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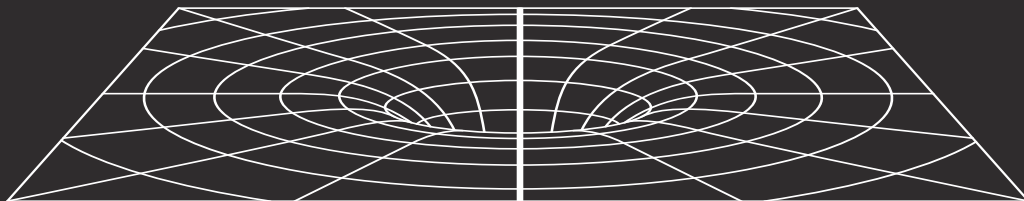
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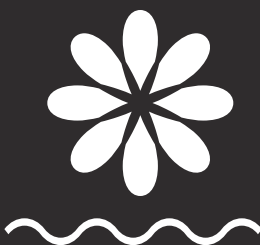


**WELCOME
FRIEND,**



**SOMETIMES THE MOST INTERESTING
JOURNEY'S ARE A SIDEQUEST**

INTRODUC- TION



06

LUCY KATE

The world of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) is vast and unique. From its earliest roots in underground warehouses and back-room house parties, to its mainstream festival counterparts, EDM continues to make its way in the music scene.

I had no idea that when I went to my first rave that it would change the course of my life in such a significant way. I, alongside so many others, instantly fell in love with the music, the people, and the culture, quickly making it our entire personalities. I hope that this book serves as insight into the culture and world that many of us call home. I wish to give perspective into the lives of the real people that attend these events, hoping that you the reader can approach them with open minds and hearts.

It is with this in mind that I present *Aboveground Belowground*, a collection of photos and essays illustrating the essence of rave culture through the years. In order to keep the nature of raving alive, it's crucial to teach the new generations, what came before them so they can understand the rather political and controversial past of the festivals and events we love today. There is no denying the rich history this community holds, and it is this author's hope that this culture continues alive and well.

The first half of the book is designed to provide you, the reader, the context and lingo needed to understand the basis of the culture and to gain perspective into the way a raver may think. The second half of the book will dive into real life perspectives through interview, or personal stories, and provide the reader with the opinions of those that are in the community themselves. The hope is that this provides a more wholistic perspective on the raves past, present, and future, so that the culture may continue on.



Throughout the book you will encounter photos from two primary photographers, with the goal of showcasing the contrast in early rave culture v.s today's more modernized atmosphere.

Tristan O'Neill captured the U.K. scene in the 90's, particularly interested by the Jungle and Drum N Bass genre's that were popular at the time. There is no denying Tristan's ability to capture the essence of rave culture, with such a genuine and raw feeling to the photos he shot. His photos give us stunning visual insight into the raving world of the 90's.

Drew Ressler created a presence in the scene with his bright and detailed captures alongside some of the largest names in EDM today. His ability to capture the transcendent nature of



8

Tribal Dance

United Kingdom, 1995

Tristan O'Neill

live performances commonly noted by members today, make his work an exceptional showcase of what the culture and visual identity is in modern day.

And lastly, sprinkled throughout are pictures of my own in gray and white, captured throughout the years, that feel quintessential to raving. Whether you are new to the scene or were going to raves in the olden days, this book is a look inside and what drives such strong connection among us. Embrace and love it fully and it will give you so much in return.



Big Gigantic Rowdytown XI
Colorado, 2023

Drew Ressler
rukes.com



Club 144
London, 2002

Tristan O'Neill



World Dance
London, 1998

Tristan O'Neill



Slander Lost Lands

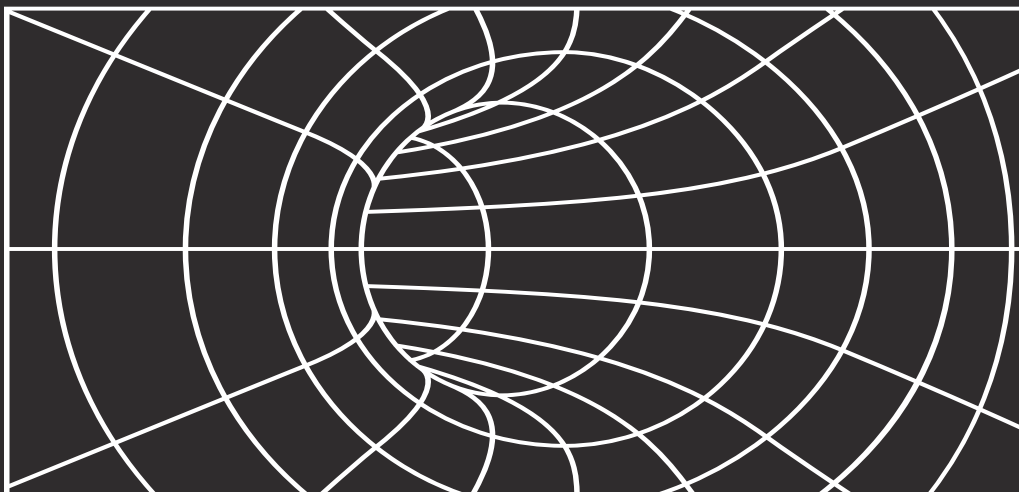
Ohio, 2025



Drew Ressler
rukes.com

THE RAVERS CODE

WHY PLURIS
EVERYTHING AT
A PARTY



YEARS



14

DAYNE HARRIS

PLUR stands for Peace, Love, Unity, Respect, a mantra that's as central to the rave scene as the beats that drive it. It's so much more than just a catchy acronym; it's a philosophy, a way of life for ravers around the globe. But why is it so important?

PLUR isn't just about having a good time. It's about creating a safe, inclusive space where everyone is welcome. Peace is the foundation. It's all about letting go of aggression and embracing harmony. Love comes next, encouraging connections and friendships, free from judgment. Unity is key in a scene that thrives on collective experiences, where every-one dances to the same rhythm. And lastly, Respect is about acknowledging each other's individuality and boundaries.

This standard has shaped the rave culture, making it unique in the world of music and festivals. It's a culture that looks out for each other, where you're not just a face in the crowd, but part of a community. You'll see PLUR in action through small acts – sharing water, looking out for some-one who might be having a tough time, trading kandi, or just a smile and a kind word.

So, why is PLUR important? Because it turns an event into something more meaningful. It's about building connections, celebrating diversity, and ensuring everyone has a good, safe time. It's the glue that holds the rave community together, making each event not just a gathering, but a shared experience built on positive vibes. Remember, in the world of raving, PLUR isn't just a word; it's the heart of the party!



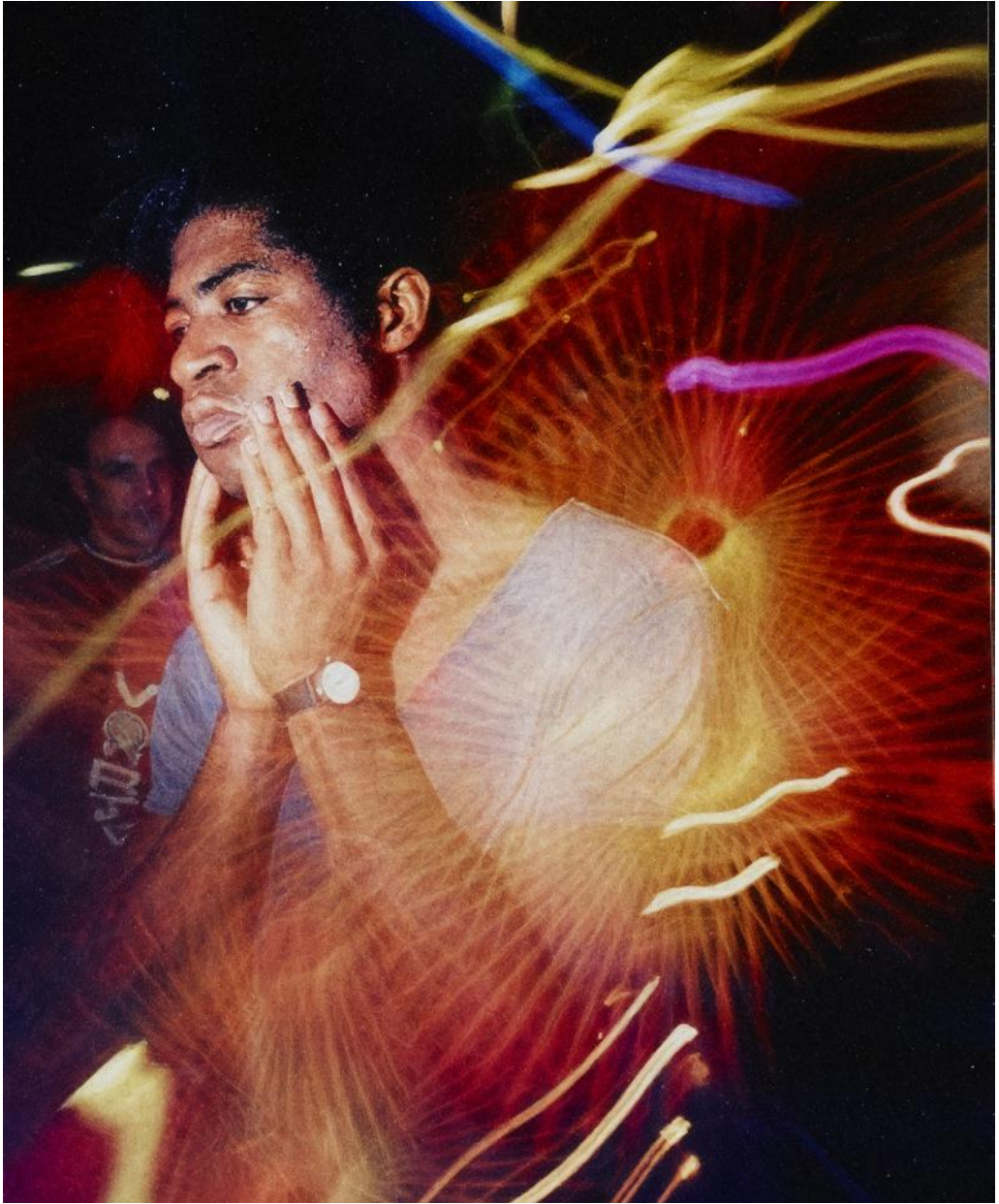
United Dance
Stevenage, 1995

Tristan O'Neill



Desire Winter Wonderland
Tottenham, 1996

Tristan O'Neill



Man in the End
London, 1998

Tristan O'Neill



Sullivan King Red Rocks
Colorado, 2024

Drew Ressler
rukes.com

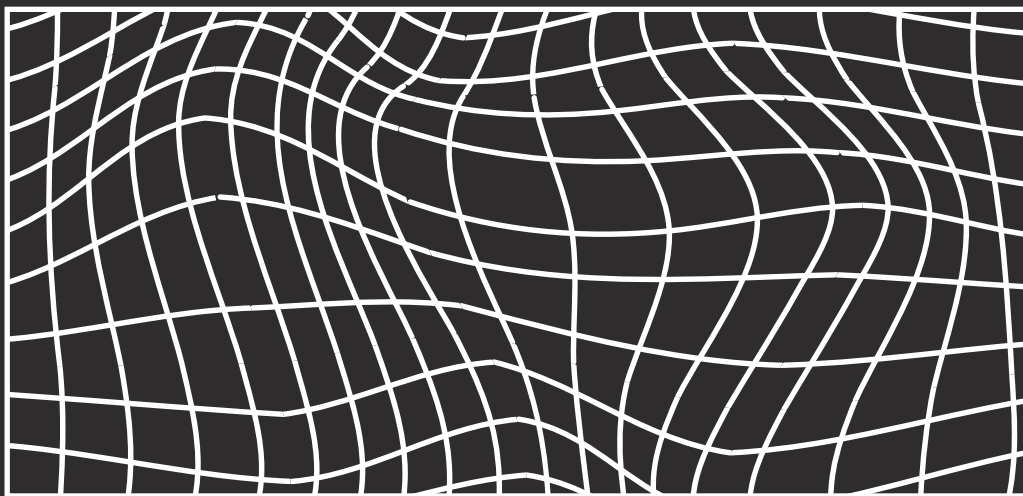


Seven Lions North Coast Festival
Illinois, 2025

Drew Ressler
rukes.com

DEGENERATION X

THE ARTIFACTS &
LEXICON OF THE RAVE
SUBCULTURE



CHRYS KHAN-EGAN

The dizzying laser lights flashed in synchronicity with the pulsating bass of the music that bounced off the psychedelic warehouse walls. As my boyfriend and I mentally attempted to organize the chaos surrounding us, we pushed our way through the crowd of spasmodic lunatics who contorted their bodies in time with the music and lights. We located a couch in a room covered with cartoonesque, hyper-graphic graffiti. An androgynous man sat himself at my feet and began massaging my thighs, while a girl with her eyes rolled back into her head demanded that my boyfriend give her a massage. Just then the deejay laid his head in my lap, told me he was in love with me, and placed a bitter pill on my tongue. This certainly was the most bizarre method of earning three graduate credit hours I could imagine.

So began my two-year ethnography on the American rave subculture. The scene described above was my initiation into the underground subculture where rave kids, typically under twenty-one years old, are given secret invitations to attend private warehouse parties with dancing, drugs, and thousands of their closest friends. Because of my youthful and unorthodox appearance, I was invited to join the then-highly-exclusive underground scene and attended numerous raves in several major cities in North Carolina. Although my chosen subculture was not typically examined by academia, I conducted an academic ethnography of what Maton describes as a “group whose world views, values and practices diverge from mainstream North American and social science cultures”. As a result, I received three graduate credit hours for “supervised research in ethnography” and conducted what may be the only academic ethnography on raves.

The American rave subculture is an alternative, underground nightclub movement promoting techno music, synthetic drugs, and teen angst: the discos of the 1990s. This paper offers an introductory glimpse into the rave subculture for members of mainstream culture. The exploration includes rave artifacts, lexicons, and mysterious rituals. Based on two years of ethnography in the rave scene combined with published documentation, a survival guide for attending raves is offered for the naive, but curious. To survive in the rave subculture, possessing both the artifacts (nonverbal communication) and lexicon



(verbal communication) is imperative. Artifacts include appropriate clothing, essential supplies, and psychedelic toys. Examples of interesting and unusual artifacts will be used throughout the paper to give the reader a vicarious rave experience. Insider lexicon phrases include codes for illegal substances, group rituals, and dance music. The reader will be taught some of the unique rave jargon, so that he or she can speak "rave."

Although there is no definitive source on the etymology of the term "rave," most ravers agree that the term originally referred to "raving" about the secret, decadent parties. There is also no universally agreed upon definition for the term, but a few examples will serve to conceptualize the term. Bradburn's broad definition is of "a new phenomenon that is of a spontaneous happening that brings people together for dancing in various locations. More specifically, Saltonstall (1995) defines raves as "all-night dance parties that move mysteriously into the city's abandoned warehouses or lofts for one night, like tremendous floating clubs, and then move on". Perhaps Reynolds (1994) captures raves best: "It is a self-induced hypergasm, a shared hallucination of the in-place-to-be grandiosity". Raves typically share the common features of secrecy, mobility, youth, music, drugs, fashion, and attitude. These features appear consistently throughout the entire history of raves since the moment of their inception. Like so much of Generation X's culture, the rave is sometimes said to be inspired by (or stolen from) the hippies of the 1960s, discoers of the 1970s, and punters of the 1980s, according to McKusick and Smith. Critics such as Garcia (1994), McKusick (1992), Tagg (1994), Hesmondhalgh (1995) and Zukeran (1995), and debate whether raves are any type of social movement or the discos for the new millennium. As the name Generation X implies, American youth is sometimes characterized as the generic generation accused of simply copying earlier American counterculture or European contemporary culture.

The origins of Generation X's raves are most directly rooted in the Acid House phenomenon in the UK in 1988, according to McKusick, Smith (1992), Hucker (1994), and Lyttle and

Montagne (1992). Acid Houses are clubs where kids can “drop acid” (take Lysergic Acid Diethylamide) and dance to music especially designed to heighten the drug effects. With more technologically advanced music and different drugs, Acid Houses began to transform into raves. Smith and “Rave summit” note that the British police soon began to crack down on raves due to the prominence of drugs, and deaths caused by a warehouse fire. Rather than give up on the subculture, rave promoters simply moved the scene to the US. Rosen and Flick (1992) and Bradburn (Jul.1993) credit the Motor City as the home of the American rave scene as early as 1988. While others in the 1980s suffered from Pac Man fever and skin-tight Jordache jeans, Detroit rave kids feverishly partied to techno music in their baggies. By the early 1990s, large scale rave events could be found in Detroit, New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, claim Rosen and Flick, McKusick, Smith, Garcia, and Mead. In the late 1990s, raves have now spread to most areas. For instance, even a small southern town like Tallahassee, Florida, has a “legitimate” rave venue which legally operates. Although not as “hip” as secret raves in larger cities, “the Underground Cafe” allows Tallahassee ravers a place to dance and imitate the scene.

Even though raves may be lurking in middle America, most members of the mainstream culture are probably not even aware of their existence; those in the mainstream who are aware may attempt to thwart this counterculture. Because of this need to keep authorities from discovering and destroying raves, secrecy is paramount. Yet rave organizers need to inform kids as to the clandestine location. What is perhaps most remarkable about raves is their ability to draw thousands of kids to secret parties without the use of media and without alerting the authorities. Reynolds notes that raves with 2,000 or more kids routinely occur in New York City despite the fact that the New York Fire Department has tried to crack down on the parties. Garcia describes “The Love Parade” rave which had over 7,000 people and 20 trucks of musical and computer equipment, yet still managed to evade police. Smith and Garcia remark that even with threats of punishments and fines, one rave occurred



with over 20,000 kids. DeeJay D. B. of N.A.S.A. (no, not the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, but the Nocturnal Audio & Sensory Awakening) dreams of the Holy Grail of raves: Ravestock, an unprecedented giant gathering of rave kids,” according to “Rave summit”.

Before Ravestock can occur, potential ravers need to possess the proper artifacts. Artifacts are nonverbal symbols such as clothing, supplies and toys used to identify ravers. Clothing is probably the most easily identifiable artifact. Garcia identifies “[r]ave clothing [as that] which tends toward primary colors, patterned wool caps and untucked shirts emblazoned with peace signs, happy faces and corporate logos”. Typical rave fashions tend toward unisex and androgynous styles. Most kids, male and female, dress the same, as if to appear pre-pubescent and sexless. They are sensual, not sexual. McKusick says that “ The kids seem lost in autistic bliss and you get the idea that they’d rather be masturbating than screwing”. Additionally, kids tend to be disproportionately bisexual since it is “considered chic to identify as bi because it’s seen as being more open to life’s possibilities according to Gelman. To emphasize androgyny and bisexuality, males and females both wear childhood T-shirts, baggy shorts, and Puma or Converse gym shoes. Males who want to wear more formal attire may don black disco pants, low cut ‘70s shirts from Goodwill, and high heel clogs. Females in more formal attire wear baggy childish dresses, and funky sandals or high heel gym shoes.

Related to the theme of androgyny is childhood regression. The pre-pubescent look, such as covering up one’s body to hide gender and reverting to childish styles, is adopted to seem not only androgynous, but childlike. Rave kids frequently wear 1970s clothes or children’s T-shirts and silly hats to make them-selves look young and sexless. They may literally wear the clothes of their youth. Examples of shirts include “Charlie’s Angels,” “Scooby Doo,” or simple child-like prints with animals. Hats include everything from huge, floppy “Cat in the Hat” top hats to pink elephant stocking caps. Additionally, some raves have themes where ravers must

wear childish clothing like pajamas, Barney outfits, and futuristic outer space costumes. Gordon summarizes rave attire in her fashion article:

For their part, ravers have pushed baggy style to an extreme. "Whatever they wear, it's got to be big, and I mean huge," said Scott Richmond, an owner of Satellite Records on the Bowery, a music and clothing store that is ground zero to local ravers and rave disk jockeys. Pants ... have legs that are typically 38 inches around-bigger at the ankle than the waist. "They look like they're floating."

Gordon continues: Ravers are so committed to their ultrabaggies that they will make them if they can't find them in stores. Gwen Berland, a raver from Park Slope, Brooklyn, had a friend make her pants with legs that each measure six feet around. "It's hard to walk," she acknowledged at Satellite, where the off-the-rack pants cost \$50-\$90. Within rave culture, there are even subgroups based on style. Ms. Berland says she was making the transition from being a "candy raver," or younger girl who likes to accessorize with toys and baby-style jewelry, to being a raver with a more sophisticated look. One of her friends, Ike Youn³, 15, is known as a "Polo raver" because of his preference for mixing his Mom and Me pants with preppy items from Nautica, Polo, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger.

Along with proper attire, certain supplies are essential to keep kids rav-ing all night long in the physically demanding environment. The first supply a raver must have is a book bag. In keeping with the regressive theme of raves, the book bag makes ravers look like young school children. More functionally, the book bag contains all of the other supplies the ravers will need that night and the follow-ing day. In essence, the book bag serves as an overnight bag because raves typically run from midnight to noon, or at least from dusk until dawn. Some of the most important supplies in the book bag include: water bottle; items to suck (pacifier, suckers, and gum); and Vicks vaporub and oil. Because of the ex-tremely high temperatures from thousands of kids dancing for twelve hours in



an unairconditioned warehouse, a raver needs an ample supply of water. Water bottles or baby bottles are preferable due to the need for sucking. One strange side effect of the rave drug of choice (to be discussed later) is the need to suck on things to reduce tension in the jaws. Tightness in the jaws is also relieved by suck-ing on pacifiers, suckers, and gum. Pacifiers, called “nukes,” are certainly regressive, as are lollipops and bubble gum. The final essential supplies are Vicks and oil. Ravers will often massage each other with baby oil to loosen their muscles. Additionally, they will apply Vicks to themselves and others to let it seep into their pores, especially their temples, says McKusick. Supplies then become both practical and fun. “Trip toys” are purely amusing rave supplies such as gadgets and trinkets to delight and amuse ravers under the flashing strobe lights.

Garcia states, “A trip toy is something that will catch people's attention and make them smile”. Common trip toys brought by ravers include: yo-yos, bubbles, squirt guns, kazooes, games, and stuffed animals. Sometimes raves will supply trip toys such as rattles, Frisbees, and even gyroscopes. Raves typically have play rooms, such as a Twister room, or a room with ropes for swinging. Trip toys, like supplies and clothes, are useful for ravers and help identify them as part of the subculture.

In addition to looking the part, ravers need to speak the part. Like other subcultures, rave has its own lexicon, or in-group speech, to identify members and exclude non-members. Reynolds referred to the lexicon as the “semantic fuzziness of slang”. Although it is practically impossible to identify all the lexicon terms of a subculture, rave terms center around drugs, rituals, and music. For very obvious reasons, ravers need code words for illegal substances. The illegal substance used to identify ravers is methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA). “Each generation finds its own drug, however (hippies chose acid, punks sulfates or ‘speed’), and this time young Britons chose MDMA or ‘Ecstasy’” reports Smith. Not surprisingly, methylenedioxy-methamphetamine is referred to by less cumbersome names, such as: MDMA, Ecstasy, XTC, X, and

Roll. Most commonly referred to as X, methylenedioxymethamphetamine was first patented in Germany in 1914, but was not used on humans until the 1960s, according to McDowell and Kleber. They further reveal that X was criminalized in 1988 due to its effects on human behavior. The drug which was sometimes used in “couple’s therapy” before its criminalization, is considered by some to be the ultimate party supply.

X’s effects caused its popularity to soar due to its “capacity to induce feelings of warmth and openness” and is used “by young people as an ideal party drug,” allege McDowell and Kleber. This “capsule of Zen,” as Reynolds refers to it, is “popular with teens and young adults at raves who see it as a drug that makes them feel closer to those around them, heightens their sensory perceptions and induces psychomotor restlessness relieved by dancing,” according to McDowell and Kleber. Mengel reported that an experiment comparing the effects of X to Shaman drumming revealed that X gave people higher: empathy, physical arousal, sexual arousal, sensual arousal, orgasmic ability, elevated mood, level of expectation, and degree of control. Because of these desired effects, there is a large demand for the illicit substance. Statistics are still being gathered on the US use of X, but 500,000 people in the UK take it regularly, says Smith. In both the UK and the US, X “is easily obtainable on the black market,” alleges Garcia. Reynolds reveals that specific brands of X are named after 1970s sweets, such as Pez or Smarties and McKusick adds that “Special K” is any drug enriched with ketamine. Depending on the location, X sells for about \$20-\$30 for a pill about the size and consistency of an aspirin. Ravers report needing anywhere between a half roll and a few full rolls.

No matter how much X is consumed, there are serious dangers involved. Schifano and Magni record abuse symptoms including: aggression, psychosis, depression, panic, cognitive disturbances, outbursts, temper, changes in appetite, and chocolate cravings. Of all of the symptoms cited in this list, the ravers interviewed during this ethnography reported only suffering from changes in appetite.



Other negative side effects reported by these ravers included changes in sleeping patterns, dehydration, and muscle soreness. But there may be far more serious consequences. Randall documents fifteen cases of X deaths in the UK, primarily due to extreme overheating and blood clots. These deaths are not necessarily drug-induced, but are 6mg-related. The amphetamine in X may induce ravers to dance longer, which in hot warehouses is extremely dangerous. Randall acknowledges that as of yet, there have been no X deaths reported in the US, but some are expected as the popularity of the drug rises. Surprisingly, the FDA is currently investigating a reported death by Herbal X (which is natural and legal) rather than synthetic X (which is manufactured and illegal).

Whether legal or illegal, as the popularity of X rises, so do the number of terms associated with it. Other lexicon terms associated with X are “rolling,” “trolling,” and “crank.” When ravers take X, they are “rolling” because they become so euphoric that their eyes roll back into their heads. If they take LSD, or “acid,” with X then they are “tripping” and “rolling,” known as “trolling.” “Crank” is cheap speed which will crank ravers up and give them energy with the side effect of ‘making them edgy or cranky’, hence the name. McKusick explains that ravers can also be “sledged” into oblivion and “cabbaged,” like a vegetable brain.

For those who want to avoid chemical highs, there are natural methods, such as the previously mentioned “Herbal Ecstasy,” and “smart drinks.” Herbal Ecstasy has been legally released in “head shops,” tobacco and paraphernalia stores, for around \$19.95 for ten tablets. However, users report that it takes at least five pills to get any feeling. Herbal Ecstasy is a blend of herbs, caffeine, and vitamins designed to give an X buzz without the hangover. Not surprisingly, according to Zukeran “most who have tried it say it isn’t nearly as good as the real thing”. (Since some ravers feel they need to take more Herbal X to get the same buzz, there is a danger of overdosing. Due to the FDA investigation and fear of Herbal X being fatal in large doses, some stores have

stopped selling Herbal X products.) Luckily for law-abiding ravers, herbal highs still come in the form of “smart drinks.” Alcohol is passé, and smart drinks are the beverages of choice at raves. McKusick notes that due to the high temperatures, ravers drink plenty of water and vitamin-enriched fruit smoothies called smart drinks. A \$5 drink typically has a base of juice-blends with B complex vitamins, bee pollen, Ma Hung and Ginseng added as an extra energy supply.

Because of the prevalence of herbal and synthetic drugs in the subculture, many rituals exist to heighten the drug experiences. Insider terms for these customary practices include body and hand rituals. For instance, “roll aid” spells relief. A roll aid is a baby-sitter, someone who watches over a first timer, or a “virgin”; a “rub down” is what a roll aid or fellow roller gives someone to loosen muscles. One of the side effects of X is tense muscles, relieved only by a massage. Plus, since X heightens sensual perceptions, being touched is extremely intense. Rub downs may involve baby oil or Vicks to further stimulate the senses. These massages may occur in a “love circle,” a love-in type circle of ravers. In addition to body massages, hand rubs are also very popular. One ritual stemming from hand massages is a transference of energy called the “snap.” When someone is massaging another’s hand, that person will quickly snap their hand away, causing a loss of energy. The person who has been “snapped” will miss the other person and look forward to seeing him or her again. Another hand ritual is the “blessing.” Blessing rituals ensure that people have good X trips. One blessing is, “X out the bad trip. A perfect circle of endless light for a good trip. A kiss for good luck.” This blessing is typically given to the “virgin” by seasoned rollers. All of the body and hand rituals can occur in the “ambiance room.” The ambiance room is away from the music, so people can talk to each other and be in private. The room has fantastical art, typically painted on the walls to look like psychedelic graffiti. Ravers report seeing hallucinations such as faces on the walls speaking to them, or watching the walls as if they were cartoons. The drugs and the rituals work in conjunction with the music



to create the total rave experience. Being on the cutting edge of bizarre, alternative music is an elite privilege, complete with buzz words to exclude the mainstream. The music makes or breaks the scene. One rave deejay explains to Rosen and Flick, "A great rave or techno record is like a religious experience. A bad one will give you a headache". Garcia explains that rave music is a "galvanizing, metronomic beat of techno, a term coined to describe an intensely synthetic, hypnotic form of dance music that was born in Detroit during the mid-'80s". It symbolizes the mecha-nized, synthetic, futuristic technology available to this generation. Fisher describes two basic genres that have emerged: silly and dark. According to Reynolds, silly music is very hyper-spastic with samples of "kiddie TV," or funny sounds that appeal to the youthful spirit of ravers; dark music, by contrast, has eerie sounds with horror movie samples and shrieks to appeal to the Gothics in the crowd.

Whether silly or dark, the music is part of the "rhythm engine." The rhythm engine consists of the music, the culture, and the people. As implied by the term "engine," the music, culture, and people are considered mechanical parts of a synthetic machine. Reynolds likens rave music to a "mad inventor's contraption gone berserk". Critics contend that the machine is very demanding of its human cogs. The culture reinforces the use of drugs and exhausting dancing, which are physically detrimental at best and fatal at worst. Exhaustion and fatalities are often the result of the spasmodic "b.p.m." The beats per minute (b. p. m.) are at least 120 b.p.m. or two beats every second, with songs categorized as 140, 160 or even 180 b.p.m. Unfortunately many inexperienced ravers may feel pressure to keep up the pace and may become exhausted, dehydrated, or even un-conscious.

Ravers who can keep up the pace earn the right to give attitude. The attitude of the music differs from most contemporary forms heard on the radio. "Instead of the tension/climax narrative of traditional pop, rave music creates a feeling of arrested orgasms,

a plateau of bliss that can be neither exceeded nor released” according to Reynolds. Also unlike other movements, rave music has taken control of its own fate. When it was not played on album oriented radio, rave promoters hosted their own events with their own deejays. Bradburn describes how, rather than deal with the recording industry, recording artists produced “white labels,” which are self-recordings without packaging. The overall attitude is that the kids control the movement and have since its onset in America.

In conjunction with the attitude and mechanics of the music are “visuals.” The visuals refer to the laser and computer shows during the rave (as well as the hallucinated visuals). Sophisticated computer technology may be used to produce a phenomenal visual show choreographed with the music, says Reynolds. More traditional effects are produced by fog machines, disco balls, and strobe lights. The ultimate goal of the complex musical and visual show is to enhance the effects of X. These X enhancers are “almost scientifically designed to heighten the Ecstasy rush,” observes Smith. “The basic blend of drugs and dance is beefed up by technological stimuli: computer graphics, laser holograms, and virtual reality installations. The goal? “Transcendence” claims McKusick.

This transcendence (a.k.a. rave movement) started with the Acid Houses in the UK and migrated to Detroit in 1988. As raves spread throughout the US, certain artifacts including clothing, supplies, and toys and lexicons referring primarily to drugs, rituals, and music bound the subculture together. Rave artifacts, lexicon, and music are starting to be introduced into the mainstream. There are, for example, currently four major national radio stations with rave formats. These stations and others also host legal rave events in local clubs where alcohol is served. Smith points out that rave tapes are available in music stores, including the first hard-core rave compilation called “Shamanarchy in the UK”. Garcia and Norris speculate that rave also may see its first major star, deejay Moby, (a.k.a Richard Melville—relative of Herman Melville) whose album has been mass distributed.



The first top 100 rave song, "James Brown is Dead," hit the US charts at number 90, and international charts at number 10, note Rosen and Flick. "James Brown is Dead' is saying something to the kids. It's like 'Roll Over Beethoven,'" they continue. The song signifies the death of the music of the previous generation.

Most ravers and observers of the subculture agree that the massification of raves that has already begun will continue to grow stronger. Most people also agree that this massification will cause the original ravers to lose interest in their own subculture. McKusick states, "The rave-knockers say that with the inevitable commercialization of the trend, raves are headed down the spiral that saw disco in the 1970s go from a hip ritual of the gay demimonde to the white suited silliness of Saturday Night Fever". In fact, former break-dancer Shabba-Doo had plans of making a rave movie similar to Saturday Night Fever to educate the mainstream about the rave subculture, according to Bradbum. Even the recent controversial film "KIDS," which chronicles the lives of some New York City kids, includes a rave club scene and hallucinogenic drugs. The problem is that as the underground becomes mainstream, rebels will no longer be participants. "Like any underground social scene on its way to mass acceptance, raves have already lost their cachet with many of their early devotees," alleges McKusick. "The danger is that as the scene becomes larger and more commercial, it risks losing the cozy counterculture atmosphere that drew people to it in the first place," observes Garcia. So, if the bizarre rave counterculture becomes mainstream, what aberrant deviations of society will graduate students study in the future? The mind reels with the possibilities.





DJ at United Dance

Stevenage, 1998



Tristan O'Neill



Illenium Brooklyn Mirage

New York, 2024

Drew Ressler

rukes.com

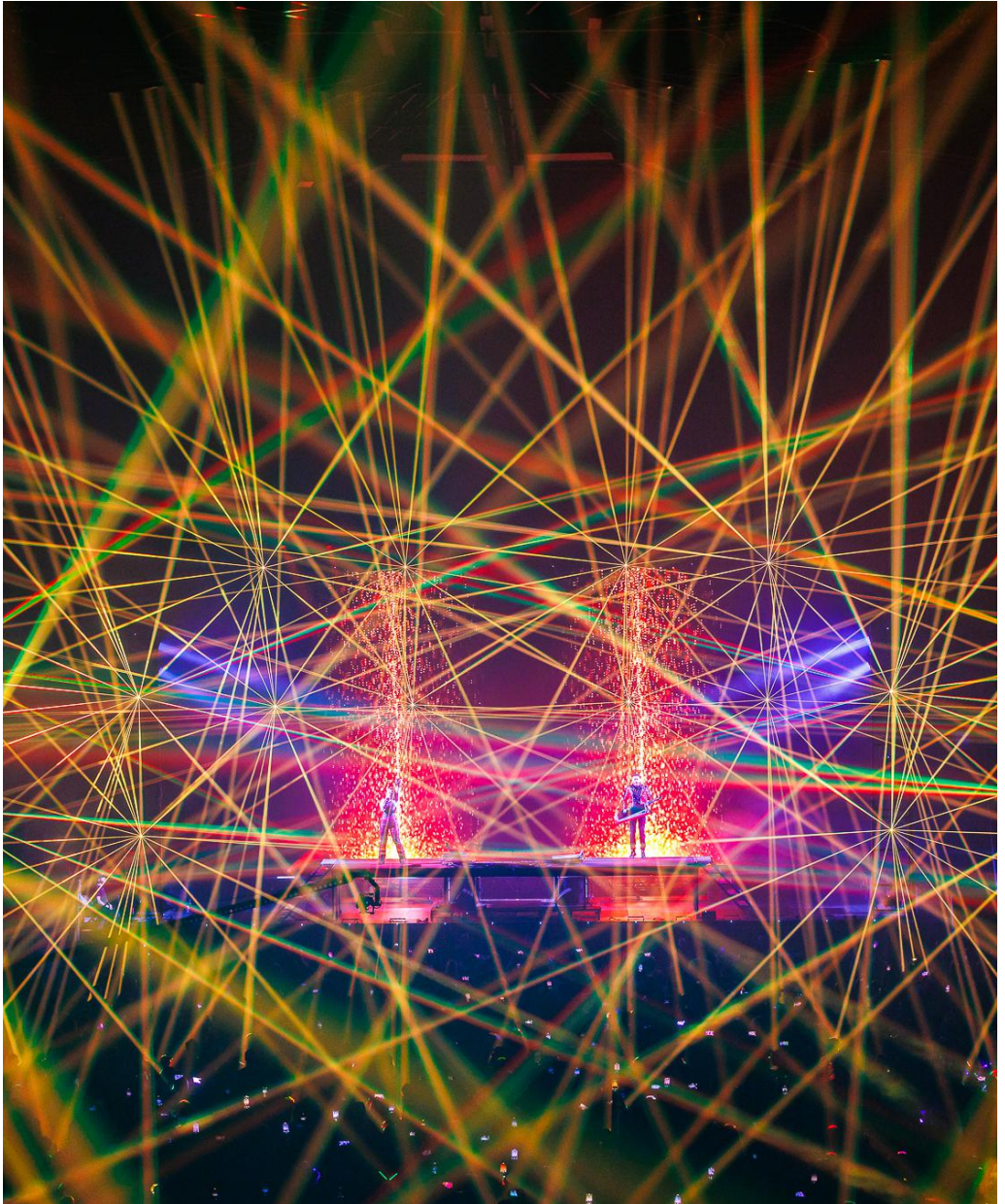


Wooli Cyclops Coliseum

Virginia, 2023

Drew Ressler

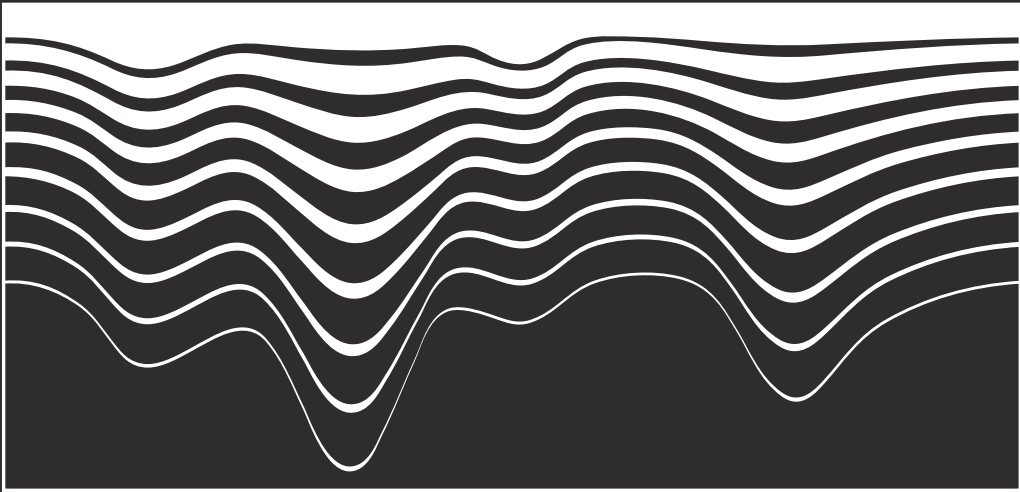
rukes.com



LSR/CITY Red Rocks
Colorado, 2025

Drew Ressler
rukes.com

WHY WE RAVE



SMILE



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JANUS ROSE

Most of the time when I see McKenzie Wark, I can barely see or hear her at all. We are usually in dark interior spaces, filled with fog machine haze and the throbbing alien sound of techno. We hug and exchange barely-audible greetings under relentless strobe lights, mere cells within a writhing mass of bodies that seems to pulsate as a single organism.

But now we're in daylight hours, sitting across from each other at a cafe not far from one of the spaces where we often find each other engaging in this sonic ritual. Meeting each other here, sipping coffee in the daytime bustle of Bushwick feels somewhat rare.

"I can only do one night a week these days," Wark tells me, as we recount some of the past weekend's highlights: a trans DJ collective's two-day takeover of a club in Greenpoint; an afterparty where the music went well into the afternoon of the next day; and a happy hardcore rave at a warehouse themed around the classic anime film *My Neighbor Totoro*.

Wark is several decades my senior, but we have some things in common. We are both white trans women and we're both ravers, qualities shared by many—but not all—of our mutual friends. We're also both writers, which means it's hard for us to resist the daunting (some would argue impossible) task of describing raving through the crudeness of words.

Wark's new book, *Raving*, is the latest attempt at putting the rave to the printed page. The book is difficult to place into a single genre. It's not a navel-gazing theory text. Nor is it just a lurid collection of drug-fueled rave stories. Instead, Wark paints a vivid series of vignettes attempting to build a shared language around raving as a technological and social practice — and trying to make sense of the role it plays in the late capitalist hellscape we now find ourselves in.



Who raves, and why? What does it mean to dance while the world burns? Like me, Wark came back to raving after a long hiatus. For both of us, this happened just in time for the COVID lockdown of 2020 to cut us off from our rekindled craving.

“I think it’s a different culture than it was in the 90s. It was sort of utopian and about resistance and spirituality and these sorts of things, but I think now it’s more of an aesthetic space that gets to be kind of a future-time,” said Wark. “The number of possible futures is narrowing all the time. So what we have is Now, and how do you experience the present?”

This idea of raving as a means of distorting our perception of time is a major theme in Wark’s book, and something very familiar to me from being in these spaces.

To properly experience a rave, something I’ve taught myself to do is to enter with intentions, not expectations—kind of like a choose-your-own-adventure game. Maybe this is why raves are so often described as utopian spaces with utopian possibilities: raving is a collaborative practice, and everyone gets what they put into it. The hosts provide the physical space and set the mood; DJs bring good tunes to build atmosphere; promoters bring the ravers, and the ravers bring the vibes.

The result is what Wark calls a “constructed situation,” where everyone’s collective vibes create a shared rave-space. People come to raves for all sorts of reasons, but if all goes well— and that’s often a big “if”—Wark writes that they can produce a euphoric kind of nonlinear time. Within this sideways techno-time, measured in kick drum beats, she describes a “rave continuum,” where moments flow into one another and all raves past, present and future seem to connect. Drugs aren’t necessary to enter rave-time in my experience, but many would argue they don’t hurt either.

This ability to exist out of body and time in the present is undoubtedly a big part of why the rave attracts so many queer and trans people. For better or worse, Wark says, trans people in particular are “virtuosos” of dissociation—a survival trait learned by people whose bodies are often viewed with disgust and suspicion, and who are statistically more likely to experience trauma and violence in their day-to-day lives.

It makes sense that, for many people, the rave can be a place of healing. It enables what Wark terms “xeno-euphoria,” a kind of self-care which comes from enmeshing oneself in external situations like raves, generating “euphoric states of welcome strangeness.”

“I’ve always felt like my version of dysphoria is sort of diffuse. Not a lot works on it, but dancing really does,” said Wark, describing how the strange and repetitive qualities of rave music can allow for healthy forms of disembodiment. “There’s something about the abstractness of techno. I feel like it’s alien to any kind of body at all, so I don’t feel especially weird in it.”

Of course, that all went away in March 2020, when the Covid lockdown disconnected techno and raving communities and replaced them with livestreams and Zoom dance parties. For our fellow ravers—many of them people of color, queer, trans, or some combination thereof—the isolation was particularly devastating. Even now, with the clubs reopened, there is a certain existential discomfort to raving. COVID is still at large, environmental devastation continues unchecked, and LGBTQ communities are increasingly being targeted and scrutinized by politicians, the media, and violent extremists—including in spaces that are meant to be safe, like clubs.

But to Wark—who was involved with the rave scene during the peak of the AIDS crisis—there are other important forms of safety in addition to the kind that protects you from a virus.



“This isn’t my first pandemic. I’ve lost people during the pandemic to COVID, but I’ve also lost people to the isolation,” said Wark. “Some friends aren’t here anymore, and isolation was a major contributor to that. Some people need these spaces.”

Of course, these needs go all the way back to the places where raving and techno started: the Black and queer communities of post-industrial cities like Detroit and Chicago. Raves were initially responses to Black disenfranchisement, where artists re-purposed consumer technology to give birth to techno, jungle, and house music in the 70s, 80s and 90s. Within the communities where it began, raving has always been linked to survival and the economic conditions faced by marginalized workers. And like all cultural revolutions, it would inevitably be appropriated by the forces of capital and industry.

As scholar DeForrest Brown, Jr. writes in *Assembling a Black Counterculture*, techno was conceived as “a concept of sonic world-building and coded information exchange” which coincided with the availability of relatively-cheap consumer synthesizers like the Roland TR-808 and TB-303. Black techno pioneers like Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson “were part of a resilient cultural moment in Detroit from 1972 to 1987, as the population of the city flipped into a Black working-class majority during a post-industrial decline rife with economic lows and high unemployment.”

That’s a far cry from the raves of today, which can sometimes be gaudy affairs with high ticket prices and promoters who care more about ROIs and cultural clout than any sense of community. While it’s always tempting to romanticize the rave, the politics of nightlife remain grounded in the unshakable realities of class, race, and which bodies are considered “other.”

“The problem with rave as utopia is that all those social contradictions are still there,” says Wark. “Just because you walk through a doorway doesn’t change that.”

Several of our mutual friends work in nightlife, and they know this well. Last year, one friend of mine was working bar at a queer club in Bushwick where a man came in, poured gasoline on the floor, and set the place on fire (Thankfully, no one was killed). A few weeks prior, several stabbings at other popular locations in the area had already put queer communities on edge. All were reminders that the safety of these spaces—despite everyone’s best efforts—is always a relative safety.

Even still, there is something precious to be found amidst the speaker stacks and fog. It’s not revolution or transcendence, but for some, it can satisfy a need to be anchored in a strange, futuristic present at a time when imagined futures seem increasingly out of reach.

“It’s an experimental space,” says Wark. “I learn a lot about my own body and about how to be around other people, about the fiber of whatever my being is. I can’t shut down my inner monologue, but to be free of it, that is something I can get into.”



Desire 95 Club UN
London, 1995

Tristan O'Neill



Gurning Raver
Skegness, 1997

Tristan O'Neill



Excision The Armory

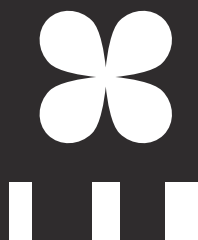
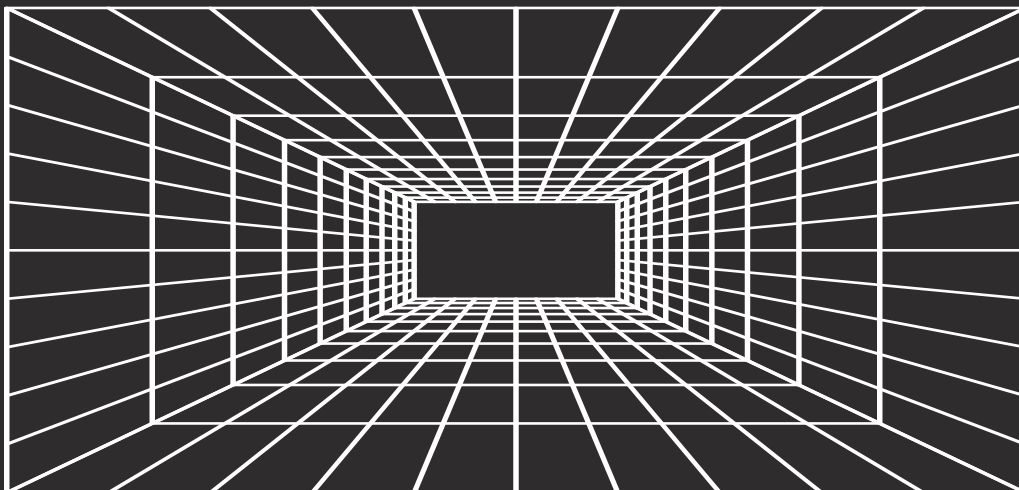
Minnesota, 2020



Drew Ressler
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THE JUNGLE YEARS

WITH TRISTAN O'NEILL



48

ESTARAE

Tristan captured the Jungle and Drum & Bass raves that took over UK nightlife in the latter half of the 1990s. Filling up big arenas across the country every weekend, thousands of kids would gather to skank, whistle and sweat away the hours until sunlight. It was a lifestyle that centred around love for a new and energetic sound. Pirate radio stations, magazines, fashion and raving made up the fabric of an exciting new dawn for youth culture.

E : How did you get into club photography?

T : I was born in London and brought up in Belgium which is where I got into taking photos. I came back to London and did GCSE photography and loved it, it was my favourite subject. I spent all my time in the library reading every book and magazine I could and taking in all the photos so my composition was really good. I was naturally good at taking pictures and I never stopped taking them. I've had millions of cameras over the years but now I just always use my phone because it's always on me. Around age 16 at the same time I was doing the GCSE I started listening to pirate radio stations and really liking the music which was a lot of hardcore jungle at the time. My friend would come to my house every weekend and we'd listen to pirate radio stations together. He would go to the record stores and found this magazine that was a few sheets of black and white paper stapled together and folded, it was made by the people who did Labyrinth club in Dalston and he said why don't you contact them and see if you could go and photograph one on their nights. So I went down with my friend Carlo and queued up outside for what seemed like forever, I'd never been to a club before so really didn't know what to expect. It was tiny inside, a labyrinth of rooms going up, down, left, right and all over the place. Absolutely rammed and sweaty.

After that I shot at a much bigger special event rave which was very different. I was reaching out to Atmosphere



Magazine for months asking to do work for them but nothing ever happened so I took matters into my own hands and got a ticket for Orange Club in Leicester Square. It started at 4 in the morning which was horrific because i'm not a night person. I went to bed, got up and put my huge puffer jacket on, camera hiding inside it. In those days you got searched quite well so I was always surprised I managed to get in with my camera. I took some pictures of that night in Leicester Square and bumped into Nicky Blackmarket who worked at Black Market Records and I recognised. I'm not a word person, I'm a picture person. There was no way I was going to write a review but all reviews need pictures. I asked Nicky Blackmarket if he'd be interested in writing me a review, he's really friendly, and he did and I sent it off a few days later with my photos and it got published the week after. That was basically the start, after that every other week I was out taking photos and searching out every single music magazine I could do pictures for.

E : So you're not a night person but you were drawn into the clubs because you loved the music?

J : Both the music and the pictures kept me up. I would take a maximum of five rolls of film and when I ran out of that I was ready to go home. I didn't drink or do anything else. By three o'clock in the morning I was ready to go. I was there listening to the music and going around searching for pictures of everyone else and seeing what the vibe was. So that's why everyone looks so put together in your photos because it's not quite the end of the night. So many people say my pictures look like AI. Because they're a bit surreal and some of them don't quite look real. They're every colourful and almost stuck together.

E : You've travelled to a lot of parties and clubs, where did you find the best crowds and dancers?

J : The time that sticks out to me was from '94 to 2000 because that was the Jungle and Drum'n'Bass years. I remember everybody going crazy to the tunes and jumping around like mad. It wasn't a people trying to be cool thing, actually people didn't care they were just going for it and genuinely partying. Later on I started taking photos in clubs that played mostly House and that's not what I was into although I enjoyed taking the pictures. So my era was really the era of Drum'n'Bass. I remember people didn't even dance, they just jumped up and down, that was the energy.

E : If you're staying up for hours on hours you need a good crowd and good sounds to get through it. The energy of the time definitely comes through in the photos. It seems like everybody's happy to have their photos taken, why do you think that is?

T : Yeah people used to always jump in front of the camera and jump into groups all excited when they saw me taking photos. Everybody and their friends wanted to be in the magazines and they would ask what magazine I was shooting for and when they found out they'd get even more excited and jump into the picture again. I didn't love taking crowd shots as much as I loved the composition of portraits of groups who are all doing different things and it's like all these different little portraits weaved in one picture. My favourite ones were when they didn't really know I was taking a photo and they're just dancing. Everybody likes to be at the centre of attention when they're out and they're all dressed up and having a picture taken that might be in a magazine is the icing on the cake. Because magazines were big in those days. There were specific magazines that were more rave magazines, there was Dream Magazine which was a big one that I got to exclusively do the pictures for which was really fun. So that was really nice for me getting the magazine every month and seeing all the pictures that were in it, it was exciting, I loved the attention I got to have from behind the camera.



E : Working with a limited amount of film, how methodical were you with your approach to taking photos?

T : Yeah, there's an approach. I wanted to sneak in as much as possible. That was very difficult but whenever I could I would first sneak in until they spotted the camera. I never used to ask for permission. My dream would be to have a camera in my eye and people not know that i'm taking photos, that would be the ultimate photography for me because I don't want to interfere with the people that are there. I just want to see something and get it quickly before they stop what they're doing. If I'm lucky they're dancing and they don't notice. I'm a candid photographer. I used to do some portraits of DJs and stuff like that for magazines but it didn't excite me. I love capturing real life. My camera was quite small and I kept my flash in my hand, I liked using wide angle and getting really close on top of the subject, some pictures you don't realise how close I am to the subject. It makes the audience feel like they're there.

E : You mentioned those years leading up to the millennium being really important to you. Can you sum up or translate the energy of the time?

T : Well to me it was a very personal time. Music was almost a religion to me and my friends. We'd meet at my house and listen to pirate radio stations every weekend. I had this analog tuner and we put marks where all the stations wereso that we could find them. At one point the things as covered top to bottom in marks, there must have been over 40 radio stations squeezed on there. We'd go to record shops and fight over who got to play their record or tape next. Then we'd go to raves with all our friends. It wasn't just a job in that period of time, for me it was something really really special. It was the beginning of a particular kind of music, if you image being there when Jazz was created or

something like that being around people who were really into it, that's what it was like at the time being a part of something new. At the time we didn't think about it we just liked the music, it's take me a long time to realise that this is a part of history that now so many people are interested in.

E : Can you speak some more about the magazines at the time and the role they played in nurturing the scene?

T : The magazines were very specialist. It wasn't like you bought a general magazines and flicked to the raving section at the back, they focused on a scene, they covered events in lots of detail with lots of pictures and write ups. There were quite a few of them, big full colour and really nice, they were crucial to the scene because there wasn't the internet. People only found out about events through magazines and flyers from going to record shops. The flyers were colourful so wed put them on our walls at home. So other than flyers and word of mouth magazines made it much easier for people to follow the scene, follow the references and get engrossed in it. It was fashion as well, they had clothing and brands that related to certain nights. It was like a little world, a little raving world. It wasn't like people would just go into town and go to a club with their friends, it was a whole lifestyle in a way, a raver lifestyle. Rather than just going out on the weekend with the local crowd. And magazines were a part of that world.

E : If you could put one object into the Museum of Youth Culture, what would it be and why?

T : Probably my AWAL Records bag, again, it's a personal thing. It was a 10 inch small record bag. I love the AWAL logo and I used to take it everywhere until it was falling apart, It's been with me for a very long time. And also my first camera which was the best one, it was the smallest and the lightest one and stayed with me a long time.



E : I thought you might say the tuner with all the pirate radio station annotations.

T : Of course, If I still had that it would be amazing but I don't anymore. I've got one really far away picture of it in a bedroom and I've zoomed in but it's not very good quality. It was amazing how many stations there were at the time.





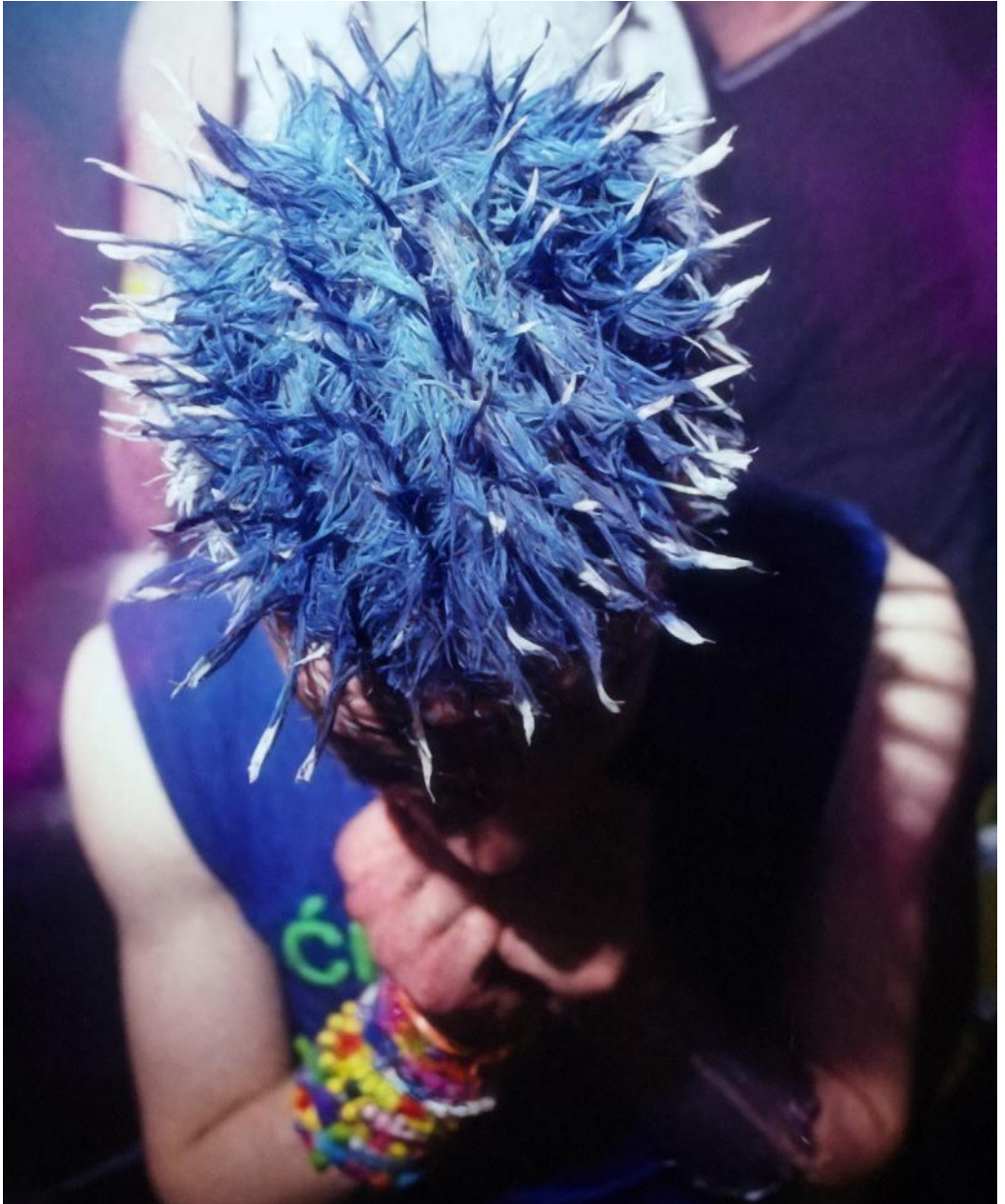
DJ Scratch The Scala
London, 2000

Tristan O'Neill



Warning Rave The Junction
Cambridge, 1998

Tristan O'Neill



Gatecrasher 7th Birthday
Sheffield, 2001

Tristan O'Neill



Subtronics Lost Lands
Ohio, 2021

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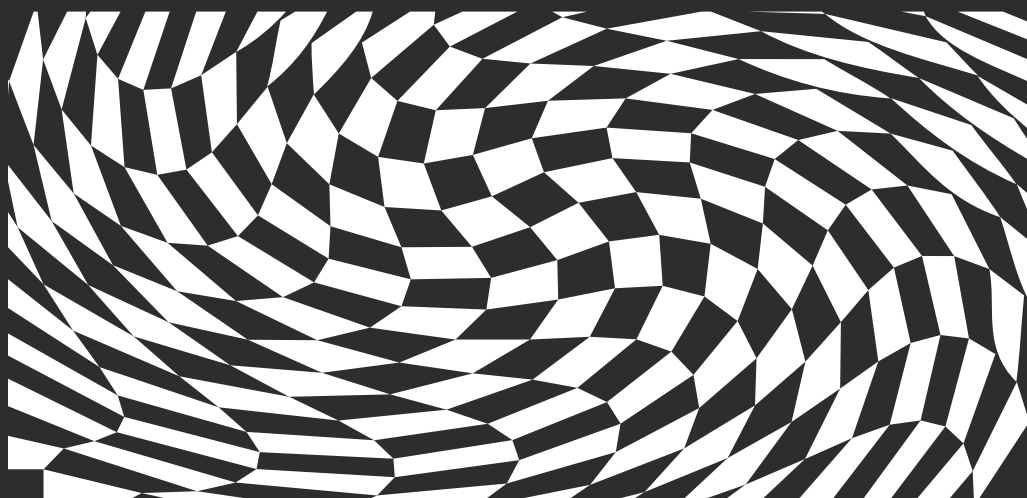


Freaky Deaky
Houston, 2022

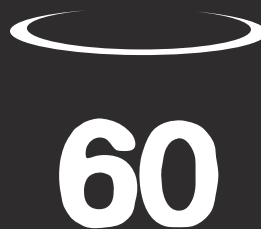
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THE RAVE

THE LAST BASTION
OF HOPE



RAVE ON



60

ISAIAH MORRIS

The Rave is a site for communal epiphany, a burst of divine revelation. Illegal raves and alternative club culture seeps into the popular imagination, informing it in ways unbeknownst to most. But it wasn't until last Summer's Brat (Charli XCX) landed on the global charts that people began questioning the importance of Rave and Club culture again. Is our Brat the herald of a new golden Rave dawn? I think not.

However, undergirding the Rave is something far more profound, perhaps even religious. Raving suggests that the world might be otherwise, and it does this through a temporary release from this world's demands. What might this say about our cultural moment?

Coordinating the Rave's aesthetic is the dance between the DJ and ravers, accentuated by the practicalities of a decent sound system, lights, and a bit of fog. Inaugurating Rave's epiphany, though, are the diverse motions of bodies to a singular beat. Techno reduces digital sounds to their basics and then pushes that to its boundary. Circumventing the rigidity of technology's logic are the gestures of human spontaneity on the dance floor. The rave asserts that technology doesn't have the last say over human life.

At the Rave, those traditionally on the margins of society become the center: a temporal expression of eternal longing, momentarily experienced as a shared catharsis and liberation. The dance floor is a bulwark against an increasingly de-ritualised and dehumanising society. It is a testament to the body being a medium for hope. Whether an intoxicated body or, in a growing trend, a sober one, it is the human fleshyness which takes priority. Both options respond to how one might cope with and confront the technological barrage.

Techno began as a language for African American youth, finding a future amidst the industrial ruins of Detroit. In our late modern moment, Rave culture acclimatizes the body to the



persistent sound of our technological age. It subverts the de-humanising tendencies of digital culture: mass impersonal media and abstracted global conversations. Instead, a momentary online connection is used to gather offline. When you're there, you're not concerned about telling the world. It is an attention to the present moment.

Worryingly, some have warned that clubs will dwindle to their knees this decade, squeezed out by neighbouring property developers or no longer economically viable amidst the cost-of-living crisis. The only thing being pushed out, however, is the possible resistance to a particularly greedy homogenisation of culture. In dislocating alternative discourses of ritual, we simultaneously assert that human bodies only have one particular "rhythm": the rhythm of ceaseless economic expansion. The Rave resists an uncomplicated acceptance of technology's gift. Its goods are re-scaled to an embodied celebration of life.

In *Raving* (2023), McKenzie Wark expands upon this, saying, 'Techno, not as genre but as technique, lets digital machines speak. Not unlike the way jazz lets analog instruments speak... Sounds at the limit of what the machine or the instrument can do to get free. Blackness in sound as the technique of making the thing free to sound off as itself and to take the human with it, into movement, into feeling, into sensation.' Rave's sound quite literally brings technology's language to the end of itself.

For some, raving is what holds them to life. For others, it's a momentary release from it. Whilst our bodies cannot exceed techno's interchange with technology, we do learn how to harness the potential humanness within it. The Rave harbours a liminal threshold between appreciation for this life and the longing for some next one. In twisting its technological medium into a more human configuration, rave culture participates in hope.

Back in 1965, theologian Jürgen Moltmann wrote, 'Hope's statements of promise, however, must stand in contradiction

to the reality which can at present be experienced. They do not result from experiences, but are the condition for the possibility of new experience... They do not seek to bear the train of reality, but to carry the torch before it. In so doing they give reality a historic character.' While Moltmann is writing concerning Christianity and the crucified Christ, his framework for thinking about hope is helpful. Hope never occurs outside of history. The Rave embraces this historical moment and attempts to inhabit it as a contradiction.

Recently, I went to Rhythm Section International's tenth anniversary party at EarthH, Hackney. Rhythm Section was founded as a music collective and is still curated by Peckham's own Bradley Zero (BZ). Known globally, its parties and label imprint span techno, house, jazz, funk, spoken word, and RnB.

I first danced to BZ's DJing at a record shop in 2018 while still living in Melbourne. The beauty of this particular community is that it provides a bridge for what Wark identifies: just as jazz brings analogue instruments to their limits, techno does the same for digital. As experienced recently at EarthH in Hackney, Rhythm Section tries to push digital and analogue sounds to their threshold across the night. In contrast to the pure techno rave, BZ's selection causes a polyphonic liberation. Joy is found through the instruments slapped just as much as in the DJ faders pushed.

This joy was evident in the diversity of ages and cultures present. "Mature heads" danced alongside students; some swayed, while others vogueed. Without spaces such as these, where else can we celebrate the diversity of human responses to the same sound? My concern with club culture's demise is that those places of contradiction are swallowed up by a faux vision of "smoothness". We replace spaces of alternative being with sameness. A diversity of aesthetics is converted into another apartment complex. We make room for the novelty of Brat but not the culture she draws upon.



Rave culture attempts to redefine the dominant technological language of our day, making the body its lens and not the periphery. By privileging the human body, Rave's hope acknowledges profound discontent with the world but understands that all "escape" is temporary. This re-calibration enacted in Rave's ritual deescalates the supposed importance of technology's ceaseless expansion. Thus, it exposes a more profound longing, one where it will be an eternal dance that deepens the love of life by going ever deeper into the particularities of individual bodies and their movements.

Because it offers a form of explicit hope, the Rave is a ritualised space filled with the belief that there can be "something more". And this more-ness is, ultimately, encountered in the face of those we dance with; whether in a fleeting glance to ask, "Are you alright?" or the mutual smile that says, "I love this song".



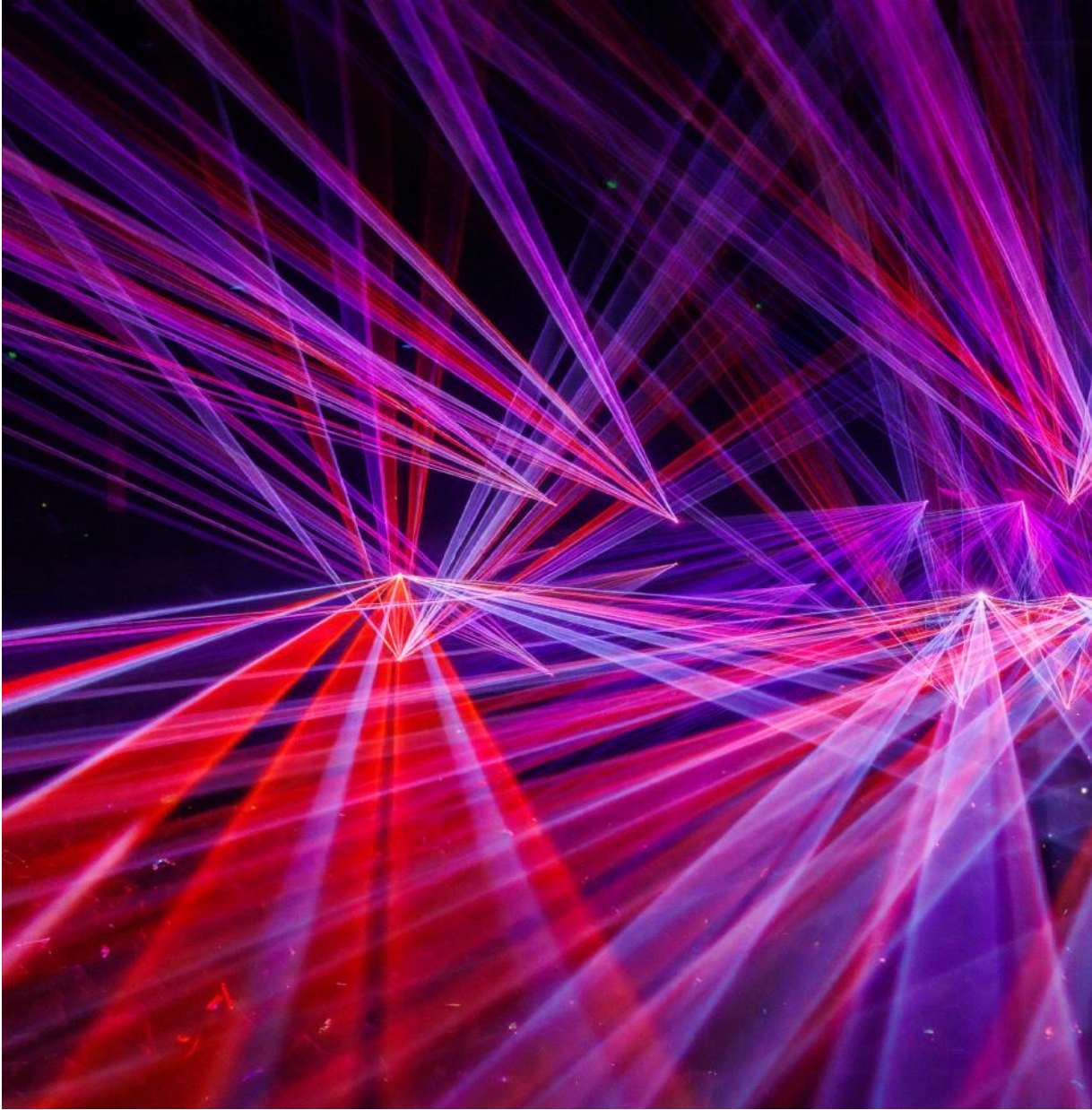


Billy Nasty Dance Valley

Holland, 2002

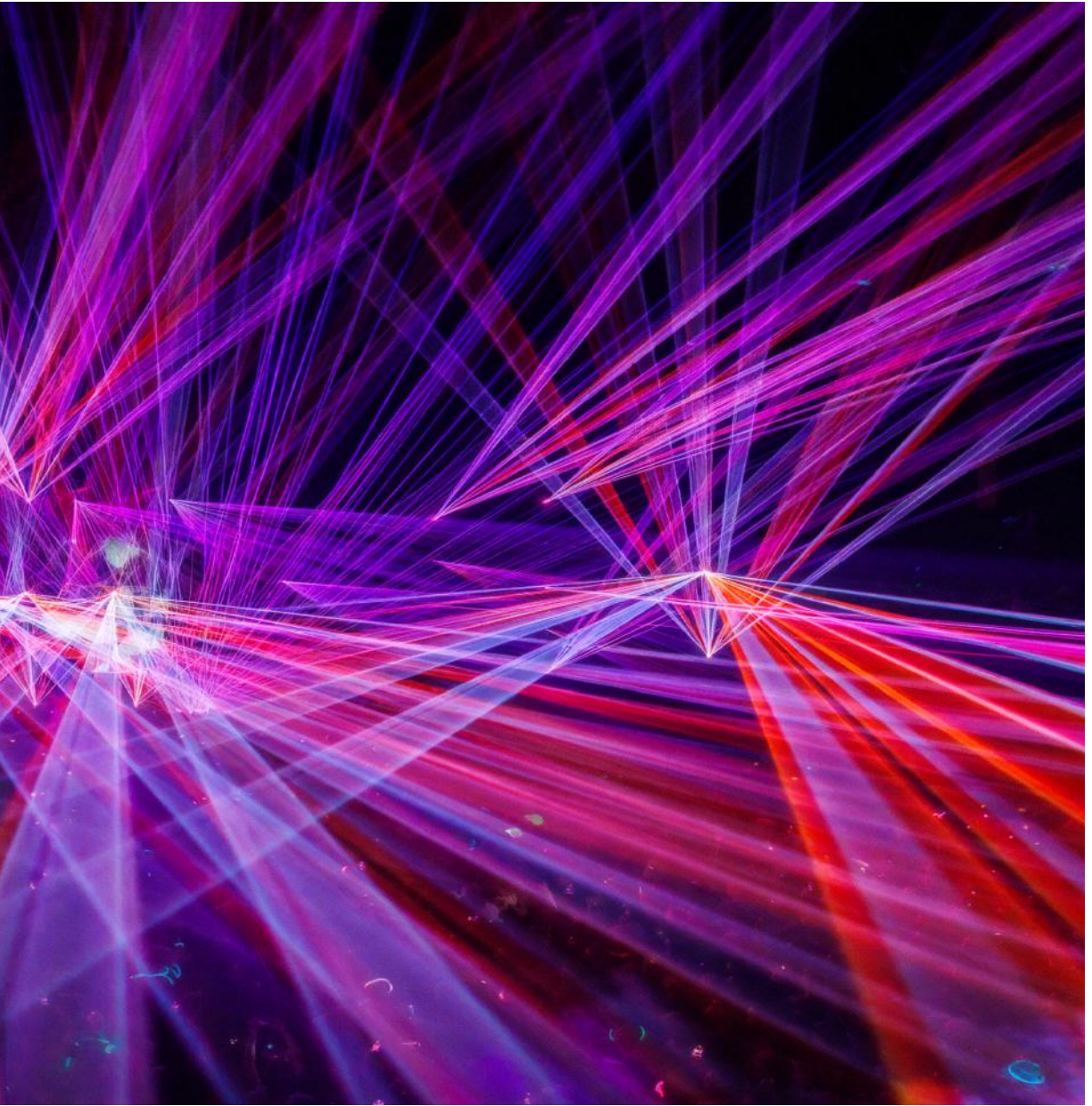


Tristan O'Neill



LSR/CITY Cyberpunk

California, 2025



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MIND
SOCIETY



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