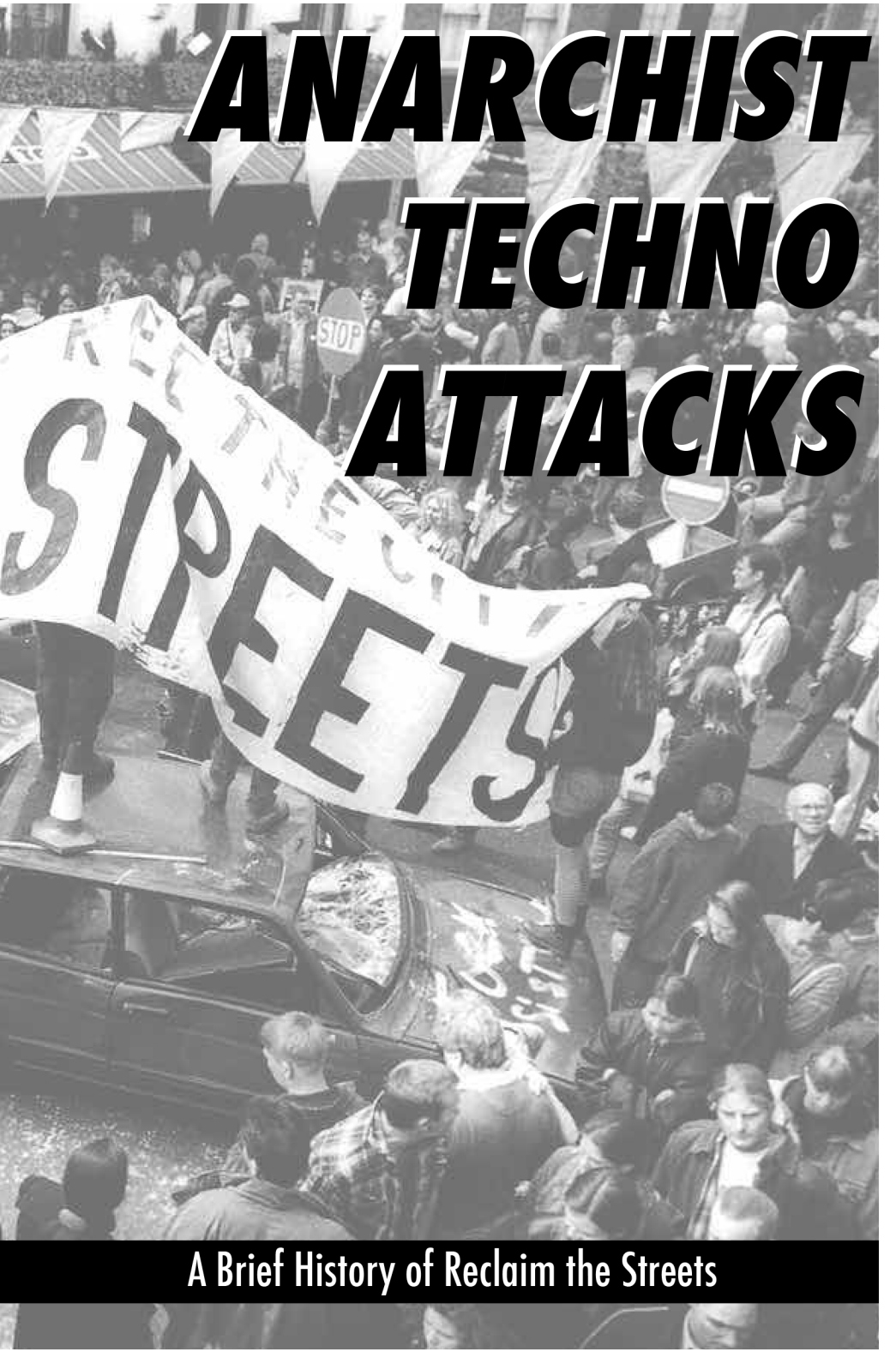
ANARCHIST TECHNO ATTACKS



A Brief History of Reclaim the Streets

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CRIMETHINC. EX-WORKERS COLLECTIVE
CrimethInc. is a rebel alliance—a decentralized network pledged to anonymous collective action—a breakout from the prisons of our age. We strive to reinvent our lives and our world according to the principles of self-determination and mutual aid.



Party as Protest <> Protest as Party

"I will dance!" I declared; "I will dance myself to death!" My flesh felt hot, my heart beat violently… To dance to death—what more glorious end!

Emma Goldman
Living My Life

"Mom, can I go to a protest?"

"No... I'm sorry, but no."

She was worried. A month earlier, a plane had slammed into the side of a pentagon-shaped building just down the road from our house.

"OK. Uh, can I go to the homecoming game?"

"Well, sure!"

"But like, I'm new at school so... can I just go by myself? So I can make friends?"

"Of course, honey."

I couldn't believe it worked. My high school was right next to a metro station—I was obviously just going to hop on the train and go to the protest.

"I hope we win."

"Me too! I'll pick you up at 8."

When I got off at the Dupont Circle stop, my punk rock role model older-sister-figure who always tempted me to skip school for cool shit was already waiting for me.

"So...what are we protesting? Bush? The World Bank? The war?" I asked, not caring too much as long as we got to fuck shit up.

"Cars."

"Cars?"

"Yeah, we're taking over a street."

"What do you mean 'taking over'?"

"Like, with couches and DJs and stuff."

"DJs?!"

That did not clarify things for me, especially because people in the march that scooped us up were carrying placards decrying all the evil institutions and people I had mentioned. But once we hit 21st and P, a black-masked affinity group, moving with purpose and apparent planning, ran out of the crowd to a nearby alleyway and pulled out orange cones stenciled with an image of bellbottomed dancers inside a diamond-shaped traffic symbol. They lined up the orange cones on either end of the block. Unlike other marches I had been on—in which the point was to keep moving so that an affinity group could break out,

quickly destroy the windows of a bank or Starbucks, then disappear among the mass again—the point of this demo seemed to be just to be here.

Someone handed out flyers with the same bellbottomed dancers traffic symbol, saying something about streets not belonging exclusively to cars, about reinventing public space as a wonderland of joyous community instead of an artery for capital.

Another affinity group quickly established good relations with the workers at a local café, who let us use the bathroom and get water throughout the afternoon. This happened so quickly that there must have been some prior, behind-the-scenes organizing with the workers. A bunch of them did have piercings and funny hair.

As I stared at the café, marveling at all the moving parts in this troublemakers' Rube Goldberg machine, a cheer erupted behind me, drawing my attention back to the crowd. A junker car—presumably acquired especially for the occasion—was rolled out of its parking spot, tagged up with "Reclaim the Streets!" and a circle-A, and flipped over. Some genius found a pole to lay inside its wheel well and people pulled couches all around it so that anyone could chill and watch the skaters grind the spectacle of destruction.





Archival photographs by the author, aged 14 at the time,
from the Washington, DC Reclaim the Streets action of October 2001

That's when the final party favor opened its doors: in the middle of the block, a white work van in an alley became a DJ booth playing techno. BOOM BOOM. And loud! Vibing my body down to its core. I live chasing that feeling: the loss of control, the impossibility of remaining unmoved, the need to get down. I had a Fatboy Slim CD at home, but I had never heard techno this loud, or around this many other people. I scanned the crowd once more—it wasn't just bigger now, it was transformed. The protestors with their placards and the anarchists with their black masks were still there, but out of nowhere there were way more party freaks: JNCOs, goggles, candy necklaces, frost-tipped hair.

I overheard a couple of the ravers talking.

"Yo, I've never been to something like this."

"I know bro. I've heard of outlaw parties before, but this is wild."

Just as this departure from traditional protest tenor mesmerized me, it was also a captivating deviation from the routine techno party. The alchemy of underground scenes kept cooking gold—the sun was setting and the party was just getting bigger and bigger.

"What are the party people going to do if the cops come break this up?" I thought to myself. Before long, I had my answer. The familiar sight of faceless stormtroopers lined one end of the block, preparing their assault. People pulled the gear inside the DJ van, shut its doors, and escaped down the alley in it. Of course, the black bloc rushed towards the police, eager for confrontation—but to my surprise, so did much of the candy crowd. Did they learn this from defending their illegal warehouse parties? Were they just excited to add a new kind of rush to their rave repertoire?

"I hope those goggles are rated for tear gas."

As I scurried out of the conflict zone, so as not to miss

my 8 PM pick-up, I wondered who got the word to all of those ravers, and how? I knew how the anarchists got there—the night prior, Positive Force punks had handed us flyers for the march at the Wilson Center's last show, an enormous DIY punk occasion. Had there been a rave somewhere in the city the previous night, too, simultaneously promoting the protest? On the subway, I reflected on the hidden size and strength of the underground. Punk rock was my own niche, but I had realized that ravers could also throw down and defend their temporary autonomous zones. How many more rebel communities were out there, each with its own style and soundtrack, ready to crew up and take down the imposed boredom of capitalism?

Music for the Jilted Generation

"Without music, life would be a mistake."

Friedrich Nietzsche

Reclaim the Streets was founded in the UK in 1991 to combat car culture. The group was just one current in the wave of anti-roads protests that kicked off all over the UK after Margaret Thatcher's government approved an infrastructure project to build hundreds of new roads. In response, a constellation of occupations and campaigns sprang up throughout the 1990s, blocking construction sites and organizing under monikers like "Earth First!"

One of the largest nodes in the anti-roads movement was the "No M11 Link" campaign in the suburbs of northeast London. For a year and a half, anti-roads activists used barricades, phone trees, tripods, treehouses, lockdowns, and building occupations to defend thousands of trees and hundreds of homes from destruction. The campaign culminated in December 1994, when over a thousand police were sent in to evict Claremont Road, the entirety of which had been squatted. The 500 residents and defenders fought back for five days as techno music blared in the background.



Claremont Road

In its first year, Reclaim the Streets only organized small-scale stunts, like painting bike lanes on roads without permission. In 1992, Reclaim the Streets brought London traffic to a halt with its first street party, which was broken up when police arrested several participants. After that, the organization laid dormant until the British government proposed the 1994 Criminal Justice Act.

In addition to curtailing traditional civil liberties—for example, the right to remain silent was altered so that judges could draw certain inferences from a defendant's silence—the Criminal Justice Act was a direct assault on rave culture. In clumsy language, the bill specifically criminalized gatherings of ten or more people enjoying "sounds wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats." In addition, one of the bill's twelve parts was entirely dedicated to criminalizing collective trespass. In one fell swoop, the British government formed common cause between squatters, new age caravan travelers, ravers, anti-road activists, hunt saboteurs, and football hooligans—all of whom enjoyed lifestyles and strategies of resistance based on collective trespass.

The Prodigy song "Their Law" was written in direct opposition to the bill.

Formal coalitions of civil liberties groups and sound systems[1] organized three mass demonstrations ahead of the vote on the bill in London. The first was on May Day 1994 and drew 20,000 people. Two months later, nearly twice as many people attended the second demonstration. In October, over 100,000 people fought and overpowered police in order to move two large sound systems into Hyde Park and dance in joyous defiance of the law.

In the end, the Criminal Justice Act was passed, but the

1 The term "sound system" refers to the assemblage of speakers, amplifiers, and mixers needed to produce loud dance music, but also the collectives that manage the technological means necessary to produce a good party.



October 1994: Anti-Criminal Justice Act demonstrators fight police on horseback in Hyde Park, London.

alliances built around opposing it did not disappear or slow down.

"On 14 May 1995, two automobiles collide in the city of London. Their drivers, overcome by histrionic rage, get out of their vehicles and start to destroy them. In reality, it is all theatre. The cars, which are second-hand, have been bought especially for the occasion by members of Reclaim the Streets. Stuck in the middle of the road, their debris blocks motorized traffic, leaving crowded Camden High Street free of cars. The street fills with people and sound systems start to work, using electricity generated by the constant pedaling of bicycles. The 'repetitive rhythms' of rave can be heard and some three hundred people throw themselves into dancing in the first party [of the reborn Reclaim the Streets movement]."

-Julia Ramírez Blanco, **Reclaim the Streets! From Local to Global Party Protest**

Whereas around 300 people attended the May 1995 Reclaim the Streets party, by the July party two months later, attendance had increased tenfold, with nearly 3000 people reclaiming

the London neighborhood of Islington to rave and revel. The following year, Reclaim the Streets launched what was probably its most glorious offensive, when over 8000 people broke through police lines to dance for nine hours on London's M41 highway.

"The sight of thousands of people running onto an empty motorway shut off by large tripods is an image that stays with you… Thirty foot 'pantomime dames' [stilt-walkers] glided through the party throwing confetti. Food stalls gave away free stew and sandwiches; graffiti artists added color to the tarmac; poets ranted from the railings; acoustic bands played and strolling players performed. At the height of the festivities, beneath the tall panto dame figures dressed in huge farthingale Marie Antoinette skirts, people were at work with jackhammers, hacking in time to the techno, to mask the sound from the officers standing inches away, digging up the surface of the road until large craters littered the fast lane… to plant seedlings from the gardens smashed by the bulldozers at Claremont Road."

-**Reclaim the Streets Rewild the M41 Motorway, Shepherds Bush**



In 1997, an anti-election rave in Trafalgar Square—"Never Mind the Ballots, Reclaim the Streets"—transformed the exterior of the National Gallery into a bombed-up graffiti wall. Prosecutors charged a group of DJs from the event with attempted murder for driving their van too close to police lines, indicating the state's impatience to suppress the growing movement.

In early 1998, Reclaim the Streets activists went to Geneva for the first-ever meeting of People's Global Action, an international coalition of radicals and revolutionaries responding to the Zapatista's call for a different kind of globalization: global resistance to capitalism. People's Global Action's first International Day of Action included a 200,000-strong demonstration in India against the World Trade Organization, a 50,000-person march led by landless peasants in Brazil's capital city, and over thirty Reclaim the Streets parties from San Francisco to Sydney to Toronto to Lyon to Berlin. In Birmingham, England, 5000 Reclaim the Streets partiers contributed to the Day of Action by paralyzing the city center in opposition to the annual G8 meeting.

"There were some great comic scenes of police incompetence, including them surrounding the small sound system (disguised as a family car) and escorting it into the middle of the party. They never once asked why the 'frightened family' inside wanted to escape by deliberately driving the wrong way around the roundabout towards the crowd. By the time they realized their mistake, it was all too late... the decks were under the travel blankets, boys. What threw you off the scent? The baby seat, or the toys?"

-Do or Die, **Down with Empire, Up with Spring!**

With the success of People's Global Action's first worldwide day of protest, the so-called anti-globalization movement stepped into the ring like an underdog boxer with an *untz untz untz* entrance song, ready to knock out the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund—putting global capitalism on its heels.

As word of the successful actions in Britain spread across the Atlantic, punks and anarchists in North America began organizing Reclaim the Streets actions—not only in urban centers like Washington, DC, but also in rust belt cities like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and smaller towns like Greensboro, North Carolina. For young people who had been chiefly active in subcultural contexts, the model offered a way to leverage subcultural connections to immediately enter the field of disruptive public action. Cutting their teeth with such events, the participants quickly moved on to confronting global capitalist summits. The movement gained momentum steadily until the attacks of September 11, 2001 shifted the discourse, though Reclaim the Streets actions continued around the world for years afterwards.

A 1998 Reclaim the Streets pamphlet offers a glimpse into the era:

Single issue? Just against the car?

For all of the mainstream media's attempt to define [us] as such, for those involved it expresses much more. The street party, itself reclaimed from the inanities of royal jubilees and state "celebrations," is just one recent initiative in a vibrant history of struggle, both to defend and to take back collective space. From the Peasants' Revolt to the resistance to the enclosures, from the land occupations of the Diggers to the post-war squatters, on to the recent free festivals, peace camps, land squats and anti-roads movement. Everywhere, extra-ordinary people have continually asserted not only the need to liberate the commons but the ability to think and organize for themselves.

For the city, the streets are the commons, but in the hands of industry and power brokers the streets have become mere conduits for commerce and consumption—the economic hero of which is, of course, the car. A symbol and a symptom of the social and ecological nightmare that state and capitalism create, the car which promises individual freedom ends up guaranteeing noise, destruction and pollution for all. For Reclaim the Streets, the car is a focus—the insanity of its system clearly

visible—that leads to questioning both the myth of "the market" and its corporate and institutional enforcers.

With a metal river on one side and endless windows of consumerism on the other, the streets' true purpose, social interaction, becomes an uneconomic diversion. In its place, the corporate-controlled one-way media of newspapers, radio, and television become "the community." Their interpretation [of] reality. In this sense, the streets are the alternative and subversive form of the mass media. Where authentic communication, immediate and reciprocal, takes place.

To "reclaim the streets" is to act in defense of and for common ground. To tear down the fence of enclosure that profit-making demands. And the street party—far from being just anti-car—is an explosion of our suppressed potential, a celebration of our diversity and a chorus of voices in solidarity. A festival of resistance!



Never mind the ballots—reclaim the streets

Time Keeps on Slipping...

"Insurrection is a party. We take joy in the din of their defeat."

Fuerzas Autónomas y Destructivas León Czolgosz
Communique #13: We Attacked the British Embassy

In America in the 2020s, the closest thing we have to street reclamation in the spirit of the history recounted above is the takeovers and sideshows model—celebrations of cars that seem to run counter to the values of the 1990s Reclaim the Streets movement. However, beyond superficial aesthetic preferences regarding motor noise, there is a deeper contrast between these two models of temporary autonomous spatial reclamation: for a full decade now, anarchists have celebrated, analyzed, and (to some degree) participated in sideshows without infusing those efforts with broader militant politics or harnessing their power to spread instances of ungovernability beyond their dedicated subculture. What would it look like if the anarchist fascination with drifting cars charted a course like the one of rave music in the UK, in which the networks and sound systems behind the scene decided to utilize their resources to catalyze massive and widespread combat with the state?

The history of Reclaim the Streets shows not only that militant, revolutionary struggle can also be joyous—something that anyone who hit the streets during the summer of 2020 knows—but also that the skills and bonds developed through underground subculture (how to scope out a spot, set up a generator, get the word out without blowing up the scene) are powerful tools for crafting other kinds of temporary autonomy that are not just clandestine, but openly confrontational.

Good music doesn't make the party. Good drugs don't make the party. People make the party. When the party draws together people who seek to break with the imposed limits of their society, a clever mix of songs or an ecstatic experience can suggest other creative possibilities, liberation of a larger scope. In contrast to the way a conqueror plants his flag in the ground to

claim territory, loud dance music can fill an area with freedom, making it a blank canvas for the expression of forbidden desire. Illegal desires.

If most techno music takes place in licensed clubs with admission costs and pricey drinks—or worse, in isolation through streaming platforms—this says more about how capitalism homogenizes the way art is consumed than about the essential character of the music and subculture.

Techno's history is one of...

- **underground innovation:** it developed and evolved in squats and illegal parties;

- **collective endeavor:** the management of sound systems involved collective decision-making, while organizing raves required cooperation and federation between sound systems and party crews;

- **direct action:** not only was techno music the soundtrack to the British anti-roads movement, it was also essential to 1990s German anti-fascism, the powerful Dutch squatting scene in the 1980s and 1990s, and countless other combative movements for autonomy and freedom.

Techno's future is...

- **up to you.**

Reclaim The Streets party strikes in Oxford



Police with Reclaim The Streets protesters in Oxford

CHRISTIAN DE SOUZA

POLICE have failed to stop an Oxford Reclaim The Streets party despite ugly clashes. A simultaneous demo, held in Australia, passed off peacefully.

British protesters outflanked police and occupied the busy Cowley Road area on November 1st. A series of clashes arose as police attempted to seize a van containing the KSN sound system, but eventually police had to admit defeat and let the party continue.

A five-mile exclusion zone had been declared under 1994's Criminal Justice Act.

Inspector David Whittaker said that his original intention had been to "prevent an obstruction of the road" but that the police had "obviously failed".

According to RTS estimates, more than 1,000 people danced at the peak of the party. Three men were arrested and cautioned for possession of cannabis.

The local Green Party intend to complain about the confrontational tactics used by police to the County Council Police Liaison Group.

In Sydney, Australia, police adopted a more laidback approach as Enmore Road was blocked – and between 2,000 and 3,000 people enjoyed a trouble-free day.

POLICE SEIZE DESERT STORM TRUCK AFTER RECLAIM THE STREETS PARTY

A TRUCK and equipment belonging to the Desert Storm sound system was seized and two of its occupants charged with conspiracy to cause a public nuisance after a Reclaim The Streets party in Bristol on June 21st.

An exuberant-yet-peaceful march from Castle Park through the city centre was followed by a four-hour rave on a major dual carriageway, with two sound systems playing techno and jungle to between 400 (police estimate) and 1,500 (RTS estimate) people.

A focus of the protest was Bristol Council's leasing of part of Ashton Court park to a quarry company and the potential destruction of a wildflower meadow.

The rave ended at 7pm, as organisers had promised police, but trouble flared when mounted officers and dog handlers dispersed the remaining crowd. In the ensuing scuffles, 22 people were arrested for public order offences, criminal damage and assault. A police spokesman said, "About 80 of them decided to sit down. It got difficult, then bricks and bottles were thrown."

However, RTS accused police of using excessive force and a Bristol councillor is calling for a police authority report about the policing of the event after receiving complaints from constituents. Jenny Smith said: "It was on the edge of the highly volatile St Paul's area, which has had riots in the past, and I am concerned because something must have gone wrong."

The Desert Storm truck was seized the following day, and the sound system is currently planning a series of benefit parties to replace its loss. A Desert Storm spokesman commented, "We'll be back."



The Desert Storm truck

“Fuck ‘em, and their law”


GENT'S HAIRDRESSER
CLAIM
THE