

Ecstatic Dance: Medieval Dansomania and the Love Parade in Berlin, 1996

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It's not my revolution if I can't dance
Emma Goldman

Introduction

The focus of this article is on the medicalisation of dance, on how certain types of dance, depending on the social context, are seen by commentators as being akin to illness, rather than "legitimate" dance (such as e.g. ballet, folk dance, ballroom dancing), and how the pathologisation of the activity labels it as deviant. Two specific instances have been selected for the purposes of the present paper: the dansomania of 1374 and the Love Parade in Berlin 1996. Though separated by time as well as geography - the dansomania was located in what is now Belgium and France - there are similarities between the two events. These similarities are to be found in the descriptions by non-participants, the commentators, historians and journalists, rather than in the events as such. Some similarities can be found between the events, of course, such as in the mass character of the dances, or in the ecstatic element common to both. But it is the reaction of the viewer-commentator that is strikingly similar, and the gaze of 600 years ago medicalises as much as the gaze of 1996.

Medieval Dansomania

In the summer of 1374 the appearance of certain dancers was noticed in the Low Countries and northern France by the lay and ecclesiastical chroniclers; apparently these dancers were originating from the cities of the Rhine region and spreading into France and Flanders. Some of the dances were called the "dances of St John" or of "St Vitus" because of their 'Bacchantic' leaps and jumps¹ which characterized them, and 'which gave to those affected, whilst performing their wild dance, and screaming and foaming with fury, all the appearance of persons possessed.'² At Aix-la-Chapelle in 1374 men and women 'continued dancing, regardless of the bystanders, for hours together in wild delirium, until at length they fell to the ground in a state of exhaustion'³. While dancing they are oblivious to their surroundings, they shriek, scream, and rave - note the use of "rave" in its older meaning of manic behaviour - and they have visions which 'according as

¹ J. F. C. Hecker, *The Epidemics of the Middle Ages*, transl. B. G. Babington, 3rd edition, London, 1859, p. 80.

² Ibid.

³ Hecker, op. cit., p. 80.

the religious notions of the age were strangely and variously reflected in their imaginations'.⁴ And again, the people dancing these dances came to Flanders like those possessed, as the chronicler Gilles de Roya puts it⁵. People danced and leaped, as the Liege Chronicle of 1402 stated, and they were possessed by demons; when the spirit descended into their limbs they were unable to cease dancing and leaping, when it reached their pelvis they were cruelly tortured, and because of this they had small sticks with which they beat themselves about the navel; this calmed their sorrow a little bit and they threw away their sticks; they had a terrible appearance⁶. The dancing was supposedly preceded by an epileptic fit, with people foaming at the mouth and then suddenly jumping up and starting to dance 'amidst strange contortions'⁷. The "diagnosis" of epilepsy as a trigger for the dancing mania was made in the nineteenth century by the medical historian Hecker, who in turn appears to have received the idea from a fourteenth-century chronicle⁸, demonstrating that the medieval commentators were already medicalising the phenomenon as a way of explaining what they could not otherwise understand. Madeleine Braekman attempts a modern diagnosis of the dancing mania, also noting the similarity of body movement between the people afflicted with dansomania and epilepsy⁹. Whether such diagnostic efforts are valid or useful is not relevant for the purposes of the present argument, suffice it to note that the phenomenon of a public, mass display of dancing is seen as *necessitating* a medically-informed explanation. Medieval people themselves appeared to see their dancing as a condition requiring cure, in this case through the agency of the Virgin and selected saints, such as St Lambert, or St Bartholomew who specialised in the treatment of nervous disorders, cramps, convulsions or possessions¹⁰. Braekman does not regard the "diagnosis" of (demonic) possession proffered by some medieval contemporaries as part of a truly medical explanation: 'Dans une société dominée par la religion et où la médecine a peu de place, l'Eglise explique les maladies nerveuses comme des cas de possessions diaboliques dont elle seule peut guérir.'¹¹ However, I do not believe this modern separation of religion and medicine is accurately reflecting medieval views on this matter. There was no strict dividing line between what we would term medicine and religion; one only has to think of the imagery of Christ the Healer to realize that the Church quite clearly saw its role as a healing, and therefore by extension a medical, institution. It is very much a feature of modern, industrialised society to think of strict delineations between "scientific disciplines" on the one

⁴ Hecker, op. cit., p. 81.

⁵ Gilles de Roya, *Annales Belgici*: 'de dansers wandelden in Vlaenderen als verhoede lieden', cited by M. Braekman, 'La dansomanie de 1374: heresie ou maladie?', *Revue du Nord*, 63, no. 249, 1981, p. 341.

⁶ Liege Chronicle: 'Dansabant ac saltabant ibi. Obsessi erant a demonibus et quando spiritus descendebat in crura eorum, non poterant contineri a dansatione et saltu; quando autem ascendebat in parvum ventrem, tunc torquebantur dure, et ideo habebant tuellas et parvos baculos, unde stringebant se circa umbilicum fortiter, et trudebant vel faciebant se trudi pugnibus in ventre parvo, et sic cessabat dolor eorum aliquantulum projiciebantque a longue baculos suos et habebant terribilem aspectum' (cited by Braekman, op. cit., p. 342).

⁷ Hecker, op. cit., p. 81.

⁸ Ibid, note 4. Hecker bases his "diagnosis" on a contemporary account by the Sponheim Chronicle of 1374.

⁹ Braekman, op. cit., p. 343.

¹⁰ 'Les danseurs recherchent une thérapeutique dans l'appel aux saints et à la Vierge', *ibid.*

¹¹ Braekman, op. cit., p.345-6.

hand and religion on the other. For the medieval world, where religion was all-encompassing, such a distinction would have been meaningless.

Dancing took place in towns and villages, where sometimes the dancers took over religious houses¹². Dancing was a mass phenomenon, the "possessed" dancers 'assembling in multitudes', and they also frequently 'poured forth imprecations' against the clergy and 'menaced their destruction'¹³. It was this element of anti-clericalism that was probably the deciding factor in achieving the pronouncement of heresy over the dancers by the ecclesiastical authorities. Furthermore, the dancers 'intimidate' other people to not make any footwear other than square-toed shoes, because they had a 'morbid dislike' of the then fashionable pointy-toed shoes. This should be seen not as a sign of the "untrendiness" of the dancers, but as a conscious statement against conspicuous consumption, since the pointy shoes, requiring so much more (unnecessary) material, would generally have been worn by the fashion-conscious wealthy. This element of social protest and anti-consumerism, to put it in modern parlance, is borne out by the observation that the clergy are keen to exorcise the dancers lest the "disease" spread from the poor, 'for hitherto scarcely any but the poor had been attacked'¹⁴, to affect also those from the higher classes. The predominantly lower-class participants in dancing were even joined by housewives (one must think of this as eliciting the response in the fourteenth-century equivalent of a "shock horror" style gutter press headline today); beggars "took advantage" of the means opened to them of new ways of getting money from people; children left their parents, and servants their masters, to take part in the dancing. Worst of all, unmarried women 'were seen raving about in consecrated and unconsecrated places, and the consequences were soon perceived'¹⁵. The appearance of masses of people dancing *per se* was deemed bad enough, but the *sorts* of people dancing were even more worrying to the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, as the above aspects of perceived breakdown of the established social order show. Hecker, gazing from a nineteenth-century perspective, reiterates medieval concerns about dansomania, since he picks up the idea that the spreaders of the "disease" are 'idle vagabonds' who mimic the "symptoms" for their own advantage 'seeking maintenance and adventures' without being 'really affected' by it¹⁶; he combines a social with a medical explanation for the phenomenon by reasoning that 'in maladies of this kind the susceptible are infected as easily by the appearance as by the reality'¹⁷.

Bacchanalia

¹² Hecker, op. cit., p. 82.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hecker, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁵ Hecker, op. cit., p. 84. Note the nineteenth-century euphemistic allusion to pre-marital sex and birth of illegitimate children.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Dancing as mass spectacle, as perceived mania, was not entirely new to the fourteenth century. The "dance of St John", as the dancing mania was sometimes called, links dancing with the veneration of John the Baptist by 'all sorts of strange and rude customs'¹⁸, which were already noticed, and forbidden by, St Augustine in the late fourth century: people should not commit excess and sing profane songs at the festival of St John¹⁹. His contemporary Peter Chrysologus (380 - 450) does not hesitate to speak of the pest of dancers (*saltatricum pestis*)²⁰, and canon 53 of a church council held between 343 and 381 reminds Christians assisting at weddings not to leap and dance²¹; also the specific character of dances, circumstances, when and where, are singled out for particular attention²²; and by 1209, canon 17 of the synod held at Avignon reiterates the injunction against dancing in churches on the vigils of saints' feasts²³; lastly canon law expressly forbade priests and other clerics to dance²⁴. With regards to the activities around the feast of St John Hecker comments:

Bacchanalian dances, which have originated in similar causes among all the rude [sic] nations of the earth, and the wild extravagancies of a heated imagination, were the constant accompaniments of this half-heathen, half-christian festival.²⁵

He goes on to conjecture, that since the appearance of the dansomania in 1374 was in July, around the time of St John's feast day, and the dancers uttered John's name, 'the wild revels of St. John's day ... gave rise to this mental plague, which thenceforth has visited so many thousands with incurable aberration of mind, and disgusting distortions of body'²⁶. Coincidentally, the 1996 Love Parade in Berlin was also held in the month of July. The Love Parade as a modern St John's bacchanalic feast, perhaps?

An instance of another dancing event related to a saint's feast, again held in summer-time, on the first day of August, is reported by Gerald of Wales, writing shortly after 1188, at the church of St Eluned in southern Wales. There people, mainly 'young men and maidens', dance in the churchyard singing traditional songs until they suddenly 'leap in the air as if seized by frenzy'²⁷. The dancers further transgress by miming 'with their hands and feet' the movements of the work

¹⁸ Hecker, op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁹ 'Nec permittamus solemnitatem sanctam cantica luxuriosa proferendo polluere', quoted by Hecker, op. cit., p. 87, n. 2.

²⁰ Peter Chrysologus, sermon CXXVII, *Patrologiae Latinae*, ed. Migne, 52: 552, cited by Braekman, op. cit., p. 350.

²¹ Cited by Braekman, op. cit., p. 350.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Decretals*, 1. III, vol. I, can. 12, in: Braekman, op. cit., p. 350 and note 69.

²⁵ Hecker, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁶ Ibid. Hecker continues his line of reasoning by drawing in social and economic factors, the extreme impoverishment of some people along the lower Rhine due to flood, famine and oppression (pp. 89-90), culminating in his explanation for the somatic location of the dancing mania's worst symptoms (p. 90): due to hunger and bad food the bowels of starving people were the areas attacked by pain, which could lead them to the behaviour (beating their stomachs) described above as part of the dansomania.

²⁷ Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales*, transl. Lewis Thorpe, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 92.

they normally do, 'in full view of the crowds', something which is contrary to the commandment on sabbath days²⁸, ie. the commandment not to work. Other dancing mania-like phenomena predating the 1374 events can be found at Erfurt in 1237, when more than a hundred children danced and jumped their way to Arnstadt; Utrecht in June 1278 with people dancing on a bridge across the river until it collapsed; and most significantly at Kolbig near Bernburg in 1027²⁹. At Kolbig some peasants disrupted the Christmas eve service by dancing and brawling in the churchyard, whereupon the officiating priest, Ruprecht, cursed them that they would dance and scream unceasingly for a whole year. Here is a case where dancing is most definitely perceived as transgressive, and has to be duly punished. Maybe this story had some influence over how three hundred years later dancing was equally positioned as a transgressive activity, and the participants were "punished" in the sense that they were afflicted by an "illness". Since the contemporary medieval accounts of mass, communal public dancing were written not by the dancers themselves, but by non-participants, who additionally were worried about apparent breakdowns of social order, it is not surprising that what is never raised as an issue is that perhaps people danced, especially on the feast of St John, for the simple, if banal, reason that dancing is *fun*.

Music

The power of music as a force in dansomania is recognised already by the fourteenth-century contemporaries. The dancers were accompanied by minstrels playing upon noisy instruments which incite and encourage people to dance. As Hecker comments: 'it may readily be supposed that, by the performance of lively melodies, and the stimulating effects which the shrill tones of fifes and trumpets would produce, a paroxysm, that was perhaps but slight in itself, might, in many cases, be increased to the most outrageous fury'³⁰. As will be seen below, this nineteenth-century interpretation of 'intoxicating' music is not too far removed from the British government's attitude of the 1990s to "repetitive music", in both cases ascribing to music a power to influence people's behaviour and especially to incite people to a behaviour that is deemed transgressive. Hecker believed that 'soft harmony' was used to 'calm the excitement of those affected, and it is mentioned as a character of the tunes played with this view to the St. Vitus's dancers, that they contained transitions from a quick to a slow measure, and passed gradually from a high to low key'³¹.

Additionally, with regards to a phenomenon called tarantism (the name is derived from tarantula, the spider whose bite is meant to have caused it), which appeared in fifteenth-century Italy, music, and especially music progressing from slow to fast measure, was also regarded as influencing

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hecker, op. cit., p. 90.

³⁰ Hecker, op. cit., p. 98.

³¹ Ibid., and p. 99 note 1. Hecker attributes the description of the calming effects of music to a text of 1650.

the people afflicted by tarantism. A contemporary, the Neapolitan lawyer Alexander ab Alexandro (1461 - 1523), describes the effects of music as making otherwise unsophisticated country people dance gracefully, and how in the summer (note that season again) cities and villages were filled with the sounds of fifes, clarinets and Turkish drums³², and how especially the sound of a drum would incite people to ever more violent movements, so that their dancing 'was converted into a succession of frantic leaps'³³ until the music stopped, whereupon people would fall to the ground exhausted. One could argue that since it was not just the music *per se* that provided the impetus to dance, but music of a certain kind and made by specific instruments, that therefore the transgressive aspect of St John's dance, or St Vitus's, or even tarantism, was not deemed to be in the music or dancing as such but in their particular expression. It is doubtful that public, even mass-attended, performances of church music, for example Gregorian chants, would have elicited the same concern and disapproving comments from either contemporaries or later observers as the various dancing manias did.

One way of trying, therefore, to explain the dancing, to make it less threateningly transgressive by labelling it, is to medicalise it, since a medical explanation fits in well with the philosophies of late medieval ecclesiastical and secular authorities. And with the nineteenth-century gaze, as the following statement by Hecker testifies: 'That patients should be violently affected by music, and their paroxysms brought on and increased by it, is natural with such nervous disorders; where deeper impressions are made through the ear, which is the most intellectual of all the organs, than through any of the other senses'³⁴. Hecker asserts that at that time, ie. the late fifteenth/ early sixteenth centuries, there was a generally held belief that music and dancing would further distribute the poison causing the disease of tarantism throughout the body and drive it out through the skin, but it had to be expelled completely, otherwise it became a chronic disorder³⁵. People from all walks of life, not just from the medically-informed class of contemporary commentators, can therefore use the rationale that dancing, if not actually curing them outright, at least alleviates their "disease".

Love Parade

Fast-forward to 1996. In July that year some 600 000 (or 750 000, depending on which newspaper reports one cites) people partied freely, dancing through the streets of Berlin, at the

³² Alexander ab Alexandro, *Genialium dierum*, libri VI, Lugdun. Bat. 1673, 8vo., lib. II, ch. 17, p. 398, cited by Hecker, op. cit., p. 108 and note 1.

³³ Hecker, *ibid.*

³⁴ Hecker, op. cit., p. 96.

³⁵ Hecker, op. cit., pp. 108-109, and pp. 112-115 for the effects of different types of music on tarantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Love Parade. Back in 1989 DJ Dr. Motte³⁶ (alias Matthias Roeingh) and 150 of his friends staged the first event, and in the intervening years it grew to become the largest free dance festival for rave, techno, or whatever else the cognoscenti wish to term the music. Thanks to a loophole in German law the festival can be staged as a "demonstration", thereby not requiring any payments for use of municipal streets, nor payments for the policing of the event or waste disposal, the latter issue being of particular concern to the German media, which focused on the huge mountains of discarded drinks cans left by the party-goers as the main reason of public concern, rather than any public order issues as would be expected of the media in the UK had a similar event been staged in, say, London. The lack of any "real" political motivations has been lamented in some of the more liberal German press. As Rainer Schmidt of *Die Zeit* put it: 'For fun, demonstrated to the scale of a generation for fun's sake, still brings out in a cold sweat every old revolutionary of '68 ... When someone dances so much do they still want to vote?'.³⁷ The importance of being *homo ludens* is still regarded as vastly inferior to the importance of being earnest when it comes to so-called political activity.

The first Love Parade was labelled a harmless event by the media, since it could be seen as a childish display where semi-naked youths hopping followed a noisy van³⁸. By 1996 the event and its participants were being almost ridiculed and the earlier theme of infantilisation was expanded on. So the ravers were described as 'wriggling'³⁹ on the floats with the high-powered sound systems. In another magazine the participants are described as a 'twitching and wriggling dance-mass'⁴⁰. "Twitching and wriggling" appears to be the most common phrase used by journalists to describe techno/rave dance, as yet a third German magazine⁴¹ makes use of the label.

The music is seen as assaulting the dancers, the 'sounds are hitting the ear with the force of a pneumatic drill'⁴² and the body of the dancer can only cope through crisis management by

³⁶ The DJ received his moniker, according to one anecdote (cited in M. Fischer, M. von Uslar, C. Kracht, A. Roshani, T. Huetlin and A. Jardine, 'Der pure Sex. Nur besser.', *Der Spiegel*, 29, 1996, p. 98), because after a long night's raving, in the early hours when Dr. Motte took over the controls his records cured the exhausted ravers, so they gave him the honorific "Doctor" - the DJ as shaman, the music as medicine. Voices from within the rave culture subsume the medical language of the commentators, or is it perhaps the other way round?

³⁷ 'Denn Spaß, bloß um des Spaßes willen in Generationenstärke demonstriert, treibt noch jedem Altachtundsechziger den Angstschweiß auf die lichte Stirn und apokalyptische Gedanken in das Springerhausdemo-verklärte Hirn. Wer so viel tanzt, will der noch wählen?', Rainer Schmidt, 'Deutschland, liebes Technoland', *Die Zeit*, no. 30, 19 July 1996.

³⁸ Uli Hauser and Frauke Hunfeld, 'Die Raff-Parade', *Stern*, no. 30, 18 July 1996, pp.140-142. The authors refer to the first Love Parade at which 'noch 150 Jugendliche halbnackt hinter einem lärmenden Kleinlaster hopsten ...'.

³⁹ 'Tieflader und Sattelschlepper des Zuges, vollgestellt mit 15 00 Watt-Boxen und zappelnden Ravern ...', *ibid*, p. 141.

⁴⁰ C. Gottwald, D. Horstkötter, U. Plewnia, R. Vernier and A. Wolfsgruber, 'Big Fun, Big Business', *Focus*, 28, 1996, p. 58: 'die zuckende und zappelnde Tanzmasse'.

⁴¹ Cordt Schnibben, 'Die Party-Partei', *Der Spiegel*, 29, 1996, p. 92: 'zappelten und zuckten'.

⁴² 'die Töne bollern mit der Gewalt eines Preßlufthammers ans Ohr', Rainer Schmidt, 'Deutschland, liebes Technoland', *Die Zeit*, no. 30, 19 July 1996.

switching off the brain and twitching in self-defence, hands and feet moved by reflexes, the body wobbling⁴³. Fellow-dancers are seen by this particular journalist as participants in 'Technotopia' who, instead of chatting each other up dance each other up [*tanzen sich an*] whilst displaying enraptured-ecstatic faces [*entrückt-verzückte Blicke*]. All these observations lead the journalist to conclude that techno is a medical condition, a disease both real in the reactions it provokes somatically, and a metaphorical illness in the contagion of participation:

We see hundreds of thousands of semi-naked people who, whilst laughing, force their body to perform movements reminiscent of epilepsy ("dancing"). Do we have here a bunch of sick people who meet each other in the capital for a demonstration of joyous lunacy? The answer is brief and emphatic: yes. For techno is a virus. Namely one of an especially nasty variety. Paths of contagion and methods of treatment are unknown. It nests itself in the body, unnoticed, and proliferates until the entire nervous system is infected.

*[Wir sehen hunderttausende Halbnackte, die lachend ihre Körper zu epileptisch anmutenden Bewegungen nötigen ("tanzen"). Haben wir es also mit einem Haufen Kranker zu tun, die sich in der Hauptstadt zu einer Demonstration glücklichen Irsinns treffen? Die Antwort lautet kurz und schmerzlos: ja. Denn das Techno ist ein Virus. Und zwar der ganz fiesen Art. Übertragungswege und Heilungsverfahren sind unbekannt. Es nistet sich unmerklich ein und wuchert, bis das ganze Nervensystem infiziert ist.]*⁴⁴

The tone of this article is reiterated by another journalist, who states that for the raver techno is a drug that only functions at 100 decibels and has a minimum of 130 beats per minute and as little vocals as possible: 'it has to drive into the whole body, not just the ears. Techno is machine music, and the raver is the human machine; a twitching nervous system that converts music for so long until it triggers the emission of pleasurable feelings in the brain, a feeling nobody but the raver believes in'⁴⁵. Yet more: 'The entire organism of the raver is now in a state of alarm, alerted by the music which does not let him rest until he is in trance and his brain announces bliss'⁴⁶.

As an aside, not just professional journalists home in on what is perceived as the addictive nature of techno. *Focus*-magazine quotes an A-level student from Bavaria who would like to see a law

⁴³ 'Dem Körper bleibt nur noch Krisenmanagement. Hirn ausschalten und Notwehrzucken. Die Reflexe bewegen Hände und Füße ... wackele ich weiter.', *ibid*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ Cordt Schnibben, 'Die Party-Partei', *Der Spiegel*, 29, 1996, p. 93: 'es muß in den ganzen Körper fahren, nicht nur in die Ohren. Techno ist Maschinenmusik, und der Raver ist die Menschmaschine; ein zuckendes Nervensystem, das Musik so lange umsetzt, bis es im Hirn ein Glücksgefühl ausschüttet, an das keiner glaubt außer dem Raver'.

⁴⁶ Unknown author, *Der Spiegel*, 30, 1996, p. 93: 'Der gesamte Organismus des Ravers ist jetzt im Alarmzustand, alarmiert von einer Musik, die ihn nicht ruhen läßt, bis er in Trance ist und sein Gehirn Glück meldet'.

passed banning all kinds of techno/rave music, as such music is a grave danger to young people who 'are unscrupulously drawn into the vicious circle of techno-music and enslaved by it'⁴⁷.

Returning to the previously analysed theme of medicalisation, it emerges that images of erotic and religious ecstasy are not lacking either, as the author of one article refers to the DJ's use of music as driving the ravers to the brink of rapture until due to pleasurable pain the dancers can only issue high-pitched screams⁴⁸. The object of attending the Love Parade for hundreds of thousands of people, according to *Der Spiegel*, is to dance themselves into a trance⁴⁹. The characteristics of a mass-demonstration are also alluded to, the ravers' arms shoot up in a wave of collective howls of ecstasy⁵⁰ - the mention of masses of arms raised and the sound of thousands of voices can not fail, for a certain type of (German) reader at least, to evoke images of other mass-demonstrations in Germany's past, the infamous Nürnberg rallies, though here, as in all the articles examined, specifically the perceived *non-political* nature of the event is emphasised. But, rest assured, any direct allusions to Nazi mass-rallies are rapidly dismissed in this journalist's concentration on the hedonistic and ecstatic aspects of the Love Parade, albeit once again medicalising the movement of dance: the collective twitches and the mass trances⁵¹. Furthermore, body cult and especially "tribal" body decoration in the form of body piercing are expounded on and analysed, as if to emphasise the "primitivism" of the dancers. *Der Spiegel* also follows the linking of rave with primitivism made by some theorists: 'Techno is like voodoo, as the techno-critics say, and the music is as simple as in the past when shaggy-haired people danced ecstatically to the music of drums'⁵².

In the UK, too, the medicalisation of dance movement has found its way in to the media. A video by the band Prodigy to accompany their number one hit *Firestarter* received 'a record number of complaints' after being shown on Top of the Pops. Apparently the sight of band member Keith Flint 'shivering and shaking (some would say *dancing* [journalist's emphasis])' was frightening small children⁵³. In addition to the medical description of Flint's dance, the current vogue for rushing to the protection of children from perceived moral harm, and the consequent infantilisation of adult society, has also found its place in this particular analysis of rhythmic

⁴⁷ Quoted in C. Gottwald et al, 'Big Fun, Big Business', *Focus*, 28, 1996, p. 56: young people are 'skrupellos in den Teufelskreis von Techno-Musik hineingezogen und hörig gemacht'.

⁴⁸ 'Er fährt die Musik mit sphärischen Klängen immer wieder an den Rand der Erlösung, bis die Raver aus lustvollem Schmerz nur noch schrille Schreie ausstoßen', Rainer Schmidt, 'Deutschland, liebes Technoland', *Die Zeit*, no. 30, 19 July 1996.

⁴⁹ Cordt Schnibben, 'Die Party-Partei', *Der Spiegel*, 29, 1996, p. 92: 'um sich drei Tage lang in Trance zu tanzen'.

⁵⁰ '... und tausende Arme schnellen in einer Woge kollektiven Glücksgejohles nach oben', Rainer Schmidt, 'Deutschland, liebes Technoland', *Die Zeit*, no. 30, 19 July 1996.

⁵¹ 'Zuckt hier nicht das Kollektiv? Rauscht hier nicht die Masse?', *ibid.*

⁵² Cordt Schnibben, 'Die Party-Partei', *Der Spiegel*, 29, 1996, p. 93: 'Techno sei wie Voodoo, sagt der Techno-Kritiker, und die Musik sei so einfach wie früher, als Zottelige ekstatisch zu Trommelmusik tanzten'.

⁵³ Andrew Smith, 'Please don't call us techno', *The Sunday Times*, 3 November 1996.

movement. But then the UK is, after all, the country which introduced a law in 1994 with the Criminal Justice Bill which specifically singles out listening to 'repetitive beats' as socially (and politically) subversive⁵⁴. Whether organisers or party-goers ever intentionally tried to be subversive pre-1994 through their dance is another issue, but it is interesting to note that amongst the huge conglomerate-type businesses that constitute the vast majority of legally-sanctioned rave events post-1994 some aspects of social and political subversion survive, notably in the form of collectives like Exodus, based around Luton, who expanded in a cultural rather than in a business sense to link dance events with socio-political direct action: 'Not just concerned with putting on parties, they are committed to channeling [sic] profits and energy into rebuilding derelict properties for the homeless.'⁵⁵ The relevance of this is expressed by Exodus themselves in that they name their events not just plain old "raves" but 'community dances' - thereby linking dance, millenarian-utopian ideas, community and individual empowerment, the same as the anti-consumerist, anti-clerical dancers in the fourteenth century, perhaps?

Primitivism positioned

One final note on both medieval dansomania and modern techno/ rave. The aspect of "primitivism" that observers and commentators ascribe to techno and rave culture is found equally in the elements of deviance attributed to medieval dansomania by the nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians. The dances performed by the medieval people are not seen as "legitimate" expressions of dance because the accompanying music, the rhythms and the body movements themselves did not conform to what these historians, and the contemporary medieval authorities before them, know and acknowledge as "dance". By turning to what some modern scholars have written with regards to anthropology one may find explanations for the meaning of dance that position dance within a dialectic of the culturally/socially acceptable and the deviant in a more meaningful way. For example, Judith Lynne Hanna has tried to discuss dance after a fashion that recognises the cultural specificity of movement, music and event, and therefore allows dance to be positioned as a socially-informed activity. She observes: 'Ethnocentrism has reigned, and false dichotomies have been drawn between 'primitive' and nonprimitive' dance. ... Focus on the promotion of social harmony has neglected dance's disharmonious consequences'⁵⁶. In both medieval dansomania and 1990s techno parades dance can be viewed as 'disharmonious', in the sense that it has been turned into a deviant, transgressive activity, because it is not the "right" kind of dance, and subsequently has been medicalised, due to the gaze of authority's need for

⁵⁴ The reaction of the authorities to dance is actually not new, in this case. Already back in the fourteenth century the laws of the town of Maastricht forbade dancing 'in the streets and in the churches, in houses and everywhere else' (cited by Braekman, op. cit., p. 342).

⁵⁵ Alex Bellos, 'Let our people go-go...', *The Guardian*, 15 April 1997.

⁵⁶ Judith Lynne Hanna, 'To Dance is Human. Some Psychobiological Bases of an Expressive Form', in: John Blacking (ed.), *The Anthropology of the Body* (= A. S. A. Monograph 15), London - New York - San Francisco, 1977, p. 211.

explaining and thereby disciplining the transgression. Hanna allows dance to function both within and without the delineations of socially-accepted norms: 'Dance may mirror or refract social and political structures and techno-environmental factors. However, it may also be a generative force, a processual agent, reflecting 'anti-structure' [V. W. Turner, *Dramas, fields and metaphors: symbolic action in human society*, Ithaca, 1974], even going beyond what Peckham [M. Peckham, *Man's rage for chaos: biology, behaviour and the arts*, Philadelphia, 1965] refers to as the human's 'rage for chaos', the need to experiment with novelty within the safety of an artistic, 'pretend' situation⁵⁷. On the theme of trance and ecstatic dance Hanna has some interesting points to make. As she proposes

'Altered states of consciousness may be induced by socialized responses to the contextual situation, by auto-suggestion, and by physical behaviour such as energetic dancing, which may alter brain wave frequencies, adrenalin, and blood-sugar content, and induce giddiness through high speed or sensory rhythmic stimulation in more than one sensory mode. Kinesthetic stress, overexertion, and fatigue, also increase susceptibility to rhythm'.⁵⁸ This is still an explanation phrased in the language of medico-biological theories, but neither does it exclude social/ cultural elements, nor is the description of the body's biological functionings used as way of pathologising and thereby disciplining dance. Applied purely speculatively, this theory can offer some insight on medieval dansomania, allowing for both Hecker's medical analysis⁵⁹ as well as providing a place for the "possession", attributed to dansomania by medieval authors. The parallels of techno/ rave with dance as described in anthropological terms are made by proponents of techno themselves, not just by the disciplining voice of outside commentators. So the Swiss author Patrick Walder on techno: 'The DJ is the shaman, the dealer the medicine man. Raves are the dance rituals of industrialised society. Ecstasy is the magic potion for it.'⁶⁰ Modern techno/ rave dance, seen as an expression of "primitivism" by the extraneous gaze, is doubly subversive in this context, in that not only it is deviant *a priori* by being "primitive", but that, by appropriating this label for itself, techno culture turns the intended derogation into a positive asset for itself.

⁵⁷ Hanna, op. cit., pp. 216-7.

⁵⁸ Hanna, op. cit., p. 218.

⁵⁹ See not 26 above.

⁶⁰ Patrick Walder cited in : C. Gottwald et al, 'Big Fun, Big Business', *Focus*, 28, 1996, p. 62. 'Der DJ ist der Schamane, der Dealer der Medizinmann. Raves sind die Tanzrituale der Industriegesellschaft. Ecstasy ist der Zaubersrank dazu.'