

Techno and Terror

(October 2001)

Prior to September 11, if any institution in New York City were distrustful of the authorities, it would have to be Vinyl. One of the few remaining underground dance spaces in the city, Vinyl's modest Tribeca dance floor attracts die-hard ravers who eschew trendier clubs in favor of old-school authenticity.

This same crowd made Vinyl exactly the sort of venue Mayor Giuliani was trying to put out of business at any price. For over a year Vinyl was harassed and intermittently shut down by police seeking the illicit drug use perceived as synonymous with electronic dance music. Clubbers saw Giuliani, the police, and the municipal government as threats to their way of life and their right to self-determination.

So it was all the more remarkable to witness the benefit that Vinyl recently threw for the nearby stations of the New York Police and Fire Departments. Cops and firefighters attended in uniform, dancing next to Fashion Institute undergrads with glow-in-the-dark tongue studs and Hello Kitty tattoos. Slouching teens with spiked hair and nose rings shook hands with the officers and offered kind words. American flags stuck out of teddy-bear and angel-wing backpacks, while others wore flag-patterned bandannas and sweatshirts. Halfway through the evening, the music paused for a vixen with blonde dreadlocks to sing "God Bless America", and the underculture went wild. At the height of last year's ecstasy crackdown, this scene would have been beyond unimaginable.

Vinyl stood almost in the shadow of the World Trade Center, and when exiting the nearby Subway station to reach it, the deathly stench of the ruins is still oppressive. The unimaginable did in fact happen nearby; these kids know a real threat to their way of life when they see it; and the cops have larger worries on their mind now than the benign mix of bass, love, gyrating hips, and psychedelia that fuels Vinyl's Friday nights.