

Outback vibes: sound systems on the road to legitimacy¹

GRAHAM ST JOHN

On Australia Day 1988, the Chairman of the Northern Land Council, Galarrwuy Yunupigu, announced that ‘Australia’s too old to celebrate birthdays’.² In the subsequent decade, mounting sympathy for such views revealed the population’s anxiety with a nationhood founded on the ‘beautiful lies’ about which noted paleontologist Tim Flannery has made ample public comment. In a recent essay, Flannery articulated that the ‘founding’ and most far-reaching deceit—the doctrine of *terra nullius*—is ‘central to the dilemma we [Australians] face in defining ourselves as a people’.³ While the Howard Government wound back advances in the cause of Indigenous justice,⁴ and, in conjunction with state governments, continued to destroy natural heritage underwritten by what Flannery sees as the keynote delusions⁵ circulating since settlement, other movements rallying to Indigenous rights and ecological causes would seek popular redress. The 1990s saw an increase in local community reaction to the ecological impact of corporate and state controlled ‘developments’. In response to Prime Minister Howard’s obstinacy, the decade also witnessed the rise of a mass movement of ‘sorry people’ engaged in the performance of a ‘proliferation of apologies’ made to Indigenous Australians.⁶ It was the ‘decade of reconciliation’.

In one mode of redress, citizens launched headlong into Landcare campaigns or went about ‘decolonising backyards’ through planting native species.⁷ In another, they sought to reconcile with Indigenous Australians. From the ‘symbolic substitution’ of Aboriginality for the monarchy in the mid-decade Republican excitement,⁸ to the Corroboree 2000 reconciliation marches and the routine practice of calling on Aborigines to ceremonially authorise the opening of public facilities and sporting events (including, notably, the Sydney 2000 Olympics Opening Ceremony),⁹ a multitude of public performances would signify a continuum of practice: from acknowledgement of traditional authority and recognition of past and present injustice to routinised tokenism. According to Hodge and Mishra, an obsession with establishing and maintaining legitimacy is symptomatic of an ‘acute anxiety’ in the Australian national psyche.¹⁰ By the turn of the millennium, as Aborigines were becoming indispensable to constructions of legitimacy and expressions of belonging,¹¹ the ultimate concern of post-settler legitimacy seemed to be scripting a range of events. While the Olympic meta-spectacle may have constituted a self-redeeming ‘resurrection’ of the other—a vicarious reconciliation¹²—it also dramatised the special role of Indigenous peoples in the continent’s heritage. But while 2000 saw such popular revisionary undertakings¹³ in the nation’s ‘centres’ (its cities on the ‘edge’ of the continent),

other, lesser-known performances were transpiring inland. In exploring these initiatives, this article addresses itself specifically to a discussion of collectives of activist musicians ('sound systems') and their events. In particular, it investigates Ohms Not Bombs and Labrats, formations which would converge in the Australian outback during 2000 in a series of events called Earthdream, and which have responded to requests from various Aboriginal communities (including the Mirrar, Adnyamathanya and Arabunna) who are seeking support for their campaigns to defend country, particularly in opposition to uranium miners.¹⁴

In the small hours of a post-settler becoming, 'Australianness' is predicated upon the genuine recognition of Aboriginal *country*. Amid revisionist historicism, on the global stage and in popular culture, Aboriginal country has acquired a significant, albeit unpredictable, cache for the population.¹⁵ But I want to suggest here that *country under threat* has given shape to a more sharply defining mood in the national imaginary. To use the language of Victor Turner, participation in the geo-historical *drama* of beleaguered country is enabled through numerous 'cultural dramas'— across TV, film, literature, festivals and rituals—evincing settler anxiety.¹⁶ Popularly experienced in the pilgrimage-like gravitation to remote regions, to 'the centre', the 'top end', and more generally, 'the outback', the liminal encounter with 'the other', *the journey*, is critical to the search for belonging. Belonging is no easy task where, as Morton and Smith remind us, 'nature' (or country) is 'simultaneously positioned, geographically and historically, as the place where Australians are not (the indigenous wilderness) and the place where Australians can find their true selves'.¹⁷ Located in 'the red centre', the 'heart' of the continent, arid and semi-arid desert regions represent in the national imaginary a potent reservoir of revitalisation and rebirth for those who must trek great distances from the 'edge', in journeys involving sacrifice, possible ordeal, 'disappointment and death'. Uluru, 'the Rock', once reported to be 'the sacred centre of a rapidly developing settler cosmology', has played a principal role in this national production.¹⁸ While the 'journey to the centre' reproduces a misogynist hero-conqueror 'legend' and reinforces Aboriginal stereotypes and disadvantage at the hand of tourism, film and advertising industries, and non-Indigenous Australians stand to gain from the experiences and services provided by those industries, these journeys are always contexts which remake an 'authentic' Australian identity. They produce alternate truths.

While initiatives to belong to country are undertaken within settler-descendant communities throughout the nation,¹⁹ youth appear especially implicated in performances through which attachment to place, to finding *their place*, is achieved. Thus aggrieved old-growth forest logging/woodchipping campaigners mount *terra-ist* initiatives which re-confirm their status as native-forest defenders;²⁰ mining industry opponents support beleaguered Indigenous peoples in the fight for country. Seeking redress and a passport to a non-colonialist future, young people participate in alternative rites of passage.²¹ Responding to calls for assistance from Indigenous elders whose lands and culture are threatened by corporate and Government complicity, they journey to remote inland or hinterland destinations from metropolitan centres on the coast. Possessing alternative 'truths' about the nation's past and present, traveling through country on the basis of an educational and/or activist 'calling', destined for remote sites of 'disappointment

and death' (for example, by becoming Keepers of Lake Eyre, or *kungkas*), settler descendants are getting closer to country.²² Not entirely 'liminoidal' in Turner's sense of optative or recreative (as opposed to ascribed) performance, these performances and actions approximate the expression of a duty, an obligation.²³ They thus resemble the 'heteronomic response' David Monson detected in the Woomera 2002 Festival of Freedom, where, responding to the call of distressed incarcerated Afghani and other refugees in South Australia's Woomera Detention Centre, participants believed themselves complicit in the detainee's plight and thus played an Antigone-like role in the 'resistance to tragedy'.²⁴

Young Australians have thus become implicated in a process Gelder and Jacobs call 'unsettled settledness',²⁵ dissolving or rendering uncertain the division of 'other' (country, indigeneity) and 'self' (settler, colonist, etc.) that constitutes a foundation of Australian nationhood. In this struggle we can detect a duty to beleaguered people and place that signifies a nascent character in the Australian imaginary. With new mateships and sacrifices forming around environmental sensibilities, the contemporary desire to 'care' or 'fight' for country is antipathetic to the archetypal 'Australian legend'—the celebrated bushman whose exploits are implicated in ecological maladaptation and the displacement and dispossession of the land's original inhabitants. In this regard, I examine below the way in which sound systems have become vehicles for postcolonising heroics in order to make a broader case for the role of music-oriented and other inspired formations in a post-settler relationship with Indigenous people and place.²⁶

Making a Noise: Sound Systems and Systems Sound

Right next to a recruitment drive by the Australian Armed Forces, the Trailer Trash sound system co-occupied Newcastle's Civic Park during the 2003 This is Not Art Festival. With DJ Morphism tracks like 'Punk up the Wombles' and 'I Dream of Greenie' booming off an Army Howitzer, you'd be hard pressed to find a stranger juxtaposition unfolding in the centre of any Australian city, particularly when a conventional carnival and a temporary stage for local rock bands also occupied this parkland heterotopia. Yet while, curiously, the military and Trailer Trash had similar ambitions – to reach the hearts and minds of youth – the *country* to which they desired to 'enlist' young people to serve was not the same. Trailer Trash is the recent vehicle of irrepressible artist and producer Pete Strong (aka DJ Morphism or Mashy P). A key player in the emergence of the activist sound system in Australia, Strong has had an important role in the evolution of an ecologically and social justice-driven techno-activism destined for the outback.

A sound system is a co-operative music initiative known for its re-purposing of sound technologies and its role in the amplification of grassroots community concerns. Contemporary sound systems are DIY affairs: they involve a 'loose network of artists and musicians who base themselves around the mobile PA' and whose collectivity enables the sharing of equipment and skills.²⁷ Historically, the sound system has been a context for the development of Jamaican dancehall and *émigré* reggae and hip hop cultures. From the 1940s, when Kingston 'sound men' began using record players, amplifiers and rare records, the sound system became the principal conduit for what has been known as the 'alternative sphere'

of dancehall performance.²⁸ With the extemporaneous MC (initially, also the ‘selector’ or DJ), the sound system would become a vehicle for amplifying local concerns. Playing ska-beat (a mix of calypso and R&B) and later reggae at private houses into the late hours, emigrant sound systems appeared in the UK in the 1960s. By the 1970s, dub reggae had been politicised through its appropriation by second-generation black British youth, and non-black youth would gain an insight into the sound systems during both the annual carnivals in Notting Hill and Handsworth and the reggae, soul and hip hop transmitted on pirate radio through the 1980s. Gradually, sound systems would become infused with punk, traveller and, from the late 1980s, techno-rave coordinates which precipitated the development of a host of techno sound systems.

Incorporating the cooperative dancehall tradition but playing increasingly harder and faster breakbeats, intimate networks of sonic squatters held discretely organised (free) ‘house’ parties in disused warehouse spaces and at outdoor sites. The techno sound system rose up out of a cauldron of musical, subcultural and transgressive traditions, the politics of its implied interracial alliances exemplified by the Luton community activists, Exodus.²⁹ The ‘exodus’ trope of this sound system revealed a mobile emigrant trajectory, one that sought to escape the confines of the city and British nationalism. It was a longing for difference satisfied on the road to other places and other times, and in ‘tribes’ succeeding from the parent culture: an adoption of a technomadic lifestyle respecting no authority other than that of the road itself. With the *Criminal Justice Act* (1994) making free outdoor events increasingly difficult, the UK was no longer regarded as a suitable landscape within which to remain mobile, and ‘the traveling circus of the late 20th century’³⁰ would make the physical exodus from Britain to transport a cooperative techno culture around the globe.

With their slogan ‘make some fucking noise’, Spiral Tribe, the most notorious UK sound system, would inspire an international travelling techno-circus showcased in the European ‘teknivals’—especially the annual Hostimichi festival in the Czech Republic.³¹ Spiral Tribe inspired Glasgow’s Desert Storm who, with their ‘beats not bullets’ sensibility, formed during the 1991 Gulf War. Like the Spirals, Desert Storm displayed a predilection for camouflage netting, transporting themselves in RVDs (‘rapid development vehicles’) and dressing in khaki and black. According to Alan Lodge, ‘Desert Storm gigs feel like they are taking place in a bunker with a civil war going on outside. The visual impact of a Desert Storm gig drives home the concept of a revolutionary culture boiling under the surface of modern Britain’.³² In 1994, the group joined a worker’s aid convoy to Tusla in Bosnia. According to member James:

We started playing on the move and we had thousands of people following us through the streets in two-foot snow and minus ten degrees. We played one techno record with a chorus that went ‘Get going to the beat of a Drum BANG!’ and all the soldiers fired their AK-47s in the air ‘kakakakaka’ and it was such a fucking buzz it was incredible. We played the same record about ten times. At one point a policeman came up to tell us to turn the volume up, but to turn off some of our lights as we were attracting shellfire. The frontline was only ten kilometres away.³³

Part of a subterranean cultural vanguard humping techno to the front lines, sound systems were conducting international cultural work. They would come to be respected far and wide for transgressions accomplished and extremes endured in the endeavour to *throw parties* for the greater good. They were participants in a frustrated diaspora whose ‘no boundaries’ decree was pursued abroad.³⁴ While this legacy of generosity and transgression had an impact on an Australian cohort, new fronts demanded new tactics. Allying with various communities of aggrieved Indigenous peoples in the fight for country, and respecting rather than transgressing cultural and physical boundaries as a matter of principle, local techno-activists would commit to sound interventions: in noise amplified and in wider social practice

The ‘Groovement’: City Sounds – Outback Bound

Sydney would be the early centre of Australian grassroots techno cooperative experiments owing much to earlier operators in Jamaica and England. Crossovers and subcultural hybridisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s assisted the transit from acoustic punk rock to the seamless aesthetic of live techno mixed by DJs. As environmental activists gravitated to Sydney, Melbourne and the NSW north coast scene around Byron Bay, techno music became the centrifugal force of a protean arts-activist movement. Emerging out of the Chippendale punk collective the Jellyheads, Circus Vibe Tribe operated free (and fundraiser) parties in Sydney Park and other venues from 1993; their techno-activism consisted largely of resisting the commercial exploitation of electronic music and the privatisation of space in the inner city. Squatting disused warehouses, reclaiming public space and establishing ‘temporary autonomous zones’, ‘the spirit of punk was sustained and painted fluoro as the Techno seismic shift sent its tremors across Australian dancefloors’.³⁵ Accumulating trends that circulated in the global music underground, these self-identified ‘new rave travellers’ were dedicated to what they called the ‘vibe’. Scholars of contemporary dance culture point out that a party’s ‘vibe’ is its *raison d’être*—with a ‘good vibe’ indicating a successful event. Victor Turner helps us understand this through his concept of ‘communitas’, the ‘direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities’ in liminal sociality, which approximates this experience.³⁶ In the dance party, collective expenditure, self-sacrifice and abandonment to music are deemed critical to the vitality of social relations—for post-party (post-liminal) affairs. Typically, the ‘vibe’ is a measure of the transgression of the conventions, demands and distinctions of daily life, enabling a clandestine ‘time out of time’, an orgiastic interlude, a clamorous disappearance in the present. For Vibe Tribe, the party communitas was driven by a DIY anarcho-punk ethos that ensured nobody would achieve either idol status or ungainly profits. This was arguably the essence of the ‘doof’: a free party with a purpose. By contrast to the rave, where demand for ‘a shared present’ is thought to convey ‘an imperative not to give in to the future’,³⁷ the doof’s vibe was one of ‘reclaiming the future’ in which cumulative environmental and social justice concerns combined with a proactive liminality.

However, this vibe would also be spatially conditioned. Outdoor, bush, forest and desert locations would, for example, be desirable since such places were thought

to possess a favourable influence on the party. In this thinking (which owes much to a redressive ecologism that co-evolved with dance culture, especially trance culture, in early 1990s San Francisco) a place—or its perceived ‘energy’ or sacrality—can influence an event’s vibe.³⁸ While the threat posed by aggressive police tactics or a negative drug experience might constitute a ‘bad vibe’, the latter is also considered a consequence of irresponsible conduct in or, treatment of, place (for example, the ‘trashing’ of nature such as leaving behind rubbish, disturbing wildlife, etc). In accordance with emergent ecological sensitivities and recognition of country, Vibe Tribe and their eco-doof successors would demonstrate a determination to ‘give something back’ to place. A key presence in this doof-laden rapprochement with land and people would be Ohms not Bombs. Formed in 1995 by Pete Strong, Ohms was a mobile doof collective on a quest for a nuclear-free future and recognition of the sovereignty of Indigenous Australians.³⁹ Inspired to catalyse a movement of anti-nuclear activists, Ohms, like Vibe Tribe, was infused with the techno-millennial sensibility of the early rave scene. Ohms began as an outfit consisting of around twenty musicians, artists and activists participating in a ‘growing groovement’ that coincided with the millennium.⁴⁰ Transporting a self-identified ‘travelling circus of resistance’ and with ‘Earth Defender’ painted along its side panels, their old State Transit bus (the ‘Omnibus’) was renovated to tour the continent. One objective of the ‘groovement’ was to communicate ecological and social justice issues, particularly those relating to Indigenous Australians and country, and Ohms would create informative ‘doofumentaries’ consisting of a syncopated audio-visual apparatus and information stalls at doofs.⁴¹ Strong once stated to me that ‘when people come to our parties they might not come for the politics ... [but] they go away with more than just a hangover’. In an effort to address the ‘social apartheid that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous’ Australians, the party machine was raised to ‘fast-track the reconciliation process’.⁴² Outback-bound, the Ohms mission became ‘a noughties version of Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters meets a Russian Revolution propaganda train meets Priscilla, Queen of the Desert!’⁴³

As part of its drive to tap the party for extra-party purposes, the Ohms trajectory was inland, or more accurately Australia’s ‘Top End’—a destination realised in July 1998 when the Dig the Sounds Not Uranium tour was launched. With a crew of thirteen aboard the Omnibus and with a PA, digital cameras and live techno equipment, the tour would host thirty events (parties, actions, music workshops) around Australia over four months before it reached its goal: Jabiluka uranium mine in Kakadu National Park.⁴⁴ Writing on behalf of the Mirrar traditional owners in 1998, Jacqui Katona of the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation circulated the following statement from a clan meeting: ‘Mirarr people have fought to protect country and people from uranium mining for many years. Now we are defending our country against the proposed Jabiluka development. We invite you to come to our country to join our struggle to uphold the cultural and environmental values of Kakadu’. The Stop Jabiluka campaign began and Jabiluka Action Groups were established around the country as activists prepared for a major blockade of the mine site. The mutual threat to ecology and Aboriginal culture that the mine represented triggered an intercultural alliance that, while troubled, was held together under the chanted maxim ‘keep it in the ground’.⁴⁵

Contributing to an ultimately successful campaign,⁴⁶ Ohms responded with a ‘Mobile Autonomous Zone’, a travelling multi-media sound system from which they would ‘drum up opposition’ to Jabiluka, ‘catalyse further actions and ideas about breaking the nuclear cycle locally and globally’ and ‘actively promote grassroots reconciliation respecting the original people of the land’.⁴⁷

Ohms was indeed a catalyst. Its tactical ‘doofumentary’ provided an inspiration for the Labrats’ alternative energy sound system. With a solar powered PA and a wind powered cinema hauled by a van with an engine converted to run on vegetable oil, Labrats would become a unique and dynamic presence in the emerging Australian sound system scene. Its two principals—street performer, cartoonist and ‘human techno beat-box’ Izzy Brown, and trained geologist, funk, reggae and dub DJ-producer Marc Peckham—met in 1998 at Jabiluka, where they were exposed to the Ohms road show and combined to entertain and enthuse fellow campaigners.

Brown and Peckham subsequently responded to Arabunna elder Kevin Buzzacott’s call for assistance, and the Labrats mobilised in support of his opposition to Western Mining Corporation (WMC) in outback South Australia. This campaign focused on securing the listing of Lake Eyre Basin as a World Heritage area, in turn protecting the region from the activities of WMC and other bio-developers. WMC had been mining and milling Roxby Downs, one of the world’s largest uranium ore deposits at Olympic Dam, since 1988, and Buzzacott, known as ‘uncle Kev’ to his ‘extended family’, had travelled widely to rally support for the struggle. WMC’s growing demands on underground water sources in one of the driest regions on the planet has had a devastating impact on Arabunna and Kokatha peoples, since such sources feed the precious springs around the Lake Eyre region essential for their cultural survival. Brown had first encountered the Arabunna leader in 1999 as a participant in Humps not Dumps. At that time Buzzacott had implored: ‘Lake Eyre is calling People to make peace with the People and the Old Country’, and ‘The country got a big power. Big energy ... Somebody got to go back and say sorry to that country’.⁴⁸ With Peckham, Brown would eventually join the Keepers of Lake Eyre, a camp established on the shores of Lake Eyre South, 180 kilometres north of Roxby Downs. The Labrats’ DIY solar and wind powered system posed an exquisitely sharp contrast to the operations of a mining giant that fuelled global nuclear power and had a negative impact on local Aboriginal culture. Adopting direct dance-activism and jacking into sustainable power sources, they would constitute the soundest system yet seen. As Brown and Peckham assert, the solar powered sound system pulled ‘the party scene back to its roots as a revolutionary force of beats and breaks, bleeps and squeaks in the face of an authority that is destroying our environment and the people that depend on it for their survival’.⁴⁹

Developing a multi-media assemblage inflected with funk, hip hop and techno traditions, and using cut up and sampling techniques, the Labrats have communicated their antagonism toward ERA, WMC and other bio-developers, and promoted their living alternative to audiences in metropolitan centres Australia-wide.⁵⁰ Their message is principally amplified via their hip hop/techno formation Combat Wombat, whose debut album, *Labrats Solar Powered Sound System*, was released in 2002.⁵¹ While the rebellious sensibility found in hip hop

is often superficial in practice, as a politically progressive outfit Combat Wombat are decidedly counter-hegemonic. Marc looks to ‘message rap’ like Public Enemy’s ‘Fight the Power’ to explain:

I remember when I first heard that song it felt like our generation was invincible and capable of anything. All I could think of was, why do they keep calling our generation, Generation X, when actually we’re Generation Y Why? Because we’re the ones asking the questions.⁵²

But they don’t just ask the questions, they claim to ‘offer a solution’.⁵³ While political *avant-garde* projects are uncommon in a scene ‘espousing decidedly conservative discourses of nationalism and community’,⁵⁴ and while they may be largely removed from hip hop’s—or, for that matter, dancehall’s—machismo, Combat Wombat give voice to a virtual given in that culture: an identification with place. In most urban hip hop the ghettos, neighbourhoods or the suburbs are defended turf.⁵⁵ But the ‘place’ Combat Wombat defends is the country itself. Tracks on their debut album convey a desire to defend threatened country and culture. In May 2000, Marc commented that ‘Lake Eyre is calling, and its calling us back. The old spirits are calling us to come and protect the country and look after the country. So we need to be there to make sure nobody comes in and stuffs up the country. So basically we sit on our hill that overlooks Lake Eyre. We keep an eye on Lake Eyre’.⁵⁶

That ‘eye’ fixed on country, and the relationships formed with traditional owners, trigger the language used to *represent* country. Ian Maxwell explains that to ‘represent’ is to communicate a ‘true’ (committed) expression of the arts of hip hop, a process amounting to ‘the subordination of self to [hip hop’s] cultural essence’.⁵⁷ To be true (to yourself, and those who you represent) is to be ‘hardcore’, so that practitioners are motivated by goals other than wealth or fame. Hip hop is the medium *and* the cause, its true expression enabling a respectable hardcore sensibility. But with political hip hop, we find that commitment to causes external to hip hop itself provides its principal motivation. Combat Wombat identify as ‘messengers’ who’ve been ‘called’: to mediate the stories of traditional owners whose lands and culture are threatened by mining companies, to represent country. When she raps that ‘white Australia has a black history’, Izzy divulges the ‘real’ history—one that should be recognised:

these old people these mates of mine
have been roamin the land since the start of time
they know the creation stories of the land
and i try my best to understand
but a lot of the lands been poisoned or stolen
as capitalism keeps the western world rolen
multinational companies dividing up the communities
with brain washing and bribery
stories you wont read in the library

coz white Australia's got a black history
that never ceded sovereignty⁵⁸

In the tradition of hip hop, Combat Wombat make claims for the authenticity derived from proximity to the street, the experience of the margins, and being 'true to the music'. Like the oppressed black Americans from whom hip hop derived, they could give voice to their struggle through rapping. Yet while they sing from the margins, this is qualified by the fact that—as with other middle-class youth cultures—they are self-marginalised; their marginality is chosen, not imposed. Life on the road is determined by a compulsion to 'make a difference'. In choosing this life, Combat Wombat/Labrats subordinate themselves to *possibility*, to the future, to the possibility that the future holds. Committed to 'make things right', their effort is one of living the future in the present. Rapping and other media, such as audio digital samples, graffiti, film, alternative energy workshops, etc. convey this desire to live the 'future now'. While a concern with the future appears to eclipse the need for articulating roots in an immediate site of origin,⁵⁹ legitimacy is derived from alliances sought and formed with the continent's original inhabitants. Aboriginal authorities⁶⁰ (such as the Mirrar and Kevin Buzzacott) call upon them to serve country. And they have responded:

uncle kevin's charging them with genocide
to pay the rent for all those that died
and his cultural lands that have been destroyed
some times it makes me wonder why
but ain't gonna sit back and cry
got to go out there and show ya care
coz we can make a difference everywhere⁶¹

According to Marc, 'There are many people who come to our parties for the music, but who, after hearing the message from the street, became involved in campaigns'.⁶² Combat Wombat also represent this community of activists, an 'underground nation' who've felt the threat to country and desire to 'make a difference'. Thus in the anthemic 'Miraculous Activist', they acknowledge the presence of a movement of those who 'hear the call'.

Outback Calling: Dancing Up Country

In 2000, Ohms not Bombs and Labrats would be in the vanguard of an odyssey in which a nomadic countercultural network amassed in the Australian outback. UK's Bedlam sound system were a principal node in the network.⁶³ Playing Jamaican roots, dancehall and ragga, 'bringing a music of resistance and postcolonial survival from one black people to another, via the London underground dance scene',⁶⁴ Bedlam came to Australia for a significant intercultural (and inter-subcultural) 'happening'. Earthdream2000 was a technomadic event where actions were mounted and performances staged in solidarity with Aboriginal people

throughout Central Australia and the Northern Territory. For over five months between May and October 2000, eco-radical collectives, new spiritualists, sound system crews and other artists and performers spiraled up the spine of the continent from Adelaide to Darwin (and East Timor). Earthdream's principal visionary was Robin 'Mutoid' Cooke, co-founder of London's industrial sculpture group Mutoid Waste Co. Inspired by the semi-nomadic traveler life in Britain, in the early 1980s Cooke anticipated 'a whole mobile road show consisting of mutated personnel and vehicles' traveling the country. Mutating trucks and buses and sculpting military hardware into extraordinary object of beauty, the dream was realised in MWC adventures in Europe in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁶⁵

However, while some of the most extraordinary caravanserais were mounted, Cooke was dissatisfied with the (lack of) direction in which this mutated waste was traveling. As the Australian outback became the focal point for an event constituting an alternate inland journey, an alternative was conceived. Originally a 'mega tribal' gathering to be held at Uluru at the turn of the millennium, Earthdream2000 became what Cooke described as 'an exploratory spiritual journey across this land, actively working with it'. For him, 'our interaction with, and care of, that land is paramount. We believe that we can learn from the Indigenous people of Australia. Earthdream will attempt to relearn those "key factors" that white consciousness seems to have lost with regard to living with and on the land'.⁶⁶

As a 'learning process' forecast to last at least thirteen years, Earthdream was envisioned as an annual corroboree, a transhumant experience, a means by which many, mainly young, people populating the edges of the continent (along with those who would travel from overseas) could meet Aboriginal and other local communities, and participate in country in an intentional and persistent pattern unrivaled by most coastal events: 'We're going to be able to reach parts within the individual make up of people that the normal one-off dance party would never even start to touch'.⁶⁷ Dialogue with Aboriginal peoples and custodians would be critical to the journey. In September 1997, Cooke met Arabunna brothers Kevin Buzzacott and Ronnie and Reggie Dodd at Roxstop, a desert action and music festival at Roxby Downs. Cooke consulted with Buzzacott regarding a possible route through Arabunna country in 2000. Buzzacott, who was campaigning to expand his support base at Lake Eyre South, welcomed Earthdream; they traded visions and formed an alliance.⁶⁸

The Labrats were committed to educating artists, new spiritual seekers and other pilgrims trekking into the outback in 2000 about the disastrous impact of the nuclear industry on land and people. Desiring 'to give something back' to Indigenous peoples suffering the ongoing impact of colonisation, they had an enthusiastic audience. As intermediaries for Earthdream travellers and Aboriginal opponents of uranium mining, the Labrats saw the journey develop into a direct action carnival. The motivational films projected by their wind-powered cinema proved a significant source of inspiration and solidarity. The recruitment drive began in May at Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Ranges, South Australia. There, Izzy and Marc conveyed the concerns of a core group of Adnyamathanha people seeking assistance to protect their cultural heritage in the Spencer region of the Flinders Ranges, where Beverley uranium mine was being trialled without their

consultation, despite the region's cultural significance.⁶⁹ With enthusiasm, charm and logic, and together with members of the Flinders Ranges Environmental Action Collective (FREAC), Izzy and Marc encouraged many to go out to meet community leaders at the town of Nepabunna. Senior Adnyamathanya members Kelvin Johnston, Judy Johnston and Ron Coultard, representing the community majority opposed to the mine, led a convoy of more than two dozen vehicles out past the Gammon ranges to establish a non-violent protest camp. The main entrance to the mine was blockaded over several days. After the blockade, travellers regrouped and debriefed near Nepabunna where Adnyamathanha camped with protestors who listened to stories told about the cultural significance of the region (including the Beverley site).⁷⁰ In meetings around the fire and in confrontations with police, Kevin Buzzacott announced that the police 'ain't the law here', and that the state government (which had approved the mine and leased the land) had 'no jurisdiction'. Buzzacott's standoff with STAR officers at Beverley, where he attempted, with fire stick in hand, to 'make a fire for peace' between their line and the blockade, made a remarkable impression on all present.⁷¹

Many participants then travelled to Buzzacott's 'Arabunna Coming Home Camp' near the shore of Lake Eyre South, and later under his direction to Roxby Downs, where a Reclaim the Streets-style protest enclave was established at the main entrance to Olympic Dam. There, Labrats were joined by Ohms not Bombs,⁷² where they jointly orchestrated a four-day carnival of protest. The Ohms bus and the urban camouflaged van Marc referred to as a 'Dis-army Diprotodon' parked in opposing positions on the road, providing bunkers for rival MCs to perform 'rhyme battles', providing both a context for DJs to launch tracks overlaid with provocative audio samples and the opportunity for Labrats to screen their own footage at night. The reclaimed road possessed a charged atmosphere resonating as an affront to colonial practice. The DIY multi-media event also fermented 'guerrilla theatre' which dramatised corporate greed, land dispossession, radiation sickness and the struggle to continue a non-violent activism.⁷³

The vibe at Beverley and Roxby Downs spoke to a desire for legitimate presence among participants possessing diverse motivations and interests.⁷⁴ While protests were an important context for generating alliances with Aboriginal communities, they were neither the only nor even the chief means of expressing one's relations with country. A series of parties ('corroborees') during Earthdream2000 were significant contexts for disparate participants to relate with one another and country. An event is more than just a party, especially when it involves traversing thousands of kilometres into the desert. As Turner would have it, the liminal sociality of the pilgrimage is a potent context for the transmission and reaffirmation of values. As 'intentional' dance parties in remote regions, the Earthdream2000 'corroborees' were permissive contexts for the expression of participants' ultimate concerns, particularly those involving ecology and Indigenous rights. These were given expression within the social context of the party via alternative technology and through inter-cultural dialogue. Dancing is an embodied participation in landscape, an intentional means of connecting with place. According to Earthdreamer Emily Vicendese, 'We need to take responsibility for our land, to respect and revere the Earth, to see it with the

eyes of its native caretakers—as sacred land’. Vicendese refutes the perception that the outback is a desolate, empty place; after several days at Lake Eyre, she says,

It became obvious that the red and barren earth is not a terra nullis (sic) . . . Without the distractions of the city it is easy to hear the Earth: she speaks to us like an electronic frequency which tweaks a line in your neural net and spreads the current down to the pads on your fingertips and feet. Doofing in the desert to funky music under a vast blanket of stars was an experience that everyone should know and understand, and fight to preserve.⁷⁵

The party is thus a context for attachment, and the accumulation of parties and actions was felt to raise the ‘vibe’ of Earthdream itself. Sound systems and other performers, as party machines, were critical to generating the experience. Bearing audio-visual equipment and fire-art technology, Bedlam, Ohms not Bombs, Labrats, and Mutoid Waste Co were the bearers of the party gift which would be presented for the main show on 21 June 2000 at the Clay Pan near Alice Springs, one of several such parties held on land to which Earthdream was invited by Aboriginal custodians. On this winter solstice night, 500 people were present, including traditional owners who ‘climbed the hill adjacent to the dance floor and addressed the whole camp offering welcome and telling the creation story of the claypan, which was coincidentally a place for dancing, the ripples of hills caused by the stomping of feet way back in the dreamtime’.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Amid growing historical sensibility and ecological sensitivity, *belonging* to the continent, becoming Australian, hinges on an understanding by non-Indigenous peoples that the maltreatment of Indigenous people and ecology (and the shame of the settler population) will continue, lest noises are sounded. While the sound system is not at all central to Australian youth culture in the way that it is, for example, in Jamaica, it has nevertheless become an important medium for amplifying the post- and non-colonial concerns of youth. As a rallying point to country, sound systems offer one kind of vehicle for post-settler becoming. In the early 1990s, the mobile system that made its exodus from the UK had acquired an anarcho-traveller ethos where the ‘vibe’ would coincide with, and be consequent upon, the transgression of national borders (and nationhood) amidst a general flouting of conventions. In the Australian context, the sound system would modify as techno mobility evolved in line with deference to ecology and traditional owners. While it remained, it was no longer transgression for its own sake, but a vibe built around the ‘resistance to tragedy’. In 2000, reconciliation would be seen to be effected nationally through mass public performances, yet at a sub-national level, countercultures were investing their energy in Earthdream—itsself considered to be the beginning of a long ‘learning’ curve. In a complex series of events whereby travellers generated strong alliances with besieged Aboriginal peoples, rather than pursuing what many perceived to be ineffectual ‘reconciliatory’ practice, Earthdream2000 provided participants concerned with

environmental and Indigenous justice issues the opportunity to begin ‘making a difference’.

Notes

- ¹ Thanks to Melissa Gregg for her comments on an earlier draft.
- ² The statement was made at a protest rally on Australia Day 1988, the bicentennial year. See Alana Harris, ‘Australia’s Too Old to Celebrate Birthdays’, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1988, p 30; see also John Morton, ‘Aboriginality, Mabo and the Republic: Indigenising Australia’ in Bain Attwood (ed), *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996, p 123.
- ³ Tim Flannery, ‘Beautiful Lies: Population and Environment in Australia’, *Quarterly Essay*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2003. In this and other notable venues, such as his Australia Day 2002 Address, ‘The Day the Land, the People’, Flannery would identify the keynote delusion of European settlement: that Australia is a land of unlimited resources and promise, a ‘boundless’ vastness, a blank canvas upon which a great nation would be built. Thus for settlers and squatters, Australia was an ecological as well as cultural *terra nullius*, and the implications have been disastrous.
- ⁴ The extinguishment of native title in all but name through a fear campaign mounted on behalf of mining and pastoral interests; a refusal to acknowledge the connection between past injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians as a result of government policy and present disadvantage; and the demolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.
- ⁵ Flannery, ‘The Day, the Land, the People’, Australia Day 2002 address.
- ⁶ Howard refused to commit to a formal government apology for past assimilationist legislation which facilitated the removal of tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. For community reaction to environmentally irresponsible developments, see Kathleen McPhillips, *Local Heroes: Australian Crusades from the Environmental Frontline*, Annandale: Pluto Press, 2002. For ‘sorry people’ see Haydie Gooder and Jane M Jacobs, “‘On the Border of the Unsayable’: The Apology in Postcolonial Australia”, *Interventions* 2.2, 2000, pp 229–247.
- ⁷ John Morton and Nick Smith, ‘Planting Indigenous Species: A Subversion of Australian Eco-Nationalism’ in Klaus Neumann, Hilary Erickson and Nicholas Thomas (eds), *Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999, p 166. Also see Jane Mulcock and Yann Toussaint, ‘Memories and Idylls: Urban Reflections of Lost Places and Inner Landscapes’, *Transformations* No. 2, 2002.
- ⁸ Morton, ‘Aboriginality, Mabo and the Public’, p 121.
- ⁹ Where, in Stadium Australia on September 15th 2000, Central Desert women performed a segment of the Seven Sisters dance and Aboriginal 400-metre champion Cathy Freeman ignited the Olympic cauldron – performances which may have approximated something of a ‘national catharsis’ for spectators. See Brett Neilson, ‘Bodies of Protest: Performing Citizenship at the 2000 Olympic Games’, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 6.1, 2002, pp 13–25.
- ¹⁰ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Post Colonial Mind*, North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991, p x.
- ¹¹ The strategic appropriation of Australian Aboriginal cultures is not dissimilar to the way other settler nations deploy icons of indigeneity to legitimate possession and galvanise national mythology. Eva Mackey, ‘Becoming Indigenous: Land, Belonging, and the Appropriation of Aboriginality in Canadian Nationalist Narratives’, *Social Analysis* 42.2, 1998, pp 150–78.
- ¹² For discussion of the ‘resurrection’ of Aboriginality as the source of white redemption from the ‘fall’ of imperialism, see Andrew Lattas, ‘Nationalism, Aesthetic Redemption and Aboriginality’, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 2.3, 1991, pp 307–24.
- ¹³ The year of the new millennium represented the ‘peak experience’ of close to a decade of activities set in train by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1992.
- ¹⁴ This article originated in research undertaken between April and September 2000 when I travelled with the Earthdream2000 convoy for the purpose of writing a book about the journey. Some of this material will be published in *Technomad: Global Pathways of Post-Rave Counterculture*, New York: Berghahn (forthcoming). See also Graham St John, ‘Off Road Show: Techno, Protest and Feral Theatre’. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 19.1, 2005, pp 7–22.
- ¹⁵ By contrast to the concept of ‘wilderness’, ‘country’ evokes recognition of Indigenous cultural landscapes. See Marcia Langton, ‘The European Construction of Wilderness’, *Wilderness News* (TWS), Summer 95/96; and

Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, 1996.

- ¹⁶ For 'cultural drama' see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969. For literature, see Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds), *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002.
- ¹⁷ Morton and Smith, 'Planting Indigenous Species', pp 153–175.
- ¹⁸ For a discussion of the outback as a 'mythological crucible' 'suffused with the aura of death' see Mark Byrne, 'Death and the Outback' *Mythic Passages Newsletter*, Feb/March 2004. Available on line: <http://www.mythicjourneys.org/passages/febmar2004/newsletterp8.html>. For Uluru, see Julie Marcus, 'The Journey out to the Centre: The Cultural Appropriation of Ayers Rock', *Kunapipi* 10, 1988, p 254. For the role of the outback in popular culture see Rosalind Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- ¹⁹ See, in particular, the trilogy of works by Peter Read: *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; and *Haunted Earth*, University of NSW Press, 2003.
- ²⁰ Graham St John, 'Ferality: A Life of Grime', *The UTS Review—Cultural Studies and New Writing* 5.2, 1999, pp 101–13; 'Reclaiming the Future: Going Feral and Becoming Native at Goolengook', in Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips (eds), *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*, London: Ashgate, forthcoming 2005.
- ²¹ I have in mind Kevin Buzzacott's 'Coming the Right Way' ceremonies at The Foot in Sydney's Botany Bay in September 2000. See Graham St John, 'Australian (Alter)natives: Cultural Drama and Indigeneity', *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice* 45, 2001, pp 122–140.
- ²² Outback missions have included the 'Roxstop' music festival (1997), the all-female Humps not Dumps cameleers (1999: <http://www.green.net.au/humpsnotdumps>) and various Friends of the Earth-sponsored trips, including the Radioactive Racism tours in July 2004 and April 2005. For Keepers of Lake Eyre see Graham St John, 'Earthdreaming for a Nuclear Free Future', *Arena Magazine* June/July, 2001, pp 41–44. *Kungkas* is the name for 'women' who have made alliance with senior Yankunytjatjara, Antikarinya and Kokatha women in their Irati Wanti 'No Dumps' campaign (<http://www.iratiwanti.org>).
- ²³ Victor Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology. In Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, pp.20–60.
- ²⁴ David Monson, 'Woomera 2002 Festival of Freedoms: Experiencing Community in Tragic Recognition of the Other', *Journal of Australian Studies* 77, 2003, pp 15–22.
- ²⁵ Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998.
- ²⁶ Research has been initiated on the role of dance culture in intentional, proactive and spiritual initiatives (doofs) in the Australian bush. See Graham St John, 'Doof! Australian Post Rave Culture', in my (ed) *FreeNRG: Notes From the Edge of the Dance Floor*, Altona: Common Ground, 2001, pp 9–36 and 'Techno Millennium: Dance, Ecology and Future Primitives' in my (ed) *Rave Culture and Religion*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp 213–235; Susan Luckman, 'Going Bush and Finding One's "Tribe": Raving, Escape and the Bush Doof', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 17, 2003, pp 315–330.
- ²⁷ See Enda Murray, 'Sound Systems and Australian DiY Culture: Folk Music for the Dot Com Generation', in St John (ed) *FreeNRG*, p 59; Hillegonda Rietveld, 'Repetitive Beats: Free Parties and the Politics of Contemporary DiY Dance Culture in Britain', in George McKay (ed), *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*, London: Verso, 1998, pp 243–268.
- ²⁸ With roots in slave-era country dances and taking cues from black American music (especially R&B) after World War II, dancehall is, as Norman Stolzoff states, more than just a means to survive racism, poverty and exploitation. It is a 'communication centre, a relay station'. Not simply a 'refuge', it is 'the centre of the ghetto youth's lifeworld—a place for enjoyment, cultural expression and creativity, and spiritual renewal'. See Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*, London: Duke University Press, 2000, p 7.
- ²⁹ See Murray, 'Sound Systems and Australian DiY Culture'; Rietveld, 'Repetitive Beats'; St John, 'Doof'; Seb Chan, 'Bubbling Acid: Sydney's Techno Underground', in Rob White (ed), *Australian Youth Subcultures: On the Margins and in the Mainstream*, Hobart: ACYS Publications, 1999, pp 65–73. For Exodus see Tim Malyon, 'Tossed in the Fire and They Never Got Burned: The Exodus Collective', in McKay (ed), *DiY Culture*, pp 187–207.
- ³⁰ In Rietveld, 'Repetitive Beats', p 251.
- ³¹ The techno-circus would include the likes of the Mutoid Waste Co, 2000 DS, Circus Normal and Bedlam sound system.
- ³² See the writings of Alan Lodge: <http://tash.gn.apc.org/desert1.htm>.
- ³³ See Lodge, <http://tash.gn.apc.org/desert1.htm>.

OUTBACK VIBES

- ³⁴ For insider notes on this see Alan Dearing (ed), *No Boundaries: New Travellers on the Road (Outside of England)*, Dorset: Enabler Publications, 1998.
- ³⁵ 'Vibe Tribe Evolution', *Sporadical* 4, 1997, p 3.
- ³⁶ On the 'vibe' see Tim Olaveson, "'Connectedness" and the Rave Experience: Rave as New Religious Movement', in St John (ed) *Rave Culture and Religion*, p 90; and 'Liminoid Tribes and Dance Vibes: Victor Turner and Trance Dance Culture', in Graham St John (ed) *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance*. New York: Berghahn (forthcoming). The quote is from Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p 131.
- ³⁷ Michel Gaillot, *Multiple Meaning: Techno – An Artistic and Political Laboratory of the Present*, Paris: Dis Voir, 1998, p 25.
- ³⁸ For further discussion of trance culture and ecological consciousness, see St John, 'Techno Millennium'.
- ³⁹ The collective emerged amidst outrage at French nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific. They were originally called 'Oms not Bombs', the name inspired by the US-derived international anarchist free food kitchens Food Not Bombs where the 'Om' (ॐ) substitute 'represents universal peace in the ancient Sanskrit symbology'. They would later become known as Ohms not Bombs. According to Strong, 'ohms' is 'a symbol of resistance [which] . . . can apply to sound or the mass of people power needed in our non-violent war against the enemies of the earth'. Peter Strong, 'Doofstory: Sydney Park to the Desert', in St John, *FreeNRG*, pp 82, 87.
- ⁴⁰ Reference to the 'groovement' is from the editorial of *Sporadical* 1.
- ⁴¹ Activist documentaries would be screened as 'agit-house' (Strong's name for techno tracks programmed with provocative, dissident vocal samples) was amplified.
- ⁴² From interviews with Pete Strong at Lake Eyre South, 15 May 2000, and Darwin, 20 June 2000.
- ⁴³ See Murray, 'Sound Systems and Australian DiY Culture', p 67.
- ⁴⁴ In defiance of environmental impact statements and strong opposition from the Mirrar traditional owners, Energy Resources of Australia Ltd (ERA) received Howard Government approval in 1997 to build a new uranium mine at Jabiluka in the World Heritage-listed Kakadu. Traditional owner Eyvonne Margarula stated that the mine was severely impacting the Boywek-Almudj sacred site complex.
- ⁴⁵ The trouble relates to controversy surrounding protest actions on Mirrar land not endorsed by the Mirrar.
- ⁴⁶ Further construction of the mine ceased in 1999, and Rio Tinto (majority shareholders of ERA) began rehabilitating the mine site in October 2003.
- ⁴⁷ *Sporadical* 5, 1998, p 8, and see Peter and Faith Strong, 'Oms Not Bombs', in Alan Dearing and Brendan Handley (eds) *Alternative Australia: Celebrating Cultural Diversity*, Dorset: Enabler, 2000, pp 142–146.
- ⁴⁸ From: www.lakeeyre.green.net.au/lakeeyre.html (accessed April 24, 2005)
- ⁴⁹ Izzy Brown and Marc Peckham, 'Tuning Technology to Ecology: Labrats Sola Powered Sound System', in St John, *FreeNRG*, pp 91–107. This clean energy system would come to form the hub of actions assailing industries associated with the nuclear cycle (from uranium mines, to radioactive waste dumps, to food irradiation plants), and in support of Indigenous and other local peoples impacted by these industries.
- ⁵⁰ Especially via their film documentary *Tunin' Technology to Ecology*, which won a New Filmmakers Award at the 2003 Wild Spaces environmental and social justice film festival.
- ⁵¹ During this time, Combat Wombat consisted of DJ Monkey Marc, MC Izzy, MC Elf Transporter, Miranda Mutanta (and occasionally MC Anna and DJ Atom13).
- ⁵² *Sporadical* 2001, p 21.
- ⁵³ *Sporadical* 2001, p 21.
- ⁵⁴ Ian Maxwell, *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin Upper*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003, p 16.
- ⁵⁵ See Miguel D'Souza and Kurt Iveson, 'Homies and Homebrewz: Hip Hop in Sydney', in R White (ed) *Australian Youth Subcultures: On the Margins and in the Mainstream*, Hobart: ACYS, 1999.
- ⁵⁶ Interview with author May 2000.
- ⁵⁷ Maxwell *Phat Beats*, p 10.
- ⁵⁸ From the track 'White Australia' on Combat Wombat's *Labrats Solar Powered Sound System* (2002). The lyrics are reproduced verbatim. As Morton indicates, the phrase 'White Australia has a Black History' is simultaneously condemnatory (of a dark, imperial history) and celebratory (with a 40–60,000 year Aboriginal heritage benefiting national identity): see Morton, 'Aboriginality, Mabo and the Republic', p 122–123.
- ⁵⁹ Such as the western suburbs of Sydney, described by Maxwell as a traditionally authentic locus of Australian hip hop.
- ⁶⁰ The only authorities they appear to respect.
- ⁶¹ 'White Australia'. As a message expressing collusion in cultural and ecological struggle, this should be clearly distinguished from efforts by well meaning yet deceitful agents whose 'mutant messages' see them effectively supplanting ethnic or Indigenous minorities. I am referring to the kind of project exemplified in Marlo Morgan's New Age classic *Mutant Message Down Under* (1991).
- ⁶² Brown and Peckham, 'Tuning Technology to Ecology', p 102.
- ⁶³ Travelling under the name of Bedlam were artists from the UK's Negusa Negast and San Francisco's SPAZ (Semi Permanent Autonomous Zone). Negusa Negast (which means 'King of Kings' in ancient Ethiopian) was a purpose built Brixton reggae roots system.

- ⁶⁴ 'Miranda's Generation', unpublished document written by Miranda Mutanta.
- ⁶⁵ See Robin Cooke, 'Mutoid Waste Recycledelia and Earthdream' in St John. *FreeNRG*, pp 131–156.
- ⁶⁶ Cooke cited in Joni Taylor, 'Mutoid Waste Co: Recycling the Future', *Sydney City Hub* 21 October 1999, p 9;
- ⁶⁷ Cooke cited in Kid Kenobi, 'Doofin' out the Back', *Earthzine2000*, 2000, p 7. Earthdream is envisioned by Cooke to be held annually until Dec 21 2012, the date signifying the end of the Great Cycle in the Mayan calendar.
- ⁶⁸ On 19 May 2000 at Lake Eyre South, Buzzacott stated, 'There's no doubt about it, this is the year to make the noise, while the world's watching'. He was referring to the Olympics and his planned 3000-kilometre 'Walking the Land' trek to Sydney in time for the Games.
- ⁶⁹ Adnyamathanha claim the mining is conducted on a significant site. Owned by US giant General Atomics, and the first new uranium mine in Australia for twenty years, Beverley was designed to employ the notorious sulphuric acid In Situ Leach (ISL) technique. Despite receiving final government approval in April 1999, grave concerns about the purported safety of the operation remained. See St John, 'Earthdreaming for a Nuclear Free Future'.
- ⁷⁰ Four days later, around 20 Adnyamathanha representatives, including Artie Wilton, the last fully initiated Adnyamathanha law man, led a group of some 150 people to the mine gates, to 'support a the Adnyamathanha's rights as law holders and keepers of this land' (from Chris Littlejohn, 'Keepers of Lake Eyre – Behind the Scenes, May – August 2000', unpublished document).
- ⁷¹ The scene is featured in Ska TV's film *Emu Spew*. Buzzacott's exploits prior to and since this event, are given coverage in the experimental film documentary *First Fleet Back: Uncle Kevin vs the Queen* (2005), Jennifer Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell, Tallstoreez Productionz.
- ⁷² Ohms had travelled to Lake Eyre South in 1999, 2000 and 2001 in their 'Peace Bus'. Strong understood Earthdream to be a focal point for what he outlines as 'a united response to the government's continued assault on the environment, on youth, the unions and the traditional Aboriginal people of this country' (*Sporadical* April 1999, p 3).
- ⁷³ Innovative theatre was integral to the Earthdream 'production'. Having staged anti-uranium performances at the mine's gates, the Half Life Theatre Company and its cabaret style circus show (featuring Miranda Mutanta's pantomime villainess 'The Future Eater' amidst a host of other characters) went on to perform for school children, miners, Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal audiences from outback South Australia to Darwin (and East Timor), a theatre influencing subsequent productions in Europe. Far from mere entertainment, Earthdream theatre would inspire an interactive approach involving art and music workshops run for kids in remote communities desperately requiring new strategies of youth re-engagement (see St John, 'Off Road Show').
- ⁷⁴ Even between Rainbow Family participants and environmental activists. I say 'even' since the philosophical praxis of 'no borders' pursued by New Age Traveller/Rainbow Family (and celebrated in various publications such as Alberto Ruz Buenfil, *Rainbow Nation Without Borders: Toward an Ecotopian Millennium*, Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1991, and Dearling, *No Boundaries*) gave rise to activity which was a cause for concern for environmental and Indigenous rights activists. For the spiritual-activist earth warrior, self-identifying as indigenous to the planet, while Indigenous people may be perceived to hold timeless and homogenised 'traditions', they often do not possess rights or authority as traditional owners (see Marcus, 'The Journey Out to the Centre'). The activities of international nomads at Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park in 2000, where they were reported to have trespassed upon areas off-limits to all besides caretakers, demonstrated a serious disregard for Tjukurrpa (Law). Acknowledging the continuing rights of Aboriginal peoples, many expressed antipathy towards what was regarded as transgression of the (cultural and geographical) boundaries that Anangu have struggled to maintain. The crisis of legitimacy emerging within Earthdream2000 was a struggle symptomatic of a worried present.
- ⁷⁵ Emily Vicendese, 'Desert Dreaming: Old Lake Eyre is Calling', *Tekno Renegade Magazine*, August, 1999, p 25.
- ⁷⁶ 'Earthdream in the Centre', *Earthzine* 1, p 26.