

Extract From *GLOBAL TEKNO 1.0*

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(US-English translation by Black Sifichi)

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There are no charter planes to Detroit and certainly no direct flight from Paris. When we give our destination to the customs officer who carries out the usual formalities at the stop over in Philadelphia, he bursts out laughing:

- What, why the hell are you going to Detroit?
- Well... to take landscape pictures.
- Good luck, you will need it!

It's a fact, Detroit Michigan is not listed in the tour operators schedule but it is certainly present on the world map of contemporary electronic music.

In the uncomfortable plane, which finally takes us there, we go over and over the story which ravers and techno heads repeat like a founding myth. After Kraftwerk, who blended with one unique rhythm Stockhausen and Pop music, followed a black trinity who gave birth to the sound of techno. It developed here, on the polluted edges of Lake Huron. The three founders are Juan Atkins, Derrick May, Kevin Saunderson. All three, born respectively in 1962, 1963 and 1964, instilled a black, funky and sensual groove into one of the first purely technological dance music. An essential mutation, which Derrick May sums up in a quote, which has remained well-known: « Our music is the meeting in one and the same elevator of George Clinton and Kraftwerk. It is the mirror image of Detroit: a complete error. »

Of all our destinations, Detroit was the most anachronistic but also the most fundamental. We soon realised that in order to forget the stereotypes we would have to stay a while, and take the time to meet and listen to those who live there.

Detroit is a huge ghetto and it is not possible to walk around this town the same way you would elsewhere. This long-suffering city is also an incredible source of creativity. The paradox is that this city was the place where we met the most positive and dedicated people. Contrary to our journey tradition, Detroit not leant us one guide but two: Bone and Mike.

: : Motorcity

As soon as we came out of the airport, we hurried to rent a car. The Hertz car park is bigger than a European hypermarket. Thousands of Chrysler, Mercury, GM cars and other brands are manufactured here. They arrogantly show off their newly polished chromes, the industrial pride of « Motorcity » : the automobile. The series of freeways, which lead Downtown Detroit, seem endless, but not once did we see a built-up area. We arrived at the car park of our hotel, opposite the Detroit River, which is the natural frontier between the States and Canada, and realised that we had not seen a single pedestrian. Only cars.

Bone is a special person : he is a DJ and a composer but above all he does not own a car ! Together we would visit Downtown Detroit, a very small business centre if you compare it to those of Manhattan or Chicago. But it is a fact : the American pride is expressed via these high tech urban neighbourhoods, which are dominated by extravagant towers. The Empire State Building, the World Trade Centre, or Sears Tower, they are all reminders that the USA dominates the world. But America ignores its underground culture.

Detroit's highest skyscraper is called the Renaissance Building. A strange name when all you see around you, at first glance, are buildings which have been ripped apart, victims of an invisible but pernicious war : the recession.

« In the seventies this used to be a very beautiful theatre », Bone told us while pointing towards an enormous multi-storey car park . Next to it is a building in ruins, perhaps a future car park ? The centre is almost empty. We did not see a single bus, cab or subway station. The only public transport available is a strange elevated tramway, which serves the Downtown area and goes round and round the same loop before shutting down at night. It is called the 'People Mover', even if it is hardly used at all in the slack summer season. However, it offers a certain view of the city. From the People Mover you can look out directly onto the ghetto which surrounds us.

: : Heritage

This inhospitable city is the backdrop to all of Michigan's techno-house productions. It is an environment which Derrick is eager to defend after his many travels across Europe. « Detroit also has some very beautiful places. Most of the city is not all bad, it is simply closed down and abandoned. There are some amazing buildings which could easily be renovated. The city has wealthy neighbourhoods and the population is 75 % black. It is one of the biggest black populations in the USA. People here are proud of their city. They take care of it, but politics has destroyed it. For the last thirty years we've had a black mayor. Detroit would never vote for a white mayor. People are far too obtuse. They still believe that the colour of a man's skin is more important than his thinking. In some cases that's true. But in the case of Detroit, the most important thing is to find someone who is interested in our future. A future in which our city would be restored to its former glory. But for as long as the situation remains the way it is as present, artists will always be in great numbers here. There is something very stimulating for the mind. You create your own universe. No one realises, but a lot of highly creative people come from here. From Ted Nugent to Madonna and Juan Atkins, writers, film producers. »

In the pantheon of artists born in Detroit, Derrick could also have mentioned : George Clinton and the Parliament Funkadelic tribe, Iggy Pop and the MC 5, Donald Byrd and his Blackbyrds, and of course the Motown label which was the first to produce soul hits in the sixties, including Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, or the Temptations... Only the best ! Techno is the proud heir to thirty years of black music repeated by the rhythm of factories and assembly lines. In a world in which technology is present everywhere and dominates, techno music was waiting to make its appearance. However, it somehow remains the fruit of destiny.

: : Soul machine

Way before the emancipation of the original triad, 'Electrifying' Mojo was responsible for the iconoclastic alliance of funk and electronic music imported from Europe. When New Wave was at its peak, Mojo used his radio show to play the best of bleep and groove. His programme was listened regularly by the pre techno youth. Kenny Larkin who belongs to the second generation of techno makers, was one of the teens hooked on Mojo... « I believe that he is not even aware of the influence he's had on us. He never realised that he would make such an impact on future generations. He used to play this music which we thought was completely crazy at the time : Depeche Mode, Yellow Magic Orchestra, Yello, Gary Numan, New Order, all these amazing electro pop tracks ! We didn't know what he was playing but we thought it was great. This is the reason why our style can so easily be recognised, we have all been inspired by the same music. We mixed everything to create our own sound. » Mojo mixes Prince and Human League, Depeche Mode and Funkadelic, and of course Kraftwerk, the first band to have « humanised » machines.

In Detroit, the industrial machine is inhuman, devoid of any feelings. But almost everyone has some sort of link with it. When cheap electronic musical instruments emerged they found their new exponents here. In 1988, Kevin Saunderson dominated the world with two essential hits : the robotic 'Rock to the Beat' (a grotesque imitation was made by Belgium new beat opportunists) and 'Good Life' with the Inner City project which had a more soulful and vocal orientation. And for the first time since Kraftwerk, the machine and its user were bound together with love.

« From the very start machines had a truly stimulating effect on my mind », Kevin explained. « With them I forgot everything happening in my daily and personal life. Between me and technology, it's a love story. I'm on the same level as machines. I don't look upon them in a condescending way, and I do not see their usage as purely mechanical. It is a natural tie established between my soul, my spirit and the innermost depths of the machine. Even if those depths are chock full of circuit boards and processors, I trust them. »

: : Derrick May

In parallel, Derrick May has composed some of the finest odes to the electronica style. Under the label prophetically named Rhythm is Rhythm, he signs a lyrical and spiritual trance accentuated by pulsating and sensuous bass. He doesn't see the digital style as a break with the past. It even revives ancient musical traditions, as shown by the epigraph which is an extract from the Dakota Indians "Song of their Roots" and which he has used as an introduction on his Maxi, The Beginning : « The new-born baby emerged from the original magma to the rhythm of his own heart. Man has reached a level of true knowledge of rhythm from the start. He then learnt to use rhythm in order to sing. Some men discovered the real power of sound : the magic of the spiritual touch. » Like many artists from Michigan, Derrick is now in the process of re-defining what he has invented.

We meet him again in Paris. He was here to promote the re-issue of his early recordings which have been brought together in a luxurious box set named Innovator. He never tires of representing the techno movement and talks about his role and Detroit's role in today's happening techno galaxy.

From writers to musicians, several generations of American avant-garde artists have experienced their first success in Europe. How do you feel about that ?

« Most American artists appreciate the fact that they have found an audience in Europe, but they only feel truly accepted once they return to their country and experience respect from their peers. It is true that I hardly compose these days but my home town remains more important than anything else. I sometimes tend to think that America is the most stupid nation in the world. But in terms of music, it is a country where people will welcome you with open arms as long as you have just a touch of talent. I think that none of us has had the chance to introduce our music to the people of our own country . It's a shame that I have to come to France to promote my music when 80 % of the music I mix is American. Next week, you will probably interview another American artist who will spend his time playing across Europe and once he is back in the US he will have to fight again in order to be accepted. This really infuriates me ! »

How do you explain the resistance shown by the US public towards techno music ?

« In the States major record companies have played an important role in the resistance against club music. They seem to believe that if they cannot create a star themselves, then no one else can do it for them. The result is that there isn't enough capital for this market. But this don't apply to my music... Armand Van Helden, Marshall Jefferson, Larry Heard, Laurent Garnier or anyone else : this music will never generate enough money. The situation has lasted quite a while now. But with the arrival of people like Daft Punk or the Chemical Brothers, record companies became aware of the fact that they could now push the marketing of these bands and make money. I am not implying that I don't have any respect for these artists. They are having a lot of fun, they do their best and do it really well, they don't suffer for their art. But a lot of other artists out there deserve this kind of attention and they will probably never have the chance to find an audience of their own. »

Is the concept of a community important for you ?

« Yes, it has always been important. When we first started the only thing on our mind was our home town. Anything outside Detroit was unknown. Our only wish was that the people of Detroit would listen to our music. Our community was more important than anything else. We wanted to develop this town and this scene. In the end we succeeded in influencing the entire planet, without being aware of the scope of our action. We started here and there, we got phone calls from England, Germany and we didn't have a clue about what was going on in Europe. We finally realised that our target was the wrong one. We had pointed our guns at our home town, the bullet reached a target further away than we had expected. Today, the situation has not changed. People in Detroit still don't know what we're about. »

And when you travel, do you take an interest in the other communities which make up the techno galaxy ?

« Yes, everywhere I go. And I look people in their eyes. I don't concentrate on the way they dress, but on the way they live and their spirit. It is always surprising to realise that men are the same everywhere in the world. We are bound to all do the same thing. There are few people can pride themselves in being true individuals. It is incredible to see to what extent our society is controlled. Television and the media represent the ultimate power. Television is nothing but another member of the family. People trust television more than they trust their own parents. They believe everything that they're told. And this has an obvious link with the way people see their social environment, society and the way they live. Everyone lives in almost the exact same way. The

same format can be found everywhere. American society is so standardised that we wonder how house or techno culture can exist and survive. »

Do you have the feeling that you belong to a counter culture movement in your own country ?

« I don't think this can apply to us. I could easily answer yes, but we have experienced a situation which was a little bit different. When we started nobody paid attention to us. People made jokes about us. For years we were laughed at. We really had to believe in ourselves. Like many others, we could have given up. Juan Atkins taught me to believe in myself, as did my family. We both hung on, side by side. Even before Kevin, Eddie Fowlkes, Blake Baxter, Carl Craig... and the rest of the world. It was only the two of us. We didn't give a shit about this whole counter-culture stuff, the only thing we had was this belief and a deep conviction that music was what we were about. We knew full well that we had to convince the others. In fact, things might have been completely different if we didn't do what we did. But we never stopped. »

When we listen to the "Innovator" tracks, everything seems peaceful, almost brightly illuminated. As if the recordings had been made during a very peaceful time. Was it a very calm time ?

« In a way, it was. Everything was recorded in my mind. So it is something peaceful. But it's a beautiful compliment, thank you. This music is old, I no longer listen to it. I don't really care about it, I don't cherish it. I was very different from today. I could never do music like that again. I will never be that person again. I was a lot younger, more fragile and I was at the mercy of feelings... flighty, light, volatile feelings. Today, I'm thirty five years old and these tracks were composed between the age of twenty five and thirty. They came from the heart and were very emotional. The peace you refer to is a part of my life which may have disappeared. »

It is also a solitary music.

« Absolutely. But you have to be a little bit romantic in order to understand it. Most people aren't. And you have to have some knowledge of the history of music. Not only electronica, but also jazz, funk, soul, the history of good music. It isn't enough to simply be a techno kid. They cannot understand this. The music is geared towards them, but it's also directed at people our age, people who were there when it all started. It is very important to promote this music, just one last attempt so that people can achieve a level of understanding and really know where it's coming from. I want people to know that the pioneers of this music which changed the world come from Detroit. It doesn't come from me, but from this city. With a little bit of luck Juan Atkins will do the same. I would be so happy if he did an album based on that concept. Kevin did the same thing. It is important to be aware to know where it all originates from.

People have to realise that there is heart and soul at the core of this music. Most artists today have none of these qualities. It is a terrible fact and the cause of it is that they don't know their history. It has nothing to do with age. When I was a kid I used to listen to records which were more than fifteen years old. The same thing goes for books which you study at school. They're not new, they're old, classic and necessary for one's education. They help you reach a higher level of knowledge. As for this new generation of so-called techno or electronic musicians, they're not all that. They go straight from the music shop to their home, they make music and a record. But they have no sense of history. This is why a lot of the music produced nowadays sounds like rock and roll. Because they have forgotten their history lessons. We no longer have a Jedi to watch over us. I have said it a thousand times, and I still repeat it again and again. Without soul you get nothing but a hole. »

Your music evokes voyages, airports, night lights, the nocturnal and illuminated urban landscape.

« The city, music, night time, lights, life, the pulse, these are the things that Detroit's techno really talks about. It was never about a heavy bass line, we never liked that, never ! Today the word techno is used for everything and anything. This is the only reason why I keep on playing and travelling across the world. We are still trying to show the public that the word techno isn't that important. What matters most is the concept of faith in music, to bring together a vast array of different musical practices which we keep close to our hearts. Sometimes people hear me mix and ask themselves why I play such records. They wonder why they don't hear something with a heavy bass line. But I want to educate people, I love having the opportunity to show them my vision of things. Demonstrate that all the right elements are available, in the fusion of souls. »

How do you feel about having to live like a globetrotter ?

« Let's say that I hadn't planned to live that life. I have recently tried to slow down a bit and concentrate more on Detroit and the Transmat label. Continuous travelling has left me tired. Because you experience the same situations, meet the same people. I don't want to lose the love I have for my work. To see too many things and too many countries is sometimes too revealing. You end up believing that there is no hope left. A while back, I had reached a stage in my life where hope no longer existed. I was travelling from town to town, I saw the same people at parties and clubs. Although these people were different, the situations remained the same. Almost everything was without hope. At the end of the day you realise that each one of them is seeking happiness, or something they cannot put into words or explains. For a long time, I used to look at these people and the whole experience became very personal. They were stoned and I was expecting a different kind of attention and behaviour. I took it very badly. It affected me a lot, I thought that there was no reason why I should continue to make music and be involved in the whole scene. It's not my fault and it's not anybody's fault. All these people sometimes do not choose to think for themselves. They do what they do because they have abandoned the choice of having a personal life. They don't think and therefore they don't exist. This is the complete opposite of the way I was brought up. For a long time, going out to clubs made me feel depressed. Today, the situation has changed. It gives me pleasure, but I'm so tired of everything. I have to remain satisfied with superficial relations. I do my own thing, without worrying too much about others. Last night, I was mixing at a party where the public was quite young and didn't quite know what to expect and didn't really know how to party either. This is missing from club culture today. Gays don't come to these parties anymore and they are people who lose their inhibitions much more easily. Straight kids are alone with themselves, without role

models, they don't know how to get in touch with their soul. Gay men are more revealing because they have already come to terms with their own feelings and they have shown it to the world around them. They have nothing to hide and when they go out, they have a great time. The gay scene is now a separate entity from the techno and house scene. This is why, when confronted with the natural desire to celebrate, drugs have become so important. There was a time when these questions were on my mind a lot. In Detroit, when I was younger I used to go out a lot to gay clubs as well as straight clubs. This is the way all my friends have grown up. We used to go to all the places where music was good. The only drug we used was music. I know that it sounds like a cliché, but it is true. »

:: Detroit : a circle

As in techno and house cities all over the world, new trends emerge from the clubs. Even today, young and old still talk about the club Heaven. It was a gay club where the late-lamented and so talented Ken Collier used to ruthlessly play the decks. But the place where the techno-soul vibes grew up was definitely The Music Institute. « This is where I discovered music, says Bone. I was very young, I certainly hadn't reached the legal age to get in. But they let us in because we were there for the music and nothing else. The club owners were really cool. We would often get in through the toilet window as we had no money to pay the entrance fee. And they didn't say anything. A lot of Europeans would come to the club. I don't know how, but they had heard of what was going on there. Depeche Mode, Eurythmics, New Order, the guys from the Hacienda club in Manchester... All of them came, but we weren't aware of what was going on in Europe. »

Tonight, Friday night, almost ten years later, all of the local youth go to the Motor to hear Bone mix... The most important techno club in town welcomes back its most popular resident after a month's absence. The flyer announces in a bold and stereotyped typography style « DJ Bone : back from the Love Parade ».

The Motor is a spacious club. Its decor is more reminiscent of a French ballroom than a luxurious New York Manhattan club. The sound system is a bit light, but Bone sets off his mix in an incredible way. With the agility of a tightrope walker, he plays from a strong and typical Chicago house to a home made, no holds barred techno. He sometimes introduces a third deck, endlessly repeating the introduction of one same track while playing filters and sounds until one massive and unique sound completely fills the room. Meanwhile several dancers move closer to the DJ booth designed to resemble a locomotive. The girls kiss DJ Bone, their idol. He is touched and smiles at everyone while redoubling his frenzied attack on the decks. « They don't realise that they sometimes get in my way, but that's how it is ! They love me. Music makes them happy and that's all it takes to make me happy too. » In the little room Bone has invited A Guy Called Gerald, a legend in his own right. His name is enough to set us vibrating even if the audience here does not know him yet. Bone knows everything that house music owes to this guy. In the late eighties in Manchester he was still working in a McDonald's. But in his spare time he composed on rudimentary machines the emblematic acid house theme, Voodoo Ray. Gerald went on to become one of the masters of the emerging jungle scene in England and his cult album, Black Street Technology is one of the finest examples of devotion to the electronic style. So it is not hardly surprising that Gerald mix here, in Detroit, the planetary epicentre of digital beat. In fact, he is working right now on duos with Juan Atkins, the godfather of the whole techno scene. The club gaers are unaware of that, and maybe they'll never know, but at least they are dancing. They are not familiar with the drum and bass rhythms beat out by Gerald, but the magic behind the secret of black technology does its work. Here the audience is fantastic. But there is one thing which intrigues us all through the evening : the whole audience is white !

:: Segregation

Our first marvellous and exciting night in a club was also our first experience of the segregated existence led here by the white and black population. It's no harsh segregation but a gentle one, almost natural separation, whose main causes take us back to some little known aspects of contemporary US history. After 1966, Detroit was the scene of big race riots which coincided with the insurrection in the black ghettos of Watts in Los Angeles and Harlem in New York. The Detroit revolt received less media coverage but was probably more violent. The economic powers that be took fright and took their money away from the city centre. Today, the rich families live in the suburbs or quite simply have moved elsewhere.

« You know, the worst thing about it was that when the rich landlords went away they kept their rights over the city. This ghetto belongs to them and they go on collecting their rents. The rich men have even signed up tough guys from the ghetto to go and get rents from their brothers instead of them. They will never admit that they did it but you have to know this to understand. »

We thought hard about this foretelling comment by Bone without really understanding its deeper meaning while our Mercury rode the asphalt out into the suburbs. This is where most of the shopkeepers are. There are long distances between the stores, but a quiet automobile ride is all it takes to visit the record, musical instrument and trendy fashion shops. We are idle and feel suburban for the time being, on our way to the lively fashionable districts. In the early evening, people are gathering in bars while the sound systems put out the puerile garbage of bland FM rock. Detroit is that too. It is not even the pre-punk rage of the MC 5 ! Despite this unattractive setting, not even fifteen minutes pass without Bone being greeted by some debonair adolescent or a smiling female rave babe.

These happy suburban kids dressed in their usual oversized baggy pants can be found in the hundreds at a huge rave in a majestic abandoned theatre. The site itself makes you dream : vast ceilings set with intact mouldings, a solid wooden staircase, great bay windows through which the first light of dawn is mingled in a magnificent ballet with the robot scan and laser flashes. This oasis, provisionally dedicated to BPM's is due to be pulled down shortly while the organisers are using all their skills and inventiveness to negotiate the right to hold another party soon. A scene like this would be inconceivable in France. Our safety regulations would prevent any attempt to organise a « wild » rave. Here there are no safety standards. The evening passes off smoothly and the few cops who pass by in the middle of the night find nothing to complain about. The police are more interested in what is going on outside. We are on a patch of a black gangs territory in the West of the city. A girl was raped in a nearby street by a band of kids only a few nights ago. The event is hardly even mentioned. It happens so often. Meanwhile Robert Hood is getting truly geared up in his pure and minimalist mix.

Physical aggression is all too common outside these raves. When Laurent Garnier gave a party here a woman was gunned down in the parking lot. Since then, Laurent has been banned from playing officially in Detroit, even though he comes back frequently to meet his brothers in arms. It was he who discovered Bone in the depths of one of these bars where he was not playing to any audience. « I was mixing with ancient equipment, old junk which would never have been used by Derrick May and the others. All of Detroit's best known DJ's came from time to time, but they never paid attention to me. One day Laurent turned up with Derrick, Kevin, Eddie Fowlkes, and a few others. He came to the tiny booth where I worked. We played together for a while and we created a fantastic atmosphere... Then, he invited me to come to France and I played the Rex Club in

Paris. The same day, we went together to Radio FG and he introduced me by saying : « This is the real sound of Detroit, this is what techno is about ! » No one had ever done so much for me. Never, not even among my own people ! »

Since then, Bone has enjoyed universal respect. He has become a “liaison” between the partitioned communities of Detroit. Equally at ease with the rave-kids and in the very close circle of Mad Mike and Underground Resistance.

:: Resistance.

Mad Mike is the most obscure legend of Detroit, the most sought-after myth of the techno galaxy. How many DJs and ravers wear Underground Resistance tee-shirts like others brandish the flag of revolt! All the UR productions and a myriad of sub-divisions served up by its distribution company Submerge find purchasers in the specialized record outlets all over the world. UR is the most combative squad of the techno labels. These two capital letters made a resounding entry into the rave world in the early 90s imposing the cataclysmic sound of Sonic EP and The Punisher on dance-floors which will never recover. First came the sound of the machine which roars out of the loudspeakers but now the machine itself has gone into revolt. At the time, the original Detroit techno was on decline as it has been so widely copied and absorbed by the rest of the world. Its leaders have dispersed and even Kevin Saunderson no longer signs any hit records with majors. Despoiled and sidelined, techno has taken refuge underground and the small independent labels are mushrooming by the dozens. In this melting-pot that was to generate amazing creativity, a catalyst was needed. UR was the bastion and Mad Mike the unifier.

This personage is all the more mythical as he is invisible. He never gives any interviews and rarely quotes his refuge at Submerge. And although everybody knows his name, very few people are familiar with his face. As we were setting out for lunch, Bone told us that we would be meeting him.

The Majestic diner became our headquarters. You can meet all kinds of players on the techno scene in this tex-mex: a rave organizer, a booker, young DJs, Juan Atkins and A Guy Called Gerald. We talk about our exploits of the night before while a tape plays Parliament as the background sound ... «Make my funk to the P. Funk / I want my funk uncut / I want a bomb / I need a P. Funk / I want my Funk funk good ...». We sang the rest of the refrain so loud that you couldn't even hear the music. A couple bicycles past the plate glass window. They stop and burst out laughing at our P. Funk improvised choral effort and go their way. We've just met Carl Craig and his English wife. This Sunday afternoon, some people are cycling and we are singing! Black and White recite the same hymn by George Clinton, reminding the whole world that Detroit invented the funky cosmology. “One Nation under a Groove” was made in 1975 and today techno cultivates the same adage.

Then the sound falls silent ... we haven't notice the guy in army trousers, a baseball cap and a tee-shirt « Made in Detroit » come in. This is the man we had been waiting for or who seemed to be waiting for us. Mike knows who we are, how long we have been here and knows where we've already been. He takes us for journalists – and that is really what we are . We explain to him that we are not here simply to prepare just another article for our magazine, but intend to write a book.

- A book about techno music ? Mike wonders.
- No, a book about the people who make it! I answered.
- I know who I am and I don't need you or your press to find out!
- But the world needs to know what's happening in Detroit...
- And what will happen at the end of your book ?
- It has no ending because music never stops.
- What I mean is this: do you control the distribution? Do you know who its readership will be? Will you have it translated into English and will you come to offer copies to the kids of the ghetto here? Will you go to the faculties to which I have no access to explain what's going on here?
We look each other straight in the eyes for a long moment. Nobody says a word. We wanted to ask questions but it's Mike who's doing the talking. «Do the right thing», he says like a Spike Lee guerillero. He gets up, gives a virile handshake and swears to see us again. We don't know where or when but he certainly knows.

:: Bootymobile

«Mike looked you in the eyes; that's where he was looking for your answer. He was not listening to your words. Words, he has enough of», Bone told me as we were going back to our fucking automobile. He took the steering wheel; normally he doesn't like to drive. We are surprised that he hasn't got a vehicle. «I don't need an automobile to go to Berlin, Tokyo or Paris».
But we do need one to get to Belle Isle Park, the island on which our hotel room looks out from its height of twenty four floors. You can see plenty of open spaces from there, greenery which is a rare color in Detroit. We expected to discover a Central Park surrounded by water, family picnickers, joggers or people on rollerblades. But it's not like that at all.
The whole of Riverbank Road is a vast procession of shining hubcaps. Pick-up trucks, 4x4 navigators and other giant models rival each other with chromium and show off in a symphony of engines idling over. A BMW overtakes us slowly on the left: a 'Black Mobile Wheel', the kind owned by dealers according to the local jokes. Everywhere automobile sound systems bellow out at full tilt. Over here, a gang of tough guys shout out gangsta rap while displaying their ringed fingers through the open windows. Over there four bimbos keep time with their head, singing a pathetic R&B cover at the top of their voices. There is not a pedestrian in sight. Motor city is cruelly paying the price of its lack of public transport. Belle Isle is the only social link in the town and even here people communicate through their cars. The only earthbound bipeds that you can see are a group of teenagers who stand proudly next to the trunk of their Chevrolet converted into a powerful bass box. This four wheel drive sound system hurls out booty trax boosted with electro bass mixed brutally by Gary Chandler ... Massive power.

Gary Chandler who must not be confused with his New Jersey namesake, Kerry Chandler, is the star DJ of the black clubber gangs. His Saturday radio show on 105.9 popularises booty sound down in the street when he is not electrifying the hyperactive tribes in the Warehouse Club. An ordinary evening here gives us another view into US style segregation. We go in without a camera and with the recommendation of a gang leader who knows that we are quiet people. In the feverish atmosphere of this white hot-shed, we hear the impression of a dancer in the raw: «In Europe you have class separation. Here, we have racial separation!» No comment. On

the dancefloor, Gary Chandler and DJ Assault are blasting out wicked sounds. They use words from the most salacious rap combined with a rough Chicago house style and a thick bass of electro. This neo-genre is not fundamentally new but it is the true flavor of the ghetto. It owes as much to industry and technology as to its ill-loved godmother techno. Here the two genres are linked but they choose not to see each other. Youngsters delight in electro, this type of pre-techno which made its appearance in New York and Miami on the eve of the 80s. The genre disappeared almost as quickly as it arrived on the scene. Detroit is still celebrating the style because of a strong community link as well as a veritable artistic heritage. «On every street corner you will hear electro-classics», Keith Tucker tells us. He is the inventor of the lyrical electro-intimist style close to a techno aesthetic. «If titles like Rock It by Herbie Hancock or Clear by Juan Atkins are played constantly on the radio, it's because these pieces are genuine singles. They are like songs while techno tends to be listened to in mixed versions. But above all these are titles that rappers adore and electro is the only link between techno and rap.»

:: Better days

As you can see all over the United States, rap is a major social culture. But it's also totally formatted and less and less audacious. Confronted with the diktat of the major recording companies, the independent ghetto trax of Detroit have found an enormous acclaim in their community, an impact much more important than in Chicago where the booty style found its major inspiration. In fact, by assuming all the social and urban wounds of Motorcity, booty sound has gained strength and personality.

We come across this inclination to «dirty your hands» in Moodyman, the exponent of dance music bathed in blues and gospel. He is the composer of profoundly abstract, slow and euphoric, house music with overtones of the gutter, yet magnetic at the same time. Simply unique ! Better Days is the only place that stays open very late in Detroit. Moodyman shares his evening with Theo Parrish and Scott Grooves. This cabaret is no more than a cavern with damp walls poorly lit by a few blue spotlights. There isn't even a bar. Just a warm groove which suspends the dancer between the precipice and the abyss. The 'chicas latinas' undulate to the beat of an ecstatic deep house which the lascivious B-boys, provoking slinky buttock movements from the girls while the rave kids 'penetrate' into this choreography with the smiles of one and all. Joints are passed from one colour of skin to the other and Moodyman makes the loudspeaker boxes groan under his music... It is so deep it makes you cry. In this backstreet den we experience the finest dancefloor communion that we have ever witnessed with no arrogance and no barriers. There are not even any partitions in the toilets.

“The Lush” offers the same kind of richly coloured attitude in the highly intimate setting of a musical bar. The place would be like any other lounge if it wasn't Carl Craig on the turntables. This prodigious composer, better known for his subtle techno-jazz production, lets himself go to old style funk – George Clinton of course – and precious disco house in tribute to one of the finest DJs of the tribe, Terrence Parker. Everybody here knows him affectionately as «Tee Pee». We are waiting for him, but he does not turn up. So Carl redoubles his concentration on the turntables, distilling old school titles which he would never play anywhere else, techno, disco, soul and even rock. More eclectic than ever, Craig finishes his selection with blues... «Blues is the most

natural expression of black music. A piano virtuoso, if he comes from the ghetto, will make even Bach swing. If I play beats, melodies or even the maddest arrangements, in the end what remains is the blues, much more than Kraftwerk or John Coltrane who have also influenced me. Everything here converges on the blues. Mine was already spinning around in my head when I was a kid and it is there for ever.»

Who said that techno was only an affair with machines?

:: Heidelberg

We took some time to get away from the stereotypes and divisions. Detroit reveals itself too slowly and our guide finally becomes amused by our slow initiation. Today, Bone has a malicious smile: « This morning, it's time for you to discover the real Detroit! ».

We are in the heart of the ghetto. There aren't even any cars around. Then, we reach Heidelberg Street. It offers us the most surrealistic show that you could imagine here. It's a gigantic artwork eight hundred yards long. The pavements are delimited by hundreds of old paint covered shoes. Statuettes, telephones, broken bicycles hang from all the trees. Further on, wrecked automobiles are covered with dolls. Everywhere there are refrigerators, car hoods and all kinds of recovered objects forming a vast post-industrial and neo-primitive tableau. It's as though Basquiat, Keith Haring and Marcel Duchamp were sharing their art in the same torment. The houses are also decorated with bric-a-brac. «Each has its theme», Tyree Guiton the mildly mad creator of this décor explains to us. «Each provokes communication. A totem pole of televisions sets rises up like a middle finger pointed at the sacrosanct news chain, CNN. Instead of a window, the famous clown by Bernard Buffet is gagged by a US flag to which is attached a chiffon doll with crossed arms. Clinton and Monica ! Tyree's house, called «O.J. Simpson house» is covered with cathode ray tubes and antennas. «This is not a show, it's our life. A family lives in each house» he tells us while an old man in a rocking chair smiles on the balcony of the neighbouring house. We come across a homeless lady who reads verses from the Bible, a muscle building photographer who invites us to his muscle club. «Heidelberg is a flower growing out of the mud» Bone concludes as we return in the evening to the pale Downtown lights.

Heidelberg is in danger. The town council is planning to demolish its arrogant buildings and houses. The local community is battling to safeguard its heritage. Tyree Guiton, constant provocateur, selects a form of contestation which is highly personal outside his own domain. On all the abandoned buildings, he applies his signature with a big coloured polka dot. This yellow, pink, blue, and red stigmata can be seen everywhere. The whole city is crisscrossed with coloured spots. They form a vast labyrinth, which invariably brings the attentive observer back to his original street.

The techno tribes have become very close to Tyree. Mad Mike and Derrick May give him constant support. And it is murmured that Underground Resistance which has not given any live performances for four years is booking its next appearance in Heidelberg, the «true» heart of Detroit.

:: Designer White Noise

Less than a mile from Downtown, Windsor offers a totally different landscape. Which is quite normal because we are on the other side of the river and we have left the United States for Canada. This is where Richie Hawtin lives. Without this eccentric, techno would probably not have had the same impact. Under the F.U.S.E. name, he dynamites a scene which was waiting for no more than a big shock to explode once and for all. So you find him djing in all the big European raves. At the same time, astonishing maxis follow in succession on his label. Plus 8.

But Richie is also a big album composer. Under the pseudonym of Plastikman, he writes increasingly minimalist electronic music, stripped to its bare bones and neatly rounded at one and the same time. His vast riverside residence instantly evokes music. Its design is luxuriously sober. The red and black dominants refer us back to the celebrated Plastikman logo while crisscrossed cables and electronic machines contrast with the aesthetic restraint of the lounge. The basement is still more implacably rigorous. Immaculately white like the 'concept series' which was so decreed and praised to the high heaven of the technovorous world. Here we are in the heart of one of the most important electronic music laboratories in the world. We even make a plince at a vinyl press with which Richie cuts dub plates, these unique grooves which provide the raw material for his mixes. But this rich edifice was also his prison. When he was persona non grata in the United States, accused of being a clandestine musician DJ worker, he wrote his most introspective music here. Across the boarder, his only audience was Spaz, a magnificent pedigree cat who never leaves him. That is how the 'Consumed' and 'Concept series' albums were born. Our conversation repeatedly came back to them.

In Europe, we have a strong image of Detroit as a huge techno community. But the reality is quite different: on the spot there is no unity but rather several communities which each live in their own way. That is not the case of other scenes which seem more welded together. What is your own position in this environment?

« It's true that it's not a community. Detroit has never been a city in which people meet up in the street, hit hands and say «Hey guys, what's going on?». Detroit is build on isolation. Detroit is like that! It's already a miracle that the different techno communities are able to have any contact at all. Believe me, it is less evident than elsewhere. For ordinary people, Detroit is even more difficult. It's every man for himself. There is the Submerge clan, Carl Craig's Planet E, Plus 8 and the others. I don't think that one day we'll be able to live in harmony and all be united in a great wigwam! (Laughter). We should certainly make more efforts to understand one another but Detroit remains a very strong setting without everyone being united. That's where the whole scene gets its strength. It's a good thing in fact because nobody treads on anybody else's territory. Communication is tough but relations are always built on respect. It's funny because we are all different but our music is always inspired by the same environment. If Detroit was not like that, techno would not be what it is. »

You were among the first ambassadors of Detroit in Europe. I have in mind F.U.S.E. for instance with which you imported the Detroit sound to European raves and gave people what they were looking for: a hard sound, a heavier rhythm than the rest of the Detroit productions. Did you know that this would make the whole planet tremble?

« That's how it happened in early 1990. The general sound of Detroit became much harder. There was a real competition between us and Underground Resistance. Mad Mike brought out 'Sonic Warfare' and I produced

F.U.S.E. Mike and Jeff had other ideas. They sent me the pressings test and said: «Watch this!». I answered immediately with a demo of Plus 8: «Check this out!». For over a year, we played out this strong arm act. Now it's a subject of jokes between Mike and I. At the time, everything was happening very quickly. Of course, we sent our pieces everywhere trying to keep a step ahead of each other. Without our really realizing it, the thing took off everywhere. It was brilliant. F.U.S.E. really caught people unawares just like the 'Elimination EP' and 'Punisher' by Underground Resistance. Their records and ours came out at the same time. We were on stage at the same time without working together. That's what made the Detroit sound known. Before that, there were Derrick, Kevin and all the other people whom you know, but Detroit had never experienced so much energy as it had at that time and it's never come back since. After this storm, Detroit has calmed down but we really gave electronic dance the kick start that it needed at that time. »

Your Plastikman facet appears more conceptual, more remote from the dancefloor and when the Musik album came out, we had the impression of dealing with a schizophrenic.

(Laughter). « I am not schizophrenic or at least I don't think so. I only make electronic music. It's also a way of showing different facets to people. If you really appreciate music, you have to be capable of letting it reach your innermost being. Music develops and shows the reality of its composer: his state of mind, his personality, his sentiments. Nobody is sad or happy all the time and I don't always make dancefloor or ambient. »

The Concept series was still more conceptual. It provoked many reactions, some positive, others negative.

What were you trying to show?

« It was created to explore techno further. In general, techno albums are not so original and I found this boring. My aim was to do something more audacious, not only at musical level but for the whole scene: the logo, the packaging, the release schedule because a new 12 inches was issued each month and the concept was spread over a whole year. »

So it was a kind of diary?

« Yes, that's it. It was a musical diary with my ideas for the month of January and its evolution over the year. And as often happens with an intimate diary, there are some things which you don't really want people to read. In the Concept series, there were two or three pieces which I don't like any more and I really rather regret having published them. But it's all very interesting because that's in the very nature of the series. This is the freest thing I have ever done in my life. The very idea of the series became more important than its creator. As things went on, I took second place to the idea itself. »

Was it also a marketing operation?

« Yes, of course. The whole thing only acquired its real meaning at the end of the year. We had to bring the twelve records together to find the logo. People may think that the pieces are not all of identical quality but back in 1996, it was far more interesting to continue the Concept series than to buy three other records by Richie Hawtin or Plus 8. »

The Consumed approach is different. Is that a new concept?

« Actually Consumed is a retrospective. It's a continuation of a theme which I imagined in the 'Musik LP' era when I had the Plastikman identity. So I used the same machines as in those days and I tried to construct a new sound, a new destination. It's a sequel to Plastikman, a cropped and almost bare sequel. The sound is more basic, more fundamental and the silences themselves are very meaningful. »

So it's not just a question of sounds but perhaps one of textures too...

« Yes. This kind of work is the opposite of what I did for my first two albums. When you begin to work on electronic machines, you want to exploit the widest possible range of sounds. You have an idea and you build up around it, so you tend to exaggerate a little. All the electronic musicians have experienced that failing. With Consumed, I began everything in the same way until I could shed all the superfluous aspects. This album is not minimalist in the strict sense of the term but it is fashioned like a kind of sculpture. Each sound takes on shape and colour. In a sense, it is stone washed and then it becomes more transparent, more alive. »

Are you suggesting that your relationship with machines has changed?

« Yes, because the machines are coming increasingly to look like me. I put more of myself and my true personality into them. I have reached the stage where machines become transparent. There is a kind of natural relationship between them and I. You learn how to use them without noticing it. It's a gradual process. You can feel this happening as you listen to the albums. They were conceived with increasing facility. They are more fluid, even if my pieces have never been highly structured. It's also a matter of movements between the titles. From one piece to another there are sounds which answer one another. They are telling a story. It's like a book. I find that these sounds come all the more easily as I have been at the heart of the machines myself. To make electronic music limpid, you have to wash yourself clear of the machine. If you know it perfectly well, you can forget the machine. »

This is a different approach from Djing. When you mix, how do you tell a story?

« In France, I have never mixed for very long. Just two hour sets, no more than that. But when I play for longer, it becomes much more than a mix for me. It's more creative. More artistic. You mix all kinds of things and you create new rhythms. When I can, I make extensive use of effects. I like to change sounds, especially in a well-known piece. So something different comes out each time. People dance and wonder what's going on. They forget who they are because they are possessed completely by the music. There is a total synchronization between music and body. The sensations that I express in my records are the sensations that I feel on the dancefloor. There is a very natural correlation between the way in which I mix and my work as a producer. »

But Consumed and Concept are not very easy to dance to.

« Because they are so minimalist they don't look as if they are intended for the dancefloor. But the beat is not a dance. Of course, I realize that in a rave or a club, a kick is essential. But the absence of beat does not rule out groove. Rhythm does not always need a kick. It may reside in a tone or a flow. It's still dance even if it's a strange mental dance. If rhythm can escape from beat it becomes organic and the blood surges. It takes you much further. »

Do you think that this is the way in which the techno scene will survive?

« Jeff Mills and I have discussed that at length. How can dance music be created without a kick. How can we invent bass lines, vibrations which make people move as they would do with the fucking kick. Jeff is working hard on that at present. Underground Resistance also has become much more funky in its recent productions. I don't know where this has taken us but we are going somewhere. If not, we are in a dead end! »

Things have changed on the techno scene. Innocence has gone and this newly acquired maturity reflects a desire for change and in a sense anxiety.

« Yes, and it's time to change things. When I began, people liked what I was doing even if it took them time because my music was different. It's time to help the public discover something else. We are not here today because we have just gone on repeating the same old shit. We've got to make things move even if what we do does not live up to the public's expectations. But the audience was not expecting to find us way back in 1990 and we are still here today. You see, we have to move on a step if we are going to survive. »

You can see the same questioning among the best electronic musicians. On the other hand, we have the impression that history is repeating itself: techno is going back to electro and hip-hop is rediscovering scratch. So what is there to do now?

(Silence). « That's a hard question to answer. I don't even know if there is an answer. What I do know is that we are talking about music based on technology. For around ten years, we've been working on the development of this technology because creation and technology are so closely linked. Everything that constitutes the real essence of this music is bound up with technology: not only the synthesizers and the rhythm boxes but also the CDs, the vinyl and the DATs. We are moving on with them. When we think we've come to the end of the creative process, technology progresses and we are away again. On the other hand, when technology is slow, we turn everything on its head. It's a kind of race between two friends whose legs are tied together. They'll always be tied together. For instance, when somebody has the idea of a new electronic sound, he won't have that idea immediately... Then he'll meet a technician who will introduce him to a new machine or a new mixing method which will enable him to perpetuate the idea that was moving in his head. And it will progress again. The whole future is just a constant progression. Perhaps it will happen in a fortnight, in two months or two years. »

Electronic music seems to be leaving the dancefloor now. Is that final?

« Not absolutely final, but a good thing for its development. It's becoming independent, no longer a slave of the dancefloor. So it is exploring new terrains to better reinvent its own being. A dance music without kick drums is one possible route. But there must be others. »

So it is a quest?

« Yes, it is a real quest for the Holy Grail. It'll never finish. Whenever somebody thinks that he has found the Holy Grail of techno, somebody else will reinvent it. »

Man has explored every possible place on the planet and even the moon. The only place that remains to be explored by us is technology.

« That is self-evident. We are at the beginning of the understanding of time and we are only now beginning to realize what is fundamental to life. Once again, nobody understands what is happening. Just look at it. For years people believed that the earth was flat and then somebody noticed it was round. That person was even burnt at the stake for his belief. Do you realize, for thousands of years all mankind believed that the earth was flat and suddenly men had to call into question something they believed to be true. Today, it's just like that. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Nothing is ever certain, nothing is ever permanent. We all have so much to learn and discover. It's just the same for techno. You think you understand and know it. In fact, you are wrong. »

And is electronic music flat or round?

(Laughter). « I don't know. Nobody knows! »

:: **Casino City**

We can't leave Windsor without visiting its casino, the main source of the city's wealth. This mini North-American Las Vegas, with advertising hoardings, lining all the highways, generates the main cross-border traffic. Detroiters cross the tunnel daily and the customs officers don't look too hard when US dollars are flowing into the local cash tills. Faced with this Canadian example, Detroit is increasingly likely to set up its own casinos. The subject is constantly debated by Michigan politicians. Increasingly grandiloquent projects are being put forward. The most startling of all is to convert Downtown Detroit into casino city, under the very nose of the surrounding ghetto. The Democratic mayor and most of the population seemed to reject this project until Michael Jackson turned up with his own plan. Jackson would not stop at building casinos, he would add an amusement park. So Detroit would get its Disneyland but nobody yet knows whether it will be called «Michael-land»!!! Reflecting on the grotesque side of the situation, we set out to waste twenty dollars in Windsor casino. Finally, we left with sixty in our pockets. A good opportunity to spend them at Submerge. Mad Mike was waiting for us in his «UR Land».

:: **Somewhere in Detroit**

Mike opened the door to us letting loose the cat that he was holding in his arms. A reddish scrawny cat which had lost his tail.

- What happened to him? We asked.

- A rat ate its tail.

- Where?

- Here!

Welcome to Submerge! Just a few blocks from Downtown, the «People Mover» repeats its incessant loop but nobody comes down to this desolate district. The temple of international techno is a hovel which stands up alone and proud in a no man's land of broken asphalt.

Our guest shows us round his property. On the ground floor the boutique displays all the house productions and those of the other independent labels: UR, Red Planet, Soul City, 430 West, Direct Beat, Technotika and also

KDJ, the Moodyman label, Richie Hawtin's Plus 8 and so many others. All these records, often rare, are carefully filed. Under the vast ceiling, extra wide felt hats and tee-shirts with the effigy of the labels, swing to the rhythm of fan blades turning at full power. Submerge is also pro at merchandising, and the sale of derivative products brings in more than the records. By definition, the vinyl is intended for DJs and pressed out in three thousand copies, seldom more. Supply stops well short of demand. So each piece becomes a collector's item. Collectables among the best. We discover for the really first time records stamped SID (Somewhere in Detroit). These anonymous productions, printed in five hundred copies, can only be found here in this underground cavern where Submerge has become the most sophisticated strategist of all. The mystery is kept afloat around this place, so much so that the mere sight of the vinyl is a moving experience. But they are simply records and an impartial observer would find the whole thing very banal in the end.

In fact, the heart of the operation is not here. We go up to the offices bypassing the big stock earmarked for export. Here the shining computers process orders and serve the communication networks. «When people say that our weapon is vinyl, I can only laugh. Our best weapon is the fax and the Internet !». We leave the headquarters office for the entrails of the studio. This is the most secret part of the edifice, Mike's most intimate refuge. We are even surprised that he shows us around commenting on the defects and qualities of each machine. Behind a well ordered assembly of digital machinery, we see a bass, a guitar and other «organic» traditional instruments.

On the upper floors, there are apartments where a colourful community of techno activists live: Meighen, a mini-pin-up of Irish origin who composes experimental music resembling Autechre; Aubrey Horman, a young duo whose first maxi has recently gone on sale in the boutique; Juan Atkins in his immense and untidy office bedroom studio, Metroplex; Lawrence, Mike's favourite sound engineer and the figurehead of the Burden brothers trio, Octave One. And cats are everywhere, some with tails, one without. One of them marks out its territory on Pierre Emmanuel's photo bag. Down below, everybody meets again. Bone is mixing the new pieces, DJ Assault drops by to leave his latest tape and we purchase few excellent records.

Legend has it that Submerge is impenetrable. But this is far from the truth. Rumour suggested that UR was racist. But that is absurd! Quite simply, Mike is mistrustful and he often admits the fact to us. Too many people have called in here to steal the Detroit techno art. Some pertinently object that this borrowing would lead to a global techno culture, but Mike defends his own community above all others. Originally, UR was twined. Jeff Mills was Mike's first companion and Jeff is today one of the most famous DJ in the world, from Detroit, to N.Y.C., London, Berlin, Paris and Tokyo, he gets the ovations of all the of audiences. Back in 1991, Jeff told me «somebody must go there». That was essential of course, but I also had to stay here.

Since then, UR has been strengthened by other resistance leaders. Robert Hood, James Pennington and Rolando are missionaries whom Mike, the sub-commander Marcos of this urban jungle, sent out to the four corners of the globe. For him resistance is not just a mere word. The names on his records tell the full story ... Hô Chi Minh, Angela Davis, Muhamed Ali, Bruce Lee, Kraftwerk, Geronimo. These are the established masters of the Detroit bastion. Mike reveals nothing about himself, not even his age. He doesn't answer any question. But he does talk a lot. Listening to the mythical maxi Galaxy to Galaxy illustrated by a picture of Geronimo, one catches this comment by its originator: «The first American colonists did not even ask whether the Indians were good or bad. They had nothing against the Indians. Quite simply, they exterminated them because the Indians were an obstacle to their expansion. Hate came later to justify the deed!».

:: Underground Reconstruction

On the next day, we decided to pay another visit to Submerge unannounced, alone. Mike was also there, alone with his sister who takes care of the computer side of things and routine business. He didn't seem surprised to see us. He even gave us a spontaneous welcome with an unusual degree of warmth. But he was also terribly sorry because he had to go and get his 4x4 repaired. A vandal had broken one of its windows overnight. Mike worked out how much time he would spend getting his vehicle back from the garage when we offered to drive him there. After stopping off at the garage, Mike took us through the Mexican quarter on the eastern side of the town, near Ambassador Bridge, which leads to Canada. A «very bad area». This is where Rolando the 'Jaguar' lives. We called on him but he was out. So we asked Mike to take us to the huge abandoned railroad station that we saw a few days earlier. He agreed to take us there, but not without protesting: «Do not only keep that image of Detroit. When journalists come here, they only want to see destroyed buildings but you must have gathered by now that there really is something else to see».

This rail road station with its marble stairways and art deco sculptures was the industrial pride of Motorcity. Today, it's no more than a gaping corpse stripped of its original riches. The edifice itself is so colossal that it cannot be destroyed. Hundreds of homeless people sleep here and the surrounding blocks are deserted because the local population fear for their own safety.

- Don't take away this image of Detroit, he repeats.

- We have seen Heildelberg, Mike. That is our image of Detroit!

- Bone took you there ?

- Yes.

- He must like you a lot because Heildelberg is our secret heaven. The real resistance is there. I am nothing compared to that!

On the road back to the garage, we can see dozens of the polka dots and circles in a myriad of colours painted by Tyree Guiton. Each one testifies to the individuality and artistic vigour of a hallucinating city. They are round like disks. And like records, they are constantly turning.