmic consciousness that is potentiated by the psychedelic party” (St John 2012: 202). My project complements such descriptions by showing varying perceptions, which ultimately emphasise the polyphony of psytrance. To connect my work with the spiritual technology narrative, during the fieldwork my interviewees’ perceptions of spirituality were also investigated. Yet as emphasised in Chapter 2.1, my methodology followed the suggestion of Hennion (2001: 5): the interview questions were not primarily addressing the participants’ determinisms, but more the ways and circumstances of music and drug consumption. I conducted four focus groups with 17 punters and organisers, and an in-depth individual interview with one additional partygoer/DJ. The respondents were all living in Melbourne and were ethnically mixed, consisting of eight Australia-born white participants, one New Zealander and one Canadian (these ten punters/organisers were interviewed in two focus groups); six Indians; one Iranian; and one Hungarian. Most of the participants have been involved in the Melbourne psytrance scene for several years, some of them also as DJs and organisers (see Appendix 1.1). In my experience the Melbourne scene encompasses a significant Indian minority, to the extent that the only regular darkpsy (dark psytrance) events are organised by an Indian crew. The inclusion of six respondents from Indian ethnic

backgrounds reflects the presence of this minority in the scene and my academic interest in the darkpsy subgenre, which constitutes the topic of a separate case study in my project.

In Australia, psychedelic parties influenced by the Goa scene have been organised since the early 1990s, and by the mid-1990s Melbourne became a centre of the psychedelic electronic music played at ‘doofs’ – the Australian onomatopoeic word for primarily outdoor (bush) festivals (St John 2012: 248-251). While doofs had initially attracted anarchist and eco-activist collectives, by the 2000s the audiences had widened, and festivals turned into “a frequently transgressively carnivalesque context in which young, and youthful, populations could suspend obligations internal to traditional familial roles and citizenship in a semi-legitimate context” (St John 2012: 253). This wide definition still holds for the parties I visited (the particularities of the festival environment will be discussed in Chapter 8). Through the example of the Rainbow Serpent Festival, the largest psychedelic festival in the Melbourne area, St John (2012: 259-262) also points to the lack of a dominant ideology and the presence of a range of agendas that can be propagated and contested at doofs, such as eco-activism, the acknowledgement of Aboriginal cultural heritage or even the affirmation of (white) Australian patriotism.

While the local contexts and explanations of the psytrance vibe may indeed vary, the name of the genre suggests that psytrance is EDM ‘optimised’ for psychedelic drugs such as acid. Accordingly, in this chapter I address drug and music consumption through two collections of interview fragments and their subsequent analyses.

7.2 Fragments from the Field: Drug Consumption Patterns

Recreational drug use is common among the focus group participants, with most of them being poly-drug users, and a few restricting their consumption to psychedelics. The following diagram shows the various substances discussed during the focus groups, ranked according to the frequency of occurrences. The participants were urged to discuss any drugs that they considered relevant. The data from the individual in-depth interview is excluded from the diagrams of this chapter to avoid the skewing of the aggregate findings towards one participant.

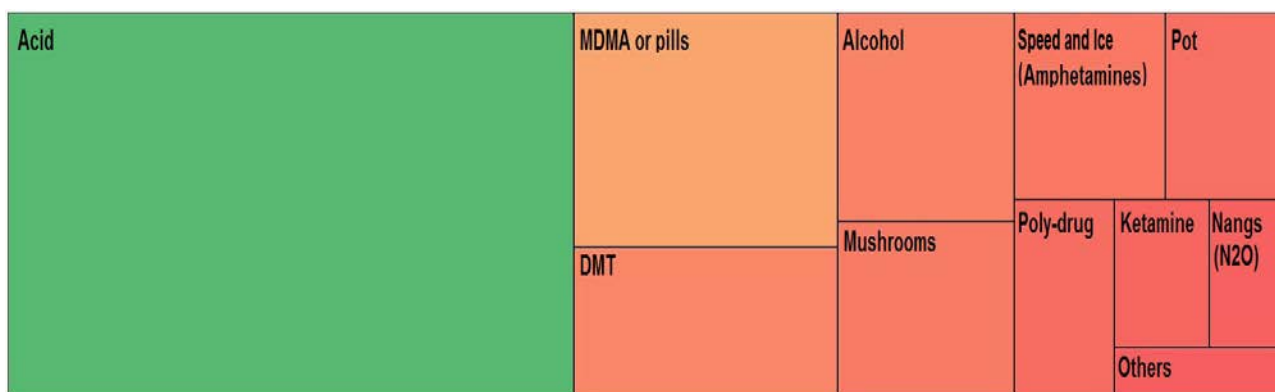


Figure 7: Drug Frequencies

Acid is by far the most discussed drug, followed by MDMA, DMT and alcohol. These are the substances that will be considered in more detail. Mushrooms are also quite popular and have similar (if shorter) effects to acid. Speed and ice (both amphetamines) are often considered inappropriate for psytrance, especially the particularly strong ice (crystal metamphetamine) that is frequently seen as too ego-pumping and highly addictive. Similar to the techno focus groups, pot (marihuana) is not considered a dance drug in itself although used in conjunction with other drugs on the dance floor, or for just chilling or coming down.

Another diagram shows the most frequently discussed effects that could be related (or not related) to the use of the four most discussed drugs. Some of these effects will be considered below.

	Acid	MDMA or pills	DMT	Alcohol
Sound enhancing	35	5	4	0
Psychedelic experience	26	0	4	0
Getting wasted or losing control	14	1	1	3
Inappropriate or bad quality	10	5	1	1
Ongoing motivation	9	2	3	3
Emotional response or happiness	5	7	2	2
Social bonds and socialising	2	6	1	2

Figure 8: Drug Effects

Acid

Almost half of the drug-related discussions addressed or touched on the effects of LSD. Acid is considered by most respondents – even by those who would prefer MDMA at parties – as the main drug that facilitates ‘understanding’ psytrance music. It is relatively cheap, widely

available, convenient to transport (it works in very small quantities) and has versatile, long-lasting effects (eight to 12 hours), which range from the synaesthetic experience of the music to total loss of control, depending on dosage, set and setting.

“The Music Needs a Good Listener”

Sami, an Iranian organiser/DJ who is otherwise critical of euphoric or energising drugs that he considers not psychedelic (such as speed, ice and MDMA), underlines the relevance of acid in the scene and particularly the drug’s music enhancing effects.

Q: So the drug would be a part of the [psytrance] culture?

Sami: It is, a very big, major part of the culture. And there is a reason everybody talks about this. And as Vipin [Indian darkpsy producer/organiser] said, it does actually open your mind to new things, it's nothing from Mars or, I don't know, there's no superpower or anything special, it's just a whole bunch of chemical reactions in our brain, but it does help to accentuate your feelings, to understand whole things better, and this is what the psychedelic culture needs. The music needs a good listener. You can't really put a drunk person on the dance floor and expect them to understand dark psytrance 'cause they wouldn't. They wouldn't have that interaction. Whereas you know, if a person is under the effect of LSD, it's more likely for them to relate to electronically generated sounds (focus group, December 2012).

Acid often has a synaesthetic effect and also increases attention to the music:

Sophie: I like the way drugs make music more visual ... So if I'm on acid and close my eyes, and I'm listening to psytrance music, I can see it all happening. In patterns and things like that ...

Sam: Yeah, synaesthesia ... It's pretty funky.

Sophie: Yeah, it's awesome. And when I'm on acid, I can't talk to people. It's just about music basically, so it's all just dancing and music. So I'll just be on the dance floor, having my eyes closed the whole time, I'll be enjoying all the visuals from it. And it's like another dimension to the music.

Q: So it's like a synaesthetic dimension and also an immersion.

Sophie: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, can't talk, dancing, and I'll come out of it like 3 hours later and just be like: whoa, I'm here. OK ... And sort of wander off to my campsite, sleep or something, but yeah, I think that acid in particular can definitely enhance the musical experience (focus group, December 2012).

Q: So does [acid] help you focus more, or does it create new sounds?

Sharabi: It heightens all your senses basically. So you perceive more information, so you get connected more.

Baniya: And you feel more connected to nature [laughs]. Doof-doof ...

Sharabi: There was a point where I was so lost in the music, when the music stopped I couldn't remember where I was, what I was doing, what time it is, nothing. When the music stopped ... I was that connected with the music. Like, completely (focus group, August 2012).

Acid is considered conducive for enhancing multi-layered music by adding even more imaginary layers to it:

Q: Yeah, I was just wondering that if the music is not minimalistic but it's very ... complex so to say, do you still have this effect of acid of making it even more complex? Adding to it something that is not there?

Rick: That's what it makes it so amazing, 'cause it's, like, already complicated, and it's already musically, sometimes, anyway, for example Terrafractyl ...¹

John: At [a local psytrance party] actually during Terrafractyl's set, when I was . . . tripping massive balls, but I was still having a sick time, and it was one of the most psychedelic I've ever been at a Terrafractyl set, and I was just like: wow, this guy, I knew he was psychedelic, but wow [everybody laughs]! There's [sic] layers, and layers, and layers, they're seriously like twenty layers in this music.

Jimmy: Ah man, it's intricate as!

¹ See Appendix 3.1.

John: Like it's intricate, it's probably, like, in any one track there's probably like 6 or 7 layers, but I was hearing like 20 layers. Like there was vocals and shit that definitely weren't there, there was [sic] all sorts of stuff going on in there, that was not there, that I was just interpreting out of it. So if it increases in complexity, it doesn't necessarily mean that the psychedelic effect is reduced, I feel (focus group, June 2012).

Psychedelic Experience and Losing Control

As discussed in Chapter 4.6, the augmentative effect of LSD enhances sensibility to associations and interpretations that stir up the context of everyday reality.

John: I don't know, for me, to put into words, it's really, really difficult. But you know, if I had to try to put it into words, I feel like when I'm having a proper acid psychedelic experience, I kind of feel like I'm interpreting stuff that's happening on a different plane of existence. Like yeah, you're like OK, I'm interpreting things that are happening beneath normal reality, or within normal reality that I don't notice, but I'm noticing these things now, that seem so clear, and I can't escape them. . . . It's like picking up messages in reality that aren't, that you can't notice in your normal state. Reading between the lines.

Rick: I think that's why it's called trip as well, 'cause you're exploring, um, an altered consciousness kind of thing (focus group, June 2012).

In higher doses, acid is particularly conducive to an excessive distancing from one's "normal reality" by temporarily dissolving processes of enculturation. At this stage, the loss of one's culturally constituted self can be connected to a narrative of spirituality:

Magan: Taking psychedelics means to me killing, yeah, destroying the brain in terms of what you've learnt so far. And for those eight-nine hours of experience your brain is not functioning at the level it [normally does], so your thoughts and everything are changing. . . . [A] big time missing of ego [is] happening over there. And whatever the person is thinking is very abducting for himself in his thoughts. Yeah. So the psychedelic experience, that's why it's sometimes called spiritual experience, because at the end of the day spirituality has no ego as well (individual interview, March 2013).

Others describe this effect of unlearning (in terms of distancing oneself from day to day life-

worlds) more prosaically as “weirding out”. The festival environment encourages experimenting with higher doses – for those who are willing to lose (more) control:

Maria: I don't think I've taken enough actually.

John: Yeah, so if you only have half [a tab of LSD] every time, you're probably not doing the [proper] level.

Maria: Yeah, but I don't want that sort of level of craziness, I'm not interested in that sort of thing. I probably wouldn't come out of it in a nice way, so [laughs] ... Yeah, I prefer just the nice way.

Rick: You'll find as well that when you have a heavy dose of acid, for example, it's ... It gives you massive serotonin rushes, so at least for the first hour or two, you'll be pretty happy, even if you're fucking weirded out, like you might feel or you might be at a weird place, and you might be worried about it, and you might get yourself into a weirder place, and when you start to come down a little bit, you're like, wow, fuck, oh man (focus group, June 2012) ...

Inappropriate Use and Bad Trips

The regular long-term use of acid is sometimes seen as detrimental, yet not on the body but on the mind. Subordinating daily life to the LSD experience may thus lead to a mental addiction that is stigmatised by some interviewees:

Umesh: You don't find LSD addictive. Like you don't ... say have addiction problems with LSD, right, but some people have a problem with some other drugs, like cocaine and heroin.

Q: So do you mean that you can't get lost in that world?

Sabeena: No, I disagree, because I've known people who have gone really crazy on acid, and yeah, like pretty much people would do it every day, and they have lost their mind on acid.

Baniya: Yeah, I have a live example on that too, like one of my very good friends started to think that he is god himself after having the first trip. You know, he actually started thinking that he's god, and he left his family, he left his kids. So it can have a bad effect too (focus group, August 2012).

Things can go wrong during the experience as well. Especially with higher doses, there is a possibility of unpredictable paranoid reaction or 'bad trip':

John: Yeah, well, that is one of the things, you know, probably everyone in this room has had a bad trip at some stage or another, and as me and Jimmy were saying, at the last party we were saying that the best thing about a dark trip or a bad trip is that it ends. And when it ends, you're like hah! Fucking I have my brain working, it's ...

Rick: Sometimes I feel like what makes taking acid really good is, um, like at the start you're really confused, and maybe it's even going in a bad direction, but then the sort of manic feeling that you get when you overcome your, you know, fears or whatever, and then you're just bursting with happiness.

John: Yeah, you managed to steer it out of it. Like, I'm good!

Rick: Oh yeah, you've got to fucking high-five yourself (focus group, June 2012).

MDMA

The dosage of MDMA and its availability in Melbourne were addressed in the techno focus group fragments of Chapter 4.4: MDMA. The same observations apply for the psytrance scene as well, with some of the interviewees also mentioning the use of homologous compounds with similar effects:

Jimmy: I think that we should mention, um, with the whole taking drugs thing, like back to the MDMA, we're not really taking MDMA a lot of the time. We're taking designer drugs a lot of the time.

John: Oh, that's true. Well you know, like, Methylone and another MDMA analogues, yeah, half of the time we probably take those as well. 'Cause MDMA, I mean, it's getting easier to get these days, but ...

Rick: Methylone's, like, BK-MDMA (focus group, June 2012).

Apart from its slight hallucinogenic effect (which did not come up during the psytrance focus groups) and its energising quality, as an empathogen MDMA increases general empathy for the participant's musical and social environment:

Sophie: But I think MDMA evens the music absolutely ... if it's awful, I'd still like it [laughs].

Pete: But you like everything ...

Sophie: But that's the thing with MDMA, you love everything, you have no choice ...

Pete: That's the problem with MDMA, 'cause I know, when I'm getting in that MDMA zone, and I know that I'm loving that night, but I'll feel like shit in 2 days. So I try not to (focus group, December 2012).

Pete refers to the notorious comedown period of MDMA that may occur for a few days after the experience. This well-known after-effect is illustrated in the following piece from the *Cool Psytrance Bros* internet meme² series shared on the Quick Meme (2013) meme generator site, which was linked by one of the participants, Johanna, to her Facebook Timeline in March 2013.



Figure 9: *Cool Psytrance Bros*, Path to Happiness (Quick Meme 2013)

² 'Internet meme' generally refers to user-generated, viral online content consisting of humorous variations of the same visual or conceptual element often accompanied by captions. *Cool Psytrance Bros* is a typical example where a party photo of two stereotypic actors of psytrance parties dressed in neo-hippie fashion (see Chapter 8.4) is repeated with different, anecdotic captions. The collection on the Quick Meme (2013) website consists of more than 250 pictures.

As in the techno focus groups, the authenticity and appropriateness of the drug effect is criticised by some participants:

Umesh: Yeah, I don't like MDMA because it's about a personal preference of going or being happy, and trying to go and talk to people. Because when you are on MD[MA] everything feels so nice, and it's a fake happiness for me. It doesn't really help you in experiencing the music, MDMA. Acid does [for me], but MDMA doesn't. MDMA distracts you actually from the music.

Q: So is it that euphoric or that intensive that it takes your attention away?

Sharabi: I wouldn't say that.

Umesh: For me it does. I get more concentrated on talking to people, I talk more.

Sabeena: Yeah, me on MD[MA] is like I would start looking for a couch, get comfortable there, and start sinking into the couch, that's it, I'd be there for the next three-four hours. And if someone sits next to me, that's it, I just get chatting, and yeah, that's it. And I actually don't like that [laughs]. I'd rather be at the stage, you know.

Sharabi: For me, I'm just blissed out, like everything's just beautiful, loving life, that's it (focus group, August 2012).

While Sharabi enjoys the feeling of being “blissed out”, for Umesh and Sabeena the unconditional euphoric effect (“fake happiness”) is problematic because it steers attention away from the music and the dance floor. These are the two typical perspectives on MDMA use that came up in the focus groups.

As also noted in Chapter 4.4, MDMA is not considered to be a psychedelic drug by most interviewees. In this thesis I follow this categorisation, while acknowledging that empathogens are commonly classified as a subcategory of psychedelics (Brandt and Passie 2012: 539).

DMT

DMT is a powerful hallucinogenic that had originally been used by South American tribes and was later dubbed as a “businessman’s lunch” during its introduction in the U.S. in the 1960s because of its rapid onset and short duration (Haroz and Greenberg 2005: 1261). In Australia,

Alcohol

All white participants consume alcohol in considerable quantities, with some of them brewing their own beer at home. Most of the non-white interviewees are less enthusiastic about alcohol; although by no means avoid drinking altogether. It is generally considered a great substance for socialising and acquiring that extra punch of cheerfulness:

Maria: I reckon you've got to have costumes [at festivals], and you've got to have punch. A chilly bin [New Zealand slang for picnic cooler] for a punch.

Rick: Every time I make punch, everyone gets really jolly [everybody laughs]. Just get a bucket of, like, wine and vodka and a few different other ...

John: You can pretty much put just one litre of juice and alcohol, and, like, a few bits of strawberries or something.

Rick: What I love is taking something like a large vessel of alcohol or whatever to the dance floor, and people, you know, come up asking for a drink. Someone comes and talks to you, so yeah, hey, do you want a drink (focus group, June 2012).

As suggested by my participant observation, drinks are also good carriers of illegal drugs such as liquid LSD.

This concludes the first collection of fragments in this chapter. In accordance with the dominance of (hallucinogenic) psychedelics among the discussed drugs, in the following section I address the psychedelic (particularly LSD) experience and the associated narrative of spirituality that often recurs in the research of psytrance.

7.3 “Meeting Myself”: The Psychedelic Dissolution of Reality

While the participants use a range of drugs at parties in varying proportions, all of them have tried acid and praise its sound-enhancing capabilities. LSD trips may get quite intense and psychologically demanding, yet the outdoor festival environment encourages experimentation

and provides a good context for taking the drug. The interpretation of the psychedelic experience varies. In Chapter 7.1 I outlined the drug's possible association with a narrative of spirituality that is reflected in the spiritual technology thesis of psytrance research. Focusing on the psychedelic effect, I would like to expand this trajectory by showing that the concept of spirituality is loaded with different meanings for different participants and by considering an alternative interpretation of the psychedelic experience.

I start the discussion with Magan's case study. Magan is a 25 year-old Indian male, and an amateur darkpsy DJ and organiser who has been listening to psytrance for eight years. He had received a religious upbringing in India before moving to Melbourne and becoming a regular visitor of Australian psytrance parties five years ago. He is the only participant who, at the very beginning of the interview, explicitly associated the psychedelic experience with the spiritual experience (see Magan's fragment in Chapter 7.2: *Acid. Psychedelic Experience and Losing Control*). Given his interesting background and this prompt association, I felt that the topic deserved further probing:

Q: From what I understood, losing one's, let's say, learning would be more a kind of, let's say, thinking out of the box, out of our own nature. So how is this connected to spirituality?

Magan: Because spirituality at the end of the day is also thinking out of the box. When you are meditating you are not thinking something. And what you think out of that, non-thinking ideas, or whatever, you get a leap after waking up, thinking nothing is out of the box.

Q: So according to this, spirituality would be a broader view on life?

Magan: Spirituality is more a ... yeah, it's a more, broader view of life.

Q: So it's not connected to a belief in a higher being or ...

Magan: No, it's not connected to anything that you are believing, or some god ... you are just meeting yourself. And meeting something more than god, pretty much (individual interview, March 2013).

Magan's comments are interesting because he does not connect spirituality to a particular belief system or narrative of transcendence. In this thesis, however, I adopt a perspective in

which spirituality implies a faithful awareness of an ultimate truth or a life-transcending entity. This transcendent is present in the working definition of religion and spirituality developed by Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001: 18), which describes religion as “an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols” that “facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality)” and fosters community bonds. Spirituality, on the other hand, is not necessarily connected to organised religion or communities and involves “the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning and about relationship with the sacred or transcendent” (Koenig, McCullough, and Larson 2001: 18).

Magan makes no reference to understanding answers to ultimate questions, and the relationship with the transcendent (god or ultimate truth) is not at all apparent. He seems to be primarily concerned about the benefits of a clear headspace as an unbiased platform for extreme introspection from which one’s life narrative would unfold with remarkable lucidity.

Q: ‘Cause I think for different people there's [sic] different definitions on spirituality. I think some would meet an entity, you know.

Magan: No, I'm talking about meeting myself. So there is no entity left in-between. There's no thoughts of the brain, basically, that are controlling me from meeting myself. That is, that happens only when you have no ego, you have no ingredient that was put in your brain soup left to actually cook. So you've undone all the knots and you reach a level where you're like, OK, I feel myself.

Q: So that would mean basically getting out of your culture, or at least having the sensation that you're out.

Magan: Yeah, at least having the sensation that I'm out. ‘Cause we are talking about having [an] experience, on psychedelics. So you basically lose yourself, you forget everything (individual interview, March 2013).

Magan discusses the spiritual experience in terms of an imaginary journey outside (consumer) culture, which is not connected to a transcendental narrative precisely because that would lead back to the confines of culture. In other words, in the context of consumer culture, the adherence to a transcendental narrative while consuming drugs would not imply a release

from the bonds of culture, but instead the consumption of spiritual achievement. In Magan's account, the spiritual experience is analogous with the psychedelic experience because both offer a fresh perspective on reality by delivering the sensation of dissolving or confusing its semiotic system. This means that all images and culturally determined concepts, including those of deities, would be temporarily blurred. Therefore, for Magan the experience is "not connected to anything that you are believing [but to] meeting something more than god". Magan's words suggest, above all, a negative identification, evoking an imaginary encounter with non-culture. Moreover, his definition of spirituality is deeply personal, and does not explicitly contend for the universality or primacy of the perspective in the sense he does not claim that "meeting myself" should have a certain fixed meaning for everyone apart from the common sensation of losing the culturally constructed self. Magan also confirms in a later stage of the interview that "at the end of the day the culture is the real thing" as a consensual platform through which one can interact with others (individual interview, March 2013).

Baniya is another Indian interviewee, who defines the feeling of spirituality as direct contact with god, which corresponds better to the previous definition of religion and spirituality. Yet the feeling is not connected to psytrance but specifically to chill out music and playing the Indian tabla drum:

Q [After finishing an open discussion about the feelings and emotions delivered by psytrance in which spirituality did not come up]: OK, so how about other genres and related feelings and emotions?

Baniya: Chill out. I would like to talk about chill out. Like, I like playing the tabla, so I like listening to chill out too, because when I listen to chill out, it gives me a very spiritual feeling. I feel that I'm in direct contact with god, if something like that exists, like what we call god. So, yeah, while listening to chill out I think that I'm really on a very spiritual level.

Q: So that would be connected just to chill out music?

Baniya: Yeah. That feeling comes when I listen to intense chill out, and I'm like really calming down, yeah (focus group, August 2012).

Johanna is originally from Canada but has been living in Melbourne and visiting parties on a monthly basis for five years. The feelings that she associates with spirituality are not connected to the transcendent and not even to the drug or music experience in itself, but primarily to group cohesion and the sense of fulfilment:

Johanna: I'm people spiritual.

Q: In what sense?

Johanna: For me, parties aren't about spirituality really and stuff like that. I get my, I guess, 'spirituality', um, for me is like renewal, what renews me . . . and what fulfills me. I suppose I'm quite fulfilled by my work, and I just see a lot more intense, amazing things at my work than I've really seen on the dance floor. But [on the dance floor the fulfilment is] not from the music, it's the people. If I have a moment, it's like my friends and stuff like that.

Q: So what is the kind of fulfilment you gain from doofs, let's say?

Johanna: OK, um, I suppose just going, and totally forgetting, I suppose, my life elsewhere. And dancing, and being free, I suppose (focus group, December 2012).

For Johanna, who works as a nurse, such fulfilling moments are not restricted to parties. Johanna and her Australian friends, some of whom define themselves as “practical doofers”, particularly emphasise the pleasure gained from group cohesion, but separate themselves from the conscious search for transcendental spiritualism in terms of doofing, which they associate with the “hippies” in the scene (see Chapter 8).

Johanna: Um, can I be an asshole [laughs]? I think it's sad that people ... I hope that people that go to doofs for it to be a spiritual experience, it isn't the only place for finding their spiritual growth. Because there are so much other better ways out there than going to doofs to enhance yourself and your spirituality.

Sophie: Sam just said, which is my big thing about happiness, basically happiness stems from social cohesion. And social cohesion is actually having strong emotional connections with friends, and family, and people you can talk to if you need to, and environments that you feel

comfortable with, and social environments, and all this stuff that encompasses social cohesion. And that's a very ... that's what drives happiness.

Johanna: And giving yourself into such a state of fucked-upness that your dear friends are there to help you.

Sophie: But I don't know that I'd call it spiritual. I'd just call it a means for happiness, really.

Justin: I think the feeling is probably the same.

Sophie: I think the feeling is probably the same, but I don't assign it to some deity.

Justin: It seems like they [the hippies] are just mystifying something that's kind of ... normal (focus group, December 2012).

What is missing from the description of this feeling is the relationship with the transcendent, which for Justin would lead to an unnecessary “mystification” of the experience. This is why Sophie would not define it as spiritual: indeed, group cohesion is manifest in many segments of consumer culture which are not typically regarded as spiritual or religious, from sports events to family celebrations.

The fragments above suggest that in terms of drug, music and festival experiences, different participants assign different meanings to spirituality or avoid using the term. This renders the use of the spiritual narrative in my research problematic. Moreover, while some of the Melbourne parties are indeed advertised with references to Eastern religion or even alternative healing techniques such as crystal healing,³ many of my interviewees are highly critical of the perceived naivety or unreasonableness of “hippie” lifestyle narratives:

Pete: And you get to educate hippies about science [laughs].

Q: About science?

Pete: About science, yeah. It's fun. At least discuss with them, passionately discuss with them.

Sophie: Why [healing] crystals don't make you feel good.

³ Crystal healing is a traditional healing technique using crystals and gems that are selected for their wavelengths and believed to beneficially influence the energies of the body (Truter 2006: 54).

Pete: I just put about a tiny little speed in this water about five years ago, shook it up, and they take it and go nuts.

Q: OK, so what kind of science is this?

Pete: Homeopathy [laughs] (focus group, December 2012).⁴

Pete's words may also suggest that among the "hippies" the consumption of ideologies is often driven by the consumption of substances.

Alternatively, ideology may conceal drug consumption. This idea returns in another piece from the *Cool Psytrance Bros* meme series (Quick Meme 2013).



Figure 10: *Cool Psytrance Bros*, Crystal Healing (Quick Meme 2013)

(Pun on the esoteric crystal healing technique and the consumption of crystal MDMA)

⁴ According to the current scientific discourse, homeopathy is a pseudoscientific healing technique not relevantly different from a placebo which tries to cure a symptom with a remedy that would produce the same symptom in healthy individuals (Ernst 2002). This remedy is repeatedly diluted (generally in water), often to the point where no molecules of the original substance could possibly remain in the solution.

Indeed, in psytrance scenes the narratives and counter-narratives of spirituality may vary, as I suggest elsewhere through the case study of the Czech scene (Vitos 2012). Yet what makes psytrance festivals quite unique among other Western institutions is the general pattern of drug consumption in a relatively uncontrolled, familiar context which contributes to the sense of freedom and release that is commonly enunciated in the focus groups. While drug use is widespread in EDM parties in general, psytrance festivals particularly encourage further experimentation even with quite ‘demanding’ psychedelic substances such as acid. For Rick, this broad engagement with “exploring alternate consciousnesses” is the defining characteristic of parties:

Rick: I feel like psychedelic parties aren't necessarily all about fucking peace, love and happiness. It's about, as we were talking about before, exploring alternate consciousnesses (focus group, June 2012).

In the focus groups this sense of exploring chemically mediated realities is primarily related to the consumption of psychedelic drugs, most notably acid. Drawing on the current perspective of neuroscience, my research acknowledges that chemicals such as LSD and MDMA mediate the neurotransmission in the brain and explains this process with references to Baudrillard's (1997a) concept of the virtual (Chapter 4.6). In the case of LSD, the cognitive effect of this mediation is the oversaturation of concepts with meanings. Depending on set and setting, some of these meanings may provisionally surpass others, leading to surprising, virtual reconfigurations of one's “normal reality” that John sees as “reading between the lines” (7.2: *Acid. Psychedelic Experience and Losing Control*).

Exceeding eight hours, the LSD trip may generate a series of virtual reconfigurations of one's normal reality, each striking the subject with astonishing novelty and contributing to the sense of exploration. As I suggest elsewhere in the context of the Czech psytrance scene (Vitos 2010), the mutability and rearrangement of the rules in this drug-mediated environment reveals that infinite configurations are possible. Each configuration is operational in its own provisional context, but may lead to anomalies in any other context. The lack of coherent narrative during such experiences would connect to the metaphoric image of an infinite maze of mirrors, in which each mirror reflects a distorted image of its surroundings and appears as a distorted reflection in the other mirrors.

The incongruence between the ‘normal’ and the ‘psychedelic’ during LSD-tripping may also serve as a source of humour. For Magan, the appreciation of this humour would still refer back to the semiotic and cognitive system of everyday reality, which could be temporarily left behind by taking higher doses:

Magan: You see, that's not the acid tending to be humorous, it's you who are tending to be humorous, not letting go of yourself, and not letting go of your input that has been in your life or something that your mind is made of. And that's why it takes higher dosages of LSD for someone to actually lose themselves (individual interview, March 2013).

Instead of continuously relating back to everyday reality, such “higher dosages of LSD” would give way to a more general feeling of getting lost in the maze: total sensory and semantic overload would lead to a nullification of meaning. Magan does not connect this feeling of losing oneself to any particular narrative; instead he compares it to meditating in the (technical) sense of “thinking nothing”. Indeed the mirror maze would be indefinable as a coherent narrative, because the narrative itself is a part of the maze, and therefore it is refracted in its endlessly distorting virtualisations.

Psychedelic drugs thus provide a means for dissolving social reality in general, and one’s surroundings in particular. Partygoers often give accounts of getting caught in an internal journey, for which the dance floor provides both musical guidance and fitting context, as in Sophie’s description in 7.2: *Acid. The Music Needs a Good Listener*. What is found during each trip (if anything) and how it is conceptualised is deeply subjective. Perhaps one may find an image of oneself (and perhaps a distorted one), not necessarily a static entity but an episode in one’s life narrative. This may include one’s relations with the narrative of the transcendent, as in certain popular descriptions of the DMT experience, a substance that is seen to overshadow acid in the intensity of its effects (Chapter 7.2: DMT). For instance, St John (2012) evokes Terence McKenna’s (1993: 77) popularisation of DMT by portraying the substance as a vehicle of “inter-dimensional transit” and “liberation in transpersonal consciousness”. The current neuroscientific discourse traces such experiences of self-transcendence to the life narratives of the (culturally constituted) self. A recent study based on brain activity measurements shows that during particularly vivid, closed-eye DMT hallucinations, the primary visual area of the brain is activated together with the cortical areas involved with episodic (autobiographical)

memories and the processing of contextual associations, which suggests that memories and associations are evoked and intensified “to the same level of natural image”, lending “a status of reality to inner experiences” (de Araujo et al. 2012).

Psychedelics act as mediators in the dissolution of social reality at parties, and their working mechanism is reflected in the psychedelic soundtrack. To pursue this line of inquiry, the following section explores the participants’ perceptions of psytrance music.

7.4 Fragments from the Field: Music Particularities

Before the evaluation of the music it is important to note that apart from the subgenres of psytrance, festivals often encompass other increasingly popular EDM genres such as glitch hop or dubstep.

Sophie: You know, 10 years ago it was just psytrance, and that was it. And you might get [sic] a bit of darkpsy screaming. And you know, in the last five or six years the prog[ressive psytrance] started working its way in. And now the dubstep and glitch [hop] is working its way in (focus group, December 2012).

Lindop (2010) discusses the emergence of a diverse psytrance meta-genre at U.K. festivals that incorporates other EDM genres, such as dubstep and break[beat]s, which are often manipulated by means of production techniques to fit into the more general psytrance aesthetic. My analysis is not focused on such other genres or their “psychedelicisation” (Lindop 2010: 118) because the actual psytrance genre (and its subgenres) still constituted the backbone of most festivals I visited (especially the smaller ones).

The first column in the following chart shows the most frequent perceptions about the psytrance genre. I added an additional column for the dark psytrance subgenre, which constitutes the topic of a separate case study in my project. The progressive psytrance subgenre (third column) was less frequently mentioned, and it was considered by most interlocutors only mildly psychedelic or not psychedelic. The questions of the focus groups were open ended, and the respondents were encouraged to discuss any characteristics that were considered relevant.

	Psytrance ▼	Dark ▼	Progressive ▼
Multi-layered or Varied ▼	10	9	1
Trippy or Abnormal ▼	9	7	2
Progression through multiple genres or parts of the day ▼	9	7	7
Hard or Intense ▼	1	9	0
Funky ▼	2	2	1
Melodic ▼	2	0	2

Figure 11: Music Attributes

Multi-layered or Varied

For Sophie, the density of musical layers and the large variety of timbres is essential for good psytrance. This is why she criticises progressive psytrance (“prog”), a subgenre that is seen to sacrifice musical complexity to a combination of groovy minimalism and uplifting melodies.

Sophie: I like everything except prog. I find it like I pretty much like all electronic music that doesn't involve vocals or guitars, complete opposite to Richie [laughs]. But I like different things at different times, so I really like the darkpsy at night, I think that's awesome. . . . Um, I like just normal psy, Goa trance, yeah, Goa trance was really cool. I don't mind a bit of prog and morning psy, if it's daylight and I'm drunk [laughs] and all my friends are around me drunk, and everyone's acting stupid, then it can be quite fun. But I wouldn't actually download it and listen to it on my MP3 player or in my car. I just wouldn't really listen to it of my own choice. . . .

Q: So how should good psytrance music sound like if it's not that much prog? What would be the structure of it?

Sophie: Oh, the structure of it. A bit harder but not as dark and fast as darkpsy. Um, lots of layers to it, lots of sounds, um, lots of trippy things going on, good bass line to it. I think prog's just a little bit weak (focus group, December 2012).

The variety of sounds and layers contributes to the diversity of the musical journey:

Sharabi: it has to be a mix of everything. It has to be uplifting, it has to be aggressive, it has to be everything. . . . Let's say, I'm a DJ, I'm playing the music, and I'm playing continuously happy music, you would lose your interest. So if I play, let's say, one track which is uplifting and the other track is banging maniac psy, it scares the shit out of you, and another one is just

something slower, and that's how you make music interesting, and that's proper music and a journey for me.

Q: OK, so it's like a journey through different emotional landscapes?

Sharabi: Exactly, if it's only one emotion [it's boring] (focus group, August 2012).

The scarcity of textual elements also means that a variety of interpretations are possible:

Vipin: Rhythms, bass line, that's the beauty of this music, that every listener can make his or her own meaning out of this. It's universal, I mean as Sami said, there's no language, there's no lyrics, no vocals, you can't speak a word of English, but you can stand and enjoy the same track that I enjoy. . . . In terms of what the feeling is, it's, like Sami said, it's energy. It's just energy, and it's just the rhythms that you can relate to. I mean at the end of the day, there's [sic] no fundamentals and not much music theory involved, like there's so many people who produce music, simply based on mathematics. And it's not that you know the notes or the chords, [it's not] that you need to know those to produce music. If you find the definition of music, it's arranging sounds in time and space, so you can get some sort of rhythm coming out of it. And that's what it is, I guess (focus group, December 2012).

Trippy or Abnormal

Many psytrance tracks can be seen as the musical transposition of LSD's effects.

Q: OK, so you told me that there are certain clues of a different plane of reality that you can reach while on acid. Do you think that this kind of second plane, let's say, or these kinds of realisations are built in the music as well, somehow?

John: Yeah, yeah, for sure.

Q: And how?

Jimmy: The music is almost ... A lot of the music that we listen to, especially in psytrance, is designed to ...

John: Well, it's written on that plane almost. Sometimes it doesn't make sense unless you're on

that plane.

Jimmy: Or at least have experienced that plane before.

Rick: It enables you to achieve higher states of consciousness, or not necessarily higher, but it enables you to bring your mind ... so it's almost like, as I was saying, like you can get really weird with psychedelics, if you're listening to good music, it will take you there safely, if that makes sense. So, yeah, the music is like a guide (focus group, June 2012).

By means of production technologies such as squelchy filters and delay effects, the music is designed to harmonise with the state of consciousness triggered by LSD:

Q: So would you have, like, certain sounds which would work better with acid?

John: Yeah, squelchy sounds, like those niiaauuw, ouwaaah, niiaauuw ...

Rick: Yeah, squelchy noises and delayed sort of stuff ...

John: I remember at Earthcore [festival] actually, that last Earthcore, that was one of the first times I was on a big dance floor on acid, and I was just like, oh wow, I finally understand why these sounds are in this music so often, 'cause they sound ridiculously cool (focus group, June 2012).

The music becomes “abnormal” and “connected with drugs” due to its unexpected structures and sonic distortions:

Sharabi: Because of the BPM [beats per minute], and the length of the track [which] is seven minutes, there's something like a driving energy in psytrance. There's always something just driving, and all these abnormal sounds that you listen to in psytrance, they're not normal, that's why it gets you in.

Q: So how would you define normality if this is not normal?

Sharabi: Like normality is something ... if you listen to a track where you can actually guess what's gonna happen or you can guess what the next beat is, and all that. But psytrance is always surprising, it's always something new. It's unexpected stuff.

Q: Back to abnormality, is it abnormal sound or abnormal structure?

Sharabi: Structure. Because the same sound, if the layout is in the proper format, it sounds normal. Like, for example, take sounds of birds, sounds of animals, anything you can mix and make a track out of it. Psytrance is not just one particular sound and creating music [from it], it's innovative. . . .

Sabeena: Um, I really think it's very, very connected with drugs, psytrance.

Sharabi: Definitely. Psychedelic drugs will actually ... you only understand psytrance with them.

Sabeena: It has everything to do with drugs. I think for a person who's not into drugs, I'm pretty sure after a certain point it would not appeal to him (focus group, August 2012).

Although Sharabi first mentions “abnormal sounds”, after questioning he clarifies that an eclectic variety of sounds and samples that would otherwise sound normal are manipulated or restructured and thus disconnected from their everyday or normal meanings.

Progression through Multiple Genres

As mentioned earlier, punters may be exposed to other EDM genres and influences.

Q: OK, so with this glitch hop element, the thing that you're going to doofs doesn't necessarily mean that you listen to psy, as far as I understand. 'Cause you can just focus on the glitch hop part of it?

Pete: Oh, I still go for the psy. Like, I love 3 to 6-7 o'clock on the dance floor, when it's dark and there's lasers, and it's just phooow, sounds are flying hard.

Johanna and Sophie: Nangs,⁵ nangs [laugh]!

Pete: Nangs, yeah [laughs]. Yeah, it's just fun watching everybody.

Q: So musically it's more heterogeneous than sticking to one single genre.

⁵ Popular name for whipped cream chargers filled with N₂O or laughing gas, used with empty whipped cream dispensers ('nanginators') for recreational purposes, often combined with other drugs.

Pete: Yeah, especially now. I think it started to change a bit, like going from, like, all just psy. Diversifies as a lot of tech [tech-house or minimal techno], a lot of prog, a lot of psy-prog, psy-tech-prog, prog-step-psy [laughs].

Sophie: Oh, psy-step, psy-breaks [laughs].

Pete: It's like a giant clusterfuck of genres [laughs] (focus group, December 2012).

Within the psytrance genre, the most common festival schedule would progress from the harder and faster genres such as darkpsy during the night, to the slower and more melodic genres such as progressive psytrance during the day.

Rick: I don't like dark, driving beats during the day [laughs]. . . . This is how we've planned our party yet to be,⁶ that it's gonna get really dark and heavy up until sunrise, and then as soon as the sun comes up, like start to bring a bit more colour into the music.

John: I reckon, burst in the colour.

Maria: That's how it's supposed to be, yeah. That's what I'm used to (focus group, June 2012).

This progression is so generally accepted that it has become a bit of a cliché according to certain respondents, opening up grounds for criticism:

Justin: And I get sick of the formula which seems to sort of run with these things, which is psy in the morning, like heavy morning psy, then have prog all day long until night-time, and then just dark psy, every day [laughs]. It's the same formula (focus group, December 2012).

Hard or Intense

The highest levels of intensity, primarily related to speed (BPM) and structural complexity, are delivered by the darkpsy subgenre, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 9.

⁶ Rick and his friends, who later became involved as organisers in the scene, had been organising their first doof at the time of the focus group.

Funky and Melodic

These are characteristic of the uplifting subgenres that are more suitable for the day.

Maria: I like funky trance so it has to have like a funky beat. I don't know how you'd call it but that's just my favourite ever. . . . And yeah, it just makes me really excited, and I just go crazy.

Q: Does it have to be freaky or have some strange sounds in it?

Maria: Um ...

John: Like do you like it when it's trippy and sort of weird like you go: who-oooh, what was that sound?

Maria: Yeah, a little bit, but also just the beat has to be there, funk.

John: So it has to be a make you groove kind of thing.

Maria: Yeah, and like it's a bit of a breeze flowing through the dance floor, and [the] sun's out and yeah ... Like, the sunrise sort of thing, that's my favourite (focus group, June 2012).

As a darkpsy producer, Vipin criticises the structural simplicity and relative predictability of the more melodic subgenres:

Vipin: With prog and full on,⁷ it's kind of easy melodic stuff, you know, it's easy to relate to. A lot of artists make it much easier with, you know, a few samples and vocals that they put in, which kind of take the journey forward. You can kind of relate to what's happening, and you know that this is what the sample is, that's what's gonna happen next. Whereas there are so many advanced listeners who just make that story with just sounds and scapes and atmospheres and drums, and you know, you have to follow every single beat, to make your own story (focus group, December 2012).

⁷ Full on psytrance is a subgenre that was very occasionally mentioned during the focus groups.

7.5 Drug and Music Working on One Another

In Chapter 7.4: Multi-layered or Varied, Vipin describes psytrance as contemporary folk music that is open to various interpretations and does not require formal music theory training, being instead “simply based on mathematics”. As Lipsitz (1990: 13) notes, popular culture lacks fixed meanings, which draws attention to the shifting ways in which popular cultural artefacts interact with their social and historical contexts. Therefore, instead of searching for an underlying meaning – which is problematised by the variety of narratives surrounding psytrance and the evolution of the genre since its emergence in Goa (Chapter 7.1) – my analysis is focused on the circumstances of music consumption, which also affects its production mechanisms.⁸ The remainder of this chapter brings together the previous sections by addressing the ways of interaction between psychedelic trance and psychedelic drugs.

All interviewees agree that the appreciation of psytrance is greatly enhanced by psychedelics at parties. While it is true that dance floors provide context to a variety of drugs and expectations (St John 2013), I now turn specifically to LSD. Acid is the drug that is by far the most discussed within the focus groups, is univocally seen to trigger the ability to ‘understand’ the music and is versatile enough to be widely used in the context of psytrance parties. The interview fragments in 7.2: Acid. “*The Music Needs a Good Listener*” describe three beneficial effects of the drug. First, it increases attention to the music and helps follow its structural complexities. Second, it enhances appreciation through auditory distortions and hallucinations, rendering the structurally complex, multi-layered music even more abundant and intricate. Third, it triggers synaesthetic perceptions such as the vivid visualisation of the music. While the influence of the external, physical environment on the psychedelic experience will be addressed in Chapter 8, once the eyes are closed the way the drug works on the music (and vice versa) is particularly increased, and the participant is absorbed in an internal, personal journey (as suggested by Sophie in the second fragment of 7.2: Acid. “*The Music Needs a Good Listener*”). The intensity and appeal of the journey is greatly improved by the abundance of textures and effects and the variety of the soundscapes in the music (Chapter 7.4: Multi-layered or Varied). The result is a private state of self-virtualisation (see also Chapter 4.6) that is commonly appreciated on the dance floor:

⁸ See also my reflections on Hennion’s (1989) commentary on popular music production in Chapter 3.2.

John: But oh man, I've had some ridiculously awesome dance floor experiences on acid. Just being in my own world. The music sounded so profoundly cool that I don't [sic] even want to talk to anyone. I don't want to break my stream of consciousness by listening to this or that's like: hey, you ... I'm just gonna not say anything.

Rick: Sometimes I feel like, when on acid, when you're dancing, you're in that zone where the music's sounding so good. Yeah, you just look around at other people, and just a little smile is ...

John: Yeah, that's like an affirmation.

Rick: Yeah, you know that they're feeling it, you know what I mean. And getting the same feeling (focus group, June 2012).

I will now address the way certain production technologies influence the musical aesthetics of psytrance. This perspective once again highlights the synergy between music and drug because many particularities of the psychedelic effect can be considered as (or at least are resonating with) built-in features of the music. The fragments in Chapter 7.4: Trippy or Abnormal signal that the psytrance music preferred by the participants is almost “written on that plane [of the acid experience]” and serves as a guide to “get really weird with psychedelics”: it reflects the particularities of the psychedelic state of consciousness. In other words – in terms of mediation – the music is relying on production technologies that mediate their referents in a similar way as acid mediates the perception of reality. This mechanism is condensed in John’s categorising of sounds as “trippy and sort of weird” (Chapter 7.4: Funky and Melodic). Beside the general view that under the influence of acid the appreciation of psytrance is radically increased, this may be another reason why many participants emphasise that the music cannot be properly understood without consuming psychedelic drugs (or at least without having had a psychedelic experience in the past).

In terms of sonic qualities, a typical example provided by the interviewees is the application of “squelchy” filters in the music that “sound ridiculously cool” while on acid (Chapter 7.4: Trippy or Abnormal). Here, squelchy describes a particular way of sound (pitch) filtering on a hardware or software synthesiser that results in a freakish or grotesque-sounding sound. This mediation (technological intervention) can be seen as the musical transposition of certain processes in the acid trip that can be better understood by considering Bakhtin’s (1968) description of grotesque realism. Bakhtin (1968) presents the medieval and Renaissance

carnival as an unofficial “second life of the people”, which uncrowns the official, ecclesiastic doctrine of faith and dissolves it in laughter. This process is impregnated with the aesthetics of the bodily grotesque, which is characterised by ambivalence, incompleteness and transgressions of its limits, attributes which alienate it from, and render it repulsive to, the new bodily canon emergent in the Renaissance (Bakhtin 1968: 28-29, 317). The latter eliminates the unfinished and the ambiguous by removing all elements which transgress the bodily limits, and presents a completed and limited body in a finished outside world. During the acid trip, the semantic overturn of everyday reality through its successive, virtual reconfigurations (Chapter 7.3) reflects a similar evasion of finished systems. Furthermore, the psychedelic experience, especially at its peak, blurs the inner condition of the participant (set) with the environmental circumstances (setting), leading to an experiential transgression of one’s bodily limits by projecting the self into a series of ever-changing, ‘liquid’ hallucinations. Music production effects or filters allow the freakish or psychedelic reconfigurations of the original sounds similar to the way LSD’s mediation of neurotransmission leads to the grotesque reconfiguration of sense perception. In the third fragment of Chapter 7.4: Trippy or Abnormal, Sharabi refers to one such logic of ‘abnormalising’ in psytrance music: the manipulation of a wide array of sound samples distances the sounds from their original, everyday referents and finished contexts, which is comparable to the semantic overturn and scrambling of signifier-referent relations during the psychedelic experience.

The way LSD works is thus ‘built in’ the music, which suggests that on the psytrance dance floor the music is both mediated by the drug and mediates the drug experience. Working on and intensifying one another, drug and music appear to be woven from the same cloth. Indeed, it is hard to decide whether the drug enhances the music or the opposite way around, with some of the respondents confirming the former, others the latter.

While much of psytrance music, corresponding with Vipin’s observation in 7.4: Multi-layered or Varied, is abstract and devoid of lyrics, the tracks may occasionally contain short vocal samples that are usually borrowed from popular media such as movies, documentaries or radio broadcasts. These samples may open up the music to a range of narratives that are often reflected in the artwork of the albums and the names of the tracks and labels as well. For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s (proto-)Goa trance and psytrance, the theme of outer space was reworked through sound samples relating to space travel (e.g., radio dialogues from NASA’s Apollo program) and the visual representation of the alien (on psychedelic

decorations), which were often mixed with Indian mythological elements (e.g., in the label name “Shiva Space Technology”) (St John 2012: 202-205). While such themes indeed fashion “other-than-human identifications” (St John 2012: 205), contemporary psytrance employs a wider range of vocal samples, usually during sudden breaks in the music, that may convey anything (human or non-human) that could stir up the LSD-trip.

John: I really like samples in psytrance, but only during, generally, only during the breaks, and I used to call them, and I still would sometimes call them, thought provokers. Sort of, like, thought stimulators, like these trippy as little quotes they put in like a 32 or 64 bar break in a psytrance track. And it's just like something really philosophical, some sort of statement, or some sort of weird thing that ends with a question, or is open ended, and then it will sort of just like drop [you] back into the trance, and you're just left with this question, and it's like: what? And it can just, you know, drag your mind into these sorts of thoughts.

Jimmy: It's like, it builds these thought-provoking samples and questions and stuff into the music. And at the very end of that break or whatever, it seems to last for eternity while you're thinking about that question, and then it just drops [you] back into the music, and then you'll be like, yeah, back into it, and you forget about it. But yeah, that one moment kind of seems to last forever, when you're thinking about it, yeah (focus group, June 2012).

Jimmy illustrates the cognitive effects of the drug/music interplay through a captivating episode that is commonly experienced on the dance floor. The “philosophical” statements or “weird” open ended questions mentioned by John emerge as surprising breaks in the music and are already detached from the ordinary contexts of the everyday, thus they are highly appropriate for interacting with the psychedelic trip, similar to the ‘trippy’ sounds and abnormal structures discussed earlier. In a recent paper, St John (2013) calls these short samples “nanomedia”, describing them as “fleeting, heavily edited sound-bytes, entire film scripts condensed into a few carefully chosen lines on eight minute tracks”. St John’s examples on nanomedia in psytrance include, among others: a fragment from the children’s musical *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (Stuart 1971) that covertly refers to LSD; an esoteric quote from Terence McKenna; a sample from the movie *Ghostbusters* (Reitman 1984) echoing Bakhtin’s (1968) grotesque realism; a sample from the sci-fi cartoon sitcom *Futurama* that warns the drugged partygoer: “if you stop partying for a single second, you’ll explode and kill everyone here in a fireball of melted gears and splattered bones” (St John 2013).

It is important to note again that such samples are not necessary ingredients of tracks, and their textual content is subordinated to the previously discussed, ‘trippy’ logic of mediation that provides the weird or psychedelic feel of the music:

Magan: For some people having Simpsons [cartoon samples] in a track sounds freaky, all of a sudden in the night. So anything to make it freaky or to make it look weird goes with psytrance. That is what psytrance is, feeling weird, psychedelic or feeling out of place.

Q: And this has to do very much with the way acid works ...

Magan: Yeah. ‘Cause on acid you will like the things which are out of the box. ‘Cause you are experiencing something which you have never experienced before (individual interview, March 2013).

This continuous quest for novelty and surprising effects is escalated in the more intense subgenres such as darkpsy. A furious DJ set is like a strong acid trip, where meaning is obscured or emptied through the overuse of signs and structural complexity (Chapter 7.3). The kaleidoscopic diversity of the musical journey is essential in many other psytrance subgenres as well, as suggested in the fragments of Chapter 7.4: Multi-layered or Varied. Yet all this happens within a rigid metric structure driven by the four-to-the-floor beat, and accompanied by ‘weird’ sounds which are, however, normalised in the genre.



Figure 12: Cool Psytrance Bros, Trance Music Is about the Journey (Quick Meme 2013)

While it may be true that for outsiders, psytrance ‘all sounds the same’, this external criticism can be applied to four-to-the-floor driven EDM in general, as well as to other clusters of aesthetically distinct yet structurally similar subgenres in popular music (Reynolds 1999: 7).

In this chapter I have argued that much of psytrance music is distinct from other EDM genres in that it is purposefully designed to sound ‘weird’ and deliver sensory overload, thereby providing a good companion to the acid experience. The unique musical aesthetics of psytrance is inseparable from the mediating mechanism of the psychedelic experience and the wider social aesthetics apparent at festivals (revealed in the next chapter).

It should be noted that some of the morning subgenres, such as the ones mentioned by Sophie in 7.4: Multi-layered or Varied, are sometimes criticised for their relative structural simplicity. Yet they are generally seen as appropriate for loosening up and socialising, especially after an intense night. These ‘lighter’ subgenres, such as progressive psytrance, are also considered more suitable for euphoric drugs (such as MDMA) and for alcohol, providing a good soundtrack for playful social interactions in a day-time environment. These considerations shift the focus to the context of the psychedelic festival, discussed in the next chapter.

8. The Psytrance Party

While the previous chapter investigated the interplay of psychedelic music and drug, it is now time to situate the psychedelic music/drug experience within its distinctive environment, the psychedelic festival. Although psytrance is played at both outdoor festivals and indoor parties (club nights), according to the interviewees and my own observations, the former are more suitable for mediating the psychedelic vibe. Especially during the summer season both large and small-scale festivals (doofs) are mushrooming around Melbourne. Integrated in the wider social aesthetics of doofing and reconfigured by technologies in the ways outlined in this chapter, nature provides a good context for getting considerably 'trashed' on psychedelics, the relevance of which will be explored below. This environment is very different to techno parties, and as I will contend in Chapter 10, it influences the emergence of a different vibe. As in Chapter 5, I first outline my field observations and then proceed with the evaluation of interviews and the analysis.

8.1 Field Recordings: Exploring Doofs

Between December 2011 and September 2012 I conducted participant observation at three long-weekend doofs (each providing camping opportunities for at least three days and uninterrupted music for at least 48 hours); two small doofs (each with uninterrupted music exceeding 24 hours) and two indoor gigs (a darkpsy club night and a combined 'land and sea' party that had two successive stages: one on a boat cruising Melbourne's Docklands and one in a regular city venue). I strategically selected three long-weekend parties of particular significance: the most important New Years Eve festival in 2012 (Tribeadelic Festival); the largest annual psychedelic festival in Australia (Rainbow Serpent Festival); and the only larger-scale winter doof in 2012 (Royal Doof). At the last doof that was part of my fieldwork, a small day party organised by one of my interviewees, I contributed to the night-time visual aesthetic by projecting on a large canopy screen stretched between trees, close to the dance floor.¹ I

¹ I screened silent films, including early German Expressionist and Surrealist cinema, surrounded by a background frame consisting of successively morphing images taken from the works of Swiss surrealist H. R. Giger.

completed the participant observation in September 2012 but continued to attend several subsequent parties. My fieldwork included four focus groups conducted between June and December 2012 and an in-depth, individual interview conducted in March 2013.

My first Australian bush doof, the Tribeadelic (New Years Eve) Festival in 2012, was a memorable experience. I was given a car ride to the doof by an acquaintance that had an extensive social network in the scene, which enabled me to approach some of his friends (and friends of friends), some of whom became my companions for the upcoming doofs as well. The arrival triggered a familiar feeling, reminding me of the psytrance parties I had visited in the Czech Republic (where I had conducted ethnographic research). At the end of our couple of hours of travel the night had already fallen, and on a forest road we were approaching the source of a heavy bass sound camouflaged somewhere deep in the woods. I could hardly imagine a better way to arrive at a psytrance party. I anticipated that upon entering the twilight zone of the festival, the spell of the night-time atmosphere, reminiscent of creepy horror movies, would suddenly be broken and reconfigured by a parade of synthetic lights and electronic music resembling the secret landing of an alien ship in the middle of a forest glade. Indeed, the psychedelic experience would soon wash together the organic flow of sounds and sights with the forest night, with many of the punters (and occasional dealers) at the 2012 Tribeadelic NYE doof carrying eyedropper bottles containing liquid LSD and distributing 'drops' to friends and/or customers.

A few hours after arrival, the party was transfigured into a swirling mass composed of dark trees, hills, four-to-the-floor beats, sudden breaks, weird sound effects, incense smells, oversaturated colours, UV glitters, fractal visuals and perplexed punters. As the night came to an end, the tunes gradually lightened, and the spooky fiesta morphed into the wacky scenery of a colourful bunch of partygoers conglomerating on the dance floor, some dressed in costumes, some dancing near their eskies and other accessories, partaking in a "quintessential freakscape, a psychedelic circus animated by DJ-producers" (St John 2012: 219). As a participant observer, this was a good moment for retreating to my campsite to have a quick rest and jot down notes which would be expanded into field journal recordings upon arriving home from the festival. What follows in this section is a description of the psytrance party primarily based on such field recordings.

Crowds and Environment

While the summer season spawns a large number of legal and illegal events typically organised during the weekends, the size and composition of crowds may vary. According to my observations, the overall age bracket ranges from late teens to mid-thirties, whereas the gender distribution appears to be slightly shifted towards the males. Attendance numbers can be under 100 at the smallest one-day doofs, which often lack the required area permits and are either free or advertised with a 'suggested donation' of \$10-\$20 to cover the basic costs. The claimed attendance of the largest annual psychedelic event near Melbourne, the Rainbow Serpent Festival (with presale ticket prices over \$200), exceeds 10 000. However, this festival attracts a fairly diverse crowd, not just psytrance regulars, and accommodates a range of other EDM genres. At a typical larger-scale weekend doof with international headliners, a realistic attendance number would be between 1000 and 2000 people (with presale prices from around \$100). In terms of a 'hard core' audience that would attend a significant outdoor festival during the winter when the temperatures approach 0°C at night, as in the case of the doof that I visited in June 2012, the numbers could shrink to under 1000.

While large figures lead to a massive dance floor and an eclectic array of punters, the smaller size of a typical weekend festival contributes to a familiar atmosphere and a comfortable and spacious dance floor. In my experience the regulars forming the hard core of the scene are quite aware of each other, knowing at least by sight many of their companions, and recognising key players of the scene: organisers, performers and dealers. I deliberately tried to approach such regulars and invite them to focus groups, considering that their insights would be highly beneficial for mapping out the central dance floor experience of the psytrance party. This is not to say that these partygoers would form a homogenous crowd. For instance, on the dance floor of the 2012 Tribeadelic NYE doof, which had a total attendance of around 1000 people, I spotted an eclectic variety of styles, ranging from batik festival clothing with natural/organic or fantastic ('pixie') patterns available for purchase at market stalls, to neon coloured ('raver') pants, to dark coloured hoodies, to neo-hippie styles, to casual urban outfits, and to various animal costumes, including an obnoxious panda bear with an oversized head.

Most doofs are organised in the Victorian bush within a few hours' car ride from Melbourne. The festival space is divided into a camping area, dance floor(s) and sometimes a market area with food stalls and party accessories. Larger doofs occasionally feature an additional 'lifestyle' area where workshops and presentations are held, ranging from dance

lessons to esoteric healing techniques. Campfires are mostly avoided due to the fire restrictions in the summer season. At larger festivals, punters often arrive in groups or ‘crews’ of 5-10 people and set up communal campsites that sometimes include a ‘renegade’ sound system, which may provide interesting alternatives to the official line-up. The hard core of partygoers is thus distributed in a loose network of crews who spend most of their festival time, in varying proportions, both on (or around) the official dance floor(s) and in the camping area (in their own campsites or visiting other camps).

Within the bush environment, the psychedelic atmosphere is achieved through the employment of various ‘trippy’ structures and accessories. A typical example is the dance floor of the 2012 Tribeadelic NYE doof, where various fluorescent backdrops attracted attention on the DJ booth (a large dome tent situated between two speaker walls), and painted canopies were tightened above the floor, providing a semi-closed cover through an assembly of curved polygonal shapes. This setup was complemented by ‘psychedelic’ decorations: backdrops with grotesque portraits; colourful fractal-like structures; giant mushrooms in neon colours; perforated fluorescent leafs and bugs; and colourful metal frames decorated with polygonal shapes. A trampoline was also placed on the dance floor, much to the enjoyment of punters.



Figure 13: Morning at the 2012 Tribeadelic NYE doof, with a spacious dance floor as the big night is still ahead (photo by author)

It is at night when much of the decorations ‘come to life’, with the UV effects, coloured lights and occasional lasers creating a chaotic swirl of lights and forms that may contribute to the sensation of mysterious or alien encounters – particularly for those who are on psychedelics.

At the Tribeadelic festival one of my drugged companions looked down at the main dance floor from a nearby hill and interpreted the audiovisual orgy underneath as a landing zone of an alien spaceship. A similar psychedelic functionalism – of decorations and special effects purposefully designed to interact with the psychedelic trip – was also characteristic of the majority of psytrance parties I visited in Europe. Some of the festival backdrops return at club nights, typically in the form of UV backdrops featuring detailed, fantastic and often fractal-like artworks, and other fluorescent structures, such as mandala-like string decorations.

Psychedelic decorations and special stage effects are occasionally employed in the campsites of doofs as well. At the 2012 Royal Doof, some of my companions ran a renegade stage in a large dome tent with a DJ booth. A fog machine and laser lights were fitted in the dome and directed, through the entrance, to outside, covering the surroundings with eerie lights. A bubble machine was then added to the mix and combined with the fog machine, spawning a multitude of hazy bubbles that would fly out from the tent and explode upon touch, leaving magical clouds of fog behind.

Crowd Interactions

Doofing is a social experience right from the onset. There is hardly any public transport to most locations, and only the biggest festivals provide festival buses. Consequently, punters arrive by car – often by hire car – and mostly in groups (sometimes with their regular festival crews, sometimes joining others). The preparations may take some time: one has to pick up the car, organise the lifts, include a run to the supermarket to stock up with goods and perhaps visit a dealer as well. The consumables for a crew of five punters at the 2012 Royal Doof included a bit of food; several bottles of spirits; cocktail ingredients; approximately 50 bottles of beer which were hardly enough for the first night; four litres of red wine for mulling; a pizza box filled with freshly picked hallucinogenic mushrooms; a batch of extra-strong MDMA and some pot (marihuana). My companions also acquired and consumed several tabs and drops of acid at the festival.

Upon arrival, partygoers would set up their campsite (or sometimes omit this) and catch up with friends in the camping area. The campgrounds provide a relaxed, semi-private environment for group interactions, with some of my companions spending more of their

festival time here than on the dance floor at certain parties. Socialising is often associated with the consumption, gifting and dealing of substances.

On the second day of the [Rainbow Serpent] festival I decide to take a shower. The showers are at a five minutes walk from our campsite, and on the road random blokes ask me if I have any acid to sell. Upon returning to the campsite I find Dan and Marc chilling in our van, I think they spent the last few hours there smoking ice (crystal methamphetamine). Aruni appears with his Ketamine – he recently acquired a large batch. Magan and Sabeena are sitting nearby, both on acid, and start to invent puns about Aruni's perceived status as a Ketamine dealer, for example by informing nearby punters about the ongoing Special oKasion (Special K is the street slang for Ketamine). One of our Italian neighbours joins us in the hope of some K, praising the purity of Aruni's batch. Aruni is obviously very wasted on his K, at times he has problems formulating words, his thoughts melting together with his bubbling saliva. Finally we all head down to the dance floor (field journal, January 2012).

This environment is very different to club nights, with most CBD venues inhibiting overt drug consumption. Moreover, the effects of psychedelic drugs such as acid can be psychologically demanding and may last longer than the duration of a club line-up. Most doofs provide uninterrupted music for at least 24 hours in a relaxed environment and are thus particularly suitable for the communal consumption of psychedelics and various drug cocktails both in the campsites and on the dance floor. For instance, at Tribeadelic:

We descend to the dance floor. The sun is high up in the sky and the temperature is great, around 30 degrees or more. The scenery is fantastic. The dance floor is floating above the deep valley underneath. The valley is surrounded by distant hills, and opens up a vast space that seems to suck the dancers away. Speaking of sucking, some dance with their nanginators in their hands: whipped cream siphons used for inhaling N₂O or laughing gas. Nanginators are fuelled by nangs, gas cylinders coming in packages of 10, sold at the festival shop for 10 bucks each. When on acid, a nang would give a vertiginous twist to the trip, not lasting more than a minute or two. We encounter several friends of Dan who are gesticulating maniacally: they seem to be on the acid craze. They filled an esky [picnic cooler] with drinks and emptied the remainder of a recently consumed LSD eyedropper bottle in it; they are offering the cocktail to their friends nearby. The esky is placed right before the DJ booth as a fountain capable of

quenching the acid thirst and thus redesigning the dance floor and its environment (field journal, NYE 2012).

The crowd interactions on the dance floor are the most evident when the sun is up. This is also supported by the music, with the more cheerful (and thus less dissociative) subgenres being played during the day at most festivals. Interaction with strangers frequently occurs, for instance through eye contact or witty dance movements, with punters often smiling at each other and expecting smiles. Some of the partygoers are dressed in colourful clothes or costumes, which are put on display on the dance floor, contributing to the carnivalesque feel of the party. During my fieldwork I spotted, among others, a vast variety of animal costumes; richly embroidered dresses; various accessories that could serve as 'toys' during the psychedelic trip (including a two metre long plush snake and a large shamanic staff ending in a puppet); body paints and, of course, clown masks.

If the daytime dance floor provides a good context for playful interactions encouraged by the music, the night is often the right time for more intensive tunes that amplify the punter's removal from 'this world' and may facilitate introversion while on acid. The obscure environment feeds the imagination and sets the mind loose, leading the psychedelic trip to unknown directions. The elements of one's surroundings lose their definite forms, and communication often becomes problematic, with words sometimes turning into incomprehensible gibberish. Costumes, UV decorations or even grimaces may acquire surprising new meanings. The behaviour of the crowd seems unpredictable; the choreography becomes chaotic and unnatural, with some dancers exhibiting weird movements as if their bones were rearranged underneath their skin. The following fragment gives a taste of the night dance floor at the Tribeadelic party:

The music is fairly fast and the crowd's choppy movements are flickering, as if the frame rate of the dance floor transmission wouldn't be capable of keeping up with the fast, swirling music affecting our mind. I see punters quickly slinking among the crowd as shadows with no definite destination, increasing the entropy of the whirling mass. Dan's armed nanginator is leaking and foam is bubbling up under its handle. He looks down at the instrument and hallucinates that the foam is red. Time is crawling slowly, but somebody offers me a delicious cocktail. The party is an overdriven feast for the senses: sounds, lights, smells and tastes are melting together into one

liquid mass stirred by the DJ. I am carried away by this fury and then bump into Dan again. Soon we spot Nick, the dealer, among the dancers. We remember that Nick was planning to take some DMT on the dance floor: we go see him and ask him about his plans. He claims that he accidentally poured a bottle of liquid LSD on himself. Dan senses that Nick is not just a dealer at this moment, he is the drug itself. Nick finally comes to the realisation that everything in this music is about acid. Dan still has some more drops left in his eye dropper which he dissolves in a bottle of water. Who needs acid here? he asks from Nick amidst the fury of the party. Nick instantly replies: everybody needs acid! Dan starts offering the water as “acid free water” to fellow dancers. Finally he sprinkles around the remainder of the bottle: a symbolic gesture of soaking the whole dance floor in LSD (field journal, NYE 2012).

Such moments of high intensity on the dance floor are balanced by the more relaxed ambience of campsite activities shared with one’s social network. According to an interviewee (Magan, individual interview, March 2013), particularly the smaller-scale parties are similar to therapy sessions, where familiar people spend a few days together taking drugs, dancing, socialising and going through a rollercoaster of experiences related to these acts. The morning or afternoon of the last day often provides a good context for a ‘coming down’ phase, with many of the punters resting around the dance floor and spotting the familiar faces encountered during the festival.

8.2 Interview Fragments: The Psychedelic Environment

Complementing the previous observations based on field journal entries, the following section reviews the interviewees’ perceptions of the ideal psychedelic environment. The aim of these fragments is to set the scene for the analysis in the concluding part of this chapter.

The following chart summarises the perceptions about the environment types that were most frequently mentioned during the focus groups (only the environments that were mentioned more than five times are included).² The questions of the interview guide were open ended, and the respondents were encouraged to discuss whatever they considered important. One exception was the spiritual or religious attribute which I explicitly addressed if I

² I excluded the individual, in-depth interview data from the chart to avoid the skewing of the aggregate findings towards one participant.

felt that the topic was avoided due to the more secular approach of some interviewees. The figures in the chart show how many times the environments listed in the columns were described using the attributes listed in the rows. Fragments referring to outdoor doofs without mentioning the size were added to both ('Bigger doofs ...' and 'Smaller doofs ...') columns.

	Bigger doofs, weekend festivals	Smaller doofs, day parties	Bigger or mainstream clubs
Sense of freedom	11	12	0
Familiar or Underground	9	13	0
Adventurous or Different Planet	9	7	0
Spiritual or Religious	6	7	0
Hidden or Secret	5	5	0
Unexpected or Special	6	3	0
Uncomfortable	4	2	6

Figure 14: Environments and Attributes

As indicated by the chart, both bigger and smaller doofs are considered more appropriate for delivering the psychedelic vibe than the regulated environment of bigger, commercial CBD clubs:

Christina [originally from Budapest, Hungary]: I prefer outdoor parties, especially in Melbourne. I have been here for a couple of years, but for me the city venues are really controlling. I don't know, I just cannot get used to it. The venue itself is too controlling for me, in my experience, and when you go out [of the venue], it's even worse. So for me, outdoor parties only. Especially that I've been to a winter party here in Melbourne, well that was fucking freezing, but still you do have the possibility to go outside during the whole year (focus group, December 2012).

While most punters favour outdoor environments to indoor clubs, the organisation of a bush doof can be more difficult in terms of running cots and securing area permits:

Sami: I am happy to be at a bush party as a person who's just attending the party, but when it's organising, it's way more work to do, and it's very risky, and especially the financial risk is just enormous. It's very, very heartbreaking, like the bush parties. But for example the [indoor] parties organised by Farebi Jalebi,³ although I'm not a particularly dark psytrance person, or anything like super full on [psytrance] or whatever, but because I know the people who attend

³ Darkpsy producer, see Appendix 3.2.

his party, it's pretty much a bush doof in the city (focus group, December 2012).

Smaller underground club nights with a relaxed atmosphere, attended by relatively close groups of partygoers, could thus provide suitable alternatives to the bush (still they seldom come up in the focus groups). Farebi Jalebi's darkpsy parties are organised in Evermore,⁴ a small club in an inner suburb of Melbourne, which fits a couple of hundred punters. The venue features a cosy lounge area, a small indoor dance floor and an atmospheric backyard with an outdoor oven, which is used as a second stage or chill out area. The bouncers are relatively tactful, and the punters are able to retreat to the backyard where they would sometimes be sitting on the ground and socialising, which contributes to the feel of the "bush doof in the city" mentioned by Sami. However, even regular visitors of club nights tend to prefer the outdoor environment as the ideal context of the psychedelic vibe.

The familiar atmosphere of small doofs is sometimes contrasted with the "epic" proportions and larger variety of partygoers at big festivals:

John: I can see the pros and cons. A really big festival is awesome because it's epic, and the scale of what you get there is amazing. But the smaller festivals are great, 'cause you get the community feeling, and, um, you tend, yeah, you get to know a lot of people really quickly, you see a lot of familiar faces (focus group, June 2012).

Sabeena: I've been to, like, small parties and big parties, and for me small parties are more so just, you know, being there for my close friends, rather than ... Because I know most of the time who is organising and who is playing. So for me it's more like, just, you know, supporting my friends. But other than that, I would prefer big parties, where I also get an opportunity to meet new people. Along with partying with, like, my close friends [laughs] (focus group, August 2012).

The largest doofs such as the Rainbow Serpent Festival are occasionally criticised as being too commercial in terms of music and crowd.

⁴ See Appendix 4.

Q: What about a big festival environment like the Rainbow Serpent?

Magan: Yeah, they're basically selling the name of, um, psychedelic trance or trance or bush parties or forest trance, but they are actually giving space to people who don't really belong there.

Q: So is there less and less psytrance at Rainbow?

Magan: Yeah, it's happening. But they're still selling it. Rainbow is a bush festival at the end of the day. They started it in 1998, and they started with complete psychedelic trance. I've been going to Rainbow from 2006, and I've seen it every year degrading, degrading, degrading, to a level where I did not even see the dance floor. Yeah, so it's still being sold under values and principles whereas people can feel free, or at least, um, it has basically to do with psychedelics, but now it's become more [about] a drug level, that you can go to bush parties and do drugs. And enjoy the environment, the environment is always there. To feel free, to do anything what you like. But that doesn't mean you feel free to do something which a lunatic is doing. You should be caring about at least the person who is in front of you (individual interview, March 2013).

Magan's criticism of the commercialised festival environment resonates with some of the tentative findings of my earlier research in the Czech Republic, which suggested that the commercialisation of an EDM scene often involves the alteration of the vibe and its substitution by ideological factors (Vitos 2012). The dance floor experience may be lost or diluted for veteran partygoers, yet discourses and ideologies prevail and are incorporated into the marketing strategies of the organisers. The festival, according to Magan, is "still being sold under [the] values of principles" of psychedelic festivals: even if the music has changed into a less psychedelic mix of subgenres that is meant to please a more general and allegedly careless EDM crowd, the ideology is retained and converted into economic capital.

I now turn to the key attributes of both smaller and bigger doofs discussed by participants.

Sense of Freedom

In its broadest sense, freedom here describes a release from the work routines and certain urban contexts of the week, accomplished through a leisure activity at the weekends that is carried out with friends and acquaintances in a relatively unregulated environment:

Sophie: It's a form of release from what you have to do during the rest of your life [laughs]. Like when I had a full time job, a friend of mine started working full time, and he came to me two weeks later and said: how do you do it? I'm like: I go out on the weekends to the forest, get trashed and dance to music! And it's a way of just getting out of that whole sort of corporate mindset and just nine to five job, and going to work, and coming home, and sleeping, and that's all you do. Yeah, it gives you a good release from that. . . . Because they go over a few days, you get some days and some nights in these campsites, you know, you can meet people and go to their campsites, you can have your music time when you're dancing, and you can have your socialisation time, you can have your sleep time, you can have your sitting up a tree in the middle of a paddock 'cause you're too high time, and you get the full spectrum of things, and you get to experience a lot of different states of being, I guess, in one sitting (focus group, December 2012).

Indeed, a key appeal of doofs is to “get trashed” with friends. This is enabled by the unrestricted flow of drugs that are otherwise stigmatised and prohibited in everyday environments:

Magan: Drugs, only because they are prohibited in the world, you do them. If they were not prohibited, I think there would be less people doing drugs today. I mean, if from the childhood no one was actually told not to do drugs . . . then less youngsters would be doing drugs.

Q: So it's more like an illusion of getting free.

Magan: It's, yeah ... Getting free, or doing things which are prohibited to you in life.

Q: So it's more like our culture just creates certain outlets, you use it and feel as if you were free.

Magan: Yeah, like even in Christianity, it is said that Adam was asked to not to have that fruit. Why was he told not to have that fruit? That's my question. So we as humans from the beginning, I think, are motivated towards doing things which we should not be doing (individual

interview, March 2013).

Freedom is also discovered in the lush natural environment. In the following fragment, John describes the former location of the Tribadelic NYE party I visited in 2012.

John: The location they had, that's my favourite doof location. It's like a perfect river flat. It's right beside a beautiful running clean mountain river, so nice to swim in. Slow flowing tides. It's like 50 metres from the dance floor. Yeah, it's like a party-river, right there. Stinking hot, New Years Eve, on a perfect flat lush grass too, all the campsites perfectly flat, ah it's the nicest doof location ever (focus group, June 2012).

Many participants particularly value free or low-cost parties, typically smaller doofs with local headliners, which are organised primarily for the sake of the psychedelic vibe.

Sabeena: Over here in Melbourne it's mostly about the figures, like, money. That's the main thing that drives the whole scene. Because I know so many organisers and DJs, and by the end of it all, what they are actually thinking or talking about, or organising anything, is for money.

Baniya: But at the same time, one of our friends organised a party, so he was telling that as soon as they reached the break-even point they stopped collecting the entry [fee], you know, like anybody could enter after that for free, like that's really appreciated. . . . Money should not be a fucking thing, you know. Otherwise you can go to any club [laughs] (focus group, August 2012).

Familiar or Underground

The familiar atmosphere that is particularly characteristic of smaller doofs is praised in all focus groups:

Rick: I went to a party in Tasmania a couple of months ago. . . . The name of the festival was Shroomed, and pretty much everyone was on mushrooms! It was amazing [everybody laughs]. I didn't take mushrooms that weekend. I took some acid, but like, everyone's, like, you know, [telling me:] how are your shrooms, kind of thing. Like it's an expected type [of thing], and I was like: nah, I didn't actually take any mushrooms. And they're like: what, you come to Shroomed, and you don't take mushrooms? [Others laugh.] So yeah, it was so trashy. But

apparently that's what the scene's like. Like, yeah, everyone over there likes to get really wasted. And I kind of like festivals where it's really messy, and you don't have to really worry about being the wasted yak, if that makes sense [laughs]. Whereas at some festivals, even Rainbow [Serpent], or something like that, you kind of feel like you have to stay a bit ... to hold your face, you know what I mean? (focus group, June 2012).

In small and familiar communities, participants are encouraged to let themselves go and “get really wasted” (lose control) on psychedelics. At larger parties, a similarly familiar atmosphere could be found in the camping area.

Sam: Another thing about doof parties is having a campsite, with all your mates, and just sitting around and just chatting around the campsite ...

Sophie: Base camp.

Johanna: Base camp!

Sophie: So you have somewhere to go back to, and there'll always be someone or will usually be someone there.

Richie: It's the saddest feeling when you go back, and there's no one there (focus group, December 2012).

Adventurous or Different Planet

The following fragment considers some of the environmental factors mediating the sense of a “different planet” that is characteristic of both psytrance parties and psychedelic drugs:

Baniya: And it's like, the ambiance, [of] any psytrance party, [suggests that] you are on a different planet. Not [just the] psytrance party, like if you have a good drug, you are already on a different planet, and also it's like ... Yeah, the Rainbow visuals are pretty good, like fucking yeah.

Q: So do the visuals enhance this feeling of being on a different planet?

Umesh: Yes. And not just visuals, it's also about the people around you. Because Rainbow was such a big party, so there were many people dressed up in costumes, um, if you have 3000 people, and you have 10 percent of them in costumes, and you have eight thousand people and you have again 10 percent of them in costumes, I would say that at Rainbow you will feel more like being on a different planet. . . .

Sharabi: Yeah, and the decors of Tree of Life [festival]. When we went to the Australian launch event, well that was the best visual [show] I've ever seen. Like they had these five projectors mapping onto one screen that was on the main stage, and these massive lasers, they've got airspace clearance for it, which was just visually blissful. Like the colours were incredible.

Baniya: Coming back to the same point, so it doesn't matter whether it's Rainbow, whether it's Tree of Life. It is a different planet altogether, you just need good drugs [laughs wickedly] (focus group, August 2012).

In terms of musical genealogy, interplanetary travel and alien encounters were recurring motifs of tracks played within the 1980s-1990s Goa scene (St John 2012: 204).

Spiritual or Religious

The hedonistic approach of partygoers would be hardly tolerated by most organised religions. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 7.3, the focus group data evinces neither a homogeneous concept of spirituality nor a common quest for transcendence – although such attitudes are sometimes attributed to others (particularly those associated with hippie lifestyle values) in the scene. The sense of shared sociality is commonly appreciated or even compared to a religious sentiment, together with a ‘common sense’ approach of looking out for each other. Yet this lacks the engagement with the concept of the transcendental that I take as common concern of spirituality and religion (Chapter 7.3) and corresponds to the moral code of ‘looking out for your mates’ promoted in Australian media (e.g., McIntosh 2012).

Rick: I know a few people that are fairly strongly religious, and I don't feel like they would be that accepted within their religious communities if that makes sense, given their lifestyle. . . . It's denying your religion in a way that you're going to a party and taking drugs. But at the end of

the day the culture that is promoted at doofs is somewhat a religious thing anyway. Um, being there, helping out your mates. Looking after, you know, just being a kind, good person, being a caring, you know, that's what a religion at the end of the day is, whatever religion you subscribe to, that's what its all about.

Q: So it's more like a social kind of attitude, not like bowing to a higher power.

Rick: Yeah.

Jimmy: One of the things that are sort of promoted the most is being nice to each other, and, you know, not judging other people (focus group, June 2012).

Hidden or Secret, Unexpected or Special

These categories are interrelated. Doofs are commonly organised outside urban limits, or at the very least in less frequented parks, hidden from the routinely experienced environments of the city. Doofing is not just a retreat to nature, but the drug-mediated exploration of an altered natural environment. Both the unique characteristics of the bush and the special effects of sound and light systems are good companions for the psychedelic experience:

Pete: I reckon favourite environment obviously, or for me obviously, is the bush. Wombat [State Forest], all those places, just because it is away, and it is a bit more novel as well, getting that far away. And you know, if you want a bit of time out as well, you know, often you want to go for a walk at some stage, you can wander off a bit in the bush. Have a good look, there's stuff there. Especially if you're tripping as well, cool fungus growing and stuff, the grasses are going wild and everything. So the venue, that's definitely in the forest. And 'cause I know that just the sound does something with the trees, like thfrthfrthfroo, that cracking sound's awesome (focus group, December 2012).

Magan: You would like to see people, see the environment, see the laser lights, see trees and all this stuff that you have actually not been able to see in the city life, or in the normal world. Yeah, 'cause people go nine to five, and they don't really know what is a bushwalk, or let's go for a bushwalk. How many people do that? Very few. People who are at bush parties, they like to do it. So it's just a different feeling (individual interview, March 2013).

Most participants agree that it is not physical distance that counts – with some even considering distances of over three hours' drive as pushing the limits – but simply getting a 'buzz' of being in a natural environment and hopefully experiencing something unexpected.

Q: So how far should it be from the city?

Baniya: You should be in a bush [laughs].

Sabeena: Yeah, it should be far, far away.

Umesh: Actually distance doesn't matter, it's about the buzz. Sometimes even if the [dance] floor is covered with mud, that's even better.

Baniya: It depends on the vibe, everything altogether.

Sharabi: Basically it has to be a new experience. It shouldn't be the same old stuff (focus group, August 2012).

Pollution

Finally, some of the interviewees express concerns regarding the impact of doofs on the environment, which is often attributed to the inconsiderate attitude of some partygoers:

John: You come across really messy doofers, they honestly, they're almost worse than bogans.⁵ Like you know, bogans don't give two fucks, and they'll be honest about it. Maybe doofers will say that they do, but at the end of the day they don't really ... You can see them at festivals sometimes, you know, you can see these guys, and they're like, you wouldn't know until it gets towards the end of the festival, when they are packing up their campsite and don't clean up a single thing, they take the important things home, leave the worst there in a mess. Yeah, Rainbow [Serpent festival] is really bad for that (focus group, June 2012).

⁵ Derogatory term used for unaware and irresponsible Australian youth (Brown and Brown 2005), comparable to the term 'white trash' in the United States.

8.3. An Ironic Reconfiguration of Nature

In Chapter 7.3 I addressed the temporary dissolution of day to day social reality during the psychedelic experience. As a cognitive consequence of the chemical mediation of the influx of neural stimuli in the brain, the significances of meanings attributed by the subject to the world are scrambled or altered, leading to ‘trippy’ reconfigurations of one’s surroundings and changes in the sense of one’s culturally constituted self (‘weirding out’). Following my interviewees’ considerations that psytrance cannot be understood properly without having experienced psychedelic drugs, with the music delivering the sensation of being “written on that plane almost” (John, focus group, June 2012), in Chapter 7.5 I explored the ways of interaction between music and drug, showing that the weird, the abnormal, the grotesque, and ultimately the ‘trippy’ characteristics of the music are channelling the same sentiment of “feeling weird, psychedelic or . . . out of place” (Magan, individual interview, March 2013) as the psychedelic experience. Of course, the chaotic, fractal-like proliferation of sounds is delivered within a tight rhythmic structure and with the deliberate intention of sounding ‘trippy’, which is a rule in itself. This reflects a captivating paradox inherent in psytrance: the systematisation of the absence of rules. This idea will be further developed in the context of the psychedelic environment.

Doofs are frequently praised for delivering a sense of freedom or release (8.2: Sense of Freedom). Freedom is of course a floating signifier, and the focus group participants anchor its meanings in particular ways. The psychedelic experience provides a temporary release from day to day social realities, and a weekend in the bush means that partygoers leave their urban routines behind. Freedom can be also discovered in nature, and in the relatively unregulated context and familiar atmosphere of the festival (8.2: Familiar or Underground). While free parties are particularly appreciated by participants, regular doofing is by no means free of charge, and one way to conceptualise this practice would be in terms of a night-time economy that culminates in the consumption of an exotic Other (Said 1978), exhibiting similarities with tourism.

At the same time, there is more at stake than taking a package tour to an exotic destination, with both partygoers and organisers employing various technologies in the purposeful and temporary transformation of the natural environment. Moreover, the focus groups lack consensus on the role of the environment in the practice of doofing, with the participants providing various perspectives: the bush offers unregulated context for partying;

the music sounds better outdoors; the music helps appreciate the natural environment; and the bush offers an engaging backdrop for the psychedelic experience. A few participants conceptualise their experience in terms of a Rousseauist return to nature, while others criticise this approach as irreconcilable with the consumption of loud electronic music in the bush, and some condemn the detrimental effects of (especially larger) festivals on the environment. As a common denominator, all participants agree that psytrance music works astonishingly well with the natural setting.

Doofs accomplish the fusion of cutting edge technologies and nature. Undeniably, visiting nature provides a release from urban culture. Yet some of the most emblematic technologies building up the urban nightlife are also relocated to the bush. The electronic orgy of sounds and visuals is incongruent with the raw natural surroundings, which amplifies its effects compared to a city party. The special effects are then reconciled with the natural environment, developing a synergistic relationship, and leading to the ironic reconfiguration of both.

The effectiveness of the first step in this process (the relocation of urban technologies, which creates an effect of incongruence) is less influenced by the physical distance from the city and more by the atmosphere of the bush. For most interviewees, doofs should be located away from urban areas, yet not too far, so they could be conveniently approached. This urges Johanna to practice humorous self-criticism and mock local doofers as “city slickers”:

Johanna: I reckon Victorian doofers are city slickers. I went to a doof in, um, New South Wales, and it was like: drive, follow these directions and then turn on to the dirt road and follow the party. We were in a rental [car], and oh my god it was 30 Ks of the most treacherous road I've ever seen, and my friends said . . . that those were good roads. And that's why everyone has 4x4s and not mini vans that we were driving. And they said that often they just set up logs to get across rivers. . . . I mean here, it's three hours, we're spoilt. But that one in NSW, people say that was a good road (focus group, December 2012).

As for the employment of special effects, the fascination with technology at doofs is paramount. The natural backdrop is bombarded by loud, repetitive, electronically generated or modulated music, UV lights and lasers. Punters often discuss the quality of sound systems, and even small parties are often fitted with cutting edge equipment such as Funktion One

loudspeakers. Some of my interviewees had spent several months building their own sound system, which was then used at their own parties and rented out to other crews. Sound systems, lasers and various other equipments are sometimes used at campsites as well (Chapter 8.1: Crowds and Environment).

At night, the kaleidoscopic whirl of coloured lights, the ‘trippy’ music, the fluorescent backdrops lit by UV light and the fractal-like patterns contribute to the perplexing sensory experience of a carnivalesque juggling mechanism that resonates well with the obscurity of the environment. In the words of an interviewee of my past research in the Czech Republic, the nature can be perceived as “photogenic background” at psytrance parties (online interview, 2007). This is a fitting comparison because the medium of photography may aptly combine otherwise separate elements of background and foreground based upon a relationship of analogy determined by the rules of photographic composition. Similarly, during the doof experience, the medium of the psychedelic drug seamlessly meshes together the artificial ‘foreground’ of the party with the natural background into a fantastic setting based upon a psychedelic logic that is also inherent in the musical aesthetics of psytrance (Chapter 7.5). Nature becomes part of the mix, and in exchange it radiates its own influence on music and decorations. For instance, one particular style within the darkpsy subgenre is called forest psytrance because, in the words of producer/DJ Vipin, “the sounds that are used are woody and organic, and there are a lot of squeaks” (focus group, December 2012). In the Australian context, St John (2012: 255-256) also notes the influence of the bush – and its psychedelic mushrooms – on the music produced by Australian artists. Such ambient elements can be lifted into the tracks by being reconfigured (‘psychedelicised’) during the music production process, which is itself a ‘coding’ based on mathematics, programming and sound engineering:

Vipin: Just backtracking a bit, if you see the kind of people who are producing this kind of music, electronic music, they are not musicians as such, you know, they're not rock stars, with long hair and tattoos and 50 women around them. They all start as nerds sitting in their studies, you know, with their computer and software, and they've got a good understanding of mathematics and, you know, programming.

Sami: It's a number game at the end of the day, it really is, and a fascination with numbers (focus group, December 2012).

In terms of visuals, the frequent use of ‘foresty’ party decorations – including large fluorescent mushrooms, bugs and leaves (Chapter 8.1: Crowds and Environment), as well as organic flyer arts and dress elements such as faerie costumes and pixie wings⁶ – contribute to the simulation of a fantasy environment that would reside somewhere between the worlds of *The Lord of The Rings* (Tolkien 1954) and *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll 1907). Fantastic journeys or trips unfold like a mysterious staged play, with the general ambience and many of the props provided by the bush.

Consequently, while punters indeed leave the city limits behind, the retreat into nature is rendered ironic by the employed mediations. The deep technological penetration (both in terms of landscaping and drug consumption) reconfigures the natural setting into the framework of a fantastic scenery or a “different planet” at night (Chapter 8.2: Adventurous or Different planet). Doofing starts as a journey away from the urban environment, yet this journey ironically twists back to the heart of consumer culture in the sense that it reflects on and overdrives media consumption. The quest for the uncanny, the adventurous, the mythical, the simulation of the nonhuman, or even the catastrophic, is a frequent concern of popular culture within science fiction books, movies, video games,⁷ and in the rides of the amusement parks (Harley 2000: 87). Yet the immersive experiences delivered such popular media are relatively imperfect and often rushed: the thrilling movie ends in two hours in the familiar corridors of the cinema, the rollercoaster ride is preceded by a long wait but only takes two minutes, and the fantasy world of the video game is surrounded by the banality of the daily environment. A good doof delivers a similar, kinaesthetic experience of media consumption, which is then sent into overdrive. The experience is ideally always “something new” (Chapter 8.2: Unexpected or Special), amplified by the novelty of the location, the intensity of the various special effects and the particularities of the psychedelic trip (Chapter 7.3), with the latter being infused into the music as well (Chapter 7.5).

⁶ Such cloths and accessories are sold at the market stalls of larger doofs and in established ‘psyshops’ such as the Pixie Collective clothing shop in Melbourne (in High Street, Northcote).

⁷ For instance, Rose (1981) draws attention to the central engagement of science fiction literature with nonhuman projects defined through the categories of space, time, machine and monster; whereas in Krzywinska’s (2006) discussion of the online video game *World of Warcraft*, the immersion of players into a virtual fantasy world is facilitated by the structuring presence of a coherent myth system that interacts with a supernatural cosmology.



Figure 15: Nightscapes of Royal Doof (2012)

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This perspective reworks the theme of the ‘exodus’ (as temporary self-exile from the authoritative contexts of state and family) proposed by St John (2012: 253, 263) in the context of Australian doofing.⁸ While doofs indeed provide a relatively unregulated environment for taking drugs for example, the fascination with novelty and originality in psytrance (always pushing the boundaries, expanding the minds, getting to the next level) reiterates the tautological rhetoric of advertisements in consumer culture, where products are always considered better, newer, faster etc. within a floating discourse which synthesises the ‘truth’ of the brand (Baudrillard 1998: 128). On a side note, the more obvious integration of doofs into consumer culture is evident at commercial, large scale festivals such as Rainbow Serpent, where the “carnival of signs and sounds operating at the intersections of *originality*” (St John 2012: 263; original emphasis) is reminiscent of the carnival of the shopping mall (of its original products) impregnated with a drop of acid, with market and workshop areas where everything psychedelic and beyond is put on display and ready to be consumed, from exotic food to ham and eggs; from crystal healing to lifestyle choices. Moreover, some of the established dealers in the scene seem to promote the agenda of consuming spiritual achievement, which is a profitable ideology when dealing in psychedelics. While these observations are hardly surprising in the context of a relatively commodified EDM festival, my project focuses on the dance floor experience and approaches the feedback to consumer culture from a second, semiotic perspective, discussing the ironic reconfiguration of nature along the lines laid down earlier.

Returning to the feeling of freedom delivered by doofs, the question of anti-authoritarianism is worth investigating. The unregulated environment of festivals provides a context for a temporary release from certain constraints imposed by the law. However, just as for Baudrillard (1994b: 80) “in bygone days, the recognition of the rights of the unfortunate meant not their emancipation as citizens, but their liberation as the unfortunate”, the provision of a semi-legal context for otherwise illegal drug use is in itself not conducive to a utopian emancipation in terms of a detour from consumer culture, but rather to a temporary liberation of partygoers as excessive consumers. The creation of a social context where transgression becomes the norm provides a sense of freedom in which pre-existing patterns of

⁸ The theme resonates with the first ‘exodus’ to Goa that preceded the history of Goa trance: the permanent self-exile of ‘freak’ travellers disenchanted with U.S. middle-class lifestyles and values from the late 1960s (St John 2012: 72-73).

consumption are crystallised. The basic idea that anti-authoritarianism is part of the system is reflected in Magan's Biblical reference to Adam's apple (Chapter 8.2: Sense of Freedom), which suggests that certain laws are designed from the outset to be broken, and the element of transgression is part of the consumer experience.⁹ While doofing may well be organised around narratives of detour or transcendence (transcending boundaries, leaving the city behind, avoiding regulations), the better its exodus attempts to approximate the 'exit', the bigger the difference from its lost original (such as the 'real' exodus of the late 1960s) becomes.

This process is reminiscent of Baudrillard's (1997a: 25) discussion of virtualisation, where the deconstruction and remodelling of an image through cutting edge technologies supplants the original in its technological perfection. The festival provides the context for an actualisation of such virtualisations in the highest fidelity: for instance, the acclaimed Funktion One speaker delivers razor-sharp sound for subgenres such as the ultra-fast high-tech psytrance that are optimally enjoyed with drugs of the highest purity. Based on mathematical abstraction or the "number game" mentioned by Sami in the previous fragment (focus group, December 2012), psytrance producers design EDM that continuously exceeds its boundaries as if it was driven by a viral code, devouring and transforming natural surfaces like a swarm of digital ants. This synergistic and viral interaction between numbers and nature returns in the frequent use of fractal-like decorations and visuals at psytrance parties. Fractals are geometrical shapes invented in 1975 by Benoit Mandelbrot in an attempt to provide "mechanical forgeries" of irregular shapes prevalent in nature such as mountains or clouds (Mandelbrot 1991: 123). Originally designed to trap such forms in a mathematical model by describing their "deterministic chaos" (Mandelbrot 1991: 122), the fractal geometry returns in festival decorations and backdrops, expressing the technological reconfiguration of nature.

For further analysis of the manipulation and transformation of the natural environment at doofs it is worthwhile to consider Baudrillard's (1994b) provocative discussion of nature as a waste product:

Nature – the natural world – is becoming residual, insignificant, an encumbrance, and we do not know how to dispose of it. By producing highly centralized structures, highly developed urban,

⁹ Ironically, at larger Australian festivals, where police presence is continuous, the breach of the law is supervised by the law.

industrial and technical systems, by remorselessly condensing down programmes, functions and models, we are transforming all the rest into waste, residues, useless relics. By putting the higher functions into orbit, we are transforming the planet itself into a waste-product, a marginal territory, a peripheral space. Building a motor way, a hypermarket or a metropolis automatically means transforming all that surrounds it into desert. Creating ultra-rapid communication networks immediately means transforming human exchange into a residue (Baudrillard 1994b: 78).

For Baudrillard, nature today is not just a provider of resources that are harvested and exploited by humans, but also an unused, residual space, which reminds us of a bygone context of human existence that has been rendered dysfunctional by modernisation and urbanisation. This alarming portrayal of the effects of technological development resonates with Baudrillard's theories of consumer culture, where unmediated lived experience becomes secondary or residual to its simulation in the media as reality is increasingly pervaded by simulation/virtualisation. As elsewhere in his work, Baudrillard offers no easy solution to this sense of losing touch with nature (or for that sake, reality) yet warns that the romantic nostalgia that is apparent in certain discourses of ecological conservation may disguise a wider attempt to sterilise and seal the natural world in the "glass coffin" of scientific experimentation (Baudrillard 1994b: 88). This futuristic engagement is illustrated through the contemporary case study of the artificial ecological system 'Biosphere 2', a closed biosphere research facility in the Arizona desert, depicted by Baudrillard as an attempt of sinking nature into a state of inertia by excluding all unpredictable imperfections and malicious factors such as scorpions and germs, thereby de-randomising nature and transforming it into a collection of relics.

This description of nature as waste product is useful because, as I will argue later, the engagement with nature at psytrance festivals reaches beyond ecological discourses of conservation, developing the process addressed by Baudrillard in particular ways – despite the fact that doofs are frequently advertised under a romanticising green agenda. This is a more fruitful way of approaching the nature/construct debate than uncritically reiterating the nostalgic stance of certain prominent discourses in psytrance – as in cultural commentaries that overlook the significance of the technological manipulation of the 'natural' bush experience. For instance, considering the manifestos of certain doof organisers, Luckman

(2003: 322) describes festival participants as engaging in “a communion centred upon a sense of re-connecting with not just one another but also natural and pre-industrial worlds”. While this imagined communion may indeed be evoked by the respondents of the Luckman study, its actualisation at doofs is worth further investigation by considering the high-tech arsenal employed in the mediation of a seemingly ‘natural’ experience.

Of course this is not to say that doofs should traumatise the local flora and fauna, which is a controversial issue raised by some of my interviewees as well. For instance, Sophie criticises the highly popular Eclipse festival, a large-scale event organised around the 2012 solar eclipse in Far North Queensland.

Sophie: Yes, I saw the eclipse ... it looked cool ... but I didn't find it to be an emotional experience. The most emotional part of my Eclipse festival experience was sadness for the cows and horses who couldn't get to their main watering hole, and the crocodiles whose breeding season was disturbed. I hope they all recover! Having said that, I did have a great time at the festival camping and partying with friends, I just wish there was some way to have these great experiences without damaging the environment and wildlife (Facebook post, December 2012).

It should be noted that the organisers of this festival encouraged punters to contribute with a “conservation donation” of \$10 on top of a gate ticket price of \$500 (Eclipse 2012) – which may be considered a strategy of ‘greenwashing’ in the light of Sophie’s comments.

The imperative of ‘leaving no trace’ is frequently requested by organisers of small and big doofs alike, yet this is only possible with responsible audiences, and particularly in the case of small parties or at festivals with established sites that are not intrusive to the local fauna. In the best case scenario, the harm is indeed minimal, and in the worst, in spite of the conservationist discourses propagated by certain organisers, nature is (ab)used as a pretext for undisturbed and reckless partying (Chapter 8.2: Pollution). This can be hardly considered a harmonic relationship, despite the aspirations of some doofers, as suggested by the following piece from the *Cool Psytrance Bros* meme series (Quick Meme 2013) (the meme series was introduced in Chapter 7.2: MDMA).



Figure 16: Cool Psytrance Bros, Megawatt Sound System (Quick Meme 2013)

For Baudrillard (1994b) ecological discourses that assign the role of the subject to nature – and thus promote a harmonic relationship of intersubjectivity – are problematic. Even if nature was a subject, it would be unreasonable to expect that once ‘emancipated’, it would ‘cooperate’ with humans in accordance with a Rousseauist ideology. At their worst, such discourses conceal something else, betraying a bad conscience and reaffirming the current role of nature as waste product. The distinctiveness of psytrance festivals lies precisely in their ability to reach beyond such agendas of ‘harmony with nature’, not in terms of pollution (which is a controversial aspect particularly of larger doofs), nor romantic reconciliation (which is often a cover discourse), but through the ironic reconfiguration of nature.

Indeed the elements of nature, rendered residual by the technological transformation of the Western world, are incorporated into a festival context in which participants exhibit behaviours that are residual to their daily interactions (they get ‘trashed’ on psychedelics). This way the doof “treats evil with evil” (Baudrillard 1994b: 79), which is reminiscent of Baudrillard’s proposition of a “maleficent ecology” instead of a romanticising discourse or a “benevolent” treatment of nature that would merely reaffirm its residual status. If nature is indeed becoming alien to us, it will be further alienated during the nights at psytrance festivals, when

consumption is sent into overdrive and the environment is converted into a “different planet” (Chapter 8.2: Adventurous or Different planet). This further alienation through virtualisation provides an authentic way of connecting to nature in its contemporary unauthenticity. Additionally, doofing has the potential of raising awareness to this world outside city limits for partygoers who become engaged in activities such as bushwalking and camping outside festival contexts (as suggested by Magan’s comments in Chapter 8.2: Hidden or Secret).

8.4 “Lose Your Shit and Try to Get It Together”: An Analysis of Getting ‘Trashed’ at Festivals

The final discussion of this chapter addresses the social aspects of doofing and the significance of getting ‘trashed’ on psychedelics (and other recreational drugs) at festivals. It is important to clarify that most of my interviewees identify themselves as ‘doofers’ and many differentiate themselves from ‘hippies’ while affirming that the latter constitute a significant portion of the scene. The selection of my interview sample corresponds to my academic interest. My project is not directly engaged in the exploration of cultural elements related to hippie lifestyle values and is not focused on the influence of the hippie trail on psytrance culture because these topics have been thoroughly addressed elsewhere (St John 2012).

Most participants describe hippies as individuals who wear a certain popular combination of fashion elements (such as dreadlocks, tattoos and vintage jeans) and (often uncritically) adhere to a certain combination of ideals or beliefs. Apart from this, the focus groups reveal a variety of perceptions, from seeing them as contributing to doofs with a good vibe to labelling them as extremist in contemporary social contexts.

John: I think the word hippie has kind of an extremist connotation to it these days. You know, someone classifies themselves as a hippie, I typically feel that they almost automatically subscribed to all hippie beliefs or sort of the beliefs that any hippie would have. Yeah, it's like, OK, you know, vegetarianism and environmentalism are both very good things, and they do have real life merits and stuff like that. Um, but then the things like anti-vaccinations and, you know, anti-GM crops and anti-pharmacology and anti-animal testing and all this stuff, which, in a sense, it does have its own merits, but you know, if you're gonna say you're gonna live your life by that philosophy, OK, yeah, you can't accept medical treatment if you really do believe in that. You can't eat any food, and basically you need to live in a cave (focus group, June 2012).

Participants from other focus groups often criticise the hypocritical behaviour of certain hippies (dubbed by some as ‘hippiecrites’), for instance those who are regularly caught out being inconsiderate of the environment and leaving trash behind at doofs. Criticism is also aimed at those who “just don't give shit to the system, but can't live without Centrelink” (Vipin, focus group, December 2012),¹⁰ an idea that returns in the following piece from the *Cool Psytrance Bros* meme series:



Figure 17: *Cool Psytrance Bros*, Wants to Live off the Grid (Quick Meme 2013)

Contrasting themselves with these negative stereotypes, many of the interviewees emphasise the importance of responsible doofing, and most hold regular jobs during the week, while some are pursuing university studies.

All participants agree that the use of psychedelic drugs has the potential to trigger life changing experiences, mainly because of the possibility of temporarily rearranging the rules of

¹⁰ Centrelink is the federal government bureaucracy that delivers the social welfare payment program in Australia.

one's life-world to provide a fresh perspective on life. One can hardly 'quit' social reality, get rid of work commitments or a mortgage, yet getting 'trashed' at doofs is a temporary process where possibilities are multiplied and one can "get the full spectrum of things" (Chapter 8.2: Sense of Freedom) in an unrestricted, familiar environment (Chapter 8.2: Familiar or Underground). This resonates with the full spectrum of emotions discovered in psytrance music (Chapter 7.4: Multi-layered or Varied). Acid, the most discussed drug in the focus groups, is particularly suitable for dissolving or shaking up the contexts of the everyday (Chapter 7.3). In particular, psychedelics are commonly seen as improving appreciation "for people, for interactions and for the way things work", allowing the drug user "to see things differently" (Sophie, focus group, December 2012).

When partygoers get 'trashed' or 'wasted' at doofs, they contribute to a socio-aesthetics that can be approached through the anthropological concept of symbolic pollution developed by Mary Douglas.¹¹ According to Douglas (1966), our ordered symbolic systems express the desire to eliminate ambiguities and irregularities. She defines symbolic pollution as matter out of place: a residual category rejected from our normal scheme of classifications or symbolic systems. Confronting anomalies is often an unpleasant experience, except in certain domains where anomalies are exploited, such as in humour and art. Anomalies can be treated negatively or positively, one can either ignore or condemn them, or deliberately confront them, with the latter transpiring in some traditional rituals as well (Douglas 1966: 48-50). For instance, the African Lele's powerful cult of the pangolin (scaly anteater) culminates in the digesting of the culturally anomalous animal, and in other examples pollution symbols are accepted as integral parts of human nature (Douglas 1966: 209-220).

In her more recent work on waste, Hawkins (2006) develops some of these ideas while acknowledging Douglas (1966) as a key point of reference in addressing the symbolic meanings of waste and dirt (Hawkins 2006: 2). While Hawkins focuses primarily on the ethical possibilities of our daily relations with environmental waste, many of her inferences apply to waste as a symbolic category and are in this sense useful for considering the nature/construct binaries and punter interactions at psytrance festivals. According to Hawkins, rubbish may connote unwanted substances, abandoned objects or useless artefacts, and its definitions are socio-

¹¹ While the concept of waste can be used for other significations in cultural studies – for instance, in Chapter 3 I follow Van Ree (2002: 352) in his discussion of the cultural significance of drug use as defiantly wasteful mode of consumption – in this section I focus primarily on the chemical transformation of the self in terms of getting 'trashed'.

cultural constructs, with shifting boundaries in different contexts. Waste has a mnemonic potential, reminiscent of bygone values, and is also open to reinterpretation, providing a possibility to move between categories, as in recycled architecture and design (Hawkins 2006: 78-79). Importantly, the act of disposal designates consumer objects as residue or worthless junk, stripping them of both their use value and exchange value, and pushing them into a transitional state. Following the terminology of Brown (1998), Hawkins (2006: 132) argues that this state defines an alternative materiality, not of 'objects' but of 'things', where experimenting with the 'misuse value' of waste may potentially delineate new meanings and uses. Finally, rubbish may connote an intermediate category between culture and nature, as suggested by the metaphorical image of "the abandoned car body rotting quietly in the landscape [that] is alive with the activity of corrosion . . . both organic and machinic" (Hawkins 2006: 10).¹²

Just as the act of disposal redefines consumer objects as rubbish and transfers them into a residual state, by getting 'trashed' on psychedelics at psytrance parties, punters deliberately redefine themselves as waste and transfer themselves into an environment that is designed to be as residual as possible to day to day reality. In this chapter I argued that doofs employ various technologies that are aligned with the amorphous logic of the psychedelic trip, ultimately channelling a feeling of displacement (Chapter 7.5). Punters contribute to this general vibe with a variety of costumes and accessories, some of which are removed from their everyday functions and reworked in the carnivalesque context of the party. Some of my interviewees mention the use of psychedelic equipment such as "having a nang machine chained to a trolley, and set[ting] up little things to the trolley" (focus group, December 2012), with St John (2012: 220) observing similar configurations at international festivals. The nang machine or nanginator is a domestic appliance refitted for recreational purposes: whipped cream siphons without milk are useless in their domestic context, but are employed at doofs as mild hallucinogens and 'trip toys' that trigger further 'twists' in the psychedelic trip. Costumes, frequently praised during the focus groups, are conducive to the playful transformation of the

¹² A similar example is provided in the documentary *Bush Mechanics* (1998) about the "madcap adventures" of Aboriginal men "driving the desert in cars chronically on the verge of mechanical collapse" (Hawkins 2006: 87). The film depicts an Aboriginal cultural imaginary where abandoned car wrecks and parts become organic parts of the landscape, serving as mementos of past narratives and potentially providing spare parts for the bush mechanics (Hawkins 2006: 89).

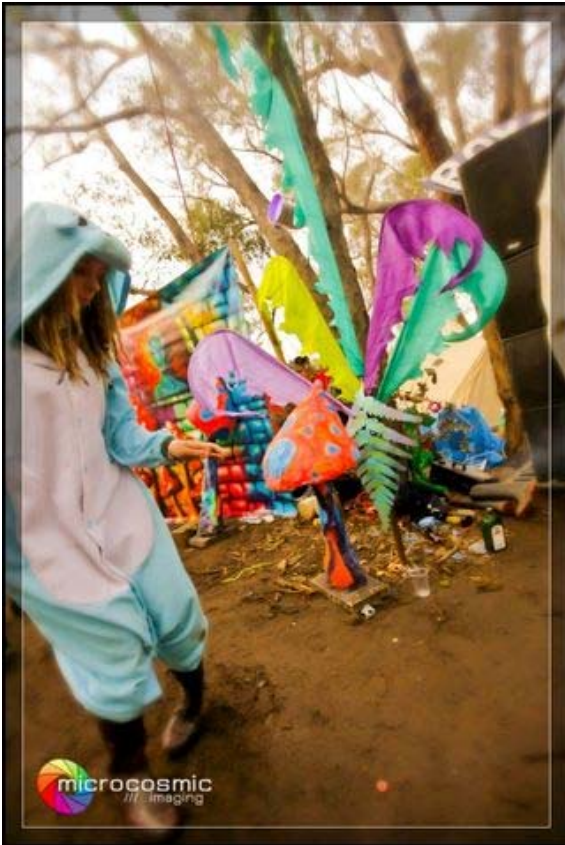


Figure 18: Punters and Backdrops at the 2012 Royal Doof
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crowd into an eclectic parade of an intergalactic zoo at night (Chapter 8.2: Adventurous or Different Planet), just as acid is conducive to the transformation or even dissolution of one's culturally constituted self. Tools and technologies are thus purposefully employed in the process of getting 'wasted' through a ritualised engagement with symbolic pollution or waste that is out of place.¹³

It is important to restate that all this happens in nature – which, according to Baudrillard (1994b: 78), is itself rendered into a waste product by the ubiquitous technological transformations of the Western world (Chapter 8.3). Baudrillard conceptualises nature as both residual to urban reality and a memento of a bygone function, which resonates with some of the perspectives provided by Hawkins (2006) on waste.

As mentioned earlier, Baudrillard (1994b: 78) finds the romanticising of ecological discourses problematic and misleading. A similar idea returns in the following fragment:

Johanna: I'm a nature person, I love nature, and I was thinking on the way walking here [to the focus group location]: why [do] people say that nature's so perfect, and it's not. Nature is like tsunamis and earthquakes, but it's still perfect, but people kill, they fight, you know, why can't we be perfect? (focus group, December 2012).

Johanna's thoughts can be reversed: at doofs, on the symbolic level, punters can be imperfect, together with nature. From this perspective, the festival creates a synergistic link between the "useless relics" (Baudrillard 1994b: 78) of nature and the fractal¹⁴ patterns of behaviour in which the partygoers are engaged with symbolic pollution. Additionally, after an extended acid session in the bush one gets filthy, muddy and covered with detritus, with a shower not one of the top priorities for many of the festival participants. Yet this engagement with waste may have regenerative capabilities or at least provide some sort of refreshment: as suggested by Hawkins, a pragmatic relationship with residual categories may provide the benefits of a new

¹³ Symbolic pollution or waste is not the only concept that can be employed in the analysis of the carnivalesque context of the psytrance party. For example, St John reworks Victor Turner's (1967) concept of liminality when he discusses psytrance festivals as dramatising a "permanent state of impermanence" without clear aim (St John 2012: 300-302). I decided to use the concept of waste because it corresponds to the metaphorical terminology of the participants (getting 'thrashed'), and it is particularly suitable for addressing the connections with consumer culture and the role of the natural environment in such festival contexts.

¹⁴ This attribute refers to the "deterministic chaos" (Mandelbrot 1991) of doofing.

perspective. Similar to Baudrillard, Hawkins (2006: 8-9) rejects the romanticising discourses or “disenchantment stories” behind much of environmentalism as inefficient, dualistic thinking that merely provokes an “alienated distance” and widens the perceived gap between culture and nature.

In her anthropological work, Douglas (1966) provides examples of ritualistic engagement with pollution that are organically connected to tribal metaphysics and are thus integral to accessing the realm of the sacred and the transcendental. At the symbolic level, traditional rituals provide access to a world of permanence where the participant can be part of a life-transcending entity (Bloch 1992: 3-4). It is important to note that in my research the engagement with symbolic pollution is not aimed at fulfilling this criterion: indeed, the focus groups reveal no common transcendentalist goal or dimension of festival experiences. Instead, I intend to provide a more secular perspective on getting ‘wasted’ at parties that resonates with the way Hawkins (2006: 123) advocates a pragmatic engagement with waste (which potentially reveals the transient and impermanent nature of existence), without turning to the more comfortable discourses of transcendence and disenchanting nostalgia.¹⁵ My research is thus primarily concerned with the grotesque characteristics of the psychedelic trip within the carnivalesque context of festivals (Vitos 2010: 165-166), in accordance with the scarcity of transcendentalist narratives in my interview sample. For many of the participants, making the psychedelic trip central to one’s life would be fairly problematic, with experiences being frequently viewed as channelling an alternative (rather than definitive) plane of existence. Indeed, when it comes to the long term effects of psychedelic drug consumption, Magan is highly critical of a significant portion of the scene that he sees as getting lost in drug use and losing sense of their day to day social realities:

Magan: People tend to lose what they really think, and they try to believe in something which is not true. It's just the cooking done in the brain for the eight hours experience, or eight to nine or whatever hours, [for the number of] times you've taken drugs. It's just your brain telling that it's you, but [it's] not what you were brought up in. You were brought up in teamwork; you were brought up in family. So it's a problem. It's a problem because . . . they tend to explore

¹⁵ Rejecting grand narratives and moralising discourses, Hawkins (2006: 128) focuses on the “ordinary sublime of transience” exemplified in the metaphorical image of the earthworm: an actor of the lowest order that, nevertheless, by converting food scraps into garden fertilizer, becomes the “penultimate loss manager” and draws attention on the generative capabilities of waste.

themselves more, and the limit is ... it is limitless to explore yourself. There is no limit. And people get lost (individual interview, March 2013).

Magan conceptualises the psychedelic experience as an illusory consequence of chemical reactions in the brain (“just the cooking done in the brain for the eight hours . . . just your brain telling that it's you”) that disrupts the structures of daily life (work, family). Additionally, the long-term use of psychedelics may trigger an introspective journey that does not lead anywhere (“people get lost”) because in its contemporary socio-cultural context it is unable to sustain the development of an ordered system. The confrontation with symbolic pollution at psychedelic parties or during the psychedelic experience may be unsuitable for providing meaningful guidance in itself, and for some it may evolve into a simulacrum built on shaky grounds (“they try to believe in something which is not true”). However, in a later stage of the interview Magan also claims that, at its best, the psychedelic experience does accomplish a temporary ‘reset’ of the world in the sense that it experientially suspends the socio-cultural conditioning of reality from which one may return with a “refreshed operating system”. The sense of refreshment gained from this temporary change of perspective is commonly praised during the focus groups.

Doofs employ psychedelic technologies that reconfigure nature and push it toward a high level of unpredictability that, similar to the acid trip, is aimed at the temporary dissolution of one’s life-world. This stands in sharp contrast with the artificial ecological system of Biosphere 2 (Chapter 8.3) that excludes all ‘evil’ and destabilising elements. Extending beyond discourses of nostalgic conservation, the doof injects its symbolic venom into such hyper-sanitised visions of the environment by rediscovering nature as an organic backdrop in the institutionalised anomaly of psychedelic drug consumption (Baudrillard 2002: 100) (getting ‘trashed’ on psychedelics). As discussed earlier, the more the festival approaches its limits, the more it is spiralling back to the heart of consumption, where the orgy of sounds, lights and signs is transferred from the city to the bush and sent into an overdrive of consumption. This reiterates the sensory overload of the psychedelic trip which has the potential of diminishing meaning through an overuse of significations.

Such nullification of meaning happens predominantly at night, which according to the interviewees is particularly suitable for harder subgenres such as darkpsy. On the night dance floor the music guides a psychedelic experience that is deeply personal yet may also interact

with the trips of others. When the heavier use of psychedelics renders ‘ordinary’ communication impossible, the psychedelic music may become the core of new, ever-changing languages, facilitating an embodied form of communication where the intense alienation of the drug experience can be paradoxically shared with others. The drug/music interface is conducive to virtualisations that may be experienced as greater than themselves, like putting two mirrors in front of each other and enjoying the infinite depth effect.

The (partial) return from this state of intense release generally happens in the morning. Most participants appreciate the night/day cycle of festivals, which is also reflected in the logical progression through certain psytrance genres, although certain interviewees criticise this as clichéd (Chapter 7.4: Progression through Multiple Genres). The daytime environment, according to most, is more suitable for lighter subgenres and playful interactions.

Sam: Do you get a little bit of conflict though, ‘cause you really like darkpsy, and [on] every darkpsy dance floor I've seen there's no interaction at all. . . . I know everyone loves getting into it, and dancing, and stuff, but maybe that's another good reason why it's on at night, that you can't really see other people anyway. The interaction during the day, during the prog[ressive psytrance], it's quite handy that you've got prog music, and you can actually take the time from dancing to interaction. . . .

Pete: You're kind of in it, like there's not really escaping, you're kind of in, in the darkpsy, it kind of washes over you. It's good, I like it.

Q: So does it change the interaction between people?

Pete: Oh totally. That's why I like prog during the day, like you know, ‘cause there's a lot of time, it's quite minimal [music], you can have a beer, plot around, still have a chat, talk about last night, you know, who you're gonna see tonight. Sometime there's some really deep, intricate moments, but a lot of time it's quite minimal. That's the thing why it gets good running it during the day (focus group, December 2012).

The change in the time of the day and the music is thus reflected in the changing nature of interactions. While the night is more suitable for immersion into the music (it “washes over you”) and an intense psychedelic experience, the day is better suited for socialising, recalling

experiences of the night, and engaging in carnivalesque interactions. Another music genre that is frequently played during the day and praised by some of the partygoers is glitch hop (Chapter 7.4), a danceable descendent of glitch electronic music. As Cascone (2000) summarises, glitch producers expand the aesthetic boundaries of electronic music by using the waste products or background information of digital technologies as raw material in their works, for instance by “exposing the minutiae of DSP errors and artifacts for their own sonic value” (Cascone 2000: 17). Indeed such aesthetic sensibilities of ‘failure’ contribute to the psychedelic feel of glitch hop and render it suitable for psytrance dance floors.

While the presence of “seasoned doofers” is seen in all focus groups as greatly contributing to the psychedelic vibe, the ideal doof would most importantly provide a convivial and appealing atmosphere that is similar to somebody’s house party and is open to new encounters:

Pete: What makes a good party is having a crowd, whether there's seasoned doofers, hippiecrites or whatever they are, as long as having people that are open to meeting people and then consequently treating them like somebody they know, rather than people that are closed off in their own group, and that's the way they're gonna stay. Um, so people come to a party willing to meet people. Willing to have bumped into having random chat over dance, you know, talk shit: that makes a good party, I think. ‘Cause same as any party, whether it's doof or not, if you go to a house party, if you go somewhere where's a bunch of group of somebody's mates, and they don't really want anybody else there, then it's a bit different to going somewhere where they'd go like: yeah, come and have a beer, talk shit (focus group, December 2012).

This atmosphere is also reflected in the general practice of inviting sympathetic strangers to drinks and other substances, although gifting is by no means completely gratuitous at doofs. During the fieldwork I could not identify a widespread “gift culture” as the one evoked by St John (2012: 289) in the context of the Burning Man festival in California. Free-riders who do not return anything and seem to be mainly interested in raiding the stashes of others (instead of genuinely “willing to meet people”, as suggested by Pete) are commonly criticised during the focus groups.

To sum up, the doof provides a familiar environment for groups of friends where release (or freedom) is sought from daily reality, working routines or even common sense. While sharing these goals with other leisure activities or hobbies, it also aims for the actualisation of encountering the Other, as if visiting a different planet, which is also a recurring topic of such popular media of consumer culture as sci-fi movies or video games. Psytrance parties transmit this engagement to the level of neurons, opening up the bodies of partygoers to the influx of technologies. Getting ‘trashed’ on psychedelics in the forest triggers a feeling of displacement (Chapter 7.5) through encountering symbolic pollution (Douglas 1966) within the residual environment (Baudrillard 1994b: 78) of the bush: a feeling of a culture that is devoured by its own waste, its own synthesised garbage¹⁶ bubbling in the mud pits of dance floors stomped by the feet of partygoers. Yet encountering waste draws attention to the boundaries of one’s system of classifications and is not without regenerative potential (Hawkins 2006): refreshment is gained from the return from this carnivalesque overturn and dissolution of social reality that temporarily ‘resets’ the world. This is offered in another way in Baniya’s laconic advice to conclude his focus group:

Q: OK guys, that was it. If you've got anything left to say, say it now.

Baniya: Lose your shit! And try to get it together [laughs wickedly] (focus group, August 2012).

¹⁶ “Synthesized Garbage” is a track produced by the Indian darkpsy project Kerosene Club (2006). See Appendix 3.3.

9. Case Study: Darkpsy Overdrive

This chapter completes the discussion of psytrance by focusing on a subgenre in which the psychedelic aesthetic mode explored in the previous two chapters is intensified in particular ways. Dark psytrance can be considered the hard core of psytrance, and it is a relatively unpopular psytrance subgenre in Melbourne, played predominantly during the night at festivals. A single crew organises regular club nights (several times a year). Interestingly, the majority of the performers and a significant portion of the audience are of Indian origin, which is reflected in my interview sample as well.

At the time of my fieldwork the biggest Australian psychedelic festival, Rainbow Serpent, did not feature international darkpsy artists. Nevertheless, darkpsy producer/organiser Vipin is fairly optimistic about the future of this grassroots subgenre in Melbourne:

Vipin: There is a very small community following the harder style of music, and it's come along in the last few years, and it's seen some positive changes because a lot of people in Melbourne have started to produce that kind of music, and that's how it's gonna grow even bigger. Because you write something, you show it to your friends, who might like it, and that's how the word spreads. And you put a few people like this in the scene, and suddenly you've got all these different branches that are making up the whole scene. So that's what's happening. And look, it's too early to say whether Melbourne's gonna develop a darkpsy scene that is as big as any other country, 'cause influence is a big, big factor, and you know how things work. So yeah, like, in Europe, you can see, 'cause it's such a closed network, everyone's kind of hopping between countries, different festivals, and that's how the whole scene skyrocketed (focus group, December 2012).

As suggested by Vipin, the situation is different in Europe, where certain festivals are devoted exclusively to darkpsy. For instance the Noise Poison festival in Slovakia, which I visited in July 2013, features more than 48 hours of uninterrupted music predominantly from one of the more

recent branches of darkpsy called high-tech psytrance.¹ Despite its limited popularity in Australia, the subgenre is worth investigation because it delivers a heavily concentrated manifestation of the ‘trippy’ musical aesthetics identified in Chapter 7.

9.1 Pushing the Boundaries

It is important to note that some of the respondents who are involved in dark psytrance (as listeners, DJs or producers) often avoid the term and use the names of its ramifications instead, such as forest and high-tech psytrance. The reason for this is that while darkpsy undeniably delivers intense feelings, these are not necessarily experienced as ‘dark’ (in terms of a sombre atmosphere). In the words of Umesh:

Umesh: I would say that psytrance is a way to explore different possibilities. So to open my mind, I need to listen to all kinds of darkpsy. I can't just say OK, this kind of darkpsy is for this particular mood. And you can't really say that darkpsy in particular is dark. It's just a name. We are just classifying this particular category of music: it's called darkpsy. It doesn't mean that it is dark (focus group, August 2012).

However, it is often stated that the subgenre is experienced as dark, scary or even evil by non-fans who cannot ‘relate’ to it. As Baniya reacts to the words of Umesh:

Baniya: But the thing with that classification is that it's classified as dark because many people get paranoid and have dark feelings with that music, related to it, so it's classified as dark.

Umesh: But for me it's not like that.

Baniya: Yeah. Music is music, and I agree, I love darkpsy so ...

Q: You don't get paranoid ...

Baniya: I don't get paranoid, it's all good (focus group, August 2012).

¹ A darkpsy festival bearing the same name had two editions in Australia in 2009 and 2010, but it is now defunct due to the limited interest of local punters. The Slovakian festival is, of course, readily accessible for a wider, European audience, which renders the yearly invitation of major darkpsy performers profitable.

Respondents who would not normally listen to darkpsy also note that darkpsy is not necessarily dark but perhaps way too ‘weird’.

Rick: I prefer more [the] happy vibe music, ‘cause it takes you to a happy place. Some people like dark music, music that takes you to a dark place, but I think that's [also] kind of weird sometimes.

John: I don't like to explore those places.

Jimmy: I don't necessarily think it takes them to a dark place, but just a weirder place (focus group, June 2012).

More often than not, the subgenre intensifies the ‘trippy’ and ‘weird’ aesthetics of psytrance, or at least speeds up to a tempo that is unpleasant for many partygoers. Quality darkpsy music involves the organic evolution and breakdown of heavily processed sound layers that are interacting with or responding on each other, embedded in bass line at a tempo that exceeds 150 BPM and sometimes collapses down to zero or speeds up to hyperspeed. The design of the tracks delivers a destabilising feeling of continuously traversing boundaries, with the same manifesto being evident in the evolution of the subgenre:

Vipin: Evolution [in psytrance] is really, really important, which is kind of OK in the hardest stuff, darkpsy, because people keep pushing the boundaries of, you know, how more abstract you can get, that's, kind of, what's made this really popular all of a sudden.

Q: So it's more, like, surprising?

Vipin: Surprises, yes, full of surprises.

Q: Against previous formulas?

Vipin: Absolutely. Because it's evolved, you know. Starting from like really dark, abstract, grungy sounds, you know, from Hallucinogen² and all these people, suddenly it's now reached a level where people like Osom Music Records, you know, they are producing 200 BPM. And even though it's really fast, for someone who can understand that music, it's really well-crafted, and

² See Appendix 3.4.

really intelligent, you know. That's a really good use of technology (focus group, December 2012).

For Vipin, evolution in darkpsy signifies the accelerated production of increasingly faster and more “abstract” music. The main preoccupation of this subgenre seems to be the continuous transgression of its own perverted boundaries, both musically and semantically: the processing, fading, panning, speeding up and destruction of rhythms and layers, the use of both menacing and nonsensical sound patterns contribute to its characteristically freakish atmosphere. Among the more acknowledged ramifications of darkpsy are forest and high-tech psytrance. Vipin, who is a forest psytrance producer, defines the former by its use of woody, organic and squeaky sounds. The music is eerily atmospheric, with a tempo around 150 BPM, and as the name suggests, particularly suitable for being played in a forest, generally between dusk and dawn. High-tech psytrance operates on a faster tempo (exceeding 170 BPM) and typically delivers almost surgically clean, futuristic, synthetic and robotic sounds twisting over a wide frequency range. Both are capable of delivering a rich fluctuation of disorienting emotions and are thus considered to be more suitable to the advanced listener, with interviewees often mentioning that for outsiders a less demanding subgenre such as progressive psytrance is a better introduction to the scene.

Vipin: It's not something with which, you know, you can just start off this thing right away. This music kind of has to grow on you. Like, very rarely you come across someone, you know, who can just start listening to a track which is like really complex and dark, and start liking the music. You have to go through the journey to reach to a stage where you are an advanced listener, and you can kind of relate to what's happening (focus group, December 2012).

Sabeena: What I feel with Neelix,³ for example, I'm just giving a pure example. Like, let's say these guys were just entering the psychedelic world, would you take them straight to a dark party or would you actually take them to Neelix? Because, you know, this is something that is a little less intense, you know [laughs] (focus group, August 2012).

Sabeena mentions Neelix, a psytrance artist who produces and performs melodic, uplifting and moderately paced (around 140 BPM) progressive psytrance tracks. Compared to the catchy

³ See Appendix 3.5.

tunes of progressive psytrance, the sound of a 180 BPM high-tech track, for example, due to its combination of fast speed and sci-fi sounds would metaphorically deliver an overall effect of an overdriven spin drier that, catapulted to outer space, entraps the deranged cacophony of little green droids.

Baniya: I feel a robotic feeling on darkpsy. I become a robot [everybody laughs].

Sabeena: It is, yeah, you become a robot, it is like that [laughs] (focus group, August 2012).

The conglomerate of such intense, fast, deranged, mechanical, eerie or dark sounds is particularly immersive for those who are on psychedelics, and it is regarded as highly innovative by fans whose community is defined in terms of belonging to this music. At the same time, darkpsy does not create an attractive embodied experience for many.

Sabeena: I don't like darkpsy. For me, I get paranoid, and I have done that on acid, and it was, like ... I've gone to Noise Poison in Australia, and that was my first dark party here. And I was just standing in one spot for like 5 hours, I could not move, 'cause it was, the music was just trrr-trrr-trrr, you know [laughs]. To be honest, I did not enjoy that because for me it's all about the journey, it's all about talking, and you know, just being able to still move around and do whatever I wanted to do, and in dark[psy] I could not do that. So I didn't really enjoy it (focus group, August 2012).

For Sabeena, the ideal journey at a festival does not equate to total and inescapable immersion into the music. Instead, she prefers to retain some control and engage in social interactions. Yet while on acid, the whirl of the intense music may trigger captivating sensations and synaesthetic perceptions that obscure everyday social relations, encapsulating the partygoer into a zone of mysterious frequencies. The engagement with the unknown in darkpsy is evident in what can be considered key tropes of forest and high-tech psytrance: the mysterious woods (as nature/Other) and the deranged robot (as machine/Other). These motifs are not retained as mere representations of established systems (as imageries of fantasy or sci-fi literature for example) but are continuously reworked in tracks that are increasingly “more abstract”, often nonsensical and continuously “pushing the boundaries” (Vipin, focus group, December 2012), corresponding to the expansive logic of the psychedelic trip, which is sometimes also reflected in the use of surprising vocal samples discussed in Chapter 7.5.

9.2 The Inverted Sublimity of the Darkpsy Dance Floor

As suggested in the previous section, dark psytrance provides a particularly effective guide for the psychedelic trip, potentially leading to the vertiginous dissolution of the cultural conditioning of self and reality. This is a feeling that may render newcomers and non-fans paranoid, but is embraced by many darkpsy enthusiasts:

Magan: [Darkpsy delivers] fear ... paranoia ... a lot of paranoia. Um, feeling out of place, feeling of death, feeling that the world is going to end, feeling of, I don't know, the new world is beginning. Anything changing, every time, on an experience, yeah.

Q: So why would you listen to music that makes you feel paranoid?

Magan: I have listened to it so much because I like being paranoid; well, I used to [get paranoid, but] now I don't get paranoid because ... I remember in the starting days, I even used to like music in the daytime, looking at chicks on ecstasy, in the starting days. But the moment I heard, myself, I experienced myself for one night, um that changed my life, on darkpsy and acid together. It changed me . . . I had no one to talk to, and I had only these fast bass lines rolling over my brain ... and yeah, never ever have felt paranoid, ever after that. 'Cause that day I lost everything, I lost my ego, I lost my fear (individual interview, March 2013).

Sophie: I think with darkpsy you get lost in the music a lot more than you do with prog[ressive psytrance]. Like yeah, you sort of fold into it. Go off, into your own world for a while (focus group, December 2012).

As argued in Chapter 6.7, what each respondent encounters in the depths of their acid trip (Magan after “losing the ego”; Sophie after “going off”) is deeply subjective. Nevertheless, most participants emphasise that darkpsy at night is particularly suitable to intensely “fold into” the music while on acid. The way Magan senses the loss of his culturally constituted self, or Sophie abandons the surrounding world, is aligned to the sensory and semantic overload triggered by the music. The partygoer is absorbed by a synaesthetic vortex that generates an excess of unreality from which distinct aesthetic sensibilities arise.

In the discussion of this underlying aesthetics I borrow my key concept from Lyotard's (1984) article 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde'. Lyotard evokes the Kantian sublime, where the subject encounters an object of immense proportions (such as a desert or a storm at the sea), an absolute which can be conceptualised as an Idea of reason but cannot be adequately represented because in its dimension and indeterminacy it defies the imagination. The impotence of imagination creates a painful tension, which is converted into a double pleasure: the imagination attempts to present the unrepresentable by 'elevating' its object to that of reason, while the inadequacy of representation reveals the immense power of the Idea (Lyotard 1984: 39-40). The absolute is thus revealed in negative presentation. The sublime sentiment is called forth in romantic and avant-garde art, which are both preoccupied with the presentation of the unrepresentable. However, while romanticism tries to evoke the sublime at a great physical or temporal distance, the avant-gardes focus on the immediate surface of the artistic work. Lyotard (1984: 40) also recalls Burke's thoughts on the negative pleasure of delight. In this perspective on the sublime, the object of immense proportions threatens the subject with the terror of impending extinction or the extinguishment of the system, implying that nothing further will happen. Yet the threat is suspended and distanced by the artwork, and the relief that despite the threat of dissolution something still happens – in this instant, 'here' – gives birth to the sublime sensation. Lyotard (1984: 40) notes that Burke recognises the limitations of figurative representation (as in figurative painting) in expressing the aesthetic of the sublime.

While the dark psytrance dance floor is preoccupied with a similar problematic (the dissolution of fixed systems, which is terrifying for some yet seductive for others), it situates the recipient in a different position, to a place which is not 'here', but 'there'. If the sublime situation concerns the confrontation with the infinite ocean that surrounds and threatens the subject's island of existence, then the dance floor will throw the subject in these waves. Through this process, not the ability of representation, but that of conceptualisation, is abolished; while cognitive acts would draw around the subject concentric islands of interpretation, these islands are repeatedly decomposed by furious (music) waves continuously pushing the boundaries. Indeed for Magan, the design of the music, experienced through the chemical mediation of psychedelics, alters the brain functions and potentially kills the thoughts:

Magan: Good psychedelic trance takes me to a different level, where I'm thinking nothing. And the beat, the bass lines rolling over each other, [they] don't let any thoughts to be produced in my head while I'm on a [psychedelic] drug. . . . So psychedelic trance is a mental therapy level. It has something to do with the brain, the name says it all (individual interview, March 2013).

Through the continuous, psychedelic transgression of sounds and forms, the dance floor freezes and expands the very moment of entering the inaccessible zone of the forbidden Otherness (in the following moment, or immediately after crossing the frontier, the prohibition dissolves, and the unknown becomes part of the system). The impossible attempt of the dance floor aims at experiencing the immensity of Otherness out 'there', without transferring it 'here' (the continuous dislocation of the experience impedes integration). Therefore its very goal is in being as ambiguous and 'spaced out' as possible. As discussed in Chapter 8, festivals often employ unusual, fantastic or bizarre decor and visual art: sometimes the partygoers themselves appear in costumes, and the use of symbols, such as sci-fi motifs or aliens, further dislocates the psychedelic experience of the participants.

Both the sublime and the darkpsy experience approach the frontier between world and un-world (between the system and its dissolution, the articulated and the unarticulated, finite and infinite); however, their perspectives are inverted. The sublime conceives its unrepresentable entity from within the system, and conceptualises it in the form of an Idea, which occupies a place in the structure of the system. The dance floor inverts the sublime situation by attempting to explore the frontier from the outside, from an impossible space where all meaning is rendered inconceivable (including the meaning of the experience). This semantic breakdown is triggered by the positive presentation of a virtualised freakshow at festivals. The show inverts the avant-garde sublime because that obscure object of desire resides not in the great distances of the romantic thought, but in the very proximity, in the raw material of the dance floor.

Johanna: I like anything hard, dark, fast, really loud [in psytrance]. I'm actually a metal head first, then electronic [music fan], so I kind of like music that's crazy everywhere. . . . In terms of emotions, it's just like a horrible, um, floundering, it's basically like being in a mosh pit [laughs]. If I'm happy on the dance floor, it's like I'm going nuts (focus group, December 2012).

The working mechanisms of psychedelics assure that each recipient acquires a different (alien) perspective on the performance, the only unifying point being the common un-knowing of what exactly is going on. The demented dance floor simulates a modified tower of Babel, urging for the dissolution of reason, which is not collapsed by the multitude of its incomprehensible languages, but exploits the entropy of its “mosh pit”, and keeps on growing or developing as an organic structure. In contrast with the formless negative presentation of the sublime, the inverted sublimity of the dance floor experience arises from the constant whirling, and – in a grotesque manner – from the reflexive transgression of forms.

Magan: You are just becoming matter. And the music is the medium. And then you are just flowing, pretty much. You're just becoming matter. So you can be dancing very fast, or you can just feel free to do what you want. You're just basically, um, like when you have a thermocol ball in a glass and blow some wind on top, you're just like rotating around. Your brain is completely washed out, empty, and just flowing in the medium of music (individual interview, March 2013).

The party ultimately generates a system that simulates the lack of rules: this is embedded in the very structure of the dance floor. The volatility of this structure, captured metaphorically in the whirl of the thermocol ball blowed by wind in the glass, is guaranteed by both the unpredictable nature of the psychedelic trip and the vague environment of the party. The technologies employed in this process are carefully designed to maximise the detachment from ‘this world’.

The ideal psychedelic environment transfers the participant to an unknown place, such as an alien planet, through the simulation of the dissolution or the evasion of the system. The aesthetic category disengaged in this process is that of an inverted sublime. An opposition with the sublime was already apparent in the aesthetics of the grotesque (Bakhtin 1968: 35, 43), an aesthetics that is characteristic of both psychedelic experience and music (Chapter 7.5). Unlike the sublime sentiment which arises from the failure of expressing a conceivable entity of infinite proportions, the darkpsy dance floor attempts to express something which is inconceivable or unarticulated in the system. While the sublime relief is triggered by the fact that something specific happens ‘here’ despite of everything ‘there’, on the overdriven dance floor nothing meaningful happens, or perhaps: everything that is not meaningful happens. As suggested by Vipin (focus group, December 2012), in the evolution of the subgenre the

continuous pushing of boundaries results in increasingly more abstract forms of expression, where the anchoring of meanings becomes highly problematic.

Lyotard's (1984) discussion of the sublime is one of the two key points of reference in the investigation carried out by Malpas (2002) on the relations between the Lyotardian sublime and avant-garde art. Malpas notes that the avant-garde break with traditional structures, involving a highly experimental approach to the materials of art, may open up new ways of thinking and acting by disrupting everyday perceptions and their limited, realist forms of representation (Malpas 2002: 199-200). Through its engagement with the sublime that is irreducible to the "laws of technological innovation and the marketplace", for Lyotard avant-garde art bears witness that "the instrumental rationality of techno-scientific calculative thinking" can always be potentially disrupted (Malpas 2002: 207). A similarly disruptive potential can be attributed to the inverted sublimity of dark psytrance, although the cultural context is different (avant-garde has been accepted in the 'high' cultural canon; psytrance circulates in popular/underground culture). As suggested earlier by Vipin (focus group, December 2012), the continuous need for experimentation is particularly important in darkpsy, not just in terms of sustaining a healthy and financially profitable evolution of the subgenre, but to maintain the psychedelic sense of technological indeterminacy that contributes to the aesthetic mode of the inverted sublime. The latter is employed at parties in the temporary disruption of solidified structures and indeed suspension of rational or calculative thought processes – described as "mental therapy" by Magan (individual interview, March 2013).

Of course, while avant-garde artists such as Barnett Newman experimented with minimalist reductions in the forms of expression during their negative presentation of the unrepresentable,⁴ the darkpsy party exploits popular culture topics within a heavily mediated context and sends presentation into overdrive. This engagement is embedded in the wider logic of psychedelic experimentation at festivals. In Chapter 8 I evoked Baudrillard's (1994b) discussion of the current state of nature as a waste product sunk into further inertia through scientific experimentation (which may be carried out under the agenda of ecological conservationism) and argued that the system of high-tech mediations employed at doofs may paradoxically dispel this curse. In the context of the outdoor festival, psytrance is employed in

⁴ Lyotard (1984) exemplifies the sublime through Newman's abstract expressionist paintings, which drastically reduce the forms of expression, yet through the flashes of their characteristic 'zips' (vertical stripes dividing the surface of the painting) become enunciations of sublime moments surrounded by the threat of indeterminacy (Malpas 2002: 205).

the ironic reconfiguration of nature, potentially disrupting the sanitisation or sterilisation of nature that is attributable to the “techno-scientific calculative thinking” evoked by Malpas (2002: 207). Darkpsy intensifies this psychedelic drive by pushing it toward increasingly higher levels of indeterminacy that culminate in the potential of dissolving the world.

The concept of the sublime can be employed in the analysis of other EDM genres as well. Chapman’s (2003) article on the “hermeneutics of suspicion” inherent in drum and bass music refers to Jameson’s (1991: 34-35) notion of the “technological sublime”, in which the sublime sentiment is defined in relation to the complex global network of contemporary technologies. Chapman’s techno-cultural investigation of drum and bass encompasses both the tension between imagination and reason characteristic of the Kantian sublime and the threatening terror addressed by Burke. A key characteristic of drum and bass is the intense, syncopated complexity of its programmed breakbeat rhythms, which are, of course, not performed live by human musicians, and, consequently, evince superhuman capabilities during the performance (Chapman 2003: 1). In the embodied experience of the dance floor the ‘imagination’ of the dancer resides in a “fundamentally ‘embodied’ envisioning of the music . . . where the body is at a loss to respond to all of the music’s intricacies” (Chapman 2003: 7). This impotence of embodied imagination is then elevated to the hyperkinetic rhythms of the music. Additionally, the body experiences a terror entangled in the computer-generated metaphors of a sinister anxiety that in Chapman’s (2003) work is explored along the lines of the technological sublime. My analysis signals that this engagement with the sublime returns in inverted form on the dark psytrance dance floor. As Vipin notes, the advanced listener does not lose track of the overdriven complexities in the music (to which then the imagination would need to be elevated) but continuously keeps up with it and is able to “relate to what’s happening” (focus group, December 2012). Acid is of particular importance here as a catalyst that facilitates and synaesthetically intensifies the sensibility to the inverted sublimity of the musical material.

This chapter provides the last addition to the distinct exploration of psytrance by focusing separately on the dark psytrance subgenre. The results of this examination will be incorporated in the comparative analysis of the next chapter. Darkpsy is regarded, by its fans, the flagship in the evolution of psytrance because it sends its LSD-infused musical structures into overdrive. In the analysis of the whirling darkpsy dance floor the aesthetic category of the sublime can be effectively employed, albeit in an inverted form. The comparison of this

perspective with Chapman's (2003) discussion of drum and bass suggests that in the broader context of EDM research the sublime may provide a useful analytical tool that may also draw attention on the differences between the embodied experiences of the various subgenres.

10. The Comparison of Techno and Psytrance in Melbourne

This chapter revisits some of my earlier findings, discussing the key ingredients of dance floors in a comparative framework in an attempt to delineate the separate machine aesthetics of techno and psytrance. This involves some repetition, but one that is carried out, as in EDM, with good intentions: the re-evaluation and development of my central arguments aims to provide a closer look at their points of juncture with the broader theoretical framework. The following sections compare, layer by layer, the mediations building up the dance floor, leading to the assessment of the emergent vibes. Consequently, this chapter can be read as an extended conclusion of my thesis, attempting to build on my previous findings within a single analysis. A key theoretical concern is to investigate the applicability of Baudrillardian concepts – which by now have moulded into a recurring conceptual theme of my investigations – in the analysis of the EDM party.

10.1 Code

“The Program Is Gonna Control Every Beat”

Techno and psytrance share certain generic particularities with other EDM genres, which were assessed in the theoretical considerations of Chapters 3.1 and 3.2. The following section considers these attributes in the context of the Melbourne research, with references to interview data that also highlights the differences between EDM and live/band music.¹ It is important to address these differences because they designate the unique functions and processes of EDM within the wider context of popular music.

Regardless of the use of synthesisers, sequencers, computers or hybrid methods combining these instruments, the composition of techno and psytrance tracks involves programming. This is a key distinction from live music that interviewees frequently mention:

Magan: The main difference is that EDM never goes out of timing. And [in] live music, yeah, someone could fuck it up, [at the] end of the day, in a track. With electronic music it's going to be in time, all the time, all the time. 'Cause it's just a loop, and electronically you know what

¹ A specific question posed to the interviewees addressed the advantages and differences between EDM and live/band music.

beat you're gonna put in time with another. There are no mistakes in electronic music.

Q: But darkpsy tends to be quite complex in its textures, no?

Magan: Yeah, complex, and at the same time everything is in time. So it doesn't matter how complex it gets, it's always done ... The program is doing everything for you, the program is becoming a medium between the writer and the sound that is being produced. Um, the program is gonna control every beat, every tone, and it's gonna make sure that all these sounds are put in time with each other, that's when it becomes complex. But if anything goes out of time with a live band ... For example, if they try to make music like that, it's gonna be very hard because there are five different brains, operating systems, trying to be in time with each other (individual interview, March 2013).

Adopting a machinic perspective, this fragment suggests that the production and recording of the electronic sign sequence constituting the track is determined by the “program” or the automatic code of EDM (enabled by the software of the computer or the electronics of the sequencer, as well as data storage and access mechanisms), which acts as a medium that guarantees the machinic qualities of the music. Of course, this medium also enables the accurate, sophisticated and relatively effortless alteration of the product (hence the abundance of remixes). During the live performance of a band, the medium that transmits the music is constituted by the assemblage of bodies and instruments, described by Magan as a network of computers or cyborgs that is limited by the imperfections of the human ‘hardware’ (“different brains, operating systems, trying to be in time with each other”). For such networks it would be demanding, to say the least, to keep up with the technical perfection of EDM, and certainly impossible with the requirements of certain subgenres: as suggested by darkpsy producer Vipin, the live performance of a 3 hours-long, 200 BPM set would need superhuman capabilities (focus group, December 2012). Moreover, interviewees frequently mention the use of artificially generated or synthetic sounds (which are not constrained by the sonic qualities of specific acoustic instruments but may cover any frequency range) as another significant departure from live/band music. These processes lend a hyper-punctual, machinic, unnatural or even inhuman feel to the music. As I argued in Chapter 3, in the historical context of (popular) music production, these particularities contribute to a machine aesthetic that provides a good fit with the conceptual framework of Baudrillardian simulation.

If the previous interviewee was concerned with the machine in EDM, the next addresses the role of human agency in live/band music. This perspective distinguishes the aura of the performer(s), which greatly contributes to the transmission of the ‘message’.

Stan: Generally 50 percent of my time is, sort of, [spent with] bands, and there's much more of a ritual there. Like the band would start, people line up, and it all becomes about the band, the person, and not really about the music, very quickly. So people talk about how they know the band, how they've experienced the band. And then they will start talking about the individuals in that band. . . . Yeah, it's about the people as well as the music, whereas in electronic music you don't feel compelled to know every last thing about the individual on stage, you're just sort of thinking about the music and how it, um, whether it works or not. It's more, sort of, everyone's doing their own thing, and it's more disperse, and it's more about you, falling in, within yourself. But with a band, I mean when a band is great, the whole parade around it kind of makes it feel more special sometimes. . . . I think the bands do have the advantage that they can use humour and words, so for a very excellent band, they are operating a lot of levels that you can't really get with electronic music. So certain melodic music, and certain sort of word and poetry, the feelings you get from the words, this means that it is a completely different experience (focus group, October 2011).

Stan mentions several ways in which human agency may influence the “more special” atmosphere of the live (band) performance. First, the audience is more concerned about the personality of the performer (“compelled to know every last thing about the individual on the stage”), which expands the imaginative dimension of the experience. Consequently, the show of a band is more theatrical, more of a “parade”, the potential of which is, of course, utilised by the performers on the stage. Moreover, the use of language, and particularly the poetic form of language, contributes to the development of an emotional connection with the stage persona of the singer. Indeed, the interviewees often praise the possible establishment of intimate bonds with the enactments of the performers, which are related to actual human experiences and narratives (a good audience will be sensitive to these particular narratives). In contrast, the reception of the EDM party is not significantly influenced by non-musical performances on the stage, and it becomes fragmented, detached from the everyday narratives of the performer and more prone to personal interpretations (“it's more disperse, and it's more about you, falling in, within yourself”). Obviously, there are exceptions to this

tendency, such as the celebration of superstar DJs particularly within the commercialisation of EDM scenes (Anderson 2009: 330), but as a general rule, and according to the observations of my fieldwork, in EDM the auratic intensity of the performance is shifted from the stage to the dance floor (Thornton 1996: 29).

This leads back to the significance of the vibe in EDM, constructed through mediations that allow the partygoer to “lose time” at parties:

Andrew: It's always like you have the clock running out when you are at a [band] gig, like the venues don't stay open longer after the band finishes. So you try to say hi to everyone once you get there, catch maybe the first band, go have a ciggie and catch the last band, and then say hi to everybody again, have a ciggie, and go home. You've got a time limit . . . and it feels like the time has slowed down for lots of it. And then the band plays, and the time speeds up, and then it slows down again. Whereas at a really good night of techno music you just lose time, it's just fucking awesome (focus group, October 2011).

This disintegration of time is characteristic to EDM in general, having much to do with the relentless four-to-the-floor beat of the music (or the progression of syncopated beats in subgenres such as drum and bass) that governs its “Dionysian paroxysm programmed and looped for eternity” (Reynolds 1999: 3) and compels the audience to dance.

The Code of EDM

Apart from the analogy between the historical development of EDM and the genealogy of the simulacrum (Chapter 3.2), the way EDM is transmitted and received at parties (as opposed to live/band performances) is reminiscent of the media's oversaturation and reframing of culture in Baudrillardian theory, as exemplified in the study *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1988). According to Baudrillard (1988: 19-21), the omnipresence of media channels and their colonisation of public and private spaces reflect the “obscenity” of communication: consumer realities are continuously permeated by its semiotic vortex in which all signs can and will be revealed. As an effect of this overflow of information, the distinction between subject and object becomes blurred; the distance between the spectator and the spectacle can no longer be sustained. Here Baudrillard revises Debord's (1970) Marxist-Situationist consumer theory of the spectacle, in which the power of the ruling economic order is solidified through the

circulation of mass media images and representations that generate a pseudo-reality to mask the actual deprivation of life, becoming the object of contemplation and reinforcing the alienation of the spectator-subjects. Baudrillard (1988: 20-21) suggests that by designating a stage, traces of theatre and illusion are still found in the spectacle, and the identification of the other in one's alienation may still provide a site of resistance. Baudrillard differentiates himself from Debord and denies the sovereignty of the stage as control mechanism in public and private spaces, proposing a model in which one no longer gazes at others and which blurs and dissolves the boundaries between public and private in the contemporary 'ecstasy' of the medium. The spectacle implies an aesthetic distance between subject and object, yet with the widespread use of virtualisation technologies this distance is short-circuited in the alignment between the fascinating influx of images (information) and the constant sensation of existing in the virtual space, signalling a reality that is continuously pervaded and assimilated by the media. The hyperbolic tone of this statement is typical of Baudrillard's writing, yet as Wise (2013) suggests, the tendencies outlined in this study are particularly relevant today with the development of new media and mobile communication technologies. A prominent example is the extensive use of social networking on smartphones: indeed Nunes (2013: 8-10) shows that heavy Facebook users, who are constantly switched on the network, sustain the real-time operationalisation of daily life in the form of a continuous News Feed of incessant status updates. This fascination with the obscenity of the screen (the over-proximity and transparency/traceability of the social network governed by an underlying computational algorithm) stands in contrast with the imaginative and symbolic dimension of the theatre and the stage, which was "once preserved through a minimal distance and . . . based on a secret ritual known only to its actors" (Baudrillard 1988: 21).

As suggested by the interview fragments of this section, the party signals a similar tendency to abandon the spectacle of the stage in favour of the immersive experience of the dance floor that is governed by the program of EDM. Stan proposes that "the whole parade around [the live band] makes it feel more special sometimes": the audience is engaged not just with the music but also the individuals in the band (not necessarily through personal acquaintances but more likely through their stage personas), who act as protagonists of a staged play that evinces the poetic dimension of familiar emotions. In EDM this creative potential of human agency is neglected, and the stage is no longer the centre of attention. What matters is the 'tactility' – which in the Baudrillardian (1993b: 55) sense signifies the

collapse of aesthetic distance during our interactions with electronic information – of soundscapes, in which in the words of Magan it is “the program [that controls] every beat, every tone” (individual interview, March 2013). This programming endows the tracks with machinic or inhuman qualities (due to their extreme precision and their use of structures and sounds that are unattainable by humans playing acoustic instruments) and an electronic traceability and reproducibility akin to the Baudrillardian obscene (especially with the advent of electronic storage media, the exact sign sequence that builds up the record is always intact and readily available). It also contributes to the experiential disintegration of temporality at parties, which is contrasted by Andrew with the fluid mutability of time at band gigs. Indeed, Baudrillard (1988: 19) suggests that the mysterious flow of “time as a stage” is disappearing as electronic communication transforms the perception of time into a discrete series of instant effects: this process is reflected in both techno and psytrance in the hyper-punctuality of the four-to-the-floor beat.

10.2 Music

Psychedelic in Different Ways

In the following musical comparison my starting argument is that the machine aesthetics of techno and psytrance outlined in the previous section does not imply straightforward technological determinism and control. Indeed the focus groups suggest that in both genres the traceable, reproducible, looping and hyper-punctual musical structures are applied in the aesthetic exploration of ‘psychedelic’ (or ‘alien’) states. It is claimed that the music triggers powerful feelings of displacement that are generally described as indeterminate, disorienting, weird or ‘trippy’.

Certain interviewees derive this potential from the perfection of an aesthetic mode that can be historically traced back to psychedelic rock. For instance, Andrew claims that “rock psychedelic music is supposed to do what you actually gain in techno” (focus group, October 2011); and according to psytrance producer/organiser Sami, “the 1960s-1970s [psychedelic bands are] not psychedelic trance music, but they're way more psychedelic than a lot of other psychedelic music I've heard” (focus group, December 2012). In a later part of the same focus group Sami, who possesses a college degree in jazz and EDM production and performed as a

drummer before switching to EDM, also mentions that live/band music experiences are extremely useful in EDM production “[be]cause you can imagine what is impossible in real life, and is possible with computers, so you kind of tend to do that”. These comments suggest that techno and psytrance provide an electronic intensification of certain sensibilities that were pre-existing in earlier genres. The intertwining of 1960s and 1970s psychedelic rock with avant-garde electronic music, which has subsequently influenced the development of EDM, is acknowledged (Rietveld 2010: 73-75), although the closer investigation of such historical continuities falls outside the scope of my project.

The psychedelic mode is actualised in different ways by techno and psytrance. As discussed in Chapters 4.3, techno creates ‘gaps’ by hinting at an imaginary dimension which is not present in the music itself. The ‘psychedelicisation’ of the tracks is attained through structural minimalism and differential repetition, as opposed to psytrance, where it is connected to the organic mutability and interaction of dense textures, and the baroque overflow of ‘trippy’ effects (Chapter 7.5).²

John: Yeah, there’s one thing a friend of mine used to say, actually the first time I showed him Terrafractyl.³ I was like: hey man, what do you reckon of this music? And he was like: ah man too much fucking taradara-da and taradara-da [sings varied melodies]. I don't like the taradara-da, taradara-da, I like just the tadadadadadadada [sings in lower tone, more rhythmically]. You know, this taradara-da should be in the mind, you know. Psychedelic is in the mind, it shouldn't be pushed on you; it should be you bringing it out. So he would prefer it like that (focus group, June 2012).

A typical Terrafractyl track is rich in twisted melodies and employs a variety of interesting sound effects. For John’s friend – who, based on his words, might as well be a techno fan – this sonic density seems superfluous and different from the psychedelic music he prefers (“psychedelic is in the mind, it shouldn’t be pushed on you”), where the austerity of expression would allow more room for imagination (“it should be you bringing it out”).

The journey of psytrance thus follows an abstract yet well-defined narrative that seems

² While certain psytrance subgenres such as progressive psytrance do employ simpler grooves and more straightforward melodies, during the focus groups these are often considered less psychedelic and thus more suitable to the newcomers to the genre – as suggested by the fragments in Chapters 7.4 and 9.1.

³ See Appendix 3.1.

more deterministic than that of techno. Where psytrance attempts to express the psychedelic state with all possible means, interviewees such as Andrew suggest that techno merely flashes a series of transitory moods or *impressions* amidst an imaginative void (Chapter 4.3).

Andrew: [Psytrance] just leads you on, and it tries to bring you here and bring you there, and there's a whole bunch of sounds happening. And it's all like watching theatre, if you drop out for a second and talk to someone, it's hard to get back into it. [Whereas in techno] I've got to dance until I fall into that groove, and then I'm just gonna follow it along. I think techno just makes spaces. Spaces that you either go in, like if you wander into them, you're sort of stuck in them. If it's a good DJ, it will just guide you from place to place, but psytrance just drags you along, and if you begin to wander, then you've lost it (focus group, October 2011).

While Andrew mentions watching theatre, it is important to note that he refers to the (cinematic) narrativity of psytrance and does not imply that the show takes part on the stage, as in live/band music. As discussed in Chapter 10.1, at EDM parties the aesthetic distance characteristic of the spectacle is typically supplanted by a tactile immersion into the music.

Consequently, the two EDM genres are psychedelic in different ways, positioned on the opposite ends of two axes: the first stretching between the apparent irregularity and regularity of expression, and the second between the abundance and the absence of forms. Psytrance presents itself as irregular and whimsical in its sonic density, yet still remains within the structural confines of the four-to-the-floor beat: it is engaged in the systematisation of the absence of rules.⁴ The most striking features of techno are its tight rhythmic and metric restrictions, yet the play with these constraints subtly produces the illusion of something that does not exist in the music: techno reveals 'gaps' within a heavily regulated system.

Fragments and Fractals

Within the Baudrillardian conceptual framework, both genres signal artistic engagements aimed at disturbing the operability of simulation from within the system. This is an avenue

⁴ De Ledesma (2010: 103-104) recalls that U.K. psytrance producers at the turn of the millennium praised the 'no rules' approach in early Goa trance as opposed to the structural restrictions of techno, with some of the latter slipping into certain post-2000 ramifications of psytrance such as full on psytrance, a pumping and uplifting subgenre that is considered less creative by many aficionados, and also by some of my interviewees.

that is left open by Baudrillard, although many of his analyses are primarily focused on the limiting potential of technologies. Computer-based virtual realities, for instance, only allow the exploration of the possibilities enabled by the program; consequently the interaction with the machine is necessarily reductionist and delusional, and human action is framed within the operational limits of the code (Baudrillard 1993b: 56-57). The widespread use of computers increasingly reduces the world into “pure calculation” because machines, unlike humans, are not designed to transcend the limits of their programming (Baudrillard 1993b: 52-53). The only exception proposed by Baudrillard is that of accidents or malfunctions such as computer viruses, which may ironically disrupt the hyper-rationality of the machine network. Although designed by humans – possibly with a rational aim such as accessing the resources of a computer or acquiring information – once deployed the virus proliferates on its own, endowed with the potential of creating disturbances on the system level. Elsewhere Baudrillard (2000: 75) identifies the “the object’s perverse strategy” or “revenge” as possible resistance to the over-rationalisation of the world and the human subject’s desire for control, exemplified in the virtual indeterminacy of particles (the impossibility of their accurate measurements by means of machines) in quantum physics.

The example of the computer virus suggests that even if the operator of the machine merely has access to a built-in dataset, similar to “a gambler [who] seeks to exhaust the permutations in a game of chance” (Baudrillard 1993b: 56), the engagement with ‘bad’ data or accidental outputs may expand the predetermined potential of the program. The exploitation and exploration of accidents had a highly influential role in EDM, with the rediscoveries of mis-designed and obsolete technologies impacting upon the evolution of the genre just as much as the embracing of the latest innovations (Butler 2006: 67-68). In Chapter 6.1 I addressed the accidental discovery of the acid sound in a dysfunctional bass line generator, the Roland TB-303, which not only determined the aesthetics of acid house and acid techno, but influenced the early development of Goa trance as well (de Ledesma 2010: 93). Another famous example is provided by one of the inventors of techno, Derrick May, who dubbed the Detroit sound “a complete mistake. It’s like George Clinton and Kraftwerk stuck in an elevator” (Sicko 2010: 11). Downstream from such ‘accidental’ beginnings, the more experimental ramifications of techno and psytrance are still engaged in the sonic explorations of such ‘flip sides’ of technologies, triggering the psychedelic modes evoked by my interviewees.

The disparate trajectories covered by these psychedelic explorations are reminiscent of

Baudrillard's distinction between 'fragment' and 'fractal' forms. As outlined by Gane (2010: 81), fragments and fractals are both characterised by transience and instantaneity, yet are opposed within the double spiral of symbolic (grounded in the relations and rituals of traditional cultures) and semiotic (networked) orders. The fragment, and its literary manifestation in the aphorism, is an attempt "to slim things down as much as possible" and "see them in detail, in a kind of elliptical void" (Baudrillard 2004: 22). This preference of scattered, aphoristic writing instead of large bodies of totalising ideas is characteristic of Baudrillard's later writing and is intended to close down the discursive or analytic potential of language and at the same time open up its poetic possibilities. It is a manifestation of thought that does not attempt to fill the surrounding void with discourse by any means; instead it isolates the fragment and "creates a whole symbolic space around it, a gap, a blank" (Baudrillard 2004: 26). The fragment becomes a symbolic singularity that may evade the totalising expansion of the semiotic order. Although techno resides in the semiotic, its differential repetition produces an inexorable intensification and mutation of (electronic) fragments, attracting attention to their surrounding 'gaps' or 'spaces' (Chapter 4.3). The medium takes a curious twist here and subtly slips from the grasp of simulation in spite of being woven from the same cloth; secrecy and indeterminacy carve their way through the hyperoperational structure. In Chapter 4.6 I argued that the genre operates within virtual environments yet also signals an engagement with aesthetic illusion, an aesthetic mode that Baudrillard (1997d: 18) traces back to traditional (symbolic) cultures.

Fractals, as opposed to fragments, belong to the networked system of simulacra and describe elements or particles that are capable of being absorbed into a system of totality, carrying the attributes of the whole as parts of a continuity (Gane 2010: 81-82). A contemporary example is the proliferation of the "fractal subject" (Nunes 2013) through social networks such as Facebook. Here identity is experienced through a data set integrated into the circulation and cross-pollination of News Feed items, where the order and presentation of updates is determined by an underlying algorithm or code. Subjects thus participate "in the production of a social world of information as fractal instances of data" (Nunes 2013: 13), as interconnected fractions of a relational database that is harvested by surveyors and advertisers. Whereas the incessant operation of the News Feed sustains the banality of quotidian virtualisations, in the more intensive ramifications of psytrance the condensation of information is designed to convey the widest range of surprising emotions and deliver a sensory overload that obscures signification, filling up all gaps with 'trippy' or 'abnormal' sonic material (Chapter 7.4). This

inverts the directive of day to day virtualisations: instead of configuring consumer reality by the naturalising processes of the media, the fractal is now plugged into an undefinable entity, the boundaries of which are continuously contested and reformulated. Within this vertiginous redefinition of the world, which is according to many respondents the musical equivalent of the LSD effect, the forms of the everyday are blurred, transformed, and ultimately pushed beyond their limits by the unexpected twists of abstract musical narratives.

Keeping these processes in mind, it is worthwhile to consider Baudrillard's preference for a thinking that poses a radical 'challenge' to the world. Such theory may share or admit the world's condition of vanishing into hyperoperational virtuality but is aimed to outpace the effects of this by "precipitating things towards their ends" (Baudrillard 2004: 75). Hence the sensitivity to extreme phenomena in Baudrillardian thinking, aimed at hastening the course of the world toward its final conditions. Indeed this may produce 'shortcuts' that precede their time: as mentioned earlier, the processes described in his 1980s texts such as *The Ecstasy of Communication* are becoming particularly relevant in the context of contemporary consumer culture and its virtualisation technologies. Such "thinking based on precipitation and precession" (Baudrillard 2004: 79) exploits the poetic function of language instead of restricting itself to the 'slower' form of causal thinking or analysis, and may develop into singularities: "mechanisms which no longer follow the normal course of things, but can go much more quickly" (Baudrillard 2004: 80). The symbolic dimension of aphoristic writing is one such example of language deprived of discourse yet endowed with poetic function. Gane (2010: 82) signals that Baudrillard discovers the primary site of singularity in the symbolic order, although he does develop an interest in fractals producing singularities.

Baudrillard (2004: 79) mentions that the development of such 'shortcuts' is possible not only in language but also in the visual arts and music. Techno and psytrance signal similar radical engagements with technologies by pushing them beyond their limits. By thinking the world through music, these genres have been exploring and psychedelising the virtual since their development in the 1980s, although following divergent trajectories: one traversing through fragments and the other through fractals. The use of chemical mediations signals a further dimension of this engagement, which I address in the following section.

10.3 Drug

A Vaccine against Reality

The focus groups confirm the significance of drugs in the dance floor experience: out of the 31 interviewees, only one, a veteran hardcore techno DJ, restricts his usage to alcohol, although admits using illegal substances a couple of times before. The recurring question of whether EDM can be appreciated the same way without ever trying drugs is often received with amusement; for instance, according to Magan, “you need to go find that person who is into electronic music and has never taken drugs” (individual interview, March 2013). In this section I first discuss the ways in which drug use enables the virtualisation of the self and subsequently address the different modes of consumption associated with the differences in music and environment.

Whereas my analyses are primarily centred on LSD (acid) and MDMA (ecstasy), other chemicals are also used at parties, sometimes in conjunction with one another. For instance, Ketamine, an anaesthetic drug that induces psychotomimetic effects including perceptual alterations and cognitive impairment in sub-anaesthetic doses (Passie et al. 2003), is consumed on its own or used to enhance other substances such as MDMA or mushrooms with its dissociative hallucinogenic effects. It is not my intention to provide a detailed classification of the possible combinations and symptoms of drug consumption at parties. Rather, I aim to explore some of the most emblematic ways drug use influences the dance floor experience by concentrating on the chemicals which were most frequently mentioned in the focus groups. LSD and MDMA are generally available and widely used in both scenes, and the effects of other substances are often defined in relation to these drugs by the respondents. In EDM their recreational history traces back to the early parties of the 1980s: LSD was prevalent in the early Chicago house scene (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 314), whereas the U.K. acid house scene was propelled primarily by MDMA, originally imported from Ibiza together with the music (Melechi 1993: 30). While both drugs may provide energy for uninterrupted partying for several hours, in the focus groups LSD is frequently praised for triggering ‘weird’ perceptual and cognitive distortions, whereas MDMA is primarily consumed for its empathy-inducing and milder hallucinogenic potential. Acid is often seen as directing attention to previously unnoticed phenomena and enhancing the appreciation of music, whereas MDMA is sometimes criticised for inducing unconditional empathy toward all elements of the environment and thus

diverting attention from the music to interpersonal relations. The assessment of these effects in Chapters 4.4 and 4.6 is based on interview fragments from the techno cohort, which are remarkably consistent with the accounts of the psytrance partygoers. One particularity of the psytrance focus groups was the inclusion of a probing question about spirituality and drugs, yet as discussed in Chapter 7.3, the answers were too heterogeneous to provide a coherent narrative.

The mediated immediacy of the dance floor is embedded in the synergistic fusion of drug and music. In the focus groups there is no consensus whether the drug carries the music, or if it is the other way around.

Sam: From the drugs and music interaction, I'd rather say ... I can listen to music without drugs. But if I'm on drugs, I need music. The music helps the drugs, rather than the other way around, you know. If we were here, we were all high, I would be like: why aren't they any fucking tunes going? [Others laugh.] So I think the question's back to front, it's not drugs helping the music, drugs are better with music.

Q: So is there an organic connection between the two?

Sophie, Justin: Yeah.

Pete: I think [it's] because what happens with drugs a lot of the time. Because it does take you away from the social norm, sometimes they make you more open, sometimes they make you more able of connect. Sometimes they make you less able to connect. In those moments where you're less able to connect, there's also music to connect with. Which you can also collectively experience and have a good time. So you know, it provides you with a different social way to connect with each other (focus group, December 2012).

As noted by Pete, this “different social way to connect” (different from the norm of everyday environments) is enabled by the media ecology of the dance floor. Similarly, in Chapter 9.2 Magan suggests that in the drug-infused whirl of the darkpsy dance floor “you are just becoming matter, and the music is the medium” (individual interview, March 2013). In other words, the partygoer is immersed in the fractal dance of particles building up the psytrance dance floor. While musical mediation at parties – and also the circulation of media signals in

day to day environments – originates from outside the physical limits of the body, the drug mediates internally by influencing neural activity, prescribing a deeper and more convincing immersion into one's virtual environment. The outcome is an experiential virtualisation of the body that is defined in Chapter 4.6 through the metaphor of the cybernetic avatar in a physical space.

The focus groups suggest that the enhancement of the music is not limited to the duration of the drug effect, and particularly acid improves the long term appreciation of certain sounds and structures. In psytrance, most respondents go as far as to suggest that the acid experience is essential for understanding or 'keeping up' with the music.

Vipin: Sure, I mean, to understand that kind of music, you do need to have taken [acid] at least once, [there are] very rare cases that you've never done anything, and you can relate to what's happening. Because, like I said, to understand all those sounds travelling at such a fast pace, I mean 150-160 BPM is not slow at any means, so to understand the whole story and, you know, look at everything, you do need to slow your brain down or heighten it.

Q: 'Cause I've heard it before, that you need at least one experience.

Vipin: Absolutely.

Sami: It takes 2 drops [of acid] to get to the zone. That's the borderline. Before the two drops, after the two drops [laughs].

Christina: And even if it was 10 years ago, you still have this.

Vipin: 'Cause you can relate to what's happening.

Q: It's like a vaccination [laughs].

Sami: Yeah, like a vaccination, exactly [everybody laughs].

Vipin: Yeah, you summed that up with that (focus group, December 2012).

Most interviewees also agree that psychedelics in particular enhance the appreciation of not just the music or the party but also of daily environments. For instance, Sophie does not simply claim that drugs such as DMT, LSD and MDMA are necessary to appreciate psytrance. She

broadens the picture and contends that they are necessary to appreciate life because the user may enjoy the long term benefits of the different perspective they provide (focus group, December 2012). This resonates with the exploration of the second life metaphor in Chapter 4.6, where it was suggested that drug use may lead to an opening up of everyday environments, which is conceived as maturation by partygoers. Consequently, the ‘vaccination’ of drugs becomes the antidote to (consumer) reality, with acid being particularly capable of corroding the simulated objectivity of consumer culture.

Within the Baudrillardian theoretical framework, the collapse of aesthetic distance at parties, which I discussed in Chapter 10.1, is facilitated by drugs: the aid of chemical mediation burns the transmission of the dance floor into the partygoer’s mind. Baudrillard (1997a: 20) provides a metaphor for virtual pleasure in which couples videotape each other to enable the real-time “conversion of the mediatized into the immediatized”. This image seems obsolete compared to the internalisation of the medium at parties, which actualises the proposition of humans having “swallowed [their] microphones and headsets” in their quest for virtualisation (Baudrillard 1997a: 19). Drugs mediate by altering the transmission of neural messages in the brain: more precisely, they are secondary mediators reprogramming the primary mediator of neurotransmission. This definition situates the effect in the wider context of operationalising or micro-processing human experience through virtualisation technologies:

The era of miniaturization, of remote control, and of a microprocessing of time, bodies, and pleasure has come. There is no longer an ideal principle of these things on a human scale. All that remains are miniaturized, concentrated and immediately available effects. This change of scale is discernable everywhere: the human body, our body, seems superfluous in its proper expanse, in the complexity and multiplicity of its organs, of its tissue and functions, because today everything is concentrated in the brain and the genetic code, which alone sum up the operational definition of being (Baudrillard 1988: 18).

The chemical model of drugs belongs to the same semiotic system as the genetic code, taking its share of the virtualisation of the world.⁵ Yet again, just as EDM producers engage with

⁵ The co-discoverer of the DNA sequence, Francis Crick was an occasional LSD user, although contrary to a rumour appearing in the British press after his death, biographical evidence suggests that he was not high during the discovery of the double helix (Ridley 2006: 156-157).

technologies beyond their intended operation (Chapter 10.2), LSD and MDMA signal a similar diversion from pharmaceuticals (applied to sustain the healthy model of the body) to recreational drugs (applied as virtualisation technologies to ‘abnormalise’ the body), coalescing into another layer of the dance floor aimed at the destabilisation of simulation from within the system.

On the macro level of social processes Baudrillard (2002: 97) metaphorically defines recreational drugs as antibodies that are released by the social body in response to the threat of its hyperoperationalisation (Chapter 3.3). Within this biomedical model of the social, drugs emerge as a lesser of two evils: the temporary disturbance of reality through the anomalous accident provoked by drugs expels the devastating effect of totalitarian rationalisation, just as “human beings gain effective protection from madness by resorting to neurosis” (Baudrillard 2002: 99).⁶ When reality is increasingly pervaded by simulation, so is its antibody, leading to an internal clash within the system: drugs question the sovereignty of the code as an “anomaly becoming institutionalized” (Baudrillard 2002: 100), one which is still repressed in most dominant medical and governmental discourses. This tension between drugs and reality, which was discussed in more details in Chapter 3.3, is exploited by the simulations of techno and psytrance, where chemicals become strategic components of dance floors exploring the accidental ruptures in the smooth fusion of the human/machine interface. With technology pushed beyond its limits, the biomedical model is disturbed, and in the long term the vaccination may disrupt the naturalising processes of consumer culture (Chapter 4.6). Indeed, it is acknowledged that particularly the consumption of psychedelics such as LSD may raise awareness to the cultural conditioning of reality and lead to insightful reflections (Brandt and Passie 2012: 539).

Patterns of Consumption

In the remainder of this section I address certain genre-specific differences in drug consumption based on the fieldwork findings. The diagrams below (explained in more details in Chapters 4.4 and 7.2) compare the frequencies of the various substances discussed in the two cohorts, ranked according to the number of occurrences.

⁶ Early 1950s LSD researchers concluded that the drug induces temporary psychosis (Novak 1997: 90-91).

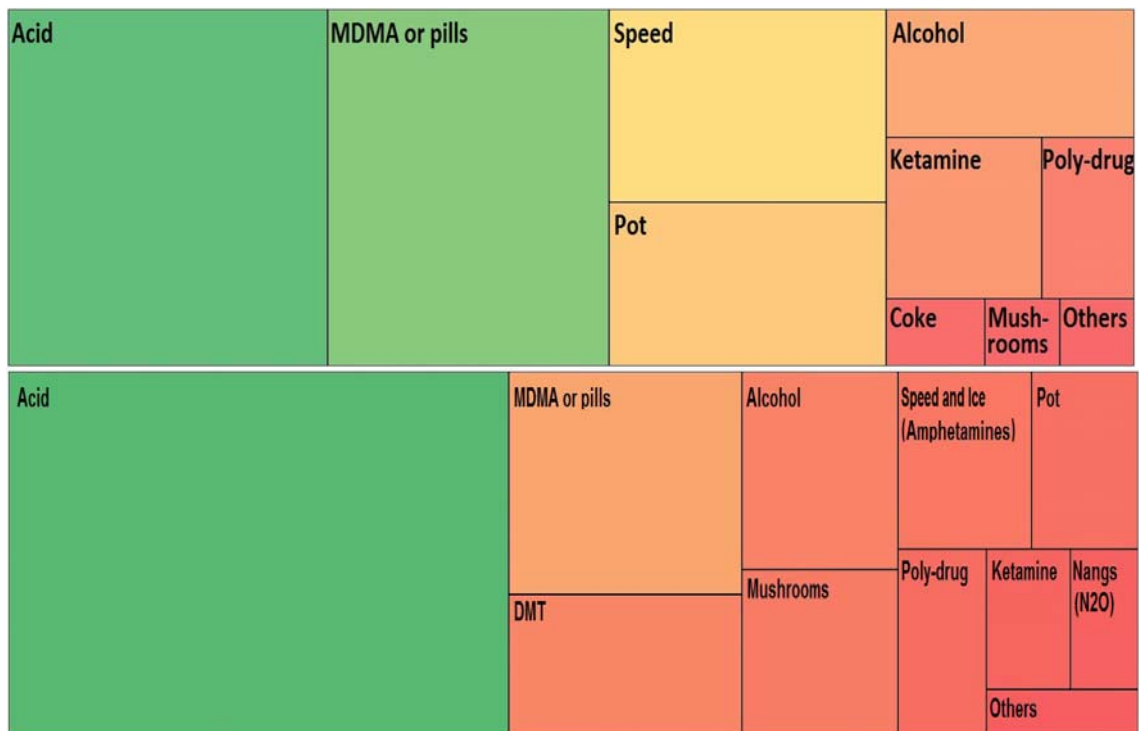


Figure 19: Drug frequencies; techno (above) and psytrance (below)

Acid and MDMA are the two most frequently discussed drugs in both groups, yet the psytrance results are strongly skewed toward (hallucinogenic) psychedelic drugs, most notably acid. Moreover, of the five most discussed drugs in the psytrance cohort, three are psychedelic (acid, DMT and mushrooms) as opposed to acid being the only psychedelic drug to reach the techno ‘top five’ (MDMA, which comes up second in both cohorts, is an empathogen with only mild hallucinogenic qualities and is therefore not considered psychedelic by most respondents, whose terminology I follow). This shift in preferences resonates with the general opinion of most psytrance respondents that the psychedelic experience is fundamental for understanding psytrance. Accordingly, in Chapter 7.5 I indicated that acid and psytrance seem to be woven from the same cloth, based on the recurring opinions that either the former helps to ‘keep up’ with the particularities of the latter or that the latter is optimised for the former.

Although techno is not seen as specifically acid-oriented as psytrance, the participants within the techno cohort share the general views that acid triggers synaesthetic immersion into the music in terms of a personal ‘journey’ and enhances appreciation of the music even after the diminishing of its effects. However, psytrance respondents are more likely to describe dramatic changes in what is heard in the music while on acid. This can be derived to musical differences: whereas in techno the mind is allowed to wander within an indeterminate void that fluctuates around the differential repetition of minimalist fragments, psytrance bombards

the dance floor with an inescapable density of sounds, increasing the complexity of the drug/music medium. The drug in turn magnifies the resolution of each fractal layer of sounds, bringing out even more nuances of their deterministic chaos, with certain interviewees evoking remarkable convolutions of auditory hallucinations. In the techno cohort such hallucinatory profusion is only mentioned in the acid techno focus group, where it is restricted to the acid sound of the Roland TB-303, the squelchy resonance of which was also influential, as mentioned earlier, in the early development of Goa trance.⁷

A distinctive particularity of techno among other genres lies in its strong focus on percussion and rhythm, as well as its inextricable fusion of musical texture with rhythmic and metrical processes (Chapter 4.1). The relentless progression of low, sometimes inaudible frequencies is of particular importance here, with some of the interviewees admitting of getting “addicted to bass” (focus group, December 2012).

Curtis: Yeah, I think [techno is] one of the most easily danceable styles of music, I mean from my perspective anyway. It depends on the attitude of the people, you know, look, it owes to the drug culture around it as well, like people, you know, generally take drugs when they go to these kind of gigs as well, it becomes also another catalyst for movement and dancing (focus group, July 2012).

Curtis suggests that the rhythmic nature of techno triggers instant physical responses in the audience, particularly when the involvement with the music is enhanced by drugs such as MDMA. This rhythmic imperative is less accentuated in psytrance even if both genres are driven by similar four-to-the-floor bass lines. Psytrance is more likely to fascinate its advanced listeners with its rich, kaleidoscopic textures in which, in the worlds of Sophie, “lots of trippy things [are] going on” (focus group, December 2012), although as de Ledesma (2010: 94) points out, the genre does incorporate less cinematic and more rhythmic subgenres as well.

Finally, not forgetting that drugs are widely available in both Melbourne scenes, and

⁷ A psytrance/techno crossover would thus lie somewhere between acid techno and 303-infused early Goa trance. Such was the forerunner of Goa trance in the early 1990s, exemplified in Hardfloor’s famous 1992 track “Acperience 1” that

moves away from the original [house/techno] minimalism by multi-tracking and looping the modulating squelching acid sequences to produce ornate sonic shapes, exaggerating its psychedelic emotion into an infinite, yet tightly arranged, mirage (Rietveld 2010: 80-81).

The 303 usage in this particular track is praised in the acid techno focus group as well.

making no claim to statistical validity, the participant observation and the focus groups suggest that psytrance parties are more drug-oriented. Baniya, for instance, promptly states that “[at] psytrance parties basically you are so fucked up on drugs and stuff; so it gets you to the journey, you know” (focus group, August 2012), whereas other psytrance respondents at the very least assert that the acid experience is essential in ‘understanding’ the music (LSD’s synaesthetic/cinematic enhancement of psytrance music could be compared to the use of 3D glasses in appropriate 3D cinemas). The techno respondents are somewhat less focused on this thread, with many propagating the idea of losing just bits of control (Chapter 4.5), subordinating the hedonistic aspect of drug use to the musical integrity of the scene and suggesting that punters should visit parties for the music in the first place. At the same time, these respondents do take drugs, which renders the discussion rather ambiguous. Yet the opportunity for getting more ‘wasted’ at psytrance parties is encouraged by the environment, with outdoor festivals being particularly suitable for experimenting with psychedelics.

The different approaches adopted in the two scenes are further explored in the following section through the comparison of environments and crowds.

10.4 Environment and Crowd

Residual Environments

Techno parties benefit from the atmosphere of post-industrial urban spaces, while psytrance festivals are often held outdoor, in the bush. In the following I compare these characteristic environments by revisiting the concepts of technological reappropriation and symbolic waste. These environments are not the only contexts for techno and psytrance parties – the former may be held in more polished environments and the latter in city clubs – but are still considered in the focus groups ‘prototypical’ or ideal for mediating the vibe.

Besides shaping the consumption of the music, these environments had great influence on the production of the music already during the early development of the genres. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Detroit techno emerged in a city shattered by economic crisis, where the dystopic perception of post-industrial reality infiltrated the aesthetics of the genre, for instance in its use of industrial noises, repetitive structures and retrofitted equipments (Pope 2011: 37). A similar process is evoked by Lucas in the historical context of Australian hardcore techno:

Lucas: Take Nasenbluten, an Australian hardcore band. They come from one of the most industrialised towns in Australia. From Newcastle, New South Wales. So they are surrounded by massive machineries, crunching coal and building steel. That's why they're just so abrasive and hard, and you can really tell the difference between that, and say Goa trance, where it's very finely produced and very clean, and it's like: let's all go tripping on the beach. Whereas industrial hardcore is like: here's the sound of a drill, cut with this (focus group, January 2012).

Hardcore techno is characterised by high BPM and harsh sonic aesthetics (McLeod 2001: 64), with a strong industrial influence that was also present in the second generation of Detroit techno (Reynolds 1999: 228). Nasenbluten, a collective of three hardcore techno DJs, were active from 1992 to 2001, a period when Newcastle's industrial reputation was already shattered, culminating in the final shutdown of its steelworks in 1999, which is possibly the largest deindustrialisation event in Australian history (Lewer 2013: 642). As a consequence of industrial restructuring, Newcastle had been stigmatised as 'problem city' from the 1980s; however, gentrifiers opposed this discourse by reimagining it as the 'promise city' of Australia (Rofe 2004). Where the discourse of gentrification can be considered post-industrial in the sense that it invents a positive and marketable identity through the aggressive erasure of the industrial heritage (Rofe 2004: 199), techno is post-industrial in a very different way. Instead of abandoning the ruins it interacts with the technological afterlife, and its Detroit manifestation in particular embraces dystopia rather than utopia (Pope 2011: 26).

Lucas also opposes the abrasive sonic aesthetics of hardcore techno with the more polished sound of Goa trance, suggesting that the development of the latter was influenced by its characteristic natural environment: the beaches of Goa (with the phrase "let's all go tripping on the beach" Lucas also suggests LSD use as another influence). Even though Goa trance, the precursor of psytrance, was not unaffected by industrial influences in its formative years (Rietveld 2010: 75), the music played on the beaches of 1990s Goa certainly fell very far from hardcore.⁸ Different contexts thus influence the formation of different sonic aesthetics, and it should also be mentioned that the Indian origin of psytrance is reflected in the exotic and orientalist sound of Goa trance during its mid-1990s crystallisation into a distinct EDM genre (Elliott 2010: 34).

⁸ De Ledesma (2010: 94) notes that it was not until the late 1990s when the musical descendants of Goa trance mutated rhizomatically toward various directions including darker and noisier trajectories.

At parties these original (industrial and natural) contexts haunt the vibe in particular ways. In Chapters 5.3 and 6.2 I discussed the techno party and its historical repurposing of post-industrial urban spaces as an engagement with a technological afterlife that can be traced back through Detroit techno to the Afrofuturist rediscoveries of “ghostly” mediums (Zuberi 2007: 286). As shown in Chapters 8.3 and 8.4, in psytrance nature is revisited, albeit neither in terms of romanticising reconciliation nor its industrial exploitation, but through its ironic reconfiguration where the Victorian bush provides an otherworldly context for encountering symbolic waste (Douglas 1966, Hawkins 2006). If the industrial wasteland is inorganic, relatively recent and within city limits, nature is organic, ancient and external to the city. Yet both are residual to urban life and their application extends beyond the nature/construct dichotomy because they circulate in the virtual transmission of the electronic dance floor as ghostly remains: either as defunct framework of production or as bygone context of daily human life.

In psytrance, a culture shaped by diverse and often contested discourses (St John 2012: 3), a tension can be found between romanticising discourses – employed for instance by the organisers of certain Victorian festivals propagating a return to a primordial condition (Luckman 2003: 322) – and the ironic reconfiguration of nature carried out on the dance floors. From the perspective of my research, waste is precious material, not in terms of its exchange value but the ‘misuse value’ of its indeterminate potentiality (Hawkins 2006: 132) that may evade simulation. Any excavation of its original functions reintegrates it into a positive system of codes: such would be the imaginary return to a harmony with Mother Nature (which may or may not be marketed by psytrance festivals), and such is the recycling of waste in Baudrillard’s hyperreal world.

Everywhere today one must recycle waste, and the dreams, the phantasms, the historical, fairylike, legendary imaginary of children and adults is a waste product, the first great toxic excrement of a hyperreal civilization. On a mental level, Disneyland is the prototype of this new function. But all the sexual, psychic, somatic recycling institutes, which proliferate in California, belong to the same order. People no longer look at each other, but there are institutes for that. They no longer touch each other, but there is contactotherapy. They no longer walk, but they go jogging, etc. Everywhere one recycles lost faculties, or lost bodies, or lost sociality, or the lost taste for food. One reinvents penury, asceticism, vanished savage naturalness: natural food, health food, yoga (Baudrillard 1994a: 13).

In Baudrillard's (1994b: 74-75) analysis a similar logic applies to the recovery, authentication and exhibition of archaeological relics, which are fetishised for provoking hallucinations of a lost and desired origin. The party, however, may move beyond this model of operational recycling and invert the logic of Disneyland through a different engagement with waste: one that is not productive but disruptive; one that does not remodel the distant origin but further distorts it. Moreover, the recycling of repressed imaginaries in Disneyland can be seen as a false alibi for sustaining the fiction that reality is still intact in California, with adults playing the child to deter the attention from their true childishness (Baudrillard 1994a: 12-13). Contrary to this, the vaccination of party drugs is the long-term antidote to the fiction of objective reality sustained by simulations (Chapter 10.3), and the disruptive drug experience is retrospectively embraced in the everyday, particularly through the ongoing 'addiction' to the music that potentially triggers flashbacks.

The comparison with Disneyland suggests that, differences aside, techno and psytrance parties do share certain functions with amusement parks in consumer culture. According to Harley (2000: 85), the amusement park reflects on the dangers associated with the widespread use of technologies by injecting the "imagination of disaster" into its thrilling rides. In Chapter 6 I described the immersive experience of the acid techno party through the metaphorical image of the roller coaster ride, comparing the squat party with a derelict amusement park centred on this single, ghostly attraction. The design of roller coasters and similar machines allows the intensive simulation of danger with the minimisation of actual risks, fitting into a wider culture of 'riskless risk' that repackages risk into the predictable abstractions of insurance policies, computer games and moral panics (Harley 2000: 86-87). The same culture of riskless risk encompasses recreational drug use (and its associated moral panics), although with psychedelics such as LSD the course of the experience can be unpredictable. Finally, the kinaesthetic effects of the thrilling ride return in the experiences of immersive media products framing consumer realities, with both mobilising a wide range of effects in the sensual realms while not leading anywhere in physical space (Harley 2000: 93). In Chapter 8.3 I discussed a similar feedback in the context of the psytrance festival, which is situated on the edge of the city yet twists back into the heart of consumer culture through its overdrive of mediations.

Such common grounds with amusement parks are approached by techno and psytrance in different ways. Techno parties are 'undetected' located within the city (Chapter 5.3), and the techno dance floor is condensed into a black hole impregnated with austere visual effects.

Psytrance is exploding into colourful, weekend-long festivals located at the edge of urban establishments, incorporating carnivalesque activities on and around the dance floor, as well as a market area, workshops and other attractions at larger events. A similar difference is evident in the use of backdrops and decorations. Techno parties are often held within the barren walls of post-industrial spaces or similar no-frills environments facilitating immersion into the music. Doofs commonly employ a range of ‘trippy’ and fantastic decorations, UV backdrops, fractal-like structures and surprising installations in order to ‘psychedelicise’ the vibe (Chapter 7.3).

The same contrast between minimalism and ornamentality returns in the design of promotional flyers used by organisers to reach their crowds within the local ‘micro-media’ (Thornton 1996: 116-117). The figures on the following pages present the flyers of the techno and psytrance parties I visited during the participant observation.⁹ I use electronic versions captured from Facebook event pages (or better resolution copies from internet forums) because these public sites are easily accessible and widely used by audiences.

Within the techno collection the design is more functional and more focused on the listing of performers, promoters and other relevant information. The non-textual elements are restricted to geometrical shapes and logos, or sometimes the photos of the headliners. The dominant colour is black or grey, with the exception of the two flyers in the upper right and the lower right corners, which mainly promote minimal techno/tech-house headliners. The psytrance collection is not restrained at all in its use of decorations, trying to impress the viewer with whirling shapes, mystical or fairy-tale-like environments, natural forms and fractal-like patterns. The only exception is the simple flyer in the lower-left corner featuring bottles and colourful, humanoid bottle-openers promoting a very small (DIY) doof called The Invasion of the Bottle Openers. The flyers are less focused on textual information and more engaged in eye-catching, vivid and colourful presentation (at psytrance parties I occasionally encountered paper-based flyers where the visibility of the text was jeopardised by the ornamentality of the design). It is interesting to note that most psytrance artists use pseudonyms – which are often deliberately ‘trippy’ – whereas techno performers tend to keep their real names.

⁹ From the techno collection I deliberately left out the 2011 event Red Bull Music Academy: Notions of Sonic Space, a one-day festival featuring DJ sets, multimedia performances and artist talks from various EDM genres including Detroit techno. While my participant observation was focused on the Detroit techno performances and talks, the flyer reflects the interdisciplinary and audiovisual nature of the event and is thus less relevant for this collection.



Figure 20: Techno Flyers



Figure 21: Psytrance Flyers

Crowds and Non-crowds

Given the scarcity of subcultural markers in techno, the remainder of this section is primarily focused on a short evaluation of psytrance crowds, outlining some of the behavioural and dress codes that were mentioned in the focus groups. As discussed in Chapter 5, techno crowds are remarkably ‘unspectacular’, and the dance floor is characterised by a relative lack of punter interactions, with dancers being connected with each other mainly through the music. James contrasts this with live music and calls it a “real selfish experience”:

James: Yeah, ‘cause for the band thing, I guess, it's kind of like a collectivist experience, where I'm there experiencing this thing with the rest of the crowd, but for techno, I find, it's [a] real selfish experience. When I go there, sometimes I shut off, close my eyes or go off in the corner, it's just ... I'm on my own, kind of experiencing it personally (focus group, October 2011).

At doofs, such introversion could happen especially at night, often when more intensive subgenres are played such as darkpsy.

The focus groups suggest that psytrance partygoers find it more important to define their scene as a community. Indeed, the formation of community bonds is highly encouraged by the relaxed outdoor environment and the extended duration of the festivals. Darkpsy producer/organiser Vipin describes the scene as generally non-conventional, yet does not prescribe any ideology or dress code:

Vipin: [The scene is] not conventional for sure. I mean there's some, a lot of people say that, you know, you should have seen hardship or some sort of pain or some sort of really strong experience, whether it's positive or negative or spiritual in any aspect, but yeah, it kind of goes hand in hand, [so] you can relate to this kind of music. . . . Look, it comes on to your belief and your connection with some like-minded people. You don't have to be a certain type of person with a certain type of appearance to like that kind of music or be in the scene. I mean, we're on a Friday, if you called me any other day, I'd come to your house wearing a suit and a tie, ‘cause that's what I wear at work, you know. It has nothing to do with how I look, or what kind of ideologies I have, or things like this. For me it's about the music, you know, and just because I like the music, it doesn't mean that I have to be a certain kind of person to like the music (focus group, December 2012).

As a producer, Vipin identifies the music as the driving force behind the scene, suggesting that certain strong experiences, which may be traced to various reasons, may help relating to psytrance music. The evaluation of interview fragments in Chapter 8.2 proposed a range of other drives or goals such as socialising, camping, getting ‘trashed’ in the outdoors, encountering a ‘different planet’ or experiencing spirituality, with the common denominator being music and drug consumption. In terms of identification, most respondents define themselves as ‘doofers’, while acknowledging the presence of ‘hippies’ and inconsiderate ‘bogans’ at parties (Chapter 8.2 and 8.4).

It is sometimes mentioned that the scene promotes certain ‘loose’ ideals such as non-judgementalism and environmentalism. One category of people generally appreciated by the respondents are, in the words of Sabbena, “the actual trippers”, who are closer to the psychedelic vibe related to acid consumption, as opposed to being “just [mainstream] clubbers” (focus group, August 2012). The latter are sometimes associated with ‘dickheads’, as well as excessive speed or ice consumers who would destroy the vibe (the tolerance is thus not extended to everyone, signalling a relatively close-knit community of regular partygoers). A similar differentiation of the psytrance scene from mainstream crowds was revealed during my fieldwork in the Czech Republic (Vitos 2012).

Finally, certain fashion elements such as neo-hippie styles, ‘pixie’ clothes or tribal outfits, are undoubtedly widespread at parties. While these also frequently appear at international festivals, a distinctive element of the Australian scene is, according to Sophie, that people often dress up in a wide range of hilarious costumes (focus group, December 2012). This contributes to the convivial atmosphere, particularly during the day, which differentiates the party, according to Justin, from being just “a meat market, or people just sort of dancing like robots” (focus group, December 2012). From an outsider perspective, such “dancing like robots” can be the main characteristic of a techno crowd immersed in the “real selfish experience” evoked earlier by James (focus group, October 2011). Yet on a techno dance floor dressing up or acting out seems trivial compared to the basic principle of belonging and dancing. The unspectacularity of this attachment defines a non-crowd among which any stylistic or ideological affiliation can be described as “superficial information”:

Curtis: [The crowd is there] for the music, but the music is to dance, it's dance music, you know. So if people are actually dancing, it becomes almost like this, this kind of collective kind of energy that is shared, which I think makes a good party, you know, that's one of the most

important ingredients. The rest is superficial information, like what kind of people are there, how they're dressed, you know. Whether or not they are, you know, from one place or another, is secondary for me (focus group, July 2012).

10.5 Conclusion: Vibe

At EDM parties music, drug and environment are adapted to each other in the manipulation of a vibe that is mediated yet unrecordable (it recedes from the grasp of external audio-visual equipments because the last determinant process of chemical mediation takes place within the human brain) and poses a challenge to analytical transposition (St John 2013). This chapter attempted to overcome this challenge through the application of an interpretive methodology in the comparative evaluation of mediations, revealing consistencies and differences within the two genres and scenes.

Similar to other carnivalesque institutions of consumer culture (Featherstone 1991: 22) such as amusement parks, techno and psytrance offer release from day to day realities by immersing the participants into virtual environments. Different to amusement parks, the duration of the 'attraction' is extended at parties, and the 'vaccination' of the drug/music medium surpasses and disrupts everyday virtualisations. By driving technologies into their excesses, and particularly through the creative engagement with malfunctions and accidents, parties reverse the hyperoperational model of the world, and delineate a buffer zone within the system where simulation may be disturbed or 'psychedelicised'. The aesthetic trajectories of techno and psytrance are contrasting: one is intensive, the other extensive; one is situated within the city, the other leaves its limits; one is minimalist, the other ornamental; one is unspectacular, the other offers a range of styles; one is black, the other colourful; one is fragment, the other fractal. At the same time, both are preoccupied with the same political project that can be formulated as follows: in an increasingly virtualised world, "where you can go as fast as you like, to the wildest extremes, without really going anywhere at all . . . the political dimension [is] how to ride this gravity-defying global network and still manage to escape its orbit" (Harley 2000: 93).

This tension is an implicit driving force behind Baudrillardian theory. Some of his analyses deal with it explicitly: operationalisation and surveillance processes may be reversed, for instance, through the 'revenge' of the object (Baudrillard 2000: 75), by turning to disguise

and illusion (Baudrillard 1988: 74-75) or through accidents and anomalies (Baudrillard 1993b: 53). Certain branches of science fiction, in which the rules of reality are abolished, may also reframe the operational model of the world (Baudrillard 1994a: 118). Such is J.G. Ballard's (1973) controversial novel *Crash*, in which a contemporary cult centred on the simulation of car accidents develops sexual interest in the scars produced on human and machine bodies. By defining the accident as the zone of possibilities around which the world revolves, *Crash* generates a hyper-functional machine without dysfunction, which devours its own rationality "through a sort of reversal of the mass-mediated substance (neon, concrete, car, erotic machinery)" (Baudrillard 1994a: 119). Similarly, through their hijacking of mediations, techno and psytrance events explore the accidental possibilities of human/machine interfaces.

Baudrillard (1997b) considers two ways of evading or destabilising operational reality: through direct engagement with the 'radical' illusion of the world as in symbolic rituals; and through the excessiveness of semiotic production. The actualisation of the psychedelic mode in techno and psytrance follows two similar trajectories, which were outlined through the concepts of fragments and fractals in Chapter 10.2. Techno embraces an austere functionalism in its technological reappropriation as opposed to the nostalgic emergence of "soft primitive" iconographies of tribal unity at certain psytrance festivals (St John 2012: 205-206); yet ironically it is still techno that operates through fragments, which for Baudrillard reside in the symbolic domain, contrary to the fractal (semiotic) structure of psytrance. This may signal that certain discourses of the scenes are floating signifiers – and additionally it problematises the delineation of symbolic and semiotic modes in this context. Indeed, Merrin (2005: 41-42) signals that in Baudrillardian theory the symbolic mode of relations (which is gradually assimilated by the semiotic system) provides a shaky critical ground against the simulacrum because it is itself a simulacrum based on anthropological theory reliant on secondary sources. Drawing on this argument, my work explores the disruptive potential of fragments and fractals within the virtual environments of EDM without tracing this back to the historical conditions of 'symbolic societies'. Techno and psytrance parties thus demonstrate authentic ways of dealing with unauthenticity without rejoining a traditional (ritual) condition. This implies that the simulacrum is potent enough to operate on its own and thus "expose the limitations of the symbolic as opposing force" (Merrin 2005: 42), expelling the historical nostalgia towards anthropological tribes – which may conceal a fascination with the Western ideal of the "good savage" (Lyotard 1993: 106) – from this reading of Baudrillardian reversibility.

11. Conclusion: Theoretical Relevance and Future Considerations

In Chapter 10 I provided an extended summary of my findings, reconciling them with my broader theoretical framework. The endpoint of my analyses, encapsulated in the Conclusion of Chapter 10, reflects on the reappropriation of technologies in the exploration of two divergent aesthetic trajectories within the virtualised environments of EDM dance floors. In terms of the Baudrillardian theoretical framework adopted in this thesis, techno and psytrance are engaged in the intensification and reversal of simulation processes, exploring anomalous patterns in the smooth fusion of the human/machine interface. By drilling new pathways into the virtual, the dance floors addressed in my project demonstrate authentic ways of dealing with unauthenticity without a nostalgic longing for the ‘symbolic’ relations of traditional societies. The following section addresses the theoretical relevance and interdisciplinary applicability of my results.

11.1 Relevance for EDM and Popular Music Studies

My project paves new ground in EDM and popular music studies by focusing on the mediating processes of electronic dance floors through the in-depth, qualitative comparison of two relatively small-scale EDM scenes in Melbourne. The careful analysis and genre-specific differentiation of mediations is a necessary addition to this field. My investigations are based on primary data collected through ethnographic fieldwork involving participant observation and interviewing, commensurate with previous qualitative research of music scenes. Although the small sample size of 31 interlocutors limits the statistical generalisability of my results, during the fieldwork I aimed and managed to encounter highly articulate respondents who provided rich details about the studied phenomena.¹ The participant observation revealed additional details and added greater depth to my explorations of these hidden populations. My fieldwork also constitutes a direct response to Hennion’s (2003) call for an empirically

¹ The coding list in Appendix 1.2 demonstrates the wide range of topics covered in the focus groups and individual interviews.

grounded investigation of the mediations from which the appreciation of music emerges.

The location of my research is of particular relevance. While Melbourne is a cosmopolitan city, widely marketed as the cultural capital of Australia (Pini, McDonald and Mayes 2012: 147) and firmly plugged into transnational networks, it is also geographically isolated from the rest of the world. As a consequence, the EDM scenes in the study are relatively small but thriving, providing an excellent ‘laboratory’ for qualitative research and also for tracing global influences arriving through transnational networks. The findings of the techno research component reveal the operations of an ‘unspectacular’, post-rave EDM scene, which revisits certain Detroit sensibilities addressed in the literature such as the ‘undetectability’ (Eshun 1998: 120) of techno. In the study of psytrance, my emphasis on the simulated construction of the vibe provides an alternative to the more widespread discourse focused on spirituality/religion, developing the findings of my earlier research in the Czech Republic (Vitos 2010). The investigation of the Melbourne scenes demonstrate continuity and change with regard to the early history of both genres, signalling that difficult socio-economic conditions (as in the case of Detroit) or middle-class disenchantment (which influenced the development of Goa trance) are not necessary preconditions for the development of profound and formative experiences on the dance floor.

Melbourne has been ranked as the world’s most liveable city in the global liveability report of the EIU (Economist Intelligence Unit) consecutively during the three years that included my fieldwork and the writing up of my thesis (Dow 2013). As indicated by this leading position within the global simulation network, the city provides a particularly suitable context for research that draws on Baudrillard’s discussions of consumer culture.² At the surface, Melbourne lives out the Baudrillardian simulation in its polished image of a comfortable, affluent society. Yet digging under the surface and exploring the alternative spaces that reside in its heart and on its periphery, the participant observer may identify underground music scenes that delve beyond this image through the hijacking of mediations and repurposing of environments.

² In Baudrillardian theory, confirmatory data analysis methods such as the ones used in the EIU report provide particularly effective channels for the operation of simulation.

11.2 Relevance for Media Studies

In the theoretical considerations of Chapter 3 I argued that the development of EDM provides a striking analogy to simulation, one that has been touched in works such as Redhead's (1993a) edited volume on early U.K. raves, and one that calls for more thorough exploration. It should also be noted that in the discussion of Melbourne scenes I moved from the concept of simulation towards the related concept of the virtual. As indicated by Poster (2001: 133-135), the virtual appears in Baudrillard's writing from the 1990s, first used interchangeably with simulation and gradually connoting an intensification or perfection of simulation through the widespread use of increasingly more immersive environments that require additional human interaction, signalling a move from passive media spectacle toward interactive immersion. The critical use of these concepts in my discussions draws attention to the relations between the media ecology – not in the environmentalist, but rather in the post-structuralist sense of the term (Fuller 2005: 4-5) – of the dance floor and the mediations of everyday life. This concern opens up my research to the field of media studies, in particular to its recent revisiting of Baudrillard's concepts (Merrin 2005, Fuller and Goffey 2009, Wise 2013).

Merrin (2005: 154-157) indicates that Baudrillardian theory makes a welcome contribution to media studies considering, among others, its McLuhanist emphasis of form over content in the theories of the simulacrum and virtuality, its investigation of the tension between the symbolic and semiotic mode of relations, and the applicability of his concepts to contemporary media phenomena. My work engages with these concerns in the context of dance floor technologies that are applied outside and within the human body, where the chemical mediation of drugs enables the virtualisation of the self. The dance floor attempts to extend the operational space of the Baudrillardian virtual through a creative engagement with accidents or anomalies that can be traced to the early history of EDM. While being reliant on the deliberate arrangements of the subject, the vibe exploits the potential reversal of simulation that is present in Baudrillard's discussions of accidents, viruses and the 'strategies' of the object.

This reversibility of the object can be of particular relevance for media studies. For instance, Fuller and Goffey (2009) call for media research focusing not on representations but on the Machiavellian capabilities of certain electronic media objects – such as manipulative website algorithms, internet bots and spamming programs – to influence or deceive human

subjects.³ It should also be emphasised that my proposed model of the dance floor is not based on resistance (against the hegemony of the system) but on acceleration (of the system). As proposed by Merrin (2005: 159), Baudrillard's challenging theoretical proposition of the dissolution of the real should be returned not by denying it, and thus losing its critical advantage, but by escalating it. By exploring the complexities of the simulacrum, my project constitutes one such attempt to develop and move beyond the Baudrillardian model, which, as Merrin (2005: 42) suggests, "is most vulnerable to a critique based not on the real, as that is precisely what he himself defends, but instead on the simulacrum".

A final relevance of my project relies on its empirical exploration of Baudrillard's concepts. The heavily virtualised, immersive environments of EDM parties provide a particularly good fit for Baudrillardian theory, and the history of EDM signals sophisticated (musical) engagements with several of its key concerns, such as the tension between copy and original, the emphasis of form over content and the accident. While Baudrillard propagates a 'radical thought' that is deliberately anti-empiricist and nonrepresentational, his theoretical perspective is reconciled with my methodological agenda. My interviews are primarily focused on form (technology) instead of content (representation); following Hennion (2001: 5), my main concern is not with the determinisms or beliefs of participants, but their ways of achieving aesthetic pleasure and their perceptions of the applied mediating processes.⁴

By drawing on insider accounts of dance floor mediations, I have explored interfaces that emerge in the blurred boundaries between subjects and media objects, tracing possible ways of rerouting the Baudrillardian 'strategies' of the object within such virtualisations of the self. These engagements allow a thinking of the world through music that resonates with Baudrillard's (2004: 75) preference for a theory that may share the world's vanishing into virtuality but is aimed at outpacing its effects. Further research of EDM media ecologies may reveal further machinations aimed at such accelerations.

³ Drawing a parallel between natural (human) language and formal (machine) language, Fuller and Goffey focus on the manipulative techniques of electronic media that are akin to the Sophist use of the language in ancient Greece, described as an exploitation of "the 'semiurgical' quality of language and the seething cauldron of affective charge it contained to make and remake our relations to the world" (Fuller and Goffey 2009: 145).

⁴ The focus group results in the psytrance cohort in particular signal that while different interpretations and discourses may coexist within the same scene, consumption patterns are remarkably similar and may help dealing with the plurality of these discourses.

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Kerosene Club. 2006. 'Synthesized Garbage' in Various – Generator Operator Destroyer, Temple Twister Records.

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Rother, Anthony. 2008. 'Welcome to My Laboratory' in My Name Is Beuys Von Telekraft, Telekraft Recordings.

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Bush Mechanics. 1998. Director: Francis Jupurrula Kelly. Warlpiri Media Association (aired on ABC Television Australia in 2001).

Ghostbusters. 1984. Director: Reitman, Iva. Black Rhino Productions.

Videodrome. 1983. Director: David Cronenberg. Canadian Film Development Corporation.

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. Director: Stuart, Mel. 1971. Warner Bros.

Appendix 1. Interview Details

1.1 Participant Lists

Techno Interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Main involvement in the scene	Cohort
Andrew	25	male	partygoer and amateur DJ	focus group 1
Christina	28	female	partygoer	focus group 1
James	24	male	partygoer and amateur VJ	focus group 1
Stan	22	male	partygoer	focus group 1
Jack	24	male	partygoer	focus group 2
Hugh	23	male	partygoer	focus group 2
Stuart	23	male	partygoer and journalist	focus group 2
Cooper	35	male	DJ and organiser	focus group 3
Jake	28	male	DJ/producer and organiser	focus group 3
Lily	23	female	partygoer	focus group 3
Lucas	42	male	DJ and organiser	focus group 3
Sophie	34	female	partygoer and DJ	focus group 3
Curtis	31	male	partygoer and amateur DJ/producer	focus group 4
Susan	26	female	partygoer	focus group 4
Thomas	25	male	partygoer	focus group 4

Average age: 27.5; 4 females, 11 males.

Psytrance Interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Main involvement in the scene	Cohort
John	27	male	partygoer and amateur DJ/organiser	focus group 1
Jimmy	22	male	partygoer and amateur DJ/organiser	focus group 1
Maria	27	female	partygoer	focus group 1
Rick	23	male	partygoer and amateur DJ/organiser	focus group 1
Baniya	25	male	partygoer	focus group 2
Sabeena	25	female	partygoer	focus group 2
Sharabi	25	male	partygoer	focus group 2
Umesh	23	male	partygoer	focus group 2
Johanna	33	female	partygoer	focus group 3
Justin	28	male	partygoer	focus group 3
Pete	27	male	partygoer and VJ	focus group 3
Richie	33	male	partygoer and amateur organiser	focus group 3
Sam	34	male	partygoer and amateur organiser	focus group 3
Sophie	34	female	partygoer and DJ	focus group 3
Christina	28	female	partygoer	focus group 4
Sami	30	male	organiser and DJ/producer	focus group 4
Vipin	29	male	organiser and DJ/producer	focus group 4
Magan	25	male	partygoer and amateur DJ/organiser	individual interview

Average age: 27.7; 5 females, 13 males.

1.2 Interview Guide and Coding Categories

1. What is your name, age, and could you tell me how long you've been involved in dance music scenes? How many parties do you go to per month and what kind of events?
2. What are your favourite venues, clubs or party environments in or around Melbourne? Why? What was the best Melbourne techno/psytrance party you've been to, and why?
3. How would you describe good techno/psytrance? What are the main feelings and emotions it delivers?
4. What makes a good crowd and dance floor? What are the ingredients for a good night?
5. What drugs do you take at parties and why? Do you use drugs outside of dance events?
6. How do drugs influence your interaction with the dance floor, the crowd and the music?

What are the differences between effects of different drugs? Which drugs work with which music?
7. Can you experience or appreciate electronic dance music in the same way if you've never tried drugs?
8. Can you give an example where drugs made a real difference to your experiences at a party?
9. How would you characterise the techno/psytrance scene in Melbourne? Have you been to events interstate or overseas?
10. How do you choose which events to go to? Are the performers/events the same or similar to the music you listen to at home?
11. What are the advantages and differences between electronic dance music and live music?
12. What other genres do you listen/go to, and why?
13. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss about your views and experiences?

Categories

Crowd attributes and types

Crowd attributes and types\Age (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Carelessness and pollution (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Environmentalism (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Familiar, friendly or open-minded (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Gender distribution (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Gifting (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Hippies (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Unauthentic or Naive (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Meat market (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Muddy or untidy festival crowd (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Playfulness and interaction (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Psybogens (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Seriousness and immersion into music (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Size (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Style, fashion and culture (crowd)

Crowd attributes and types\Trashed (crowd)

Drug effects

Drug effects\Bodily response or energy altering (drug effects)

Drug effects\Comedown (drug effects)

Drug effects\Emotional response or happiness (drug effects)

Drug effects\Getting wasted or losing control (drug effects)

Drug effects\Inappropriate or bad quality (drug effects)

Drug effects\Losing the ego as spiritual experience (drug effects)

Drug effects\Mental response or cognitive reflections (drug effects)

Drug effects\Ongoing motivation (drug effects)

Drug effects\Overdose or Dosing Details (drug effects)

Drug effects\Psychedelic as Second Life (drug effects)

Drug effects\Psychedelic experience (drug effects)

Drug effects\Questions of authenticity (drug effects)

Drug effects\Social Bonds and Socialising (drug effects)

Drug effects\Social stigmatisation of drug effects

Drug effects\Sound-enhancing (drug effects)

Drugs

Drugs\Acid
Drugs\Alcohol
Drugs\Amphetamines
Drugs\Coke
Drugs\DMT
Drugs\Ketamine
Drugs\MDMA or pills
Drugs\Mushrooms
Drugs\Nangs
Drugs\Other drugs
Drugs\Poly-drug
Drugs\Pot
Drugs\Psychedelics
Electronic Genres
Electronic Genres\Ambient or Chill out
Electronic Genres\Drum and bass and Breakbeat
Electronic Genres\Dubstep
Electronic Genres\Dubtechno
Electronic Genres\Electro-house
Electronic Genres\Glitch and Experimental
Electronic Genres\Hip Hop
Electronic Genres\House
Electronic Genres\Psytrance
Electronic Genres\Psytrance\Darkpsy
Electronic Genres\Psytrance\Fullon psy
Electronic Genres\Psytrance\Goa trance
Electronic Genres\Psytrance\Melodic psy
Electronic Genres\Psytrance\Progressive
Electronic Genres\Techno
Electronic Genres\Techno\Acid techno
Electronic Genres\Techno\Detroit techno
Electronic Genres\Techno\Hard techno
Electronic Genres\Techno\Hardcore or Gabber
Electronic Genres\Techno\Industrial techno
Electronic Genres\Techno\Minimal techno
Electronic Genres\Trance

Electronic Instruments and Effects
Electronic Instruments and Effects\Crossfader
Electronic Instruments and Effects\EQ
Electronic Instruments and Effects\High Hat
Electronic Instruments and Effects\Kick or bass drum
Electronic Instruments and Effects\TB-303
Environmental attributes
Environmental attributes\Adventurous or Different Planet (environment)
Environmental attributes\Eco-conscious (environment)
Environmental attributes\Familiar or Underground (environment)
Environmental attributes\Grimy or Post-industrial (environment)
Environmental attributes\Hidden or Secret (environment)
Environmental attributes\Polluted (environment)
Environmental attributes\Safe (environment)
Environmental attributes\Sense of freedom (environment)
Environmental attributes\Sombre or Dark (environment)
Environmental attributes\Spiritual or Religious (environment)
Environmental attributes\Uncomfortable (environment)
Environmental attributes\Unexpected or Special (environment)
Environmental elements
Environmental elements\Campsites (environmental element)
Environmental elements\Crowd or Dance floor (environmental element)
Environmental elements\Decorations, structures and spaces (environmental element)
Environmental elements\Lights, Smoke and VJing (environmental element)
Environmental elements\Hippie or new age institutions and structures (environmental element)
Environmental elements\Sound System (environmental element)
Environmental elements\Trees and forests or other natural settings (environmental element)
Environments
Environments\Bigger doofs, weekend festivals
Environments\Bigger or mainstream clubs
Environments\Commercial festivals
Environments\Home listening and everyday environments
Environments\Occupied urban spaces
Environments\Overseas
Environments\Smaller doofs, day parties

Environments\Smaller underground clubs
Legislation and Organisation
Legislation and Organisation\Area permit (law)
Legislation and Organisation\Crew or DJ competition (organisation)
Legislation and Organisation\Dealing (organisation)
Legislation and Organisation\Drugs (law)
Legislation and Organisation\Profits and Expenses (organisation)
Legislation and Organisation\Security and bouncers (law)
Legislation and Organisation\Sound levels (law)
Legislation and Organisation\Time frame (law)
Live (band) music
Live (band) music\Live (band) elements in EDM
Live (band) music\Metal
Live (band) music\Punk
Media
Media\Electronic media
Media\Mass media
Media\Movies or TV
Media\Printed media (flyers)
Music attributes
Music attributes\Abrasive (music)
Music attributes\Alien - psychedelically (music)
Music attributes\Blissful or spiritual (music)
Music attributes\Boring or Inappropriate (music)
Music attributes\Challenging or Surprising (music)
Music attributes\Crescendo (music)
Music attributes\Dirty (music)
Music attributes\Funky (music)
Music attributes\Hard or Intense (music)
Music attributes\Logical progression (music)
Music attributes\Loud (music)
Music attributes\Melodic (music)
Music attributes\Multi-layered or Varied (music)
Music attributes\Progression through multiple genres or parts of the day (music)
Music attributes\Relaxing (music)
Music attributes\Repetitive (music)

Music attributes\The Bass (music)
Music attributes\Trippy or Abnormal (music)
Music attributes\Unpopular or Underground (music)
Music creation
Music creation\DJing
Music creation\Production
Music Elements
Music Elements\BPM
Music Elements\Melody or harmony
Music Elements\Meter
Music Elements\Pitch
Music Elements\Rhythm
Music Elements\Sound or timbre
Music Elements\Textual elements, samples and messages
Music Elements\Texture
Music Responses
Music Responses\Dissociative response to music
Music Responses\Emotional response to music
Music Responses\Mental response or cognitive reflections on music
Music Responses\Ongoing motivation or addiction to music
Music Responses\Physical response to music
Personal information
Personal information\Personal (hi)stories
Personal information\Personal commitment
Scene histories
Scene histories\Australian psytrance (history)
Scene histories\Australian techno (history)
Scene histories\International psytrance (history)
Scene histories\International techno (history)
Scene histories\Notable DJs, tracks, crews, parties, clubs
Scene histories\Other genres (history)

Appendix 2 Techno Artist Biographies and Cover Art

2.1 Jeff Mills

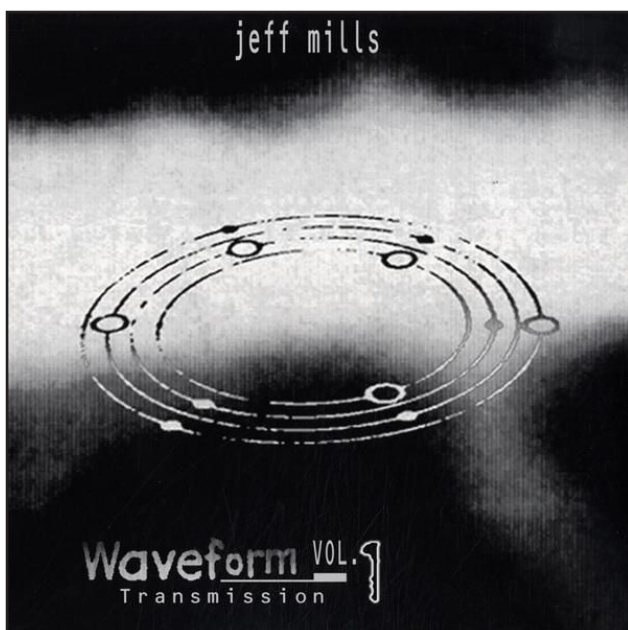
“ Detroit’s synthesis of funk trance-grooves and European disco futurism was accomplished by a surprisingly small coterie of producers, who started their experiments in the mid nineteen-eighties. . . . One of the pioneers was Jeff Mills, who as producer and DJ has seeded the sound from Durban to Tokyo, and must bear no small responsibility for the fact that urbanites around the world now live in a media landscape where stripped-down electronic beats soundtrack everything from their shopping trips to their drug experiences to their nights home in front of the telly.

Mills is a quiet, bird-like man with a gaunt face and long fingers. When he deejays he uses three decks, rarely playing a record for longer than a minute, and often opening all three channels at once, filtering the sound so one deck is playing a bassline, the second the middle and the third the lead. His involvement with his machines is so intense, so concentrated, that as he darts from mixer to turntable Mills the DJ seems self-evidently a component of a human-machine assemblage, a system which includes crowd, PA, the whole apparatus of record production, and the stylus cartridge whose sensitivity he has turned up so it produces an angry metallic treble buzz. . . .

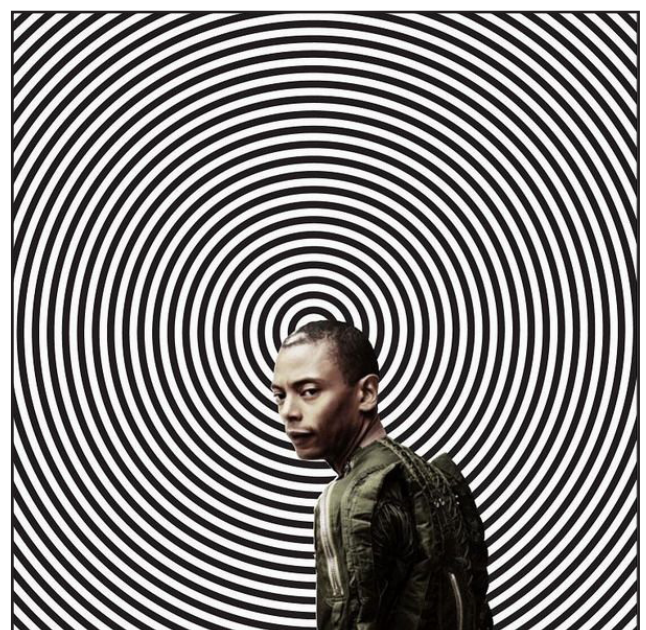
Mills is totally unforthcoming about content or inspiration for the sounds on his records. There doesn’t seem to be a clear aesthetic or social agenda. But he has some unusual organising principles. “I think of a concept and maybe put it in some kind of colour scale,” he tells me at one point. “I need a very clean feel with some amount of drama, so maybe I pick green. In my mind I have this idea of what green sounds like. Green is the frequencies which are much lower, not subsonic, but midrange.” Then he confusingly glosses this by saying “it’s just like if you take a keyboard and start from white and go all the way to black.”

Mostly Mills talks about himself as the originator of the message, using the usual Romantic vocabulary of the artist, the creator. But he is a creator with a peculiar relationship to his tools. “Often I get half-way with a sequence and then just let it run. I’ll go out, leave it running for up to 24 hours. The machines fluctuate. Over time the sequence changes slightly. The machines mould themselves, giving their own character to a track. We did that a lot with Underground Resistance. Sometimes we would let the sound run for days at a time. It would evolve into a very fixed state.”

Kunzru, Hari. 1998. “Music is the Message.” *Mute* no. 1 (11).
<http://www.harikunzru.com/jeff-mills-techno-futurism-1998>



Jeff Mills. 1992. *Waveform Transmission Vol. 1*. Tresor.
<http://www.discogs.com/Jeff-Mills-Waveform-Transmission-Vol-1/master/5943>



Jeff Mills. 2009. *Sleeper Wakes*. Third Ear.
<http://www.discogs.com/Jeff-Mills-Sleeper-Wakes/release/2049264>

2.2 Traversable Wormhole

“ In 2009 a series of five anonymously produced ink stamped vinyl recorded releases appeared in the global techno scene under the mysterious guise “Traversable Wormhole”. The series released exclusively on vinyl. The sound of “Traversable Wormhole” is a unique signature of sci-fi laden techno music with gaps of time, space & bass in between sound & rhythm. Within a month’s time of it’s conception Volume 2 of the series appeared and a huge buzz was soon amassed on the project. Accusations on who was the artist behind the project ran wild. People all over the techno scene had made theories to who was behind it. The project quickly received huge support from many of the world’s most renowned techno shops such as Rub A Dub , Hardwax, Juno & Decks. Word traveled fast through the wormhole and it was soon reported that globally respected DJs such as Chris Liebing, Ben Klock, Marcel Dettmann, Mathew Herbert, Ryan Elliot, Andrew Galluzi, Surgeon, Function, Frankie Bones, Surgeon, DJ Deep & Radioslave were all supporting the sound of TW. With the series fast approaching into further galaxies with the appearance of Vol 3. Techno cult blogsite MNMLSSG (<http://mnm1ssg.blogspot.com>) tracked down TW via Twitter. A sonar ping was sent back to the popular blog and soon a “Traversable Wormhole” mix appeared anonymously on the site, receiving rave reviews. Their were also reports through the anonymous “Traversable Wormhole” Myspace profile† that DJs from the dubstep scene were supporting the songs that had more of a broken beat structure in the series. As the series transgressed to Vol 5 by the year end of 2009 the mystique of anonymity continued to grow.

To usher in the very start of 2010 “Traversable Wormhole” would release the sixth volume of the series. At the same time 20 year veteran techno artist/dj Adam X originally from NYC and now residing in Berlin would be invited to partake in a feature called “Playing Favorites” on “Resident Advisor”, the world’s biggest electronic music website. As Adam’s feature read towards the end he would subtly take claim as the producer behind “Traversable Wormhole”.

<http://djadamx.wordpress.com/about/>



Traversable Wormhole. 2009. Vol. 5. Traversable Wormhole. <http://www.discogs.com/Traversable-Wormhole-Traversable-Wormhole-Vol-5/release/1994432>



Traversable Wormhole. 2011. Vol. 8. Traversable Wormhole. <http://www.discogs.com/Traversable-Wormhole-Traversable-Wormhole-Vol8/release/3043717>

2.3 Robert Hood

“ Robert Hood needs little introduction. Founding member of the legendary group Underground Resistance as a ‘Minister Of Information’ with ‘Mad’ Mike Banks & Jeff Mills, his seminal works on Jeff Mill’s Axis and his very own M-Plant imprint paved the way for a wave of stripped-down dancefloor minimalism that directed much of techno’s path throughout the late Nineties. As Birmingham’s Surgeon once remarked, ‘When Hood released his pivotal ‘Minimal Nation’ EP in 1993, it was like a bomb went off.’

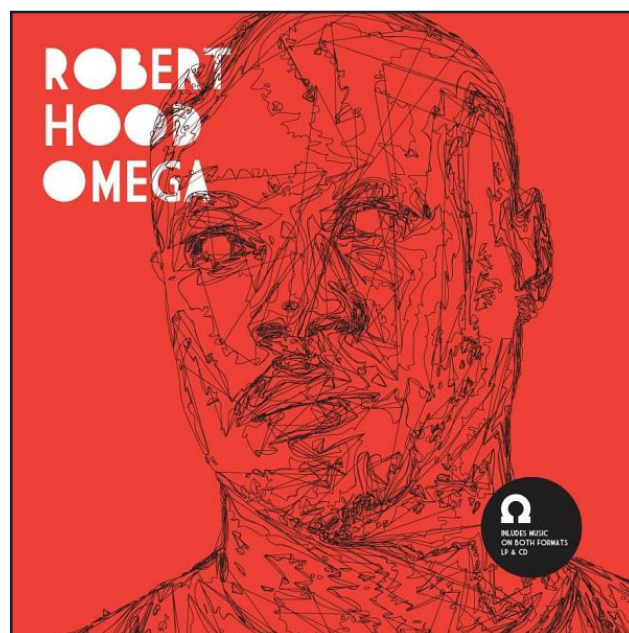
Robert Hood makes minimal Detroit techno with an emphasis on soul and experimentation over flash and popularity. Having recorded for Metroplex, as well as the Austrian Cheap label and Jeff Mills’ Axis label, Hood also owns and operates the M-Plant imprint, through which he’s released the bulk of his solo material. [He was] part of the original UR line up whose influential releases throughout the early and mid ‘90s helped change the face of modern Detroit techno and sparked a creative renaissance. Infusing elements of acid and industrial into a potent blend of Chicago house and Detroit techno, UR’s aesthetic project and militant business philosophy were (and remain) singular commitments in underground techno. . . .

“M-Plant started in ‘94. It kind of borrowed from the sound I was using from Axis and really expanded on that sound. I had developed this ‘grey area’ sound - what I mean by that is that in Detroit, even when the sun is out, there’s something in the atmosphere. I don’t know if its pollution or whatever, but the sky has that grey haze over it. It’s got to be something from the industrial factories there. I’d never really heard a sound like that before and it came from a Roland Juno - it was a chord sound that really went along with my depiction of what Detroit was at that time. A lot of buildings were abandoned and there was a lot of lifelessness in the city, especially downtown. The M-Plant, in minimalism, kind of reflected that. I remember thinking of Detroit like a museum. You know, like a work of art standing still, suspended in time. There wasn’t a whole lot of activity going on.”

<http://www.mplantmusic.com/>



Robert Hood. 1994. *Minimal Nation*. Axis.
<http://www.discogs.com/Robert-Hood-Minimal-Nation/master/4763>



Robert Hood. 2010. *Omega*. M-Plant.
<http://www.discogs.com/Robert-Hood-Omega/master/254368>

2.4 Ben Klock and Marcel Dettmann

“ Berlin born DJ, producer and label owner Ben Klock is without a doubt one of the most significant characters in techno’s recent history. A resident at [Berlin club] Berghain since its opening in 2004, he has been able to leave his mark on the club’s unique sound, in turn the special space influenced Klock’s approach as a DJ and producer as well.

Playing techno sets full of hypnotic, deep and heavy grooves, releasing records on Ostgut Ton and last but not least the aesthetics of his own label Klockworks (founded in 2006), have earned him an excellent international reputation over the last few years. Supported by stringent and enthralling tracks, remixes for such diverse artists as Kerri Chandler, Martyn or Depeche Mode, the revered debut album “One” on Ostgut Ton and his Berghain mix, Ben Klock’s name is synonymous with the vitalization of an essential definition of techno.

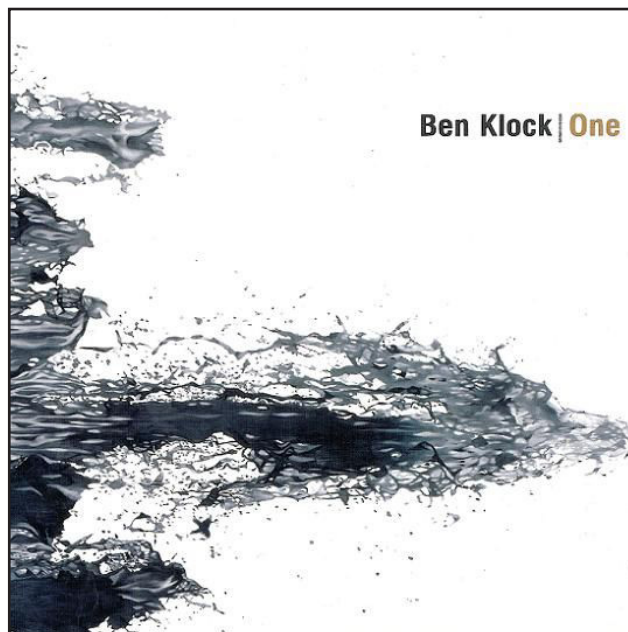
http://www.cocoon.net/artists/ben_klock

Marcel Dettmann is one of the supporting pillars of the Berghain sound: powerful, sexy and knowing in the right sense. One could also say he knows his edutainment. Since 1999 Marcel is and has been a steady fixture at both the old OstGut and the new Berghain. The classic sounds of Chicago and Detroit have had a huge influence on him, but Marcel also says that „the music and the sets have to work, should have a soul and be ignorant of boundaries. I re-invent my dj philosophy for every new set, location and night. Generally, it is very important to me to play as varied as possible sets fusing classic tracks with the contemporary ones.”

http://www.cocoon.net/artists/marcel_dettmann



Marcel Dettmann. 2010. *Dettmann*. Ostgut Ton.
<http://www.discogs.com/Marcel-Dettmann-Dettmann/master/242379>



Ben Klock. 2009. *One*. Ostgut Ton.
<http://www.discogs.com/Ben-Klock-One/master/14964>

2.5 Plastikman (Richie Hawtin)

“ Long before Richie Hawtin became what he is today—superstar DJ, mastermind of the Minus label, entrepreneur, technological innovator, style icon—he was best known for a single project: Plastikman.

Between 1993 and 2003, Plastikman created an astonishing body of work, one that didn't so much define a time and place as explode them, expanding the dimensions of Detroit techno and redefining the possibilities of electronic dance music itself.

Across six albums (*Sheet One*, *Musik*, *Recycled Plastik*, *Consumed*, *Artifakts (B.C.)*, and *Closer*) and numerous singles like “Spastik,” “Plastique,” and “Sickness” Plastikman evolved into one of contemporary electronic music's most distinctive voices: minimalist, psychedelic, groovy as anything, ever mindful of the transcendent properties of pure electronic sound.

The records alone would be enough to make a legend out of anyone, but Hawtin—as Plastikman—also had something else going for him: some of the most intense, unhinged, and mind-bending parties that underground electronic music has ever known. Held mostly in and around Detroit and Hawtin's home town of Windsor, Ontario, these events' reputations spread worldwide, by word-of-mouth and message board, to become legendary moments in the history of underground electronic music.

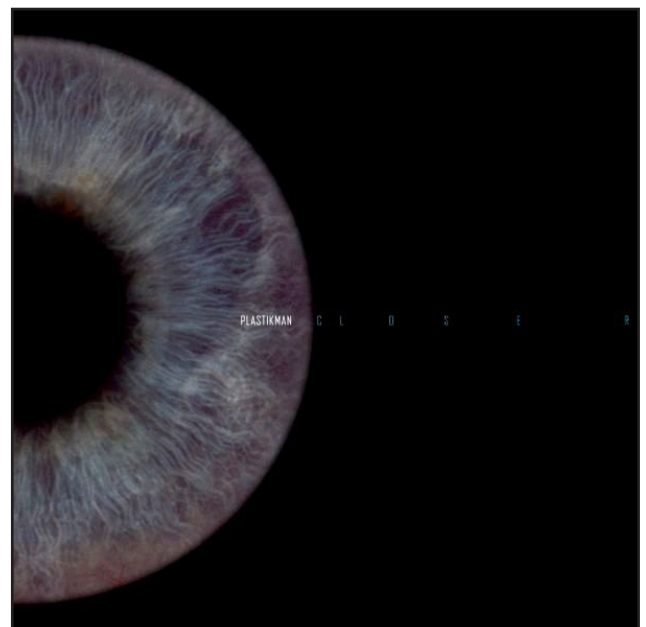
The recipe for their success wasn't exactly rocket science, despite Hawtin's contemporary reputation for technological innovation. The parties were based upon the model that Hawtin had experienced as a teenager at Detroit's legendary Music Institute: a black sweatbox of a room, a single strobe light, and the loudest, fullest sound system that the walls could withstand.

Beginning with those Spartan elements, Hawtin and his friends staged increasingly elaborate events whose every detail was intended for the sole purpose of pulling people out of the everyday and plunging them into the unknown.

<http://www.plastikman.com/arkives/>



Plastikman. 1993. *Sheet One*. NovaMute, Plus 8.
<http://www.discogs.com/Plastikman-Sheet-One/master/37367>



Plastikman. 2003. *Closer*. Novamute, M_nus.
<http://www.discogs.com/Plastikman-Closer/master/37453>

2.6 Oscar Mulero

“ The mid-eighties, Madrid. The Spanish capital is teeming under the grip of a musical explosion the likes of which has never been seen before. In the midst of that rabid swirl, a teenager, unknown and unassuming, enters a record shop to blow his savings on an album, *Standing on a Beach*, by The Cure. Little did he know that this was to be his first step on the long and difficult path to becoming one of the country’s essential DJs. He soon became a familiar face in the DJ booths of the most exclusive underground clubs of Madrid, but the best was still to come and the first chapter was called *New World*, his first “proper” job.

New World sessions were soon all the rave, and Oscar entered the studio for the first time to collaborate in the making of the club’s official record, *Nuclear Zone*. His was a backseat involvement, more as a sound advisor than as a producer. It wasn’t until later on that producing and deejaying became his livelihood. The record went on sale in 1993 and was quite a success, going on to get included in many of the national compilations of the time. The *New World* experience finally came to an end. But it allowed for the birth of *The Omen*, which for many was the ultimate club. *The Omen* was so successful it quickly became a tourist attraction, with clubbers from all over the country coming to Madrid every weekend to enjoy Oscar’s sessions. This led to a change in his career. He gradually moved away from being an important resident DJ to a travelling one. He started to travel regularly, taking the *Omen* sound all over the peninsula. Firstly to the north, and then gradually, to all four corners of the country. It was the beginning of Oscar’s intimate relationship with airports and the road. . . .

His first release with an international label came in 2000 on the French label Kobayashi. It was his first away match and first away victory!

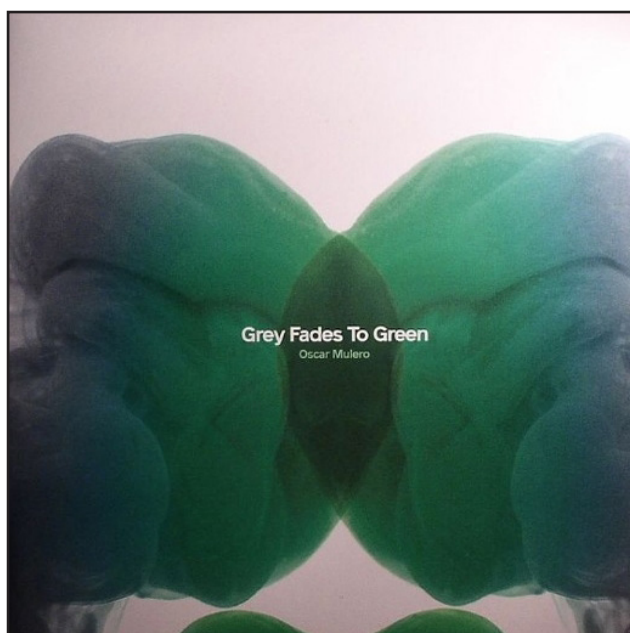
That very year saw the birth of *Warm Up* and a couple of years later, its offspring *Pole*. From then on, all Oscar’s efforts were focused on releasing his own material, whether home or away, on the very best techno labels of the planet, such as *Coda*, *Pure Plastic*, *Tresor*, *Sheep*, *Tsunami* and *Main Out*. That put him definitively on the world techno map. . . .

During 2011 we saw the release of his first LP as Oscar Mulero, *Grey Fades to Green*. A double CD also released as a 4 vinyl set which will bear testimony to Oscar’s maturity and consolidation as one of the most important electronic music producers worldwide.

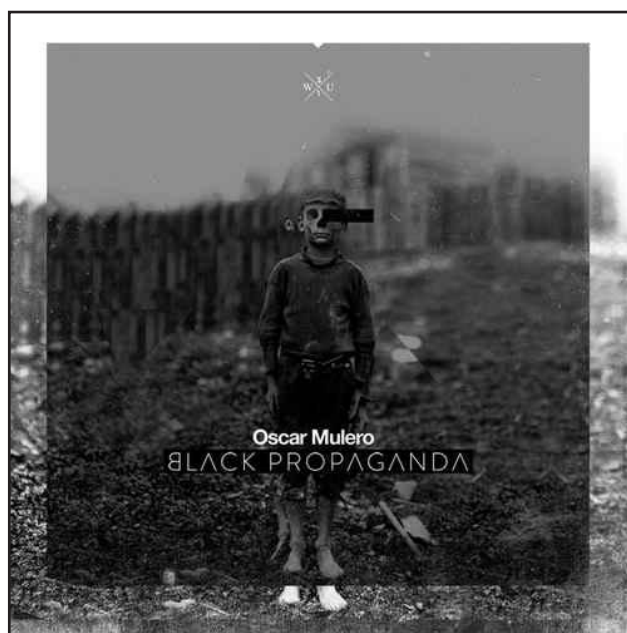
On the stage side Oscar has developed a fully audiovisual experience with his “*Light & Dark AV Set*”, tested live in some of the best festivals around.

2012 was *Warm Up Records* tenth anniversary, with thirty four releases to date. Last year also saw the publication of Oscar’s second full length album, *Black Propaganda*, which means a twist in his trademark sound on behalf of a modern and dark approach to techno, and has the support of the best DJs and the media.

<http://www.residentadvisor.net/dj/oscarmulero/biography>



Oscar Mulero. 2011. *Grey Fades to Green*. Warm Up Recordings.
<http://www.discogs.com/Oscar-Mulero-Grey-Fades-To-Green/master/318131>



Oscar Mulero. 2012. *Black Propaganda*. Warm Up Recordings
<http://www.discogs.com/Oscar-Mulero-Black-Propaganda/master/459877>

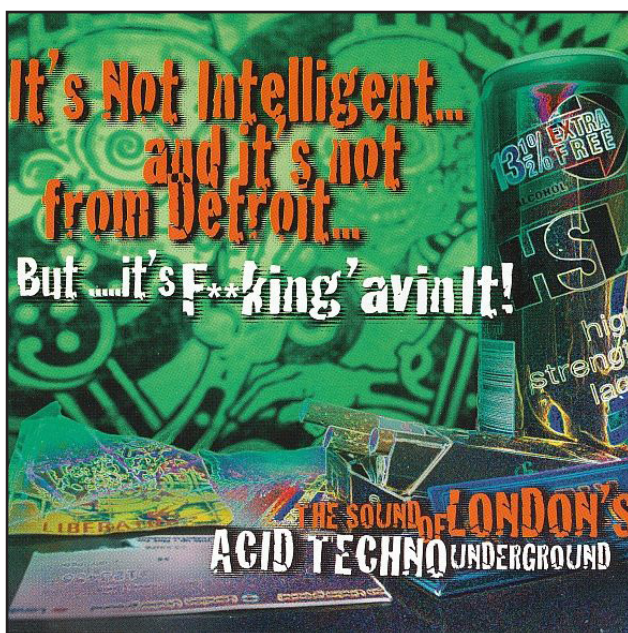
2.7 The Liberators and Stay Up Forever

“ Out of the Rave explosion at the end of the Eighties came a massive underground dance movement that combined the anarchy of the free festivals with the music and style of the orbital Rave parties. Three DJs from the Hackney area of London called Chris, Aaron and Julian Liberator took the spirit of this movement to their own all night rave parties. They would fill squatted venues with punks and ravers who lost their minds to the tough and totally tripped out techno sounds that were being spun by these three brothers in arms.

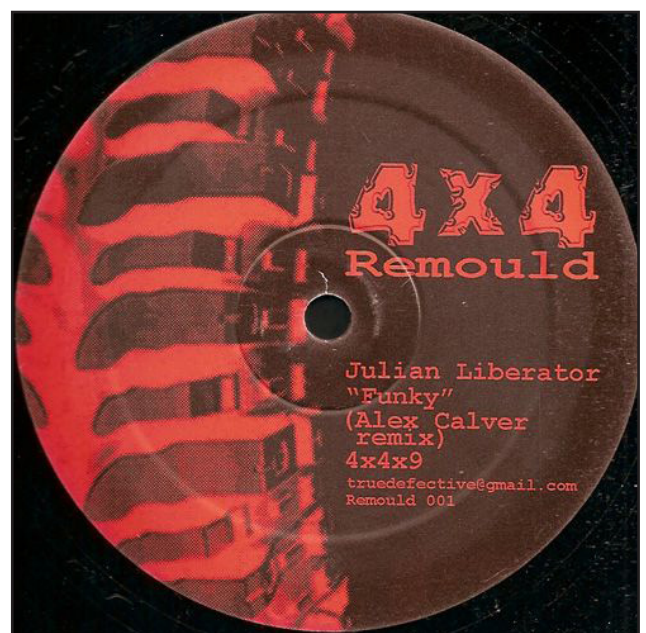
By 1991 the Liberators teamed up with the extremely influential sound system Bedlam busting into warehouses to make some of the most chaotic free parties London had ever seen. This was to have a profound and long lasting effect on the Liberators in both their attitude towards the dance music scene and their commitment to the London squat party scene playing for sound systems such as Immersion, Underground Sound and Manic and you can still find a Liberator or two or three playing at a squat party in a warehouse on the fringes of London today.

The music also was starting to influence their direction and by 1993 the boys started the Stay Up Forever record label a chance for them to express what they wanted to hear in those early free parties. With the help of local producers Paul Harding and D.D.R. Stay Up forever began to take shape. Originally the label was going to be a techno label with some influence of the Roland 303 machine sound that had created Acid House. What was unforeseen was that the label soon developed its own sound, a unique style that had the heart of British rave/ hardcore due to big breakdowns and the spirit of Detroit techno finished off with intense 303 lines Acid Techno was born!

http://www.909london.com/articles/who_are_we



Aaron, Chris & Julian Liberator. 1997. *It's Not Intelligent...And It's Not from Detroit...But It's F**king 'Avin It.* Truelove Label Collective. <http://www.discogs.com/Aaron-Chris-Julian-Liberator-Its-Not-IntelligentAnd-Its-Not-From-DetroitBut-Its-Fking-Avin-It/release/168270>



Julian Liberator. 2007. *Funky.* 4 x 4 Remould. <http://www.discogs.com/Julian-Liberator-Funky/release/1060459>

Appendix 3 Psytrance Artist Biographies and Cover Art

3.1 Terrafractyl

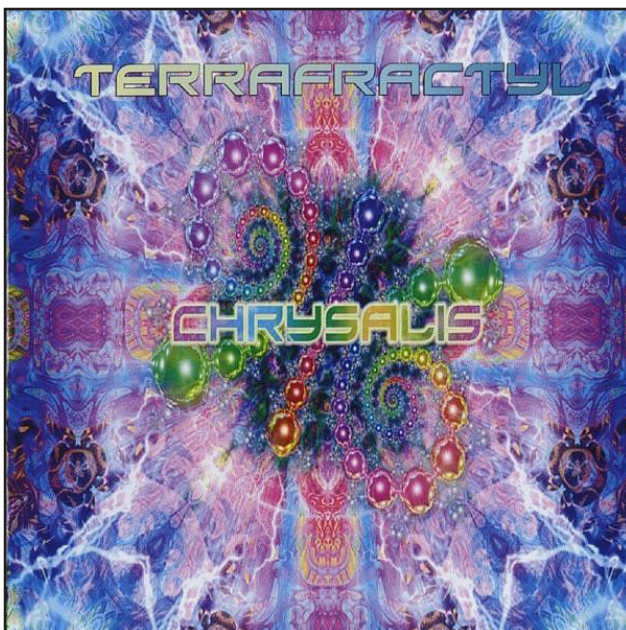
“ Felix Greenlees, aka Terrafractyl was raised on a diet of classical music, opera and jazz. Trained as a Bassoon player, he started his musical career playing for professional orchestras and opera companies around Australia.

During the late 90's Felix found his way to an outdoor Goa party in Tasmania, was completely captivated by the psychedelic music he heard there and couldn't resist trying his hand at electronic music production. Since then, he has been weaving the threads of psytrance, jazz and classical music together, incorporating his love/addiction of piano and a new found addiction for building analoge synthesizers. This unique melding of styles quickly led him to become one of Australia's most prominent electronic music performers.

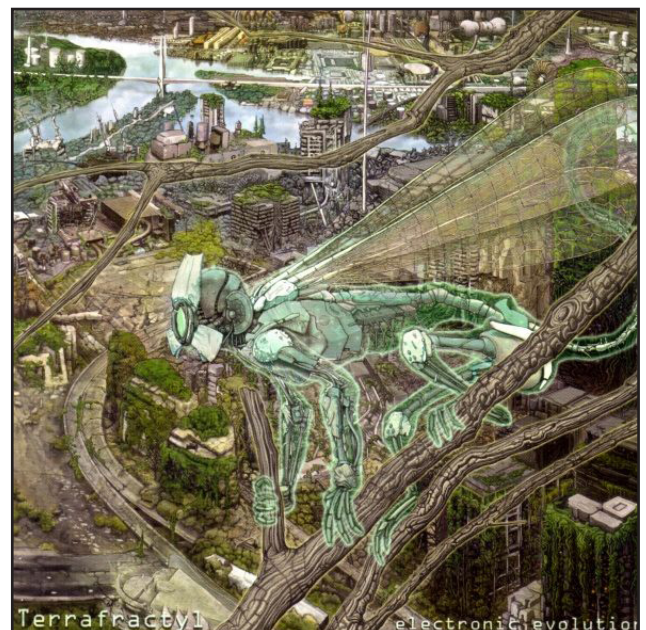
Fans have enjoyed Felix's music at all major festivals around Australia, including the 2012 Eclipse Festival where he preceded the solar eclipse and one fan stated that he caused magical unicorns to descend from the sky, farting rainbows. More recently he has also travelled to share his music in Europe, USA, Canada, Russia, Israel and more.

While also working on his other projects, Mental Extensions and Hypnagog, Felix has released two full length albums under Terrafractyl: 'Chrysalis' (2009, Sundance Records) and 'Electronic Evolution' (2012, Vertigo records) as well as numerous tracks on various compilations.

<http://www.kinematicrecords.com/Artists/Terrafractyl/Terrafractyl.html>



Terrafractyl. 2009. *Chrysalis*. Sundance Records.
<http://www.discogs.com/Terrafractyl-Chrysalis/release/1762536>



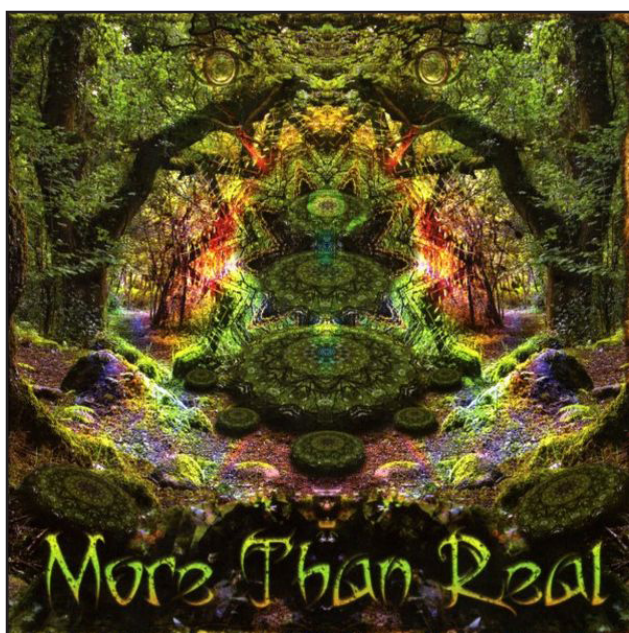
Terrafractyl. 2012. *Electronic Evolution*. Vertigo Records.
<http://www.discogs.com/Terrafractyl-Electronic-Evolution/release/3518331>

3.2 Farebi Jalebi

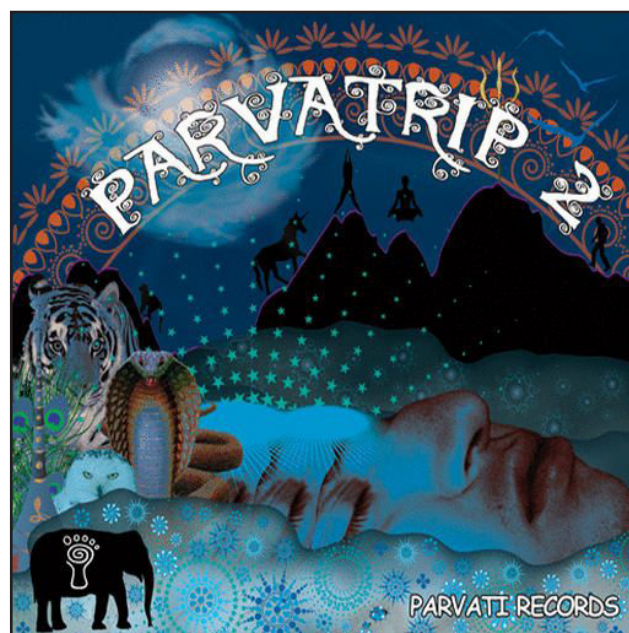
“ Farebi Jalebi is Atom Ant’s second cousin. (Thus the “250 times his own weight” lifting capacity.) Never worked for fame, was always behind the scenes when it came to crime fighting. After half a life of bringing molecules of evil to justice, FJ decided to express the tew’ness inside his head in the form of cycledelic trance. His powers which mostly consisted of the ability to fly, superspeed, and amazing strength are now channelized to invert dance floors . . . his sounds are influenced by magic and the weird.

Apart from the 6 legs, Falabi Jarobi is a puppy at heart. He has a regular puppy side (chewing, pooping in the house, yadda, yadda, yadda)—on a serious note . . . Farebi Jalebi spent the last few years producing and playing his own sounds. FJ started producing music in early 2008; inspired by the stories of many pioneers in the groovy dark psy phenomenon across the world. Ever since, he has been developing a flavour of his own—with bouncy basslines, weird scapes and dripping sounds, each track has a different twang and tells its own peculiar tale. His music is groovy, powerful and dramatic; amidst a mix of emotion and insanity.

<https://soundcloud.com/farebi-jalebi>



Farebi Jalebi. 2009. “Day the Funk Died” in *More than Real*. Real Vision Music.
<http://www.discogs.com/Various-More-Than-Real/release/2026088>



Farebi Jalebi. 2011. “Carnival Tradition” in *Various - Parvatrip 2*. Parvati records.
<http://www.discogs.com/Various-Parvatrip-2/release/2758540>

3.3 Kerosene Club

“ Brian Fernandes aka Kerosene CLub/ Flipknot/ Fibre Stomp is one of India’s most respected trance composers/DJs with a fan following spread all over the world. His sets are legendary as well his diverse taste in other genres of music. His versatility lies across his different styles. He can send you into the deepest realms of existence to the most pleasant journeys one can embark on. One of the few versatile Indian electronic musician who is constantly touring and spreading his sound to the four corners of the world. A slight peak into his main occupation revolves around manipulating sound frequencies to influence one’s brain and one’s kneecap and testing it on human specimens. . . .

But this is not about him. This about his psychedelic avatar—Kerosene Club/ Flipknot.

Kerosene Club/ Flipknot is a figment of a fragment of Brian Fernandes (formerly known as) dj 26Brian’s alternate imagination. Kerosene Club came into existence in dj 26Brian’s psyche in 2003 in between a mix of the 6th and 7th track in his power-driven dj set (he fails to recollect the tracks playing then coz the intensity of Kerosene Club’s birth was so much it erased all other memories of that night), and ever since Kerosene Club and Flipknot have been lurking in there, sometimes active, sometimes dormant state. The Kerosene Club project encompasses the wide spectrum of the power brain gargling psychedelic music accompanied by the furious beats of the new generation with the old skool vibrations thrown in between for good measure. The aim is not to scare anyone, but to experience the fear n pure rush of adrenalin via chaos and then learning to control it to an extent u start enjoying it and making it your bitch. While Flipknot sounds are more deep, groovier psychedelic experiments.

<https://soundcloud.com/keroseneclubflipknot>



Kerosene Club. 2007. *Forest of the Freaks*. Temple Twister Records
<http://www.discogs.com/Kerosene-Club-Forest-Of-The-Freaks/release/988138>



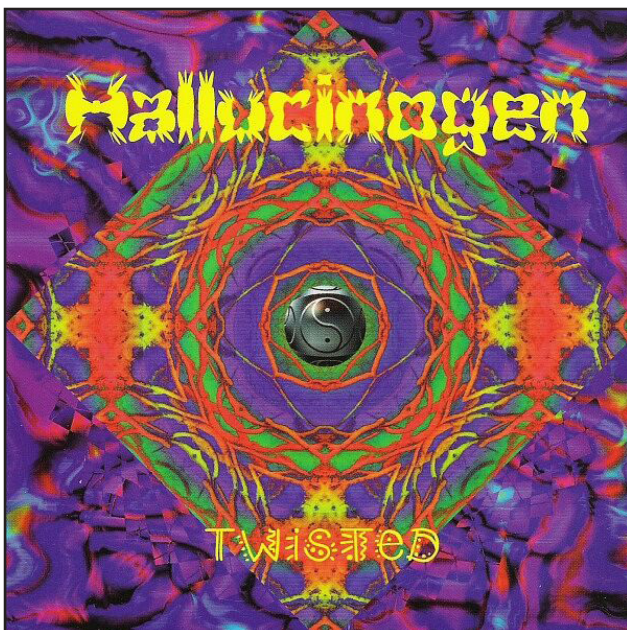
Flipknot/ Silent Horror/ Red. 2008. *The Big Brainwash*. TUP.
<http://www.discogs.com/Flipknot-Silent-Horror-Red-The-Big-Brainwash/release/1539383>

3.4 Hallucinogen

“ Hallucinogen aka Simon Posford is a pioneer of electronic music and founder of the psy-trance scene. With the release of his first album, “Twisted”, which reached Number 27 in the French album charts, a genre was born. There are many words to describe modern electronic music but none that come close to the wealth of emotion and experience that comes from listening to a Posford tune.

These days he is just as likely to be entrancing crowds around the globe with a throbbingly epic live set as he is to be dribbling ambient delectations in the Hallucinogen Soundlabs in the West Country. He is co-director of Twisted Records with Simon Holton, ex-label manager of Dragonfly Records. Their label is one of the hottest underground gatherings of talent this side of Mars. Hallucinogen’s second album “The Lone Deranger” blew the lid off the musical scene that had built up around his influence. Not only did it have more of the killer musical riffs but also was a feat of clean production and professionalism previously seen with the likes of The Floyd, one of Simon’s major influences. Another tune that influenced Simon was “The Age of Love” by Jam & Spoon, and this can be heard in some of his earlier releases. More recently he has produced tracks with Benji Vaughan for their band Younger Brother. Simon Posford has completed new sounds with Dub ‘Ott’ & Hallucinogen and is currently collaborating with the Twisted Allstars and touring the world spreading his music to all sorts of people. There is talk of a ‘Hallucinogen 3’ but Simon’s most recent album is “Tales of the Inexpressible”, his second album by Shpongle. Simon is the musical genius behind Shpongle and for this latest orgy of brain fluid he gathered 4 other talented musicians, as well, of course, as Raja Ram-Druid of Psy.

<https://www.facebook.com/hallucinogen/info>



Hallucinogen. 1995. *Twisted*. Dragonfly Records.
<http://www.discogs.com/Hallucinogen-Twisted/master/5659>



Hallucinogen. 1997. *The Lone Deranger*. Twisted Records.
<http://www.discogs.com/Hallucinogen-The-Lone-Deranger/master/7784>

3.5 Neelix

“ One could say that the creative act of piecing together several ideas by using the computer is a kind of a golden thread in the life of Henrik Twardzik. Originally the native of Hamburg, he used to compose works for film productions, following a regular job. It was 1999, when something happened that changed his life: basically he heard a song. But “Klein Aber Doctor” made him so stoked that he finally decided to get into producing music himself. Having a creative vein on the one hand and heaps of experience with clicking the mouse buttons hundreds of times per day, piling up sequences on a computer screen, on the other, he moved forward pretty fast. His first releases rapidly gained popularity and simultaneously Henrik got more and more enthusiastic about producing music. Taking the necessary actions as a result of that made his girlfriend pronouncing a certain phrase more and more often: Get a proper job again! Well, today she doesn’t say that any more... Following the patterns of classical Progressive Trance at first and playing to its referee’s whistle, Henrik slowly but constantly developed a very own style. His album “No Way To Leave” from 2005 marks a turning point in his musical career. With this one he founded his own school of Trance music, consequently following the paradigm of Progressive in the very original meaning of this term. Today Henrik is blissfully happy with getting a remarkable positive feedback from Trance fans all around the world and even being asked to produce music for TV commercials and popular movies.

<http://www.beatport.com/artist/neelix/33075>



Neelix. 2005. *No Way to Leave*. Sinn-Tec Recordings.
<http://www.discogs.com/Neelix-No-Way-To-Leave/release/656669>



Neelix. 2008. *You're under Control*. Spintwist Records.
<http://www.discogs.com/Neelix-Youre-Under-Control/master/237892>

Appendix 4

Field Journal Notes: Nightclubs

Kronos:

Underground club located in a basement on the border of the CBD. Basic environment with concrete walls, considered ideal for techno acts. A single dance floor with two adjacent chill out areas (just a few sofas, very noisy). Big sound system, can be heard all over the place. It is a real sweatbox when internationals play. Basic bar with bottled beer and spirits, no cloakroom. Smoking possible only in front of the venue, with punters often sitting on the pavement and having a chat. Music normally goes until 5-6 AM.

Passage Club:

Large, multi-level club with five dance floors located in the Melbourne CBD. Particularly suitable for larger events and festival afterparties. Labyrinth-like architecture with passages and a spiral stair between the rooms. Some rooms have stain glass windows. It hosts a multitude of EDM genres (techno, psytrance, house, drumandbass, etc.) and sometimes live music. It has a rooftop area suitable for smoking where music is sometimes played until 8 AM.

Dorothy Parlour:

Average nightclub on the third level of a building located at the end of a CBD alley. It has two dance areas, a comfortable chill out room and a smokers' room. The design is glamorous/burlesque with red carpet and tapestries, although the main dance floor has a more basic, almost industrial look. Techno and house gigs are sometimes organised here, as well as festival afterparties. It's a bit flashy with decent bar and cloakroom.

Neo Loco:

Stylish venue in the heart of the CBD with an interesting forest theme and separate gazebo-like areas. Decent bar with drink specials that appeal to the occasional after-work clientele. It seems to be better suited for a few after-work drinks with a bit of dancing than for a solid techno night. It still hosts various EDM club nights on the weekends, often with international headliners.

Evermore:

Great little club in an inner suburb with a cosy lounge area, a separate dance floor and a backyard suitable for smoking. It's so small that DJs play literally on the dance floor. The backyard may serve as a second dance area and is particularly suitable for psytrance gigs where punters are keen on getting a bit loose. The venue also hosts underground techno nights. Basic bar with friendly staff and relaxed atmosphere. Music may go until 6-7 AM, depending on the night.

All venue names have been altered.