

ecstasy and the status quo - <transcending the invisible barrier>

by Jesse Desenberg (Kid Kenobi)

These kids are natives in a land where the rest of us are innocent.

And these kids speak the language like natives, and, speak it, better, than you and I might ever...

This is their culture, and they built it.

This is their culture, and I think its we who have to look to them to (know) how to navigate our course through this terrain.

Not they who should be looking to us.

- 'Their Culture' B.L.I.M. [Gervase Cooke]. Additional creative input by Vincent Medley. EMOTIF Records, 1995, UK.

'Sex, drugs, and Rock 'n Roll', declares the popularised motto of deviant youth cultures. Each generation has had its own variants, and each to some extent has been ostracised by the dominant culture for believing in the maxim. In the last four years Australia has caught on to what has been steadily gaining momentum in Europe and America - raves. Centred on the 'dance party', this new sub-culture has come under intense scrutiny from society, in particular for its association with the drug *ecstasy*. On one side lies the dominant elites *perception* of rave culture, on the other side of the *invisible barrier* lies the ostracised youth sub-culture. This essay attempts to unearth the fabricated perception of the inner aesthetic and moral bent of this sub-culture from the authentic nature of its existence. In effect this essay will question the representation of this sub-culture both in the media and in the eyes of the moral and aesthetic perception of reality upheld by the dominant culture. In questioning the ignorant and stereotyped perception of rave culture this youth sub-culture throws into question the perception of reality itself.

Perhaps more than any other element of the rave scene the drug *ecstasy* has created an invisible barrier between the *established* culture and the *sub-culture*. *Ecstasy* is fundamental to the framework of understanding by which the dominant culture and its 'voice', the media, perceives raves and ravers. Media discourses concerning *ecstasy* are based primarily on *moral panic*. Moral panic itself is based on sub-cultural mythology. In his essay, '*The Politics of Ecstasy*', Steve Redhead suggests that it is discourses *on* drugs which produce the problem, not the other way around. The function of 'moral panic' is to maintain a strong relationship between the rave sub-culture, the 'news item', and well established sub-cultural mythologies. As Stuart Hall states in his essay; '*The Narrative Construction of Reality*':

...you can't develop an account...out of absolutely nowhere every time you tell the story. You constantly draw on the inventory discourses which have been established over time...I am talking about the fact that in any society we all constantly make use of a whole set of frameworks of interpretation and understanding, often in a very practical unconscious way, and those things lone enable us to make sense of what is going on around us, what our position is, and what we are likely to do.

Quite literally *ecstasy* users have been attributed many of the characteristics attributed to previous 'folk devils' - punks, hippies, mods and rockers etc. However, while the same framework of understanding has been used to define these sub-cultural peripheries, what the media fails to do is draw parallels. What society witnesses is another, new threat in a series of unrelated sub-cultural threats. The utilisation of a basic framework of understanding allows society to understand, to categorise, and to homogenise rave culture in the same neat box that previous sub-cultures were placed. What it simultaneously prevents is the *relationship* between previous sub-cultures and today's rave culture to exist. It prevents the

understanding that rather than a series of similar, yet isolated threats, sub-cultural peripheries are a constant re-evaluation of the dominant society. Labelling and isolation diffuses the threat that outsiders and *re-evaluation* is a *constant presence*. They are seen as a series of isolated events or 'movements' with a beginning and an end - battles won and fought by the dominant elite against those beyond the city gates.

What all of this opposes is the perception of young outsiders as a continual flow, a living thing. It prevents an understanding of the *individual* nature of the sub-culture so easily diffused by regarding the sub-culture as a *threat*. The media in particular *constructs*, yet fails to *understand* the raver as a threat to the status-quo, which is indeed the irony of questioning its own role in society - as a voice of the status quo. The media fails to understand the ability of the sub-culture to express transgression, to challenge the status-quo, the ruling class or 'hegemony' which manifests itself in the form of *common sense*, concerning *morality* and *aesthetics*. The point being that drug taking is seen as a threat, yet the threat itself is not understood.

An invisible barrier is created not only between mainstream and peripheral cultures, but also between generations of peripheral cultures. As opposed to seeing rave culture as a cultural evolution from previous generations of hippies or punks it is seen as an isolated event that perhaps bears no relationship to sub-cultures in recent history which older generations relate to. Whether this is a product of media discourses concerning rave culture or the relationship between youth rebellion and sub-cultural peripheries that allows older generations to *grow out* of their sub-cultural defiance, what is created is a severe lack of understanding and subsequent isolation of the rave culture. Much of which is discussed later in this essay.

Ecstasy, as a drug, is central to any framework of interpretation concerning the rave scene. It is clear that ecstasy and rave culture go hand in glove. Ecstasy use allows the mass media to ostracise ravers while at the same time forces ravers to accept their ostracism. It is that one particular element of the individuals personality which comes to seem so important to the rest of society, so crucial, so absorbing that all the rest has to be stabilised and consolidated around it. The one way in which the individual differs from the majority is taken to negate and disqualify all those ways in which he or she is similar.

When the individual is transformed, and accepts some special identity, his perception of the world around him is transformed also. It is not too much to say that the individual comes to inhabit a different reality from that in which the conventional man dwells.

Taking drugs, in this instance ecstasy, is outside of the status quo, of common sense. As a consequence, in order to enhance the idea that ecstasy is outside of aesthetics and morality, the picture often painted of ecstasy related deaths entertains the discourse that ecstasy takes lives, rather than lives taking ecstasy. It is perhaps intrinsic to campaigns - if not wars - against ecstasy related deaths. Irradiation rather than purification. Understanding that lives take drugs would not coincide with the belief that ecstasy is a murderer. It would strip the drug of its sinister connotations:

At 6am he was taking phone calls from strangers, all but one full of praise for his family's bravery and composure in the face of the awful grief of losing a child to a drug named ecstasy.

Anna Wood - with no disrespect - is a perfect symbol of the reinforcement of the status quo by a framework of interpretation borrowed from previous persecutors in Britain. The day after Anna Woods funeral, *The Daily Telegraph Mirror* ran a front page stating:

As these girls said last farewells to school friend Anna Wood the merchants of the evil trade that killed her were doing...BUSINESS AS USUAL.

It is what, as Hillegonda Rietveld calls 'unscrupulous drug dealers and warehouse party organisers...in a seduction of the innocent.' The 'innocent' is seen as the highest purified form of the status-quo, the pure incarnation of the ruling elite's ideas of morality and aesthetics. The 'seduction' of the 'innocent' re-enacts the idea of raping the innocent of its youth, of abusing the pure aesthetics and morals held by the innocent on a symbolic level of interpretation, while re-enacting the idea of sexual assault on a practical level, primarily that of an 'innocent' girl.

In Britain, the portrayal of the 'victims' of this 'evil cult' quickly shifted from the category of 'young people' in general to specifically young women. It was young women who were primarily spotted smoking cannabis or taking the hallucinogenic drug LSD. The amphetamine designer drug ecstasy, the drug which

had been closely related to Acid House events, was described as a 'sex drug', implying and coinciding with the dangers of sexual violation.

The Acid House story was re-written in a tabloid version of the bogey man - combining the moralism of the cautionary tale with the excess of the horror story - as acid pied pipers sought to seduce their unsuspecting prey [typically young girls] with their evil wares, calling on the alluring spell of 'killer music' and the hypnotic charm of their calling cards: the smiley logo. Somewhat reminiscent of the way black Jazz musicians had lured white women with Jazz and marijuana during the Reefer Madness of the 1920's. Antonnio Melechi, in his 'Ecstasy of Disappearance' essay quotes *The Sun*, November 7, 1988:

Police raided a huge acid house disco yesterday/ then fled to let 3000 teenagers carry on raving it up at the sex and drugs orgy...some reports saw pushes openly selling ecstasy, a drug which heightens sexual awareness, but can lead to hallucinations and heart attacks. Outrageous sex-romps taking place on a special stage in front of the dance floor.

Drugs are associated with *moral indecency*, on par with *sex* and *violence*. Ostracised from the inner circles of acceptability each 'indecency' helps to define, reinforce, and construct an understanding of each others position in the status quo.

In the week ending April 23 1938, a drug of a different kind was invading the moral standard of the status quo - marijuana. The Australian newspaper, *Smith's Weekly*, ran the following warning about the drug:

A Mexican drug that drives men and women to the wildest sexual excesses has made its first appearance in Australia. It distorts moral values and leads to degrading sexual extravagances. It is called marihuana...

The article goes on to say that "the addict becomes at times an uncontrollable sex-maniac, able to obtain satisfaction from the most appalling of perversions and orgies."

The media 'understands' drug taking in accordance with the moral standards of the time. Reality is based on the perception of the ruling elite. The reality of drug taking is therefore based on a construction of reality by those in antithesis to the peripheral culture.

Two days after the death of Anna Wood the *Telegraph Mirror* ran an article titled '*The Secret Signs of Anna's Death*' which attempted to explore the 'secret language of drug imagery' which was 'indecipherable to parents' and was being used to 'lure' - again the idea of *seduction* - teenagers to dance parties. It went as far as to say:

Images such as these lured Anna Wood into taking ecstasy before going to a dance party on Saturday night.

The inside pages continued to expose 'Ecstasy's Secret World' by defining the use of 'e', 'smiley faces', and the like. It must be noted that this media attention comes at a time when the dance party spectacular or 'rave' is being considered by those who have been in the scene since its Australian conception in 1991/92 as 'commercial' or 'mainstream'. In Britain, the acceptance of the profit-making motive in 'raving organisations' drew such widespread support from punters, especially in the wake of an increasing state moral authoritarianism and constant media tales of youths in 'smiley' T-shirts that raves slowly moved from 'underground' to 'commercial':

There seemed to be an eagerness to cleanse the consciousness of the 'darker' side of the Thatcherite entrepreneurial spirit of the 80's. As a result of this type of publicity, rave events became big business, as though constituting a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As a consequence, raves were produced on scales unfamiliar to 'older' ravers. The media, ironically, were intrinsic to this commercialisation. The distorted, manufactured press and television image in turn became 'real' as more and more participants acted out media stereotypes.

In Australia, commercials advertising everything from National Parks to breakfast cereals, and in particular, a Coke ad - specifically targeting several youth sub-cultures - have all included dance parties and dance music as central marketing devices. The act of *cashing in* on sub-cultures subsequently becomes a commercial cleansing of the sub-culture at hand, a re-rendering of the sub-culture in accordance with the status quos level of acceptability. Ecstasy, intrinsic to rave culture, is replaced with a placebo. The product being marketed, for example, Coke, becomes a sublimated drug. It is the Coke or

Lucozade drink which inspires and drives the teenagers to dance, party and express themselves. All that separates the ad from the rave is the perception of the stimulant and the rendering of the stimulant to certain groups. If images of ecstasy 'lured' Anna Wood into taking ecstasy then it would be fair enough to say that ideas of ecstasy are being used to lure consumers into buying soft drinks.

Where techno was once the ultimate 'underground' sound, it is now being established on par with Rap and Rock music. Sporting broadcasts, commercial 'top 40' radio and television commercials are legitimising the experience of raves to a mass audience while simultaneously suppressing the culture that gave it birth. A dual train of thought is created whereby rave culture can be accepted on the one hand and yet ostracised on the other without any discrepancies in the ambiguity of such a perception.

When youths seek out the authentic sub-culture beneath the shimmering media-scape they move from one hand to the other without disturbing the ambiguous perception of rave culture. Youths move out of what is accepted as moral and aesthetic and into what is peripheral. They reverse the status quo's act of osmosis - of extremist beliefs - by giving authenticity to the cleansed experience. Through this 'reversal' they move *against* the grain of society and into stereotypes of 'rebels' and 'outsiders', outside what has been rendered, perceived and accepted as 'normal'.

Not only does media commercialisation question what really does lure teenagers to raves - by the means above - but also the media's role in voicing issues of public interest. It should be noted that two or three years ago people attending raves rarely progressed below the age of 18. Since the incredible amounts of media attention and consequent economic viability of dance parties raves have seen a dramatic leniency in an accepted age bracket, falling well below 18. The media is acting out its own dreaded self fulfilling prophecy.

More importantly, by refusing to acknowledge the origins of the 'validated perception' of the dance party the authentic sub-culture suffers, with:

The smaller parties are already feeling the pinch of the hysteria with at least three underground events unable to go ahead as their venues have since backed down on prior bookings...yet these are the parties LEAST likely to attract 15 year olds. They are also the future of the wider scene, cultivating musical talent and developing the commercial styles of the future.

preventing perhaps the act of osmosis intrinsic to the survival of a *popular culture*.

I myself was sitting in the Hollywood Hotel, a small pub in Surry Hills, about one week after Anna Woods' death when we were told that the night - playing anything but commercial techno - would finish three hours early due to police crackdowns. What the hell had a girl dying of an e got to do with a small cosy scene playing abstract hip-hop, a scene consuming anything but ecstasy? If you want to help, go help the 16 year old heroin addict dying alone in a corner five minutes up the road.

What becomes apparent is that drugs are outside the invisible barrier. The heroin addict has no home, no family and is therefore ostracised because of this. The addict who needs help more than anyone is seen as nothing more than the drug they consume, they can be dismissed totally because of this. Anna Wood on the other hand comes from a family that is identifiable to a vast majority of Australians. As a consequence the drug is separated from Anna Wood, as Anna Wood comes to symbolise the relationship between drugs and the status quo, while the drug addict is the evil of the drug incarnate. The media rhetoric concerning Anna Wood places the drug with the addict outside of society and keeps Anna Wood apart of the status quo by reinforcing the belief that Anna was both an inexperienced drug user and a victim not a drug user. With an incredible emphasis on the hardships faced by the Woods family - such as Anna's older sister confronting the HSC - they are perhaps coming to symbolise a great Australian myth incarnate. Drawing on the inventory discourses which have been established over the last 200 years of white settlement the Woods are perhaps coming to symbolise the last in a long line of Aussie battlers. The convict, the digger and the bushman, have already won their battles against the harsh unknown - the Aboriginal, Turk, and arid outback. It seems the media is creating a new Australian hero battling threats to the status quo and its future:

No decision could have been harder for a family to make and the anguish suffered by the Woods is shared by every parent. Anna Wood was yet another victim of the criminals who peddle their evil products in this country...As a matter of urgency this council [on Crime Prevention] should look at eradicating the use of illegal drugs of all types in NSW... Every drug death impoverishes our nation immeasurably. It would be unpardonable if we

now ignore this most recent tragedy and permit the insidious murderers of our young people to keep destroying the future of our country.

But what is it about drug taking - aside from physical effects - that poses such a dire threat to the status quo? In his essay on 'hippy' culture, titled *The Cultural Meaning of Drug Use*, Paul E. Willis suggests that:

In fact, the importance of drugs [does] not lie in their direct physical effects, but in the way they facilitated passing through a great symbolic barrier erected over against 'straight' society...He [the drug user] is defined not simply by drug use, but by his existential presence on the other side of this symbolic barrier.

he also suggests that:

...the head [hippy] could ride the forces, experience the forces, that the alert autonomous mind would have nervously blocked. He was free experimentally because he was relieved of the personal task of holding the world together.

Drug taking then takes the user out of the structured reality of the dominant culture. The 'head' gazes at, the 'straight' manages the real world, in doing so is free to perceive, understand, and re-evaluate it. In accepting that he no longer needs to believe in the dominant cultures perceived notions of reality, he is released subsequently of the need to be an active participant in holding that reality together. If reality is based not on reality itself but a perception of the ruling elite, then by disassociating ones self with 'the' perception the drug user is stepping out of reality itself. When one moves 'out of', one moves from one side of the invisible barrier to the other and perhaps, now that one 'gazes', believes that he or she sees the society in question in its true form, an 'actual' reality. Something which the conventional man, in his preoccupation with holding an accepted perception intact, has been devoid.

The survival of a 'status quo' depends almost entirely on the continuation of holding together an accepted perception. However, as Richard Mills suggests in his study of alternative youth cultures:

Adolescence is not, of course, equally turbulent and troubled for all. The chances of feeling oneself the outsider and becoming a hippie are therefore not randomly spread. A portion of young people will always find themselves to be the children of their age, and in tune with its technological, economic and ideological trends. They are predominantly today those schooled in the sciences or with a commitment to particular technical competencies. By and large, hippies are not found among them. For such individuals, youth is not so deeply problematical, and indeed for them no real crisis of identity may occur. They discover in the historical culture into which they move a symmetry and congruence with their own values and skills. They move forward on the wave of the economic and technological trends of their time. Their identity is adequately defined by the roles the culture provides. They reinforce the culture they encounter and that culture validates them. They do not question it, and it does nothing to cause them to question themselves.

What is apparent is a close relationship between drug induced experiences, and many of those experienced at times of great emotional and psychological change. Both experiences re-evaluate the individuals acceptance of his or her self, the acceptance of themselves by and within wider society. Both therefore are the antithesis of a mass cognition. Those who oppose the 'children of their age', become 'rebels', 'young outsiders', and 'deviant youths', misunderstood, if not beyond understanding. It is for this reason that the 'youths of today' are the primary targets of drug use.

In her essay, *Living the Dream*, Hillegona Rietveld takes the transgression ecstasy expresses in terms of a status quo to an even more complex level. Rietveld argues that the use of a dance-drug like ecstasy in a rave environment makes one return to a stage in psychological development which is before the acquisition of language and in and by its constructed discourse.

Language, that "Apollonian creator of the symbolic order", she states, was unable to catch the event, the rave. Participants of any rave event do not seem able to describe the experience as anything else than, "it was wild", "absolutely unbelievable", "there wasn't anything like it", "radical", "insane", "mental", "sick", or "this is not dancing, this is a religion", and so on.

A break is caused with the established symbolic order at a basic level, however temporary. This could possess a greater threat than simply to pose a subcultural style within the context of a so-called 'dominant

culture'. A subcultural style would simply affirm the established order of society by being 'different' from [and therefore defined by] this order. In the case of the rave there was a surrender to a complete void of meaning, rather than some form of resistance.

In their theoretical overview titled *Subcultures, Cultures, and Class*, by John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, the authors point to the relationship between the two sides of the invisible barrier that been discussed thus far - the media and the control culture, and the peripheral subculture. It is interesting to note the authors overview as it provides an alternate perspective on the notion of an invisible barrier. That is, as opposed to seeing the 'dominant culture' from the perspective of an 'actual' reality, it surmises the relationship between the two cultures from the point of view of the status quo as it exists in the media.

The first symbiotic relationship discussed is 'the control culture as primary definers [of a deviant event] and the media as reproducers'. According to the paradigm the routine structures of news production - impartiality and objectivity - direct the media in the first instance to outside, accredited sources. In the case of 'deviant' events, this, in practice, means the 'control culture'. Thus, news items are based in the reproductions of primary definitions presented by the control culture.

On Wednesday October 25th of this year, the *Telegraph Mirror* ran their first article on the 'ecstasy related' death of Anna Wood titled "*Teenagers Tragic Dance Party*" on their front page, followed by a subsequent two page spread. The first 'accredited' source was a 'police spokesman' who stated:

The life support machine was turned off shortly after 4pm.

followed by 'police statements', statements from 'Detective Senior Constable Stephen Page', and an 'ambulance spokesman'. Quotes from 'friends' were included to give an emotional texture to quotes taken from representatives of the 'control culture.' In one instance, a friends comment stating Anna must have had an 'allergic reaction' is juxtaposed, and almost ridiculed by, a quote from a paramedic who states:

We had a report that a 15-year-old girl had vomited - when we got there the girl was not breathing.

The subsequent two page spread went on to quote the 'principal' of the school where Anna Wood was a student 'until two weeks ago', 'police intelligence experts', and an entire article devoted to 'State Intelligence Group Commander Angus Graham.' The control culture went on to define and attack raves and the deviant youth without any reference to those inside the subculture.

The structure of 'balance' reacquires the admission of alternative definitions - such as Anna Woods 'friends' - but these almost always come *later*, and so are required to reply on terrain already marked out by the primary definitions; and they too must come from accredited alternative sources - organisations or experts - and not from the *deviants* themselves.

While the October 25th article attempted to 'expose' the deviant subculture in question, in particular, making scathing comments on *3D World Magazine*, which they referred to as the 'rave' or 'dance party bible', as it advertised the dance party which Anna Wood took ecstasy at. This was done without any reference to the editors of the magazine.

In a follow up article on October 27th the *Telegraph Mirror* ran another front page article and subsequent two page spread - in which the Anna Wood story was contrasted by the opposite page which ran an irrelevant article titled: "*Football Star Jailed 16 Years For Drugs*" - titled: "*Secret Signs of Anna's Death*". It stated:

A secret language of drug imagery, indecipherable to parents, is being used to lure teenagers to dance parties throughout Sydney.

The article went on to state:

Any issue of the mass circulation dance paper 3D World is riddled with such promotions, along with more explicit drug messages to young people.

It is in light of these vindication's - two days after it was first condemned - that the paper *3D World* was

able to respond. On page 4, treading on a well worn path and trying to deal with fairly concrete emotional vindictions of their paper, that *publisher* Jonathan Morris was able to 'defend the references' in a one line quote:

'I think it creates a mystique', Mr Morris said. 'I don't think its advertising drug use'.

However, as the article states, he 'admitted drug symbols were used to advertise dance parties', disqualifying any possibility of defence that may have been drained from these two lines. A similar discourse prevailed throughout the issue. Two 'rave promoters', known as 'Sean' and 'Adam' were the token deviants for the issue giving readers the perception that the paper was interested in 'balance'. However, not only were these deviants walking on ground well trodden but their simple 'first name' basis recognition - the kind of names given to criminals to protect their identities - did battle against the less familiar and slightly more formidable names of control culture experts such as: Australian Federal Police Detective Sergeant Chris Payne; Drug Enforcement Agency Task Force Four Acting Commander Detective Senior Sergeant Michael Donovan, DEA Education and Training Unit Commander Detective Inspector Mick Drury, police and other authorities who exposed the 'promotion', 'secret symbols', trafficking', and the 'rave' of 'drug cultures'. Nestled in amongst all of this was an emotional article by Anna Wood's mother titled: '*Our Girl Must Not Die in Vain*'.

The *Telegraph Mirror* in particular created their public language by reinforcing particular sentiments or discourses which constituted the readers framework of interpretation. The issue of Anna Woods's death was titled '*The Tragedy of Anna*', such that it became a sub-heading for almost all articles concerning Anna Wood. Angela Wood - Anna's mother - Anna's sister doing the HSC, the secret signs of 'rave culture', and Anna's 'friends' sharing their loss amongst others, became discourses on drugs, symbols of the crusades of moral panic. The school photo of Anna headlined every one of their articles, repeated more often than not such that it became the human incarnation of attacks on innocence, morals, and the status quo by ecstasy. Badges bearing the same photo bore the motto: *Say No to Drugs*.

And it is perhaps these three words which have been subject to more controversy than anything else by 'drug cultures'. As is stated in *3D World's* response to the media attention concerning raves '*The Tragedy of Drug Culture*':

The point is simple: there is no escaping drugs, and the current "don't do drugs - they're bad" way of thinking in the upper echelons of authority will not solve the problem either. What we need is to find a way to minimise the risk, to educate, realise that our youth are consuming - at a young age - drugs that can and do harm, cause death, and some of these drugs are LEGAL and ILLEGAL.

'Say No to Drugs' is probably the acme of the philosophical status quo - that drugs lay outside what is accepted, that drugs are the target of the problem, and to eradicate drugs is to purify society and eradicate the issue. 'Say No to Drugs' is a symbolic barrier, simplistic and conventional, it establishes a stable reality that keeps transgression sub culturally suppressed and keeps the dominant culture as the control culture. Transcending this invisible defence subsequently demands a reevaluation of reality itself, it involves a complex paradox that prevents change.

Since the death of their daughter the Wood family has vowed to crusade against the existence of 'illicit drugs' and to uphold the public perception of drugs. Ironically they are acting out one of the contributing factors of their daughters death. By driving the perception of drugs further and further out of what is considered 'normal', the further the youth are from proper education. If Anna's friends had not felt like criminals who didn't 'Say No to Drugs' perhaps they may have been educated - drug educated enough - to call the proper authorities in time for Anna rather than hiding - scared shitless - of the proper 'authorities'.

It is stated in the *Drug and Alcohol Directorate* distributed by the NSW Health Dept. titled *Survey of Ecstasy [MDMA] Users in Sydney* that:

...reports of problems arising from ecstasy use is relatively rare given its widespread use. Given the lack of quality control in manufacture which is an inevitable characteristic of this type of illicit substance, many of the reported acute adverse reactions may have resulted from ingestion of substances other than ecstasy.

'Say No to drugs' does no attempt to remedy the dangers of drug taking, rather it seeks to discriminate between what is right and what is not morally accepted. It attempts to theorise on the perception of drug

taking rather than the act of drug taking itself. To minimise the real dangers of drug taking - not just the dangers to the status quo - would involve a 'normalisation' of drug takers. It would place them inside what is morally accepted, and would subsequently go against the status quo's own train of thought which suggests that drug taking is beyond normality.

The Dutch in particular are pioneering this revaluation. The Dutch have looked around at the 'all out war on drugs' policies of neighbouring countries and decided that they don't want people who take drugs to be marginalised outside mainstream society, outside of help and advice, believing themselves beyond 'normality'. They call it 'Harm Reduction' or 'Normalisation' because the Dutch believe if people are going to do drugs it should be done as safely as possible - in particular ecstasy - after several ecstasy related deaths.

In Holland the people producing ecstasy are not producing the drug in the "filthy conditions of most backyard ecstasy laboratories", where the drug can be "cut with anything, including toxic cleaning compounds or chemicals", rather, these producers are concerned with an ideological manufacture of ecstasy - as opposed to a financial one. These 'missionary producers' as they have been nicknamed, are the result of the Dutch governments realisation that rather than penalise people for taking illicit drugs, they are allowing people to know exactly what drugs they are consuming.

The Jellinek centre in Amsterdam, subsidised by the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, receives between 30 and 50 pills a week and sends them to the National Institute of Alcohol and Drugs, who sends them to a lab in Rotterdam for testing. 70% of the people who use the service are small time dealers who sacrifice a pill to know *exactly* what it is they are dealing. Samples can range in one week from three mgms of MDMA to 330 mgms, they can range from MDMA, to MDEA, to MDA.

Drug education, be it of dealers or consumers, drastically reduces the risk of ecstasy use. 'Stichting Adviesburo Drugs' is another, much smaller organisation funded by the Ministry of Health, the City Council, and NIAD, that takes ecstasy education to the front line. The small organisation provides 'Safehouses' in order to test e tabs at raves.

Each ecstasy testing takes about two minutes. The 'Safehouse' set up consists of two large white dinner plates, a bottle of acid with a dropper in it, a stanley knife, an electronic measuring device, and a print out of the currently available ecstasy tablets. If the acid turns blue when added with a small sample of the given e tab then it is worth measuring the pill and looking up to see which MDMA, MDEA, or MDA brand it could be. If the acid turns orange it could be a speed pill, and if nothing happens it could be anything.

Ecstasy testing of this calibre transcends the invisible barrier between ravers and the capital pill of society. It ministers an improved perspective on the myth which dictates that ecstasy takes lives as opposed to lives consuming ecstasy. As a consequence, ecstasy use transcends the stereotypical classification and consequent exclusion from the 'control cultures' perceptions of reality. The consumption of ecstasy invalidates traditional frameworks of interpretation which associated drug use with 'rebels', and 'outsiders' dicing with death and devoid of moral and aesthetic judgement. Rather, ecstasy use itself becomes a moral and aesthetic judgement and transcends the imaginary line of exclusion - it moves *within* the status quo.

'Say No to Drugs' attempted to distinguish between what was right on the 'inside' and what was wrong on the 'outside'. Ecstasy testing 'says no' to *dangerous* drugs, separating what is in essence *dangerous*, from what is *safe*, rather than simply separating perceived notions of what is moral. Rather than seeing youth, ravers, or ecstasy users as morally moribund outsiders, ecstasy testing understands that these 'rebels', or 'outsiders' are as concerned with the negative effects of drugs as any 'sergeant', 'expert', 'detective', or 'special task force agent' condemning the death of Anna Wood. The 'outsider' sheds his or her two dimensional stereotype and becomes a three dimensional thinking and feeling human being:

Gertian is 19 and anxious looking. He got his pills tested and found that the pill contained 60-80 milligrams of MDMA. "I want safety. I use drugs and it's not good to use drugs but if you use them use them good. I also tested my speed to see if it was good and it was. I only want the best 'cos it's very unhealthy to use drugs." Yessica is 18 and is getting her drugs checked out for very good reasons..."I almost died once", she says, "I took a pill once that was 340 milligrams, that's like three pills in one. My brother took me to first aid and tried to get me out of it. This is very safe, it's good that there is this."

Ecstasy testing also goes on to consider other things, things that place ecstasy use in a social context. First there is the drug, the dosage, how often it's been taken before. Then there is the person, their

character, stability and psychological profile, and finally there is the setting. This perception of ecstasy use demonstrates that 'Say No to Drugs' tends to stereotype and formalise drug use, oversimplifying the relationship between the drug and the drug user.

Perhaps it is lack of education or information that has seen Sydney's youth culture condemned as a result of one girl's experience with ecstasy. One cannot help but wonder what would have resulted if Anna Wood had been able to test her urine on sight before consuming it. Instead her parents - with no disrespect to their loss - are enforcing the status quo's motto of ignorance, preventing perhaps, the one thing that could have saved their daughter, and perhaps many more yet to consume an untested one.

It's 9pm, and there are over 20 little pools of acid on one of the dinner plates. A skinhead looks particularly happy with his 90-100 milligram Bunny and necks it then and there. Two uniformed police show up, one male, one female. Master explains how the test works. "It's good", says the female police officer of the test. "I'd never seen it before but they are using drugs anyway so it's good to have a test." Her colleague agrees: "It's a very good precaution. People have taken things and then collapsed, it's always good to have a test possibility."

- Ecstasy in Amsterdam

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