

TRANCE-GRESSION: TECHNOSHAMANISM, CONSERVATISM AND PAGAN POLITICS

Abstract

This article looks at the politics of successive Conservative governments in Britain in the 1980s and '90s through the lens of the increasing politicisation of Paganisms in that period. A wave of moral panics in the late '80's and early '90s concerning marginal communities – such as Ravers, New Age travellers and anti-road protesters – and their 'riotous assemblies', culminated in the Conservative Government of John Major enacting The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994. This was seen by these communities as legislation against alternative lifestyles and, in some respects, an infringement of spiritual freedom. Using the case study of technoshamanism – a Pagan meeting of 'rave' culture and neo-shamanism – I wish to examine how the political and Pagan religious landscapes of '80s and '90s Britain intersected and led to politically engaged forms of Pagan practice often centred around grassroots lifestyle and environmental politics. This will be explored with especial reference to the politicisation of The Spiral Tribe, a technoshamanic collective of the early '90s, and their increasing involvement in resisting the 1994 Act and promotion of campaigns such as Reclaim the Streets.

Key words: Conservatism, Criminal Justice Act, Moral Panic, Paganism, Spiral Tribe, Technoshamanism.

The Thatcherite Agenda

Much has been written about how the election of Margaret Thatcher as UK Prime Minister in 1979, and the subsequent Conservative governments of the 1980s and '90s, marked a turning point in British culture, politics and society (e.g. Evans, 2004; Vinen, 2009). There has been comparatively little discussion, however, of the effects of 'Thatcherism' upon religious and spiritual practices of that period. This article explores the effects that Thatcherism had upon Pagan spirituality, particularly the 1990s phenomenon Technoshamanism. Technoshamanism, and the politicisation of connected Pagan paths was, in part, stimulated by a reaction to contemporaneous Conservative Party policy and ideology. In order to understand this relationship one requires a deeper understanding of Thatcherite ideology.

Thatcherism, although not as radically right-wing as 'Reaganomics' in the USA of

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the early 1980s, owed a similar debt to Neo-Liberal political economy (Smart, 2003). In contrast to the consensual Statist politics that had dominated the UK since the end of World War Two, Thatcher advocated laissez-faire free market economics, low inflation, privatization with the goal of a small minimally interventionist state coupled with new constraints upon the labour force and Trades Unions (Evans, 2004; Vinen, 2009). Within this framework, the British post-war politics of welfare, which oversaw universal benefits and comprehensive healthcare provision, were seen as creating dependency and sloth in its citizens. To rectify this Thatcherism advocated that welfare benefits should be kept at a minimum standard and reserved only for those truly unfit for work (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992).

Similarly, contemporaneous British industry – particularly nationalised industries – was also seen as being dependent upon government subsidy and unfit to compete upon the international stage at a time of nascent globalisation. Throughout the 1980s previously nationalised industries were privatised and monopolies were opened up to competition, for example, the newly privatised utilities, telecoms and transport industries (Vinen, 2009: 192-203). This was also accompanied by a shift in British industry from primary and secondary industries to the rapidly expanding tertiary sector, particularly banking and financial services, attracted to the UK by its educated workforce, low inflation rates, attractive incentives for businesses and its Anglophone positioning on the edge of Western Europe (Evans, 2004; Vinen, 2009). These effects have had three important consequences for the article at hand:

Firstly, Thatcherism was built around a cult of individualism (see Hayek, 1996). Public state provision was to be downsized to create a nation of individual private consumers (Bale, 2010; Evans, 2004; Vinen, 2009). Similarly, wealth creation was no longer the preserve of nationalised collectivities, but was to be stimulated by individual entrepreneurship. Attractive taxation for the wealthier in society, coupled with a cutting of certain bureaucratic red-tape which was seen as impinging on the civil liberties of individual free marketers, stimulated business. Whilst critical of the notion of society, Thatcherite civil society depended on the moral rectitude of this entrepreneurial class. That is, it rested upon Christian virtues that wealth individually created at the top of society would *trickle down* to the rest through economic growth and its attendant expansion of business, creation of jobs and acts of social philanthropy (*ibid.*).

Whilst the average UK standards of living did rise in the 1980s, this came at a social cost, leading one to a second important consequence – increased social polarisation. Wealth did not trickle down in any relative sense (Mack and Lansley, 1992). Indeed, throughout the 1980s the UK had the second highest rate of social polarisation in the World after New Zealand – itself employing a Thatcherite model of political economy termed 'Rogernomics' (Collins and Keesing, 1987). Economic recession in the early 1980s, coupled with the structuring of UK industry, led to increasing levels of relative poverty, fanned by increasing levels of un- and under-employment (Vinen, 2009: 124-33). This was felt most keenly in the Northern industrial heartland of England – notions of a North-South economic divide gained currency – but also in the heavily industrialised South Wales and central belt of Scotland (see Baker and Billinge, 2004). Such division occurred in an era before political devolution in the UK, prompting regional and Nationalist resentments and antipathy towards Westminster-based government. Young people, particularly urban working-class males, were also marginalised by the

failure of 'trickle down' (MacDonald, 1997). Youth unemployment was rising, springing both benefits and employment traps. That is, without work experience young people could not secure employment. This often forced them to become dependent on increasing low levels of welfare and leading to further social marginalisation (*ibid.*). The cult of the individual and increasing social polarisation inevitably led to our third and final consequence: a new moral climate.

New Devils, New Panics

Thatcherism engendered unprecedented levels of mediated criticism within UK society. Alternative comedy, for example, flourished as a lucid protest against Thatcherite policy. *Spitting Image* – a satirical puppet show created for an adult audience – in particular, was a carnivalesque response to the worst excesses of Thatcher's Britain. Critique sometimes spilled over into social unrest. Riots broke out in economically and socially deprived urban areas of Britain in 1981, notably Brixton in South London and Toxteth in Liverpool, but also in Moss Side in Manchester, Chapeltown in Leeds and Handsworth in Birmingham. Whilst many of these were given racial motivations by the Government and police at the time, increasing social polarisation lay at their heart (Benyon, 1984).

Other individuals cultivated alternative lifestyles as a form of protest against the perceived materialism and individualism of Thatcherism. Some dropped out of mainstream society adopting nomadic lifestyles built around alternative forms of spirituality and non-conformist tribal politics – so-called New Age Travellers (Hetherington, 2000). Others, whilst adopting ostensibly conventional lifestyles in the daylight hours and during the working week, spent their leisure time at raves as an antidote to the grind of '9-to-5'. Rave music was originally an outgrowth of disco and house music, particularly those beats which proliferated in the 1980s urban gay scenes of North America, predominantly in New York and Chicago (McKay, 1996: 103-26; Reynolds, 2008; St John, 2004: 1-7). Emerging in the underground club and free party scene of late '80s London, raves were often exclusive transgressive gatherings, outside of mainstream club culture, with an emphasis on ecstatic dance and drug-use rather than alcohol use, sartorial display and courtship (*ibid.*). The drug of choice for ravers Ecstasy (also known as 'E'), or MDMA (Methylenedioxymethamphetamine), is a relatively inexpensive euphoric which induces feelings of self-acceptance, (non-sexual) intimacy with others and feelings of increased physical stamina which allowed ravers to dance with increased longevity and intensity (Collin, 2009; McKay, 1996: 103-26; Reynolds, 2008).

This emphasis upon ecstatic tribalism within rave some meant that, by the early 1990s, connections began to be made between raving and the ecstatic rituals of non-Western religious cultures (St John, 2004, 2009). Such Techno-Primitivism encouraged ravers to liken their experiences to the ecstatic spiritual communion of shamanisms (St John, 2004: 28). The rise of cultural globalization at this time also facilitated the syncretic appropriation of religious symbolism as emblems of this new tribalism. Pagan and Celtic symbols, alongside others appropriated from Hinduism and Buddhism became common totems. In particular, the 'chilled out' bliss induced by MDMA was frequently likened to Buddhist awakening, so mantras became important tropes within a Rave sub-genre termed Buddha Beats (St John, 2009: 165-93).

Ravers and Travellers were not the only constituencies constructed as new Folk Devils. A whole range of groups were perceived by the Conservatives as threats to the integrity of this New Britain: The very poorest, now conceptualised as an emergent Underclass – following racialised perspectives on poverty in the United States of America – were viewed as a dangerous lumpen-proletariat who had inculcated a morality built around deviance, promiscuity, drug use and dependence (Murray, 1989). Welfare purges against a growing number of teenage single mothers at the time typified this new politics.

Trades Unions were also seen to be threats to laissez-faire operations of the free market and were met with opposition and suspicion. Perhaps the most famous example of Thatcherite industrial relations was The Miner's Strike of 1984-5 (e.g. Vinen, 2009: 154-77). Inverting the hitherto avuncular image of the British 'policeman on the beat', Conservative governments began to use the Police as a physical extension of their political ideology (Milne, 2004). The most striking example of this is self-styled 'Battle of Orgreave', South Yorkshire, where picketing miners (numbering perhaps 5,000) clashed with police (numbering perhaps 6-8,000), some of whom who had riot training and were veterans of the unrest of 1981. Skirmishes resulted in 51 injured miners, 72 injured police, and over 90 arrests (*ibid.*). The majority of these arrests resulted in charges of unlawful assembly, with a number of these put on trial. Significantly, all of these cases collapsed with the South Yorkshire Police awarding compensation to the accused in an out-of-court settlement in excess of £500,000 (*ibid.*).

Importantly, the same tactics were used to subdue other Folk Devils, notably New Age Travellers and Ravers. The Stonehenge Free Festival was a carnivalesque music festival held at Stonehenge, Wiltshire, from 1972 until 1984 (McKay, 1996: 31-2). It ran for much of the month of June every year culminating in celebration of the Summer Solstice at the stones. Despite media reports of public drug use, policing remained relaxed throughout much of the 1970s. Indeed, negative media coverage, however, only served to increase the festival's attraction with young people resulting in an attendance of 65,000 for the final festival in 1984 (*ibid.*). In 1985, with Thatcherism in its pomp, English Heritage, Stonehenge's guardians, sought an *eleventh hour* exclusion order of 4 miles around the monument in order to protect the site. This effectively ended the festival. Such was the last-minute nature of the granting of the order, however, that many revellers did not know about the exclusion until they tried to access the site (Lodge et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2009).

On June 1st 1985 members of a New Age Traveller neo-tribe, The Peace Convoy, comprising of around one hundred vehicles, were diverted from the site by a police roadblock into a field near to the village of Shipton Bellinger, Wiltshire, about 8 miles away from Stonehenge. Vastly outnumbered by the constabulary, a stand-off ensued which was interrupted by what has been construed as an act of police brutality – travellers and their vehicles were attacked and damaged by truncheons – and which ended in mass arrest (*ibid.*). This violence became known as 'The Battle of the Beanfield'. Such were the numbers of those arrested that the local judicial system could not cope, meaning that families were separated – in some cases, parents and children – and held in other parts of the UK. In echoes of Orgreave, some travellers were eventually awarded compensation after the police were found guilty of wrongful arrest, assault and criminal damage (*ibid.*).

Back to Basics – The New Victorianism

Margaret Thatcher was eventually deposed by elements within her party in 1990. By the time of the Conservative governments headed by John Major in the early 1990s, Folk Devils such as ravers and travellers were squarely being defined by their moral fallibility, particularly around drug use. The political solution to these alternative lifestyles was twofold:

Firstly, the Conservatives launched what was termed The 'Back to Basics' Campaign (Bale, 2010: 46; Murray, 1994). This was an ill-fated attempt to return to Victorian moral principles, particularly legislation aimed to strengthen family values – with single mothers and the underclass again the perceived *bête noires* of civil society – coupled with retrogressive reviews of education and law and order (*ibid.*). Whilst the campaign was seen to be hypocritical in the light of numerous accusations of sleaze, particularly, sexual infidelity, against high ranking Conservative Party officials, it did stimulate a moral climate conducive for legislation against ravers and travellers. This leads one to the second solution – legislation against the illegal assembly of these 'immoral' minorities. This is particularly the case of The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 which was stimulated by a new moral panic concerning rave and nomadism in the wake of the Castlemorton Common Festival of 1992 (Reynolds, 2008: 135-42).

As we shall see later in this article, the early 1990s saw a coalition of travellers and ravers built around a seasonal circuit of free festivals. The closure of the Avon Free Festival in Bristol in the Spring of 1992, and subsequent police action shunted revellers northwards into the South Midlands' countryside. Repelled from their original destination, festival goers gathered in Castlemorton, a sleepy village in the Malvern Hills, Worcestershire, where an impromptu week-long festival ensued. Perhaps 40,000 attended, making it the largest gathering of its kind since the Stonehenge Free Festivals of the early 1980s. Its location – in the Conservative heartland of 'Middle England' – coupled with concerns about its lax policing and immorality, especially increasing moral panics around the dangers of Ecstasy use, meant that the Conservative government was forced to act (*ibid.*).

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994

Whilst the Act legislated in a number of areas pertinent to criminal justice in Britain of that era – policing and terrorism in Northern Ireland, clampdowns on youth offenders in a period of high youth unemployment, and drug trafficking – it was the legislation on public order that courted the most controversy and is most relevant to this article. The Act targeted the traveller and rave communities outlawing large scale outdoor parties where music was played. This targeting is made explicit within the act (Part V, Sections. 61-2) which empowers the police to remove trespassers upon private land, especially convoys of six or more vehicles, and to generally expedite legal procedures to evict such travellers. Non-compliance would result in arrest and seizure of vehicles and belongings by police.

The Act (Part V, Sections. 63-7) also made specific provision to clamp-down on illegal raves. Raves and 'rave music' were characterised by Section 63 of The Act as follows:

(1) This section applies to a gathering on land in the open air of 100 or more persons (whether or not trespassers) at which amplified music is played during the night (with or without intermissions) and is such as, by reason of its loudness and duration and the time at which it is played, is likely to cause serious distress to the inhabitants of the locality; and for this purpose;

(a) such a gathering continues during intermissions in the music and, where the gathering extends over several days, throughout the period during which amplified music is played at night (with or without intermissions); and

(b) "music" includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats.

However, the legislation did not just focus upon the arrest of ravers caught *in flagrante delicto*. Arrest and seizure could now result based on the suspicions of senior officers that a person, or persons, were planning a rave, empowering police to take action:

(2) If, as respects any land in the open air, a police officer of at least the rank of superintendent reasonably believes that

(a) two or more persons are making preparations for the holding there of a gathering to which this section applies,

(b) ten or more persons are waiting for such a gathering to begin there, or

(c) ten or more persons are attending such a gathering which is in progress, he may give a direction that those persons and any other persons who come to prepare or wait for or to attend the gathering are to leave the land and remove any vehicles or other property which they have with them on the land. (*ibid.*)

Furthermore, provisions within Sections 64-7 permitted the Police to seize sound equipment and other property belonging to ravers, plus powers to prevent people from proceeding to a rave within a 5 mile exclusion zone. Individual ravers could be arrested for aggravated trespass if the raves were to be held on private property (Sections 68-9). Free festivals were to be regarded as forms of trespassory assembly if construed to cause 'serious disruption to the life of the community' (Section 70, Sub-Section 14A (i)); or,

Where the land, or a building or monument on it, is of historical, architectural, archaeological or scientific importance, in significant damage to the land, building or monument (Sub-Section 14A (ii)).

This effectively spelled the end of many existing free festivals forcing Rave into a counter-cultural neo-tribalism (St John, 2009).

Rave and Religion

Thus far one has seen how Thatcherism fostered a moral and political climate which marginalised and criminalised certain 'alternative' sections of society and that Rave culture began to appropriate and syncretise religious symbols and frameworks of interpretation (St John, 2004). These issues come into sharper focus if one examines Technoshamanism, a hybrid of shamanism, traveller and rave cultures which was both affected and politicised by the above ideologies and events. The remainder of this article therefore uses Technoshamanism as a heuristic device in understanding the nexus of politics and Pagan spirituality of that period (St John, 2004, 2009).

In the early 1990s, against the backdrop of the criminalisation of raves and traveling, UK-based clubs and labels such as *Return to the Source* and Megatripolis mixed 'rave' music and esotericism to create a neo-tribalism which links pagan ritual, performance and technology in a loose movement termed Technoshamanism (Harvey, 1997: 122-4). Given its obvious etymological roots, a key to understanding Technoshamanism is its complex relationship to shamanism:

[I]t rose in my mind's eye like a great time-lapse vision. I saw a human being rise from the earth, stand for a moment, and then dissolve back into it. It was only a brief moment, and in that moment our whole lives passed. Then I saw a huge city rise out of the desert floor beneath me, exist for a second, and then vanish back into the vastness of the desert. The plants, the rocks, and the earth under me were saying, 'Yes, this is how it really is, your life, the city you live in.' It was as if in my peyotized state I was able to perceive and communicate with a resonance or vibration that surrounded me. Those inner barriers which defined 'me' as a separate identity from 'that' - my environment - had dissolved. An overwhelming realisation poured through me - that the human race and all technology formed by it are nothing other than flowers of the earth.

I went along for a laugh with some mates and to do some E, but soon it all. . . the beat. . . got to me. Eventually I realised that I wasn't moving alone, but became part of something bigger than just me. As the drugs kicked in with the music, the dance floor, everything, sort of dissolved. . . everything fucking merged. I wasn't dancing anymore, I was part of. . . it might sound shit, but I was part of the dance of the planet. I was part of its rhythm. . . It was blissful, that feeling. . . I felt whole. . . with the lights, the drugs, everything. . . Everything was within me and I - 'I' isn't adequate - I was nothing, insignificant but I was also the whole universe. . . everything. Fuck. It's really hard to put into words but it wasn't just me anymore. I saw death but felt the life force so fucking strongly. That first time. . . I've never felt so connected with the earth. That was my first encounter with magic. . . real magic.

The first quote is taken from anthropologist and neo-shaman Prem Das' (cited in Drury, 1989: 49) vivid description of taking peyote during a shamanic ritual with the Huichol Indians of Mexico's Sierra Madre. The second is taken from an interview I conducted for my doctoral research into Paganism with 'Steve', a Thelemic magician and self-defined Technoshaman. Comparing the above quotes it appears that traditional shamanic and Technoshamanic experiences are in some ways related, but what is the significance of this relationship? Indeed, since the early 1990s, why were ravers returning to the primitive techniques of the shaman? Steven Mizrach (n.d.: 1-2), a self-styled cyber-anthropologist, poses the question thus:

Why at this apex point in human history, according to our various socioevolutionary theories, are we rushing once more to embrace the cast-off 'primitive'? . . . Why are 'raves' bringing us back to Lévy-Bruhl's earliest phase of human consciousness - the participation mystique?

Let us examine in more depth this relationship between indigenous shamanism and Technoshamanism.

The shamanic world

Being chosen by spirits, taught by them to enter trance and to fly with one's soul to other worlds in the sky or clamber through dangerous crevasses into the terror of subterranean worlds; being stripped of one's flesh, reduced to a skeleton. . . and then reassembled and reborn; gaining the power to combat spirits and heal their victims, to kill enemies and save one's own people from disease and starvation - these are features of the shamanic religions which occur in many parts of the world (Vitebsky, 1995: 8).

In brief, the word *shaman* comes from the language of the Evenk, a small Tungus-speaking tribe of hunters and reindeer herders in Siberia (Lewis, 1989; Shirokogoroff,

1982). From these specific origins the term has become a catch-all anthropological term to describe similar spiritual practices – ‘similar constellations of techniques, beliefs, traditional knowledge and authority in other cultures’ (Harvey, 1997: 107) – around the globe. Thus, despite the ubiquity of the term in contemporary anthropology and religious studies, perhaps it is more accurate to talk about ‘shamanisms’ rather than a single global shamanism. Whilst all shamanic activity involves some sort of involvement with the realms of spirits, outside of this fundamental activity, a pre-modern shaman might be ‘psychopomp, priest, healer, therapist, spiritual-warrior, spirit-controller, medium and/or powerful communal leader’ (Harvey, 1997: 108).

The shaman enters these spirit realms through accessing altered states of consciousness (ASCs) – also termed shamanic states of consciousness (SSCs) or *nonordinary reality* (see Harner, 1990: xix-xxiv) – wherein the shaman’s soul is said to be able to leave its body and *journey* to other, super-sensory, parts of the cosmos such as the upper world of the Great Primordial Shaman and the lower world of the dead. In these altered states the shaman is able, among other things, to fly like an eagle in seeking ingredients for the formulation of cures for the sick, fight spirits which are causing certain maladies or ill fortune, or seek answers to problems faced by the tribe.

There are numerous techniques for accessing these states, though the most common involve hallucinogenic drug use, dancing, drumming or vocal techniques such as chanting. The most sensationalist anthropological accounts of shamanism have stressed ubiquitous drug-use – probably catalyzed by the fictive *shamanthropology* of Castaneda, Harner’s experiences with the Jivaro, or the drug-fuelled literary cut-ups of William S. Burroughs – but in fact it is mostly confined to the shamanisms of the New World. Hallucinogenic plants are actually conceptualised as spirit-teachers by these shamans and their ingestion transfers into shamans spiritual properties and attributes. These so-called teacher plants or *entheogens*, for example, *Fly Agaric*, *ayahuasca*, *peyote* – reveal the altered realities which usually lie hidden or dormant within ordinary states of consciousness.

Rhythm in the form of drumming, chanting and dance are other important gateways to these super-normal realities. As Vitebsky (1995: 78-9) argues, ‘The experience of the spirit realm in shamanism is closely tied to music. In particular, there is a powerful connection between trance and the rhythmic regularity of percussion instruments. In virtually every region where shamanism is found, the drum is the shamanic instrument par excellence’ (also Drury, 1989: 38). Luisah Teish, a shaman and priestess of a Yoruban religious tradition called *Lucumi*, describes the way that a combination of dance and rhythm allows her to enter trance and facilitates possession by the Lucumi goddess Oshun, a Nigerian counterpart of the Graeco-Roman Venus or Aphrodite:

Suddenly I find I’m dancing off-rhythm, and an ancestor or a spirit is there. You are bombarded by music, and not really in control of your body. It seems that the drummer’s hands are your feet and then at some point there is a great silence. You find you are now on the wall, on the ceiling – over there somewhere – watching your body performing... (cited in Drury, 1989: 72).

Such performance – or *performative acts* (Smart, 1997; Tambiah, 1985;) – and artistry are absolutely central to indigenous shamanic activity (Turner, 1982). Performance, however, is connected to something other than manifest spectacle – linked with *efficacy* rather than *entertainment* (see Schechner, 1994) and *enacting* rather than simply *acting* (Alexander, 1997: 154). Shamanic ritual performance was, as it remains today in

contemporary Paganism and Technoshamanism, about mutual explorations of ontology – both latent and manifest – and the psyche. Erik Davis (1999 :173), for example, conceptualises pre-modern shamans as ‘the social and ecological psychiatrists of their societies’. He aligns shamanic magic with both ‘empirical science’ and ‘virtual theatre’, arguing that the shaman used ‘language, costumes, gestures, song, and stagecraft’ in order to apply ‘*techne* to the social imagination, actively tweaking the images, desires, and stories that partly structure the collective psyche’ (*ibid.*). He terms this psychic process – echoing the science-fiction of William Gibson (1984) – *neuromancy*. Thus although different from indigenous shamanisms in that they are elective practices, the techniques of ecstasy one finds in the context of a Technoshamanic rave have a direct correspondence with neuromancy and traditional techniques of consciousness alteration.

The Technoshamanic World

Technoshamanism has, for example, digitised tribal beats, chants and sounds from the rainforests; replaced psychotropic ‘teacher plants’ with synthesised highs in the form of amphetamines, LSD and Ecstasy; substituted the dances of the Whirling Dervishes with raves; and, swapped ritual bonfires with the ‘magically’ transformative gazes of the strobe, and internet images and computer-generated fractals which are projected onto the walls of the venue (McKay, 1996: 107-13; Harvey, 1997: 122-4; St John, 2004, 2009).

These techniques are said to allow access not to the lower, middle and upper realms of traditional shamanism, but to the latent reality of *Gaia*, also termed *Cyberia*. As well as having connections to notions of Earth as a single sentient organism, and to cyberspace, this reality is a realm of artistic and political inspiration. For Technoshamans it is about being connected to the Earth, drawing creative inspiration from this connection, and ultimately wanting to preserve these elements through political action and resistance (see Harvey, 1997: 122). Through art – music, the rituals of the rave, and subcultural style – Technoshamanism becomes a counter-cultural political force.

Dan C. Noel (1997: 135-6) argues that shamanic practices combine introspective perspiration with artistic inspiration citing both the rock art at the caves at Lascaux and – following Michael Tucker (1992), Mark Levy (1993), and Maureen Korp (1997) – shamanic ways of seeing at work in contemporary art. However, at the same time, the underlying neuromantic efficacy of shamanic ritual also transcends normative Western conceptions of art and performance. This is demonstrated by this extract from Shirokogoroff’s (cited in Lewis, 1989: 46-7) description of a Tungus shaman ritual:

The rhythmic music and singing, and later the dancing of the shaman gradually involve every participant more and more in a collective action....When the shaman feels that the audience is with him and follows him he becomes still more active and this effect is transmitted to his audience. After shamanizing, the audience recollects various moments of the performance, their great psychophysiological emotion and the hallucinations of sight and hearing which they have experienced. They then have a deep satisfaction - much greater than that from emotions produced by theatrical and musical performances, literature and general artistic phenomena of the European complex, because in shamanizing the audience at the same time acts and participates.

These forms of transcendence are also apparent in Technoshamanic ritual. Self-proclaimed *psychonaut* and godfather of technoshamanism, Terence McKenna claims

that Technoshamans, like their shamanic forefathers, journey the latent realities of Gaia to bring both artistic inspiration and sacred and political liberation to a disenchanted world (see McKenna and Zuvuya, 1993; The Shaman and McKenna, 1993). Just as shamans transcend performance in Lucumi and Tungus ritual, Technoshamanic ritual is also about dissolving or transgressing normative conceptions of performance and relatedness. Technoshamanism, like traditional shamanism, is about the dissolution of the boundaries between performers and audience, transporting both beyond manifest performance and manifest reality to somewhere sacred. Both opening quotes talked of processes of dissolution. As noted above, Prem Das talked of the dissolution of 'Those inner barriers which defined "me" as a separate identity from "that" - my environment'. 'Steve', meanwhile, stated that 'As the drugs kicked in with the music, the dance floor, everything, sort of dissolved....everything fucking merged. I wasn't dancing anymore, I was part of....it might sound shit, but I was part of the dance of the planet'.

McKenna equates this dissolution to changes in consciousness from ordinary states to altered, collective states – in other words, spiritual states. For McKenna, rave participants actually 'change neurological states, and large groups of people getting together in the presence of this kind of music are creating a telepathic community, a bonding....' (cited in Harvey, 1997: 24). Douglas Rushkoff (1994: 159-60), goes further by arguing that the creation of collective consciousness means not only that there are 'no performers, no audience, no leaders, no egos', but also that all raves become part of the same mystical participation: 'For the fractal rule of self-similarity to hold, this also means that every house club must share in the co-operative spirit of all clubs'. In these respects the collective consciousness and tribal, expressive sociality of technoshamanic identity acts to challenge more individualist, late modern conceptions of self-identity (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990, 1991; see also Hetherington, 1996, 1998; Maffesoli, 1996). That is, Technoshamanic performance is a deliberate counter-point to the atomism of modern sociality and, in particular, Thatcherite individualism. Performance is the way in which Technoshamanic tribal identities, solidarities and politics are created and perpetuated (see St John, 2009).

Theorising Technoshamanism: Heterotopia and *trance-gression*

So far the importance of the tools of shamanic *trance-formation* in performance, particularly psychedelics and music, has been emphasised. A vital dimension has so far remained unexplored – the spaces in which these dissolutions, *trance-formations* and galvanizations of tribal identity occur. Central to the Technoshamanic experience is the dance floor which, for many participants, appears to represent an innovative form of ritual space. For example, this member of the pagan technoshamanic band Medicine Drum equates the dance floor with more mainstream notions of sacred sites:

Welcome to our world of Sacred Sites. Ancient places of power where our ancestors gathered to conduct scared ceremonies, celebrating their connection to the earth, the sky and each other. These sites provided the focus for community ritual where we danced all night around huge fires to celebrate the seasons and empower ourselves as one tribe united in spirit. As we danced on the earth the power of these sites was released into our bodies giving us strength and connecting us to Gaia. Then the religions of fear began to take control. They destroyed our sacred sites and our dance rituals, burning all who dared question the new order. But the power could not be suppressed

forever and the great cycles of time have brought us full circle to this new moment and we are gathering once again. The ancient memory has been reawakened, the all night dance ritual has returned. All across the world people are again experiencing the power of the dance. Our new sacred site is the dance floor and even though the structure of the temple has changed the sacred earth beneath our feet is still the same.... This album represents a sacred global journey. It is an attempt to reconnect with the ancient spirits of the earth, reminding us of the power we once felt as we danced the sacred path. The power we again feel today. (Deckker, 1997, 4-5)

In these terms the Technoshamanic dance-floor is constructed as a magical transformative ritual space. It is a space of *otherness* that is resistant to mainstream social and cultural values, particularly to the tenets of mainstream religion and politics. It is also specifically (neo-) tribal space, a space of expressive sociality and *communitas* (Turner, 1969; Bey, 1991). In these terms the dance floor appears strange and replete with overlapping, competing and multiple meanings. Such ambiguous places are termed *heterotopia* by Foucault (1986; 1989: xv-xxiv).

In Foucauldian terms heterotopic spaces can be considered the blind-spots in the gaze of the *panopticon* in which one can temporarily be freed from carceral society (see Foucault, 1977). That is, as society becomes increasingly subject to political surveillance – both physical and ideological forms – gaps in this gaze become important sites of political resistance and liberation. These gaps tend to be marginal places with sacred sites, free festivals and raves all being prime examples of these.

Thus, according to Hetherington, heterotopias become affective centres of social centrality for certain marginalised out-groups and activities (see Babcock, 1978: 32). It is in these spaces that groups can meet and 'be themselves', expressing and galvanising their practices, beliefs and resistant identities outside of mainstream social space (see Stallybrass and White, 1986). Thus heterotopias are places filled with both cultural 'others' and cultural otherness, which shades into political otherness. It is this alterity which makes them simultaneously culturally marginal and symbolically central (for example, Hetherington, 1996; Melucci, 1996: 101; also Babcock, 1978). Just as many technoshamans venerate the sacred sites of antiquity, Hetherington (1996) gives the example of Stonehenge, the site of the free festival, as a *heterotopia par excellence*. He cites the pagan and New Age-inspired activity of the traveller free festivals at the sacred site as a form of cultural inversion – recalling both the liminal and ludic spaces of Victor Turner (1969, 1974, 1982) and Bakhtin's (1984) *carnavalesque* – wherein marginality and alterity become temporarily normalised and celebrated. Just as varieties of shamanic experience dissolve boundaries, heterotopias temporarily subverts or dissolves normal forms of ordering and hierarchy, allowing normative social and political boundaries to be transgressed. Individual concerns are overcome to be replaced by tribal politics. In the Technoshamanic context, ritual space acts as a crucible for dissolving or *trance-gressing* the boundaries between ordinary and shamanic realities, between culture, nature and the supernature of Gaia. According to Duerr (1985) it is this ability to cross the boundary between civilization and wilderness, culture and nature that is the key to spiritual and political transformation. Thus, it is this positioning of the dance floor at the symbolic borders between culture and nature which gives Technoshamanic ritual its efficacy and empowers its politics.

The Spiral Tribe and After....

I wish to bring some of these theoretical concerns into focus by examining one of the major technoshamanic collectives, The Spiral Tribe. The late 1980s saw a reinvigoration – and some might say commercialisation – of UK festival culture. Glastonbury began to cast off its exclusively hippy image and became a broader-based arts festival with an eclectic mixture of music acts designed to appeal to a wider audience (Shearlaw and Aubrey, 2005). Similarly, the Reading Festival, straying from its rock roots, re-invented itself as a celebration of indie music courting a younger, student-oriented market. After a decade in power, and mainstream political resistance to Thatcherism looking remote, hedonism and escape became important drivers of youth culture. Music and fashion cultures looked to the late 1960s for inspiration with psychedelic inspired guitar and dance music by the likes of Spacemen 3 and The Madchester Baggy Scene (for example, The Stone Roses, Inspiral Carpets and the Happy Mondays) being teamed with flares and neo-psychedelic Flower Power inspired style (Collin, 2009; Reynolds, 2008). Linked to this was an apeing of late 1960s drug culture. Ecstasy certainly broke down boundaries of individual personal space, but as Technoshamanism developed out of Rave, the drug of choice became LSD as a method of shamanistic insight advocated by Terence McKenna. Certainly his 'stoned ape' theory of evolution became a popular trope within the scene (see McKenna, 1992).

Alongside these neo-psychedelic trappings came the rejection of the rise of the self-proclaimed super-clubs. These, emerging from the Thatcherite marketisation of British culture, were often prohibitively expensive urban dance clubs with strict door policies so that an exclusive club culture emerged based on a wealth, celebrity, youth and style. Rave culture, on the other hand, rejected the increasingly opulent surroundings of these super-clubs for free parties in squats, disused warehouses and the rural outdoors (St John, 2009: 21-64). This was galvanised both by the coming together of rave and traveller cultures in the late 1980s and emergent musical technologies which meant that music production was increasingly portable, sophisticated and inexpensive (Reynolds, 2008).

The Glastonbury Festival of 1989 was arguably the genesis of Technoshamanism – the event where the Rave and Traveller communities first came together. The travellers brought with them the nomadic lifestyle, a concern with spirituality and psychedelic experimentation (McKay, 1996; St John, 2009). The ravers brought with them the sound systems, music and technological expertise. In 1990 a sound-system emerged which wove these concerns together: The Spiral Tribe (see Collin, 2009; McKay, 1996: 120-4; Reynolds, 2008: 135-47; 214-43; St John, 2009: 36-40). This rave neo-tribe was named for the discovery of an ammonite fossil on the pavement near to the home of one of its founders Mark Harrison and emerged out of London's free art-house party scene. Its first party organised in October 1990 in north-west London was rapidly followed by more ambitious parties culminating in a warehouse party in Wapping in June 1991. Free parties were becoming subjected to increasing police scrutiny prompting The Spiral Tribe to take their sound system temporarily on the road. They played the displaced Stonehenge Free Festival in 1991, a much smaller event mostly attended by travellers, and such was the success of this that The Tribe decided to follow the festival circuit all summer. They did so with minimal police intervention. As they travelled they

became increasingly steeped in the New Age psychedelia of Traveller communities and in the Pagan folklore of southern England (*ibid.*). Free festivals often took place at or near Neolithic sacred sites and knowledge of these places began to suffuse The Tribe with a strong Pagan and environmental ethic. In theoretical terms these free festivals functioned as heterotopias allowing new forms of sociality, spirituality and politics to develop (*ibid.*).

In the Autumn of 1991 The Tribe returned to the London free party scene with a new spiritual vision. As outlined above, the dance floor became consecrated as a ritual space, synthesised psychedelics were treated as entheogens, and shamanism became the guiding spiritual practice (*ibid.*). In the Spring of 1992 The Tribe went back onto the road, growing in numbers all of the time. This peripateticism culminated in the central part that The Tribe played in the organisation of Castlemorton (e.g., St John, 2009: 50-2). The negative media and political discourses that followed in the wake of Castlemorton forced The Tribe back into the free party scene of the Capital. The political climate after Castlemorton had changed and police intervention was now inevitable for any detected rave. A free party organised in London's Canary Wharf less than a month after Castlemorton was closed down by police and resulted in numerous arrests. Such police attention made such a large neo-tribe an unviable easy target and, by that Summer, The Spiral Tribe had disintegrated with many of its members dispersing as nomads throughout Europe, and eventually into North America (St John, 2009: 55-8). However, their exposure to rural Britain and their treatment by the police lead to an increasingly overt politicisation of a small hardcore of The Tribe.

The legislation which was to become The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 was passing through Parliament as The Criminal Justice Bill (CJB) (see McKay, 1996: 159-81). The Tribe became prime public opponents of the CJB, organising protests and using the sound systems as a form of *agit prop*. These experiences led The Tribe to an anarchist politics which was both anti-Conservative and anti-Capitalist. As such they became part of the so-called DIY (Do-It-Yourself) grassroots political culture with a particular focus on green politics and anti-globalization protest (see McKay, 1998). This is exemplified by The Tribe's involvement in the Reclaim The Streets (RTS) campaign. RTS concerns the public ownership of urban space which the RTS campaigners believe has become wrongly dominated by cars and Corporatism. Campaigners advocate that such spaces become reclaimed by citizens in carnivalesque political scenarios very similar to free parties. The streets themselves become heterotopias (*ibid.*).

As The Tribe travelled around England it became increasingly aware of the emergent environmentalist agenda, in particular a number of high-profile anti-road protests that were happening in Southern England in the early 1990s (see McKay, 1996: 127-58). Arguably the two with the highest political profile were those protests against the extension of the M3 motorway at Twyford Down, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Site of Specific Scientific Interest, in Hampshire, and the Newbury By-Pass in Berkshire. Both of these were built around DIY politics coupled with the mobilisation of local support. Both protests, and later protests such as the A30 extension protest in Devon, were also heavily populated with Pagan protestors – for example The Donga Tribe occupying Twyford Down. Here, again, we can point to The Tribe, and Technoshamanism more generally, as a seminal catalyst in the DIY politicisation of Pagan forms of environmental action in the 1990s and beyond (*ibid.*).

Indeed, contemporary Paganism is suffused with stories of Pagan environmentalism, sometimes termed *Sacred Ecology* (see Harris, 1996; Letcher, 2000). Whilst Pagans had a visible presence at the female peace camps at Greenham Common in the 1980s, it was Technoshamanic DIY politics that catalysed and inspired Pagan politics and its high profile involvement in the road protest movement (McKay, 1995). From these road protests came a broader Pagan response to the environment often rooted in Deep Ecology (see Harvey, 1997: 126–42). In recent years, in particular, Pagans have scored notable successes in the preservation of, and (re)gaining access to, heterotopic sacred sites such as Stonehenge, The Rollright Stones, Silbury Hill, and Seahenge.

Nomad or 'Mad for it'?

The concept of heterotopia is informative when one seeks to understand how an oppositional counter-cultural politics is created and sustained. However, it tells us little about the relationship between these DIY politics, built upon a sense of artistic and spiritual union, and the mainstream political centre. Counter-intuitively, the avowed materialism of the French neo-Nietzschean philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari provides a way of thinking about these issues.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of the *nomad - bricoleurs par excellence* - is useful in trying to understand the spiritual and political strategies of Technoshamans. Deleuze and Guattari draw their inspiration for the term from successive barbarian incursions across the boundaries of empire from Asia into Europe over many centuries. The flat, 'smooth' terrain which these nomads conquered, the Eurasian Steppes, coming to represent, in Deleuze and Guattari's scheme, space which resists the hierarchical, *striated* spaces of modernity. That is, capitalist politics, particularly Neo-Liberalism which seeks to create social difference. These resistant spaces, for me, do not follow the rules of rationalised spaces, rather they resemble heterotopias, such as the Technoshamanic dance floor. Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus*, in particular, is a treatise of horizontal, *rhizomatic* thought over vertical, *arborescent* hierarchies of modern knowledge. Rhizomatic thought belongs to 'the smooth' spaces of heterotopias rather than the striated and hierarchised spaces of modernity. That is, Deleuze and Guattari have levelled out made horizontal – modern hierarchies of signs and knowledge so that no single signifier or discourse is privileged. Their philosophic method – and that of the nomad and Technoshamanic *bricoleur* – resembles the rhizome rather than the tree, horizontally, synchronically connecting and invading different spaces or nodes rather than discretely and diachronically arching upwards. It is about linkage – of thought and of people – rather than individualisation. The rhizome like the nomad is sustained by constant movement – *deteritorialization* – only temporarily creating new symbolic homes and practices – *reterritorialization* - before moving on (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 381–4).

These analogies of nomad and rhizome works upon several levels within Technoshamanic political practices: Clearly nomadic, rhizomatic thinking underpins the spiritual and artistic bricolage that comprises Technoshamanism. The rhizome, however, also links the specific elements that comprise the heterotopic space of the dance floor, bringing together retraditionalized ritual forms with contemporary technology. The endless drum loops and samples are in themselves rhizomatic. Rhythms and sacred

sounds culled from archaic sources fold back on themselves in endless variation, but are still part of the same continuous movement of sound, reverberating from their times and places of origin into the now of the dance floor (Return To The Source, 1997; also Bachelard, 1969; Game, 1995). The rhizome also links individuals in a sense of mystical participation. Rhizomatic thought acts in conjunction with heterotopias to produce tribal politics which resist the *isms* of arborial thought – in this context, Thatcherism with its attendant individualism and materialism.

Conclusions

Technoshamanism is bound with British Conservative politics of the 1980s and '90s. Not only was its genesis a result of the moral agenda of that period, and the suppression of particular Folk Devils, but these experiences created an innovative and novel nexus of politics and spiritual belief which has had a lasting impact upon personal and environmental politics. In particular it had a catalytic effect upon the politicisation of contemporary Paganism. What is interesting about Technoshamanism is the way in which ritual practice, rather than moral philosophy, becomes a locus of the political; for example, the dance floor becomes writ large as a carnival of protest on the streets.

Furthermore, conventional political or religious understandings of this movement are not possible. Instead concepts of heterotopias and the rhizome are innovative ways of untangling the complex bricolage of religion and politics that underpins Technoshamanisms. Thatcherism and mainstream religion typify arborial thought, DIY politics and spirituality, the rhizome. Technoshamanism is a fascinating case study which demonstrates how spirituality can be an important expression of political resistance.

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Дејвид Грин

ТРАНСГРЕСИЈА: ТЕХНОШАМАНИЗАМ, КОНЗЕРВАТИВИЗМ И ПАГАНСКА ПОЛИТИКА

Резиме

Овај чланак разматра политику узастопних конзервативних влада у Британији 1980-их и '90-их година кроз призму растуће политизације паганизма у том периоду. Талас моралне панике крајем '80-их и почетком '90-их, повезан са маргиналним заједницама као што су рејвери, њу ејџ, антироуд и њиховим бунтовним окупљањима, кулминирао доношењем Закона о кривичном праву и јавном поретку 1994. донетог за конзервативне владе Џона Мејџора. Исти је, од стране поменутих заједница, виђен као акт против алтернативних начина живота и, у неким аспектима, као кршење духовних слобода. Користећи се студијом случаја техношаманизма – паганског сусрета рејв културе и неошаманизма – желим да испитам како су се политичка и паганска релгијска слика Британије '80-их и '90-их укрштале и водиле политички ангажованим облицима паганске праксе често смештене између „грасрутс“ начина живота и политике животне средине. Ово ће бити испитивано с посебним освртом на политизацију The Spiral Tribe-а, техношаманског колектива раних '90-их, на његово растуће учешће у отпору Закону из 1994. и на промоцију кампања попут Повратимо улице.

Кључне речи: конзервативизам, Закон о кривичном праву, морална паника, паганизам, *Spiral Tribe*, техношаманизам.

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