

Chapter Seven

**Trance Tribes and Dance Vibes:
Victor Turner and
Electronic Dance Music Culture**

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Is there any one of us who has not known this moment when compatible people—friends, congeners—obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group which is felt (in the first person) as “essentially us” could sustain its intersubjective illumination. (Turner 1982a: 48)

Does anyone who has experienced the benevolent, expectant, and even millenarian “vibe” of a dance party not recognize what Turner meant by this statement?¹ Excavating and renovating his ideas, scholars of electronic dance music culture (EDMC)² have indeed begun looking to Turner for insights. While other youth, music, and alternative cultural phenomena—including Deadheads (Sardiello 1994), New Age Travelers (Hetherington 1998, 2000), the Maleny “Fire Event” (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993), ConFest (St John 1997, 2001a) and Burning Man (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005; Kozinets 2002)—have received illumination via Turnerian thought, EDMC (especially the genre and culture of “trance”) stands to gain from its heuristic insights. Though EDMCs have received growing attention within contemporary cultural and ethnographic studies—with, for instance, the study of acid house raves (Redhead 1993), international “house” (Rietveld 1998), clubbing (e.g., Jackson 2004; Malbon 1999; Pini 2001; Thornton 1995), and post-rave (see St John 2001b) cultures serving to buttress or introduce varying theoretic-

cal positions post-CCCS (Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies)—“trance” as a countercultural EDMC has been little understood or studied. Rooted in psychedelic dance parties held on the beaches of Goa, India, in the 1980s and 1990s, trance would develop as an alternative post-rave phenomenon. DJ-led and psychedelically fuelled trance parties became the background for the birth of a new electronic music genre: “Goa trance,” later “psychedelic trance” (“psytrance” or “tribal trance”). By 2005, psytrance would enjoy massive international appeal among a highly mobile and technologically savvy spiritual-counterculture. Though the lifestyle constitutes a significant departure from that of clubbing and raving, since the psytrance evolution is clearly interdependent with these developments—as popular cultural histories convey (Collin 1997; Reynolds 1998)—the following does not neglect these wider developments. The chapter will explore trance formations—especially their “tribal” recreations—according to an understanding that they (and EDM events in general) are significant contexts for the subjective, reflexive, and social dimensions of what Victor Turner held to be the *limen*. I demonstrate how trance culture problematizes analyses of contemporary cultural performance that assume an underlying disparity between “liminal” and “liminoidal” behavior.

SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD RISING: TURNER, PLAY, AND ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE

As Turner inveighed, the ethnography of those moments beyond, beneath, and between the fixed, the finished, and the predictable lends great insight into culture in its moments of (re)constitution. As a recreational pursuit enabling participants to be “out there,” “loved up,” or “in the zone,” EDMCs are intriguing manifestations of liminality in the present. Ostensibly constituting a voluntary rather than obligatory set of actions and associations typical of cultures with a complex social and economic division of labor, implying a separation of leisure and work accompanying capitalist democracies in particular, and featuring a media apparatus enabled by advanced communications technology, EDMC is a complex cluster of “liminoidal” genres. Significantly, in his later speculative digressions Turner saw that liminoidal (or ritual-like) occasions and sites are characterized by the “negative” and “positive” freedoms to which political philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1958) gave vague attention. That is, emergent performance genres and aesthetic forms, from sports to “the Arts” and festivals, enable both the “freedom from” institutional obligations “prescribed by the basic forms of social, particularly technological and bureaucratic organization,” and from “the

chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office”, and the “freedom to” generate “new symbolic worlds,” to transcend social structural limitations, to play with ideas, with fantasies, with words, and with social relationships (Turner 1982a: 36f.). According to Turner, in societies where “leisure” has emerged, this experiential freedom (free play) proliferates. While this is as true of EDMCs as it is of other forms of popular music, the nature of freedom is ambiguous, since, as with sports, games, and other recreations, play can be disciplined, bound by intricate codes of style and genre, increased knowledge of which enables a *hardcore* sensibility and a concomitant accumulation of “subcultural capital” (Thornton 1995). Such requisite rules of distinction and codes of appropriation are features of “cult fandom” (Hills 2002), and may trigger a passionate (or cultic) commitment to a club night, dance festival, sound system, micro-label, music style, or artist, who may be recognized as authentic, legitimate, and an “authority”. Commitments may also be characterized by sacrificial and pilgrimage behaviors. Devotional behavior within EDMC and other experiential consumption pursuits reveal that leisure genres possess an “ergic” (“of the nature of work,” Turner 1982a: 36), perhaps even dutiful character. But, as exhortations to “work your body” (in “house” music), “go hard or go home” (in clubs), or to “surrender to the Cosmic Spirit” (in trance)—perhaps at disused industrial warehouses, in ex-churches, or in proximity to geometric “shrines” in forests—resound within leisure genres enabling individual choice and experimental *freedoms*, such work/play guarantees an acceleration of risk taking, innovation, and transformation.

Turner recognized that, despite the apparent contraction of institutional religion in the twentieth century, play (in leisure genres) had “become a more serious matter,” inheriting something of “the function of the ritual frame” (1983: 105). Yet while he acknowledged that the way people play in the present is possibly “more profoundly revealing of a culture than how they work, giving access to their heart ‘values’” (ibid.: 104), there is a further, unwritten, though equally significant dimension: the way societies extinguish, diffuse, discipline, or regulate ludic behavior gives us access to a culture’s hegemonic, perhaps *head*, values. Play is hotly contested in the contemporary since it may be transcendent and valuable to players, albeit potentially dangerous or taboo for nonplayers (and thus categorically ambiguous in Mary Douglas’s formulations [1966]). This speaks to the reversible nature of transgression: what constitutes *the sacra* for some may be *sacrilegious* to others. As performance theorist Richard Schechner (1993: 27) reported, play constitutes “a rotten category” in Western history. Schechner’s suggestion that playing is “an activity tainted by unreality, inauthenticity, duplicity, make believe, looseness, fooling around and inconsequentiality” echoes Don Handelman’s

observation (1990: 70) that, in modernity, “the forces of uncertainty in play” are “domesticated,” dismissed as irrational, mere fantasy and pretence. That “domestication” is here synonymous with regulation or, more generally, governmentality, is perhaps no better evinced than by repressive and disciplinary state responses to the transgressive aesthetics of counterculturalists, such as beats, hippies, anarchists, queers, and other, to use Turner’s (1969: 128) phrase, “edgemen” whose ludic lifestyles, category disruptions, and cultural politics threaten to disrupt the established order.

While there is cogency to this reading, it may overlook processes consequential to twentieth century detraditionalizing tendencies, to the expansion of corporate transnationalism, and to the accompanying emergence of restless, fickle, and irresolute identities (Bauman 1996: 32) whose “lifestyle tribalism” is thought to be associated with postmodern consumerism. Market-enabled identity formation (playing as consumer behavior), and the commodification of free play is central to life under capital. If the work of Goulding, Shankar, and Elliott (2002) and other consumer researchers is to be taken seriously, play is a lucrative, or perhaps, *ripe* category. After all, while Turner had it that liminal (or more specifically “liminoidal”) processes arise “apart from central economic and political processes along the margins, in the interfaces and interstices of central and serving institutions” (1982a: 54), according to John Sherry (2005) a “postmodern liminality” is central to capitalism.³ We thus need to qualify that domestication and control can mean both *regulation* (the suppressive practices and prohibitional injunctions of ruling authorities—from church to state) and *commodification* (the expansive and exploitative practices of industry). At one extreme we find exclusion and discipline; at the other, protection and investment. This is perhaps no more evident than in attitudes toward the human body. Illustrative of both state and entrepreneurial power ranging against or recuperating the youth corporeality notably evident in hipness, punk, and other “hard” modes of play, are efforts either to discipline the dirty, abject, or carnival body of the hippie/queer/punk/raver/feral, or to redirect its now measured corporeality into style catalogues and “pleasure prisons” (Reynolds 1998: 242); to arrest and confine the liminoid (*freak*) body or to manipulate its excesses and expenditure through loyalty to the brand. Transgression is thus rendered “deviant” or “cool” (see Frank 1997). Accordingly, dance, in its most passionate and unproductive manifestations, constitutes an ecstatic and unruly embodiment that has been the subject of suspicion and panic (prohibition) throughout Western history (see Wagner 1997), and legitimacy (productivity) at the hands of contemporary market forces.

Of course, the desire to dance within socially unorthodox and permissive environments has motivated all forms of EDMC (from disco to rave to

trance and beyond). While Turner only made a brief entry on the carnal liminalities of social dance in industrial social contexts (the Carnavale in Rio, published in one of his best essays: [1983]), he did make important observations about the development of culture's "subjunctive," as opposed to "indicative mood," assisting explanation of the unsanctioned social dance forms emerging throughout Western popular music (especially EDM). As denizens of nightworld, raving neophytes and entranced *habitués* abscond from the labor market, parents, and the nightly news and enter a world of "wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis," a mood of "maybe," "could be" and "as if" (Turner 1982b: 83, 1992: 149), they are exposed to domains of licensed otherness, festal zones of "free or ludic recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird" (Turner 1982b: 82). As such, they become temporary "freaks." While ravers may, like tribal liminars, be adorned with "unprecedented combinations of familiar elements" (e.g., at once space aliens and indigenes, giving simultaneous expression to primitivism and ascensionism, incorporating Disney characters, superheroes, and the Buddha), there is little sense of structural transformation to their freakiness. At these ludic thresholds, where there may be, as Roberto Da Matta (1984: 223) recognized, little preoccupation with "the act of arriving," the forces of uncertainty in play are valued and consequential.

Furthermore, dancers may experience *ekstasis*, which has been identified by Hemment (1996: 23, drawing on Heidegger) as the condition of "standing out from the surface of life's contingencies ... [enabling] a more profound contemplation of being." As is acknowledged in the recent film documentary *Dances of Ecstasy* (Mahrer and Ma 2004), *ekstasis* or ecstasy approximates a sacred work, an experience Turner (after Csikszentmihalyi 1975) would have deemed "flow," whereby the rules of engagement to life are dissolved to the point where the ego may give way to a "non-reflective awareness autonomous in its 'freedom' from ideology, language and culture" (Landau 2004: 113). In such moments, "freaks" may more approximate the experience of *being* other than *performing* otherness. Here, the ludic reversal or reconfiguration of structure and language common to festival and carnival performance is replaced with the dissolution of language and meaning, with a raw experience of self-dissolution or "surrender," a process most consciously orchestrated within trance parties. Emically recognized as "going hard," "losing it," or being "out there," and often involving the use of chemical alterants such as "Ecstasy" (MDMA)⁴ and "acid" (LSD), the condition may potentiate something of a "limit experience," which, as Anthony D'Andrea (2004: 246) notes, can be sublime and traumatic: "Pleasure, pain, catharsis, awareness, despair, and happiness underlie such accounts of non-ordinary sensations and states. Telepathy, mystical visions, paranoia, ego dissolution, excruciating

pleasures, deep insight, serenity, and cosmic love are not uncommon.... As an exercise of intensity and impossibility, these transpersonal practices engender experiences of personal derailment—deterritorializing asignification—sacred madness with rewards and dangers” (ibid.: 249).

Since journeying beyond the bounds of the ego and predictability, and embodied submission to the rhythm and experimentation with alternative subjectivities, became integral to popular global dance cultures, interdependent efforts to eliminate the *threat* of EDMC,⁵ or to exploit its fiscal *promise* (superclubs like Liverpool’s Cream), can at least be partially understood. Furthermore, the “inconsequential” (and gendered—i.e., feminine) character of dance has tended to warrant its dismissal within studies of youth subcultural language and practice around which the field of cultural studies originated (at the CCCS). Ignoring what could not conform to cultural Marxist models of resistance (e.g., Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979), and uninterested in nonverbal or nonvisual (i.e., kinaesthetic) actions (see Desmond 1997: 30), CCCS scholars neglected much youth cultural practice—including, as McRobbie (1993: 419) observed, that practice “where girls were always found in subcultures,” and later “a motivating force for an entire subculture”—dance. Yet a growing literature, including studies of “playful vitality” (Malbon 1999), an alternative “*habitus*” (Jackson 2004) and a “freak ethnoscape” (D’Andrea 2004), attest to the possibilities of the subjunctive mood rising in the present.

COMMUNITAS AND THE COUNTERCULTURAL “VIBE” OF TRANCE

[Ravers] experience deep feelings of unlimited compassion and love for everyone around them ... For a few hours they are able to leave behind a world full of contradiction, conflict and confusion, and enter a universal realm where everyone is truly equal, a place where peace, love, unity and respect are the laws of the land. (Fritz 1999: 43, 172)

The social interstices of EDMCs (re)produce a sense of immediacy, safety, and belonging, outside and in between the routine *habitus*, conventional gender roles, or the crushing ennui of workaday lives. In her ethnography of young female clubbers, Maria Pini (1997: 121) found that the “sense of connectedness between mind, body and spirit, between individual and crowd, is a theme of a wider ‘synchronicity’ of individual components within what comes to look increasingly like a complex, mechanic network.” In his ethnography of clubbing, Jackson (2004: 19) comments that on a crowded dance floor, “you sense the sheer closeness of the bodies next to you and the sen-

sation of moving *en masse*. Your kinaesthetic sense is externalised by being transferred from your own body into the body of the crowd... The room ceases to be occupied by strangers, instead it is filled with party folk all satisfying their need to *be*. The heat can be overwhelming as the energy level rises with each tune the DJ drops. The sweat, which pours from your skin, cleanses you, draining out the toxic residue of frustrated plans, niggling worries, stupid arguments and petty insecurities. Nothing matters, but the beat, the crowd, the dance. Glorious.”

While Pini and Jackson take no recourse to Turner to elucidate this glorious intercorporeality, as the dance floor is thought to contextualize an abandonment of the sociocultural roles and status expectations by which individuals are routinely divided, Turner’s “spontaneous *communitas*” has proven particularly appealing to dance scholars and ethnographers (see Bardella 2002; Gerard 2004; McAteer 2002; Olaveson 2004; Sommer 2001–02; St John 2004a: 29ff.; Sylvan 2002; Takahashi and Olaveson 2003: 81; Tramacchi 2000), some of whom perceive how Turner’s (1974: 169) understanding of a “direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities which tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured and free community” facilitates comprehension of “the vibe.” According to Sally Sommer (2001–02: 73), the “vibe” is “an active communal force, a feeling, a rhythm that is created by the mix of dancers, the balance of loud music, the effects of darkness and light, the energy. Everything interlocks to produce a powerful sense of liberation. The vibe is an active, exhilarating feeling of ‘now-ness’ that everything is coming together—that a good party is in the making. The vibe is constructive; it is a distinctive rhythm, the groove that carries the party psychically and physically.” The “vibe” is an experience pervasive to dance cultures, where *habitués* “rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and enter into vital relations with other[s]” (Turner 1969: 128, in Sommer 2001–02: 72).

According to Donald Weber (1995: 528), “the heady promise of social critique and social regeneration” inscribed in the countercultural carnivalesque of the 1960s in the US provided the principal stimulus for the “apocalyptic agency” of Turner’s ritual liminality (*communitas*). As was revealed in *The Ritual Process* (1969) and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974), *communitas* is a theme at least partially shaped by the countercultural and utopian undercurrents of 1960s California. In his own “long conversation” with Edith Turner, Matthew Engelke (2004: 30) points out that in Palo Alto (where Turner was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences from 1961 to 1962) the Turners encountered beatniks, “fellow admirers of Rimbaud and detractors from ‘the establishment’”. These new

friends had them read Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and the poetry of Alan Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. Ithaca was also a fertile intellectual ground. It was full of budding hippies and the site for Edie of her first 'love-in' on the Arts and Sciences Quadrangle at Cornell." This subversive and defiant atmosphere transpiring within the "social drama" of a modern nation state (and indeed in the global context of an escalating "cold war"), had some conceptual impact on liminality. Turner recognized that "happenings" (extended psychedelic rock music gatherings, "freak" playgrounds, locales of "good vibes" sometimes known as "raves"; see Rietveld 1993: 41), and the hippie quest for "existence" paralleled the experience of traditional ritual liminars. While nowhere clearly stated by Turner, the effect of psychedelics on a generation of young Westerners in the 1960s—a dismemberment of psychic and social structures—may well have nourished the concept of "anti-structure." It is not unreasonable to suggest that hallucinogenic highs correspond with the "floating worlds" that preoccupied Turner (1969: vii). Unlike the antistructure of tribal ritual, though, the counterculture harbored a millenarian, perhaps even apocalyptic, disposition to embrace the psychedelic "happening" as "the end of human endeavour" (ibid.: 139).⁶ Taking a "heroic dose" of *communitas*, it was a conscious effort to escape the dialectic, enter more permanent autonomous zones, to stay afloat forever. The decade constituted a historically "liminal" juncture where, for instance, "the 'rock' *communitas*" (as reported in such significant scene publications as Haight-Ashbury's *The Oracle*) would be extolled by scenesters as a principal site of what Turner related as the construction of "new definitions and models for behaviour" (Turner 1974: 261ff.), indeed, the formation of a new America.

EDMC would be heir to this transformational sensibility. As early as proto-disco (for a discussion of David Mancuso's Soho "Loft" see Lawrence 2003: 9f.), electronic dance music would be a conduit for experimentation, transgression, and liberation, with rave becoming a manifestation of countercultural continuity in the 1990s. While disco was domesticated in commodified *communitas*, and the E-fueled "second summer of love" (in London in 1988) hardly replicated the "politics of ecstasy" advocated by Timothy Leary (nor developed as a context for New Left insurgency), acid house rave and its offshoots did carry forward the "anti-disciplinary" politics of the 1960s (Stephens 1998). Early ravers may have been "Disneyland hippies" stridently simulating the images of that decade (Rietveld 1993: 43, 55), but their "amoralism" would nevertheless demonstrate continuity with earlier efforts to disappear from, rather than openly oppose, the disciplinary gaze of the state and the recuperating powers of the market. A "fructile chaos" in the present, inheriting a "freedom to" construct what is akin to Hetherington's (1997) "alternative orderings," trance culture would become most rem-

iniscient of the sociality informing the Turners. Fulfilling advanced needs for self-realization and a highly developed reflexive apparatus, trance (and psytrance) enthusiasts would be most expressively continuous with earlier countercultural generations.⁷ That those exotic sites of hippie experimentation, Goa and Ibiza, have played significant roles in the techno-counterculture (D'Andrea 2004; Davis 2004) demonstrates this, as does the fact that electronic trance dance parties are continuous with UK free rock-folk and New Age Traveller festivals (Partridge 2006). Furthermore, Eastern (especially Hindu) and pagan religiosity⁸—integral to the earlier counterculture—remain formative, and a “techno-millennarian” sensibility has evolved (see St John 2004b).

Since the formative 1980s “full moon parties” in Goa, travel—often to international festivals such as, for instance, Portugal’s biennial Boom festival⁹—has become integral to the psytrance experience (though club events such as Earthdance or the UK’s Synergy Project are common too). Events become akin to pilgrimage destinations, a circumstance adding weight to the applicability of *communitas* to trance events, as it is in the study of pilgrimage to sacred centers (specifically Catholic centers: Turner and Turner 1978) that *communitas* has received its most effusive application (and where its unqualified application came into question). A trance party’s physical and cultural remoteness (its otherness) from “civilization” enhances its potential as a *sacred* context for extraordinary experience. And as D’Andrea comments, the “horizontal displacements” constituted by travel (trips) to remote physical locations are often accompanied by “vertical displacements” of self and identity (2004: 249)—“tripping” experiences that, with the assistance of DJs like *sadhu* Goa Gil, enable the “surrender to the vibe” (McAteer 2002: 29). That the “vital relations” constituting a “good vibe” are, for many, chemically assisted, seems incontestable. While clubs such as those documented by Jackson (2004) are sites whose “hyper-sociality” is enhanced by the “chemical intimacy” of Ecstasy, a different order of sociality, indeed, a “psychedelic *communitas*” (Tramacchi 2000),¹⁰ is generated on and around the dance floor at psytrance events where use of psychedelics (e.g., LSD and other “entheogens”)¹¹ is common. As parties in exotic (peripheral) locations gain reputations as significant centers for reproducing “the vibe,” they attract travelers who undergo periodic (seasonal) journeys, often involving trials, ordeals, and “limit experiences,” and who hold expectations of the special vibe to which they gravitate and “surrender”.

But the idea of the dance *communitas* is not without its problems. Adopting *communitas* to unpack the techniques and practices of “connectedness” within EDMC, and evaluating its possible contiguity with new religious movements, Tim Olaveson (2004: 93) observes raves as contexts for the dissolution

of differences based on class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age—thereby reproducing the ideology of inclusivity that enjoys a lasting legacy in EDMC and provides motivation for “raving” evangelists (see Fritz 1999). Yet, while a social leveling thesis is maintained as an emic ideology manifested, for instance, in such conceits as PLUR (the oft-repeated rave mantra of Peace Love Unity and Respect), or even in the “vibe” itself, studies indicate that not only is the techno-communitas jeopardized by a pharmacological dystopia (Reynolds 1997b; 1998), a sexual division of labor (Bradby 1993; McRobbie 1994: 170), elitism, exclusivity, and coolness (Thornton 1995), and the reproduction of “striated” relations such as those that Saldanha (2002, 2004) observes in contemporary Goa, it is compromised by vigilant authorities seeking to covertly monitor its production and curtail its reproduction. Thus, in negotiation with authorities to conform to zoning restrictions and health and safety guidelines, organizers and promoters sometimes make compromises in their struggle to reproduce an unadulterated, utopic experience.

The result is varied. While little research is available to buttress discussion of the results of such compromises in trance culture exclusively, for EDMC generally the “vibe” may become: *encoded*, its liquid architecture solidified, its immediacy and unpredictability enshrined in routinized and normative (i.e., legal) party structures (such as that described by Gerard 2004: 173f.); *decoded*, subject to surveillance, its temporal and spatial practice heavily regulated and criminalized (see Gibson and Pagan); or *recoded*, its transgressions redirected and rerouted within authorized leisure corporations (clubs) occupying the liminal zones of the postindustrial city (Hobbs et al. 2000) or exotic locations like Ibiza or Koh Phangan that cater to rave (trance) tourism (see D’Andrea 2004; Westerhausen 2002). With simultaneous standardization, criminalization, and institutionalization triggering outbreaks of ferality, inciting nascent “freakness” (D’Andrea 2006), spurring renegade sound systems to secede from the parent culture (see St John 2005), or engendering “hardcore” commitments pushing below the radar of the major media and the legislature,¹² we come close to the “instituant” religion identified by French anthropologist Roger Bastide (1975, see Gauthier 2004) whose “savage” religiosity is to the “instituted” as Turner’s “anti-structure” is to “structure.”

DANCE, RITUAL, AND NEOTRIBALISM

Just as EDMCs are popular carriers of liminality flourishing among Western youth, might not dance cultures exemplify what Turner considered to be the “cultural debris of some forgotten liminal ritual” (1982a: 55) surfacing in

(post)modernity? Despite the apparent diminishing power of ritual (ostensibly passing like Tolkien's Elves from the "Grey Havens" into the West), "there are signs today," Turner thought, "that the amputated specialized genres are seeking to rejoin and to recover something of the numinosity lost in their *sparagmos*, in their dismemberment" (1986: 42). Would trance contextualize such a recovery? While the notion that ritual has diminished from the disenchanting nineteenth and twentieth centuries onward may be a specious intellectual position (see Bell 1997: 254), there seems little doubt that trance party promoters and cultural *habitués*, like their countercultural forebears, have generally embraced such an argument. Whatever the case, the in-between, liminal, or passage-like character of dance cultures has received increased scholarly attention (e.g., Goulding, Shankar, and Elliott 2002: 268f.; Sommer 2001–02). Though insiders and academics have repeatedly referenced the "ritual" of clubs and raves,¹³ as Gerard points out, the structures and experience of such "ritual-ness" are most often subjected to neither empirical, nor critical, investigation. In this way, a sense of ill-defined "ritual-ness" inherited from Birmingham's CCCS is thought to pose an obstacle to understanding the ritualized social interaction at dance events (Gerard 2004: 169; see also St John 2006).¹⁴ But the proposition that EDMC is liminal ritual, possessing the processual structure of a *rite de passage* (van Gennep 1960), remains problematic since the experience may better approximate the *transitional world* of the festival, the return to which is sought over and over by participants repeatedly deferring "*agrégation*." If such constitutes a *threshold*, it is indeterminate and without telos. If it is liminal, then it possesses an accelerated, iterative, and hyperliminal character—perhaps similar to the ephemeral "hyper-communities" referred to by Kozinets (2002)¹⁵—comprehension of which may assist explanation of postmodern ritual.

Attempting to sustain the *vibration* through a vast network that D'Andrea calls a "freak ethnoscape," as participants in a "civilizational diaspora," trance travelers pursue a kind of transnational "vibe." Escaping commercial exploitation, they seek refuge and sustenance in parallel worlds of their own making. But while they may be exiles occupying a place that is "no-place," squatters on utopian thresholds, they are less passengers than *habitués*—"nomads" who "do not move" (D'Andrea 2004: 241). Connoting separation, a breaking away from the parent culture, and thus an implicit cultural politics, the "Exodus" Cyber-Tribal Festival held in Northeast NSW, Australia, evinces a desire to be *separate together*, collectively elsewhere. It is this subterranean sociality, this sense of being together in exile, of being "alone together" (Moore 1995), of being colleagues in transition, that may approximate the specific meaning of being *en-tranced* within milieus from proto-disco through to psytrance.

Since liminality is thought to be “the central aesthetic feature of underground dance music,” indeed “encoded in every mix between records” (Gerard 2004: 174, 177), such practice also evokes Turner’s speculated “re-tribalization” (and resacralization) of the contemporary. If we listen to dancers who valorize and adopt the raiments of tribalism, borrowing symbols and motifs of indigenous cultures, referring to “the vibe” as “tribal,”¹⁶ consuming hallucinogenic or entheogenic substances whose use is known or purported to have originated with certain indigenous peoples,¹⁷ and even regarding their dance and party organizations as “tribes” (e.g., Spiral Tribe, Moontribe, Shrumtribe, Moksha Tribe), then we can hardly avoid speculation about the valency of such a claim. Associated with contemporary romanticist desires to reconnect with origins and regain a lost authenticity, to “Return to the Source” (a UK trance club and label; see St John 2004c: 26ff.), such claims are redolent within the trance community. As François Gauthier (2005: 25) asserts, the “myth” that rave enables a “re-connection with more tribal, primitive, simpler, fuller, truer, more powerful and ‘more real’ times and experiences more or less explicitly sets raves in opposition to a decayed, empty, superficial and meaningless world.” And the imagined return to “more real” and perhaps “more human” or other *times* is often facilitated by the reclamation of other *places*, such as industrial wastelands, abandoned warehouses, church basements, and bridge lees. The transforming of such spaces into sites of sacred sociality evinces a desire for more compassionate, authentic, and enchanted communities.

Commentators have grown excited about an apparent “electronic re-tribalization of society” whereby electronic musics (and other advanced technologies) are implicated in the achievement of a desired “reconnection with the primitive in us all” (Amoeba 1994: 1; Fatone 2004: 204). Though a host of cultural traditions—including Indigenous (Australian Aboriginal, American Indian, Mayan) and Oriental (e.g., Buddhist and Hindu)—are borrowed from and remixed by new generations of consumers with advanced “compositional sensibilities” (Bennett 1999: 610), the presence, for example, of a Balinese *gamelan* orchestra in San Francisco Bay Area techno parties (Fatone 2004: 206), the sexualized exoticizing of Hinduism at the 1999 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Sleaze Ball (Velayutham and Wise 2001), or the use of Australian Aboriginal instruments and iconography, demonstrates that such desires surface in the romanticizing of ethnic Others whose symbols may be appropriated (borrowed, disembodied, homogenized, and dehistoricized) for the purpose of authenticating Western selves. Of course, it is not the music alone that contextualizes the embrace of primitivity, or the embodiment of the East. Dance—collective “trance” under perhaps the “shamanic” guidance of DJs conducting an all night dance “ritual” (perhaps in the vein

of *sadhu* Goa Gil)—is often articulated to exemplify a generalized return to tribalness, which may be conceptualized as a stripping down (a lowering) of social status and pretense, or an “opting out” or withdrawal (a marginalizing) from the center, both of which, as Turner noted, enable the approximation of the social liminality of *communitas* for countercultures, cults, gangs, and other modern agents of antistructure (see Turner 1969: 112f., 1974: 244). While the abandonment to an experience approximating trance (and thus tribalness in the popular discourse of participants) may reflect the “continuing rhetorical association” amongst dominant Western populations of “bodily expressivity” with “other” (gender, class, but specifically ethnic) groups (Desmond 1997: 30), many aver that the “tribal gathering” constitutes a return to an experience common to all humanity.

Roy Rappaport’s (1999) philosophy of ritual, and the role of dance within it, assists understanding of the undifferentiated and timeless sociality commonly felt to be relived or revived at trance parties.¹⁸ A prolonged dance experience appears to orchestrate a shift in temporal awareness from what Rappaport calls “social time” (mundane social interactions) to a synchronization of “organic” (physiological) temporalities facilitated in particular by percussive rhythm (electronic beat-driven dancing can occur over several days at trance festivals). The experience of “organic time,” argues Rappaport, enables entry into “eternity”—or a “time of out of time”: “the sheer successionless duration of the absolute changelessness of what recurs, the successionless duration of what is neither preceded nor succeeded, which is ‘neither coming nor passing away,’ but always was and always will be” (1999: 231). Others have noted that what Rappaport calls a “successionless duration” where “one returns ever again to what never changes” (*ibid.*), is particular to festal realms, the “eternal presence” of which contrasts with the teleology or function that ritual is often thought to harbor. As Gauthier (2004: 69) suggests, it is the festival that “implicitly seeks forgetfulness, selflessness and oblivion. What this implies is that the prompted effervescence is sought after *for itself* and *in itself*. In other words, it is its own purpose and reason. By opening up to creativity, by staging an otherly, unlicensed temporary world, the festive need only contain *itself*. Disengaging from temporality, the festive bursts into an ‘eternal’—or, to be more precise, ‘indefinite’—present.”¹⁹

But while “eternal presence” may imply a “forgetting” of the present, a disappearance, at the same time it implies remembering, a simultaneous “anamnesis,” and thus a return to familiarity.²⁰ Thus the effervescent moment of “intersubjective illumination,” to return to Turner’s discourse on *communitas*, may involve not only those who are “essentially us,” and those who are corporeally present, but those “others” who are perceived to have ‘come before us’, and perhaps even those who are yet to come. As McAteer

(2002: 33) points out, for trance enthusiasts this memory “extends back as far as archaeological knowledge will permit since members of this culture typically identify with all civilizations, especially tribal ones.” As he further relates: “Not only do the beats stay constant throughout the party, giving rise to a sense of changelessness, but the event is marked by a feeling that similar activities revolving around similar beats have been going on since time immemorial” (ibid.: 33f).²¹ The experience of “one-ness with oneself, with the congregation, or with the cosmos” (Rappaport 1999: 220) appears to trigger the kind of reflexive imagination apparent in the following San Francisco raver’s comment: “You don’t have to watch many National Geographics to see the obvious similarities between parties such as these and the religious ceremonies of more ‘primitive’ cultures. Ritualistic raving will remain viable because it appeals to the sense of spirit in us that has been viable since the dawn of human consciousness.... On Sunday we were a tribe of the Universe, of the basic essence of life and energy, body and mind (reproduced in Sylvan 2002: 147).

That Western youth populations are not entrained to enter and interpret entranced states of consciousness within received tribal frameworks—such as Condomble Orisha possession ceremonies among the Mae Zelinha of Pelo Ife Axa, Brazil (in *Dances of Ecstasy*)—is recognized by scholars of contemporary dance (see Takahashi 2004). But this does not prevent people from attempting to make sense of their experience, often via highly personalized, complex, and fluid frameworks of meaning. In a culture dominated by “monophasic consciousness” (Laughlin, McManus, and D’Aquili 1992), the desire for altered states of consciousness tends to result in a proliferation of interpretative schemes. Turner indicated that the inhabitant of “a place that is no place and a time that is no time” (1983: 103) will seek out frameworks to make sense of, recount, and eventually replicate the experience. “He,” says Turner, will “ransack the inherited cultural past for models or for cultural elements drawn from the debris of past models from which he can construct a new model which will, however falteringly, replicate in words his concrete experience of spontaneous communitas” (1982a: 48). Via an articulation of a generalized “tribe of the Universe” to more specific appropriations, trance culture demonstrates how this is achieved. Events like Moontribe Full Moon Gatherings, Tribeadelic, and Psycorroboree are determined efforts by promoters and organizers to recreate “eternity”, to revive a “time out of time” (and thus liminal ritual). Thus the objective of Goa Gil, who has studied and experienced various traditional initiation rites, has been to “redefine ancient tribal ritual for the 21st century” (McAteer 2002). Furthermore, the intention to replicate the altered experience of the tribal initiate, cult member, pagan rite, ancestral pilgrimage, or epic quest is apparent in the strategies of

party organizations such as Return to the Source, Exodus, or the US Pacific Northwest's Oracle Gatherings, in event décor (totems and do-it-yourself shrines) and fliers, in the imagery projected by VJs and in DJ monikers, in the titles of releases and the samples used on them. While we can hardly call a party "vibe" an "imposition of liturgical sequences upon duration" (Rappaport 1999: 234), the commentary of a great many participants—and see, for example, Fritz (1999), ENRG (2001), Davis (2004) or the work of Apollo (2001)—suggests not that events are merely, if at all, primitivist reenactments or simulations of eternity, but that they facilitate the transportation of participants into a realm of experience constituting "an extraordinary union of the quick and the changeless" (Rappaport 1999: 225).

LIMINOID TRIBES?

While produced by a conscious effort at ritualization or an intention to re-sacralize, the trance party's liminal status seems always tempered by its independent, do-it-yourself, and subversive character. In liminoidal fashion, the party strives for its autonomy, its freedom outside the law, and beyond the gaze of the "authorities." But since participants are exposed to and express "truths" relating to how the world "ought to be," there appears to be no clear progression from liminal to liminoid in its emergence. Participants may regard performers (such as the revered Goa Gil and other DJs like Ray Castle) as "authorities" in their own right. And it is also common, as illustrated by Australian trance festivals (see St John 2001b and forthcoming), that Indigenous traditional owners of event sites are respected as authorities, deference to whom is observed through various gestures such as permission ceremonies. At Exodus, for instance, Bunjalung Nation dancers perform Opening and Closing Ceremonies, assisting, one could argue, the transition to "cosmic time." Redolent truths, or *sacra* (Turner 1967: 102), such as reconciliation and ecological sustainability, may not possess "common intellectual and emotional meaning for all the members of the widest effective community" (Turner 1977: 45), but the wide circulation of their symbols indicates a reasonable approximation.

The dilemmas inherent to observing ritual in the contemporary via a liminal/liminoid, sacred/secular division are thus apparent in the study of trance culture. As these frameworks constitute leisure experiences within the context of postwar consumer capitalism, where involvement is voluntary, often short-lived, and subject to changes in fashion, style, and the development of communication technologies, it appears to be a lifestyle (liminoid) tribalism to which we are witness. Yet that the process has greater complex-

ity seems confirmed by the heuristics of poststructuralist sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996). As Maffesolians aver, what has come to be accepted as “neotribalism”—the elective, temporary, empathetic, and networked sociality developing post-WWII—has found its most apposite manifestation in raving, or techno-tribalism (Bennett 1999; Gaillot 1999; Gore 1997: 55f; Luckman 2003: 324; Malbon 1998, 1999; St John 2003, forthcoming). According to the theory, the contemporary “tribus” converge in *optional* “orgiastic” associations from theater restaurants to football matches to rock concerts and raves.²² But the Maffesolian perspective also identifies a “return to local ethics,” reclamatory practices illustrating a “persistent and imperious need to be en-reliance” (Maffesoli 1997: 32), an “empathetic,” “de-individualized,” and re-enchanted sociality—replicating Turner’s own speculations about re-liminalization. For Turner, echoing Durkheim, while a qualitative de-liminalization appeared to characterize modernity, holding a trace of “the original,” many performance genres involve collective commitment, moral duty, the display of sacred symbols, and the engagement in sacred work. “Re-liminalization,” or “neoliminality,” has been noted to be pervasive within contemporary cultural performances, from sporting events—notably the Olympic Games (McAloon 1984) and the “carnival liminality” of football (Hognestad 2003)—to alternative music and lifestyle festivals (see Hetherington 2000; Kozinets 2002; Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993; Newton 1988; St John 2001a). Yet, the curious feature of many of these “neotribal” associations, which they hold in common with psytrance events, is that they are orchestrated to accommodate or revive a consciously “tribal” sociality. According to a Turnerian framework, these *neotribal tribes* would appear to be liminoidal liminalities, a complicated circumstance that appears to further confound the distinction.

CONCLUSION

“Raves are good because they don’t happen all the time.” Reproduced by Scott Hutson (2000: 43), this raver’s comment—which could have been “raves are good because they are temporary departures from time”—is close to a popular, emic, definition of the dialectical logic of the *limen*: a necessarily impermanent yet perennial, fleeting yet eternal, condition. With the *limen* offering insights on electronic dance music cultures (and psytrance in particular), Turnerian ritual theory assists efforts to elucidate youth cultural practices and contemporary society more widely. EDMCs constitute efforts by contemporary *habitués* to “make now last longer,” to push eternity’s envelope. Such is attempted through increasing the frequency of party attendance, by accelerating the “vibe,” by defying (re)incorporation and desacralization.

A convergence of counter- and electronic dance music cultures, psytrance demonstrates a unique manifestation of this. Trance constitutes a persistent effort to escape the dialectic in more permanent states of impermanence through the adoption of transitional “tribal” identities. This chapter has also explored how tribal trance demonstrates inconsistencies in Turner’s speculative liminal/liminoid, ritual/leisure formulation. It is particularly apparent that, while illustrative of hypersubjunctive contexts for the expression of freedom and autonomy, such cultures are characterized by dutiful commitment and respect for authority, inconsistencies I explore in current investigations of global psytrance culture.

NOTES

1. My observations of trance culture in Australia are drawn from both a growing literature on the subject, and ongoing ethnographic research (including Victoria’s Rainbow Serpent Festival and Exodus Cyber-Tribal Festival in New South Wales), the more complete results of which I hope to convey in future publications. I thank Sarah Nicholson for reading and commenting on an earlier draft.
2. EDMC includes a vast range of genres and associated subcultures, from proto-disco through house to rave and post-rave developments—from jungle to trance, from clubs to free parties. See St John (2006) for an introduction to EDMC by way of an overview of scholarly approaches to its religio-spirituality.
3. Sharon Rowe (this volume) argues that sport’s characterization as liminoid (marginal, fragmentary) is belied by its central and ubiquitous role in contemporary society (especially capitalism), where it can serve to reinforce traditional social and cultural values.
4. In 2003, official, though likely conservative, statistics estimated that 500,000 to two million Ecstasy tablets were being consumed each week in Britain (by 2.2 percent of the British population aged 16 to 59—730,000 people) and reported that eight million people were consuming Ecstasy (an increase of 70 percent over five years) globally (Thompson and Doward 2003).
5. In the form of the UK’s Criminal Justice Act (1994) or America’s so called “RAVE Act” (2003). The CJA gave police extraordinary powers to thwart unlicensed rave parties, especially those in rural areas, and criminalize promoters and participants. Legislated as the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act, the “RAVE (or Reducing America’s Vulnerability to Ecstasy) Act” would involve repressive penalties for promoters and club owners.
6. This sentiment is found in the hippies’ etymologically homologous relationship between “existence” and “ecstasy,” where “to exist is to ‘stand outside’—i.e., to stand outside the totality of structural positions one normally occupies in a social system. To exist is to be in ecstasy” (Turner 1969: 138).

7. Like ambient house, psytrance would be influenced by the pastoralism, pantheism, and nostalgia of psychedelic rock (see Reynolds 1997a), and the desire for an experience approximating “panenhenism” (or “all-in-one-ism”), which may itself engender “psychedelic mysticism” whereby participants may experience a profound sense of interdependence with the cosmos (see Partridge 2003).
8. As is perhaps most evident in the work of Terence McKenna, who held that trance parties (and hallucinogenic substances—particularly psilocybin) would be a chief means of bootstrapping the “archaic revival”—a near-future reconciliation with the “planetary other” (1991: chap. 15).
9. Featuring a “Liminal Village,” which in 2004, included a conferencing and workshop area with presentations on *ayahuasca* and a range of workshops including yoga, meditation, “crystal technology,” astrology, alchemy, ecological awareness, and “ritual structures,” and a “Dreamspell School”—all of which evince post-1960s spiritual pathways attending to the interconnectedness of self healing and ecological harmony (see <http://www.boomfestival.org>). The village name reveals how trance culture has been exposed to and influenced by Turnerian theory. See Lee Gilmore (this volume) for discussion of the adoption of ritual theory at Burning Man.
10. Researching the significance of psychoactives in actualizing the “subjective continuity” of “doofs” in north eastern New South Wales and southern Queensland, Australia, Des Tramacchi suggests that doofs “open a juncture where individuals are able to share in a kind of *agape* or collective ecstasy that mitigates against the sense of *ennui* and isolation so often associated with modernity” (2001: 184). Joshua Schmidt (2005) uses the phrase “hallucinatory communitas” to describe a similar experience in Israeli psy-trance culture.
11. “Entheogenic” is a nonpejorative and non-ethnocentric term recommended by Jonathon Ott (1993) meaning that which “engenders god within.” Other than LSD, the “endogenous psychedelic” (Strassman 2001) DMT has also grown in popularity at trance events.
12. As Gauthier (2004: 79) points out, such “hardcore” developments involve “decomposition, destructuring, the essence and aim of a counterculture that, paradoxically, desires not—a priori—to be instituted in a new *definable*, and therefore possibly recuperated and commodified, culture.”
13. This is evident in a range of approaches, from early dance culture research (Redhead 1993; particularly Melechi 1993; and Reitveld 1993) attending to the apparent “rituals of disappearance” of acid house via a Baudrillardian lens, to Takahashi and Olaveson’s (2003; see also Olaveson 2004) serious approach to the ritual, or more to the point, to the “syncretic ritualizing” of raves; to Sylvan’s (2002: 136ff.) discussion of the temporal and spatial ordering forming the ritual dimension of the typical rave.
14. Detailing the DJ-dancer interaction, Gerard’s (2004) approach is of particular note since it enhances understanding of the *ritual process* of the EDM experience. As stages in the transition between records (tracks) in a DJ’s “set” are thought to correspond to van Gennepp’s tripartite rites of passage model, and dancing

- participants acquire a “ritual knowledge” of the dance/music experience that is contingent upon the DJ’s manipulation of the “liminal techniques” of filtering, looping, EQing and mixing, each successful record (or track) mix may, Gerard argues, enable belonging in a dance floor community. In another approach, Tramacchi draws parallels between “psychedelic dance rituals” (Australian outdoor dance events or “doofs”) and several non-Western community-oriented entheogenic rituals (Tramacchi 2004: 125; see also Tramacchi 2001: 179ff.).
15. Sustaining “the vibe” by accelerating the frequency of party-going is a process thought to render the experience ever more fleeting, unobtainable, and dystopic. For instance, Simon Reynolds (1997b) argues that increasingly risky pharmacological dosages and combinations possess dystopian consequences for partygoers.
 16. For instance, Saunders (1996:35) favorably compares raves with “tribal rituals or religious ceremonies,” and Sylvan (2002: 147) reports raves celebrating “ageless tribal rituals.”
 17. For example, psilocybin and *Salvia divinorum* with the Mazatec of Mexico, and *ayahuasca* amongst the inhabitants of the Western Amazon.
 18. A theme also explored by Michael McAteer (2002).
 19. An adequate consideration of the roots of trance festivals would recognize that, in European history, this “eternal presence” has been periodically reestablished in agricultural festivals and seasonal celebrations (experienced throughout premodern history into the present) and through carnivals (since at least the Roman Saturnalia and Lupercalia)—events that are realms of “turbulence, free improvisation, carefree gaiety [and] . . . uncontrolled fantasy,” and that give permission to what Roger Caillois named *paidia* (from Greek meaning “child”) (Turner 1983: 106).
 20. As Iyer (1978) relates, “anamnesis” means “soul memory.”
 21. The popularity of the film *Dances of Ecstasy*, which documents similarities between trance experiences within traditional and nontraditional cultures, and which has been screened at trance festivals worldwide, may be indicative of a longing for familiarity and duration among the *habitués* of such events.
 22. And techno-tribes, like EDMCs, utilize available technologies—especially the Internet (websites, list-serves, blogs, p2p networks)—to build and maintain an identity and to promote events (the “tribal” *raison d’être*).

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