

Chapter 9

Voodoo Rage: Blacktronica from the North

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Afrofuturism ... is concerned with the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future conditional. (Eshun, 2003, p. 293)

Enter

In 1988, A Guy Called Gerald's idiosyncratic electronic dance track 'Voodoo Ray' (Rham!) entered the sonic spectrum of British house dance clubs and parties, as it was mixed into acid house and techno DJ sets. With a rich pool of musical influences, the northern English city of Manchester offers the particular circumstances that made 'Voodoo Ray' possible. Initially a response to the locally developing electronic dance scene, 'Voodoo Ray' spent 18 weeks in the UK charts, reaching number 12 on 8 April 1989 (Official Charts Company, 2013a). It re-appeared in a sanitised production format as an album bonus track, 'Voodoo Ray Americas' (CBS, 1990), and has been deconstructed and remixed by various DJ-producers to suit the DJ-styles and tastes of different dance floors in the US and Europe.¹ In the mid 1990s, as London's electronic dance producers were in the grip of the ragga-rave aesthetic of jungle, the track was reincarnated as 'Voodoo Rage', a drum'n'bass track on the acclaimed 1995 album *Black Secret Technology*, independently released on Simpson's own label Juice Box, which touched the album charts for one week at 64 on 1 April 1995 (Official Charts Company, 2013b) before falling into obscurity until its remastered revival in 2008. In addition to remixes, the (sub)cultural capital that 'Voodoo Ray' has amassed over the years has led to multiple re-releases. In 2012, a small bohemian pizzeria in Hackney, London paid homage by being named 'Voodoo Ray'. As Bill Brewster claims, 'Voodoo Ray defines an era' (Brewster, 2010). Not only does this track signify the acid house era within the British popular imagination, it also functions as an important crossroads that connects a range of black British life-worlds articulated through reggae, hip hop, jazz funk, electro (funk), post-punk electronica, house music and techno.

¹ For example, the first routine remixes came out in 1988 on Warlock Records, by New York DJs such as Frankie Knuckles. A new treatment was offered in 1991 by German trance producers Hardfloor, released by Totall Recall (see: statenhal, 2007). New York DJ Danny Tenaglia produced a 15-minute extended mix (see: YOUTARD, 2010). A collection of such mixes can be found on a limited 2005 edition double vinyl pack, released by Club Standards (see Discography).

Having produced at least 10 albums – packed with intricate danceable weaves of electronic texture, melody and rhythm – Gerald Simpson aka A Guy Called Gerald complained in 2012 that, ‘they only seem to know me for this track and not any of the other thousands of tracks I made’ (dbsmusicberlin, 2012a). During his musical career, now spanning 25 years, Simpson has spent time with techno producers in Detroit, jungle and drum’n’bass producers in London, moved to New York to break with the past, and currently resides in Berlin, absorbing its buoyant electronic music scene. As such, he is keen to stress that ‘A Guy Called Gerald’s music is way more global than just Manchester’ (cited in Montanaro, 2013). Nevertheless, this chapter will show that Manchester does have something to answer for in the development of Gerald’s visionary sound. Addressing the city’s rich underground black music culture during the 1980s in the context of a post-industrial economic climate may help to challenge a whitewashed mythology of British rave culture that broke the careers of white male superstar DJs and majority-white *Madchester* indie guitar bands, proto-Britpop by-products of what was ultimately an electronic dance music scene.

Selecting one musical creation as the focal point is not meant to provide a pedestal for just one artist or one track. Rather, by providing a genealogy of ‘Voodoo Ray’, it is possible to engage with the rich connections that make up British *blacktronica*. Addressing this dance track, soul and jazz funk DJ Colin Curtis states that, ‘It appealed to everybody. I mean, that crossed-over to most of the venues I was playing at the time, I could play that record ...’ (quoted in Wilson, 2008a). Cultural identity may be understood as process, a mobile node in a network of relations that is continuously en route, in flux, despite our attempts to fix it in our efforts to comprehend. Electronic dance music is exemplary of this fluidity – and not only in the shifting forms of DJ mixes and remixes. Composed of technical accidents and aesthetic choices, formats shift and change at an accelerating pace. As a living organism, the sonic field of electronic dance music expands exponentially and its contradictory messages multiply accordingly. By providing a focus on one unique production, this chapter aims to illustrate some of the complex networks that enabled the formation of British *blacktronica*. As a ‘proleptic intervention’ to sample Eshun’s words (2003, p. 293), ‘Voodoo Ray’ heralds a British *blacktronic* Afrofuturism.

The term *blacktronica* is borrowed from Charlie ‘Dark’ Williams, of trip hop outfit Attica Blues.² In 2001, a Blacktronica conference was held at the I.C.A. (Institute of Contemporary Arts) in London³ followed by regular music evenings of the same name with the purpose of foregrounding black electronic music

² The group name Attica Blues refers to the 1970s politically Afrocentric work of jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp in his album of that name (Impulse! 1972), which in turn points to the Attica Prison riots of 1971. These were historically important to black civil rights struggles.

³ The ICA is situated on The Mall, in central London, close to Buckingham Palace, making the Blacktronica gatherings very British indeed.

from hip hop to grime, from soul to electro, and from break beats to broken beats. The underlying argument was that although plenty of black electronic music has been produced since the 1970s, hegemonic histories of electronic and synthesiser music do not acknowledge this sufficiently. When addressing British pioneers in the field, one often hears about bands such as Depeche Mode, Human League and New Order, but less so about black British artists in this field. However, during the early 1980s, as the jazz funk scene seemed to become formulaic, black-majority British jazz funk bands started to integrate electronic sounds into their music in, for example, songs like 'Body Talk' by Imagination and 'Southern Freeez' by Freeez, both released in 1981. This style eventually merged with electronic jazz funk, which was inspired by pioneers like Herbie Hancock and Parliament. In 1983, a much whiter-looking Freeez entered the domain of electro with 'I.O.U.', produced by New York's influential electro producer, (white American) Arthur Baker. Later, British funk outfit Loose Ends would develop their own electronic soul sound, breaking through in 1985 with 'Hanging on a String'.

In Manchester in 1983, black funk band 52nd Street achieved a radical electronic sound by enrolling the sequencing skills of (white) New Order's Bernard Sumner (as BeMusic) on 'Cool As Ice / Twice As Nice', which was played regularly on Kiss FM and WBLS, the authoritative dance radio stations of the time in New York City. Here, my own story is interwoven with this narrative: as electronic instrumentalist for the band Quando Quango, between 1982 and 1986 I toured and played with our Factory Records label mates 52nd Street, A Certain Ratio (ACR) and New Order, as well as with Manchester's (white) electro DJ Greg Wilson and (black) break dance group Broken Glass. I was also closely involved with Manchester's The Hacienda club between 1982 and 1994, where 'Voodoo Ray' would eventually achieve its first major success in 1988.

Jazz Steps

'My main focus was the dancers. At the time there was this jazz fusion stuff but they'd kind of crossed over into dancing to acid house', Gerald Simpson recalls (quoted in Brewster, 2010). Greg Wilson, electro-funk DJ at dance club Legends between 1982 and 1983 before he briefly joined The Hacienda for a year, argues that the underground black dance music scene was crucial in enabling the formation of 'Voodoo Ray':

Gerald was a kid who was on the Jazz-Funk scene, then he went through the Electro period, then he was the DJ while MC Tunes was the rapper, and when you listen to Voodoo Ray as a track, you can hear those Jazz influences, you can hear the electro, it's not an orthodox House record. (Wilson, 2008a)

Manchester's black dance scene of the 1980s, with its jazz and electro dance crews, such as the smoothly stepping Jazz Defektors and the energetic almost acrobatic

Foot Patrol, offered a particularly fertile ground for Gerald Simpson. At Spin Inn, Manchester's US dance import record shop during the mid 1980s, Simpson would watch DJs like Hewan Clarke (Haçienda, Berlin)⁴ and Colin Curtis (Rufus, Rafter's, Berlin) make their record selections, when they both worked at a small club called Berlin where their jazz dance nights were central to the local black dance scene. Simpson was, as he put it, 'collecting as many dance moves as I was (music) equipment or records' (quoted in Brewster, 2010). He was a regular dancer at Berlin, a small 'futurist' (New Romantics) club that hosted a jazz funk night in the mid 80s, where DJs Colin Curtis and Hewan Clarke ruled with their jazz selections. According to Colin Curtis,

The importance of dancing, to most of the black crowd I knew, it was an integral part of life, yes it was about the music, the going out, yes, but the dancing, everybody had moves, everybody had styles ... You know, you've got Broken Glass in Manchester. We had The Rock City Crew – the breakdancers down there, IDJ from London, you've got all the guys, Salts, and all the guys from my city – the Jazz Defektors. (Quoted in Wilson, 2008a)

Dressed in suits, the Jazz Defektors interpreted the music in a contemporary 'ballet' style, reminiscent of dancers in musicals like Gene Kelly mixed with Latin mambo steps. With Hewan Clarke, not only a DJ but also a keen jazz dancer, they practised their steps on Colin Curtis's and Hewan's dancefloor at Berlin and started to perform as a boy band. As friends of the band A Certain Ratio and of jazz outfit Kalima, both on the Factory record label that also part-owned The Haçienda, the Jazz Defektors were regular visitors to this night club, where Hewan was the resident DJ during the club's first year in 1982. Tony Wilson, co-owner of the club, insisted Hewan play 'black music'. However, as Hewan explains, he prefers to think of his music selections as 'just music', rather than as black music (quoted in Wilson, 2008b), illustrating how the notion of 'black music' was emphasised, even fetishised by his white DJ peers, and employer. After an intense year, he took a step back in 1983 and instead took care of the main dance nights during weekends until he left for the club Berlin. The DJ to follow Hewan was Greg Wilson, from disco club Legends, who introduced electro-funk to The Haçienda.

Electro-Funk

Electro emerged from the United States in 1982, crudely speaking as a melting point between the punk and hip-hop subcultures of New York. Pioneered in Greater Manchester as a mix with electronic jazz funk, the style became locally known as 'electro-funk'. This was further inspired by American electro-funk releases like

⁴ See the online interior image of Spin Inn Records in 1987, with DJ Hewan Clarke, in *Sunday Rover*, 2009.

'On a Journey (I Sing the Funk Electric)' by Elektrik Funk and 'Electroponic Phunk' by Shock, both from 1982. The formation of the electro genre was initiated in New York from a meeting point between anglophile punks and uptown hip-hop crews at massive dance clubs such as The Roxy (previously a roller skating rink) and The Funhouse (with its central dance floor raised like a boxing ring). Electro must be distinguished here from the embrace of electronic pop nostalgia during the late 1990s. Rather, the electro genre of the 1980s was characterised by rap and electronic break beats created with relatively affordable electronic instruments such as the Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer, known as the 808, and the Roland TB-303 Bassline, also spoken of as the 303, which were initially used by DJs to enhance dance music during a DJ mix.⁵

Although heterosexist and male-dominated, like most underground music scenes, electro music, and the hip-hop culture it was associated with, offered a democratic ethos that cut through class and ethnic divisions, inspiring a mixed-race subculture within the UK. Simpson recalls how everyone could be part of it in some way, regardless of formal educational background, playing different roles: as dancer, breaker, rapper, DJ or graffiti artist – even acrobatic skate boarders and BMX bikers were associated with this scene, adding that,

I was going out dancing, and they started playing this electro-ey stuff – 'Planet Rock', Nucleus [*sic*], that kind of vibe. That blew us away back then – dancing-wise it was perfect. Before that we were listening to jazz, funk and soul, where the music was all played live. But this stuff – you know exactly where the beat's gonna come, so dancing-wise you can experiment a bit more, leave a few beats out, come back in somewhere else, and it's spot on. We had loads of dance crews going around in Manchester. (Quoted in Finlayson, 2011)

Simpson refers here to the seminal 1982 electro recording 'Planet Rock' by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force, produced by Arthur Baker with John Robie who operated under the name Planet Patrol. He also refers to the galactic electro-funk of Newcleus, generally known for their 1986 'Wiki-Wiki Song' with its speeded up 'cute' alien vocal samples. And then there were the Manchester dance crews that responded to the electro music style.

As part of his DJ sets, Greg Wilson also brought in local break dance crew Broken Glass, with Fiddz and Paul 'Kermit' Leveridge⁶ (later with Ruthless Rap Assassins and Black Grape). Broken Glass recorded just one electro track, 'Style of

⁵ On recommendation of New Order's Bernard Sumner, an avid reader of music technology magazines, I purchased my 808 and a 303 in 1982. This enabled me to go to New York where, in 1983, I witnessed the 808 being used with the 303, at the spectacular and seminal electro and break dance club, The Roxy.

⁶ Paul 'Kermit' Leveridge, member of Broken Glass, would later set up Ruthless Rap Assassins, followed in the 1990s by the band Black Grape, with (white) ex-Happy Mondays singer Shaun Ryder.

the Street' in 1984 with the support of Wilson, jazz pianist Andy Connell (A Certain Ratio, Swing Out Sister) and drum programmer Martin Jackson (Magazine, Swing Out Sister). With its raw, unpolished, production values, this track encouraged budding blacktronic musicians like Simpson who in 2011 declared that,

it was the biggest thing since sliced bread! The next thing I heard after Broken Glass, house-wise, in Manchester was this group – they used to be called Quando Quango and ... did a track called 'Cariño'. (Quoted in Finlayson, 2011)

Simpson explains elsewhere that the bassline and use of toms in 'Voodoo Ray' were created with black Mancunian dance crew Foot Patrol in mind, composing music that goes straight 'from the speaker to the sneaker' (RansomeNote TV, 2013). They can be seen on the video for T-Coy's 1987 recording 'Cariño'. T-Coy (Take Care of yourself) was formed from the ashes of Quando Quango. The trio consisted of Mike Pickering, Richie Close and Simón Topping. The latter had moved to New York to study Cuban percussion after his exposure to the jazz dance scene in Manchester. In 1983 he joined forces with Quando Quango when in NYC to remix their second electronic dance single 'Love Tempo' with DJ Mark Kamins.

House Music

Foot Patrol formed in 1986, around the same time that house music, African-American electronic dance music with a four-to-the-floor dance beat, started to filter through from Chicago. This was mainly because house music label DJ International had showcased its artists during the then influential industry-oriented New Music Seminar (NMS) at New York's Better Days club. In the same year, Foot Patrol were filmed in Manchester at the Mastermind electro roadshow at the 8411 community education centre, Moss Side.⁷ They performed a routine to a mix of electro-funk and house music. This was embellished by a riot of carnivalesque whistle blowing by the black majority crowd, a noise that four years later became the typical sound at UK raves. On the footage, the four dancers wear white t-shirts and their signature jazz dancer's suit trousers with braces and patent dance shoes with spats (Ch0yc3, 2011). They present a relaxed demeanour while engaging in energetic jazz step footwork and what seems like some lindy hop dance acrobatics in a tight square dance formation, while teenage revellers make space for them on the dance floor.

In Chicago in 1992 I saw African-American dancers showing off some intricate steps and energetic contortions to the locally produced house music, yet the fast jazz steps of Foot Patrol were more complex and contrast significantly to the

Moss Side is a neighbourhood south of Manchester's city centre that five years earlier, in 1981, had been gripped by two days of inner-city riots, following similar riots in Brixton, London, and Toxteth, Liverpool and other UK cities.

way dancing to house music is usually depicted in the UK. Foot Patrol's member Godfrey tells Snowboy that, 'Everyone knew us in the Jazz Scene, but there was money to be made in the dance (House music) scene. We'd "shuffle foot" and those people had never seen anything like it! That's the way we made money. We got known at The Hacienda' (cited in Cotgrove, 2009, p. 105). The dance crew was given free passes at Manchester's flagship club The Hacienda to spice up the dancefloor during the rise of house music and appeared with music groups like Swing Out Sister, as well as on television programmes such as talent show *Opportunity Knocks* or the weekly dance music show *Hitman and Her*, hosted by successful pop producer Pete Waterman with Michaela Strachan. By contrast though, Gerald Simpson saw house music as an opportunity that should not be compromised by commercial interests: 'House was much more accessible than electro. I knew that I could make music like that. It was really stripped down and I'd had enough of the charts, so I got into House because it was sort of like an anti-pop thing' (E.G., 1994).

Greg Wilson's electro night at The Hacienda was followed in 1984 on Fridays by the Nude Night, running for six years with DJ Mike Pickering and guests, including electro and, eventually, house music enthusiast, 'Little' Martin Prendergast (calling themselves MP2) and, from 1988, house music DJ Graeme Park. Playing the latest house music recordings mixed with electro, Pickering benefited from direct industry contacts in the United States, established during his visits to New York with Quando Quango. This mix of fresh American dance imports appealed especially to Manchester's black dancers. Group dance formations developed that increased in size each week, even taking over the stage next to the dance floor. Greg Wilson states that, 'it was Gerald and the people like him that built that kind of scene in The Hacienda by going across on the Friday, and obviously they had been going to clubs like The Playpen, Legends, The Gallery, Berlin, these kind of clubs beforehand ...' (2008a).

Beyond the obscurity of the club nights, it was soul DJ Stu Allan who had significant influence on the introduction of Chicago house music to Greater Manchester with a weekly radio show in 1986 on Piccadilly Radio, which he continued in 1987 at his *House Hour* show on local Radio Key103 (Allan, n.d.). Unlike in London, where pirate dance radio was developing, these stations were legal and appealed to regular popular radio listeners. 'I started sending my stuff into the radio' explains Gerald Simpson. 'Voodoo Ray' was one of the tracks he developed initially as a radio demo (quoted in Brewster, 2010). According to Tim Lawrence, 'lost for a name when he played the material on Piccadilly, Allan introduced the producer as "a guy called Gerald"', and quotes Simpson as saying that,

I had bought an 808 drum machine and a 303 bass line machine and was making electro and hip hop in the style of Ice-T "Dog in the Wax" ... I'd have reverb on the snare and this really heavy sound on the 303 bass. Then I heard these guys from Chicago using the same instrument, but they were tweaking it. I did

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a load of this stuff and gave it to Stu Allan and he was, 'What the fuck! How did someone from around the corner do this?' (quoted in Lawrence, 2006: 10)

Stu Allan's radio shows helped to open up access to this underground electronic dance sound, training the ears of his young audience years before the house music dance floors were invaded by ecstasy (MDMA) enhanced ravers.

Acid House

Already by the end of 1986 a demographic shift started to take place in The Hacienda, partly because of a new generation of 'punters' and partly because the club's new manager, Paul Mason, decided to set up a dress code that locked out anyone wearing trainers. This did not go down well with the electro fans. In a short time, the Friday nights started to look whiter and more homosocially male. Friday night was the traditional 'lads night out' in town, to get work out of your system and to prepare for the football match, a male working-class bonding ritual, on Saturday. It was this new clientele that would eventually dominate the emergence of Madchester, a drug-fuelled explosion of 24-hour partying, or raving, regardless of employment status. A new type of creative entrepreneur appeared, embracing the grey economy of hedonism-in-hard-times, organising parties, setting up record labels, making music or DJing, designing clothes, even selling dance drugs. In the words of Nathan McGough, second manager of Manchester band Happy Mondays, '... the whole kind of *raison d'être* of Thatcherism and the political and economic culture was to do it yourself, get off your arse, make some money, get rich quick' (Russell, 1993, p. 130).

Where electro paid electronic homage to funk, house music re-animated disco in an electronic style (Rietveld, 1998), sampling rare and hard to find disco recordings and placing them over hard-hitting beats, programmed with the 909 and its predecessors, the 707 and 808 drum machines. However, an abrupt break with the past occurred with the arrival, in 1987, of 'Acid Tracks' by Phuture. This track uses the machine grain of the 303 to its full potential. This is partly because the actual tonal melody, generated by the programming, is superseded by extreme manipulation of its cut off frequency, resonance and decay functions. A similar manipulation of the 303 sound can also be heard in 'Voodoo Ray', yet I argue that that sound is not acid house in itself. Already in 1984 a gurgling 303 sequence was laid down over an 808 rhythm program on the electro track 'Jam on It' by Newcleus.

For the jazz dancers in Manchester, the well-documented acid house 'explosion' during 1988 (resulting in a media-led moral panic as rave culture started to grip the country's imagination) may have seemed like the beginning of the end of jazz stepping to electronic funk. From 1988 onwards the acid house and, later, rave dance floors became too packed, too dirty even, to step out. Some of the new dancers that gathered at The Hacienda club, which would pack in

over 1,200 punters on its Friday and Saturday nights between 1988 and 1991, seemed too drugged to do so anyway. Instead, ravers firmly planted their solid basketball shoes on the floor, bent slightly forward to keep their balance and used their arms and hands to articulate the music, surging upwards from their anchored base. Feeling the dance floor was invaded by ‘hooligans’, this was a put-off for the sophisticated steps of jazz dancers who veered away from the whitening rave scene of the late 1980s toward the acid jazz scene with its Latin rhythms and stepping breaks. Also, Gerald Simpson felt uneasy during that period; reflecting back in 2012, he stated that ‘Voodoo Ray’ seemed like a ‘happy rave thing, but I wasn’t with it’ (dbsmusicberlin, 2012b). In this, not only the musical references, but also the mood of ‘Voodoo Ray’ oscillates, resonating with the different places and people where it was played.

Madchester

About A Guy Called Gerald, drum’n’bass producer LTJ Bukem observes that, ‘He’s got his own style from the word “go”’ (soniceunderthesun, 2007). As a musician in Manchester, Gerald Simpson was able to integrate particular musical influences in his own way. Unlike a mega-city such as London, where specific taste groups control the development of distinct music genres, with around half a million inhabitants Manchester is small enough for different cultural groups and classes to mix and cross-fertilise and for artists to be open to outside music influences that enable them to carve out a distinct trajectory. Gerald Simpson’s local musical friends – some black, some white – shared dance floor experiences, shared their explorations in forging a new musical aesthetic. These people lived either in or close by the working-class communities of Moss Side and Hulme, and hung out at Gezze’s (Gerald’s) attic bedroom studio (girlshmir, 2006). For example, although Chapter and the Verse share with Ruthless Rap Assassins the use of sampled references to funk classics and the urge to raise social awareness, each fostered their own creative directions.

Nevertheless, they seem obscured from the Britpop media hype that boosted the myth of Madchester. This hype developed through the propagation of a cluster of indie guitar boy bands. White Salford-based indie guitar band Happy Mondays pinned the concept of Madchester with their 1989 EP *Madchester Rave On*, which referred to a DJ-driven electronic dance music culture that regarded The Hacienda club, as well as The Kitchen (an after-hours party squat of three knocked-through flats in Hulme just south of The Hacienda), as its epicentre.

By way of illustration, take the party ‘Wet’ of 1989. This was organised by The Hacienda’s Paul Cons in Manchester’s turn-of-the-century Victoria Baths (massonix, 2012), with its pools, sauna, an old metal proto-Jacuzzi (appearing like a cooking pot for cannibals) and tiled Turkish baths (reminiscent of the steamy, smoky, dance floor of The Hacienda of that time) at the height of Manchester’s party fever. The club’s staple house music DJs, Mike Pickering, Graeme Park

and Jon DaSilva, provided most of the music that night (see also Savage, 1992). Tony Wilson, co-owner of Factory Records and The Hacienda club, presented the event as part of a television show for Granada TV (ITV), *The Other Side of Midnight*. On video footage of the programme, Graham Massey, the avant-garde musical brain of 808 State, as well as Colin Thorpe of Chapter and the Verse, can be seen with Gerald Simpson, as A Guy Called Gerald, placed at the side of a pool filled with party people playing with inflatables. Using keyboards, samplers and drum machines, they perform 'Voodoo Ray', underlining, however uneasily and uniquely, that this track exemplified the Madchester era.

The Hacienda

Despite the increasing crush on the dance floor of The Hacienda during the dance craze of 1988 – 1991, this is the place where 'Voodoo Ray' found its biggest fans. The track seemed a perfect fit in the club's otherwise hollow warehouse acoustics of brick walls, scattering sound with The Hacienda's zig-zag glass ceilings, especially during the club's early years when it was less packed and the sound system less powerful. Bez, the pale emaciated Salfordian dancer of Happy Mondays, describes the club as follows:

Bodily movements feel at first as if they are being dwarfed by the sheer vastness of the vault that is the main dance floor ... The sound echoes, bouncing in an out of dark alcoves an up from the concrete from every angle. (Berry and Faulkner, 1998, p. 118)

When 'Voodoo Ray' arrived in 1988, the club had moved up a gear in tempo, with acid house and techno selections by Mike Pickering and Graeme Park dominating its intense Friday 'lads night out'. During that era, Happy Mondays with their friends clustered under the dark mezzanine and by the dance floor, controlling the dance moves of their social circle. In particular, hand and arm movements became central, in contrast to the footwork of jazz dancers, as drug-fuelled dancers would plant their feet as firmly on the ground as possible in order to let their upper bodies sway. 'Voodoo Ray's unHINGED tonality and metallic resonating bass line nevertheless suited a defiant mood of hedonism-in-hard-times during the conservative Thatcher regime which had brought high unemployment as well as creative entrepreneurialism to the region. Original and in-your-face, this track seemed utterly Mancunian in its uncompromising form – not quite techno, not quite acid house, standing out from the rest, but using electronic instruments associated with those genres and in the right tempo to suit a DJ set. It became the soundtrack for The Hacienda and, indeed, confirms Bill Brewster's assertion that in its idiosyncratic crossover way, this recording defined an era.

It is also possible to imagine the acoustic space of the now demolished concrete crescents of central Manchester's Hulme council estate, only walking

distance from The Hacienda. It was in one of the maisonettes of this estate that Simpson set up home, as many creative people did during the 1980s. Built in a brutalist streets-in-the-sky style,⁸ the architecture was a distant echo of the Situationist urban principle that, incidentally, had also given The Hacienda club its name. In an essay titled 'Formula for a New City: Milord I am from another country', French architect Gilles Ivain (Ivan Vladimirovitch Chtcheglov) declared in the *Situationist International* of 1958 that '*The hacienda must be built*' (1998, p. 15) and that, 'future architecture will be a means of modifying contemporary conceptions of time and space. It will also be a means of *knowledge* and a means of *action*' (1998, p. 16). Hatherley argues that such an architectural style provided new social relationships that required and produced new musical forms (2010).

The Hulme crescents were anarchic and could be alienating, even criminal, because the open corridors and sky-bridges between the buildings were not policed due to confusion in the city's council management about what was private property and what was a public street. Yet, the estate also housed multicultural working-class and young creative communities. Hulme's crescents not only stimulated new attitudes and connections but also provided a particular acoustic space, due to its curved cliff-wall that pushed a howling wind through its open corridors and gave a hollow echoic decay to outdoor sounds. It is the latter that seems to haunt 'Voodoo Ray'. The estate's grey utopian sky-streets seem to take flight in the acoustic space of the recording's sound production – a haunted spirit attempting to escape, now sounding doubly ghostly, as Hulme's crescents no longer exist.

Techno Culture

The almost cinematic space of 'Voodoo Ray' is also reminiscent of the 1984 recording 'Techno City' by Cybotron, a proto-techno outfit from Detroit, which Gerald Simpson cites as one of his early influences (Brewster, 2010). However, Cybotron's 'Clear' stood out particularly for him, a track best described as electro without rap. In addition to jazz funk, electro, house music, and some of the local electronic dance productions, Gerald Simpson felt particularly inspired by Detroit techno, especially Derrick May's work (girlshmir, 2006). Suffering a post-industrial crisis in an even more acute and dramatic sense than Manchester, Detroit provides the cultural and economic context for electronic dance productions that embrace post-soul (see Albiez, 2005; Sicko, 1999; Williams, 2001) an electronic funk sound that according to Simpson is, 'breaking with the past, moving forward, making music quicker – press save' (dbsmusicberlin, 2012a). Techno enables an exploration of the experience of a cyber-future in which information and communication technologies play a central role. Jon Savage observes that,

⁸ For an illustration of Manchester's old Hulme crescents, see Capdevila (2013). For an additional rich source of images of people living in the old Hulme crescents: <https://www.flickr.com/search?sort=relevance&text=hulme%20crescents>.

‘the electronic sounds all too accurately reproduce the snap of synapses forced to process a relentless, swelling flood of electronic information’ (1996, p. 312).

In its futurist approach, Detroit’s techno turns away from the sound of Detroit’s soul record label Tamla Motown. Instead, it connects to New York electro, Detroit’s own electronic funk, as exemplified by Parliament, and Chicago’s (acid) house music. Indirectly though, Motown is linked to the marketing of Detroit techno. In 1988, Neil Rushton compiled, with Derrick May, a genre-defining compilation that introduced techno as a genre to the UK, *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*. He explains that,

At the end of the 80s I got into house music, both the music itself and the anti-establishment side of it (Northern Soul part 2) and ended up managing various producers and artists including Derrick May, Juan Atkins, Kevin Saunderson and Inner City. From that myself and partner set up (and still own) the Network label which had a lot of success. (Culture of Soul, 2010)

A decade earlier, during the late 1970s, Rushton ran a successful northern soul night at The Ritz in Manchester, incidentally on the same road in central Manchester, Whitworth Street, as the mythologised 1960s northern soul club Twisted Wheel, as well as night club The Hacienda that operated during the 1980s and 90s. To the northern soul scene, the fast dance sound of Motown’s soul music was crucial, even though the more well-known releases were eschewed in preference for rare imports. As the soul scene dwindled, Rushton sought out, and found, a fresh and still obscure set of importable productions in Detroit.

Although techno was first marketed as the house sound from Detroit, to distinguish it from Chicago house music, the name ‘techno’ was eventually adopted, echoing the title of one of the compilation’s tracks, Juan Atkins’s ‘Techno Music’, a title that was inspired by Alvin Toffler’s futurist manifesto *The Third Wave*. Popularising the notion of an information society, Toffler states that ‘The techno-rebels contend that technology need not be big, costly, or complex in order to be “sophisticated”’ (1980, p. 152). This is a fitting description of the DIY electronic music producers who emerged during the late 1980s, to dominate the dance sounds of the 1990s.

Voodoo

The enigmatic concept of a *voodoo ray* seems to simultaneously invoke the mental state of raving dancers on the 1988 acid house dance floor; a sense of black alienation in the UK and Caribbean voodoo (‘black secret technology’). The abstract metallic marimba bass line and the doodling 303 sequences in ‘Voodoo Ray’ are anchored by words provided by the sampled voices of two white British comedians, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in their alter-egos of Derek and Clive. A bootlegged recording of a biting satire of African-American inverted language

use, 'Bo Duddley' was compiled, with other hard hitting sketches, as *Derek and Clive (Live)* and released in 1976 by Island Record's owner Chris Blackwell (it was re-released in 1981 and in 1989). Before diversifying its catalogue, Island initially imported Jamaican popular music to Jamaican immigrants in the UK during the 1960s, helping to place ska and then reggae on the map.

The original sketch had appeared on television during the 1960s but the 1973 live audio version cuts deeper, due to its ludic exposure of a colonialist racist imagination. Dudley Moore pretends to be a 'black' British musician, Bo Duddley (a play on the name of R&B and funk guitarist Bo Diddley) with no understanding of African-American culture, while Peter Cook plays a white upper-middle-class ignorant toff who together try to get to grips with language used in what seems to be James Brown's 1965 funk performance of 'Papa's Got a Brand New Bag'. The 10-minute sketch slips from what seems a music discussion to an othering of 'these boogie households' in New York's Harlem. It is a nonsensical story in which a woman is assumed to be 'in her sort of voodoo rage' (7 min 34) about her brand new bag.

Peter Cook speaks the phrase 'voodoo rage' with the distinctive upper-class accent heard in British theatre, cinema, and television and among 'ex-pats' in the 1950s and 60s, making it a powerfully affective sample to use and subvert. This is particularly audible in the digitally time-stretched 1995 version of 'Voodoo Rage' on the drum'n'bass album *Black Secret Technology*, in which every aspect of this sample's vocal pronunciation is exposed. In the original 'Voodoo Ray', due to the use of 1980s sample technology, the sample is shortened, cutting off the '-ge' consonant, to become 'Voodoo Ray'. This is repeatedly used in the track: 'voodoo voodoo voodoo raay ...', interspersed by the repetitive sample of 'Later! ... Later!' taken from Dudley Moore's character Bo Duddley (7 min 10 sec). The 'Bo' character attempts to explain an African-American inverted play with language (in which 'bad' is 'good') in an increasingly confused and confusing manner. The exclamation 'Later!' is introduced as an invented word to indicate that 'whiteys' do not possess the correct subcultural capital. The joke, then, is that both characters are outside of the secret, yet as actors they are aware of this, and the audience is aware that they are aware, and are therefore 'in' on the joke. This creates a double inversion, as a result of which the wrong use of 'Later!' is quite cool after all.

Using these samples creates a kaleidoscopic experience of twisted, ironic identity masquerades. As a rhythmical device, 'Later!' seems quite blank, without meaning, yet combined with the space imagery of a 'ray' (a voodoo laser light ray?) it simultaneously morphs into a form of Afrofuturist coding, 'Later!'—voodoo ray, until a better day. In this way, the sketch lives on in a deterritorialized form, a ghostly sample in a dance track in which black identity is exposed as a type of heterotopia, 'secretly undermin(ing) language', making it 'impossible to name this *and* that' (Foucault, 2002, p. xix), oscillating, iridescent. A similarly ironic, deconstructive moment occurs on Gerald's 1992 jungle track 'King of the Jungle', utilising a sample of Tarzan's Hollywood jungle call. Voodoo, as a fantasy of black otherness, is reclaimed here to accompany the heady days of acid

house—a radiating ray that compels the listener to dance. In this way, ‘Voodoo Ray’ oscillates between ironic humour, dark (‘gothic’) parody and pastiche, which is given a digital twirl in the 1995 drum’n’bass track ‘Voodoo Rage’, exposing the mystery of the acid ray.

Added to this assemblage is the unacknowledged female voice of Gerald’s friend Nicola Collier. Rather than using words, she performs a kind of *écriture féminine* in which language gives way to abstract vocal sounds. Gerald Simpson explains that Aniff Cousins and Colin Thorpe, of Chapter and the Verse, introduced him to the digital audio sampler during that session, which he tried out with Nicola’s vocals:

... she sang all the way through, without sampling ... we spun one sequence of her vocals in and I remember putting the reverse thing on – I think I did that on everything actually because it was like the new tool. ... I was thinking, ‘Wow, shit! That sounds wild!’ So we kept her vocals as it was, just raw ... (Quoted in Brewster, 2010)

In short, the female vocal sample came about spontaneously, almost accidentally. This had a peculiar effect on the track: ‘the actual tone of her singing forward and backward at the same time created this weird, kind of hypnotic feeling’ (Simpson, quoted in Brewster, 2010). By chopping the improvised vocal line into segments, one phrase stands out, that is repeated throughout the track: ooooohh-woohoo woohoo-wooo hoo-oo ’oo. Hovering in a cavernous virtual acoustic space, the deconstructed voice gains an uncanny haunting quality as it challenges the tonality of the over-resonating bass line. It slips past the groove and frames the samples ‘Voodoo Ray’ and ‘Later!’ According to Bradby (1993), in electronic dance music particularly female vocals are cut up by male producers. Deformed and disassembled, they become a type of cyborg, a digitalised and sexualised ‘other’ who can be controlled. On ‘Voodoo Ray’, though, this othered voice does not suggest a contrived sexy seduction, as is often the case in house music productions. Rather, it seems to function doubly as the voice of an unselfconscious girl and that of a techno-magical, hyperreal, voodoo priestess.

Outro

This discussion traces only some of the many genealogical connections that made ‘Voodoo Ray’ possible and meaningful, including jazz dancing, electro breaking, a house music approach, an embrace of Detroit techno, and the contexts of Situationist urbanism, acid house parties and the Madchester myth. Politically, ‘Voodoo Ray’ oscillates between a ghostly satire and a post-colonial rave concept of futurist voodoo. In exploring a cross-over recording like ‘Voodoo Ray’ it appears that electronic dance music is increasingly fused, broken, twisted and remixed to such an extent that, as Gilroy observed in 1993: ‘The calls and responses no

longer converge in the tidy pattern of secret, ethnically encoded dialogue' (1993a, p. 110). Uprooted in a global culture of accelerating information overload, identity formation can feel fragmented while social marginalisation persists. To combat and make sense of this experience, Gilroy argues, music is a useful medium to 'struggle against representation ... It is endowed with the power to change both time and space, setting them in new relationships and summoning up feelings that political discourse merely describes' (1993b, p. 9). As a connotative form of communication, music becomes a phatic vehicle for an affective politics of subjectivity, shaped by both global and specific local conditions. With its unusual bassline and deconstructed voices, 'Voodoo Ray' inverts and breaks with (nostalgic) representation while the groove keeps dancers moving forward, to the future. Embarking on its own ironic and stubborn route in response to cross-Atlantic influences, it is certainly made in Manchester, while its many remixes, from Frankie Knuckles and Danny Tenaglia in New York to Hardfloor in Düsseldorf (Germany) take it beyond its location of formation. 'A Guy Called Gerald's music is way more global than just Manchester. If you can find any music that sounds like mine, let me know' (Simpson, quoted in Montanaro, 2013).

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