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New edge : technology and spirituality in the San Francisco Bay Area

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Chapter Four: The Sociality of New Edge Temporary Autonomous Zones

> Galen : There was something very... *homemade* to *Active Worlds* (...) It wasn't talked down. And it is very different from *Second Life*... Maybe because it got corporate, that is what I picked up, the sense that you get talked down… The difference between one Virtual World and another is like going to Reno after Burning Man, Reno is totally artificial and contrived. Like *Second Life*, theoretically it is free but actually it is so. (...) In Active Worlds there is this feeling that people are self-representing themselves, and that made me feel more enlarged, I could inject myself into it imaginatively (...) it made me feel enlarged and genuinely expressed. [219]

Galen Brandt makes two sets of comparisons and distinctions here. Virtual Worlds are compared to cities, and a particular kind of Virtual Worlds is compared to a particular kind of city. Both types of 'immersive environments' are compared and contrasted for the way in which they enable or inhibit the possibility of feeling 'enlarged' and 'genuinely expressed.' The Virtual Worlds environment Active Worlds is contrasted to the Virtual World Second Life as the city Reno is contrasted to Burning Man.

Active Worlds is one of the first interactive, multi-user, three-dimensional online Virtual Worlds. It was conceived in 1994 and has gone through a tumultuous corporate history since then. In 1997 Active Worlds was promoted by one of its very active contributors and enthusiasts, the NASA simulation programmer Bruce Damer, Brandt's partner, in his book *Avatars*. In one of the Active Worlds universes Damer and Brandt once connected in a way that Galen experienced as truly spiritual, an experience she says she is not likely to have in Second Life.

The distinction between these two worlds, to Brandt, is similar to the distinction she feels to exist between the two cities in the state Nevada: the temporary city of Burning Man in Black Rock Desert and the gambling city Reno. Reno is the last large city that Burning Man attendees pass through, when driving out from California, before they reach the festival. Reno is the city where 'burners' get extra gas, buy their last supplies such as water, goggles to protect against the sand storms, vitamin pills, and more water. At first sight it seems strange that Brandt compares Reno to the desert-city of Burning Man. Yet, when I stayed in Reno prior to Burning Man 2008 - and after having been to Burning Man in 2005 - I recall having made this comparison myself: I recall comparing the flickering neon

[219] Interview Dorien Zandbergen with Galen Brandt, Santa Cruz, California, September 2008.

lights in Reno to the many blinking lights that adorn BM at night; and thinking that in terms of professed activities, Reno and BM seem to have similar things on offer: a liberal ethos towards sex and drugs and an invitation for adults to indulge in 'play.'

The contrast drawn by Galen between the two cities and the two Virtual Worlds is between 'immersive spaces' that invite gnostic awareness and others that do not. Brandt's mode of distinction-making reminds us of an important theoretical point when discussing cybergnosis: it reminds of the seeming obvious, but nevertheless regularly ignored, understanding that neither places, nor particular media, are in and of themselves 'sacred'. In line with Talal Asad's understanding that every study of the religious needs to be accompanied by a study of the secular, i.e. that 'the religious' is not a universal category, but a *relational* and contextual one (1999: 22), so are we here reminded that this is also true of gnostic environments: the transformational potential of gnostic environments is derived in relation to and in contrast with social spheres that are considered non-transformational, or even as inhibitive of transformation.

If we recall that New Edge environments like Virtual Worlds and Burning Man are, at an emic level, considered in ritualistic terms, Catherine Bell's insight on ritual also applies here. In her *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992), a discussion of ritual studies in anthropology, the anthropologist Bell argues against those works that define 'ritual' in universalistic terms. Instead, Bell calls for a relational understanding of ritual:

> Most attempts to define ritual proceed by formulating the universal qualities of an autonomous phenomenon. They maintain, however provisionally, that there is something we can generally call ritual and whenever or wherever it occurs it has certain distinctive features. Such definitions inevitably come to function as a set of criteria for judging whether some specific activities can be deemed ritual (...) The categories of activity so defined tend to override and undermine the significance of indigenous distinctions among ways of acting (Bell 1992: 69).

Ritual practice, Bell argues, is a practice of distinction making (1992: 70), and anthropological enquiries of ritual practices need to be concerned with the "way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions" (1992: 74).

Bell's insights need to be brought into relation with the New Edge understanding of ritual: in chapter two we learned that New Edgers celebrate ritualistic, liminal conditions as permanently desirable. Liminality, in this sense, is equated with 'expansive freedom', with being creative, with experimentation, with exploration of different mindstates and with different modes of being: liminality is a condition that, from the New Edge perspective, facilitates true, gnostic transformation. A relational understanding of ritual alerts us to the fact that such a celebration of liminality occurs in juxtaposition with a sphere in which this 'freedom' is felt to be non-existent. What is it in the social make-up of New Edge

immersive spaces, I ask in this chapter, that facilitates the understanding that genuine transformation is possible here? And to what types of social formation are these New Edge spaces contrasted?

In the way that Galen makes her distinctions, an easy answer to such questions is suggested. Galen characterizes Burning Man and Active Worlds as 'non-corporate' and contrasts them to the 'corporate' environments of Reno and Second Life. Such a distinction, we will see, correlates with the understanding among New Edgers more generally that spaces like raves and Burning Man are 'Temporary Autonomous Zones' (TAZ); they allegedly stand in an 'autonomous' relationship to mainstream society. In this chapter I question this particular dichotomy as not fully capable of explaining the ethnographic quality of a TAZ. I argue that central to TAZ-life is the ethnographic experience of being part of a trusted social environment that offers a radical break from other, 'mainstream' forms of sociality that are not trusted.

4.1. Relational Understandings of Ritual

Pronoia and Paranoia

By discussing the significance of the TAZ for New Edgers in relation to the notion of trust, I seek to expand on an insight I have sought to offer in chapter one of this dissertation. In chapter one I discussed the embeddings of New Edge in a larger cultural environment. There I argued that the New Edge discourse defines its larger environment in holistic terms. Whether imagined in relation to technology or whether perceived in terms of 'magic' or 'synchronicity', the New Edge worldview postulates that everything that exists is entangled, caught up in one system. What has been left implicit in chapter one, and what I seek to make explicit in this chapter, is the fact that the New Edge discourse promises that a *difference* can be made between positive and negative interconnectedness. An emic term that I introduced that refers to a sense of positive interconnectedness is 'pronoia.' The full ethnographic value of this idea of ‘pronoia’ only comes to the fore when we understand this notion in relational sense: New Edgers experience ‘pronoia’ as a key characteristic of a TAZ, I postulate, because they also experience *paranoia* in non-TAZ environments. Scholars who study ‘paranoia’ as a social phenomenon often associate it with post-war North-American culture (Gray 2007; Aupers 2002; Melley 2000; Hofstadter 1979). Timothy Melley (2000) describes the paranoid attitude as 'agency panic', which is:

> (...) intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control - the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by (...) powerful external agents (2000: 12).

While allegedly characteristic of the political culture of North-America at large, we may also say that a paranoid mind-state resonates well with modern gnosis:

according to modern gnosticism, external forces - 'Archons' - deliberately conceal the true nature of reality for human subjects. When we look at some of the literary manifestations of New Edge, this resonance becomes manifest in the fact that conspiracy theories are among the many types of expression of the New Edge gnostic discourse. In ironic plays of concealment and revelation, and sometimes deadly serious in tone, Mindstates presentations, articles in Mondo 2000, cyberpunk fiction stories, parody cults like the Church of Subgenius and full-fledged conspiracy works still popular like Robert Anton Wilson's *The Illuminatus Trilogy* (1975) point to the military industrial regime, secret societies, the 'reducing valves' of the brain, forms of artificial intelligence, extraterrestrial life and hidden symbolism as manifestations of forces that control and structure humanity's notions of reality. Such New Edge expressions of paranoia suggest the existence of a larger sphere – a hidden reality – that implicates people in a negative sense. These New Edge expressions of paranoia are as such the mirror images of the New Edge celebration of a larger sphere in which humans are positively implicated: paranoia, as the idea of negative interconnectedness, and pronoia, as the idea of positive interconnectedness, are two sides of the same holistic coin.

Galen's characterization of Active Worlds - those immersive environments that facilitate true transformation for her - as 'homemade' offers a first understanding of what such a difference between 'positive' and 'negative' interconnectedness may entail in terms of social formation. In Second Life Galen feels that she is being 'talked down', i.e. that those who control the immersive environments are telling her how she should behave and what she should look like. By contrast, in Active Worlds Galen feels 'genuinely expressed.' One of the sets of distinctions used by Galen to explain this contrast is 'homemade' versus 'corporate.' Albeit in objective sense Active Worlds and Second Life are *both* corporate enterprises, this distinction has much subjective value: it refers to a significant difference experienced by Galen in terms of the social formation attached to each world. The idea of Active Worlds as 'homemade' resonates with Galen's sense of here being present in a social setting that is small-scale, intimate and familiar. This sense was fed by the fact that many of the co-creators of this world were friends and affiliates of Galen: for instance, as noted earlier, her own partner Bruce Damer was one of the early enthusiasts and active contributors to Active Worlds. By contrast, Galen's understanding of Second Life as 'corporate' corresponds with her subjective understanding of Second Life as 'distant', which is rooted in the fact that Galen does not maintain intimate relationships with the creators and early enthusiasts of Second Life.

In line with this example, the simple understanding advanced in this chapter is that the special significance of moments and spaces that give New Edgers a sense of being positively transformed is facilitated by a social configuration that is trusted. I thereby rely on the Simmelian notion of trust as a

"state of favourable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions" (Möllering 2001: 404). In a trusted setting, a subject can feel part of a larger whole without feeling paranoid about the loss of agency. On the contrary, this experience of being part of a larger whole is often imbued with cosmic significance and associated with experiences of positive transformation and spiritual revelation. This experience of pronoia, I argue in addition, is inherently relational: it is facilitated by an experience of contrast with a 'default' social formation - the larger society - that is not trusted. The ethnographic task of this chapter is to make insightful how New Edgers constitute trusted social formations as part of a TAZ, and to understand against what kinds of social formations a TAZ is contrasted.

I advance my relational understanding of the New Edge TAZ as follows: First, I situate myself analytically in opposition to scholars who tend to evaluate the special significance of immersive environments like Virtual Worlds and Burning Man in non-relational, intrinsic terms. Then, I discuss the notion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (T.A.Z.), coined by the anarchist writer Hakim Bey (1991), as an emically relevant understanding of how New Edge environments relate to a larger 'non-autonomous' and 'permanent' 'default' world. I will note that there is great diversity in the way that the notion of 'autonomy' has come to work as a differentiating category for New Edgers. In a third section I will illustrate this point through a discussion of the multi-varied meaning of the idea of the hacker, as celebrated in New Edge discourse. Even though the New Edge discourse postulates the figure of the 'reality hacker' as the ideal-typical inhabitant of the TAZ, the New Edge variegated understanding of what a 'hacker' is makes clear that this figure cannot be more than a symbol, a vaguely defined figure that points to quite a variety of different social realities and ideological positions. Whereas the figure of the 'reality hacker' makes it seem as if hackers, artists, and users of psychedelics are overlapping dispositions and endorse a TAZ environment in similar ways, an ethnographic understanding of a TAZ needs to account for the fact that all three dispositions are tied to quite complex and ever-evolving social networks, occupational activities and modes of self-understanding. The fourth step in this chapter then consists of a discussion of the significance of a TAZ as constructed from the perspective of a psychedelics explorer, an artist and a hacker. A fourth portrait considers a person who comes close to the New Edge ideal of the reality hacker and who lives his life as a hacker, a consciousness explorer and an artist. As part of these portraits we see the contours of different types of TAZ environments. The one consistent element that I will distill from these portraits is that a TAZ is celebrated for the way it offers a sociality of trust in contrast with a sociality that is experienced as not-trusted. This emphasis on trust, I maintain, cannot be grasped through universalizing distinctions such as 'autonomous' versus 'mainstream' and ‘corporate’ versus ‘non-corporate.’ Instead, the quality of trust needs to be

understood as flowing from the particular life-worlds in which such a TAZ is rooted.

In the final section of this chapter I will draw on my own transformational experience during Burning Man 2008 as a way of pointing out the significance of the practice of 'Do It Yourself' participation for the construction of a trusted environment. It will become clear that the idea of Do It Yourself is not quite what the slogan says: it calls for a particular social commitment and necessary mutual trust, in the context of which it is possible to experience one's environment as benevolent, and to obtain an experience of pronoia.

Immersive Environments as Intrinsically Sacred

In chapter two I described immersive environments like Virtual Worlds and raves as 'molting rituals for the new species.' Now it is time to nuance this definition by investigating the cultural conditions that make some immersive environments seem to be 'molting rituals' and others not.

Academic explorations of the 'spiritual' nature of immersive environments are not generally concerned with this type of questioning. Too often, scholars imbue specific mediated environments with intrinsic spiritual power, thereby celebrating these environments in universalistic terms. For instance, writing about Virtual Reality and 'cyberspace', the scholar Michael Heim argued that these virtual environments have become the "Platonic new home for the mind and the heart" (Heim 1995). In a similar universalistic manner did Michael Benedikt refer to cyberspace as a "new Jerusalem" (Benedikt 1992) and Nicole Stenger called this space a "paradise" (Stenger 1992).

Scholars who argue the spirituality of cyberspace in such intrinsic terms generally note that the 'spiritual qualities' of immersive environments are 'potentials' and that technologies such as VR are not necessarily spiritually empowering. However, they don't generally heed the anthropological question how particular spaces are experienced as spiritually liberating and why other spaces are not experienced as such. Michael Heim (1995) writes about different spiritual experiences that are induced in different Virtual Reality environments, but attributes this difference to the technical design of these spaces. Heim contrasts "Head-Mounted Display" (HMD) types of VR to "Spiral VR". In the first type, which is the most familiar one, users wear goggles onto which the virtual world is projected. In the second type, projections are produced on a "surround screen" using "surround sound". Heim calls the first type of VR "perceptive", and the second type "apperceptive": in the first type one does not see oneself moving in the VR world, in the second type an additional reflexive quality is added by the fact that the environment that one witnesses includes the own biological body. The second type of VR is more transformative, Heim argues, because it "implies

reflectednes, a proprioception, a self-awareness of what we are perceiving" (1995: 72).

Heim's enquiries into different types of experiences made possible by different technical designs of VR are valuable, but don't account for the fact that VR designers such as Brenda Laurel and Jaron Lanier have celebrated also Head-Mounted Display-types of VR as "sacred" and "transformational" (Laurel 1993; Lanier 1992). Given that similar technical configurations are differently validated for its transformational potential, it follows that if we want to grasp the emic construction of sacrality in the context of immersive environments, it does not suffice to look at the technicality of these environments alone.

Academic studies of *offline* immersive environments such as raves, and more specifically the Burning Man festival, are generally more interested in the anthropological question as to how sacrality is socially constructed. Nevertheless, in a recent academic effort to zoom in on the 'religious dimensions of raving', we find yet again many accounts that understand the sacrality of the rave experience in intrinsic instead of relational terms. An example is the book *Rave Culture and Religion* (2004) edited by Graham St. John. This book traces the historical roots of contemporary rave culture to the 1960s counterculture. The book roots 'rave culture' squarely in post-traditional religious currents such as New Age. One chapter of this collection is dedicated specifically to understanding the "religious dimensions" of Burning Man. In their article *Dancing on common ground: exploring the sacred at Burning Man* (2004), Robert Kozinets and John Sherry discuss the Burning Man festival as "sharing common ground" with "rave culture" at large. Whereas motives for attending Burning Man vary, they note, it is "a temporary spatial phenomenon that its participants construct as sacred and even utopian" (2004: 288). In the start of their article the authors contend:

> with its pioneering, endlessly experimental, libertarian, individualist, flag-flying, diversity-seeking, hardworking ethos, Burning Man could be considered a quintessentially American event (Ibid.).

However, the authors don't explain in anthropological terms how this event has also come to be experienced by participants as a momentary radical break from conventional American society. While seeking to understand the sacrality of the event, the writers don't focus on this relational aspect, but on intrinsic characteristics of the event that induce transformational experiences. They describe, for instance, the transformational aspect of "drum-dominated music":

> The ubiquity of the beat seems to signal a different type of social space, and perhaps the phase-shifting to a different timing for everyday life. The presence of 24/7 techno (...) signals a liminal space (Turner 1967), a place that is betwixt and between, a site where the party is intense and ongoing. (...) Music also has deep ties to the sacred, existing in a timeless biocultural nexus where popular culture, emotion, and bio-basic responses collide (2004: 289).

The authors also emphasize the 'sacred nature' of dancing. Comparing Burning Man to other neopagan gatherings, they write:

> (…) the ritual fire, like the secret dance floor, is a place to transport participants to a higher state of consciousness, a place that is particularly sacred, a place where self-transformation can occur. Music, drumming, lights, fire-these are places where participants at these events and festivals gain an experience, and a bodily knowing of loss of control and freedom. With an ancient language, the percussive beats tell the body what to do (2004: 299).

Kozinets and Sherry put it that in order for people to understand their environment as "sacred" they need to feel "safe" and regard this space as "special". The writers ground these qualities in the intrinsic, material conditions of the space of Burning Man. The climatic and geological conditions of the desert are mentioned in this regard. The authors emphasize the daytime heat that can:

> (...) easily surpass 100 Fahrenheit during the day, and plunge to 40 in the evening. Constant rehydration is required: "piss clear" is a maxim of the event. Sunlight and desert dryness expose the body's needs and its fluids become suddenly (and literally) salient. These realities of daily existence are often related in informant interview and dialog to a more primitive state articulated as "back to nature" or more "authentic" than ordinary lived experience (2004: 299, 300).

This understanding of the sacrality of Burning Man is, indeed, close to the experiences of participants. Participants of the festival are generally ready to interpret what they see, feel, touch and sense otherwise in this space in terms of the sacred. The programmer Russell recognizes it in the eye contact he makes at BM between people: "When you look people in the eyes at Burning Man, you simply know that they know!" he says. The photographer Rosy recognizes it in the quality of the sand. Although the alkaloid sand caused my feet to painfully crack, Rosy is convinced that the quality of the sand is positive: "The sand at Burning Man has healing power!" she shouted during a pre-Burning Man gathering. The financial administrator Cloe refers to Burning Man as her "home", even though it costs her more money than she can actually spend, she says she needs to be there to "get back in touch". And the British youth-worker Shaun calls Burning Man a space where "the best that is inside people gets out".

We cannot, I argue, understand such experiences in a phenomenological sense only. If we are to understand how such immersive environments *make a difference*, how they are experienced as safe and special vis-à-vis otherwise 'unsafe' and 'mundane' social environments, we need to understand with what kinds of sociality and technological formations these spaces break.

Immersive Environments as Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ)

In a recent dissertation on Burning Man written by the American Studies scholar Jeremy Hockett, the significance of Burning Man for its visitors is described in the following general terms:

> It is an experimental realm that helps negotiate real-life scenarios and to facilitate communication. The real life scenarios are those from which they feel alienated, suppressed as they are by society's normative dictates, stagnancy, and standardization; Burning Man makes possible alternative forms of communication (Hockett 2004: 2).[220]

What Hockett does account for in this description of Burning Man is the fact that many burners understand the significance of the event in terms of autonomy: at Burning Man one may live a life that is autonomous from and that proposes alternatives to 'conventional existence.' What Hockett's general description does *not* account for however, is the fact that 'autonomy' is not a universal, but a context-ridden and relational state of being: what accounts as autonomous, of course, is juxtaposed against a state of being that is not-autonomous. Moreover, different attendees of a place like Burning Man configure 'autonomy' in quite different ways. Nevertheless, the general notion of autonomy has served as a powerful signifier among Burning Man participants as well as among scholars to explain the special character of this and comparable event(s).

Indeed, as we saw also in chapter two, participants and enthusiasts of online and offline immersive environments like Virtual Worlds and Burning Man are generally quite active in projecting a particular understanding of what makes these environments special. And, as we saw in emic uses of Johan Huizinga's concept of the 'Homo Ludens' and Victor Turner's idea of 'liminality', quite often such projections involve concepts and analytical frameworks that are also employed by social scientists, particularly anthropologists, to describe the significance of these spaces. This accounts in particular for the idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), coined by the American anarchist-writer and poet Hakim Bey (birth name Peter Lamborn Wilson). This term has particularly been embraced by academics and enthusiasts of these environments as a way of describing its relational sociality.

Bey's coinage of the term Temporary Autonomous Zone occurred as part of a set of flyers and books in the mid-1980s and resulted in a book entitled *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* that was published in 1991. Bey's idea of the TAZ was inspired by his understanding of 18th century "pirate utopias":

> THE SEA-ROVERS AND CORSAIRS of the 18th century created an "information network" that spanned the globe: primitive and devoted primarily to grim business, the net nevertheless functioned admirably. Scattered throughout the net were islands, remote hideouts where ships could be watered and provisioned, booty traded for luxuries and necessities. Some of these islands supported "intentional communities", whole mini-societies living consciously outside the law and

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[220] Taken from the chapter *Cultural Performances at Burning Man: Dramatizing the Postmodern Crisis of Affect:* https://www.msu.edu/~hockettj/Burningman.htm. Retrieved October 31, 2010.

> determined to keep it up, even if only for a short but merry life. (...) Modern technology, culminating in the spy satellite, makes this kind of *autonomy* a romantic dream. (...) Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? Are we reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future? Must we wait until the entire world is freed of political control before even one of us can claim to know freedom? Logic and emotion unite to condemn such a supposition. Reason demands that one cannot struggle for what one does not know; and the heart revolts at a universe so cruel as to visit such injustices on *our* generation alone of humankind. I believe that (...) we may collect evidence to suggest that a certain kind of "free enclave" is not only possible in our time but also existent. All my research and speculation has crystallized around the concept of the TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE (hereafter abbreviated TAZ).

Bey, who wants the TAZ to be understood as "poetic fancy" and not as "political dogma", tentatively describes the TAZ as:

> (...) an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it.[221]

In a preface to the second edition of his book (2003), Bey writes that the book *TAZ* feels "very much like a book of the 80s": Bey had written it under the sign of the dialectic between Stalinism and Capitalism: "the basic notion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone was meant as a contribution to a desired third way, a kind of evasion of the dialectic, an alternative to both Capital and Ideology", Bey writes (2003: x). Writing in 2003, Bey noticed that this old dialectic had given way to a "new phase of neo-liberalism: hegemonic globalism or "Imperium"' which signals the 'apparent failure of all third ways" (Ibid.). Nevertheless, Bey contends: "The TAZ seems more relevant than ever (...) it sometimes appears that the TAZ is the last and only means of creating an Outside or true space of resistance to the totality" (2003: x, xi).

Since Bey's coinage of the term in the mid-1980s and particularly since its popularization in the early 1990s, the idea of TAZ has been used by academics and public spokespersons to refer to a wide range of moments and spaces that are considered 'autonomous.' According to the Dutch media scholar Geert Lovink, the idea of the TAZ has come to associate "rave parties with the internet", (e.g. Lovink 2002: 239) and the magazine Mondo 2000 played thereby a popularizing role (Ibid.). Mondo 2000 indeed was one of the vehicles in which Bey presented his notion of the TAZ[222] and editors of the magazine described the magazine *itself* as a "Temporary Autonomous Zone": editor Gareth Branwyn writes about Mondo:

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[221] http://hermetic.com/bey/taz3.html#labelTAZ. Retrieved October 25 2010.

[222] Issue 5 (undated) (pp. 124-128) contains an article from Bey entitled *Pirate Utopias. The Temporary Autonomous Zone*.

"Each issue creates a "temporary autonomous zone" where people, events, and new technologies pop-up in the strangest situations and combinations".[223]

Partially due to Mondo 2000 and partially due to online bulletin board systems (BBSes), flyers and cyberpunk novels popularizing the notion, the term TAZ has found fertile ground in a Bay Area subcultural environment where hackers, ravers, artists and users of psychedelics have felt themselves complicit with Bey's project and by which Bey himself was inspired. In the aforementioned rave manifesto, written by 'Cinnamon Twist', it is stated:

> Like the TAZ, the rave is wild, nomadic, outside the maps of Power. At its best, the rave opens onto a realm of free-form behavior and perception, one in which there is no hierarchy, no leaders or followers, at most the dj and the light-show artists. (Hopefully benign - be careful who you leave your sensorium with!) (...) a space of liberated interactions...but where the participants are the art and the show (...) Anyone who has been part of a REAL rave, if only once, briefly, knows that its insane, insanely beautiful ferocity is something that exceeds all the contrived parlour-games that pass for alternatives, social or political. The simple fact of this ferocious hedonism is, without words or slogans, *A REFUTATION OF DOMESTICATED EXISTENCE*.[224]

In the early 1990s the raver Ken also referred to raves as Temporary Autonomous Zones. In a manifesto, called Cybertribe Rising, Ken wrote:

> When we come together for a ritual such as a Full Moon Rave on a remote beach, we are creating what Hakim Bey calls a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ). A rave creates a TAZ of relatively short duration, only a few hours, but during that time, we are functioning at the level of Community.

Bey's notion of the TAZ has also inspired some of the early organizers of Burning Man, and it still is one key term that is employed by enthusiasts and emic journalists to refer to the significance of the festival.[225]

In Branwyn's characterization of Mondo 2000 as a TAZ and in the celebrations of raving by Cinnamon Twist and Ken, we see already quite different ways in which the notion of the TAZ is employed. Branwyn's remark suggests that Mondo 2000 is a TAZ because its 'strangeness' makes it difficult to pin down and to define unambiguously what the magazine is about. In his celebration of raves as a TAZ, 'Cinnamon Twist' emphasizes the 'out of controlness', the hedonism, the lack of hierarchy and the free form of behavior which he believes are characteristic of raves. Ken's celebration of raves in terms of the TAZ emphasizes the experience

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[223]http://www.streettech.com/bcp/BCPgraf/CyberCulture/mondo2000.html. Retrieved October 29 2010.

[224] Rave Manifesto entitled *The Imaginal Rave* written by 'Cinnamon Twist', updated November 8, 2008 http://www.gashaus.com/component/content/article/55.html. Retrieved October 15 2010

[225] http://blog.burningman.com/metropol/black-rock-city-the-taz-and-the-rise-of-great-civilizations/. Retrieved October 25 2010; see also Kozinets and Sherry in *Afterburn. Reflections on Burning Man* (2005: 98, 99).

of community that can be generated during raving. With Branwyn emphasizing 'strangeness' as a key component of a TAZ; with 'Cinnamon Twist' emphasizing non-domestic, hedonic behavior to be central and with Ken highlighting the experience of strong community as constitutive of a TAZ, all three thinkers emphasize different ways in which a TAZ environment stands out amidst and is autonomous from 'conventional reality.'

A similar variability can be observed with respect to the different *kinds* of moments and spaces that are imagined in terms of freedom and autonomy. In 2003, Bey, for instance, began using the notion of TAZ also in relation to moments and environments that are not necessarily *temporary*. In a preface to a reprint of his book in 2003, Bey introduced the notion of the "P.A.Z".: the "Permanent Autonomous Zone":

> A T.A.Z. is a situation, or even a 'psychospiritual state' and 'existential condition' that can be truly temporary but also perhaps periodic, like the recurring autonomy of the holiday, the vacation, the summer camp. It could even become a "permanent" PAZ, like a successful commune or a bohemian enclave. Some PAZ's could be clandestine, like the areas of rural America and Canada secretly controlled by hemp farmers; others could operate more openly as religious sects, art colonies, trailer parks, squats, etc. You could even talk of relative degrees of TAZness; a bit of autonomy's better than none, after all. I find hobby groups and old-fashioned fraternal organizations interesting in this regard (Bey 2003: x - xii).

By speaking of "relative degrees of TAZness", Bey conceptualizes a TAZ in terms of a sliding scale. This way of reflecting on a TAZ, in other words, renders it questionable whether it is actually possible to isolate 'autonomous spheres' from a larger social and cultural environment. On a different level, this question becomes particularly pressing when we consider the fact that the ideals of freedom and autonomy are often part and parcel of the daily and corporate lives that many Burning Man participants live.

In his book *The Rise of The Creative Class* (2002), the American economist Richard Florida zooms in on regions of "creativity and innovation such as Washington, D.C., Boston and the greater New York region, and leading high-tech centers like the San Francisco Bay Area" (2002: 11). Florida argues that these regions witness the arrival of a new class composed of "scientists, engineers, artists, musicians, designers & knowledge-based professionals" who earn their money through "creativity" and who are, according to Florida, the "dominant class in society" (Florida, 2002: xiii). This class has arisen particularly in relation to the new digital and media technologies of the late 1980s and it signifies a new lifestyle that favors "individuality, self-statement, acceptance of difference and the desire for rich multidimensional experiences". The creative class is also characterized by new ways of working "replacing traditional hierarchical systems of control with new forms of self-management, peer recognition and pressure and intrinsic forms of motivation" (2002: 13). As such, members of this class leave behind them a

"previous organizational age" that "emphasized conformity" (Ibid). Members of the creative class, Florida asserts, are "in touch" with a major transformation that is now unfolding itself:

> (...) the great transition from the agricultural to the industrial age was of course based upon natural resources and physical labor power (...) The transformation now in progress is potentially bigger and more powerful (...) [it is] based fundamentally on human intelligence, knowledge and creativity (2001: xiii).

Florida's qualifications resonate with a historical trend within Bay Area computer corporations such as Apple to think of their computer programmers as "artists" and of their computers as tools that "bring out the artist in each one of us" (e.g. Levy 1994: 150).[226]

The celebration of self-expression and creativity at Burning Man needs to be understood against the background of this more general celebration of creative transformation and individual expression in the Bay Area corporate sphere. This means that we should not think of an environment like Burning Man as a unique event that stands on its own and that stands in opposition to an alleged rigid and un-free mainstream social sphere. Instead, we need to see how the Burning Man TAZ is interrelated with a larger environment in which attempts to draw boundaries between creativity and rigidness, autonomy and repression are constantly made.

The difficulty of drawing clear-cut boundaries between a TAZ and mainstream society also becomes apparent when we consider the often ironic and paradoxical forms of self-awareness among Burning Man participants. For instance, Burning Man organizers, participants and scholars of Burning Man generally emphasize the event as non-commercial. Besides the sale of coffee, vending is not allowed during the festival. Furthermore, the event is not sponsored by corporate parties and does not participate in promotional activities. In addition, every burner is asked to shield brand names - those displayed on trucks or clothes - from public view. Because of such anti-commercialist practices, the cultural studies scholar Hockett analyzes Burning Man as an event that 'helps to alleviate the anxiety of interacting in a postmodern world thoroughly saturated by a culture of commodity.' And Larry Harvey, the initiator of Burning Man, says about the event: "We're the other choice in a consumer world".[227]

Despite its overt anti-commercialism, however, many scholars and participants also note that BM is ran by a corporation and inhabits an important place in local and global economic systems. Burning Man started as a spontaneous, free, artistic event on the beach of San Francisco in 1989 but, when it grew bigger,

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[226] See also the historical trend at research laboratories and computer corporations to employ people trained in the liberal arts as part of design teams, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

[227] Harvey, Larry in Reno Gazette Journal September 1 2003.

the initiator Larry Harvey was forced to look for a larger space to hold the event. He also found himself in need of a corporation: in 1997 Harvey founded the Limited Liability Company that would have a fulltime staff on payroll, attract artists and pay some of them for their work, negotiate politics with county and federal governments, organize the sale of tickets – which, in 2008, were priced around $200. In addition, Burning Man supports many other corporate enterprises. The festival is a great source of income for car rental companies, thrift stores, supermarkets, gas stations, and hotel rooms in Nevada as well as elsewhere. In San Francisco, weeks prior to Burning Man thrift stores and costume rental stores advertize their "Burning Man gear" and in Wal-Mart chains close to the festival ground each year racks and shelves are set apart for "Burning Man Discount products" such as goggles, bandanas and water (fig 17).

In their study of Burning Man, the anthropologists Robert Kozinets and John Sherry take note of this massive consumerist component of Burning Man:

> In our interviews with participants, we often found people waxing enthusiastically about the no-vending rule, wearing new branded hiking shoes, and slugging down large bottles of Gatorade they bought from the Reno Wal-Mart. In 2000, a survey question by the Ministry of Statistics (...) asked participants how much money they spent to prepare for and attend Burning Man. The median response fell between $500 and $750, with considerable percentages spending thousands of dollars (2005: 99).

More significantly, the scholars also acknowledge that participants of Burning Man are 'well aware of the irony inherent in their massive spending.' The scholars write that while they initially presented their interest in Burning Man as an "anticonsumption" event: 'Many participants laughed at our naiveté, noting that they had never seen so many people consuming so much in their entire lives.' Some burners manifest this 'irony' in art installations and performances such as Las Vegas style theme parks, strip malls and entertainment spectacles (Kozinets and Sherry 2005: 101) that hyperbolically celebrate passive consumption and mass entertainment.

Other burners reflect on the consumerist aspect of Burning Man in quite a different way. They don't see the consumerism of Burning Man as antithetical to the event but as intrinsic to it and as strengthening its social base. Gary, key member of the rave collective Dance with whom I camped in 2005, pointed out to me that much of the consumerism that structures *his* Burning Man experience strengthens his rave community: the costumes that he buys for Burning Man, for instance, are made by rave members themselves. Various other ravers told me that their involvement in Burning Man most definitely helps them find jobs, build close work relationships and create a corporate network they draw from in everyday life.

What these examples illustrate is that a TAZ like Burning Man is not necessarily anti-corporate, anti-capitalist or anti-consumerist. Instead it can be seen, using the words of Kozinets and Sherry, as "an attempt to ameliorate some of

the social deficiencies of markets" (2005: 103). The distinction these scholars recognize that is being effected at Burning Man is the classic distinction first postulated by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft; between community based on intimate, informal relationships (Gemeinschaft) and social formations based on formalized, instrumental, rationalized relationships (Gesellschaft). Environments like Burning Man, they write: "have resisted not the market itself, but the Gesellschaft, the distanced, corrosive, exploitative social relations that people associate with the market" (2005: 97).

This discussion of Burning Man consumerism illustrates a more general point that I want to make about the ethnography of a TAZ: generally the official language espoused by key participants of a TAZ - like Harvey's insistence on Burning Man as anti-consumerist - conceals more than it reveals. The understanding that Burning Man is a non-corporate/consumerist event that stands opposed to a consumerist/corporate mainstream world, conceals that Burning Man is about the creation of a particular kind of sociality that cannot necessarily be addressed in terms of this particular dichotomy. As mentioned earlier, Kozinets and Sherry describe Burning Man as a place seeking to be "special" and "safe" (2004: 299). This sense of 'safety', I maintain, has a lot to do with the celebration of a sociality that contrasts with a larger social environment in which participants of a TAZ feel negatively interconnected. For different participants of a TAZ this sense of negative connectedness may be differently structured. Some may for instance refer to it in terms of the market while others employ the language of political or religious repression. In the following I seek to understand more about such variety in the starting positions from where people celebrate a TAZ as different from everyday reality.

4.2. The Emic Sociality of New Edge

Who are the people that create TAZ environments? Key participants of a TAZ are generally quite clear about this question: a TAZ, so it is suggested when looking at Mondo 2000 and at Burning Man, is created by artists, hackers and explorers of psychedelics. These three 'dispositions' converge into the mythical image of the 'reality hacker' - a figure fully capable of creating reality anew. In this section I wonder how much we can learn about the actual social inhabitants of a TAZ through New Edge projections like this reality hacker.

The people who were portrayed in Mondo 2000 are either artists (musicians, fiction writers, poets, graphic designers), science and technology aficionados (hackers, Do It Yourself chemists) or explorers of psychedelics (Timothy Leary and Terrence McKenna being the most famous ones). A similar set of groups comes into view through the reflection on the Burning Man participants

by Mark Pesce.[228] Pesce, speaker at Mindstates and Burning Man enthusiast, describes the populace of Burning Man to consist of "geeks, freaks and artists". Together, Pesce called these the "cultural trifecta".

If we are to believe the Mondo editors and New Edge representatives like Pesce, hackers, artists and psychedelics explorers (‘freaks’) form the natural population of a TAZ. It is suggested that these groups are similarly interested in autonomy and freedom. What such autonomy and freedom may mean is worded by Rudy Rucker. Rucker is a mathematician, science fiction writer and a prime contributor to Mondo 2000. In a compendium of Mondo 2000 articles, he summarizes the attitude of Mondo 2000 as follows:

> a) there is a better way and b) I Can Do It Myself. The way that Big Business or The Pig[229] does things is obviously not the best way; it’s intrusive, kludgy, unkind, and not at all what you really want. (..) Now, thanks to high-tech and the breakdown of society you are free to turn your back on the way “they” do it, whatever that may be, and do it yourself. You can make (…) –most important of all – your own reality (Rucker 1993: 10).

Rucker thus celebrates an attitude that urges people never to take 'consensus reality' at face value and to take control over their own reality. Ken Goffman captures this celebrated attitude through the notion of 'reality hacking.' Goffman: "Mondo is about this idea that we can hack reality, that we can get more out of reality and maybe ultimately escape the limitations of this particular reality".[230] For Goffman, 'tools' are essential in this process. One computer hobbyist told him: "if you want to change the rules, change the tools". Goffman: "I was never a Geek, but I saw that too".[231] Significantly, 'tools', in Mondo 2000, could be anything from a computer, to a paintbrush to a drop of LSD.

The 'reality hacker' thus portrayed is the ideal-typical inhabitant of a TAZ: this figure embodies the creativity, curiosity and 'irreverence' of artists, hackers and explorers of psychedelics. Moreover, I propose, in this figure we may recognize the contemporary manifestation of a vision that was also central to 1960s counterculturalists. According to the Esalen-historian Walter Truett Anderson, for instance, it was a central endeavor of the Human Potential Movement to search for a new archetypical human being, "a new kind of *persona* to carry into the new decade" (Anderson 2004: 208, italics original). A similar goal was proposed by

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[228] http://www.tripzine.com/listing.php?id=mcburners. Retrieved November 12 2010.

[229] Using the term ‘Pig’ to refer to political authorities has become common among those who are familiar with and sympathetic to the so-called YIPPIES (Youth International Party), a theatrical political party founded in the US in 1968 by Abbie and Anita Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and Paul Krassner. The YIPPIES believed in ‘media revolution’, and in 1968 they announced that they were nominating a pig (“Pigasus the Immortal) as candidate for President, and "once it got elected, they were going to eat it" (Goffman, 2004: 291).

[230] Interview Dorien Zandbergen with Ken Goffman, Mill Valley, California, September 2005.

[231] Ibid.

countercultural 'guru' and leading figure at Esalen, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970). In his book *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1962), Maslow wrote:

> Every age but ours has had its model, its hero. All these have been given us by our culture; the hero, the gentleman, the knight, the mystic. About all we have left is the well-adjusted man without problems, a very pale and doubtful substitute. Perhaps we shall soon be able to use as our guide and model the fully growing and self-fulfilling human being, the one in whom all his potentialities are coming to full development, the one whose inner nature expresses itself freely, rather than being warped, repressed, or denied (in Anderson 2004:66).

A similar desire to constitute a 'new kind of persona' transpires through the various cultural manifestations of contemporary New Edge: in the multiple kinds of rejection of 'conventional reality', in the celebration of multiplicity, liminality and indeterminacy, in irony and in the multiple manifestations of embodiment and personhood, the New Edge proposes a mythical, all-encompassing being that serves as a hero-model of fully-lived existence. Unlike conventional Christianity, however, this heroic figure is not a god to which people pray. Instead, it is an image of being that is (idealized) as democratic: anybody can turn into it. And a TAZ is the environment in which this transformation is established.

By definition then, the reality hacker so celebrated by the New Edge discourse, is a figure that is defined in opposition to the mundane and the everyday-life. Or put in other words, it is a figure that embodies the potential of creating reality anew. There are many ways in which people can turn into this figure. In the context of Mondo 2000 this is done, among others, by subjecting to-be-photographed interviewees to long hours of make-up and dressing-up sessions. And at Burning Man people do so, in addition to the transformational practices already described, by dressing-up in fantastic costumes, as well as by undressing and by engaging in role-playing practices. While the image of the reality hacker is *inspired* by the lived reality of artists, hackers and proselytizers of psychedelics in everyday life, the New Edge also creates this model-hero through a particular interpretation and refraction of social reality.

To illustrate how the New Edge discourse creates its model-heroes, in the following I show how the seeming clear-cut celebration of the hacker in a magazine like Mondo 2000 may be informed by quite different understandings of what hacking is. I also discuss how New Edge understandings of hacking may be quite divorced from how hackers understand their own cultural environment to be.

New Edge Readings of Hacking

'Hacking', perceived through the discourse of New Edge, is an activity that entails more than computer programming and particularly more than committing computer crime. It entails a basic love for life and a radical inquisitiveness and curiosity about the way things *really* work. It also involves a penchant for overcoming boundaries that may stand in the way of such knowledge. This penchant may give

way to practices that are criminalized, but does not in the first instance have the objective of breaking laws.

The contemporary New Edge celebration of hacking finds its recent origins in the countercultural celebration of computer aficionados who were then alternatively referred to as *computer hobbyists, computer amateurs* or *hackers*.[232] At a time when computers were mainly used by large corporations and government agencies, these hackers sought to 'appropriate' computers for their own, personal uses. At least since the early 1970s countercultural spokespersons have shown an interest in these 'acts of appropriation' among computer software and hardware hackers. A manifestation of this counterculture- hacker alliance is the Homebrew Computer Club, a famous gathering of hackers in the San Francisco Bay Area brought together by the Berkeley free-speech activist Fred Moore. The Homebrew Computer Club became a space where hackers could swap information and help each other build their own 'personal' computers. The Club spawned the first personal computer companies, such as IMSAI, PET, and the most famous of all, Apple.

Both in the 1970s and today, in countercultural celebrations of hacking we can trace two different understandings of the social value of hacking. In one variant, hacking involves a high degree of social responsibility that comes from the unique level of insight that a hacker has into technology and into 'systems' in general. In another variant, hacking implies a love for breaking boundaries, chaos-creation and 'pranking' for the sheer love of it, without a political agenda or over-arching ideology. A brief genealogy of the countercultural celebration of hackers will show these different readings.

Hacking as an act of Social Responsibility

One of the two initiators of the Homebrew Computer Club was Frederick Moore. Moore is widely recognized as the person to have set off the Berkeley Free Speech movement in the late 1950s. In a recent documentary on his life he was also portrayed as an adamant peace activist, anti-materialist and ecological conservationist. Moore edited the newsletters of the Homebrew Computer Club for the first few months. His entries in these newsletters suggest that he thought of the Homebrew Computer Club as an anti-corporate zone, dedicated to giving access to computers to 'the public.' Moore depicted existing computer corporations as not interested in the public use of computers:

> The evidence is overwhelming the people want computers, probably for self-entertainment and educational usage. Why did the Big Companies miss this market?

[232] To emphasize the continuity between 1970s celebrations of computer aficionados and contemporary New Edge celebrations of hackers, I will employ the term 'hacker' also in my historical account.

They were busy selling overpriced machines to each other (and the government and military). They don’t want to sell directly to the public (...).[233]

In line with the notion that computers should be made available to a larger audience, Moore also saw it as the task of the Homebrew Computer Club to transform the public understanding of computers. Instead of holding on to the idea of computers as complex, incomprehensible machines, the Homebrew Computer hackers are there, Moore thought, to ‘demystify’ computing:

Computers are not magic. And it is important for the general public to begin to understand the limits of these machines and that humans are responsible for the programming.

In the early-to-mid 1970s, the understanding that computer hackers have a social responsibility was harbored by more newsletter editors of the many other hacker groups that sprang up all over the USA.[234] For instance, Pearce Young, member of the editorial committee of *Interface*, the newsletter of the Southern California Computer Society (SCCS), wrote in September 1975:

(...) we should never become dedicated solely to hardware and software, but to the computer arts and sciences. Although we should seek to enrich our own lives and understanding through the Society, we should not forget our responsibility to the community in which we live.

Such rhetoric was shared by the Menlo Park-based *People's Computer Company* (PCC). PCC was one of the offshoots of the Portola Institute. It supported a walk-in computer center -the Community Computer Center (CCC) - and published a magazine.[235] This magazine emphasized the necessity to make computers easy to use and simple to understand, granting hackers thereby great responsibility. The journalist Andrew Clement wrote in a 1977 issue:

(...) one consequence of the influential role computer amateurs occupy at the present moment is that they have a social responsibility to others to use their position wisely. This responsibility comes from the fact that the actions of computer amateurs could have a significant effect on other people’s lives and is independent

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[233] Moore, F. (1975). "It's A Hobby." *Homebrew Computer Club Newsletter*, *1*(4).

[234] In 1975, besides the Homebrew Computer Club in Palo Alto, there were other clubs in other parts of the country. Many of these clubs created newsletters, which they exchanged among each other. In the Newsletter from the Southern California Computer Center *Interface* October 1975, vol. 1 #2 – made available by the Stanford University Library, the following clubs are listed: - the Southern California Computer Center, the hp-65 users club, the UCLA Computer Club, the San Diego Club, the Chicago Users Group, the Southeast Minnesota Amateur Computer Club, the Texas Computer Club and the Oklahoma City Club. Furthermore, in the archives at the Stanford University Library I found newsletters from the Rochester Area Microcomputer Society, the Sonoma County Computer Club, Santa Rosa Computer Center and the Portland Area Users group.

[235] This magazine began as the PCC Newspaper and changed names several times in the course of its existence: in 1977 it changed into *People's Computers* which became *Recreational Computing* in 1979. In addition, the People's Computer Centre published several journals and books including *The Computer Music Journal* and *Dr. Dobb's Journal*.

of whether they actually choose to acknowledge the responsibility. (...) The challenge to the amateurs and other pioneers in this field is to accept a share of the responsibility and work actively to ensure that the micro-computing for home and personal use grows in humane and positive directions (Clement 1977: 39).[236]

Theodore Nelson, a frequent visitor of PCC, wrote a manifesto in which he summed up what such positive directions could mean. Computers, he wrote, can "create art, literature, films and academic knowledge" (Nelson 1974: DM1); "help people to deal better with the ecological problems that face us" (Nelson 1974: 3); "make education a pleasurable experience" and "[raise] human minds to the potentials they should have reached long ago" (1974: Dm21).

As the entries from computer hackers like Moore, Young, Clement and Nelson suggest, the notion of social responsibility did inform the practices of certain computer hackers to some extent. This sense of responsibility comprised in particular the twin ideals that computers should be 'demystified' and made relevant to the needs of the larger society. In 1977, two hobbyists associated with the Rochester Area Microcomputer Society (RAMS) proposed to do so by developing electronic products that will offer "service to mankind through development of alternate energy, energy conservation, access control, and other non-conflicting areas".[237]

Hacking as Boyish Irreverence

In contrast to the emphasis placed on the social responsibility of hackers, the early writings of Whole Earth Catalog founder Stewart Brand represent quite a different take on the significance of hacking. In his article *Spacewar* (1972), also mentioned in chapter one, Brand celebrated computer hackers not for their ability to make computers easy-to-use and available to the general public. Instead, he celebrated computer hackers as a new elite that has appropriated powerful and magical tools for the creation of their own reality. In Brand's version of hacking then, hackers were not depicted as technological leaders who create the tools for a larger populace, but they featured as rock stars who showed people a new way of *being* that could serve as a model for others to follow.

In his article, Brand compared computers to psychedelics and computer programmers to the 'freaks' that could be found at Grateful Dead concerts. In observation of computer hackers who worked at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (SAIL) and Xerox Parc, Brand wrote:

These are heads, most of them. Half or more of computer science is heads. (...) The rest of the counterculture is laid low and back these days, showing none of this kind

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[236] The article is entitled If 'Small is beautiful' Is Micro marvelous? A look at microcomputing as if people mattered (in PCC 1977).

[237] *Memory Pages*, June 1977, 0 (7)

of zeal. (...) the freaks who design computer science. (...) This is the most bzz-bzz-busy scene I've been around since Merry Prankster Acid Tests. [238]

According to Brand, the computer engineers, scientists and programmers in the computer labs he visited had adopted a similar spontaneous approach to the world as the Merry Pranksters had done earlier. In the start of his article, Brand sketched the 'Prankster-like' atmosphere present at these labs:

> Reliably, at any nighttime moment (i.e. non-business hours) in North America hundreds of computer technicians are effectively out of their bodies, locked in life-or-death space combat computer-projected onto cathode ray tube display screens, for hours at a time, ruining their eyes, numbing their fingers in frenzied mashing of control buttons, joyously slaying their friend and wasting their employers' valuable computer time (Ibid.).

Through such observations, Brand sketched hacking as a quite irresponsible form of practice. In their "youthful fervor", Brand wrote, the computer engineers at the Bay Area computer institutes show indifference towards their own bodies (ruining their eyes, numbing their fingers in frenzied mashing of control buttons); towards ‘political correctness’ (joyously slaying their friend), and towards their superiors (wasting their employers' valuable computer time). This indifference for everything but their own dedication towards the exploration of technology – an exploration that is guided not by rules but only by "the starker demands of what's possible"- characterizes the hackers, as Brand puts it, as

> (...) [f]anatics with a potent new toy. A mobile new-found elite, with its own apparat, language and character, its own legends and humor. Those magnificent men with their flying machines, scouting a leading edge of technology (..) (Ibid.).

Brand's celebrations concentrate particularly on the way that these (male) programmers had created the first interactive graphic computer game 'Spacewar'.[239] Brand celebrates Spacewar as a truly empowering technology that draws its particular cultural strength from the fact that it was 'unplanned' and developed 'spontaneously':

> It was the illegitimate child of the marrying of computers and graphic displays. It was part of no one's grand scheme. It served no grand theory. It was the enthusiasm

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[238] Brand, S. (1972). Spacewar. Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums. *Rolling Stone* www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling_stone.html. Retrieved October 29 2010.

[239] Spacewar was first created at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1961 as a game to run on a 'PDP-1' computer. When Brand saw it being played at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (SAIL) and Xerox Parc, it was fitted to a smaller computer, the 'PDP-10.' The PDP-10, computer historian Paul Ceruzzi (2000) writes, can be considered an "ancestor to the personal computer" (2000: 208). The PDP-10 broke with decades of computer-use whereby a central computer was dividing its processing power over many terminals, while slowing the computer down severely when many users logged in and forcing hackers to work in quiet hours late at night. In contrast, the PDP-10 operated in a 'personal' way: "for fun, interactively, with no concern for how many ticks of the processor one was using" (Brand 1972).

> of irresponsible youngsters. It was disreputably competitive ("You killed me, Tovar!"). It was an administrative headache. It was merely delightful.

What these programmers showed in their creation of Spacewar, in Brand's view, was that they did not leave technology-creation to 'the planners' but took it into their own hands, thereby avoiding 'passive consumerism' through active creation. Brand writes:

> In those days of batch processing and passive consumerism (data was something you sent to the manufacturer, like color film), Spacewar was heresy, uninvited and unwelcome. The hackers made Spacewar, not the planners.

In this 'inquisitive' and 'heroic' approach towards technology, hackers thus showed a different way of being to the larger public. This different way of being, so Brand argued, is a way of being that we can all adopt "when computers become available to everybody":

> When computers become available to everybody, the hackers take over. We are all Computer Bums, all more empowered as individuals and as co-operators. That might enhance things ... like the richness and rigor of spontaneous creation and of human interaction ... of sentient interaction.

This narrative made computer hackers seem heroic, rock-star like and quite comparable to the irreverent users of psychedelics.

Contested Readings of Hacking

In the above we have seen two readings of computer hacking, as projected by social interpreters like Moore and Brand. In the first reading, computer hackers are (and should be) bearers of social responsibility; in the second reading, computer hackers are (and should be) irreverent and individually self-expressed. In the 1970s, both readings faced quite some challenges from the perspectives of computer aficionados themselves.

With respect to the first reading, while expressions of social responsibility certainly characterized the spirit in which some computer hobbyist projects were carried out, many computer hobbyists were not necessarily interested in the social consequences of computing, nor in the demystification of computers. In Steven Levy's well-known study of three generations of computer hackers (*Hackers* 1984) he writes that Moore did not understand what really was the source of much of the enthusiasm for computers among the Homebrew Computer Club hobbyists:

> Fred Moore was very excited about the energy the gathering generated. It seemed to him that he had put something in motion. He did not realize at the time that the source of the intellectual heat was not a planner-like contemplation of the social changes possible by mass computing, but the white-hot hacker fascination with technology (Levy 1984: 202).

As also told to me by the Homebrew Computer Club member Bob Lash, at the Homebrew meetings the hobbyists generally did not work with the non-technical user in mind, nor did they speak of computers as 'appliances.' For most computer

hobbyists, like for Lash, the computer chip was a device that was limitless in its potential, and the Homebrew Computer Club was a playground where one could learn about these potentials. Lash:

> When the PC industry had started, one of my concerns was that people buying these systems were not really learning about computers, they were just buying them to use them as appliances (...) People (...) don't care about what is under the hood, they don't care about what it is capable of doing, they just care about what it can do for them right now.[240]

For Lash, the computer chip was interesting in and of itself, and an object worthy of being explored regardless of its social use.

While Stewart Brand took this 'white-hot hacker fascination for technology' as the basis for his understanding of hacking, his reading did not generally correspond with the way that computer hackers reflected on themselves either. Brand presented the hacker fascination as an explicit and self-conscious act of rebellion and irreverence. However, many computer hobbyists and hackers understood themselves to be shy and quite unheroic. In his book *Dealers of Lightning* (1999), a history of Xerox Parc, author Michael Hiltzik describes the impact of Stewart Brand's article *Spacewar* at Xerox. Particularly the young computer scientists, who had cooperated with the article, were delighted by the article. "And why should they not?" Hiltzik asks rhetorically: the article depicted "those who had been socially conditioned to feel ungainly and isolated by [their] devotion to machines and math as the prophets of a new world in which computers and their unparalleled power would belong to the masses" (Hiltzik, 1999: 81). Yet, as Hiltzik argues, "there was much in what he said, and much of himself" (1999: 157): "Brand was a self-styled social theorist interpreting the new technologies against the era's political backdrop". And as Bob Lash told me, it surprised him that he was depicted as a rebel and a rock star, but it *did* make him feel rather proud of himself.

The Meaning of Hacking in New Edge

In the contemporary New Edge celebration of hackers both types of reading exist side by side. This can be exemplified by looking at the various discourses that support the activities of the San-Franciscan Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF).

The EFF, described on its website[241] as a non-profit "civil liberties group defending your rights in the digital world", was founded in 1990 by Mitch Kapor (1950) and John Perry Barlow (1947). Both founders are self-conscious about the role that the 'sixties' have played in the shaping of their worldviews and practices. Mitch Kapor is a soft-spoken technology entrepreneur who told me that he had

[240] Interview Dorien Zandbergen with Bob Lash, Mountain View, March 2005.

[241] http://www.eff.org

earned his "hippie credentials" “by going to Woodstock in 1969". [242] As a young hippie, Kapor also tried psychedelics. When he discovered that he became "freaked out" by psychedelics, as he put it, he turned to Transcendental Meditation (TM). He did so as a way of recovering from the effects of psychedelics, and as a way of accounting his "general feeling of unhappiness" at the time. For several years Kapor was a TM teacher and, having also been a humanistic psychology student, he spent several years working as a psychology counselor. Kapor is also the designer of one of the first spreadsheet programs, Lotus 1-2-3. Released in January 1983, this program proved to be the so-called 'killer-application' for the first IBM personal computer, turning Kapor into a young millionaire. After an initial phase of spending the money on items like a large house and a private airplane, Kapor has begun to seek ways of using his money to make “a difference in the world". Founding EFF was one of the ways in which he has sought to do so.

John Perry Barlow is a former cattle-ranger and is also self-consciously shaped by the explosive 1960s and 70s. Barlow's motorcycle, leather jacket and half-long hair are trademarks of his personality which visibly connect him to the countercultural past. In the 60s and 70s Barlow was the lyricist of the psychedelic rock band *The Grateful Dead* and he hung out in various Bay Area countercultural scenes. Barlow refers to his younger self as a "techno-hippie"[243] and developed in the 1980s an interest in information technology. This manifested among others in his enthusiasm for Virtual Reality and in his attendance of some of the first Hacker Conferences organized by Stewart Brand.

In the 1990s, Kapor and Barlow were both active members of the Bay Area online community The Well – which was an online offspring of the Whole Earth Catalog. The trigger for their contact was a post that Barlow placed in 1990 on The Well. In the post, Barlow wrote about a visit he had received from the FBI. The FBI was looking for a part of the source code of the Macintosh computer. A mysterious person or group that called itself *NuPrometheus League* had sent this copyright-protected code to industry leaders and press. Upon this act, Apple had called for the assistance of the secret services and the FBI who sent agents to industry leaders, hackers and people associated with hacking as a way of finding the sender(s). Being associated with the Hacker Conferences, Barlow was one of the people who received a visit from an FBI agent. Barlow's post about this visit addressed the lack of understanding that Barlow perceived this agent had of his own task. Barlow told his story to R.U.Sirius and David Gans for Mondo 2000:

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[242] Interview Dorien Zandbergen with Mitch Kapor, San Francisco, January 2006.
[243] Sirius, R. U., & Gans. (1990). Civilizing the Electronic Frontier. Interview Mitch Kapor and Barlow. Retrieved November 3, 2010, from http://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/John_Perry_Barlow/HTML/barlow_and_kapor_in_wired_interview.html. The interview was also published in Mondo 2000 Issue 3 Winter 1991 pp. 45-49

> "He referred to them as the New Prosthesis League", (...) "He was looking for something called 'the ROM Code.' He didn't know what a ROM chip was, he didn't know what code was, he didn't know whether it had been stolen or what exactly had happened or whatever it was".[244]

When Barlow described this experience on The Well, Kapor found it resonating with a similar experience of his. He had also been visited by FBI agents who were looking for the 'Macintosh ROM code.' Kapor in fact had received the code, but had sent it back to Apple. This seemingly simple story proved difficult to explain to FBI agents who didn't appear to have a clue about what exactly a ROM code was. After having spent several hours trying to create some kind of "mutual understanding" of the situation, Kapor was left with "a sense of danger" because these FBI agents had "fundamental misimpressions" about information technology, which they weren't even capable of articulating. Kapor: "And that meant they couldn't be doing anybody any good, because they'd be acting not intentionally but more or less randomly. And that just deeply offended my sense of order about things".[245] Shortly after both these events, the two men heard about a series of quite violent raids that were connected to the same search for the Apple source code. Under the label of *Operation Sun Devil* these raids were conducted by secret services against young hackers. During these raids virtually all the electronic equipment of the hackers was confiscated - including answering machines - with the use of guns and without warrants.

Their experiences alerted Barlow and Kapor to a great lack of understanding among legislators, secret services and the general public about the nature of information technology. A concern they had in particular was that the rights to privacy and freedom of speech were being violated by acts like the FBI home-raids, while most people weren't even aware of this. In addition, it was unclear how people could defend themselves against demands from authorities to hand over their digital data. These concerns formed the motivation for founding the EFF and translated into the two EFF mission statements: the EFF was to 1) give computer hackers legal protection and to 2) civilize the 'new frontier' of cyberspace. With financial help from two other wealthy beneficiaries - the hacker and psychedelics advocate John Gilmore and the designer of the first Apple computer and former Homebrew Computer Club member Steve Wozniak - it became a core-task of the EFF to hire lawyers educated in ‘digital rights’ who could defend the rights of computer hackers and users. The EFF also began to cooperate with other networks with similar incentives such as the Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility.

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[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.

There are strong parallels, I believe, between the 1970s Homebrew Computer Club and the EFF of the early 1990s: what the Homebrew Computer Club was for the personal computer, one could say, was the EFF for the internet. In the context of both projects, hackers, social activists and psychedelic enthusiasts worked together in the material and social shaping of a new form of medium. And different readings of hacking and hackers were thereby employed, endorsing different types of hacker practice. I have already pointed this out for the Homebrew Computer Club. With respect to the EFF: while both founders shared a similar understanding of the central task of the EFF, they associated in quite different ways with the practice of 'hacking.' For Kapor, who is himself a computer programmer, the EFF is an outgrowth of the social responsibility that he experiences as flowing from his own intimate understanding of information technology. His encounters with the FBI had thoroughly upset him because it confronted him with the large gap in digital understanding between himself and the FBI agents. What violated his "sense of order" even more was that these agents, despite their digital illiteracy, had the power to make themselves the controllers of the digital world nevertheless. After Barlow made a similar sense of unease explicit in his post on The Well, Kapor felt that he needed to act and took the initiative to visit Barlow. In 1990, being one of the few digital literati standing amidst a larger society of masses of people who are computer illiterate but who would nevertheless come to depend on digital technology, Kapor felt the pressure to mobilize his understanding of high-tech for political purposes.

John Perry Barlow is not a hacker in the same way as Kapor is: his interest in hacking does not flow from his own programming and computer-tinkering activities. Instead, Barlow draws parallels between the psychedelic hippies of the sixties and the computer hackers - the 'digital skateboarders' as he calls them - of the 1990s. For Barlow this parallel resides in particular in the way that hippies and hackers, as well as psychedelics and 'suspicious' computer equipment have been criminalized by authorities. In an interview with Mondo 2000, Barlow says about this:

> For a long time now, drugs have been seen by the government as the main threat to its control of knowledge and information. Since the 1960s, the particular species of vegetable that I sometimes carry in my pocket could, if found by the wrong person, land me in jail and lose me my property. Now it's my disk drive (Mondo 1991: 45).

By drawing such parallels, Barlow imbues an organization like the EFF with a significance that surpasses the specific technological situation of the early 1990s: the EFF is depicted as one in a long legacy of countercultural and pre-countercultural organizations that have been fighting against social oppression in defense of individual expression, creativity and independent thought. Along similar lines, Barlow celebrates hackers in archetypical terms. In a variety of poetic writings Barlow equates hackers with the first American pioneers; with the users of psychedelics in the 1960s; and with young, male "trespassers" in general. Barlow

made the latter characterization in a Mondo 2000 interview when he spoke of a group of young hackers that he had met:

> They were unquestionably inclined to trespass, but I tend to think that that's sort of a testosterone-based endeavor that has been with us for some time. You know young adolescent males like to go places they don't belong. That's just what they do. And they just found a new place to go.

In such ways, Barlow celebrates hackers as only a recent incarnation of an age-old phenomenon, a drive for freedom and exploration that has always been in the bodies and hearts of, particularly, young males. In contrast to Kapor, whose support for EFF is rooted in his own understanding of digital technology, Barlow is more inclined to celebrate the hacker as a particular way of being that has to be defended. Just as Stewart Brand had, in 1972, celebrated the Xerox Park programmers as creative irreverent boys, so does Barlow feel connected to the 1990s network hackers as a new brand of creative, young, free-thinking individuals that need protection against the conditioning and criminalizing forces of mainstream society.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation has grown into a large and quite influential institution. It is one of the institutions where the former Mondo 2000 crowd can be found at receptions and parties, and it is the place where the marriage of countercultural visions and information technology is regularly reflected and commented upon.[246] EFF, in other words, is one of the contemporary Bay Area institutions where the New Edge discourse is at home. More specifically, the EFF operates as one of the several New Edge Autonomous Zones of the Bay Area, which, in turn seeks to protect cyberspace as an Autonomous Zone in its own right. As argued, in the way it does so it manifests the ideal of 'hacking' in quite different ways. It attracts Open Source software hackers who feel socially and politically responsible and who have a clear vision of the "transparent society" they seek to create. It also attracts libertarian countercultural activists who believe hacking stands for creative expression, individual freedom and lack of social control. 'Hacking' in the context of EFF has thus manifested as a way of executing social responsibility and shaping technological realities that keep intrusive government and corporate agencies out the door. It has also come to be equated with illegal activity, boyish irreverence and social irresponsibility.

In a recent dissertation on hackers *The Social Construction of Freedom in Free and Open Source Software: Hackers, Ethics, and the Liberal Tradition* (2005), the American Anthropologist Gabrielle Coleman warns against singular readings of hacking. Coleman emphasizes hacking as a plural, multi-varied

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[246] One instance in which such reflections took place was the 15th anniversary of EFF on October 2 2005. A reception was organized at the EFF office which was over-crowded. Present were, among others, several former staff members and 'friends' of Mondo 2000 - among which Ken Goffman himself.

practice that cannot easily be grasped in universal terms. Although Coleman subscribes to Steven Levy's reading of hackers as people who derive "great pleasure from "hacking" the formal logic of any system in order to solve a pressing or interesting problem (and blatantly disrespecting any technical barrier or institution or authority that may stand in the way) (...)" (2005: 6), she also warns against a too singular treatment of the term:

> Nearly every scholarly and journalistic account of hackers uses a particular strand of hacking to stand for the whole. Largely portrayed as a tightly bound subculture guided by a singular ethic, differences among hackers are erased or sanitized (...) (Coleman 2005: 21).

Coleman's warning relates to my discussion of the different countercultural readings of hacking. Neither of the New Edge readings of hacking is fully and exclusively capable of describing the social practice and experience of hacking. Whereas both readings that I discussed have become part of the self-consciousness of some hackers today, these readings a-priori assume that hacking is a practice that has intrinsic political and cultural meaning. The experiences of those hackers who don't translate their love of technology into political programs, social visions or reflections on new modes of being are thereby disregarded.

My discussion of the New Edge readings of hacking illustrates a more general point I seek to make about the archetypical figure central to New Edge, the 'reality hacker.' Projected onto this epic figure are idealized readings of artists, psychedelics users and hackers as fighters for freedom and autonomy. Yet, just as 'hacking' is no singular practice, neither is psychedelics use or artistic creation. In actuality, 'Temporary Autonomous Zones' like Burning Man attract quite dispersed groups of people who may identify themselves as 'geek', 'freak' and/or 'artist' in quite different ways.

4.3. Generating Trust

Considering the complexity discussed above, I cannot even begin to try and assess in any overarching way what the relational meaning of a TAZ is for its participants. However, I can attempt to understand at least *some* of the ways in which the idea of the TAZ - and associated ideas like autonomy, freedom and transformation - is significant for the creative workers of the Bay Area. I can do so by taking several individuals as representative of a particular disposition. I here use the notion of 'disposition' in the way proposed by the French sociologist/anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, as a "way of being", a "habitual state" or a "propensity" (Bourdieu [1977] 2006: 214). I distinguish hereby the disposition of the psychedelics advocate, of the artist, the hacker and the reality hacker. For each of these dispositions I seek to understand what it is that drives them towards an embrace of spaces that they define in the process as 'free'. In the course of their stories, we will

see the celebration of autonomous/trusted sociality giving way to various kinds of social environments: it appears in relation to 'invite-only' conferences, to public (yet expensive and therefore not so public) spaces like Burning Man, to private (home) environments, to unique, singular occasions or to recurring events, to permanent or to semi-permanent environments, to mundane or to epic moments. I will regard all such occasions as manifestations of the generalized and celebrated ideal of the TAZ.

The Psychedelics Advocate

It is difficult to write about the life of the man whom I will call Bill Bright (1959). The reason for this has everything to do with Bright's awareness of the danger of talking about psychedelics in public, and because he cares deeply about two psychedelics-related organizations he founded. In the one organization Bright explores the religious significance of psychedelics. He does this together with scholars, philosophers and religious leaders, many of whom are associated with Esalen. The other organization is a rave group that Bright founded. This rave group offers participants an experience of community and an environment where they can 'expand their consciousness' in a safe and intimate setting.

Bright cares a lot about both projects and he does not want them to be publicly associated with each other. The reason for this is that he feels that this association may endanger both projects. I will return to this sense of danger later. For now Bright's concerns matter because it means that the following account only addresses his projects in general terms. Nevertheless, Bright's story is quite illustrative of the particular sociality that explorers of entheogens need in order to be what they understand themselves to be: explorers of entheogens instead of drug abusers.

Before interviewing Bright, I had tried several times to get in touch with him to talk about his rave community. Yet, I had also heard that past events in which his community received bad press led Bright to be very careful: he rarely discusses his involvement in this rave community with researchers and journalists. I figured that it was for this reason that I could find no personal contact information of him on the internet. Then I bumped into him, at a wine and sushi-evening organized at the house of Gary.[247] After we met, Bright hesitantly invited me to his house in San Francisco. He first asked me to write about his activities in a nuanced way; meaning that I would make sure not to write about him as a drug addict, which he clearly is not. Then, sitting in his sun-lid, comfortable living room, we had a long interview about Bright's interest in psychedelics, primary religious experience and raving.

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[247] Gary has been mentioned earlier as a key member of the Dance rave collective with whom I had attended Burning Man 2005.

Bright was born on the East Coast, where he studied electrical engineering and computer science. With his family, Bright attended the Episcopal Church. Also when his parents stopped going, Bill continued to go. He sang in the church choir and in addition he did a lot of chores such as turning the pages for the organist, repairing things in the church, turning the lights on and straightening up the candles. Bright loved the church atmosphere and the sense of community he experienced here.

It was only during his high school period that Bright started to pay attention to what was actually being said in church. He then discovered that he was not a true believer of the religious doctrines presented to him. Bright expresses the struggle that followed:

> I realized that I was making an oath, a public statement, and I am not sure that I actually believe these things. That means that I am sitting there every week saying out loud things that are untruthful. I am misrepresenting myself and I started to feel so uncomfortable with myself that I just did not want to be there. (...) I was an outsider and they didn't know it.

Because Bright felt he was "dishonoring" himself and the other church members, he stopped going to church.

Then Bright attended drama class and after discovering himself to be gay, started a gay encounter group. With respect to his professional life, he began consulting in technology for a variety of US-based and international technology firms. This led to a job offer for a large computer corporation in Silicon Valley. This offer, he says, was so generous that he couldn't refuse.

Back on the East Coast, Bright had had some experiences with hallucinogens. This interest increased when he moved to San Francisco and was introduced to "this thing called rave:"

> (...) I didn’t know what a rave was, but we went anyhow, and I was quite astonished by what I saw. It was the first time that I had seen an informal dance environment that wasn’t either a gay dance club or a straight dance club/night club. (...) for the most part my experience had always been with nightclubs that were always either gay or straight. And I couldn’t quite figure this out, there were all kinds of people of all ages, both genders, and some very obvious, more than a few, very obviously gay. And there were people that I thought were straight people but [they were] also spending a fair amount of time hugging people of the same sex, and people didn’t seem to like to hold their drinks and to stand on the side. Almost everyone was dancing. [it was] very much focused on the dance.

Bright began attending raves a lot. What fascinated him most about raves, he tells me, were the particular kinds of experiences that people were having:

> (...) some of these people, not everybody, would describe these experiences as some of the most important they were having in their entire lives. While on the dance floor, or in case of an outdoor rave, while being in the middle of the field, dancing all night, with their eyes closed, [they were] having big experiences. It could be cognitive, it could be visionary, there were different kinds, but [they were] big. They

> would then later say: "god, that was just incredible". And: “I learned this thing”, “I felt so inspired by that”, and “I understand so much better”, "I always thought this this and this", "I was stuck there, now I feel unstuck and now I have this great freedom". People told stories about these big significant gifts they received. They were life-changing events.

Bright was also fascinated by the names of the events and all the literature that surrounded raves:

> (...) they would put on names like “peace”, or “harmony” or “community” or “grace”, these are religious words. And sometimes there would be raves or parties at people’s houses and there would be a literature-table, and people would put out these little flyers, sometimes about social change, or political change, or visions of a more harmonious world filled with more opportunities for everyone, about more fun and less suffering, and it reminded me of what little I knew of the psychedelic sixties.

Bright began reading "a lot of books, a lot of papers" on the role of psychoactives in the creation of "life-changing events". His explorations introduced him into the heart of, what he calls, the "countercultural psychedelic scene". His interests also earned him invitations to dinner parties in San Francisco where he was introduced to countercultural 'veterans.'

Eventually, his participation in the *Pacific Symposium on Psychedelic Drugs* organized at the Human Potential Movement institute Esalen in 1994 and 1995 brought him into contact with "distinguished academics, scientists, lawyers and philosophers". With money that Bright attracted from "private funds, from the financial world, from heritage and from the media world" and with the people he met at Esalen, he founded an organization that conducts "scientific study of the spiritual effects of psychedelics":

> The context is a bunch of academics, from different fields, various sciences and public policies and law, there are some people from organized religion as well.

Around the same time Bright also developed a related interest, which he nevertheless prefers to think of as very separate. Bright felt that within the nightclub scene of San Francisco, and even within the rave scene at large, the spiritual experience was not honored enough:

> (...) it occurred to me in one night, literally all at once: here are these people that have all these experiences, usually at commercial events (...) often in venues that are unpleasant. This is before smoking was outlawed in clubs, there was a lot of cigarette smoke, nicotine tar sticking to the walls. I thought: “This is not honoring the experience people are having". The venue, the physical environment was not honoring it. (...) And I thought it would be an interesting experiment if we could be creating something that looked a lot like a church community.

Bright founded a rave community that, for over ten years now, has gathered every three months for a "celebration" (or rave). In addition, the community stays connected through email, through weekly dinner gatherings, and other shared moments of celebration that Bright refers to as 'rites of passage.' Like with a church

community, Bright wanted to have a community with a "rich calendar of dependable, predictable events". He wanted "longitudinal coherence in a social grouping that may extend over a period of several generations:"

> (...) not just 6 months or a year, not just for people in a narrow age-range, but across age-ranges and across generations, and seeing people through the rites of passages and cycles of life. Birth, coming of age, marriage, disillusion of relationship, marriage again, disillusion, sickness and death.

In order to strengthen the sense of social commitment even more, Bright's rave community allows new people to its ceremonies only on an 'invite-only' basis and organizes its ceremonies in such ways that people are asked to stay throughout the entire night until breakfast and clean-up in the morning.

With his rave community, Bright addresses not only his "yearning for direct experience of the divine" but also his "yearning for that in the context of community:"

> So besides reflection on the greatest questions of life, there is also just "how do you get along with community?" who is doing what? Who is going to fix problems? How do you learn how to be nice to somebody who you think wasn't nice to you? What happens when two people want to do something that appears to be in conflict? How do you choose which to do? Somebody did something within the community you think was wrong, how do you respond? Do you confront them personally? Are they open to be confronted personally, how does the community as a whole respond? It is kind of like family issues, on a somewhat larger scale.

Bright claims to speak for many members of his community when he says that as such, this community addresses an experienced omission in the larger society: the larger society is dominated, Bright explains, by status, financial wealth, physical attractiveness, success, and competition. By contrast, the rave community seeks to be non-hierarchical, informal, direct, emotional, and confrontational in ways that everyday corporate life can never be:

> (...) it is an environment that isn't all about business, not about the product, not about the quarterly result, not about stock ownership. It is about the other part of life, not about being at affect in the world, making money, or a business. (...) you can say what your darkest fears are, or share some of your biggest hopes. Or even questions. It is pretty awesome to be in a community where people frequently are doing that with each other.

Central to both projects is a celebration of 'primary religious experiences' - experiences of sudden insight, of ecstasy, of otherworldly contact that cannot be put into words. Both projects explore primary religious experiences under different rubrics: Bright refers to the first project as 'scientific' and compares the second project to a 'church community.' He thus employs either the language of science or of religion to give expression to what is, in fact, an interest in gnosis. While this illustrates the difficulty of talking about 'gnosis' in its own terms - and of giving this interest in 'gnosis' a public presence in its own terms - it is even more difficult to negotiate the public stereotyping attached to use of psychedelics. Bright operates

in the context of a political environment that is used to the "just say no" policy of conservative political regimes and that has criminalized unlicensed possession, use and distribution of LSD since 1970. Given this political climate, Bright realizes that both projects - even though imagined in terms of 'science' and 'religion' - run the risk of being seen as masquerades for drugs abuse. Bright therefore chooses his words carefully (he never uses the term "drugs" and never speaks of his rave celebrations in terms of a "party"), yet he feels he has to continue managing this communication in a very careful way. And with *both* of his projects being essentially different from how both science and religion are understood to the larger public - Bright's ecstatic experience may not be accepted as a 'scientific' topic nor as the stuff of religion - he does not want both projects to be publicly associated with one another. Bad publicity of the one project may also endanger the other.

One of the ways that Bright seeks to ensure the continued existence of both projects is through the particular social organization of them. Bright emphasizes that his scientific project definitely does *not* comprise a community: it consists of individual scholars, journalists and religious leaders who are in touch by phone and by writing and who take responsibility for their own activities. This model of distributed responsibility works as a way to secure the continued existence of the project: when one person receives bad press, this does not automatically backfire on the entire project. In the case of the rave community, trust plays a very significant role in securing its continuity. This is so, in the first place, because trust is the necessary condition in which people can open themselves up to primary religious experience, particularly when these are induced through entheogens. Trust, in the setting of this rave community, means that one can explore psychedelics without fear of being busted or betrayed. The invite-only rule, the request to be fully committed for the duration of one long night, the encouragement of participants to partake in rites of passage and the emphasis on ritual and repetition, are organizational features that intend to enhance this sense of trust.

Bill's caution regarding the way in which his interests in psychedelics become public, are similar to that of a programmer I call 'Joe'. Joe hosts a website that discusses different kinds of hallucinogens. He received, as sign of gratitude, a signed portrait of Albert Hoffman, the Swiss scientist who first synthesized LSD. In 2008, Joe's interests shifted towards a more public, higher profile function upon which he removed all evidence of his connections with the psychedelics community out of the public spaces of his house: Hoffman's portrait, for instance, moved from the living room to his bedroom.

Bill and Joe's caution is not so much based on a fear of legal repercussions: talking about psychedelics or owning psychedelics-related visuals are not crimes. Yet, they are worried about the public stereotypical understanding of psychedelics and drug-use in general. The criminal status of psychedelics reinforces this

stereotype. What all TAZ environments in which the use of hallucinogens play a role have in common, therefore, is the cultivation of a permissive attitude towards hallucinogens. This means that in the case of 'bad trips', people are not left to themselves but there is expertise and know-how to deal with it. It also means that extensive discussions are being conducted, in an open manner, about different kinds of hallucinogens and about different ways of making these psychedelic experiences meaningful. The 'firewall' around the rave community secures against all of this: feelings of guilt, of moral righteousness and fear of being persecuted are leveraged. In this way a mindset can be achieved in which the use of psychedelics is not stigmatized as drugs-abuse. Instead, it can be "honored", to use Bright's words, as a sacred practice that leads to renewed insight and heightened awareness of what is meaningful in life.

The Artist

> Everything got so designed, but the design was so driven by money and by a kind of harshness. For example, I remember trying to open a door and the door handle was so designed that it has lost all function as well as artistry. Nothing worked, but everything was very expensive. It was the dark ages I think, it was really horrible.[248]

Galen Brandt recalls the period in the late 1990s when the dot.com industry was reaching the zenith of the boom. What was recounted by Homey in chapter one as a 'surreal time', was mourned by Galen as a disastrous time. As a true artist, Galen 'read' the signs of the disastrous moments in the aesthetics of her environment, in this case in the design of doorknobs. In order to understand why the boom was such a disaster to Galen, we have to turn to the period right before that: the moment at which information technological artifacts such as Virtual Worlds were still 'experimental' and considered as 'art' instead of as consumer products.

In the early 1990s Galen had gathered around her a group of co-artists, computer engineers and scientists with whom she explored the possibilities of using Virtual Reality technology as a way of communicating 'spiritual reality.' She experienced this group as a true community:

> It was like a very coherent science fiction tale, in that we had all seen exactly the same thing, it was like we all had the same hallucination, and we all knew where we fit. (..) it was very (..) consensual.

Galen sketches a situation in which her visions as an artist matched perfectly with what Silicon Valley technologists were also envisioning. Then, in the mid-1990s, Virtual Worlds became the next 'hype' after desktop publishing, attracting Venture Capital money. As a result, non-disclosure agreements prevented the members of the Virtual Worlds community to exchange information in the way they had been doing. Galen:

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[248] Interview Dorien Zandbergen with Galen Brandt, Santa Cruz, California, January 2006.

(...) everybody stopped talking. And you would go to parties and everybody would say the same thing, cheap-shit horrible stuff, like, "well, I am working on something but if I told you I'd have to kill you". And everybody talked about their IPO's[249], I know it sounds like a real corny history, but it was true, it was like the dark ages. A lot of people went underground and a lot of people got very nervous, and a lot of people made a ton of money, it was a very dark time.

The artist, theater maker and university teacher Brenda Laurel has a similar story that occurred a few years earlier. In the early 1990s Brenda Laurel, along with Rachel Strickland, led the creation of a Virtual Reality project that was called *Placeholder* and that was financed by a computer research lab *Interval.* By the time Laurel began working on Placeholder, she had published her book *Computers as Theatre* (1993 [1991]) in which she described the ultimate expectation she had of this technology:

Virtual Reality may be many things. It may become a tool, a game machine, or just a mutant form of TV. But for virtual reality to fulfill its highest potential, we must reinvent the sacred spaces where we collaborate with reality in order to transform it and ourselves (Laurel 1993: 197).

Laurel called for the need to have artists involved in the process of technology creation to make this real:

[modern technologies of computation and communication] offer new opportunities for creative, interactive experiences and, in particular, for new forms of drama. But these new opportunities will come to pass only if control of the technology is taken from the technologists and given to those who understand human beings, human interaction, communication, pleasure, and pain. It is time for the engineers to go back to engineering. To develop these new technologies, we need a new breed of creative individuals, most likely those associated with poetry, writing, and theatrical direction (Laurel 1993: 11).

As such, Laurel, who has studied theatre, legitimated her involvement in the world of computing. This involvement had begun in the 1980s when she worked for the video game corporation Atari.

Laurel's plea for more involvement from artists in technology project was not novel in the computer environment. Other earlier important initiatives in the 1970s and 80s that invited artists at the heart of computer science and development were the non-profit computer-art programs initiated at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta in Canada, and the Ars Electronica Center in Linz. Other collaborations between artists and computer scientists took place at corporate research labs, such as the Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) founded in 1985 by the Professors Nicholas Negroponte and Jerome Wieser. As Stewart Brand detailed in his study of the MIT lab, this lab invited "artists who have ideas about what to do with technology, and scientists who have ideas what to do with art"

[249] IPO stands for Initial Public Offerings - it announces the moment when a corporation enters the stock market.

(Brand 1987: 83). Artists were invited here to cooperate with computer scientists because of their image-manipulating skills and their "restless creativity" (Ibid.: 82). Apart from the context of research institutes, in the early 1980s various computer corporations – and particularly those specialized in gaming or interface design – hired people trained in the fine arts to advice on the design of their products.

Also in the early 1990s, the computer research center Xerox Parc in Palo Alto, for instance, launched a program the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center Artist-in-Residence Program or PAIR. In the context of PAIR, various people trained in the fine arts were invited to the research center in order to "enter into the heart of research as core participants" (Wilson 1999: 187). The organizers of PAIR thought that artists would be beneficial to Xerox in two ways: In the first place, artists were expected to "revitalize the atmosphere". They were expected to do so by "bringing in new ideas, new ways of thinking, new modes of seeing and new contexts for doing" and by keeping the researchers "creative, alert, generative, and innovative". The second reason was that artists were expected to "keep the research on track and relevant to the needs of the (...) world" (Harris 1999: xii). However, Laurel's experiences with Interval show a conflict to exist between an artistic approach to technology and the corporate reality in the context of which technology quickly transforms into a consumer item:

Far from trying to build a consumer item, with her project *Placeholder*, Laurel sought to 'humanize technology', to divest computers of their identity as 'machines' and to allow for 'intimate', 'emotional' and 'engaging' ideas of computing. As Laurel told me about the project, and as can be read in the publication of the research results in *ACM Computer Graphics Quarterly* (Laurel, Strickland & Tow 1994), the goal of the project was to create a virtual environment that invited people to be "truly engaged" in. The methods through which the researchers sought to achieve this, were informed by the conviction that users should not think of this virtual world as a "machine world" created by the computer. In order to create a 'natural' and engaging environment the team had moved to the Banff Center of the Arts and made videotapes of the natural environment there. Visitors of Placeholder were given the sense of really being present in this natural environment:

> The geography of Placeholder took inspiration from three actual locations in the vicinity of Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada - the Middle Spring (a sulfur hot spring in a natural cave), a waterfall in Johnston Canyon, and a formation of hoodoos overlooking the Bow River. Three-dimensional videographic scene elements, spatialized sounds and words, and simple character animation were employed to construct a composite landscape that could be visited concurrently by two physically remote participants using head-mounted displays. People were able to walk about, speak, and use both hands to touch and move virtual objects (Laurel, Strickland & Tow 1994: 119).

As a design strategy, the team chose not to use any explicit computer imagery but ancient symbols and deliberately fuzzy imagery instead. Furthermore, they did not want people to have to learn computer language and formal gestures in order to use the system. Instead, they wanted people "to move around fairly naturally in the environment". The players that were immersed in Placeholder, could use the bodies of four archetypical figures – the Spider, Snake, Fish and Crow – in order to move between the different places in the environment.

In her discussion of Placeholder in ACM, Laurel juxtaposes Placeholder against other kinds of VR that invite 'passive consumption.' For instance, VR installations in theme parks such as *Star Tours*, she writes, work to constrain rather than to empower. Such installations work with "hard-driving plots" with distinct beginnings, middles and ends. This is "a great way of controlling how long the experience takes", Laurel states, "but “classic” VR is inimical to this kind of authorial control- it works best when people move about and do things in virtual environments in a relatively unconstrained way".[250] The development team of Placeholder then envisioned this project to be something much grander than mere entertainment. Their ambitious purpose, moreover, was to define the very nature of VR in terms of active engagement:

> (...) it may be that the nature of VR makes it inappropriate to think of it as an entertainment medium at all. Entertainment – at least mass entertainment- implies the consumption of some performance by a large audience. (...) If, on the other hand, what you want is to create a technologically mediated environment where people can play – as opposed to being entertained-then VR is the best game in town (1993: 118).

However, when the project was only one year on the way, VR came to be one of the central 'buzz words' of the ensuing interactive media hype. In her afterword in the 1993 reprint of her book *Computers as Theatre*, Laurel writes:

> As the VR meme started to flame out in northern California in 1992, many of us involved began scrambling to change our shingles from virtual reality to something roughly synonymous, but less tainted – telepresence, augmented reality, immersion technology. Anything to get some distance from the all-too-vivid spectacle of the hype-fueled, VR road-and-media show that rocketed VR pundits to the pinnacle of pop culture and then sent us burning back into the atmosphere, noticing too late that we were in the decaying orbit of a fad. “Hey guys", little voices shout from the capsule as it begins to glow, “We weren’t done yet…we were just beginning…” (Laurel, 1993: 200).

Placeholder lost its stakes in the market to other Virtual Reality enterprises, in a way similar to how Galen Brandt's artistic visions of Virtual Worlds would later have to give way to commercial Virtual Worlds.

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[250] http://www.tauzero.com/Brenda_Laurel/Severed_Heads/CGQ_Placeholder.html. Retrieved November 12 2010.

We should read Brandt and Laurel's difficulties with processes of commercialization not merely as signs of an ideological resistance against consumerism or capitalism. Nor do their struggles only imply a difference in opinion regarding the proper design and use of VR/Virtual Worlds. Their difficulties are also rooted in the particular shift within their social networks that both of them had to endure when VR/Virtual Worlds commercialized. For them, commercialization of the technologies they had worked with, re-organized the social structure of work. Prior to the hypes, the artists had full access to the technological expertise and the tools of co-workers and friends without needing to have too much concern for the institutional boundaries they were thereby crossing. During the hype these same co-workers and friends had to sign non-disclosure agreements and to become secretive about their projects. In other words, new mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion were put in place, and the 'open-endedness' that also fitted Brandt and Laurel's visions of VR/Virtual Worlds was put to a halt. When 'art' turned into a 'consumer product', in other words, artists like Brandt and Laurel also came to be evicted from the social spheres - their Temporary Autonomous Zones - where they had been dreaming of transforming society, changing reality and experiencing the sacred through technology.

As a consequence, for some artists and other early enthusiasts of Virtual Worlds, the dot.com crash was not experienced as a disaster, but rather as a hopeful new beginning. Brandt and her partner Bruce Damer recall:

> Bruce: and then the crash happened and it really knocked the wind out of everybody, and the creative community started meeting again.
> Galen: that was a great time. My friend (...) had his 50's birthday party, and we went and it was up in the city and I thought, what is different? And I realized, wow, everybody is talking about art again, not about money or their IPO, it was because everything had collapsed, the door had slammed in their face. [251]

Damer and Brandt remember that the crash coincided with an explosion in Burning Man attendance:

> Galen: That was also the period that Burning Man sort of exploded, all of a sudden everybody was going.
> Bruce: It went from 12.000 to 40.000 and I remember in 2001 the signs that welcomed you were saying 'out of a job, wiped out, destroyed, spat out by the dotcom bust? Welcome home!' This BM ticket is all they saved up for.[252]

From the artistic perspective of Damer and Brandt, Burning Man thus offered them a re-entrance into the creative social sphere they had lost due to the dot.com boom. In the context of Burning Man, artists could experience once more how it is to operate in a 'free', or 'autonomous' zone where they can cooperate on artistic

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[251] Group interview with Bruce Damer, Galen Brandt, Jim Funaro and Bonnie de Varco, Boulder Creek, California, January 2006.
[252] Ibid.

projects with technologists and psychedelic visionaries in 'unconstrained', 'open-ended' ways.

The Hacker

Before new hackers are allowed entry into the annual Hackers Conference - the one that was initiated by Steven Levy and Stewart Brand in 1984 - they first have to prove that they are really what they claim to be: hackers. In order to do so, they need to be invited by a hacker already admitted to the conference. This hacker, in turn, has to fill out a form to the committee of the conference. The first question of this form is:

> What is it that this person has done (outside of school or work, even a year or two ago) for the "love" of it -- stayed up all night, lost a job over, flunked classes because of it, etc. -- that's so cool they had to tell the world (or at least us at the conference)?

What this question shows is that hacking, at least in the setting of this conference, is not considered an activity that is necessarily tied to computer technological practice. Hacking predominantly involves an absolute passion for a project, whatever that project is. As a hacker at the first Hackers conference put it: "Hackers can do almost anything and be a hacker. You can be a hacker carpenter. It’s not necessarily high-tech. I think it has to do with craftmanship and caring about what you’re doing" (Burrell Smith in Levy, 1984: 434).

I witnessed how hackers manifest themselves in this general sense at an invite-only hacker conference. I was allowed entry to this conference after filling out a form that questioned me, among others, about my "favorite frequency". Most of the computer programmers and engineers that I met at this conference showed themselves passionate for many kinds of "experimental practices". One hacker brought a recent invention he was highly enthusiastic of: the two-wheeled electric vehicle called the Segway. The hackers also discussed remote-controlled airplanes, Do It Yourself radio broadcasting, tricks for opening car locks, for circumventing passport control and for improving memory and creative thought. What all these projects and interests have in common is a resistance against technical, social and physical limitations to creative exploration. This resistance also translates into forms of activism against government or corporate imposed forms of property-protection. The hacker Jonathan (1979), with whom I attended the conference, told me about the activism that he is involved in.

Jonathan works for the San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF). In 2005 Jonathan dedicated a lot of his EFF-time to fight the use by corporations of Digital Rights Management (DRM). DRM is a generic term that refers to technologies that prevent people from using their technological products in ways that are not desired or foreseen by the producer. For instance, DRM software prevents music that is bought from the Apple I-Tunes store to be played

on programs other than I-Tunes. The term 'DRM' is also used to refer to software that obstructs users from expanding the capacities of a given technology. As Jonathan explained to me, the chip in the Apple I-phone, for instance, is technically capable of making so-called *Voice Over Internet Protocol* (VOIP) phone calls, which are often free. However, Apple has programmed its phone in such a way that only Apple itself can be used as telephone provider. Jonathan is "outraged" by such DRM practices: "when an engineer deliberately builds something into software with the specific purpose of limiting that what the device can do, that gives me outrage. It is a betrayal of the idea of making things as good as possible", Jonathan told me.[253] Jonathan also finds it a betrayal of the customer:

> I look at a telephone and know there is a computer chip inside that can do a lot of cool things. The average customer cannot see inside technology in the same way. I know what is underneath and what people are missing out.

Hence, Jonathan feels morally obliged to fight DRM software on behalf of the consumer.

Jonathan's 'outrage' directed against corporations that limit the range of what can be done with technology, resonates with sentiments that can be found at hacker conferences and hobbyist gatherings more generally. At the hacker conference that Jonathan and I attended, a hacker employed at Microsoft told me about the eternal hostility that often exists between corporate marketers and hackers. There is a big gap, he told me, between the way in which each party thinks about the potential of technology. But, frustrating to hackers, the marketer generally wins: "when you cannot explain how a particular product will enable a company to profit and grow, it cannot be done". For this reason, hacker conferences are important to him. Here, outside the limitations of non-disclosure agreements or corporate demands, hackers can exchange information and explore technology in more depth. As such hacker conferences operate as a kind of Temporary Autonomous Zones where hackers can enjoy, what they see as, the never-ending flexibility of technology outside the constraints placed on them in a corporate setting.

As Temporary Autonomous Zones, hacker conferences also offer a social environment that is held together through a particular form of trust. In order to understand this feature of the hacker-TAZ, we have to note the flip-side of the hacker optimistic faith in the limitless potential of technology. This is the wariness, often shared among hackers, about the negative effects of technology when embraced on a mass-scale in the larger society. The raver and hacker Gary pointed me to these effects, when we were watching *A Scanner Darkly*. A Scanner Darkly is a paranoid and dystopian movie, based on Philip K. Dick's novel of the same name. The film features an Orwellian world in which computer surveillance and

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[253] Interview 'Jonathan', March 6 2005, San Francisco.

hallucinogenic drugs are used by an all-powerful corporate-federal institution as a way of controlling society. The so-called 'rotoscoped' style of the movie parallels the general ambiguity of the lead characters: animations are projected on top of live-action movements so that viewers of the movie are presented with a kind of 'in-between' reality that is neither 'real' nor entirely artificial. In a similar sense, the lead-character of the film ('Bob Arctor') is ambiguous in a total sense: he is schizophrenic and lives two separate lives. In the one life he is a drug addict immersed in the drugs underworld, in the other life he is a secret agent assigned with the task to infiltrate in the drugs underworld. This leads to the bizarre situation that, as a secret service agent, he spies on himself, thereby wearing a suit that continuously shifts into a myriad of colors and shapes.

While Gary and I were watching this film, Gary told me a story that resonated eerily with the movie. He told me worriedly about an incident with *OnStar* communication technology installed in cars. The *OnStar* communication system was advertised as a security device: it would automatically send out signals to rescue teams in case of car accidents. In July 2008 news reports mentioned the abuse of this system by FBI agencies who used it to listen in on conversations conducted in the car. This example manifests the ambiguous character of technology when used in society at large: technologies bought and used for reasons of protection turn into agents that spy on its users. "You can't even trust your own devices anymore", Gary said after telling me about *OnStar*.

Gary's wariness about *OnStar* is only one example of his general wariness about the embrace by corporations, politicians and citizens of technologies that are 'unsafe.' This wariness shows in the fact that he only uses mobile phones that he can program himself. Gary does not understand the blind trust that other mobile phone users put in the 'closed' software of corporations such as Apple: consumers as such hand over control to large corporations who may build all kinds of features into their software that may violate privacy and limit the range of options for the way the device is used. Also, when users cannot program their own mobile phones, they have no power in fixing it when the software contains errors.

Such worry is a general theme of hacker conferences and is informed by a strong awareness both of the powers and the limitations of technology. At the hacker conference I attended, an engineer was pleading against the use of computerized voting machines. For a crucial political moment such as elections, he said, "machines with magic in it are not ready for prime-time". With 'magic', this engineer referred to the unreliability of voting machines, and of computers in general. "We all know how bad software is", he said. This remark illustrates the other side of the hacker enthusiasm for technology: precisely because of their intimate understanding of technology, many hackers are well aware of the fragility and unreliability of large software systems. As a consequence, it is typical for socially-conscious hackers to dread a society that uncritically buys into the

promises of technology to allow for more efficiency and security. I found another sign of this hacker mistrust of technology from a hardware engineer I met, who calls herself "Nana Second". Nana warned me not to take the San Franciscan underground, the BART. She had worked as a hardware engineer for the metro underground, and she told me the system was dangerous, particularly because of the way in which this underground system was automated by computers.

To simplify the approach towards technology by socially-conscious hackers, it is characterized by a paradoxical optimistic rejoicing in the 'unlimited' capacities of technology on the one hand; and, on the other, suspicion of living in a society that uncritically relies on technologies. Hackers find themselves living in a society that they know is easily 'hackable' and that allows corporate and government agencies into people's private spheres. In their minds, this society also consists of consumers and corporate managers who don't have interest in and technical expertise for making technology as good and safe as possible.

In this sense, a hacker conference may be thought of as a TAZ: besides offering the necessary moments of face-to-face interaction between hackers and besides offering moments of mutual recognition (Coleman 2005) a hacker conference is also an environment that offers a trusted sociality for hackers. Here hackers know that they are part of a social environment where *everyone* is technologically literate and/or where not many people would endorse easy and misplaced trust in technologies. Gary validates Burning Man along similar lines. "I really feel safe at Burning Man", he told me while we were discussing his feelings of technological paranoia, "It really is a place you have in your own control, you know the people who create it".

The Reality Hacker

Nik (1954) is a digital artist, a self-educated programmer, chemist and land-sculptor whom I find to be representative of the New Edge ideal-typical disposition of the reality hacker. Nik has integrated the New Edge understanding that hackers, artists and psychedelics explorers have overlapping attitudes. In Nik's story we will see how he distinguishes between two types of TAZ: a TAZ like Burning Man that is open to the general public and a TAZ like Bright's rave community that is relatively protected from an outside world. Nik celebrates both types of TAZ, yet in different ways: the first offers an environment where he can proudly show his technological ingenuity. The second is an environment where he can feel safe from the 'spying eyes' that he experiences in everyday life and that he, as a 'spying hacker' himself, is quite conscious of.

The first time I met Nik was at the Tech Night of the Accelerating Change conference. Nik did not actually attend the daily program of the conference, but the Tech Night was one of the many events going on that weekend that Nik had to tick off his list. As I later learned, Nik tries to organize his life through many long lists

lying on his desk on which he writes his chores and on which he keeps track of any social activity of the Bay Area that is either related to technology, to art, or to 'partying.'

At the Tech Night, Nik gave me his card, which read "3D Technologist", "Futurist" and "Writer", catch words that don't account for the totality of Nik's interests. He could as well have written "Burning Man art car maker", "land sculptor", "chemist", "electronics engineer", "landlord", "party host", all activities that Nik associates with in the context of the many overlapping networks in which he moves in the Bay Area.

A first thing to note about Nik is that he is an all-round, Do It Yourself, self-educated person. Nik was born in Brooklyn and he thinks of his younger self as a shy kid who hated the world that his peers lived in. He loved chemistry, electronics and photography. Around the age of 11 or 12, Nik told me, he built his own radios and studied photography. One night, he recalls, he was going to create radio between his house and his friend's house. "That meant getting the wire, getting up at night in the telephone pole and rewiring the telephone system". Besides being interested in technology and science, around the age of 14 or 15 he became interested in philosophy and religion:

> I was very curious about all the religions, especially about all the esoteric religions, or the primitive ones, describing these other worlds, I wanted to learn these other languages, Greek and Sanskrit and Latin because they offered a certain degree of insight into how people thought a long time ago.

When Nik was 16 he left home and never attended high school, which he found "boring and degrading" and in which he found "no virtue or meaning". Nevertheless, Nik took, on his own accord, various classes in physics and computer science in various educational institutions across the country. One of them is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston, where he was a 'drop-in' student, as he called it: without being officially registered he attended classes and made use of the MIT facilities. Also in the context of several jobs, among others at a semiconductor factory, at the aircraft manufacturer Lockheed and at the Los Alamos National Laboratories, Nik found his way in the world of (micro)-electronics, engineering, chemistry, physics and eventually digital computing. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Nik taught himself 3D design and began creating computer graphics and animation. He produced visuals among others for *Mondo 2000* and for a host of Los Angeles companies such as Lucas film. Psychedelic drugs also became a major interest, since the illegal synthesizing of LSD was what he and other chemists at some of the laboratories he worked at were heavily engaged in.

In the manner that Nik appreciates physics, mathematics, psychedelics and computing, he oscillates between two attitudinal poles. On the one hand, Nik tells me that through these technoscientific disciplines he feels engaged with the world

in an almost mystical way. On the other hand, Nik manifests a boyish love for exploding things and for danger and secrecy in general.

With respect to the first attitude, Nik understands physics as 'magical' and as congruent with Zen-Buddhism:

> I liked its both knowing and not-knowing, the magical quality of understanding reality. And the more I learned about reality, I really enjoyed that almost non-physical aspect of understanding reality. (...) When you study physics it is just like Zen Buddhism, you are constantly encountering the impossible, the unlikely, the unpredictable, the counter-intuitive and you are also demanding of yourself to know more than you are capable of rationally understanding.

Also the creation of LSD and other hallucinogenic chemicals at the laboratories he worked at turned, for Nik and, as he says, for his fellow chemists, into philosophical and existential quests:

> (...) there was the desire to find out the relation between who we thought we were as individuals, and the chemicals. It is just a fascinating notion that when we take one methyl group, we would feel different about who we thought we are. (...) We were all fascinated by not only trying to define ourselves but also trying to understand more deeply who we were by exploring these other dimensions of who we were, based on these other chemicals that are not in your body. (...) there is this whole other world out there that is waiting to be discovered.

Also the practice of three-dimensional computer design made him ponder objective reality:

> When I did early work in computer animation, I worked for Lucas film, sometimes when I had an object spin around, it would suddenly just disappear. And I didn't know what was wrong in the software and the coding, it would just disappear. (...) there was this one guy (...) and he said: "oh, obviously you would just need quarternions". DZ: "quarternions"? Nik: "I needed a fourth dimension from where to program: I was like a painter who operates only in three dimensions and who encounters himself in the painting, finds himself painting his own feet. I realize in a Cartesian coordinated system, you meet yourself, and you need to escape to another dimension. It was a spiritual experience".

Besides this deeply emotional and spiritual connection with science and technology, Nik displays also a quite pranksterish, (stereotypically) 'boyish' love for boundary-transgression and danger. He has, for instance, quite some scary tales about bomb testing in the Los Alamos desert and has many stories of his own attempts to create big explosions. Nik also told me proudly of several instances in which he managed to get into events for free. One instance in which he showed himself a hacker 'par-excellence' was when he 'hacked' himself for free into the otherwise expensive yearly Hacker Conference. Another instance that he told me about was when he managed to enter a party organized on NASA territory. He deluded the guard in thinking that he was a maintenance guy, which also gained him entry into one of the space shuttles that were on exhibit. Nik also has a penchant for scaring and confusing people with his technology and science.

"Sometimes I have a magnet with me and I ask someone 'what does your compass say?' and I walk around it with my magnet in a circle. And I do things like that, leaving people very confused about reality". For Halloween Nik pretended he was carrying the radioactive chemical plutonium on his body.

Living alone on a beautiful, self-sculpted plot of land in the Santa Cruz hills, housing five buildings two of them he rents out, Nik is busy tying all his different interests and social networks together. He keeps long lists with work chores, and with the many Bay Area events that he wants to attend. One Friday in September 2008 I sat with Nik overlooking the mountains on a bench in front of his condo, which stands at the highest end of his plot of land. I enquired him about his list for the weekend. Nik summarized:

> Tonight, there is the Museum of Art and History, in downtown Santa Cruz that hosts an event, a reception, then there is the Fantuzzi Party[254], which is a spiritual New Age party. Tomorrow there is the Burning Man Decompression Party and the Rupert party in Santa Cruz. These people make art cars for Burning Man. There is also the opening of the Academy of Art and Science in San Francisco and in the afternoon there is a pool party hosted by Opel Productions[255] at Cathedral Hill hotel, San Francisco. Then there is also a wedding in Los Gatos, and there is the Mad Scientist collective party in Los Gatos.[256]

And if that was not enough, on Sunday Nik was planning to attend a meeting of the rave collective founded by Bill Bright, a collective he considered joining.

Nik's list pointed to a host of other social scenes in the Bay Area that are bristling with other 'mad scientists', people crossing over the projects of science and art, spirituality and engineering. And most of the scenes that he feels connected with converge in the yearly celebration of Burning Man. What Nik celebrates each year in the context of Burning Man, is celebrated by him throughout the year in his weekends. Almost every weekend, Nik dresses up for parties and shows his technological and scientific wit to others. And as Nik tours most of his weekends in his car from scene to scene, so does he tour, during the one week in the year that Burning Man is organized, in his two-person art-car from camp to camp.

One of the things that Nik loves about Burning Man is the ability to 'awe' people with his technology-as-art. About one experience Nik says:

> I was doing pyrotechnics in the shape of pleiades, the 7-star constellation. (...) In New Age myths it is supposed to have great importance, lots of people would say that extra-terrestrials from Pleiades came down to earth and inhabited earth, you hear a lot of stories about that and I don't believe it but to me it is a very noticeable,

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[254] Fantuzzi is the name of an art-music performance group, that visited the Bay Area that weekend. (http://fantuzzimusic.com. Retrieved October 31, 2010)
[255] Opel Productions is a professional organizer of (costumed) parties.
(http://www.opelproductions.com. Retrieved October 31, 2010)
[256] The 'Mad-Scientist Collective' is a group of 'creative scientists' who have a yearly presence at Burning Man.

> very classic star constellation. Not everybody would notice it [his pyrotechnic simulation of pleiades] but people who would see the pattern in the sky would go, 'that's Pleiades'. It was glowing, extremely bright, illuminating the desert. It had 7 flairs, and it sat in the sky all the time. You see people in absolute awe and that is great.

However, Nik also has negative stories about Burning Man. At Burning Man 2008 he was 'busted' by the Washoe County police for speedy driving.[257] Nik found this bust unfair and it fed into his paranoid feeling that authorities may be watching him. Nik's paranoia is based on the ground that he is, or was, involved in a variety of activities that are illegal and on his witnessed experiences with various forms of government repression. For instance, he knows many people who are imprisoned for the fabrication of drugs. He also has experiences of being wiretapped and has been fired once for the possession of classified information. In addition, his thorough knowledge of communications technology makes him aware of the ease with which eavesdropping can happen.

For these reasons, Nik feels drawn to a closed, safe environment such as Bright's rave community. His love of meaningful community, his wariness about security and his own identity as hacker strangely converged as Nik told me he had hacked into the computer systems of Bright's rave community. He had done so as a way of finding out how well this community was protected. Before joining this community, he wanted to make absolutely sure that he could feel safe there.

Temporary Autonomous Zones and Trust

In the four interwoven stories above, we have seen various different kinds of 'autonomous zones.' Among these are rave communities, computer research laboratories, hacker conferences and Burning Man. Some of these environments are invite-only, others are open to anyone with dedication and/or money to buy a ticket. Some are shaped by momentary conditions - like the moment right before hypes - others are semi-permanent. What makes these spaces and moments 'autonomous' are two related understandings: in the first place there is the understanding of participants that they here have the utmost freedom to explore the 'unlimited' capacities of human consciousness, technology and/or science. Secondly, this freedom is experienced in contrast with other moments and places in which this freedom is absent, inhibited, obstructed, criminalized or co-opted.

As we could see, the different dispositions that I identified construe their autonomous zones in different ways. And also *within* the personal lives of the people discussed, different kinds of TAZ operate alongside each other. Each of the

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[257] Law enforcement at Burning Man happens in cooperation between the 'Black Rock Rangers' - community peacekeepers of the Burning Man community itself - and county policemen. Arrests are made at Burning Man for drugs sale, speeding and possession of weapons. The attitude of the county policemen at Burning Man is typically quite laid-back.

TAZ spaces mentioned has a different social dynamic and different key practices. They also celebrate different kinds of expertise, embrace different kinds of tools and identify themselves vis-à-vis the larger society in different terms. Some juxtapose their 'autonomous sphere' explicitly against church dogma or social prejudices. For others mainstream technological naiveté, spying authorities, corporate consumerism, gender stereotyping, or alienation are more relevant qualifiers to consider how the TAZ differs from mainstream society. It is, then, difficult to define in any unambiguous way what it is that deems a TAZ 'special.' If we try, for instance, to define a TAZ as a space that is non-corporate, we dismiss the experience of some ravers who were introduced to raving in corporate settings. To illustrate this point further: Damer's observation that the dot.com crash led to a renewed interest in the Autonomous Zone Burning Man cannot be generalized into the notion that a TAZ *intrinsically* implies the negation of corporate life. For instance, one raver I interviewed, Mike Migurski (1977), discovered raving around the time that "the dot com boom was just kicking into gear". [258] Migurski's rave friends were just "founding companies" and were "well off doing technology stuff". The optimism that Migurski felt in this rave scene had everything to do with the economic high times of the late 1990s. Mike:

> The Dao hit 10.000 at some point in 98, all my friends were getting ridiculously rich at that time, optimism was really big here at that time, everything went kind of up up up up up, wherever you were. The optimism was kind of baked into everybody around that time, especially here. (...) people had this subconsciouss expectation that everything was going to continue to get more and more wonderful every year.[259]

In this case, the spiritual appeal of raving was thus married to economic prosperity. And when the bubble burst, this was also the end of raving for Mike, and for many others with him. Another raver told me how the rave community fell apart after the crash. People stopped attending parties and needed to focus on more mundane things like gaining income and finding new homes. For Mike, this period coincided with a sense that raving felt somehow 'scripted', lacking creative energy.

Mike's story is diametrically opposite to Galen's, yet what is constant is that their optimistic, spiritual celebration of high-tech environments were shared in the context of communities they trusted. Whereas the corporate-non-corporate dichotomy does not fully explain the significance of TAZ environments within New Edge, this notion of trust does. Psychedelics advocates like Bright, artists like Brandt and Laurel, hackers like Jonathan and Gary and 'reality hackers' like Nik require, each in their own ways, a social environment that they can trust in order to fulfill their boundary-transgressing and transformational aspirations. For Bill Bright this means being part of an environment where there is a permissive attitude

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[258] Interview Dorien Zandbergen with Mike Migurski, San Francisco, December 8 2005.
[259] Ibid.

towards psychedelics. For Galen Brandt and Brenda Laurel it means being in an environment where creative projects cannot suddenly be interrupted by external corporate restrictions like non-disclosure agreements or a sudden lack of money. For hackers like Gary it means operating in an environment where other people are technologically-savvy and responsible enough not to blindly rely on technologies that they know are unsafe. For Nik, trust is forged in relation to his wariness about computer hacking as well as about the illegality of drugs-use.

In the stories of the psychedelics advocate, artists, hackers and reality hacker, we have seen against what kinds of socialities the celebration of a TAZ is contrasted. However, we have not yet gained a proper understanding of how a sociality based on trust may be cultivated. As the many sociological studies of trust illustrate, this is not an easy question to address. As the German management philosopher Guido Möllering argues in his discussion of the sociology of trust, people may come up with many different kinds of explanations for *why* they trust. Yet, Möllering argues in line with George Simmel's study of trust, "there is no automatic logic connecting interpretations (...) to trustful favourable expectation" (2001: 413). Notwithstanding the many recent studies that have appeared on the way in which trust is generated,[260] it remains an open question, contingent with particular life-worlds and experiential settings, how in a particular situation trust is shaped and explained. Trust, as originally theorized by the German philosopher Georg Simmel, contains an "element of socio-psychological quasi-religious faith", that is "hard to describe" (Simmel 1990: 179 in Möllering 2001: 405). Trust, Simmel postulated, depends not only on cognitive, calculative and inductive knowledge but also on "another type of confidence" that "stands outside the categories of knowledge and ignorance" (2001: 406).

In the last section of this chapter, without seeking to formulate a definitive, all-encompassing account of how an experience of 'trust' may be generated in the context of a TAZ, I will use my own experiences at Burning Man to argue that the Do It Yourself ethic may well shape good conditions for the generation of such experiences. During my second attendance of Burning Man I experienced how trust came as part of the act of practicing 'Do It Yourself'. The type of trust that I began to experience, moreover, may be likened to that 'other type of confidence' that Simmel spoke about: while growing from the social relationships that developed as part of a long period of intense cooperation, in my experience it

[260] Möllering summarizes: "By way of illustration, many influential typologies of trust make explicit reference to the idea that trust can be produced in various analytically distinct but practically complementary ways, for instance: process-based, characteristic-based and institutional-based trust (Zucker 1986), cognition-based and affect-based trust (McAllister 1995), or calculus-based, knowledge-based and identification-based trust (Lewicki and Butler 1996)" (Möllering 2001: 404).

extended out into the larger environment of Burning Man. As such, it obtained the characteristic of 'pronoia' - that magical quality I had heard so much about.

Returning To Burning Man

In 2005 I attended Burning Man for the first time and did not quite 'get it' then. Talks of 'pronoia' seemed delusional to me and all the hyperbolic and ecstatic acts of self-celebration seemed to me the mark of a general Californian weirdness, that I could not make much sense of. In 2008 I returned to Burning Man again with quite a different intention and a different grasp of how I could make 'it' work this time: I chose to be much more involved in the practical arrangements and building of the camp, and was quite overcome by the social effects that this had. In this last section, I will return to the New Edge environment of Burning Man to make explicit what kind of sociality can here be constructed through committed 'Do It Yourself' creation and how this sociality can grant quite a special significance to this event.

Burning Man 2005

When going to Burning Man it is possible to camp by yourself, yet most people choose to join a 'theme camp', or - a larger variant of a 'theme camp' - a 'village.' The prime requirement for a theme camp is that it 'engages' BM visitors and that it is radically open and welcoming to anyone. When registered beforehand, your theme-camp is assigned to a reserved spot and placed on the map that is handed out to every visitor at the gate. 'Theme-camps' generally offer a particular kind of 'service' to the 'BM community.'

In late August 2005 I attended Burning Man for the first time. By that time I had only been in California for three months - from March until May - and by that time I had a vague idea of the general 'scene' in which I would explore cybergnostic spirituality. My initial ethnographic explorations left me with three options as to what camp to join at Burning Man. I was invited to join a theme-camp of computer hackers in their 20s, a camp of computer hackers who were in between their 20s and 40s and who facilitate internet connection at Burning Man, and I could join a camp of 30 to 40 year old members of the rave-collective 'Dance'. Because 'raving' had my particular interest at the time, I decided to join the latter group.

Joining a theme-camp generally starts with subscribing to a mailing-list and with signing a form through which you introduce yourself and the 'skills' you have to offer to the rest of the members. You also pay a fee - in addition to the general Burning Man ticket - that pays for the communal services that the particular camp chooses to provide. In the case of 'Dance', this fee was used, among others, to rent a truck, to build the DJ 'booth', a 'shower', a kitchen area, and the banner of the camp.

A few weeks prior to Burning Man the group organized a rave in a warehouse in San Francisco as a fundraiser for Burning Man. And as Burning Man was approaching, communication on the emaillist grew ever more frequent. People were discussing how to protect the DJ booth from the sand, how to create power, how to build the shower, how to ensure the camp would not become too large, where to place the cars, and 'volunteer shifts' were allotted to camp members. The camp was composed of people whose jobs varied from programmers, fashion designers, lawyers, schoolteachers, financial administrators and students. The millionaire entrepreneur and software designer Gary took Marijke and me under his wings. He helped us to get enough water and offered us a ride in the back of his SUV, in the shade of which Marijke and I set up our tent.

Due to a variety of factors, my role in the creation of the camp that year was rather passive and observing. In the first place, having been away from California in the summer I had missed some preparatory meetings and wasn't sure what 'skill' or 'resources' I could contribute to the camp, other than signing up for volunteer shifts such as 'greeting new arrivals' and keeping the camp clean. Secondly, it was clear that the participants of this camp had known each other for so long that they had become entirely self-sufficient with the resources and skills they already had. Dance had been organizing events together for over ten years, and I quickly became aware of the routine ways in which the core members also set up this Burning Man camp. The group collectively owned speakers, turn-tables, video-projectors; some of the members had licenses for driving cranes; there were members in the group who could DJ, and some of the members were very wealthy and could provide special items. Hence, it was unclear to me where and how I could add. Thirdly, for Marijke and myself the entire event was overwhelming and so new that we were very busy determining our boundaries with respect to it: how to negotiate our own desire for sleep with the ongoing pounding of music all-night long? How to deal with the fact that it seemed - in that camp - a habitual routine to take drugs? How to bond with people when we decided not to take drugs? How to dress? How to negotiate boundaries in relation to the free-sexual mores of this space? The environment in the rave camp was intense and demanding in a way that was not inviting us to blend and blur in.

That first year, Marijke and I were busy negotiating our boundaries. Clearly we did not trust this environment well enough to become fully involved in the sensory-violating immersive aspects of the event. Implicitly, we decided to enjoy the festival in that other 'mode': we got up early to have coffee in Center Camp where we watched the dancers and performers; we got high up on art cars and drove across the playa to enjoy the scenery. The festival was amazingly beautiful, and I was ready to enjoy it in this 'distanced' way. From this distanced position, we observed also those 'loopy' remarks around us with some irony: "isn't it amazing", a woman said to us, "I was just thinking about how thirsty I am and

then I was offered this lemonade". The woman had experienced pronoia, whereas all we could remark was that in this environment, where people constantly have all kinds of drinks and food on offer, it is hard not to have your thirst or desire for shade satisfied. We also remarked to ourselves that all the rhetoric of danger, risk, burning heat and sandstorms was greatly exaggerated. We were leisurely enjoying the many shade structures, and the storms didn't seem so different from those that come across the Netherlands in spring and autumn times.

Burning Man 2008

How different was my experience the second time I joined Burning Man: remembering the distanced appreciation of BM the first time, I now wanted to understand what it means to 'get it'. My understanding was that I could only begin to experience this when I would join a camp where I could fully participate. I made sure this time that I would be in California in due time to be involved in preparations, and that I would join a camp where members didn't know each other that well yet in advance. I enquired with my friend Nik (the reality hacker discussed earlier) what camp to join. Nik himself wasn't sure yet which camp he would join, but introduced me through email to one of his female friends who was in the process of setting up a theme-camp that centered around a form of meditative dance that is called 5-rhythm. By building a theme-camp called *Rhythm Wave*, a woman whom I call Cloe wanted to bring 5-rhtyhm dances to the 'playa'.

With BM starting in late August of 2008, by the time I enquired with Cloe, in mid-July, she was just getting ready to organize the camp and to 'recruit' members. I subscribed onto her mailinglist, and in the course of several weeks people were introducing themselves to it. Through the list I met a mother and a son who were coming in from Australia. I also met a 'yoga-loving roboticist at NASA' and an organic food farmer who were partners and lived together in Menlo Park. Through the email-list I was furthermore introduced to a computer programmer-turned massage therapist from Oakland, a nurse from LA, a photographer from San Francisco, a youth-worker from Brighton, UK, a furniture designer from LA, a construction worker from Santa Cruz, a river-activist from Minnesota and a computer programmer from San Francisco.

In the course of several weeks, different tasks were allocated to different people, depending on their expertise. The construction worker created the bamboo dancefloor that would be the pride of our camp and the biggest 'service' to the larger 'Burning Man community': with the alkaloid sand cracking feet easily, a bamboo dance floor offered opportunity to dance barefoot. We would also bring DJ's and yoga teachers. The DJ's would 'spin' music several times a day while guiding the dancing crowd on the floor through the movements. The programmer created our website and arranged our online registration forms; his girlfriend designed flyers that would make people on the playa aware of our presence; the

food farmer took care of a 'meal plan' that people, who wanted to eat communally, could sign up for in exchange of a modest fee; the river activist would create a fountain in a shade structure for people who wanted to relax from dust and heat; the nurse from LA would bring her medical kit; the photographer would take photos of us and the 'yoga-loving roboticist' was useful in an 'all-round way'. Others would create the shower, the kitchen, arranged water - we needed to have a plan for what to do with waste water and how to store the potable water - and Nik, although he did not camp with us himself created our 'floor plan.'

I helped with cleaning. Prior to the festival, I spent several afternoons with other members of the camp in Cloe's garden. Here we cleaned and sorted all the stuff that this camp had bought for the previous Burning Man and that it had stored, still entirely covered in dust, in a storage room in Oakland. I also helped loading the truck and I accompanied the truck driver when we, as the first two, set out to build the camp before Burning Man had opened to the larger public. Present at the site at Burning Man, furthermore, I helped set up the bamboo dance floor and create a signpost out of cut-up CDs.

Compared to 2005, I was much more involved, 'shared sweat' with other camp members, and became slowly intoxicated by the ongoing stream of positive encouragements. These encouragements already began on the emaillist: "you guys rock!", "this camp is amazing", "I already love you all" were common messages coming from people who, like myself, had not even met most other camp members in person. The furniture designer from LA wrote:

> Whoa everyone,
> I want to manifest the blessings of what my retreats at burningman always give me. There is hardly a day where I am not in contact with some wonderful person befriended through sharing the experience. Burningman has shown me the layers of conditioning that were so easy to peel away after ripening under the BRC sun. I am ready for another treatment. It gets sweeter as the layers fall.
> I am looking forward to being part of the great camp all of you have been putting together this year and share with you some of my super special energy.
> I am so grateful.

Others would reflect on the 'spirit of BM':

> Deeper in the spirit of gift economy is the gift of services: a helping hand erecting shelter, a lovingly prepared meal for others to enjoy, advice on costuming, a safe space for emotional expression, a deeply felt smile. The gift of service is to truly perceive where another person is in a particular moment, and to somehow facilitate that moment toward their satisfaction.

Cloe herself was the most generous with handing out compliments. Cloe made sure that everyone who helped was publically thanked and recognized on the email-list.

Also the first few days of the camp, I noticed the genuine empathy of many of the people in the camp. These days we were all working on the dance-floor, on our own homes and on communal structures like a shower, a dome and a kitchen.

As a way of thanking me for driving to Burning Man early, the construction worker from Santa Cruz had brought me cold beer from home. And while I was busy working somewhere else, he had put a structure over my tent as protection against heat, dust and wind. I received massages and began giving them in return. And also in the act of dancing I noticed myself 'opening up' more than I had done before at Burning Man. Prior to coming here, I had felt very uncomfortable dancing to '5-rhtyms'. Yet here, with people whom I had come to know in the course of work, it was easy and fun. On the bamboo floor, I was lifted up and spinned around by the camp members, and before I knew it I had spent three hours in a row on a dance-floor (fig 18 and 19).

As the week progressed, the intensity of social life in the camp increased and became rather heavy at times. The exhaustion many people felt from the preparations for Burning Man or from long job hours prior to arriving, began to be felt. People now gathered in smaller groups and began sharing emotional stories and personal tragedies. The river activist told me he had lost his wife years ago one year after they got married. He was still mourning her death as well as the fact that they never had any children. Throughout the week, the man had performed a fatherly role: he had accompanied me through a dust storm to the other side of BM and had taken care of my cracked feet. The very last day of Burning Man, as the tall constructions were taken down and the playa became empty and quiet again, he told me how it had been transformational and healing for him to perform this role - to feel as a father to me.

The nurse from LA was 'processing' heavy tragedies in her own life, such as a past with an abusive father and her suffering from anorexia. During the 'Temple Burn' she was crying out loud while others held her. For some, the transformation came after the event: Chris who had been quiet and grumpy all week got into a severe car accident when driving back from BM. His email on the list showed him grateful again for being alive, apologized for being so closed up and thanked us for trying to 'reach out' to him again.

It was nice during this intensity to be able to 'escape' to other, more lighthearted camps, or to join individuals within the camp who were cheerful and not publicly 'processing' anything. Yet, this phase in our camp gave me good insight into how, as part of 'Do It Yourself' communal creation, people opened up to each other in emotional ways. While building experiences of trust as part of the necessary reliance on one another in terms of technological, organizational, or managerial needs, people were creating clearer visions for themselves about their deepest values.

For me, apart from the dancing, my 'immersive moment' came during the sand storm the last night. After the Temple Burn, it had become dark and a very strong dust storm came on. I was with a few camp members and we couldn't even see our own hands before our eyes. We began stumbling into one direction, but

soon realized that we didn't have a clue which way to go. It began to rain softly and the nurse from LA was getting cold. It was right after her moment of emotional breakdown, and it now seemed as if she was getting into a shock. She needed to go somewhere comfortable, I felt.

In a moment of inspiration, I told them all to hold hands and to follow me. While I walked into, what I thought was, the direction of our camp, I bumped into a structure. It was a shed, in front of which a bunch of people were seated around a heater. Pronoia! We stayed there for some surreal moments. Due to the thunderous sound of the storm and the fact that we all wore goggles and mouth caps to protect our faces, we could neither see each other clearly, nor speak to each other. Standing silently and half-blinded in a small circle around the heater, with only dust and darkness surrounding us, I felt we had entered a dream-like reality. Our fronts were warm and lid, our backs were cold with thugs of wind grasping our clothes and all that seemed to exist was some sense of togetherness.

After a little while, I took the lead again and we stepped into the storm. Holding hands, with me on front, I walked straight to our camp. With all the talk that surrounded me all week, of 'seeing clearly' and 'knowing better', I now felt that I could see in a different way - through the dust and darkness right to where we needed to be.

During Burning Man 2008 I realized that the act of 'Doing it Yourself' is not quite what the term says. It is quite social in nature. As part of this practice, I experienced a kind of sociality that was remarkably strong considering the short amount of time that we were building it. People of the camp seemed fully committed to building the camp and to caring for each other. Encouragements to 'be a leader' and public recognition for help were a significant part of it. For me, life in this camp was a strong antidote to my academic, cognitive and sedentary life. In contrast to this life, Burning Man really was a place that 'immersed' me in an intense way in an interactive and engaging reality. This reality felt quite meaningful and interesting and was lavishly physical. In contrast to my daily professional life where I had been mostly observant, it felt as a relief to be holding an electric screwdriver, to be driving in a truck, to be carrying heavy wood, and to dance while only feeling a little bit embarrassed. In addition, these acts of Doing It Yourself also fed into my sense of responsibility for the camp and for the camp members, more than I felt so in 2005. That year, the art seemed more vibrant and I left with quite a special feeling. When I arrived back home, and when I found myself secretly taking out the dustbin for neighbors I had never met before, I knew that I had 'gotten it' and that I wanted to spread the sense of pronoia.

Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at New Edge from the perspective of its 'sociality.' What is it in the social make-up of 'ritualistic' New Edge environments, I asked, that

facilitates the understanding that genuine transformation and true creativity are possible here?

The findings in this chapter may be used to critically question the concept of the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone.' This term is used both by scholars and participants to grasp the special significance of occasions like Burning Man. It suggests that an actual break is forged between everyday life and the ritualized sphere of events like Burning Man. In academic and in emic reflections on a 'TAZ', dichotomies between a corporate and a non-corporate, a restrictive and permissive, a mundane and a sacred sphere are often evoked. However, by zooming in on the sociological fact that many different people celebrate the 'autonomy' of places like Burning Man from quite different starting positions, I was led to conclude that the special quality of a TAZ cannot be phrased in such dichotomizing, universalistic terms. The 'autonomy' of a TAZ may, for instance, be juxtaposed against a corporate sphere or it may be congruent with corporate practice. It may be linked to a sense of permissiveness vis-à-vis the use of illegal substances or it may be juxtaposed against an 'anomic' mainstream world. And it may be celebrated in relation to a shared sense of technological savvyness or of artistic experimental freedom.

In this chapter, I postulated also that the subjective quality that permeates through all the TAZ environments that I studied, is 'trust.' By means of portraits of four participants of New Edge TAZ environments, and using my own experiences of Burning Man 2008, I explored this notion of trust in more depth. As part of the four portraits, I looked at the way that artists, hackers, psychedelics advocates and reality hacker Nik situate themselves within a larger society. I observed that for each of the people portrayed, a TAZ serves to ameliorate feelings of social, or 'universal' unease; sometimes even transforming these into experiences of social, or 'universal' connection. My own experiences at Burning Man served to understand some of the ways in which trust may be generated. Whilst acknowledging that it is impossible to identify a universal mechanism for the generation of trust, I discovered that the practice of Doing It Yourself works as a powerful leverage for it. As part of long-term intense and 'hands-on' working relations with people that were unfamiliar to me at first, I built intimate social ties with my camp members in Burning Man 2008. I witnessed how, in the context of such relationships people divested themselves of sadness and unease in their daily lives. A sense of community unfolded that, experienced in its most intensified form, did not seem to me social in kind. Instead, it seemed a quality of the larger environment of Burning Man. During Burning Man 2005, I had heard people refer to this environmental quality with the term ‘pronoia.’ It was only in 2008, in the context of the social intimacy then experienced, that I could personally understand what this sense of pronoia in a New Edge TAZ environment could mean.