

---

# Techno-shamanism and Educational Research

David R. Cole, Ph.D.

---

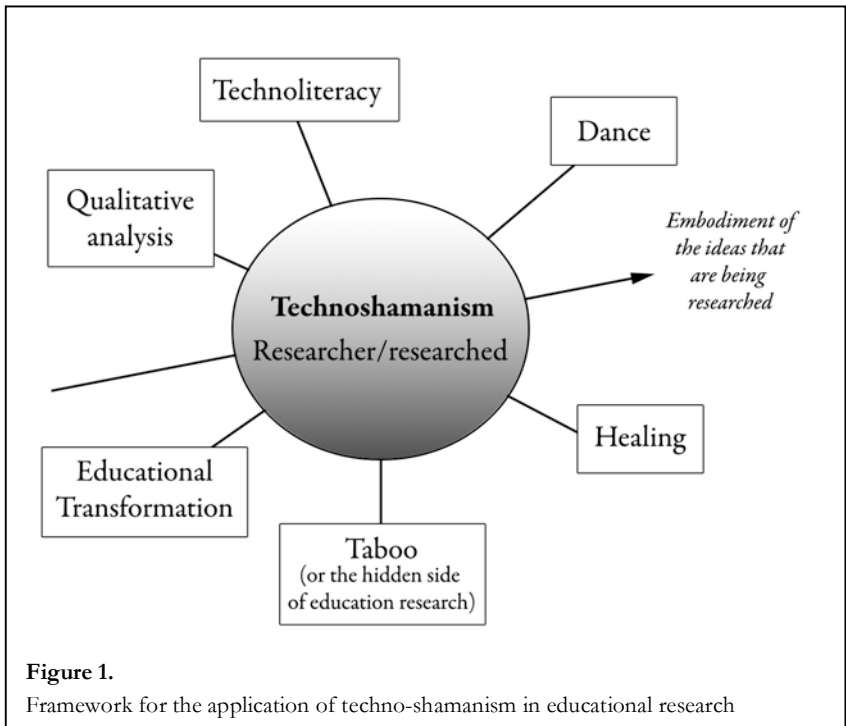
## Abstract

This article offers an approach to writing about the qualitative experience of change in an educational context. The analyst spent four years studying how children use technology to augment their literacy practices in the Midlands of the UK. He simultaneously became involved with free parties in the district that offered social celebratory gatherings using technology to generate dance music. Rather than separating these experiences into categories such as work and play, the analyst has drawn them together through the practice of techno-shamanism. To summarise this approach, the researcher's understandings about techno-literacy change through research into the behaviours of the youth of the area who are present in the schools that took part in the study. He also changes as he dances and organises parties that represent an augmentation of the self through technology. Thus techno-shamanism synthesises an exploration of these changes and the transformative power that technology offers at its most intense and socially inclusive.

## PART 1

### Introduction

During four years of researching the way in which adolescents use technology to alter their literacy practices, a vital factor in this process was always out of reach. In particular, I did not have access to the actual forces of transformation that were operant. You could say that in the restricted spaces of schools in the UK, or in the relation of stories about what might have happened with respect to technology and literacy; the empirical evidence that I discovered was hollow or boring (Richardson, 2000). This hollowness, rather than being dismissed through rich qualitative data or



**Figure 1.**

Framework for the application of techno-shamanism in educational research

through a critical approach (Foley, 2002) to examine the power factors that may have been inhibiting this research, became an overriding and dominant theme of my qualitative analysis. This paper is a direct response to the contiguous sensation of hollowness that I felt as an educational researcher. I let go of the descriptive mode of naturalistic analysis due to the way in which I continually doubted the interview, observation and questionnaire data as unsubstantial. I did not seek a solely personal and reflective narrative style, as I felt that the investigation of technological literacy was bigger than such story-telling could accommodate. I do not consider these problems to be methodological defects in qualitative analysis (Hook, 1997) that may be 'put right' in terms of a shift in research tools or design (Court, 2004).

Rather, this paper seeks to present a new way of looking at augmented technological change that underpins the transformations in literacy that I was noting in the youth, and also deals with my personal experiences as an educational researcher living in the Midlands of the UK during the 1990s. During the day I researched young people using the technology to change their literacy. At night, and at weekends, I became increasingly involved with free-party organization that connected the augmentation of technology that I was studying in the schools to a social and celebratory practice. As such, this paper is a result of a four year intensive longitudinal study of public and private thought processes and practices, and provides a sign-post for qualitative analysis in education (Freebody, 2003) and a legitimate alternative for social science.

### **Remarks on a transformative notion of qualitative change**

This paper explores a theory of education that juxtaposes personal qualitative development with the emergence of transformative possibilities

through the use of technology to augment literacy. I came to the conclusion that the change of agency involved in technological literacy may be expressed in terms which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1988) have called, “blocks of becoming” (p. 239). Such blocks of becoming are unstable complex crossing points; they act in a variety of manners to be explored here through techno-shamanism. This position avoids linear appropriation of technological change as a model of learning (Semali, 2002). The figure of the techno-shaman and the qualitative position of techno-shamanism stand in a dual movement to introduce us to the dark areas beyond rationality (Christians, 2000) and to release us from identification with the individual in a post-modern, computerized educational environment where transformation may readily become identified with efficiency (Arnold and Ryan, 2003).

The introduction of the techno-shaman also produces a type of delirium that is irresistible to contemporary society. Exploration of this delirium is an escape route from current notions of psychic disease, and it opens up the possibility of entering into the immanence that rave music presents. The question of immanence is directly tied to that of the machine by Deleuze and Guattari (1984) by inventing the notion of “desiring-machines” (p. 8). According to this conjunction, immanence does not produce necessary conditions for the evolution of the system under analysis, but acts as a plane on which the full complexity of the phenomena may co-exist. On this plane, machines do not evolve mechanically given the calculation of the starting parameters to set goals, but symbiotically make hybrid and complex behaviours to consciously heightened rhapsodies during the rave. The multiple transformations of the ‘blocks of becoming’ make tracks towards the becoming-[x], about which Deleuze and Guattari (1988) have spoken. Techno-shamanism in the educational system may cause localized disruption through the imaginative use of the history of

demonology, that we find for example in Shelley (1994) & Stoker (1992). It could also be stated that techno-shamanic transformation implements what is forbidden; in other words, its practice scrambles the coding apparatuses of mainstream sedentary society. This process may be understood as the transmission of taboo or “the power of infection” about which Freud (1991, p. 75) has written, and may be accelerated, intensified and dispersed in the electronic media environment. In nomadic societies, the splitting of the shamanic ritual has not yet occurred: the transformative figure of the shaman is not one of worship, but encapsulates intensive variations of personal and public fear in a vibratory spiralling movement. Therefore, the idea of transformation that is applicable to techno-shamanism is one of generating power and energy that may be used by the qualitative analyst to comprehend simultaneous internal and external changes in areas of contemporary society - for example, the raves. These may be hidden to traditional forms of social science (Thomas, 2000).

The transmission of taboo is one of the ways in which this paper works. In this communicative arena, the sacred and the profane are interwoven. The qualitative analyst, who is learning about rave music, raving and simultaneously analysing data about technological literacy augmentation, may be positioned as an educational experiment designed to experience the techno-shamanic transformations and represent them rationally. It is in this sense that the analyst exploring this area needs to practise techno-shamanism. This is not in order to write the script for a horror film, but to take us within the intensive variations of fear that define the thought patterns of techno-shamanism and are discernible as extensive forms of puissance in the masses (Maffesoli, 1996) where computer technology now operates in education and work. In a parallel manner to the cyberpunks who hack into prevailing capitalist codes and systems and in so doing augment their collective zeitgeist; the qualitative analysis of techno-

shamanism in education may be positioned to cut across technological determinism - i.e. the use of technology to determine the state of progress or evolution of a society - in order to open up a way of thinking about technoliteracy that feeds back into society at large. This is a complex loop, and one in which the descriptive parameters should be flexible enough to cover the behaviour of the analytical social scientist (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005) and the delirium of the rave. Information is not the primary goal of this research, as it is subsumed by the transmission of vibrations that are contained in taboo, intensity and the fluctuations of dancing with an electronic cohort whose aim is joy.

### **Becoming techno-shaman**

At the apex of the relationship between qualitative analysis and technological literacy is the techno-shaman. The techno-shaman is a shaman who uses technology to augment similar processes to the shaman in nomadic society. The anthropological studies that have been carried out to understand the shaman reveal the predominance of shamanism in nomadic, hunter/gatherer societies. Shaman are importantly associated with everything to do with movement, with rituals of flight, with the control of fire and with the journey from life to death. The period of initiation for the novice shaman is a time of mental instability where they experience strange dreams, or they are taken by violent fits, or they have to leave the tribe to be alone in the wilderness in order to 'come to terms' with the powers which are beginning to possess them. Mireia Eliade (1974) has described this process in his anthropological work, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. The learning of the shaman confers knowledge from the dead, which includes rituals about movement, the use of drugs and the signs and symbols of their craft. The cobeno shaman of Mexico, "introduces rock

crystals into the novice's head; these eat out his brain and his eyes, then take the place of those organs and become his strength," (Métraux, 1944, p. 216). The shamans as such have to die before they are endowed with magical substance that allows them to move freely in the spirit world, and thence they are able to communicate with the spirits in the fulfilment of the shamanic following. This death is rehearsed by the enactment of powers which defy death; for example, masters and neophytes walking barefoot on fire without seeming to burn themselves, or the exchanging of eyes, ears and tongues between novices and shaman, or the piercing with hot rods in the chest and the stomach. The central motifs of dismemberment, gashing or opening the abdomen remain constant in shamanism.

During the initiation of the medicine man in Malekula, the novice is asked to lie on a bed of leaves, while the Bwili or medicine man cuts off his arms and legs. The victim is required to receive this dismemberment with laughter, and if he does so, the Bwili cuts off his head, after which the novice is still required to show no sign of discomfort. The Bwili puts back the "body parts and the rite of passage is thereafter negotiated," (Eliade, 1974, p. 56). According to the Kiwai Papuans, the initiate has his bones replaced by an *óboro* (spirit of a dead person); after which the power to summon the dead is achieved, and the shamanic powers are bestowed. Among the Dyak of Borneo, the brains of the neophyte are taken out and washed in order to clear the mind so that it may receive the mysteries of evil spirits. Gold dust is sprinkled into the eyes so that they may see the wanderings of souls, barbed hooks are planted in the tips of their fingers in order that they are able to seize the soul and hold it fast, the heart is pierced with an arrow so that it receives the suffering of the sick. The impetus for the learning process of the shaman is the necessary connection between the savage rearrangement of the flesh, and the augmentation of psychical powers. If we take these points and use them for the techno-shamanism of this paper, the

rearrangement that is necessary for the novice qualitative analyst is that his or her deeply held knowledge beliefs are “profoundly shaken” (Hatch, 2002, p. 47). The subsequent loss of certainty that this process entails must be recast and transformed as the analyst reconstructs their knowledge in an expanded learning context that comprehends technological augmentation and shamanic healing.

### **The subject of techno-shamanic qualitative analysis**

The litany of horrors confronting our prospective techno-shaman take many of their energies from the residues of festal ecstasy that have been played out in human society in terms of sacrifice, cannibalism, and the enactment of predator and prey relationships through ritual. Such activities have been described by Georges Bataille (1992) in his *Theory of Religion* as the domain of the sacred and the threshold between the human and non-human. The purpose of the sacrifice according to Bataille (1992) is to destroy the ‘thing’, so that the community may enter into the world of immanence and be absorbed by the richness of sensuality associated with blood rites. Sacrifice also contests the primacy of utility in the group, as the useless wasting of human life demonstrates that production and power are not wedded in an unbreakable union, but may be wrenched apart through the glorious and consumptive act of sacrificial death. In a later text, Bataille (1991) charted the rise of the military and industrial orders, which placed a blockade around the domain of the sacred, and constructed a world in which productive forces became primal and programmed to expand in order to meet ever increasing material needs. In effect, a schism was introduced, which took autonomous industrial and military society away from the violent intimacy of the sacred order even though Christianity has attempted to plug this schism through the rituals of the sacrament.

Bataille (1992) has given us a convincing account of the loss of the sacred world of primitive society and the energies that concern techno-shamanism. However, it is also true that the power of sacrifice was one of a sedentary people, for example, the Aztecs employed it on a grand scale to establish a priest class via a massive hierarchy of blood in order to impose fear into the masses; and one could argue that we now see this behaviour represented through the channels of the media (Baudrillard, 1983). Whether this was an employment of the sacred realm of immanence or merely an economy of terror as Christian Duverger (1979) has argued is debatable. Elsewhere in a series of essays Bataille (2001) made it clear that the Aztecs provided his model for the articulation of a theory of religion, which went along the lines of his notion of expenditure or useless waste. Thus, even though the idea of expenditure is useful to help reconcile the sacred world of myth with the necessity for blood, it does not help us to understand the techniques of knowledge abandonment necessary for techno-shamanism. This is because the fundamentally Hegelian, historical subject of Bataille that desires by negation of the 'I' with the not-'I', and conquers by destruction of the not-'I', is more cogently positioned as a comment on the political climate of post-war Europe than a useful description of the subject of techno-shamanism that has to negotiate distributed networks of post-modern knowledge in qualitative analysis (Schirato & Webb, 2002). The discovery of that which is uniquely sacred to humans seems to be less vital today in understanding global subjects that are learning through digital technology and partying at raves. The techno-shamanic analyst is a subject that is not uniquely exploring or overcoming historical forces to find an authentic rendering of the person, but acts as a suitable qualitative position to describe complex transformations (Lankshear & Knobel, 1997).

**Animal forms and techno-shamanic transformation**

The transformative power of the techno-shamanic subject is directly located in episodes that have been described by anthropology and folklore, and relate to the way in which shaman change into animals. The shaman takes possession, or is possessed by the animal form in order to shed his or her human skin and to travel in the dimension of the spirits. Eliade (1974) speaks of the secret language of the animal-spirits, in which the shaman become fluent, and use to establish an existence “in illo tempore” (p. 74) where the separation between humans and the animal world has not yet occurred. The Buryat shaman describe a process called *khubilgan*, which may be translated as ‘metamorphosis’; the spirit-animal serves as a double or alter ego, which enables the shaman to take on its form and to pass through the dimension of animals. The animal form of the Tungus shaman is a snake, whose motions imitate those of the whirlwind during the communication with the dead. The Chukchee shaman turn themselves into wolves; the Lapps become bear, reindeer and fish. The Semang hala can change into a tiger, as can the Sakai halak and the bomor of Kelantan. During the initiation of the Carib shamans of Dutch Guiana, the neophytes are taught how to turn themselves into bats and jaguars, which is part of a long period of ritual, dancing and intoxication with tobacco. Witchcraft in England also has the idea of being able to turn into animals firmly rooted in its folklore (Burrell, 1997). In 1673, Anne Armstrong gave elaborate accounts of witches who are able to turn themselves into animals. They may appear as hares or cats, at Allansford they danced in the likeness of bees. Anne Baites, it is related, turned herself into a cat, a hare and a bee. Hole (1945) describes how Dorothy Green of Edmondbyers and Mary Hunter of Birkenside bewitched a mare by turning themselves into swallows and flying around it forty times.

Becoming-animal defines a plane of consistency or immanence that allows for the multiplicities of transformative change to emerge. We do not have to restrict the formula to becoming-[only]-animals, but in the context of techno-shamanism in education, the becoming-[x] may be 'blocked' or streamed into a definite tendency towards the limit fringe between animals and humans. To this extent, the techno-shaman is a figure of the 'borderline'. Iain Hamilton Grant (1997) has described the changing into an animal in the form of a zoopoliteia whereby the techno-shaman may use the borderlines to intensify the possibilities of change on the thresholds. Grant (1997) explains the demonology of the 'New Earth', which is where the notion of the shaman is taken away from an anthropological study of hunter/gatherer society and used as a metaphor for the politics of biology which influences thinking about the rendering of the human. According to Grant (1997) the present scientific priesthood entails a form of morality that arrests the transformations of the techno-shaman by defining them as schizophrenic, anti-social and nonsensical. I do not wish to position this paper against any bodies of opinion, but I do want to clarify the use of techno-shamanism as a practice that connects qualitative analysis and techno-literacy augmentation whilst not reproducing the dominant codes of organising power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) through education.

### **Further techno-shamanic considerations**

One aspect of techno-shamanic music ideology is that everything is music. For this reason electronic artists explore the experimental creation of music from all kinds of unusual sources. Computers are used to generate; DNA music by assigning musical sequences to the base-pairs, galactic music by transforming celestial radiation into sound, bio-music by translating the electrical pulses of the peripheral nervous system into sound, and hyper-

music created by hyper-instruments which are basically acoustic but whose sound qualities are shifted by the motion of the performer and the instrument. Ravers feel, almost animistically, that there is music in everything, and that the key to releasing it is by using the right technology (Plant, 2001). Part of raving is “getting in touch with your groove” - like in the New Age, the idea is that each person has a fundamental musical self, a harmony that is rooted in their being that they need to get in touch with.

The goal of techno-shamanism according to the ravers is “phase locking” - this is to get the group of people assembled at the rave into a synchronized, synergetic, collective mental space or vibe (Hutson, 1999). The rave is constructed to be a self-similar, unbroken, self-organizing factual; thus no divisions are permitted, and likewise no egos, leaders or partners. Ravers and techno-shaman are fascinated by chaos theory, and they believe that when the right number of people are all in one place, dancing to the right groove, a new emergent order around spontaneous strange-attractors can appear, and people shall evolve into mutants that will lead the human race into the chaotic, turbulent world of the 21st century (Rushkoff, 1994).

Techno-shamanism is conceived to deconstruct dualities, especially collapsing the past and the future into a singular modern primitive. The oppositions between technology and spirituality, the primal body and the higher mind, and neo-tribalism and global humanism; are supposed to implode at the rave, resulting in techno-shamanism where the DJ serves as the initiator of the people in a participation mystique when they may tune into the vibe of Gaia. Techno-shamanic music is an accelerated music, and ravers believe history is accelerating. Unlike Christian millennialists, many ravers follow Terrence McKenna’s (1966) dictum that we are approaching a singularity in time in the year 2012, and that after this point time will fold into hyperspace. We are all being dragged into this “strange attractor at the

end of time”, that is creating newer and more powerfully emergent forms of cultural novelty, such as the raves and the interconnections that raves can produce in society through electronic mediation.

Providing the visual accompaniment at many raves are computer-generated fractal images and 3D rendered animation. But raves have also featured laser light, coloured-wheel lighting, holography, liquid oil projection screens, video projection, strobes, robotic characters, or other high-tech displays. Very common is the use of the Video Toaster to combine images from kitsch TV and movies, Japanese ‘anime’ cartoons, MTV music videos, advertising, and science fiction into a rapid-fire display which switches images at a rate close to the 135 bpm of the music. Techno-shamanism is a multimedia, multi-sensual experience, and thus there will be attempts to stimulate the sense of smell and touch of the ravers with incense and scented oils, dry ice and fans. Ravers feel that this ‘sensory overload’ serves a purpose - to overwhelm the senses.

## PART 2

### **Who am I?**

I started this project as a qualitative analyst of children's literacy practices. In particular, I was looking at the end point of the education system in the UK, the 'sixth form' – 16-18 year olds, or the 'youth'. By this time, students had perhaps been in the system for 13 years, and their educational mores had been well established. As I sat in the classroom, and watched them use computers for various assignments or to surf around on the internet, I was struck by the way in which the group were intimately constructed. They had been together in restricted spaces for many years: What chance did I have, an older university trained researcher, of discovering anything new or exciting about the way in which they were learning language by using technology?

I suspected from the start that the project I was embarking upon had a lot to do with identity. I eagerly devoured books on the subject, and became lost in the intricate discussions and arguments about how we become the people that we are. I was especially intrigued by what I termed as the 'Nietzschean heritage' in social thought, encapsulating the work of Georges Bataille, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault and feminism. They spoke about desire, bodies and power; the factors that I felt actually motivated us to become the people that we are. I began to move away from the scientific evaluation and description of the processes that I was scrutinising, and looked for a more personal, emotional, affective approach to understanding techno-literacy.

It was clear that I had to somehow get involved in the actual practices that my subjects were doing in and out of the classroom to have any chance of understanding them. I conducted interviews, gave out questionnaires,

held focus groups and on-line forums as my supervisor suggested, yet to find out what my cohort were getting up to I had to lose my identity as a mainstream researcher and find a way into their world outside of school.

My chance to do this came by accident. I had been seeing an undergraduate philosophy student. She was very interested in living a bohemian lifestyle, and assiduously sought out contacts in the local creative community that could be summarised by the phrase 'the underground'. She told me about a party in a stately home. Apparently, the owner was an eccentric aristocrat, whose estate was so large that he didn't mind people having gatherings on his property. I arranged to go to what she confidently declared would be a 'real rave' with a teacher that I had met during fieldwork collection in a secondary school. He was a dedicated and hard working teacher of the creative arts who also enjoyed going out and exploring whatever nightlife there was on offer.

We drove to the event in his newly acquired car that seemed to splutter and spurt at every bend in the road. I had been told that raves were conducted in remote places, and this was no exception. Eventually, I noticed that the agricultural countryside was transformed into the rolling landscape of an aristocratic estate. We drove past the shadows of a lake and straight lines of cypress and elm. The turning to the party was an unmarked brick gate on a small road, almost impossible to find in the middle of the night.

To my surprise, as we ventured up the tiny winding unpaved path, we came across a large field full of cars. As my friend carefully parked, I wound down my window and caught the first aural blast of dance music. Even at this distance, I was captivated and moved by the sound; it gripped my whole body in a way that rock music never could. It was as if a deep tribal memory had been shaken out of me. My friend and I walked towards the sound in silence and anticipation of what we might find.

The party had been organized at the side of what looked in the gloom like a series of out-houses. They were arranged in a square with shadowy retreats and a section that had been cordoned off with a large tie-dyed sheet. I lifted the sheet and found groups of people sitting around and dancing. We made our way through the individuals and sat down against a barn wall in order to survey the situation. The people were an incredible, eclectic mixture of ages and backgrounds. It was impossible to say definitely that there was one type of person that attended the rave. My friend and I looked at each other and smiled in non-verbal agreement that we had definitely found a 'place-to-be'.

Several extremely agreeable hours passed before the main event took place. We had bumped into a few friends and acquaintances, including my bohemian girlfriend, who was incredibly excited and could not sit down or stay still for more than a moment. She told us that the main DJs were now coming on and that it was going to be fantastic. Someone rolled back the large sheet, and the sound system that had been filling the covered alcove where most of the people had gathered, was connected to the square between the buildings.

The music went off, and people came out of their hiding places in the array of shadows. They all stood and looked towards the DJ table and the sound system that was arranged on either side in two sombre black towers. At this point, the music began in earnest. It was louder, more minimal and driven. The crowd was immediately sparked into motion. My friend and I felt ourselves swept along by the pulsating and insistent noise. We danced for what seemed like hours without feeling tired or self-conscious; and at several points we were joined by fellow dancers who we may or may not have known, yet were fused with them and shared an intimate, real, emotional connection. As dawn came up over the English countryside, and the pumping techno set came to a close, we found ourselves close to the DJ table

and the source of the communal trance. I noticed with astonishment that the DJ was one of my student subjects who had been taking part in the techno-literacy research.

On the way back in my friend's car, I wondered about what I had witnessed and how it would affect my research. I wanted to immediately pore over the interview transcripts and questionnaire data for some sign that would connect the reality of the educational inquiry to the talent of the adolescent for moving large numbers of people that I had experienced at the rave.

However, I could find no such connection. If we may call this subject X, he was non-committal in the questionnaire about technological language; he had expressed an interest in virtual reality, yet had suggested no positive applications. I had interviewed him in a group and he had not responded or participated. I had been advised by the school authorities that he was a failing student with low levels of literacy. By this they meant that he had failed a linguistic test at 15 that had measured his spelling and grammatical ability. Yet I had witnessed the same student at the centre of a rave orchestrating a crowd. This contradiction sat in the middle of my research. I was convinced that the disparity in evaluation of the subject X was due to testing regimes. The standard literacy assessment principles were designed to generate individual linguistic profiles. These are essentially hollow vessels, not containing any information about the substance of identity: i.e. what a person is like, or how they express themselves. X, in the context of the rave was a sublime and competent generator of atmosphere and meaning. In the environment of the examination hall or the classroom, he was limited, hesitant and withdrawn.

I had to find a way of expressing this difference that did not diminish either activity. Through extensive research on the internet I found out about techno-shamanism. It immediately stuck me as a means to discussing a

linkage between the changes that I had experienced at the rave and the ways in which we may express ourselves through technology.

At the rave, the DJ is the techno-shaman, initiating the group into a ritual of collective celebration through dance. He or she, through skilful choice of track, subtle mixing and a powerful sound system may create a unified and coherent group environment that expresses the values and affective growth of collective power. Technologies such as the internet also have the potential to augment multiple identities, though these processes of change are not as clear or unified or personally affective as those that are exhibited in the rave. On the contrary, in the context of a school, the usages of the internet that the students demonstrate such as research for assignments or the following of personal desires tend to individualise and reflect the surveillance and control procedures that are in place.

As I made my way through the doctoral studies programme, and organized the literature review, methodology and results sections into a coherent whole; I found myself shuttling between rented accommodation. One October evening, I followed the directions of an advertisement to a farmhouse in a small village. As I drove up the gravel drive I noticed beautiful rhododendron bushes and a small lake in the grounds. I parked in a regular enclave of out-buildings not dissimilar from the house where the rave had taken place. As I entered through a back door and into the kitchen, I quickly recognized the décor and organization of the English aristocracy. The owner of the farm was the second son of an old Norman family, who owned the surrounding area, including a housing estate, half a dozen working farms and several small but pristine villages. The young aristocrat explained that his father had given him the farm in order to establish an art gallery. He showed me the gallery building that was a converted barn, painted white with a new wooden floor, a silver-plated bar and internal toilet. The deal was that I rented a bedroom and looked after the place. The

owner was usually away in his recently acquired townhouse in London, though would come back for an occasional weekend. This was an ideal place for me to finish my doctoral write up, and I felt like the lord of the manor as I walked around the property during the next few days.

I had finished the fieldwork for my thesis, and therefore contact with X through the school had finished. However, I had met him several times at raves in various locations in the Midlands of the UK. He was a top draw, and worked with another DJ who had been at the same school, Y. They were surviving financially by using a combination of welfare and illicit means such as selling marijuana. The two subjects had a following in the local underground network. Arrangements for their parties were made at a pub by handing out small pieces of paper with a phone number. When you called the number, an answering machine gave you instructions to go to the party. Close to the location one would usually come across other people trying to find the place that had been described on the phone, so it was fun, and working together would probably sort out any misunderstandings.

On one instance, I travelled to the site with my school teacher friend and several others. He had bought a VW caravanette, which made the journey even more enjoyable as the communal atmosphere inside the van was strengthened by the excitement of driving into the unknown. On this occasion, we were headed to an orchard in Worcestershire.

After a couple of hours of travel we eventually met up with a small convoy of vehicles that took us to our location. The set up for this party was impressive; there was a stage and dance-floor replete with neon and daglo decorations. There was a drinks truck and people sat and chatted next to fires hidden between the trees around the dance-floor. Everyone that I met was relaxed and amiable. My techno-literacy subjects X & Y played barnstorming sets that completely filled up the dance area, and as dawn broke, we were just about ready to make our way home in the early morning.

This had definitely been a techno-shamanic event. The natural surroundings, great music and friendly folk had inspired a tremendous feeling of community and healing. I danced with people from extraordinarily different backgrounds and ages. I remember an enormously muscular farm worker, who had gyrated vigorously for much of the night with his top off and in skin-tight jeans. As I went out of the dance-floor and into the bright morning, I felt simultaneously at ease with the natural world and part of a community. I looked up at the hills that surrounded the site and noticed lines of figures coming down in formation.

People started to run in all directions, women screamed and children looked around helplessly to try and understand what was going on. It was a police swoop. Gatherings of this sort are illegal in the UK, and the police have the power to impound the sound system and to arrest anyone who they think is part of the organizational structure of the rave. I saw my first officer of the State running towards what had been a peaceful gathering. Now the scene looked like war. The police had shiny knee-length boots, riot helmets, shields, batons and dogs. They struck anyone in their path as they made for the sound system. They formed a line and marched in formation towards it, walking on those who got in their way. I was an Education PhD candidate, and my friend was a teacher employed by a State school; so we decided not to get involved in the conflict. I do not consider my writing to be political, but I do not think that you have to be a radical activist to appreciate the over reaction and harshness of the police action. The police had targeted the rave with military precision, even though the group constituted of an unarmed civilian gathering. I wondered about the validity of my own research as we drove away from the scene.

Literacy is one of the most over researched subjects in the field of Education. Researchers may struggle to find anything original in this area that often reports directly to government. It is clearly a political zone of

research. The study of children's reading and writing abilities is basically a control mechanism. The State looks to intervene in people's lives and gain information about the make-up of their subjectivity for its own information banks. Yet I had witnessed the nature of this intervention myself. It was regulatory, imposing and oppressive. I asked myself the question: Does my research serve the purposes of the State to become more powerful?

Furthermore, what is the other side of this equation? Can educational research really help individuals develop their subjectivity, and improve their literacy outcomes? I decided as I wrote up my thesis, that the answer to this question lay somewhere in the subjective practices of my subjects X and Y. They were engaged in activity that lay outside of State control, and yet constituted a clear augmentation of social purposes. We must assume that literacy is a social practice, as much recent research has convincingly proved. Yet the social practice of techno-shamanism is rooted in deeply affective landscapes of the imagination and motivation, where the individual is overrun with desire and positively contributes to the practice as well as being fully absorbed by it.

My engagement with X and Y increased by a qualitatively measurable amount as I become more fully involved with the rave scene. My rental status a lodger was put in jeopardy as my landlord decided that he was going to put the whole property up for rent, and live permanently in London. He had been visiting less and less, and his estate agent saw an opportunity to make some more money by converting several of the out-houses into luxury apartments. This work was going to take at least eight months, and I decided, in a calamitous few days that I would take on the whole property for twelve months whilst the conversion work proceeded. I would have the house and the art gallery, yet it would be extremely expensive for a PhD research student, working part-time as a teacher and lecturing first year psychology students in the philosophy of education for three hours a week.

The solution to my dilemma came in a chance meeting with X and Y. I had been with my bohemian girlfriend, when X had come to sell us some weed. In the midst of the conversation, I had mentioned to him that I was to embark on renting out the farmhouse and an art gallery, and needed to look for reliable sub tenants with whom I could share the rent. X was immediately captivated by the idea, and said that he would find some others to move in including Y and another DJ that he knew who was moving to the Midlands from Scotland, that I shall call Z. Welfare would pay three quarters of the rent, and we could share the house and the facilities of the immaculate property. I remember assuring the owner that his farm would be inhabited by serious educational types that I had met through the university.

However, this was far from the truth. The farm was soon filled up by the three DJs and their entourage, which included several single mums, a couple from South Africa on the run for drug smuggling, a French model with nowhere to live and assorted wanderers who usually turned up after a rave and stayed for several days to calm down. This was an extraordinary turnaround from the enforced seclusion that the doctoral study required. My life was now full of social action. I was released from the solitude of researching, writing and organizing a thesis, where notions of community may be a distraction and you can only share the worry and fear of academic failure with other research students and your supervisor. I felt joy in the company of the youthful musicians and their colourful group. I wondered at the contrast between my now exciting home-life and the sterile dryness of the academy.

There was also the matter of the art gallery. In addition to being a great exhibition space, it was a near perfect party venue. Thankfully, it was not illegal in the UK to have parties on your property, but you must have a licence to serve alcohol or charge an entrance fee. We decided to go ahead and

arranged a party for the following month. I commissioned a local artist to do an ice sculpture of a pistol that we hung over the bar so that drinks would emerge from the barrel frozen. We erected a tarpaulin over the yard in between the out-houses in case of rain, and we decorated the space with lights and tables and chairs.

As the night began we could tell that the party would be a success as crowds of people started to arrive. We kicked off with heavy house music and progressively changed it into techno with X playing the last set as dawn came up. The gallery and courtyard were completely packed out with party revellers. It seemed to become obligatory for men to take their tops off, and I can remember the gallery was absolutely full of half-naked men at one point. I had also been impressed by the freedom and fun that the women wanted to have at our party. They were several large groups of them who were especially boisterous, and terrorised anyone in their path as they made tracks inside the gallery, courtyard and farmhouse. One might ask: Did you feel that this event could have got out of control?

And indeed I was asked this question by a university undergraduate who was amazed to see 500 half-naked men dancing vigorously to powerful techno music. Yet as I watched these strangers expressing themselves to the limits of their physicality in my house, I felt no fear whatsoever. On the contrary, I had an overwhelming sensation of care and companionship with these men. They were all engaged in a peaceful and unifying activity that diminished social divisions.

The farmhouse was located close to a country church, and the next morning, I saw several of the congregation frown in disapproval at the sight of some of the mixed bag of party-goers who were still leaving well into the next day. The contrast could not have been more powerful. They were dressed up in their 'Sunday best' and the party-goers were by this stage rather bedraggled and unkempt. The congregation were going to sit and

listen to a sermon, sing several hymns and gossip in the cemetery before going home for lunch. The party-goers had been celebrating together since the previous evening in various forms and levels of organisation.

I made a connection in my mind with educational research. It can be invested with a morality that may misunderstand and not investigate the very phenomena that it seeks to explain. For example, teenage desire and the often confusing search for identity that this entails is not a straightforward story. In fact, I would go so far as to state that many of the more extreme behaviours that we may find enacted by the 'youth' are directly related to restrictive moral codes that have been imposed by Christianity. As such, investigation into educational 'failure' in the youth needs to start with the ways in which desire has been trapped and homogenised by Christian society in history, and certain behaviours such as drug taking, sexual promiscuity and profound celebration have become taboo.

These thoughts also focused my interest and research into techno-shamanism. If we disavow educational research of Christian morality and as an information mechanism for the augmentation of the secular State, what are the grounds for our 'values education'? I am not proposing that we should all become techno-Pagans and actively propound this perspective through education; but that multifarious religious options are opened up through new technology such as the internet and dance music, and that the desire of the youth is discovering these options through celebration. Techno-shamanism is to an extent a neat category within which to bracket these behaviours, and the youth will break out of it as they continue to experiment with lifestyle options. Yet it is one that may give us a clue as to the qualitative subjective changes that are happening in contemporary society that are connected to techno-literacy.

## CONCLUSION

I am now ensconced in the sedentary life of an academic at the University of Tasmania, Australia, and yet I believe that the evidence and ideas contained in this writing are still acting on my behaviour. Techno-shamanism is a positive and life-affirming practice. It is also a guide to the many contradictions and tensions that present themselves when one is describing complex transformations of the self, and in this process one might be experiencing complex changes (Land, 1995). This salient point is directly relevant to the social sciences as techno-shamanism defies qualitative analysis just as it is competently categorised. It simultaneously works on the behavioural aspects of the imaginary and the pragmatics of everyday life.

I am not practising techno-shamanism now in the same way as I was during those heady days of free party organization. Yet I cannot deny the space that was hollowed out in my personality during this period, and the positive energy that delving into this space enables. This energy defines my sense of what John D. Brewer has termed as 'ethnographic realism' (Brewer 2000), or the description of the local under extreme pressure from the forces of globalization.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the work of Steve Mizrach, or 'Seeker1', who is an inspiration in the field of cultural anthropology. Also, the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit who lived out many of these ideas during the 1990s in the UK.

### References

- Arnold, R., & Ryan, M. (2003) "The Transformative Capacity of New Learning" Australian Council of Deans of Education, Bundoora, Victoria: RMIT University.
- Baudrillard, J. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.
- Bataille, G. *The Accursed Share: Volume 1 Consumption*. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- Bataille, G. *Theory of Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1992.
- Bataille, G. *Literature and Evil*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 2001.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. *Reproduction in Education: Society and Culture*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1979.
- Brewer, J. *Ethnography*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000.
- Burrell, G. *Pandemonium: Towards a Retro-Organization Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Christians, C. "Ethics and politics in qualitative research" in N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 139-164. London: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Court, D. (2004) "The Quest for Meaning in Educational Research." <http://www.rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/cho27244j.htm> [Accessed 1/19/06]

- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: The Athlone Press, 1984.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia II*. London: The Athlone Press, 1988.
- Duverger, C. *La Fleur Léthale: Economie du Sacrifice Aztèque*. Paris: Seuil, 1979.
- Eliade, M. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton: Bollingen Paperback Printing, 1974.
- Freebody, P. *Qualitative Research in Education*. London: Sage Publications, 2003.
- Freud, S. *Totem and Taboo*. In *Civilization, Society and Religion*, Vol. 5 Penguin Freud Library. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.
- Foley, D. "Critical Ethnography in the Postcritical Moment" in Y. Zou & E. Trueba, (Eds.) *Ethnography and Schools: Qualitative Approaches to the Study of Education*, pp. 139-170. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002.
- Grant, I. "At the Mountains of Madness: The Demonology of the New Earth and the Politics of Becoming" in K. Pearson, (Ed.) *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*, pp. 93-114. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Hatch, A. *Doing qualitative research in Education Settings*. Albany, NY: New York University Press, 2002.
- Hole, C. *Witchcraft in England*. London: BT. Batsford Ltd, 1945.
- Holly, M., Arhar, J. & Kasten, W. *Action Research for Teacher: Travelling the Yellow Brick Road*, second Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005.
- Hook, D. (1997) "The politics of psychotherapy: An historical surface of emergence." <http://www.criticalmethods.org/derek.htm> [Accessed 1/19/06]

- Hutson, S. (1999) "Technoshamanism: Spiritual Healing in the Rave Subculture."  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2822/is\\_3\\_23/ai\\_64190176](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2822/is_3_23/ai_64190176) [Accessed 1/21/06]
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (1997) "The moral consequences of what we construct through qualitative research."  
<http://www.aare.edu.au/97papa/lankc302.htm> [Accessed 10/3/05]
- Land, N. "Meat (or How to Kill Oedipus in Cyberspace)," in Featherstone, M. & Burrows, R., (Eds.) *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, pp. 191-205. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1995.
- Maffesoli, M. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage Publication, 1996.
- McKenna, T. (1966) "Pay attention and keep breathing."  
<http://fusionanomaly.net/terencemckenna.html> [Accessed 2/5/06]
- Métraux, A. (1944) "Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale." *Acta americana (Mexico)*, 2(10): 3-4.
- Nietzsche, F. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Random House, 1969.
- Plant, S. (2001) "The Sadie Plant information page".  
<http://fusionanomaly.net/sadieplant.html> [Accessed 2/5/06]
- Richardson, L. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 923-947. London: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Rushkoff, D. *Cyberia: Life in the trenches of Hyperspace*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994.
- Schirato, T. & Webb, J. (2002) "Cultural Literacy and the Field of the Media." <http://www.reconstruction.ws/042/schirato.htm> [Accessed 8/23/04]

Semali, L. (2002) "Defining new literacies in curricula practice."

<http://www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/semali1/index.html>

[Accessed 8/11/04]

Shelley, M. *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus*. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Stoker, B. *Dracula*. New York: Signet classic paperbacks, 1992.

Thomas, E. *Culture and Schooling: Building Bridges Between Research, Praxis and Professionalism*. Chichester, W Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2000.

---

**Dr David R Cole** is a lecturer in Literacy, English Education and Professional Studies at the University of Tasmania <http://fcms.its.utas.edu.au/educ/educ/pagedetails.asp?lpersonId=2601>. He is researching and publishing articles in the fields of affective education, multiple literacies, and English Education. He is also a creative writer and has a novel published in 2006 called *A Mushroom of Glass* <http://sidharta.com/books/index.jsp?uid=183/>. He has been an international teacher in Colombia, Argentina, Egypt and England.