Music Scenes
Local, Translocal, and Virtual

Edited by Andy Bennett
and Richard A. Peterson

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Behind the Rave: Structure and Agency in a Rave Scene

Ken Spring

To the casual observer, music scenes probably seem to emerge more or less spontaneously: jazz in New Orleans, 1914; be-bop jazz in New York, 1943; rock in Liverpool, 1963; psychedelic rock in San Francisco, 1967; grunge in Seattle, 1991. This view may be sufficient for discussing the experience of a scene, but it is a bit like describing a movie as the interaction among a group of actors preserved on film. It fails to examine the required interactions of many individual specialists, such as directors, set designers, music score writers, lighting experts, scriptwriters, film editors, and others who work behind the cameras and contribute their skills to make a film. Likewise, for music scenes to flourish, a variety of types of people need to cooperate in order to take advantage of opportunities for scene building in a particular place and time. First drawing on Goffman’s (1959) concept of backstage, then borrowing from Becker’s (1982) analysis of backstage contributors, I focus here on the individuals who have played a role both in the rise and in the fall of a music scene.

So why do scenes happen? Why do scenes occur where and when they do? And in particular, what is the role of those working backstage in creating a risk-free environment that facilitates the appearance of a spontaneous music scene? Here I discuss the circumstances within which a local scene was launched, hit cruising altitude, and then came crashing to earth. In many ways this flight is not unlike that of innumerable local scenes, such as the rock scene of Austin, Texas, described by Shank (1994), rave in Wisconsin (Champion 1997), and contemporary dance club culture (Thornton 1995).

I describe the ebb and flow from 1987 to 1996 of a rave music scene in a largely Eastern European ethnic working-class satellite city near Detroit, Michigan. The city, which I call Ruston, proved an ideal site for this study. (The name of the city has been changed, as have the names of the key actors, so that I can report events candidly while protecting the confidentiality of the informants.) This is an ethnographic account made by a participant observer who was involved in the Ruston scene in a variety of roles over the course of seven years. My roles ranged from checking identification and taking money at the door to promotions, from bartending and bouncing to setting up and breaking down the space. I have refreshed these observations by using journals I made at the time, as well as those of peers, co-workers, and friends. I have supplemented these with recent interviews and correspondence with several former club kids, DJs, promoters, drug dealers, and club managers familiar with the Ruston scene.

The Ruston scene flourished when it did because many elements that complemented one another came together in one particular place in time. Some may argue that it “just happened”; however, the Ruston scene occurred as the result of a rather complex social structure in conjunction with a few exceptionally driven individuals who set goals and followed them through to the end. While the music played a vital role in establishing an overall atmosphere and rationale, an underlying complex of social networks that involved money, power, and status was essential for the rave scene to emerge. So while music is central to the scene, the focus here will remain on the elements of the supporting apparatus that in combination allowed the scene to flourish. To establish this context, I focus on the particular urban setting, the actors associated with building the rave scene, and the sociopolitical structure that provided capital and political cover.

What Is Techno? Who Are Its Fans?

Techno music lies at the heart of the Ruston scene. One in the family of genres associated with dancing that evolved out of 1970s dance music, it developed in Detroit in the early 1980s and spread across the United States to Europe and Southeast Asia.
Techno requires a disc jockey (DJ) who plays especially produced vinyl albums that typically have a deep bass-driven beat mixed with diverse forms of electronic sound. Using two turntables mounted side by side and equipped with record-speed equalizers, sound faders, and diverse sound-altering devices, the proficient DJ continually switches the sound between the two turntables or blends the sounds coming from each. These recorded sounds are periodically augmented by manually pushing the revolving disk backward, creating a distinctive scratching sound. While one turntable is being played, the record on the other can be replaced; the result is a song with a steady beat that continually changes but need never end.

Typically, DJs stand on a raised platform over the dance floor, and their continual activity takes on the look of an intensely self-absorbed dance. Proficient DJs regularly watch the dancers and interact with them from time to time, while shaping the sound to maximize the number of people actually dancing. The resulting block of continual music (called a set) is a unique performance that can last from forty-five minutes to several hours. Typically, a set begins softly and builds to an intense peak, then mellows out to bring the dancers down and signal the set's end.

The vinyls that DJs spin are especially produced for them from sounds generated electronically or acoustically and augmented with music sampled from diverse sources. These samples range from familiar dance music to themes from old TV shows and movies to world music. The most proficient DJs have signed with independent record companies that cater to the techno market, so that they can make their own mixes into vinyls. These they use as the raw material for making live mixes at dances. DJs regularly share their vinyls with label mates, and they are sold to other DJs, so a new mix can spread around the world in a matter of weeks.

This genre of music was not played on MTV or mainstream radio in the 1990s, so it was not widely embraced by the mainstream U.S. audience. Rather it remained unique to a marginalized population that consisted predominantly of white urban “club kids,” that is, people between eighteen and thirty who participate with others like themselves in activities associated with urban nightlife that revolve around dance, alcohol, and drugs.

**The Rave Scene as a Risk-free Environment**

Throughout this chapter I will refer to the ambiance of the rave scene as a risk-free environment. This sort of environment was essential for a vibrant rave scene, because much of the activity was transgressive or illegal. Raves

are associated with several styles of electronic music, including techno, house, trance, jungle, and other forms that came and went more rapidly. Many of the nightclubs that played this music in the United States were exclusionary in the sense that only a few kinds of people were welcome. This was due to regulations regarding age, dress, looks, and finances. As a result, DJs took their music to abandoned warehouses, old churches, and other evacuated areas where kids could escape and be themselves in a world that seemed separate and entirely their own.

The environment created, one of mutual toleration, sharing, and anti-competitiveness, allowed freedom of dance, sexual expression, and drug use. The most common drug was Ecstasy (called “E” or “X”), because it created euphoria and facilitated dancing for extended periods of time, but other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine were used. Other characteristics of the rave scene, which over the course of the Ruston scene changed a number of times, are colorful lights, “smart” drinks (herbal juices thought to enhance the mood, as well as the environment), dancers (called ravers or partiers), lightsticks, and stylistic clothing. (For a more in-depth discussion of the characteristics of rave culture, see Reynolds 1997, Champion 1997, or van Veen 2002a, 2002b.)

**Flow and Ebb of the Ruston Rave Scene**

Few of the many small cities like Ruston developed an active rave scene, so what set this city apart? In fact, for the Ruston rave scene to develop, a number of structural factors had to come together in this small Midwestern city, which was not widely known for its music or nightlife. Just as Stanley Cohen (1980) speaks of the necessity of bridging structure and culture through biography to understand the [sub]cultural scene, this chapter will flesh out the relationship between structure and agency through a biography of the Ruston scene. This process can be described in three stages: founding days, functioning scene, and collapse.

**Founding Days of the Ruston Scene**

As Phil Cohen (1972) points out, the relationship of the subculture (scene) with the physical territory or community is important in a scene's development. In Ruston, the characteristics of the neighborhood and the management of the venue where the scene began were vital in shaping the scene. The setting was a four-block-long, two-block-wide urban environment. It
was a run-down area with houses converted to cheap apartments, along with abandoned buildings, vacant stores, a few small, locally owned stores, and three biker bars. The area, referred to here as "the Strip," was cut off from the more prosperous part of town except for one connecting street that formed its focus.

The one remaining local restaurant/bar was on this street. Johnny's Bar and Grill had been in one family for three generations, and the rising owner-manager, Bill, then in his early twenties, instituted Saturday-evening music shows in the early 1990s that featured "alternative" bands such as the Smashing Pumpkins, Kid Rock, the B-52's, Babes in Toyland, and the Goo-Goo Dolls—all before they became famous and pricey—as well as other bands supported by kids in the area. The club's location was far from the town's entertainment district on the "other side of the tracks" and had poorly lit streets and little police protection, which might seem to make it an unlikely place to draw hip young people. However, Bill was able to use this negative stereotyping to his advantage and marketed Johnny's Bar and Grill as the Beat, which became the nucleus of an underground scene.

By catering to the stereotype of the other side of the tracks, Bill was able to attract a select group of alternative kids. By day he ran an ordinary working-class neighborhood bar and grill, but at night, when all the regulars had gone home, Bill's bar turned into a hip place for the college-age crowd attracted to trendy live music by local and national alternative rock bands, as well as other popular college groups. This was music that spoke to the kids and gave them a voice—angst-driven punk rock, soul-searching acoustics, and so on. The Beat fit the stereotype as well. It was dark, slightly seedy, and yet a cutting-edge oasis that was nestled in a run-down commercial area that kids considered dangerous because of the nearby biker bars. Adding to the rough underground stereotype, the Strip was located on the run-down and shabby industrial side of the city.

An important factor in the creation of the scene was that Bill was from the neighborhood, and everyone was delighted to see him do well. In the daytime, locals would file in to have a few drinks at lunch or before making their way back home. Consequently, the Beat was well established and supported in the area. As a neighborhood boy who grew with the business, Bill not only developed the managerial skills needed to run such a business, but also learned how to deal with members of the local community, the police, fire and sanitation inspectors, and the political authorities downtown.

The residents of the community supported Bill's efforts because they had hopes of more money being spent in their community, while new tax dollars would translate into more funds for police protection, road repair, and other activities that would affect the development of the neighborhood and raise land values. As a result, building owners gave Bill the chance to purchase properties before they were officially advertised for sale. And because Bill seemed to have a vision and a genuine interest in the community, the community was more likely to turn a blind eye to inappropriate or illegal activities going on behind the closed doors of the club; it was not a public nuisance, and all that was visible were the immediate benefits, such as new facades on buildings, better roads, and increased police patrols. Having local community support also translated into solid backing from the precinct alderman, the police, and city political authorities. Bill received city money earmarked for urban renewal and, though young, was officially cited for his civic contributions. He reciprocated by giving generous contributions to political officials.
Developing the Ruston Music Scene

After experiencing early success with alternative rock bands playing nightly in the bar, in 1989 Bill opened up the previously unused basement of the Beat as an underground dance club devoted to playing vinyl records mixed by DJs. From the outset, much of the music that was being played in the warehouses and studios of Detroit found its way to the Basement of the Beat. While most of the Basement’s music had been played widely for weeks, the last two hours of every night were set aside for the DJs to play their new musical inventions. In addition, about once a month, the club would close down at the regular time, only to reopen its back door to continue as a private party. This was a time for the DJs to really share their new techno music with the audience.

Detroit DJs and their music heavily influenced this scene, but the Ruston scene flourished as a result of a handful of individuals, many of whom had begun as party kids themselves, growing into full-time jobs step by step. It was run as a private party, where in exchange for not charging rent, Bill the bar owner kept all of the bar receipts and paid no one. Bartenders worked for their tips; DJs played for free drinks and the promise of a good time; active clubbers were comped in (that is, got in without paying an entry fee). In addition, two of the bartenders took it upon themselves to play the role of promoters and bring rave music to Ruston. One told me of the beginning of the scene:

When we opened up Monday nights, I took twenty bucks out of the drawer; we chipped in a few more bucks and bought a cooler full of imports and a bag of weed. I could get four DJs to show up—a couple from Detroit, and a few locals. If I got four DJs to show up, each would bring about five people with them at least. At first we would style everyone down with alcohol, two-dollar cover, joints, and a lot of extras passed out at a nominal fee (Ecstasy was big, mushrooms, acid).

The other bartender, an MBA student at a local university, gave me a good idea of how the rave scene was introduced to Ruston: “I introduced the music ‘risk free’ to the DJs and people I considered the early adopters. A good marketer knows that the early adopters get things for free at first and then, well, you know, [prices] go up.”

As another promoter said: “Anyone who wanted to get involved in the scene could get good drugs, and get laid.” This programming and style of operation apparently worked, because in a few weeks the word of the late-night parties got around, and club kids were coming in from all over that part of the Midwest. Ruston now had an after-hours dance-party scene known to those in the dance club world. Monday nights drew several hundred participants from around the Midwest.

The Functioning Ruston Scene

Over the course of the next four years, from 1989 to 1993, the Strip added two all-night eateries, four nightclubs, a tattoo parlor, and a coffeehouse/record and clothing store. Bill owned and operated most of the venues or leased them to a business or an individual. All leases had clauses that stipulated either that the lessees could not compete with Bill or that he would be cut in on a percentage of their profits. Apartments over the stores owned by Bill were filled with artists’ studios and semi-stabilized vagrants. Vacant buildings were condemned and demolished to make way for well-lit parking lots. In addition to all of Bill’s enterprises, new nonrelated chain-store businesses popped up, such as drugstores and pizza places. This structure of the Strip existed for about four more years, until early 1997.

In the heyday of the scene, two clubs specifically targeted the underground-club crowd, and the largest of the new clubs, the Center Stage, set aside an off night (Monday) for rave music. Bill never asked about the events that took place at the Center Stage on Monday nights. It was easy money, and the club was becoming more profitable each week. Participants entered through the back door, and neither the police nor liquor control officials interrupted the party. In addition to the Beat and Center Stage, the coffeehouse offered kids much more than coffee: rave clothing, a showcasing of graffiti art, vinyl records and turntables to try them out on, bootleg tapes of their favorite DJs latest party mix, and a well-equipped basement that frequently housed after-hours dance parties. While the upstairs was a mellow environment for kids to grab a coffee or water to help control their buzz, the downstairs was just the opposite. In the basement, they could find everything to maintain or enhance their music- and drug-induced “high.”

Beyond the ravers, others essential to maintaining the Ruston rave scene included DJs, promoters, drug dealers, politicians, fire marshals, and police.
DJs

DJs provided the mix of music the kids wanted to hear and introduced new music the dancers would come to want to hear. When I asked how the Ruston DJs went about introducing people to techno music, the answer given by one of them is representative: “I always try to keep the crowd guessing. And I always try to educate by introducing a new sound in between a couple of tracks which the crowd may already be familiar with. This way they are pumped at the point that the new sound comes on and pumped again when it goes off. It’s sort of like programming them to like it.”

Beyond sharing their music, the Ruston DJs maintained established social networks with other DJs and promoters in the music industry, advising each other about good places to spin. As a result, when the Ruston Monday-night raves became established, they drew headline DJs from major cities such as Toronto, London, Chicago, and Detroit. Local DJs used the experience to educate themselves in both the music and the culture, and in time many of them became draws in other cities around the United States; several are still in demand around the world.

Advertising visiting name DJs became unnecessary, because it was understood by the kids that the Strip always had good DJs and that the range of styles would meet or exceed their expectations. As one club kid said:

The promoters always had a well-balanced line-up of DJs for the evening; they would spin house, techno, trance, and maybe a hip-hop artist to kick things off. Promoters were known, and if their names were associated with the party, people knew that the best DJs, the best drugs, and the best time would be had. The convenience and security of the Strip was the perfect fit for their cause.

Promoters

Promoters’ prime role was to introduce people to one another, including club managers, DJs, club kids, and drug dealers. The promoters of the Ruston rave scene were all well educated; some were in various stages of earning MBAs—master of business administration degrees—with a focus on marketing and were therefore well versed in the tools of marketing and networking. At the same time, they had a genuine interest in the music and could profit financially by connecting others in the scene.

The most influential promoters in the Ruston scene took advantage of the risk-free space to cash in on some of these events with their own safe venue. They leased the coffee shop from Bill and threw parties that complemented the other events on the Strip. Bill demanded that they not compete with his bar business, and they agreed that their parties could not begin until the legitimate clubs were closing. The promoters complied because violation of this stipulation would result in their lease being revoked.

Drugs

Drugs were prevalent at parties, as well as within the bar scene. As one club kid remarked, “The same five people were always holding, and once you knew, you could count on it every time.” When I asked a promoter if it was easy for a newcomer to find out who was holding drugs, he said it was easy for them “if they personally knew one of the promoters or DJs. The drugs were part of the business and vital for making money to support upcoming events.” Thus it was an unspoken certainty that anyone who wanted to extend or enhance the party mood had the opportunity to do so. Many of my informants mentioned that not only were you assured that you could find the drugs you wanted, but also you had a place to use them with little chance of being arrested or negatively sanctioned for your actions. They agreed with my assumption that the risk-free environment increased both attendance and drug use. DJs and promoters stated that while “drugs have always been a part of the rave culture, now it seems to be the main part of the culture, dominating even over the music.” They also agreed that most parties in most cities operate in a similar fashion.

Security guards hired by the management or promoters were essential to the regular availability, quality, and price of drugs. By the time everything was set up and ready to start, security would arrive to work the door. Even for “underground” parties, some form of security would be present. Sometimes the security would be off-duty police officers or bouncers from one of the clubs; sometimes the promoters would hire out friends to work security. In all cases, security would be at the parties, putting down people and checking bags prior to entry. Security guards would not typically go beyond the front door of the party, and in most instances they would be located outside. In addition to checking IDs for age, a major part of their job was to take drugs away from kids seeking access to the party.

How then did drugs get on the premises? One of my informants explained:
A few selected dealers with a reputation for high-quality drugs were allowed in before opening of the party, perhaps during set up. The dealers would have the night's supply inside the party before anyone came. Then security would only catch the 'unlicensed' dealers who tried to smuggle in the goods, guaranteeing that the selected dealers would sell out and owe the promoters a percent of what was sold.

Thus an absolute monopoly was formed. There was no direct agreement as to how large a cut promoters would receive, and in some instances it was the promoters themselves who made the drugs available. Some of the benefits of the drug sales for club goers were a decrease in the cost to get into the party, better-known DJs, better lighting, and better sound, as well as a better quality of drugs.

According to knowledgeable respondents, drugs were chosen for their reputed mood-control effects. Marijuana was not considered a real drug, any more than were nicotine or caffeine. Recreational drugs included LSD, E or X, mushrooms, cocaine, and various types of speed. Alcohol was always present. As one observer said: "In the beginning, alcohol was important to gain critical mass; a lot of people won't come out if they can't drink." An experienced raver told me: "Alcohol was important as a stabilizer—you do enough drugs, you need something to calm you down." When I inquired about the percentage of people who were using recreational drugs at the parties, safe estimates were between 50 and 60 percent; from my observations, these estimates are low.

While the drugs were indeed pervasive, people seemed to be aware of their personal limits. This does not suggest that people sometimes did not use in excess, but most would not push their limits, and in my seven years on the scene, there was no instance when an ambulance needed to be called to cope with a drug problem. As one promoter said:

The majority would take what they could get without crossing their personal limits. However, a lot of people know better than to use the harder drugs like coke, crystal meth, or crack, and they would simply say "No thanks" if offered those. The hard-core ravers used E. For the mullet heads [outsiders], who found themselves at a party uninvited, it was a free-for-all.

**Officialdom**

The political structure of the Ruston community in the early 1990s aided in the creation and continuation of the rave scene. In this rust-belt industrial city in a postrecession era, there was a dire need to encourage new businesses. The Strip was located in a run-down area that offered low rent for a large amount of space, and one could purchase a building for much less than in other areas of town. In addition, the city was eager to have new businesses take over the otherwise vacant spaces on the Strip, which generated tax revenues and ensured the viability of the area. Bill, the club owner, approached the mayor and city councilman with requests for urban-development money and for a tolerant attitude regarding what was happening in his clubs. City officials were eager to help him succeed, in part because his success facilitated their efforts to bring the city back to economic prosperity. The political alliances that were created by Bill, a local boy, with the local ward alderman and city officials made possible the risk-free environment. I suggest that an official blind eye with regard to the events was essential to the establishment and smooth functioning of the Ruston rave scene, and Ruston city officials, police, and fire marshals worked with Bill to create a structure that allowed marginalized deviant activity to occur without the threat of sanction.

Bill established close ties with the local councilman and had a scattering of other political figures either on his payroll or with a vested interest in the success of the Strip. Whenever concerns arose in the mayor's office, the councilman for the district where the Strip is located would typically attempt to persuade a majority of the council to withdraw their objections to the permit renewals. Bill received honors from the city for his renovation of the Strip and was praised by the mayor, the councilman, and local police.

**Fire Marshals and Police**

Police and fire marshals had the job of accommodating the rules of the city to the needs of the rave scene. While policing was increased in areas around the Strip, the same rules did not necessarily apply to everyone equally. The maximum attendance set by the fire code was 300 for the Beat and 250 for the Center Stage, yet crowds at those bars would typically exceed capacity three and four times over; neither club was ever served a formal citation for its violations. When the fire inspectors came on their
infrequent inspections, they would give the manager a verbal warning along with an order to clear the premises in a timely fashion (the time conveniently coinciding with the party’s planned ending time). Thus Bill and his enterprises appeared to be bullet proof, adding to the feeling of the Strip as a risk-free space.

Bill's close connections with the fire marshals and police allowed him and his associates to use these officials for their own ends. Thus, for example, in order to terminate a profitless night, the party promoters would sometimes call the fire inspectors and ask them to preemptively close the place. Bill used the authorities against his rivals as well. Two clubs that opened on the street within a few hundred yards of the Beat to cash in on the Strip's success were closed by city officials within a year for the same violations that occurred in Bill's clubs on a regular basis. These raids were often initiated by anonymous phone calls that informed police about violations in these other locations. In this way, Bill used his political power to have the competition removed. In another example of differential treatment, police set up DUI (driving under the influence) checkpoints at the intersection just past the Strip, essentially shutting down any traffic to the rival clubs.

Some violations that occurred at Bill's bars were brought to the attention of public officials, but the citations seemed to get set aside, or perhaps even lost in the paperwork. Violations such as serving liquor to a minor, making excessive noise, urinating in public, exceeding fire code limits, operating without a liquor license, selling alcohol after hours, and others added up in Bill's clubs on the Strip, but citations for these violations did not make it to court, let alone result in the clubs being closed. In fact, as these violations were adding up, Bill received official accolades from the mayor and city council members as one of the outstanding businessmen in the city.

City authorities were also helpful in protecting Bill's bars from state liquor-control agents who might stop by for a “surprise” inspection of underage drinking and other violations. Advance warning allowed the operation to run squeaky-clean while the agents were in the building. Youngsters were asked to leave, and security guards closely checked the age identification of customers. Bouncers would be sure to check hand stamps, as well as re-check the IDs of customers they thought were suspect. In addition, through a set of signals, bartenders knew the exact moment that the agents entered the building, as well as when they left, and would tip off the crowd to keep it under control while they were present. It was back to business as usual as soon as they left.

The scene benefited not only those already mentioned but also the community surrounding the Strip. Ruston community residents benefited from higher tax revenues, better roads, higher property values, and increased police patrol.

The Day the Music Died

The scene's demise began when all of the important actors began to compete for a greater share of the profits, causing the structure of mutually supportive arrangements to collapse. For example, the resident house DJs came to feel underappreciated as well as underpaid so, given the opportunity, would play a private party, which left the club managers scrambling to find a no-name substitute, thus disappointing the club kids. As one DJ said: “DJs prefer to play after-hour parties versus being a resident at a club. When you are a resident, you have owners and managers telling you what to do, what to play.” Furthermore, the good DJs could make four to five times the amount of money playing a party instead of working at one of the clubs. On several occasions, DJs would leave in the middle of the set, or leave early, to go play a party across town. This would force the club either to shut down early or to improvise with a bartender or manager playing some CDs, which cast a pall over the rest of the evening.

To give another example, several promoters decided they could manage the drugs directly, cutting out the politically well-established dealers. The promoters who leased the coffee shop started cutting into Bill's hours of operation. They had parties every weekend, and they started their billing earlier in the evening, sometimes as early as nine or ten o'clock. As a result, attendance at the Beat and the Center Stage, as well as at Bill's other clubs, dropped significantly. Bill retaliated by evicting the coffee shop owners for violations of their lease agreement and for allowing suspect activity within his building, thus eliminating one of the prime attractions to the Strip.

Bill's decision not to support the political campaigns of the precinct alderman and city officials had swift and devastating results. One night without warning the police set up DUI checks at the only convenient railroad crossing, where 90 percent of the clientele traveled into the Strip. In subsequent weeks, the police checkpoint was announced on the evening news. Though few arrests were made, at a stroke these actions destroyed the sense of a risk-free environment that had been so carefully nurtured. This news spread rapidly among club kids across the Midwest, and the Strip no longer was a place to be.
Many of the city officials who had supported Bill in the past became vocal participants in the destruction of his empire. The city clerk found the piles of official citations that had been filed against Bill and his establishments—several of Bill's clubs were closed immediately. City officials publicly decried the types of activities that occurred on the Strip and denounced Bill for allowing them to occur. In the ensuing investigation, the state liquor-control agents put together a case against Bill that cost him high fines and barred him from having a license to sell liquor in the entire state. The police and city officials received acclaim from the media for "cleaning up" the Strip and saving Ruston youth from sex, drugs, and techno music.

The Ruston case provides a solid example of the complexities that exist between organizational structure and entrepreneurial agency. These are highlighted when entrepreneurial agents in Ruston attempted to bend the existing structure to create a risk-free rave scene in this small Midwestern city. The rapid demise of the scene again reflects the complex interdependency of these elements. As we have seen, the scene would not have flourished without the cooperation of a bar owner, club kids, DJs, promoters, drug dealers, police, fire marshals, and city politicians, and the scene fell apart when the cooperation was overtaken by personal greed. The Strip is gone now, and perhaps the scene's only tangible echo is in the careers of several local DJs who have gone on to establish custom record companies and international acclaim in the worldwide techno music scene.

A number of studies have shown officialdom to be hostile to raves (Thornton 1995; Champion 1997; Hollands 1995), but I wonder to what extent the story they report is only the one that authorities and the media want to project. This observation suggests one other significant actor in the making of the Ruston rave scene: the media, who played an important role by doing nothing. The local newspaper must have had some idea of the collusion of public officials. At the very least, members of the paper's staff were in regular attendance at events on the Strip, but it was not until city officials attacked Bill that the media attacked him, and they never asked how he had been able to operate in this manner for all those years.

References


