

Cyberthon & the 90s Melbourne Rave Scene: Briefing Document

This briefing document synthesizes information from three sources: an [ACMI webpage](#) about the "Cyberthon" exhibition, a personal account by Cyberthon co-creator Adem Jaffers titled "[My Two Bob's Worth](#)," and an excerpt from "[Rave Days: The Birth of Melbourne's Rave Scene](#)." The document outlines the main themes and important ideas surrounding the Cyberthon project within the broader context of the 1990s Melbourne rave scene.

Main Themes:

- **Capturing and Preserving a Cultural Movement:** All sources emphasize the importance of documenting and preserving the ephemeral nature of the 1990s Melbourne rave scene, with Cyberthon acting as an additional vehicle for this. Jaffers' efforts to archive the Cyberthon tapes and ACMI's role in making them accessible are central to this theme.
- **DIY Ethos and Guerrilla Media:** The Cyberthon project was deeply rooted in a DIY ethic, operating on a shoestring budget and embracing a "guerrilla TV" approach to broadcasting. This reflects the broader anti-commercial and creatively driven spirit of the early Melbourne rave scene.
- **Technological Experimentation and Innovation:** Cyberthon was a platform for experimentation with emerging technologies, particularly Amiga computers, analogue video mixing, and early online platforms. This pushing of technological boundaries was integral to the aesthetic and interactive nature of the broadcasts.
- **Collaboration and Remix Culture:** The Cyberthon events thrived on collaboration between artists from various disciplines (VJs, DJs, musicians, animators) and embraced a remix culture, repurposing and transforming existing media in a free-flowing and often copyright-ignoring manner.
- **The Spirit of the Rave Scene:** The sources paint a picture of the rave scene as inclusive, energetic, and a reaction against the commercialism and exclusivity of previous club cultures. Cyberthon aimed to capture this spirit and broadcast it to a wider audience.
- **Evolution and Adaptation:** The Cyberthon project evolved significantly over its run, adapting to changing technological landscapes (from live TV to interactive online streaming and episodic television) and the increasing regulation of public broadcasting.
- **Serendipity and Unplanned Creativity:** Many key moments in Cyberthon's history arose from technical glitches or spontaneous decisions, highlighting the improvisational and experimental nature of the project.
- **The Intersection of Art, Technology, and Counterculture:** Cyberthon stands as a significant example of the intersection between artistic expression, rapidly evolving technology, and the countercultural energy of the rave movement.

Most Important Ideas and Facts:

- **Cyberthon as a "Guerrilla TV" Broadcast:** Adem Jaffers (aka Tekno Mandala) was the creative force behind Cyberthon, described as "energetic marathon style events" that captured the "zeitgeist" of Melbourne's experimental rave scene between 1990 and 1995.

- As Jaffers stated, "we documented what we were living, and we transmitted it."
- **Origins in the Tekno-Cyberdelic Underground:** The seeds of Cyberthon were sown in informal gatherings at a St Kilda share-house where discussions revolved around "computers, modems... experimental graphics, virtual reality, chaos theory and all things electronic." This prefigured the themes and technologies explored in Cyberthon.
- **Reaction Against Commercialism and Embrace of DIY:** The 90s Melbourne rave scene "rejected the over-commercialisation of the club and music scenes before it, the rave scene offered a new and inclusive platform for collaboration." Cyberthon mirrored this ethos with its DIY approach.
- **Serendipitous Birth Through RMITV:** What was initially intended as a pre-recorded documentary on the techno scene for RMITV unexpectedly became a live broadcast and remixing event due to technical issues. This "impromptu format" so impressed RMITV that they encouraged Jaffers and his collaborators to continue, setting the stage for future Cyberthon events.
- **Embracing Remix Culture and Copyright Infringement:** Cyberthon fearlessly embraced remix culture, often repurposing and mishmashing existing artwork and media without regard for copyright laws.
- Jaffers admitted, "What we essentially did was hijack public TV... we were breaking all copyright laws. We didn't care about that sort of stuff."
- **The Light Warrior as a Mascot:** The 3D animated "Light Warrior" became Cyberthon's mascot, embodying the ideals of "cyber-tech" and guerrilla broadcasting."
- **Technological Innovation with Limited Resources:** Cyberthon artists creatively utilized a mix of "high and low-tech hardware and software" including studio equipment, turntables, cassette players, and Amiga computers to create innovative and uncensored content. The use of Amiga software allowed for complex real-time animation and audio generated purely through code.
- **Pioneering Online Presence:** Cyberthon was a pioneer in adopting online platforms, with "Cyberthon IV: EPIC Omnicast" in 1994 being an interactive, live-streamed event utilizing BBS, Mbone, and CU-SeeMe technologies. They were also early adopters of using webpages to promote their events globally.
- **Collaboration with ACMI for Preservation:** Jaffers initiated a collaboration with ACMI in 2013 to preserve and make the Cyberthon archive accessible. This involved the "condition report, inventory, digitise and quality check" of a vast collection of audiovisual materials.
- **Importance of Artist Intent in Preservation:** Working directly with Jaffers allowed ACMI's preservation team to understand the original intent behind the works, even acknowledging technical glitches as intentional artistic choices.
- **Public TV as a Launchpad and Later Constraint:** Public TV, particularly RMITV and later MCT-31, provided the initial platform for Cyberthon. However, the move to a full-time broadcast license for MCT-31 introduced constraints like censorship and copyright restrictions that challenged Cyberthon's free-flowing ethos.

- **"Visual Jockey" Term Coined:** During Cyberthon III, Jaffers coined the term "Visual Jockey" to expand beyond the limitations of "Video Jockey" and encompass the broader range of visual mediums being used.
- **Interactive Episode and Telstra Collaboration:** Cyberthon experimented with interactivity, culminating in a pilot episode where audience members at a cafe could influence the live broadcast using connected Amiga computers. This led to a potential collaboration with Telstra to transform their "The Edge" exhibit into an interactive public space, which was ultimately cancelled due to political changes.
- **The Rave Scene's Core Values:** The "Rave Days" excerpt highlights the rave scene's origins as a reaction against the exclusivity and commercialism of the 80s club culture. It emphasized inclusivity, freedom, and a focus on music and dancing over alcohol consumption. The scene fostered a sense of community and broke down social barriers.
- **Drugs and the Rave Culture:** While acknowledging the presence of drugs, the "Rave Days" excerpt suggests it was no more prevalent than in other parts of society and emphasizes the non-violent and community-oriented nature of the scene.
- **Cyberthon's Role in the Rave Landscape:** The "Rave Days" source positions Cyberthon as an effort to take the energy and creativity of the rave scene and broadcast it through a more traditional medium, albeit in a guerrilla and experimental way.
- **VJ'ing as Experimental and Cutting Edge:** Jaffers, as VJ Mandala, was at the forefront of technology, using Amiga computers and later various other technologies to create "wild and tripped-out VJ graphics and animations." His work for projects like "Rave Safe" and the TAC's "RAW" video showcased the potential of experimental digital art for public messaging.
- **Nostalgia for Early Internet Aesthetics:** Jaffers reflects on the resurgence of 90s aesthetics and the nostalgia for early internet visuals, suggesting it's part of a cyclical process of generations reinterpreting their past.
- **Global Connections:** Jaffers discovered a similarly named "Cyberthon" event celebrating virtual reality in San Francisco in 1990, highlighting a global interconnectedness of the cyber-minded underground.

Quotes:

- **Adem Jaffers on Cyberthon's Purpose:** "we documented what we were living, and we transmitted it." (ACMI)
- **Adem Jaffers on Hijacking Public TV:** "What we essentially did was hijack public TV... we were breaking all copyright laws. We didn't care about that sort of stuff." (ACMI, "Rave Days")
- **Jeff Jaffers on the Uniqueness of the Era:** "'What was initiated and co-created at that time was unique and can never ever be repeated within today's technological environment.'" ("My Two Bobs Worth")
- **Adem Jaffers on the Amiga's Impact:** "the capabilities of this computer just blew my mind." ("Rave Days")

- **Adem Jaffers on the Appeal of the Early Tech:** "there is certainly a buzz to riding a primitive wave of the buggy computer revolution that we were at the beginning of. It was exciting and uncharted territory." (VICE)

Conclusion:

The Cyberthon project, as detailed in these sources, was a significant manifestation of the energy, creativity, and technological experimentation that defined the 1990s Melbourne rave scene. Driven by a DIY ethos and a desire to capture and broadcast the unique spirit of this countercultural movement, Cyberthon pushed the boundaries of public television and foreshadowed the interactive and remix-oriented media landscape of the future. The ongoing efforts to preserve and make the Cyberthon archive accessible through ACMI are crucial for understanding this pivotal moment in Melbourne's cultural history.