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“Revolving Stages” of Primal Scream: Autoethnography, “Collective Effervescence,” Live Performance, and the Making of an Alternative Legacy Act

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolution of the Scottish rock band Primal Scream into an alternative legacy act. It discusses the “revolving stages” of Primal Scream’s career, focused on their musical and performative development, which aligns with their ever-increasing profile and audience. The article takes an autoethnographic approach, based on memories of four concerts the authors attended between 1986 and 2010, where Durkheim’s notion of “collective effervescence” is applied to gain insights into the experience of seeing Primal Scream live during this period. Tutenges’s subtypes of violent effervescence and compassionate effervescence are also applied to underline the nuanced and radical evolution of the band, as understood from the perspective of the audience experience. The article concludes that the period between the groundbreaking albums *Screamadelica* and *XTRMNTR* (1991–2000) generated the foundation of the alternative legacy act that emerged in 2010 at Olympia London.

KEYWORDS

Durkheim; autoethnography; Primal Scream; live music performance; punk; dance music; collective effervescence

Introduction

This article will use the framework of “revolving stages” to interpret Primal Scream’s career, looking at their changes of musical direction and the sustained political sensibilities which define them as an alternative rock-and-roll legacy act. We employ Durkheim’s concept of “collective effervescence” from *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, to interpret Primal Scream’s musical legacy by using ethnographic reflections of their live music performance across the period 1986–2010 and around the performance of songs from two albums: *Screamadelica* (1991) and *XTRMNTR* (2000). In the study, we use autoethnography to explore our personal entries into the Primal Scream oeuvre and our “cultural memory” of these times. We address moments of tension and contradiction between the creative struggle and multiple genre adaptations that delivered *Screamadelica* and *XTRMNTR* and the subsequent live performances of these LPs. Here, we recognize that these iconoclastic movements of musical direction and

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apparent change of values are now part of the framework of their alternative legacy act and are reflective of their critical diversity.

Through our autoethnographic vignettes of live performances, we argue that Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence comes alive within the connection between the audience and the performers and through two subtypes of collective effervescence: "compassionate effervescence" and "violent effervescence" (Tutenges, *Intoxication* 7–8). Through this focus on the collective experience of emotional intensity and cultural purpose specific to individual moments in time across Primal Scream's career we propose that Tutenges's understanding that effervescence is "revitalizing . . . [and] . . . accelerates interpersonal exchanges, rouses people to action, boosts self-confidence, and strengthens group cohesion" (*Intoxication* 24) acts as the intersection between these diverse musical styles and live experiences. The article will first introduce the band, followed by details of the research methodology and researcher positionality; the following sections will explore Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence to understand Primal Scream's two legacy albums alongside the autoethnography of their live performance in the UK.

The Revolving Stages of Primal Scream

Primal Scream were formed in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1982 by Bobby Gillespie and Jim Beattie (guitar/keyboards, 1982–1987) and have recorded twelve studio albums to date, from 1987's *Sonic Flower Groove* to 2024's *Come Ahead*. During this time, there have been over twenty full-time members of the band. The core group personnel across the duration of their career are Bobby Gillespie (vocals, 1982–present), Robert "Throb" Young (guitar, 1984–2006), Andrew Innes (guitar, 1987–present), Martin Duffy (keyboards, 1984–2022), Gary "Mani" Mounfield (bass, 1997–2011), and Darrin Mooney (drums, 1997–present). We recognize that collaborations with other musicians were also essential to the sound of *Screamadelica* and *XTRMNTR* and are central to the development of Primal Scream into an alternative legacy band: Denise Johnson (*Screamadelica*, vocals, 1990–1995), Henry Olsen (*Screamadelica*, bass, 1989–1996), Toby Tomanov (*Screamadelica*, drums, 1989–1996) and Kevin Shields (*XTRMNTR*, guitar, 1998–2007). We further recognize the influence of an eclectic range of producers on these records: Andrew Weatherall, Hugo Nicolson, the Orb, Jimmy Miller (*Screamadelica*); Brendan Lynch, David Holmes, Hugo Nicolson, the Chemical Brothers, Kevin Shields (*XTRMNTR*). These artists provided studio support and direction to the band, across the course of the band's evolution into an alternative legacy act.

Broadly we identify four "revolving stages": in stage one, Primal Scream's sound is defined through an indie and punk ethos in the late 1980s where Shane's first ethnographic vignette locates a developing early-career band unsure of its identity both musically and aesthetically; stage two explores the dance/acid house hybrid expressed by the 1991 Mercury Prize winning album *Screamadelica* and the subsequent tour in 1992 when Shane's second ethnographic vignette identifies a band at its peak that has found its sound and identity via collaboration with the acid house subculture of the time, the band and record becoming emblematic of the communalism of experience during that era; stage three is defined by the *XTRMNTR* album and tour in 2000 which is angry, forbidding, and politicized, where Rob's first ethnographic vignette finds a contorted sound and live experience at odds with the "live and let live" ethos of *Screamadelica*,

bound within a package of their origins in punk attitude and their progression into a dance music aesthetic. Stage four is where we are now, that Primal Scream represent a concentration of all these stages from 2010 onwards where Rob's second ethnographic vignette captures a fully matured band, supporting themselves with their career-wide greatest hits set before delivering the *Screamadelica* album in full live for the first time to a vast audience who are at one with the performers in a state of collective effervescence.

Methodology: Autoethnographic Post-Memory and Researcher Positionality

This article primarily uses autoethnographic vignettes to enable the reader to journey into the present and the past, to be at the gigs and venture into our researcher positionality as we reflect on and write our “imaginary” accounts together. Methodologically, we jointly use our memory of being present at a series of Primal Scream concerts. Here, memory and biography create a narrative which is non-present, as it is at once in the past, in the future, and in the now. Our narrative seeks to grasp the memory before it is dissolved or disturbed by unrelated events. Obviously, we are going forward, through writing, yet the narrative of memory here resolves itself by going back to the beginning where it has been described as “post-memory.” For Hirsch, “Post memory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (659). We are also influenced by Abercrombie's notion of memory as poetic control using music, lyrics, visions, imagery, and feelings to evoke an ethnographic memory based on excitement and the power of the moment.

We use the specific research methods of observation and the field diary within a context of engaged reflexivity. The principle of autoethnography is to move from the personal to the cultural, to show connectedness, and to explore the social and cultural dynamics at a political level through an autoethnographic lens focused on audience and performers. In terms of the data, we selected specific concerts attended to describe; we then looked for similarities and differences within and between our ethnographic observations and checked these with live reviews in the music press and on social media platforms. The grounded thick descriptions (Geertz, “Thick Description”) were explored through Durkheim's concept of “collective effervescence” as well as Tutenges's subtypes of “compassionate effervescence” and “violent effervescence.” On this basis, we assess the creative differences between Primal Scream's legacy through their live performance with the audiences' physical responses to the material from the two albums and what it felt like to “be there” as a member of the audience. Although this approach affirms Geertz's notion of “being there” at the live venues as central to the discussion, at the same time, our stories work within an analytical and interpretative framework (“Thick Description” 11).

Aware that memory can be unreliable, we integrate reviews of Primal Scream concerts to support our “partial truths” as Clifford would suggest and seek to use Chang's “boldest departure from traditional academic writing” to use “imaginative energy” highlighting the emotional and creative side of writing data (148). Our aim of the autoethnography material is to take the reader to the imaginary and immediate moment of “being there” where the descriptions are vulnerable, and contextually dependent as we make connections to wider critical situations within the politics of popular music performance. In this

sense, we invoke Geertz's notion of "being there" not to disguise our presence but to ensure it "breathes the air of the nervous present" ("Thick Description" 11).

Our researcher positionality in relation to Primal Scream is informed by our biographical entry into the context of their music in particular periods. Savin-Baden and Howell-Major note that "positionality means acknowledging and allowing a researcher to have a place in the work" (71). Put simply, Shane came to Primal Scream through punk and Rob arrived at Primal Scream through dance music and the rave scene. Our social identities impact our perceptions of the band and the context in which they performed at the time. Our relationships with Primal Scream could never be thought of as neutral because we have grown up with them at different stages of our lives through subjective participation and commitment. In the subsequent ethnographic sections, all aspects of positionality play a role in influencing the focus of research, yet because of our research training in ethnographic approaches, our priorities are directed to the meaning of field-work and capturing the feelings and experiences generated.

Music and Live Performance as "Collective Effervescence"

Our experience is that live gigs are intense settings of collective experience, where a range of emotions can be experienced, often within the same time and space setting. Frith states that "live music is particularly significant for understanding musicality and place" ("Analysing" 2). The autoethnographic vignettes of Primal Scream's live music performances are theorized through the concept of collective effervescence derived from Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*:

Once the individuals are assembled, their proximity generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every emotion expressed is retained without resistance in all those minds so open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse thus becomes amplified as it reverberates, like an avalanche gathering force as it goes. And as passions so strong and uncontrolled are bound to seek outward expression, there are violent gestures, shouts, even howls, deafening noises of all sorts from all sides that intensify even more the state they express. (172)

Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence" allows an opening into the stark contrast of the different social meanings and cultural connotations within Primal Scream's ground-breaking albums of *Screamadelica* and *XTRMNTR* to form the structural basis to present the band as an alternative legacy act. Through the cultures of gigs, rave, and festivals we argue that Primal Scream have been able to move through a series of revolving stages from the dreamy hedonism of *Screamadelica* to collide uneasily with the anger and critical politics of *XTRMNTR*. Within the example of Primal Scream, we see the power of Durkheim's theorization to understand two oppositional experiences focused on musical performance and popular music.

Significantly, in *Intoxication*, Tutenges asserts that Durkheim was fully aware that his theory held the contradictory explanation of "love" and "hate," which is why Tutenges layered the intoxications of sensory and sensual people as core to his understanding of collective effervescence. This will be applied to the radical distinction between experiencing Primal Scream on record, but, particularly, live, in 1992 and then 2000, where there is seemingly an ideological U-turn in the lyrical and musical content in their recorded

output, but more strikingly in their live performances which are understood through Shane's and Rob's sensory experiences of seeing Primal Scream live. Whilst Shane's story commences in 1986 with an initial sense of brooding violent effervescence, his story is very much one of "love" or "compassionate effervescence" (Tutenges, *Intoxication* 9) through the unifying experience of seeing Primal Scream live in 1992. Rob's story, however, commences as one of "hate," or "violent effervescence," in which Primal Scream have become an alienated, paranoid force depicted by the live setting and their visual representation of society and culture in 2000. By 2010, Rob sees a more mature collective identity to the band, where they accept their legacy as a coherent collective to be delivered to their vast audience as an expression of collective effervescence.

We seek to use Shilling and Mellor's contrasting vision of Durkheim's collective effervescence (195–96), which was understood by Maffesoli (see *Time*) as positive based on themes of "revitalization" and optimism (Shane's experience of *Screamadelica* in 1992, Rob's in 2010), whereas Mestrovic (*Coming Fin*; *Emile Durkheim*) sees effervescence in terms of "devitalization" and fear through marginalization and discrimination (Shane's early experience of the almost-unknown Primal Scream in 1986; Rob's experience of *XTRMNTR* in 2000). In Mestrovic's *The Coming Fin de Siècle*, effervescence works as a negative erosion that sustains uncertainty and resolution is an illusion where contemporary politics has created a "post-emotional" society (Fish 278). This fits into the "edgy" Primal Scream world of *XTRMNTR* which sees royalty as "insects" and, in "true punk" (Savage 1991) tradition, demands "Kill all Hippies"; here anxiety meets alienation firsthand as Primal Scream's aim is "to pulverise the senses . . . with ferocious incendiary beauty, the extremities of sound, agitated, it is a devastating deviation from the conformist norm" (qtd. in Cameron).

Bobby Gillespie states, "We thought 'Swastika Eyes' (1999) was a good image, a great insult applicable to any authoritarian figures whether it be the head of a multinational corporation, the President of the United States, a policeman, a prison warden, you know, anyone like that" (qtd. in NME).

Whereas effervescence for Maffesoli (*Time*; "Sociology") is linked to community and different forms of solidarity—as Durkheim would see in terms of sociality, shared lifestyle, and being together—Tutenges (*Intoxication*) sees Maffesoli's resurgent effervescence as a form of vitalism promoting optimism. This fits snugly into the warm, cohesive drift of the Primal Scream world of *Screamadelica*, which transcends time and is "mind-blowing" or as Simon Reynolds in *Spin* puts it, takes you "so deep into inner space you want to drift off and never touch down to reality." As a result, Andy Bennett (606–07) applied Maffesoli's (*Time* 32, 35) positive framework of collective expression whereby binding rituals can be associated with revolt, narcotics, passion, uprising, and festivals, which we argue is now the current position of Primal Scream as an alternative legacy act where both contrasting albums are delivered live.

Building on Straw (373) and Hesmondhalgh's use of effervescence we argue that celebrated within the two legacy albums is a "reinvigoration of social life through periods of creative effervescence" (Shilling and Mellor 205). The dual side of effervescence is apparent within the legacy acts of Primal Scream's *Screamadelica* and post-apocalypse of *XTRMNTR*. According to Ben Malbon, the concept of effervescence, at an autoethnographic level, is useful when talking about the "playful vitality" which was "through dancing linked to" overarching

“notions of power and resistance” (4). Durkheim’s idea of collective effervescence is central to interpret the live performance of Primal Scream’s legacy albums. Fish argues that Durkheim’s concept is “emotionally centered” (272) and Schiermer maintains it can be seen as an “interactionist concept of the social” (2). Whilst it has been pointed out that Durkheim’s concept was meant to be applied on a macro scale, Schiermer’s belief relates to its interactionist potential whereby “music animates and breathes life” (14) and “places the individual in a concrete setting around an emphatically shared object” (2). The body becomes a key aura within musical performance for Tutenges (“Stirring Up”) and Jonathan Fish (258) as Durkheim investigates the non-rational highlighting of the “collective emotional energies.” This is supported by Kassabian’s assertion focused on bodily response to music through the concept of “haptic listening,” described by Holt which “not only involves hearing but also kinesthetics in immersive experiences of being touched and surrounded by sound” (47). In the autoethnographic fieldwork we found intoxication was an interactive push and pull experience. For Vandenberg, drugs feature as collective effervescence heightening an interactive ritual showing the power of sociality where groups of people are brought together through musical performance (100–04).

During the dancing and singing an all-encompassing sound enters the body and the mind, and the audience is united and communicating the same message. Diverse participants collectively affirm the relationship within the crowd and between the audience and performers. It is through this effervescence of body, sound, and intoxication that collective emotional interaction occurs. Durkheim also sees collective effervescence as “characteristic of revolutionary or creative epoch” (158). This corresponds to the changes taking place at a macro level within “ecstasy culture” and the development of the innovations within dance music during the *Screamadelica* period described in Matthew Collin’s *Altered States*. Suitably, Durkheim does reveal that collective effervescence “leads to unpredictable behaviour” (163) or change, as we argue Primal Scream revolve into the second part of the legacy when the audience, anticipating the blissed-out coolness of *Screamadelica*, encountered, however, the transformed identity of the rugged political post-apocalypse of *XTRMNTR*. Frith suggests that “live performance” is experienced as “collective participation” and “how we enter music bodily and take pleasure” (*Performing Rites* 142). Our individual audience response to the Primal Scream concerts is brought to life through the social and cultural conditions which we bring to these events. The sheer excitement and anticipation drowned any passivity, as the audience was fully aware that this ecstasy-based generation’s personal and political circumstances created a new immediate musical experience held together through polarities of fun and seriousness.

Randall Collins sees the applicability of Durkheim’s “collective effervescence is the move from sparse to dense bodily assembly” (82). Shilling and Mellor critically note the differences and similarities between the normal and the abnormal to assert that Durkheim’s understanding of collective intoxication reveals his insight into the relevance of contemporary forms of “abnormal” intoxication (28–34). Here, Durkheim’s view of collective effervescence can be applied to the different live performances of Primal Scream, underpinned not by threats to social differentiation, but to embody the collective unity of social beings. At these live concerts, we were aware that we might be amid something new; it was near tangible and unpredictable because the legacy was in the

making. These autoethnographic descriptions allow meaning to be actively contradictory: both uncertain and temporary while at the same time secure and purposeful.

Primal Scream's Live Performance and Biographical Experience

The biographical encounters are provided to enable the reader to journey into the present and the past, to be at the gigs, and to venture into our researcher positionality as we reflect and write our “imaginary” accounts together. The writing offers a sensory experience as Hartman captures: “This story is told from inside the circle” (xiv). Whether walking to the venue, being asked if we wanted to buy drugs, or standing in the auditorium, we seek to seize moments, the real feeling of a culture and the critical context as observed. The “lived experience” is meant to be dynamic, reflective, and not fully known. The heat was close, the bodies moving, the feelings touch sensitive. We have been allowed into Primal Scream’s musical world, fused together, revolved, and represented. The musical narratives are derived from a collision and integration of different voices and overlapping music genres. Critically, the band took, they stole, they inverted, then they let others reorganize their sound. As a result, as audience members, we found ourselves in what can be described as both oppositional and complementary narratives, each underlined by Tutenges’s subtypes of violent effervescence and compassionate effervescence, which finally converged into Durkheim’s notion of collective effervescence.

Primal Scream Astoria London, November 1, 1986: Brooding Violent Effervescence—Shane’s First Experience

This section describes my (Shane’s) initial entrance into the unrecognized world of Primal Scream’s live performance as an underground band. The first time I saw Primal Scream was as support to Julian Cope at the Astoria London, 1 November 1986. Walking into the Astoria was always a cramped affair, as attendees shuffle between tight walls of people along the enclosing corridors—as in *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977), during the Trash Compactor Scene, where the walls close in on Han, Leia, and Luke. We got there early because we wanted to see the new support band, Primal Scream, who were not featured on the ticket, although this ticket image below reveals DIY graffiti.

A month before the gig, I purchased the 7” single “Crystal Crescent”/“Velocity Girl,” on Creation Records (1986). *Velocity Girl*, which comes in at a majestic 1:22, was also the first track on the *New Musical Express*’s C86, a cassette compilation released by the British music magazine in 1986 compiled from British independent record labels. All 82 seconds wowed us! The song reached the #4 position in the yearly B.B.C. Radio DJ John Peel’s festive fifty vote in 1986. It was not, however, on their debut album *Sonic Flower Groove*, later released on Elevation, in 1987. So, at the gig, there was little to go on except for a couple of singles. I sensed the audience were not overwhelmingly anticipatory.

At about 8:30 p.m., the dancefloor was open and free to easily walk past Primal Scream performing on stage. They were all within arm’s reach. But what stood out were the fringe haircuts with black hair swaying to the fast rhythms. All members of



Primal Scream ticket, 1986, Astoria, London.

the band appeared to be wearing leather trousers with a sort of dark Jim Morrison narcissistic look, topped off with either black or psychedelic mod-type shirt. At another gig in 1986, saiston68 writes, “They troop on stage at Leeds all bowl haircuts, stripy tops, leather jackets. They look like they hate us.” This brooding stark effervescence was just under the surface of their performance. Being unfamiliar with most of the tunes, because the debut album was not out, my enthusiasm picked up when they played “Sonic Sister Love,” “Imperial,” “Leaves,” and “Love You” because they all had a Stone Roses feel to them (although, of course, I did not know the titles of these songs until later). I heard a male voice behind us shout to his mate, “This is shite. Let’s go to the bar for lager.” Here, the intense rock aesthetic still dominated with booze and fronting egos before the arrival of ecstasy culture in 1988.

Being in the audience that night, I found their jangly sound derivative, but they were committed to getting it across with passion. Although, contradictorily, they tended to be quite still on stage which had an unnerving dangerous effect on the audience. Both performers and the audience appeared to be waiting for something else to happen. Although they were very cool, you could detect they did not fully have their hearts in it. Bobby Gillespie states, “We played a few gigs in 1986 but nothing big because we were still an underground band” (*Tenement Kid* 273). Creation Records owner Alan McGee reported that “everyone had been telling me for years they would never amount to anything” (121). Then, things went from bad to worse when the debut album did not sell, because of its underproduction.

Further, the recording experience at Rockfield impacted the band. Gillespie says he was “defeated. I felt deep shame, guilt, and embarrassment. . . . We had failed and we knew it” (*Tenement Kid* 278). I did not think they had failed but were at a stage set for future revolving in their musical career. Coming out of the Astoria gig, we had nearly forgotten the Primal Scream part of the concert—except for a small echo of crushed antagonism that lingered from the band’s hostile posture.

Primal Scream Brixton Academy, March 28, 1992: Compassionate Effervescence—Shane’s Second Experience

This section describes a momentary biographical encounter with fashions of youth cultural intoxication during the early 1990s. I had been listening to *Screamadelica* for several weeks when I saw an announcement in the *NME* that Primal Scream were playing Brixton Academy on Saturday, March 28, 1992. Cost £15.00. So, I borrowed my partner’s racing bike and sped down Herne Hill to Brixton. At the box office, the man said, “No, mate, all sold out!” God, I was disappointed. Still out of breath, I sadly picked up Deb’s bike, but then the man banged on the window and waved his hand, and said: “Hey, we’ve got two returns. Do you want them?” I pushed back up the Herne Hill Road in seconds at lightning speed, just as fast as I came down the hill. The words from “I’m Coming Down” echoing in my head: “Yep, I know that feeling,” the sample Nastassja Kinski lifted from 1984’s Wim Wenders film *Paris, Texas*. I was high!

On the night we walked to the Academy, it was fun, stepping out from the Railton Road shortcut at night, then passing the Railway pub just off the high street, we were on our way! Outside the venue, there were loads of people trying to sell you this, that, and the other. Did I want to buy a ticket for the gig, a poster, a T-shirt, or drugs?



Primal Scream ticket, 1992, Brixton Academy, London.

I remember looking at my ticket. It was visibly shiny orange with a bright yellow border with a reflective black and green nymph floating in the air. The nymph caught the dazzling lights and sent beams back into my eyes. I thought, “This is going to be a night to remember.” Having got through security, we immediately checked out the merchandise. Lots of T-shirts with the *Screamadelica* logo. The *Screamadelica* image was painted by Paul Cannell, an artist from East London, via the Heavenly Recordings label, who also did Heavenly label’s iconic bird logo. Cannell’s psychedelic sunburst for *Screamadelica* lives on although he took his own life in 2005. The sunburst image first appeared as a small image in the corner on Cannell’s cover art for the single, “Higher Than the Sun,” June 1991; the *Screamadelica* album appeared later in September 1991. Now the sunburst had been recast as a blissful coming down, a vision of floating. On *Screamadelica* and the Brixton Academy gig, Will Russell said, “Inside on its grooves lies a secret code, a hidden world. Man, it would be spinning when you went out, spinning when you came in, a continuation of the night, a replication of the club. A portal to that place.” This was right; the tracks traveled with you on the way to the Academy. Then, when you heard them live, it was there and then. When you went home the album was still within our mind as an unfolding wholeness. It could be described as an aesthetic, or, more accurately, as emotionally transforming positive collective effervescence revealed through the sociality of smiling.

The buzz of the place was dynamite as Deb and I made our way to get a drink at the bar. Astoundingly, the bar was totally empty at 9:30 in the evening. I easily bought two pints of lager. I thought this is unusual. The bar was clear. As I looked around, I saw people buying bottles of Evian water from machines. There was a queue for water! I turned back to the bar, and nobody was there. I was really struck by my observation that my partner and I were the only ones consuming pints. I felt like the young woman in the horror movie who on a crowded dancefloor looks in the mirror and sees only herself. This was the scene in Roman Polanski’s *The Fearless Vampire Killers/Dance of the Vampires* (1967), and Dracula’s masquerade ball scene in Stephen Sommers’s *Van Helsing* (2004), where Anna Valerious sees only herself in the looking glass; her dance partner Count Dracula and the other vampires are gone, a terrifying realization! Why were we the only people holding pints of lager?

Being at this Primal Scream *Screamadelica* gig in London was not just a *personal* experience, it marked a *social change* in youth culture in the relationship between drug consumption, popular music, and subcultural identities (Blackman 508). It was happening right here, right now! During the early 1990s, I became interested in the forms of collective intoxication within the youth culture of acid house parties and kept a keen eye on how this evolved from illegal events in fields and big sheds into legal rave events. It was apparent that fashions of drug consumption were changing as Collin states, what the UK brewery industry feared was “a nascent nation of teetotalers fuelled by pills, powder and puff, drinking only Lucozade and Evian water” (273). This was confirmed for me at the *Screamadelica* rave at the Brixton Academy. This was a transforming experience, a gig with no alcohol! I looked around; people seemed to be happy, no fights, no struggles, and no arguments! As Needs notes, “Ketamine and ecstasy ruled that night” (57–58). There were a few people



Primal Scream aftershow party ticket, 2000, Ocean Rooms, Brighton.

stretched out on the floor, against the wall or in corners, and the loos were near empty without lager consumption. You couldn't tell whether some participants were sleeping, or vampires resting up as the compassionate effervescence took hold.

Price commented on the gig: "[E]uphoria erupts. Before they've even played a note there are standing ovations, ovulations, copulations, ejaculations, and probably many more things ending in 'ation' than even I dare consider" (13). Looking at the band on the boards, I got the feeling of presence, an electric reverberation suggesting that "their time is now!" From "Slip Inside This House" (1992) to "Higher Than the Sun" (1991), a mesmerizing effect layered on the audience, as waves of dancing bodies gently crashed together only pausing momentarily to chorus the celebratory resistance of "we want to be free" and "to do what we wanna do" from "Loaded" (1990). The collective effervescence was reflected in the chant of solidarity on "Come Together" (1990) with the Reverend Jesse Jackson's impassioned political speech from the Wattstax Music Festival at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, August 20, 1972: "Today we are together. We are unified, and of one accord, when we are together, we got power." Collectively smiling, all members of the band moved around and interacted; whether Bobby or Denise were singing, all were dancing or swaying. As though they were both the performers and the audience at the same time. The musicians were revolving on the stage, and the lights were blurring into different shades of color as sound fused blushing and dazzling beams. In his review, Price wrote of Gillespie, "He's the frontman who isn't a frontman. His role is an amalgamation of football manager and a cheerleader, dictator of tactics and crowd-rousing enthusiast" (13). For the band and the crowd, it was fun, exciting, and liberating. Compassionate effervescence was everywhere. I had been transferred to another world. This was rock music legacy in the making and, through autoethnography, it became part of the self through being there.

This was an all-nighter, so after Primal Scream left the stage, the rave began, and the pulse of the beat took over and I found people moving close to me. Time seemed to evaporate. What was the time? At around 4:30 in the morning, it was impossible for me

to dance any longer. Oddly enough, there was also a small fire to the side of the dancefloor which nobody appeared to see. It was time to leave Dracula's den and head for the early sunrise of Brixton.

Primal Scream Event II, April 19, 2000: Violent Effervescence—Rob's First Experience

My (Rob's) first entrance into the live performance of Primal Scream was on the *XTRMNTR* tour. Having found their music over the past couple of years, we quickly became huge fans of the band, thirstily listening to their back-catalog, although we were a bit confused by how the jingly-jangly Byrds/Love musical style and Velvet Underground-inspired image of *Sonic Flower Groove* had led to *Screamadelica* in four short years. Wow, what a shift! This musical and aesthetic revolution was both rapid and remarkable to our youthful ears and eyes. So, in early 2000 as the new millennium became a stark reality rather than a foreboding sense of doom (millennium bug, anyone?!?), we were all anticipating Primal Scream's first new album since *Vanishing Point* (1997). This record's sound had already revolved from the dancefloor-friendly rave aesthetic of *Screamadelica* toward a more heavily psychedelic Syd Barrett/dub Lee "Scratch" Perry hybrid. What would they do next though? Well, *XTRMNTR* blew this out of the water. Bobby Gillespie explained, in 2016, that "The time spent between making *Vanishing Point* in 1997 and then making *XTRMNTR* was a very, very powerfully creative time." Gillespie also revealed more about the culture and lifestyle around the band at that time:

I was feeling angry and disgusted. I still feel the same way. But it was a really personal record. The title song is about the culture we were a part of. Everyone I knew was addicted to drugs, people who at the beginning of the 90s had huge creative potential but who, by the end of the decade, hadn't realized it but instead had dug themselves into dark holes and couldn't get out. The damage was plain to see. I was damaged myself. I was disassociated. I saw a diseased, dark, disgusting scene. (qtd. in M. Bennett)

This was music that was dark, twisted, sinister, paranoid, and cynical, as mentioned by Gillespie: "It's about living in Britain right now, living in the cities, it's claustrophobic; a death culture" (qtd. in Bonner). Driven by Mani's blasting bass and Gillespie's dystopian lyrics, alongside a horn section reminiscent of saxophonist Steve McKay's influential playing which heightened the sense of disorientation of *Fun House*-era proto-punks the Stooges (1970), and with Kevin Shields and Rob "Throb" Young clashing and twisting on guitar, it was electronic dance music, with a punk ethos, with pummeling rhythms, but without the sweet uplift and dreamy hedonism of *Screamadelica* in sight. We had entered atmospheric violent effervescence where the audience were united against a common enemy identified by the band's agitation in opposition to right-wing beliefs.

We had to see this live. I traveled down by car to the south coast from where I lived at the time in Bedford with two mates (the three Robs!) and we made an overnight stay to see them perform in Brighton on April 19, 2000. Unlike other bands who I would subsequently see in Brighton, they didn't perform in the Brighton Leisure Centre, but downstairs in the Event II below the main building, which was also used as a nightclub

space. This involved entering “around the back” of the main building, making this gig feel more discreet and less visible than those concerts I attended in Brighton thereafter at the much bigger Brighton Leisure Centre. We queued for about 20 minutes in this blackened alleyway, not sure what to expect, before we descended the steps into the Event II. On entering, we could hear pulsing, throbbing heavy basslines leaping out of the sound system. An eclectic mix of dub/house/punk was on the menu. Visually, a darkness arose from the small stage space which appeared to our righthand side. There was a bunker dancefloor in front where some 300–400 people could gather whilst the crowd could also gather on a platform at around the same level of the stage which arced around the half circumference of the dropped dancefloor. The ceiling was low, and the stage itself was framed by a rock face fascia, whilst the stage décor was like combat gear, with webbed netting and camouflage covering the sound system and the edges of the stage. It was violent effervescence marked by collective guerrilla warfare awakening group-based cohesive hostile celebrations.

There was a mistiness where the smoke accentuated the darkness through the sporadic injections of the light show, like a smoldering burnt out tank amid a battlefield. I felt a sense of wariness and foreboding of what was to come, reminiscent of Martin Sheen’s character Captain Benjamin L. Willard in the opening sequence to *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Willard anticipates the wreckage that awaits him in his mission to locate and extricate Marlon Brando’s Colonel Walter E. Kurtz as “The End” (1967) by The Doors which features on the *Apocalypse Now* soundtrack looms over the burning landscapes of Vietnam and Jim Morrison slowly intones: “All the children . . . are insane.” These were intense feelings that the movie elicits in the viewer whilst the military helicopters bring new recruits to the battlefield; this beginning is the end, and this end is the beginning of something new, something unknown, something that cannot be escaped. This is a “stage statement,” a comment by the band. Their music and image have revolved beyond hedonism toward something deeper, more endless, more troubling; a space where hedonism is rejected, and the political hangover of unity is a condition of paranoia and belligerent skepticism as the audience moved collectively as one to the band’s narrative.

I looked around the crowd; some people were in their 30s, early 40s who were watching from the back. We were closer and in with the younger crowd, who had probably joined the Primal Scream following around the same mid to late ’90s era as ourselves, the post-*Screamadelica* period. The compact space of the Event II added to the claustrophobic atmosphere of the music. When Primal Scream entered the stage—9 musicians strong—they were packed into a tight stage space, dressed in dark clothes, combat gear. The music was a punk squall of sound, intense, sweaty, not hedonistic but coming from somewhere else. It was hard machine-like live music, as described by Lisa Verrico in her 2002 review of a later performance: “The next 90 minutes was a relentless assault on the senses that was both brilliant and almost unlistenable.” As Gillespie describes it as “trying to marry high energy, aggressive punk to hardwired electronics” (qtd. in M. Bennett). This sense of impending paranoia is embodied by Bobby Gillespie’s presence as vocalist: “Gonna tell the truth. Truth about you. Truth about you, you never been true. You’re nothing, got nothing to say, shine a light on you and you fade away . . . FADE AWAY” (“Pills”). Far from the lysergic and uplifting journey and serenity of *Screamadelica*, Primal Scream were now intensely politicized in their social commentary as violent effervescence absorbed the audience. We wondered if they might play some of

Screamadelica; we got “Loaded” and “Movin’ on Up” toward the end of the show. The set ended with a raucous cover of MC5’s “Kick out the Jams” (1969), highlighting the Scream’s revolutionary intent and influence. *XTRMNTR* was front and center for 2/3rd of the set, opening with “Swastika Eyes,” a song, according to Gillespie, “about modern fascism, multinational militarism, the United States’ international fucking terrorism. . . . That’s why we used the image, to get attention. We’re using it provocatively to shake people up” (qtd. in NME). Then, “Shoot Speed/KillLight,” followed by the intense “Insect Royalty,” “Kill All Hippies,” and “Blood Money.”

This was their new material, and they were going to play it to us, like it or not: “This is who we are now.” We walked back to our B&B after the show, ears and heads still ringing. We felt battered and bruised, but exhilarated together. We phoned home to our other mates who hadn’t made it. They couldn’t believe how hyped we were. This was NOT Primal Scream 1991. This was Primal Scream for the new millennium, and they were twisted, angry and confrontational: a collective expression of violent effervescence. With a developing audience of old and new followers. All vowels removed. No more, “I believe in live and let live.” This is PRML SCRM MTHR FCKRS!

Olympia London, November 27, 2010: Collective Effervescence of the Legacy Act—Rob’s Second Experience

By the time I (Rob) finally saw Primal Scream perform *Screamadelica* in 2010, I had followed the band closely since the Brighton gig. Over this decade-long period, I saw the band return to *Screamadelica* in their sets, always playing “Loaded” and “Movin’ on Up,” with the shimmering psychedelic masterpiece of “Higher than the Sun” acting as their encore piece. The band would also play songs from their follow-up to *Screamadelica*, the much-maligned *Give Out but Don’t Give Up* (1994), with “Rocks” a crowd-pleasing opener and “Jailbird” another welcome Rolling Stones-influenced dancefloor stomp. “Kowalski” and “Burning Wheel” from *Vanishing*



Primal Scream ticket, 2010, Olympia London, Hammersmith.

Point were consistent points of reference to the mesmeric dub-psychedelic sound of Primal Scream 1997, and, then, the remainder of the sets were over to *XTRMNTR* and *Evil Heat* (2002) for “Swastika Eyes,” “Shoot Speed/Kill Light” and “Accelerator” with the Kraftwerk-inspired “Autobahn 66,” as well as “Country Girl” from *Riot City Blues* (2006) in the latter gigs. Around this time (2006 onwards), the band retracted from their drug-fueled, pre-millennial paranoia and skepticism, displaying a wide array of their musical styles in their live performances as they (r)evolved into a “legacy band.” Unlike the experience of *XTRMNTR* at Brighton, which was like a machine gun directed at the audience from short range, there was a sense that the band was comfortable in its own skin and aware of its legacy, still angry and occasionally belligerent but courting less controversy and attracting a wider audience due to their longevity. Their performance became more refined and less directed at confrontation with the audience.

Still, I had never heard *Screamadelica* in full, in a live setting. Knowing that Shane had seen this in ’92, I yearned to experience it. Then finally! Finally, the tour was announced, and we were able to get tickets to see Primal Scream perform their masterpiece in full, at the Olympia London (by now, the two Rob’s and Ian!). We made our way there on the evening of Saturday, November 27, 2010. Unlike the Event II at Brighton and other venues where I had seen Primal Scream, the arena was *vast*, with a large stage filling one end of the auditorium. No intimacy here! Arriving in good time, having weathered the touts and the dealers on the way in, we gathered in the auditorium in hyped anticipation as the venue continued to fill, waiting to find who the support act was going to be, as they had not been announced. There was a smaller stage to the left of the main stage, where equipment was being checked. Realizing this, we walked over and waited for the band to appear. Ten minutes later they did: it was Primal Scream supporting Primal Scream! The band then entertained us with a set of their greatest hits with the lights turned on, presenting the (r)evolving stages of Primal Scream in one nine-track setlist. Their legacy supporting their legacy, before the main course! This was going to be some night, and Bobby and the band bade us farewell to go to prepare for the main event where the lights were definitely *turned down*.

When the band returned to the main stage, it was akin to a religious experience. As Durkheim notes, we “were transported into a special world” (250). Bobby situated majestically stage front, the hushed shaman whose fragile vocals guided us through this hedonistic vista, with the remainder of the band more traditionally set back on the stage than during the *XTRMNTR* era. Behind them was a dripping, shifting lysergic visual show projecting out at the masses with the *Screamadelica* logo morphing and blending into various shapes and images, hypnotically drawing our focus to the stage like a twisting, tunnel of light. Unlike Brighton, this was an inviting, welcoming place! All weapons on the ground. No ammo required. Around me, the crowd was moving as one, communal, like the warehouse raves I had attended as a teenager in the mid-1990s, people drawn together into uniformity by the combination of the sonic experience and visual performance. The smell of shared cannabis was abundant. The band played *Screamadelica* in its entirety, accompanied by a brass section and a gospel choir, saving “Higher than the Sun,” “Loaded,” and “Come Together” for the final triumvirate. During these lengthy, spaced-out jams I felt a sense of elevation and revelation only experienced in those rare moments of pure, shared community; my elevation to a higher spiritual

place, and the revelation of participation in a subcultural dynamic which had endured across one band's musical (r)evolution. *Screamadelica*, as I'd never seen or experienced it before: shimmeringly, staggeringly beautiful. Using Courpasson, Younes, and Reed's (19) broad argument of a possible "effervescent political intoxication" here we could interpret compassionate and violent effervescence as two distinctive types of solidarity relating to the politics of live performance by Primal Scream (19).

Conclusion

This article explores the evolution of Primal Scream into an alternative legacy act. This evolution of the band is depicted through a series of what we define as "revolving stages," mainly focused on the period 1986–2010 and related to their musical and ideological journey from their inception in 1982 until the present day. The legend was further consolidated by the release of *Demodelica* (2021), which features outtakes from the *Screamadelica* sessions in, of course, more of a raw state than the final finished release. We also note that Bobby Gillespie now performs live adorning a full *Screamadelica* sunburst suit and shirt, bearing the iconic logo in full, attaching the band and their audience to both the past and the present. In the article, we connect these revolving stages to key personnel changes in the band and their iconoclastic changes of musical direction in the period between Primal Scream's recording what are now regarded as their two legacy albums, *Screamadelica* (1991) and *XTRMNTR* (2000).

Further to this, we relate these revolving stages to the compassion of the *Screamadelica* era of the band and the violent, crashing hangover experienced by the band across the remainder of the 1990s leading to the recording of *XTRMNTR*. Parallels are drawn between these revolving stages. As Primal Scream entered the dawn of the new millennium, we recognize the band had shifted from a dreamy, hedonistic ideology to one of revolution and violent anger as portrayed by their live performances in 1992 and 2000. Alongside this, two subtypes of collective effervescence—compassionate effervescence and violent effervescence (Tutenges, *Intoxication*)—were also applied to represent the sense of communalism exhibited by the relationship between the band and its audience within the space of the live concerts. In both instances, we argue that the band is depicting the spirit of this specific time as the central point of the revolving stages of their maturing into an alternative legacy act, one which emerged at the Olympia London *Screamadelica* gig in 2010. To exhibit this rich experiential dimension, we employed an autoethnographic approach, based on ethnographic memory of four Primal Scream concerts where Shane attended gigs in 1986 and 1992, whilst Rob attended gigs in 2000 and 2010. We presented the ethnographic passages and analysis to show that the synthesis of *Screamadelica*'s peace and love and *XTRMNTR*'s anti-elitism, into their newly aligned positioning as a legacy rock act, underlines the power of musical transformation when in symbiosis with audience participation and reaction through live performances.

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