

The Space in Between: Electronic Music's Occupation of Warehouse Space in Sydney
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Though commonly considered to be simply a space in which goods or merchandise are stored, the warehouse is actually a far more complicated construct and has played a profound role in the development of modern society. As Tobias van Veen explains, 'a warehouse becomes more than space as it becomes a space of becoming'; a space of potential, an 'empty nest of surplus value' (van Veen 2003, p.13). Initially a space of capital production, the warehouse has since also served as an important site of cultural production, adopted by artists all over the world. The warehouse 'conjoins sound and architecture, people and politics' and it is in this way that warehouse space has performed an integral role in the development of electronic music culture in Sydney, offering a space of development free of the expectations and limitations of the more heavily codified spaces of today's society (van Veen 2003, p.13). However, the warehouse as cultural space is becoming increasingly rare as warehouses are developed into residential apartments, raising the question of what other space is available, and desirable, for fringe cultures such as electronic music in Sydney.

Moving In

The adoption of warehouse space by artists can be traced back to SoHo, New York in the late sixties. As Richard Kostelanetz notes in his book *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, the creation of the artists' colony that developed in SoHo was possible due to 'the availability of empty commercial/industrial space that was comparatively cheap initially because no one else wanted it' (Kostelanetz 2003, p.31). In the past thirty years Sydney's inner city has been undergoing a process of development and change, with suburbs like Glebe, Surry Hills and Chippendale being gradually transformed from industrial slums to high-density residential areas. And, just as was the case in SoHo, this transformation has meant that between the exodus of industry and the inner city residential boom artists have been able to capitalize on the availability of vacant and un-redeveloped warehouse space.

Wendy Shaw recounts in her article 'Consuming Sydney's Warehouse Cultures' that it is likely that the adoption of 'unconventional residential accommodation' in inner city Sydney dates back to 'just after World War II when accommodation was in short supply', and subsequently 'by the late 1970s, empty office and warehouse buildings in Paddington, Darlinghurst, East Sydney, Surry Hills, Redfern, Alexandria and the CBD became increasingly occupied for residential purposes' (Shaw 2003, p.8). As she explains:

Low-income earners – students, would-be artists and musicians, and others of the city's fringe-dwelling **demi monde** – had sought "creative" refuge from suburbia and conventional inner city housing (such as terrace houses and old flats) in warehouses and unused old office buildings... An oversupply of warehouses in and around the CBD ensured the availability of this new, albeit informal vein of alternative accommodation throughout the late 1970s and 1980s (Shaw 2003, p.8).

However, the link between electronic music culture in Sydney and the space of the warehouse wasn't expressed concretely until the development of rave culture in the late eighties. Sydney's rave scene emerged from the shadow of the 'Madchester' warehouse party scene in England, a scene that spawned 'a wave of ecstasy-influenced music' around the world (C. Gibson & Pagan 2001, p.10). But apart from the common ground of drug use and repetitive beats, the territory which drew the movement together was its use of space and specifically ex-industrial space, the warehouse. As Gibson explains:

Unlike other musical subcultures, where performances take place in formal, regulated environments (such as concert venues, live pub music, disco nightclubs), the sites for the performance of underground raves in big Australian cities such as Sydney have deliberately included space normally used for industrial and manufacturing production (Chris Gibson 1997, p.2).

Such a conscious re-purposing of former spaces of capital production for cultural production is a constant feature of the artists' adoption of the warehouse space, apparent as far back as SoHo and Andy Warhol's 'Factory'. And yet the identification of electronic music with the space of the warehouse and its industrial past is even more profound. As R Murray Schafer outlined in his book *The Tuning of the World*, 'the industrial revolution introduced a multitude of new sounds with unhappy consequences for many of the natural and human sounds which they tended to obscure', a development 'extended into a second phase when the Electric Revolution added new effects of its own' (Schafer 1977, p. 71). So the adoption of the warehouse as a space of cultural sound production is also an overt reclaiming of sonic production. Though, fundamentally the character of the warehouse does not change, it is a space of production and the artists' adoption of the warehouse merely shifts the production's outcome, from capital to cultural.

House Sitting

Rave culture made its 'spatial strategies' explicit through its (often illegal) appropriation of disused warehouse space for dance parties, articulating a 'subversive appropriation of cracks in the urban landscape' (Chris Gibson 1997, p.2). The relationship between the rave and the warehouse space it inhabited, albeit fleetingly, was therefore not incidental but rather a crucial part of the formation of the rave. And most commonly the rave's concern with the re-territorialization of space has been theorized in reference to Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone (or TAZ). The rave representing a constructed, impermanent space in which 'the assumed foundations of the 'social' are put to question through the sonic and through movement' (van Veen 2003, p.14). As Bey explains:

The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land/of time/of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the state can crush it (Bey 1985, p.101).

This re-territorialization of space is not just in the physical occupation of the warehouse but is mirrored both in the music itself, which collapses time through repetition, and the dancing of the ravers which, expressing the re-territorialization through movement, 'is both a response to, and a fight against the city and its inherent structures: polis' (van Veen 2003, p.14). So, there is a totality to the rave, which fits well with Bey's concept of the TAZ and its liberation of land (or space), time and imagination. However, as Tobias van Veen examines:

Dancing in a warehouse is a contradictory act, alive and dead, at once such dancing deterritorialises the proper use of the physical space, at once the financial and economical backbone of the rave maintains the actuality of the structure and its potential to be utilized again for the drives of capital (van Veen 2003, p.13).

Consequently the rave makes no permanent change to the space of the warehouse. As Bey understood, seeing the TAZ as 'uprising' rather than 'revolution', as a fleeting 'peak experience' acting in contrast to 'the standard of "ordinary" consciousness and experience' (Bey 1985, p.100). However, Bey also argued that the TAZ should be, at least in some sense, 'a tactic of disappearance', which he considered to be 'a very logical radical option for our time' (Bey 1985, p.128). While this was possible in some cases, and indeed for some time, gradually increased media and Police attention brought rave culture into the public consciousness, gradually invading and sublimating the Temporary Autonomous Zone, though with the warehouse's defining potential intact, to be used further at a later date.

Signing The Lease

With the utopian days of momentary occupations of inner city spaces little more than memory, in Sydney the warehouse as cultural space is now possible almost solely through the leasing of spaces by resident artists or artists' collectives. And within that space, following the collapse of rave culture, recent years have seen the rise of so called sound culture as both the site of development of electronic music in Sydney and, perhaps not co-incidentally, the site of electronic music culture's continued relationship to the warehouse. Where once the repetition of the beat and the movement of the dance re-territorialized the space of the warehouse, now the beats and moves have been evacuated. The warehouse space revised yet again through the abandonment of overt rhythm in favour of the reverie of boundless sound and the deep concentration of an audience seated motionless on the floor. A renewed focus on sound itself meaning many artists often no longer even consider themselves musicians, preferring terms such as sound artist. As Achim Szepanski recounts in his article 'This evening a concert will take place', seen through sound culture 'sound machines are inhabited by heterogeneous sound materials, disjunctive varieties, perhaps tones, sounds, noises, less by linking, which assumes that the tone series are homogenous and discrete, than by shifts and the production of an in-between that becomes a composition' such that the sound produced within comes to echo the liminal space of the warehouse itself (Szepanski 1998). 'Suddenly, as if struck by lightning, waves and streams of sounds penetrate the ear, tear up the forms that the memory has stored' (Szepanski 1998). And so, further paralleling the ambiguity of the warehouse space, the development of sound culture has seen a blurring of the lines between artist and musician, sound and music. Ian Andrews observes:

In a post-Cagean world, if sound art is 'performed' in front of an audience it can too easily be perceived as music or theatre. If sound art happens on radio it becomes radiophonics or, again, music. So sound art ends up in the culturally over-coded environment of the art gallery (Andrews 1996, p.38).

However, sound culture in Sydney avoids this through its use of the warehouse space as a site of performance, or perhaps more accurately presentation. The warehouse space's only codification is as a space of production, as a space of potential and so the constructed space of the warehouse performance mirrors the ephemeral nature of sound itself, a fleeting glimpse into the impossible.

In the warehouse space there is little delineation between artist and audience. Where more conventional venues use the stage to separate and foreground the artist, raising them above the audience, the warehouse most commonly lacks a traditional stage and artists often mingle within the audience, blurring the conventional lines of performance. With this mind perhaps it is more useful to read the warehouse performance as an event of collective listening, perhaps even collective dreaming. Both the 'rave' of the illegal warehouse dance party and the 'reverie' of deep-listening sound culture have their roots in the Old French "rever", to dream. So, as Walter Benjamin wrote, warehouses fulfill a role as 'dream houses of the collective' and through their ambiguities a collective experience emerges possible precisely because of the avoidance of the guiding codifications of other spaces and cultural constructions (Benjamin 2002, p.405).

Performances by so-called sound artists, like DJs, also largely lack any real performativity. While it is possible to argue that, at the very least, a sort of micro-gestural performance emerges the experience for the audience is largely one lacking in visual stimuli or, indeed, any of the expected codifications of a musical performance. Gibson claims, 'rave culture, and its emphasis on DJs and pre-recorded material, has signaled a shift in the codes of authenticity and musical credibility of 'live' rock performances' (Chris Gibson 1997, p.1). Similarly, performances by sound artists lack the 'live' authenticity of a rock performance, the lack of conventional gestural theatre or perceived causality between the artist's movements and the sounds made rendering the performance somehow corrupt or inauthentic (Turner 2001). However, rather than 'shift the codes of authenticity and musical credibility' as Gibson claims, it would seem that sound and rave culture has established a new set of codes, apart from the existing codification and expectation of a live musical performance (Chris Gibson 1997, p.1). Under these new codes a multiplicity of ambiguities emerge between the artist, their tools or technology and the audience, such that conventional readings of performance become problematic, if still possible. And this uncertainty is reflected in the ambiguity of warehouses themselves; a space of potential, between identities and open to possibilities.

Renovating and Reorganizing

It is possible to read the warehouse, and particularly the warehouse leased by resident artists or artists' collectives, through Michel Foucault's theorized 'heterotopic space' (Foucault 1984). Gibson argues that the nightclubs which have emerged from rave culture exist as 'heterotopic spaces', constructed to house behaviour otherwise considered deviant in wider society, such as 'hedonistic dancing and the consumption of illicit drugs', while simultaneously containing that behaviour and the subculture around it, separating it from the wider sphere (Chris Gibson 1997, p.3). However, this is a construction that can be applied to warehouses themselves, particularly the current trend of artist leased spaces, but perhaps even in their former use for raves. Certainly the rave demonstrated at times quite utopian aspirations, connected overtly to notions of space. As Gibson observed in relation to Sydney's rave days:

Ravers have consistently portrayed their subculture in terms of the specific sites chosen as venues, and the transformation of these sites into imaginative landscapes. This is clear with the names given to events such as Happy Valley, Field of Dreams, Bent in Space, Utopia (Chris Gibson 1997, p.2).

Though some of these were not held in actual warehouse spaces, they nonetheless provide an insight into the utopian aspirations of the rave. Aspirations that have carried over, if a little less consciously, into the more static, permanent situation of the artist leased warehouse space, as is apparent in Achim Szepanski's account of a typical sound culture performance, in which the listeners 'escape into virtual sound space' (Szepanski 1998). However, Foucault believed utopias to be 'fundamentally unreal spaces', which, although they 'present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down', remain 'sites with no real place' (Foucault 1984). Having come to this conclusion, he argued:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias (Foucault 1984).

Thought of in this way, while the constructed cultural space of the warehouse does possess many utopian characteristics, it is more accurately viewed as a heterotopic space, a constructed utopia within real world frameworks. Specifically, the warehouse has come to function as a 'heterotopia of deviation...in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (Foucault 1984). The warehouse acts as a space for that which culturally has no other place in society, a breeding ground for fringe culture.

Foucault argues that there are 'oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work' (Foucault 1984). Apart from the obvious blurring of cultural space and so-called useful space that occurs in the warehouse, in recent years warehouse spaces in Sydney have generally been artist leased and operated and so have straddled the public/private divide, acting both as a space of public performance and a place of residence. And this represents an important difference between warehouses and more traditional performance venues such as pubs and clubs. As Benjamin outlined in *The Arcades Project*:

The residential character of the rooms in the early factories, though disconcerting and inexpedient, adds this homely touch: that within these spaces one can imagine the factory owner as a quaint figurine in a landscape of machines, dreaming not only of his own but of their future greatness. With the dissociation of the proprietor from the workplace, this characteristic of factory building disappears. Capital alienates the employer, too, from his means of production, and the dream of their future greatness is finished. This alienation process culminates in the emergence of the private home (Benjamin 2002, p. 226).

To at least some extent, then, the adoption of the warehouse by the artist as both a space of residence and performance represents a re-unification of the space of work and living as well as of the public and private, fulfilling the Foucault's assertion that 'the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault 1984). The warehouse at 144 Cleveland St, Chippendale itself embodies this merging (or perhaps collapsing) of spaces. Its current incarnation as Lanfranchis Memorial Discotheque has seen it as home to six or so artists at any one time as well as being a base for the Dual Plover label and regular venue for fringe electronic arts nights. Apart from this, and its brief identity before receiving its current name as The Chocolate Factory, the building was also used in the mid-nineties to house The Evil Brotherhood of Mutants, a group including artists such as Ian Andrews and Tobias Kazumichi Grime. As their website explained:

The Evil Brotherhood of Mutants was set up to give likeminded electronic artists in Clan Analogue a 'factory floor'. A 600sqm warehouse in Sydney Australia has become the living and working space for 6 individuals. From this place shall pour music videos, CD-ROMs, software, photography, electronic art, information kiosks, electronic gadgets and of course web pages galore. We are about fostering a feasible local industry by providing a focal/launching point for electronic artists who want to start using the Internet as a medium for profit or pleasure (McParlane 1996).

The Evil Brotherhood of Mutants' use of rhetoric such as 'factory floor' and 'local industry', demonstrates both an infinity with the notion of their space as one of production of cultural capital, mirroring its former use for more traditional capital production and the way in which warehouses continue to operate within the dominant paradigm of societal relations. A connection that, despite some obvious exceptions, has been recognised in Sydney by the tradition of naming warehouse spaces for their former purposes. Examples include Imperial Slacks in Surry Hills, formerly home to a clothing manufacturer of the same name, The Gunnery in Woolloomooloo, a disused Naval Gunnery, and The Chocolate Factory, which was

once the site of MacRobertson's Chocolates. However, it is also a tradition that seems to be disappearing, with more recent spaces being named less directly. For example, The Frequency Lab in Surry Hills (presumably a reference to its use for esoteric sound experiments), Yvonne Ruve (named for the mother of one of the tenants), iRaq (a short lived space on Wattle Street Ultimo) and Lanfranchis Memorial Discotheque (which replaced The Chocolate Factory at 144 Cleveland St and is named in homage to the criminal Warren Lanfranchis who was murdered in Dangar Place, right behind the warehouse itself).

Subsequently, many of the artists involved in The Evil Brotherhood of Mutants, and Clan Analogue more generally (which still exists, though in a far more mainstream, dance culture orientated form), have been involved in performances held at venues such as Imperial Slacks, The Frequency Lab and Lanfranchis Memorial Discotheque. In fact, both Ian Andrews and Kazumichi Grime have performed at a monthly night, Disorientation, which for two years resided in their former home - a demonstration of the strands that can be found connecting the different eras, communities and spaces of electronic music in Sydney through the heterotopic space of the warehouse and the 'heterochronie', or time-strand, to which it is linked (Foucault 1984). But, Foucault argues:

Opposite these heterotopias that are linked to the accumulation of time, there are those linked, on the contrary, to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These heterotopias are not oriented toward the eternal, they are rather absolutely temporal [chroniques] (Foucault 1984).

So the warehouse comes to function simultaneously as both as a link to the 'heterochronie' of electronic music in Sydney and as a portal to an experience of time at its most transitory and fleeting through the ephemeral and intangible experience of sound. Yet, paradoxically, the warehouse sound performance is simultaneously as atemporal as it is transitory, the momentary stretching into the eternal, lost in the reverie of sound. And so time becomes another spatial construction that is re-territorialized by the warehouse heterotopia.

However, despite the importance of the reunification, and subsequent re-territorialization, of spaces offered by the heterotopic space of the warehouse, Foucault noted that:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications (Foucault 1984).

In this way, the artist-leased warehouse operates both as private and public space while at the same time 'it shrugs off a public role in the creation of exclusionary community' (van Veen 2002, p.12). Warehouses remain inaccessible to the greater public, access to the subculture housed within granted only to those who have somehow achieved involvement with that culture through some form of invitation into that space. And so, the heterotopic space of the warehouse exists 'within or on the edges of an urban fabric, which are contested but do not alter the primary relations of power in society' (C. Gibson & Pagan 2001, p.3). Foucault, though, believed that 'the last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to

all the space that remains' (Foucault 1984). So the role of the heterotopic space of the warehouse, despite its inability to alter the underlying frameworks and relations of society, is 'to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory' (Foucault 1984). Thus the heterotopic warehouse space exists as a site of collective dreaming, a route of escape, a space of possibility and potential.

Growing Up, Moving Out

The warehouse heterotopia seems a much more accurate construction of the cultural space of the warehouse than the Temporary Autonomous Zone, taking into account the real world frameworks that maintain and surround the warehouse space itself. Especially given that the heterotopic model of reading warehouse space can be applied as equally to the rave and its fleeting, illegal occupation of the warehouse as to the more permanent occupation of the artist-leased warehouse which has been prevalent in Sydney in recent years, a shift for which the Temporary Autonomous Zone cannot account. However, regardless of this distinction, as Gibson realizes:

The fundamental philosophical contradiction within the concepts of the Temporary Autonomous Zone and heterotopia concerns the extent to which strategies of spatial mobility, as progressively radical features of youth subcultures, are to rely on evermore fixed, static spaces for their survival (C. Gibson & Pagan 2001, p.23).

More than ever this is a problematic situation, as the gentrification of the inner city of Sydney has seen the artist occupied warehouse become an increasingly rare phenomenon. Many spaces such as Imperial Slacks and The Gunnery have already disappeared, with The Frequency Lab and Yvonne Ruve (both on the same floor of Hibernian House on Elizabeth St, Surry Hills), along with Lanfranchis Memorial Discotheque, seemingly the only remaining regularly used spaces.

The first formal warehouse conversion in Sydney occurred in 1979, on the corner of King, Clarence and Kent Streets and by 1981, when then head of the NSW Department of Environment and Planning announced the advent of such conversions more than seventy warehouses had been redeveloped (Shaw 2003, p.8). Since then the gentrification of the inner city of Sydney has been a slow but continuous process which is now almost complete, following a boom in the number and scale of warehouse conversions in the late nineties (Shaw 2003, p.8). Ironically, it was New York style loft living that inspired both the informal adoption of warehouses by the artist and the subsequent popularization of high density inner city residential living, as epitomized by the lost-style apartment, that has ultimately displaced the artist from the warehouse. It appears that, at least in the inner city, the artists' role as caretaker tenants has largely been fulfilled as the inner city completes its shift from industrial to residential space. So the question that emerges is where else will electronic music culture be able to situate itself? Tobias van Veen argues that the abstracted concept of the "warehouse" stands regardless of 'whether "warehouse" takes its space and time within an actual warehouse or the backcountry, a forest or a field' (van Veen 2003). So, in this vein, the constructed space of the "warehouse" could remain long after we have lost its physical manifestations. But, while this sounds feasible, the issue remains of the unique physical and historical construction of the warehouse, which can be easily substituted.

It is possible that as a result of the gradual disappearance of the inner city cultural warehouse space there will be a geographic shift of Sydney's electronic music community from the inner city to more affordable areas such as Homebush, the Blue Mountains (where indeed many artists reside, commuting to the city to perform) or perhaps even Wollongong. Just as, following significant increases in rent and an influx of non-artists to SoHo, the arts community began to shift to other areas such as Brooklyn (Kostelanetz 2003, p.223). This year $\frac{1}{4}$ Inch, another monthly night held at The Frequency Lab, has actually been held in Wollongong every second month. Though, more broadly this prospect seems unlikely, because, unlike much of New York, despite the availability of cheap and plentiful space these areas lack many of the other factors that make inner city industrial areas so attractive to niche sub-cultures. That is, the ability to form a close knit community living in close physical proximity both to each other and to the facilities and employment of the city and yet, paradoxically, also have access to abundant space at low cost and a population base large enough, and educated enough to support that community.

Aside from the disappearance of warehouse space itself, it seems that electronic music culture in Sydney is anxious to move on from the space of the warehouse, like a child that feels it has outgrown living at home and seeks new experiences, greater horizons, a chance to stand on its own. Two of the regular monthly performance events of recent years, Impermanent Audio and Disorientation, have this year both shifted from their respective homes at The Frequency Lab and Lanfranchis Memorial Discothèque to more commonly known (and heavily codified) venues such as The Abercrombie Hotel and Spectrum Nightclub, to varying degrees of success. And, by way of example, one of the largest fringe music festivals in Sydney, the NowNow, was this year held at the old Newtown RSL for the first time, and attracted hundreds each night, far more than would ever have been possible the previous year when the event was held at Lanfranchis Memorial Discothèque. Though, these shifts still seem tentative, exploratory steps from a community keen to move forward but unsure how to do so. Certainly a move to the more known and familiar territory of traditional music venues can open up new audiences for electronic music in Sydney. However, the role of the warehouse in the development of electronic music culture in Sydney is undeniable and so questions remain as to what effect any move away from this space will have on the music and on the culture around it.

The constructed space of the warehouse has been integral to cultural development in Sydney, as it has elsewhere around the world, providing a unique environment for artists to produce and present their work free of the expectations and limitations of the more heavily codified space that dominates society. In particular, warehouse space has played an intimate and crucial role in the development of electronic music culture in Sydney, through which a symbiotic relationship between sound and space has emerged. Due to its intimate link to the physical space of the warehouse, it remains to be seen whether the constructed space of the warehouse will remain viable after warehouses themselves have disappeared. Regardless, despite the inescapable societal frameworks that surround it, the cultural space of the warehouse has been an invaluable space of possibility, escape and collective experience.

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