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## Chapter 7 "FINAL FRONTIER"

My plane landed in Detroit at about 5pm local time. I was checked over several times whilst going through passport control, for no real reason. Eventually the officer got bored and stamped my passport with a pink stamp. I continued my way through customs, and walked out through the security doors.

I jumped into a cab and gave the driver Kenny Larkin's address who was waiting for me at his house in the white suburbs of Detroit. The car drew away and sailed onto the ring road. Once we had crossed the invisible boundary line signalling downtown Detroit, I began to make out the wide avenues of the city. It was dark. Our headlights faintly lit the decrepit walls lining the streets that resembled crumbling mausoleums. In the distance I saw two towers beholding the letters G and M. The taxi driver pointed out the towers to me as if showing me the ruins of a local monument: «You see right there, it's the General Motors towers!» On top of these two steel and glass towers, the red and blue letters overlooked a pained Detroit.

I was trying to remember in the taxi: when had I heard the name Detroit for the first time? Was it in the 90's through techno? Or through the soul of Motown? Soul and techno, two consequences of the same story of suffering and integrity. One this is sure in my mind, I have always associated Detroit with music. For all those people who like me have grown up with music, Detroit is a stamp of quality. Whether it is in experiments in jazz and rythm'n'blues, or to the futuristic funk of George Clinton, not forgetting the cries of anger of the Stooges and the unforgettable soul of Motown.

For the United States, who seem to have a hard time remembering this, Detroit is a high point in the cultural void of this country. Whereas for Europeans it is a city full of innovation, swing and perfection. And for people like me Detroit is the birthplace of techno, a place of pain where jazz, the last great music of the century, has undergone a metamorphosis and become electronic music. As techno can be considered as the urban continuation of jazz. From John Coltrane to Derrick May, their obsessions are the same, space, time, groove and infinite melancholy. I was in Detroit from reasons that were bugging me: soak up the vibes of the city and to meet my masters of techno. Try to understand the purity and the immense sadness that saturates their music.

Try to understand why this music drains so much emotion, so much hardship, experience and beauty. I had expected to arrive in a city of ruin, to struggle to comprehend the mystery of Detroit, to interrogate everybody I met, to question every sign. But it was all the answers could already be found in the history of the city.

The golden economic era, similarly to Manchester in England, when Detroit was to become the great American city of industrial experiment and welcomed several thousand workers from all over the United States to work in the Ford automobile factories, the black workers were confined to the foundries. The Greek immigrant population founded Greek Town and the first black community within the city settled in the ghetto known as Black Bottom. It was there in Hastings Street that the first temple of the Nation of Islam was built.

In 1932 at the end of the Wall Street crash, Detroit was nicknamed the green city: there were more trees per square kilometre than in any other American city. The second World War marked the second golden era for Motor Town, which became «Democracy's arsenal»: B52's were being built in the Ford factories whilst tanks were being built at Chrysler. Jazz appeared, the Black Bottom ghetto was knocked down and replaced by a highwayman in 1959 Motor Town gave birth to Motown, cultural pride of the black community.

Then the battle for civil rights broke out in the States, and in July 1967, a few weeks after the events that took place at Watts, Detroit experienced three days of bloody rioting itself. And finally began a slow downturn: closure of the automobile factories, loss of ideals, the white community fled to the suburbs as the ghetto grew larger; And in the 80's the massive arrival of crack in the ghettos.

Detroit techno tells the stories of all of these hardships. Within this powerfully dramatic music one can feel the force of life that refuses to be oppressed. Here words are unnecessary. Everything is expressed within a few notes repeated infinitely. This music is metal, glass and steel. When you close your eyes you can hear, in the distance and then getting closer and closer, the echo of a cry. Like in jazz and in blues, Detroit techno transposes suffering. And the authenticity of the soul has no price.

In the beginning of the 80's, Detroit was still a testing zone for American record companies. Believing that if an artist made it in Detroit he would make it all over the States, the majors entrusted a part of their power of influence into local radio stations. It was the birth of the radio DJ that was to play such a crucial role for the future of young artists and the development of new musical trends. Every DJ and producer who make up the first generation of Detroit techno artists still talk today about Electrifying Mojo's radio show. He was a visionary DJ who mixed the latest European electronic sounds with traditional black music. They all agree on his huge influence, Mojo was the first, and would play prime time Prince and A Certain Ratio, Funkadelic and Kraftwerk, Visage, New Order, Pet Shop Boys, the B52's, Falco and even the French violinist Jean Luc Ponty. Mojo was the person who placed the theory within Detroit techno.

In the middle of the 80's another DJ appeared on the radio: The Wizard. His technique, his innovation, his science of mixing and the mystery that shrouded his true identity resulted in him becoming a figure of legend within the city. Almost twenty years later, Jeff Mills still remains for the people of Detroit The Wizard. The current Hip-Hop generation in Detroit grew up listening to The Wizard. And to this day on the rare occasions when he accepts to perform in Detroit, you will still see his hip-hop following who would never normally venture into techno clubs. Listen closely and you will hear « Eminem and his possee came down to listen to The Wizard », « The Producer Jay Dee and the group Slum Village were at the venue »...

Jeff Mills is undoubtedly one of the most important music producers of the last fifteen years. He is a visionary, a leading light in the world of techno, and a master DJ (as one would use the term master musician). You have to see Jeff playing on three decks, mesmerised by his cat like senses, and see the inimitable way in which he plays rough minimal and funky music, to understand fully the extent of this artist's investment in his art. Jeff Mills will be our guide through the Detroit of the early 80's. He will lead us through this city struck by crises that went in one generation from a city of abundance to an urban nightmare, giving birth on route to the final musical revolution of the 20th century: techno.

#### JEFF MILLS

“In 1979 I was 16. My older brother had already been a DJ for several years. He let me practice at his place, on his gear. At about the same time we both began to send mix tapes to radio stations in Detroit. It was not really something people did at the time. Upon his advice I must have sent about 15 tapes in one year to the station WDRQ, but I never got a reply. When my brother decided to stop DJ-ing he gave me all his records and his equipment which I set up in my bedroom and began practising for several hours each day.

“From 1979 to 1981 the first sounds of hip hop started filtering through to us from New York via Chicago. It was the beginning of a street culture made up of dance, graffiti, rap and DJ-ing, with some incredible inventions such as scratching. A global and community culture, created by and for

the ghetto (For Us By Us). On the East Coast there was Grandmaster Flash and DJ DST; on the West coast Dr Dre and DJ Yellow, in Florida and in Mississippi, the Bass stations, radios that were playing Miami Bass , were spreading.

But at this time videos of DJ mixes didn't exist, and it was impossible to get hold of the right information from Detroit , to try and find out how these first Djs were scratching and producing these sounds. We were told that if you wanted to scratch faster you had to wear esurgical gloves. Within a matter of days every DJ in Detroit was wearing a pair of white gloves.

The more news we got from New York , the more I got into DJ-ing , taking in every bit of information that concerned the music directly or indirectly: the label bosses, the musicians who were in , remixers, scratching patterns... In Detroit we grew up with music; From as young as fourteen kids were going to mobile discos . Every age group has their own parties. When I was seventeen I started getting DJ work at mobile discos.

Then my brother introduced me to some of the influential people behind Detroit's nightlife scene. These people could help me develop my art teach me how to play records in the context of a club, to create a programme of music suited to an older audience. My brother had arranged a meeting at a downtown club called "lady" so that I could audition. As I wasn't yet the right age legally (21) to be allowed into the club I had to sneak in through the back door and climb up to the DJ booth without being seen by security. It wasn't yet 10pm and the club was already packed. The bosses and the resident DJ's came into the DJ booth and said "OK, show us what you can do".

I started off my set with a move that they had never seen before: I put the needle on the first record in the middle of the break and then played a second copy of the same record from the beginning. I just won my ticket to play the week after. The managers accepted to take me on and teach me the ropes. I learnt how to win over the crowd with a track ( play part of the record, take it off, play it again an hour or so later to build a hit. I learnt what kinds records I should always have in my boxes to be able to adapt to any situations, which records were good as transitions etc... In a word I learnt about the psychology of the dancefloor. A teaching which a lot of Detroit DJ's and musicians have never had access to.

In spite of my young age I inherited 3 residencies in Detroit clubs within a few months. In one of these clubs, the UBQ, they held the after party for Prince's Purple Rain Tour which was in town for seven days. By coincidence, WDRQ radio had decided to broadcast the after show live . I received instructions only to play music related to the universe of Prince (Sheila E, Vanity, The Tiles etc.) It was my first time on the radio. I was really excited and had prepared my set several days beforehand. Just before I was to start my mix the radio Dj turned to me and said: "What's your stage name?" And I replied "My friends call me The Wizard". And so she announced "Here is live at WDRQ the Wizard!" The next day I found out that WDRQ had scored their best audience figures in months.

So I was called down to the radio to be interviewed in view of my own mix show and to meet the new programme director at the station. He came from New York and wanted to introduce Hip Hop to Detroit by creating a special Hip Hop mix show on WDRQ. There were two of us being auditioned. After playing a fifteen minute set I struck a deal. The director took me aside in his office and said " We know of you already because of all the demo tapes you have been sending us. He opened up his cupboard and there I saw all the tapes I had sent over the years in order of year. "Here we're going to teach you all the rules of radio. And so I learnt how to edit tracks on tape, to create a show, I was given a budget, I had access to the entire discotheque, I was allowed to buy all the records I wanted, I had carte blanche.

For a guy who was not even twenty, it was an unbelievable stroke of luck. Faced with a rival radio station WRDQ needed to beat the competition and the new director was counting on me. "Here's your studio (built specially for me with three turntables), here's your receptionist, here's your telephone, it's over to you."

WDRQ slowly introduced The Wizard to their listeners from November 1982. The goal was to impose him the evening of the big new year's show, during which he was supposed to play a nine-hour radio set: "The radio station did a lot of advertising on me. I had to be able to be present on air any time of the day, in order to surprise the listeners. On the radio, I distinguished myself from other Djs by creating thematic mixes: Michael Jackson vs. Prince, automobile vs. Motor City, etc. For these shows, I used the radio's records. I think that my attraction for concepts comes from these years.

"To preserve the Wizard's mystery, I didn't have the right to use this name in clubs or to reveal my radio identity to anyone. At the same time, I continued to play in the city's clubs. In the beginning of the 80's, Detroit had many very talented Djs, Darryl Shannon, Delano Smith, Carl Martin, who, influenced by Electrifying Mojo brought the new music coming from Europe (in other words, synthetical pop) in clubs.

"Then, in 1981, a record was published, Sharevari, who was going to play a key role in the birth of what was going to become Detroit's techno. It was produced by upper-class students from Detroit, two boys and two girls playing under the name of A number of names. They were members of a private association (called Sharevari) which organized parties and had earned money. They decided to create their own music. They went in a studio, inspired themselves from the title "Moscow Disco" of the Belgian band Telex, and recorded Sharevari. Mojo made of this a huge blockbuster in Detroit. Sharevari is the very first techno record from Detroit. But nobody had ever pronounced the word "techno", it simply didn't exist.

"I met Juan Atkins right after the release of Sharevari. He already had his band, Cybotron, loved Kraftwerk, and had published the song "Clear". After Sharevari, the sound of his music changed. His band split, the two other members left in California to play pop music. Juan preferred to stay. In 1985, he released No UFO's and Night Drive, two wonderful songs who sounded really like Sharevari. At this moment, everything exploded: people talked about techno, without really knowing who had launched this word, but who cares ! The new music from Detroit had an identity, a particular taste. Sharevari had been the launcher, and Juan Atkins became the first hero of the techno trinity. Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson would then follow him.

"But in this small world, people didn't meet each other. The town was divided into sectors ; on one side downtown, on the other the suburbs. At this time, there were many parties in Detroit, from the neighbour's garden to the next-door club. A Sunday night, at a "black night" during which I was playing, Kevin Saunderson came to (meet) me. We didn't know each other, we weren't in the same milieus. Many parallel scenes had developed at the same time without necessarily meeting (crossing) each others. Kevin gave me one of his first records, which he had published under the name of Reese & Santonio.

He also presented me to Neil Rushton, the boss of Network Records, the first recording house that had published Detroit techno in England. A few months later, Kevin Saunderson released Big Fun and made a big hit.

"At this time, I had created my industrial music band, The Final Cut. We had done a few records, but I had the feeling I hadn't found the good partners in music. This is when I met Mike Banks."

Mike Banks, alias Mad Mike, is the soul of the Detroit techno. An urban fighter (guerrilla), a man haunted by the suffering of his town. If Mike chose music to fight every day life, he finds his inspiration in (his inspiration comes from) the 60's afro-american struggle. Mike is a resistant, "a pure product of Detroit's black culture", as he says.

Musician, producer, legendary techno figure in the whole world, Mike chose to organize his struggle in the background, not giving any interview nor picture of his face. With his label Underground Resistance, Mike Banks spreads a guerrilla philosophy whose targets are the majors, the American segregationist system, and the ghetto despair.

From the building in which sits the label (Underground Resistance), the distribution platform of all the Detroit independent labels (Submerge) and the studios, Mad Mike continues a commitment which is at the same time social (get out young people of delinquency, drugs, and denounce the economical disaster in Detroit) and artistic.

When he talks, Mike Banks doesn't expect any question from his interlocutor. He counts Detroit with a slow voice, low and full of personal scars, and relates the saga of his creature: Underground Resistance.

Mike Banks:

"Jeff and I, we wanted to do great things, like all the kids of this city. To create something bigger than what's around you, be on a major, earn money, be seen on TV, have its face in magazines, it's (all these things are) a proof (mark) of success here.

"Jeff loved industrial music, and I loved everything Jeff played, as he has the funkier ear of the world. We met in a studio in Detroit, the United Sound Studio. I was recording with other musicians: Ray (now in Underground Resistance), Mike Pierce and Scott Christers. We were studio musicians, able to play any kind of music: R&B, funk, church music, gospel... Our band had been signed on Motown. But the label wanted to call us For Girls Only, or something like that, and make a boys band out of us. They wanted us to be dressed like Prince and to put make-up...

We were 23 or 24 years old. We said to ourselves: "If that's what we must do to success, fuck off!" Motown broke off our agreement, and we became studio musician for the rest of the time of our contract. This allowed us to work with George Clinton, David Spradley (who wrote Atomic Dog), Amp Fiddler, or the Reverend Thomas Whitfield. Because of this bad experience with Motown, we had a bitter taste in our mouths. This is when I met Jeff Mills.

"Jeff also had a bad taste in his mouth. Musically, he was excellent, but things were getting bad with his band The Final Cut. Besides, a black man playing industrial music, it didn't make any sense! Jeff had an amazingly fast way to work music. As R&B is a music that requires precision, we were used to work up to three months on a song to obtain exactly the right harmonies. This is precisely why the Kraftwerk music was so fascinating for us. We were trying to reproduce their songs on our guitars. We didn't know that it was machines that produced such sounds (we didn't know that these sounds were obtained with the help of machines). When we learned that all these things were done with computers, we started to study technology. We took advantage of our lunch-break to record. Jeff came and gave a hand on the edit of a few songs.

"We started to see each other more frequently, to work together regularly. We both liked Public Enemy for the way they refused to play the show niggers. You know, we the Blacks, in the USA, we always have to be disguised, to make ourselves up, to be flashy or to play the clowns if we want to enter the music business. I came from a sportsmen and workers family. At my place, we were opposed to this show nigger shit! I was educated in a surrounding that refused sparkling clothes, all

these pimp things, because living in the ghetto doesn't necessarily mean acting (behaving) like a pimp. My family inculcated one value in me: working. Pimp, prostitute, dealer, that's not a model. I became very severe with this kind of people as I grew up: The "showboats niggers", as I called them, were nothing else but cannon fodder for me.

And that's why a band like Public Enemy immediately touched me. They were so powerful, so efficient. Their logo was a target with a silhouette in the middle. What they meant to say to the white establishment was: "This silhouette, here, it's me, and I put myself in front of the target on purpose. If you have the balls, shoot!" They were attacked in justice (sued) for this.

"With Jeff, we realized we did good job together, we had the same state of mind. This is when we created the UR concept, Underground Resistance. UR sprung from Public Enemy for the power, and from a love of the German precision of Kraftwerk. When we joined together (became partners), Jeff was at the top of his fame with his radio double the Wizard. He started playing Public Enemy on WJLB, the most important black radio in Detroit. The bosses asked him to stop. But, hanging with me, Jeff had become a resistant. He was supported by me and my boys, most of which were members of gangs. Jeff ignored the station's warnings. He continued playing Public Enemy, each night, on WJLB.

The radio station started to shorten his shows. From two hours, the show was brought back to one hour, and then to thirty minutes, until it only lasted fifteen minutes, and at this point, Jeff gave up (resigned). It was the end of The Wizard. It was hard for us. And I think it harmed musical progression and overture (???) in Detroit.

"UR sprang from this fighting spirit. It's the continuation of a long struggle, and it chose to use the existing technologies to make this struggle progress (move forward). Through UR, we wanted to express everything by the sole sound, no use of pictures. We were opposed to everything one should accept to become famous.

Since Jeff and I were studio musicians, background people, we decided that if people wanted to meet us, it would be for our music, not to see our faces or the colour of our skins. We were just coming out of the 80's, during which many black artists had had their nose redone or their skin whitened. Fuck that! If a guy doesn't know what you look like, he won't care seeing you as long as he likes your music. It's Detroit and all the Black America experience who engendered Underground Resistance. UR is a prolongation of the everyday life incessant struggle. I think inspiration goes beyond generations. Jeff and I often talked about that. Our music goes beyond us. Sometimes, I compare music to what a vampire obtains of the blood he sucks: eternal life. The energy we pass on stays and will be able to touch people in two hundred or three hundred years. I'm on earth to inspire other people, and maybe also people who are not even on earth yet."

Jeff Mills:

"At the beginning of UR, Mike and I would meet and discuss about what we wanted to do. Derrick May, Juan Atkins et Kevin Saunderson had counted (told) us their bad experience with European record companies. Big Fun and Good Life had been released on majors and the story turned sour. It was perfectly clear for us, we didn't want to work with majors. We both had experience of deals with majors in which we had been swindled. The name "Underground Resistance" comes from here. Literally, to build a resistance to overground. Before starting playing music together, we mainly thought of the direction we wanted to take. Our militant approach of techno comes from Public Enemy, but this way to conceptualise our music comes from the radio. If you want a show to become important on radio, you must be different, surprise people. That's what we did with UR. I had access to good recording studios, I had a good knowledge of sound, I knew editing, I could be a Dj for a hip-hop evening as well as for a house party. Mike brought soul in our music. And an unique way of playing keyboards. He had a certain knowledge of vocals, and brought a kind of patience in our songs.

“All my machines and all his keyboards gave life to an incredibly equipped studio. At that time, we didn’t work on computers. Our studio was configured so we could work on several songs in the meantime. We had a very simple way of working in UR, distinct roles. First, we ate chicken, and then we discussed about what we wanted to do. We wrote the instrumental parts together. Mike played the keyboard’s lines, and then left the studio to let me prepare the mix on the mix table. He came back to do the final mix, and I finished alone the song’s definitive edit’. We worked with this repartition of roles during all our collaboration time, from the first UR record *Your time is up*, released in 1990, until *The Punisher* in 1992.

This year, we produced a band from Detroit, *Members of the House*. The record had been published under license on the English label *React*, and as it had success in Europe, the band was engaged for a show in England. The guys of *Members of the House* came from the ghetto and they were hard to handle. Mike decided to go with them in Europe, while I stayed in Detroit. It was the first time we were separated more than a week. During Mike’s absence, I wrote *The Punisher*, the first record I did alone on UR. At this time, *Derrick May* and *Blake Baxter* were starting to tour in Europe and reported astonishing informations: ”I played in Belgium in front of 15000 persons.” It seemed crazy to us ! I had only been once in Europe and had no idea on what was going on out there. Meanwhile, Detroit had changed, from musical ebullition to a slow agony. All the artists had moved to Chicago, California or New York. Hip-hop and gangsta rap had become enormous in Detroit, and radio station didn’t play techno anymore.

Radio mixes were done by young people, with no musical background nor studio experience, who didn’t even know the difference between hip-hop and gangsta rap. Progressively gangsta rap imposed itself as the major musical style, and completely changed the young public’s mentality. There was more and more drugs, gangs, streets became more and more aggressive and the audience less and less open-minded.”

In 1992, *Jeff Mills* left *Underground Resistance*, and went to live in New York. *Mike Banks* continued his struggle, surrounding himself with a younger generation (*Drexciya*, *Aux 88*, *James Pennington*, *Dj Rolando*, etc...) But Detroit plunged once again into darkness.

The taxi crosses deserted neighbourhoods, passes along endless warehouses seated in the middle of nowhere, blocks of broken up steel lashed by the freezing wind, (last) surviving evidences of a bygone age, when this neighbourhood was Detroit’s central market (=Rungis). I notice shells of trucks, abandoned on gigantic parking lots that even vegetation seems to refuse to invade. All around, loneliness. Graffitis - seen too quickly - stand out against car’s shells dying here.

People say that during the night, the *Unknown Writer* wanders nearby Detroit’s abandoned buildings. He crosses abandoned neighbourhoods, disaster areas, streets of the ghetto and paints his texts (slogans, pamphlets or poems) on the dirty walls of the city. *Underground Resistance* largely spread the *Unknown Writer* texts, printing them on records in order to diffuse his urban poetry which has political and lucid accents. “Do not allow yourself to be programmed”.

The conversation starts up with the cabdriver. He asks me: “What are you here for ?”. I hesitate, answer: “People to meet... I’ve been wanting to come here for a long time, you know... I want to understand a few things.” Silence. And then he repeats “ a long time” with a drawling voice, as if he tasted the flavour of the word in his mouth, and whispers: “So, you came here to understand Detroit...” He prevents me: “We’re going to make a detour, there’s something you must see, it’s a few miles from here. Don’t worry, I won’t charge you for that, it’s my pleasure...” From outside, I can hear bass vibrations, without being able to find their origin. The cab edges its way into night. A couple of (neon) lightings twinkle. Baptist chapels and other houses, destroyed by bad weather,

alternate with alcohol shops. Further, a crack house. I feel in the heart of obscurity people moving. On kilometres, this same configuration: church, alcohol house, crack house...

The landmark changes briskly, and the taxi slows down. In the headlights of his Ford T, buildings shells painted with frescos become visible. A huge tarpaulin tended on the walls of a building made of faded bricks announces: "You are entering in the Heidelberg Project peace zone". On the walls, the soil, the abandoned car shells, poems advocating non-violence and respect are painted in round letters. The cabdriver turns at me: "Here, it's a truce zone. It must be one of the only places in Detroit in which people salute each other, pray together. Even gangs spare this quarter, you know ! Detroit is also like this: there's violence, but there's also hope..."

Then the cab "redémarre", crossing the same abandoned landscape to go back to Downtown. Smells like death, drugs, violence, loneliness. The city seems to live under a perpetual curfew. The center of Detroit is deserted, except for the Greek Town area, which recovers luxurious hotels, restaurants and stores for tourists. A ghost town. The few pedestrians that we meet constantly turn over to be sure they're not followed. In Detroit, cars waiting at the red light keep an eye on people who cross the street, in case they'd use a gun. That's everyday life in Downtown, that runs until the doors of 8 Mile Road.

8 Mile Road is the name given to the circular road that separates two very distinct worlds: inside, Downtown, in which lives eighty per cent of the black community. Outside, middle class white suburbs, spared by gangs, drugs and violence. When a car driven by a black leaves Downtown, passes by 8 Mile, and goes in the direction of the white suburbs, the driver sees from far the DPD cop's flashing lights, installed at the frontier of these two worlds. Every time, it's the same scenario (story). The vehicle is stopped, its driver questioned ("where do you live ? Where are you going ?") and is called to order (is lectured, is sermonized) ("Don't forget you must soon go back to your place...")

Mike Banks:

"What's happening with this city is so sad ! The will of seeing something new built is dead before birth. I cannot afford feeling happy or even satisfied, because I know in a week or two, somebody else will be shot. If you let yourself go to being happy around here, something comes and destroys you. In the meantime, I love this town for its particular color. Nothing is really normal here. For example, if you buy shrimps: "Hello, a pound of shrimps, please". The guy answers: "We don't have shrimps". There's a huge billboard "We sell shrimps" right in front but the guy answers quietly "We don't have any". That's crazy ! But I learned to appreciate all of this. It's like church... When I was a child, I didn't understand a single word the priest was saying. He was talking about the struggle between good and evil. I listened to what he said and said to myself "Yeah, right, keep talking". And I grew up and this theme of the struggle between good and evil came back to me. I realized it was true. It's a vampire world, here.

Public Enemy wrote Night of the living baseheads ; it's exactly that ! When the night falls, plenty people go out to take their dope, you can see them wander like vampires looking for blood, they hang on in the streets looking for a dose. When the sun rises, they go back to hide. When the Bible mentions possessed, freaks who are prisoner of their two personalities, like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, it looks very much like it's talking about people who took heroin. Now, when I attend church, I understand better what the priest is talking about. Because in the meantime, I lived, I became older here, and I learned not to judge people. That's what the Bible says: "don't judge your neighbor"

The taxi drops me in front of a house in Birmingham, a white suburb where Kenny Larkin lives. Kenny was considered in Detroit like the little genius of techno. Actor, he found himself in music by accident, had been inspired by Derrick May's music, had signed three records, among which

Azymuth and Metaphor, and consequently to their success in the whole world, had earned a lot of money. For all these reasons, Kenny was criticized in Detroit, but - problem for his enemies - his music was excellent.

After a warm reunion, Kenny tells me a dinner is organized at Fishbones, a restaurant in Greek Town in which a few people are waiting for me. And, on the doorstep, he tells me “ Take your discs. - Why ? - Don’t worry ! Take your discs.” I put my bag in the trunk, enter and let myself drive. Direction, the lights of the luxurious Greek Town hotels. We enter in a restaurant with walls covered by baseball players pictures and lithography of classic models built by the Ford factory. In the back of the room, at a round table, all the main actors of Detroit techno are seated. I approach, Kenny introduces me, and I understand that this kind of dinner, with all the actors of Detroit scene, is exceptional, perhaps even unique.

In 1993, it was still rare that a European took interest in Detroit. At the Fishbones table are entrepreneurs, Derrick May, Mike Banks, Kelly Hand, one of the only female producer in Detroit, Maurizio, a Berliner musician who invested here in a vinyl press factory. Warm, they spare me the distance they generally use with white people. I’m not here to beg anything, and they know that. Acid Eiffel, licensed by Fragile/Transmat, has been one of the only records in collaboration between Detroit and Europe. And Kevin, Mike and Derrick all have been to the Rex.

They know me, they know that what I do is sincere. I talk with Mike Banks, who proposes me, with a strange tone of voice, a walk tomorrow morning. “I got somethin’ to show ya.” The atmosphere is relax, we talk about music, of course, they make fun of each other, the absents are mocked, and the conversation stops on baseball actuality, and suddenly I’m absolutely lost. The last clients are leaving. I notice that none of those who pass by our table recognizes these gods fighting about the pitcher of this or this shitty team...

As everybody is leaving the table, putting on their warm winter coats, they ask me: “Did you take your records with you ?”. I answer yes, shyly. We go in the car with Kelly, and I learn that a party is having place in a school refectory. There’s hardly any club nor structure in which organize techno parties in Detroit, but a high sense of resourcefulness in spite of the risk of seeing DPD cops or local gangs come in. Almost never more than two hundred people attend to these techno parties, and most of them come from the white neighborhoods, after 8 Mile.

I meet Dj Bone in this primary school’s labyrinth of corridors. He suggests I play with him in a table and chair-free classroom. The audience, exclusively black, is here to dance and listen to music, without light, hardly lighted by the outside neons, in a word, we are very far from the little snobby Parisian having a talk on Detroit. Bone plays a few minutes and proposes me to continue. I open my records in two seconds, start my mix, work with the audience, feel some skeptical looks on me. And the atmosphere cools down, the mamas start dancing, with wider and wider moves. Mike is in a corner of the room and looks. I feel we’re touching the goal, the room s’emballe.

I put in a row a St Germain title and Losing Control, by DBX. Mamas start yelling “Yeaaaaaaaah !” I had been dreaming for years of this first evening in Detroit. I would had given anything for an opportunity like this one, and now it’s working ! It’s like in a dream, in fact I think I’m dreaming... And suddenly, a guy stops in front of me: “No more music here !” Bone stays behind me, without a move, Mike comes slowly. I ask why and the only answer is a mumbling : “Stop the music.”

They tell me that police made irruption. That the party is over. Audience empties (leaves) the room without making scandal, obviously used to the castrating methods of the DPD. Kenny takes me to the exit, offers to bring me back to my hotel, when I hear a bass growling coming from another room occupied by the Canadian Dj Richie Hawtin, at the opposite of the long corridor. I approach

and discover a place filled with white clients clearly ignorant of any police interdiction. Did the DPD close one room out of two ? I won't learn anymore. I take my boxes full of records, salute Bone, rejoin Kenny who's waiting for me in the hall and return (go back) to my hotel.

The next day, Mike Banks gives me an appointment at the Motown Historical Museum, 2648 West Grand Blvd. Mike waits for me in front of the museum, seated on his old car's hood. He asks nothing on yesterday's incident, takes me to the building's doorstep, and mumbles: "You got to understand where you are." We enter in Hitsville, the house opened by Berry Gordy in 1959. Mike pays my ticket. "I'll wait for you outside. " On the first steps, we can already feel the phantoms (ghosts) of past splendor. Here, people speak low, like in churches. I see pictures of Marvin Gaye, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder. I enter in the recording studio, preserved until now in the very details of his decoration. Here, Smokey Robinson, Gladys Knight, The Temptations and Norman Whitfield recorded some of the most beautiful pieces of black-american music.

A studio once opened 24 hours a day who only stopped its infernal production rhythm in 1972 when Berry Gordy, the master of this place, moved its creature to Los Angeles. I follow a corridor covered with gold records, come across a projection room. I seat anywhere. Like a perfectly orchestrated partition, the projection of a movie on the Motown story starts. Images pass by me, commented by a respectful voice off. The scenes are sometimes silent, sometimes filled with music. Everything here talks about pride, ambition and autonomy.

These images tell the ideal of the black-American culture that Motown spread. I sink into my seat and slowly, I understand the purpose of this visit: try to catch the soul of Detroit through the memories of its most beautiful creation. I understand that the "Young America" spirit is still alive, that despite the knocks (???) it's not disappearing, and that we find its marks again, 40 years later, in the work set about by Mike Banks, via UR. Motown was, like UR is today, a records distribution network ensuring the independence of the label against majors, a recording studio (in which all the musicians of the label went) that guaranteed a specific sound, a group of accomplished artists sharing the same philosophy, and a visionary boss pumping his benefices into his label and in his city.

With Underground Resistance, Mike Banks continues this work of memory. But UR didn't model its functioning on Motown. It inspires itself, of course, but adapts the Berry Gordy's purposes to the reality of a disenchanted Detroit. It's like a thread running through the years to communicate the same urgency. It's sufficient to plunge into UR's work, to see them grow from a vocal house to a hard-line techno to realize it's always about the same motor: soul and anger.

You just need to smell the perfume of the streets here to notice that the golden age of Berry Gordy has disappeared (is over). Since then, its artists, keepers of its soul, have massively left its walls, the city makes the experience of night. Of this drama, Mike Banks found energy, and tries to bring back hope with his music.

Mike Banks:

"For my parents generation, Berry Gordy was a symbol of hope. That's what the Motown museum represents for me. When we enter, we realize that the struggle we are now having is the same as in the 60's. But Gordy won without the technology we now have. That was also an inspiration for me. At Submerge, we have printers, computers, faxes: with all this we should be able to do something ! When I see in which conditions worked the Motown musicians, what they had, and the way they stayed in people's memory, I find this astonishing ! Berry Gordy wanted to conquer the planet with Motown music, in a time where black people were still fighting for their rights. He was a pride for the community.

But in his system, musicians weren't put in the forefront, and suffered from it. What happened with them won't happen to us ; because me too, I'm entre deux chaises: the CEO and the musician.

Berry Gordy was an excellent businessman and I know the things he had to manage, like for example when he had to give to the mother of an artist on drugs the money he had earned... The dark side of success, I sure know what it is. When you succeed in this city, you have three thousand unemployed guys running after you and who want to be in your boat. But it's impossible ! I hear people angry against Kevin Saunderson, saying: "Kevin sold himself, he left in the white suburbs of Detroit" But he didn't have the choice ! He was not capable of saying no ; every time a buddy came to ask him five hundred dollars because his kids had nothing to eat or because he was having a rough time, Kevin gave him money.

If he hadn't left, he would be unable to provide for his family('s) needs today. Berry Gordy lived under a constant pressure, and had to face the same kind of dilemmas. He decided to leave for Hollywood in 1972. He wanted to produce movies, but I'm sure all the pressure created by all these people who wanted the money earned by Motown (Motown's money) helped him taking this decision. I'm positive about this, because we live under the same pressure.

Other reasons pushed Gordy to leave Detroit. The Motown's artists had become stars, and they simply were yearning to a better life in a friendlier town, who'd have a nice weather. Until the end of the 60's, Gordy could still take his artists in hand by a hard managing. But some of them became too famous, they stopped obeying, started to talk about leaving to California against his will (advice, opinion) He couldn't bare the idea of seeing them growing away from him. So he left in California, to produce his movies and keep control on his artists. I still have an article on him - that really touched me - in which he says the worst mistake he ever did was leaving for California, because it changed the sound of Motown. It modified the soul of the music.

The sound, the urgency and the struggle weren't the same... Maybe if they had gone to Compton, Inglewood or any other hole, things would have turned different. But these jerks (idiots), they went in Beverly Hills or some place like that ! And there, they lost the thing. The magic disappeared !

I'm not really attached to Detroit like a mussel to his rock (???!), but when you enter in the Motown building, you can feel that the spirit of the musicians is still here. There are some places in Detroit in which you can feel this vibration. I feel I'm a part of this town. I often say to my guys (boys) that with some artists, it's possible to feel changes in their music by listening all their records in a row. In the beginning, they're in Detroit, they work on their songs, they have a real sound. Then they travel, do other things. They work less here, they deal with people who think that since they're from Detroit, they necessarily are big guns in techno, that anything they do is marvelous. From this point, it becomes shit ! And one day, they find themselves back here, and they realize they lost something.

But I'm not saying everything comes from our environment. Other factors have influence on our music. In my case, an important factor is "save my ass !" Some of the best producer I know were really poor guys. Their inspiration came because they needed money: "Someone told me I could earn money with music, so listen to what I did".

Mike Banks invested all the benefices of UR in the community (neighborhood associations, kindergarten, etc...) and in the construction of the label's offices. "The construction of the Submerge building has really been an enriching experience. People whom I thought would be on my sides during the travaux weren't there. Those who rallied round me and supported me were cousins and a few friends - among which many on drugs. Before this experience, I thought they wrecked themselves, I was angry. And one day, I found myself snowed under with the travaux, I had no more money to finish the building. I told them: "Listen boys, it's the end, we can't continue, I don't

have a cent.” My cousin Cliff answered: “You think we’re here for money ? With what we’re paid ! Us, what we want, is seeing this building done !” It shattered me. Because compared to what they had lived because of drugs, my problem was nothing. This day, I realized that we must not judge people.

The Submerge building is a tribute to all the people who bought our records. Every single cent we earned is invested in it.

I want to be able to pass on what I have to people around me, to my kids and my friends kids. I want it to be possible for them to work here if they want it, instead of working like robots at the factory. At Submerge, everyone can have a role, a legitimacy. To learn and to pass on. To say: “My father worked here thirty years ago, smart ass, and that’s how a record should be wrapped. Like my father showed me.” Working for Underground Resistance and Submerge is working for a familial company.”

Since 1992, everyday life in Detroit has become harder and harder. The techno microcosm is corrupted by rivalries, quarrels, jealousies. The major artists have deserted the city for Europe. The rare techno parties still organized in Downtown are inevitably stopped by Detroit police.

While Mike Banks and Underground Resistance were continuing their struggle from Detroit, Jeff Mills was wandering in the world. In 1993, artists and American labels became conscious of how huge the house and techno phenomenon was in Europe. Eager to leave their town, some producers and Djs gave way to easy money and pleasure of adulation. An American Dj scene developed, satisfying the demand of Europe, which had eyes only for Detroit, New York and Chicago. Whereas most famous American Djs couldn’t hope to be paid more than 500 dollars a night in their own country, in Europe some New York Djs asked fifteen or twenty thousand dollars for a three hour set in England. Taking advantage of the opportunity, American Djs demanded indecent amounts. The promoters and European clubs accepted their whims. And the worldwide phenomenon spread to the Holy of Holies: Detroit.

The Detroit label became a value subject to speculations. For most of the artists, music served to get out of a difficult life. It never was question of easy money and celebrity. When in 1993 Berlin invited most of Detroit’s Djs for the Love Parade, they all understood they had in their hands the goose that lays the golden eggs, that they could sign slapdash records on labels that only wanted to put the Detroit label in their catalogue, have fun and have it off with girls. It was inevitable, some of them turned crazy. During too long, a part of American artists fobbed off - without forgetting to get well paid - their worst productions on European labels. No European recording house refused one title of a Detroit artist, even when the music was mediocre. Everybody took advantage of the situation. And at the end: eighty per cent of the songs signed by Detroit artists in Europe are very bad. Europe adulates Detroit, but it’s a love free relationship.

Mike Banks:

“I realize that our community has no tradition in the administration of money. Some of us cracked up when they suddenly had some, because they were sure it wouldn’t last and that they should make the most of it. I can understand that. In Detroit, if you never go outside your place, you have a completely deformed idea of the world. The news just enumerates the problems (=dérappages) (“somebody has been killed in this or this place”) or repeat to white suburbs people that they are right to live outside Downtown because otherwise they’d end up with a gun against their temple.

They sell us this, or stories of perfect citizens giving soup to poor people. This town is divided even in the way an event is related. The TV news just give a partial vision of actuality. I believe that those who create techno music are trying to escape this. But I already evoked the influence the city

had on us... When we try to escape her, we bring her with us in spite of ourselves.”

Underground Resistance continues to work for music, in accordance with its ethic, turned towards street and future, exploring the possibility of other worlds record after record. Jeff Mills tells it willingly, the theme of space, omnipresent in black music (from Sun Ra to Funkadelic, from Coltrane to techno), has always been marked with the same desire:

Jeff Mills:

“For us, it represents freedom. Out of here. Out of this world. Space, the unknown, it can be anything: even if it’s worse than here, it’s not here. Space is the final frontier. The Final Frontier. We have fifty per cent of chance for life elsewhere to be better than life down here, and this is where the space theme takes its importance. It’s a hope. Because in this country, if you’re born black, you’re getting into big troubles. Really into big trouble !”

It’s another taxi that brings me to the airport. I’m sprawled on the banquette arrière and I read the badges of the records filling my bags. The words “future”, “warfare”, “fugitives”, “planet”, “mystic” and “riot” stand out. Outside, still the same ravaged landscape. But the true bankrupt of Detroit, nobody ever evokes it in Europe. Detroit is a dramatic cultural failure. Here, we erase up to the memory of what has been. The theaters “à l’italienne”, remains of the golden 50’s, have been turned into parking lots. Same thing for the concert halls. You have to take refuge in the Baptist Church of Greek Town to find the only Downtown library. And there’s no more music here.

At my return, people will ramble on the generally accepted ideas (clichés) that it is good form, in Europe, to carry on Detroit (??????). I will hear once again all kinds of aberrations and clichés on its so-called techno scene. Fuck that shit ! There’s absolutely nothing in Detroit looking like a scene. To have a scene, you need a night life. And structures, clubs, network. A desire that spreads, that finds an echo. But here, everything seems harmed.

Before my arrival, I fantasized this town. I imagined it brutal. This is precisely what it is. A despaired vision and, in spite of everything, exciting of future. But I thought that this violence was so unbearable that the link between the actors of techno in Detroit were stronger. I was wrong. I imagined them driven by the same ideal, and I have been disappointed to see that some of them only wanted to make money from the “Detroit” label in Europe. This first trip to Detroit didn’t change my life. I didn’t like its music more after having breathed this town’s air. What I understood was the necessity to put his heart in his music. If the Detroit techno distresses me, it’s because his authors give everything to their records, they reveal their sorrows, their resentment, their scars, their hopes. I recalled the words of Derrick May: “You don’t make a record for fun, man.”

If the music from Chicago had always talked to my pelvis, the one from Detroit talked directly to my heart. It made me cry. It passed on me incredibly intense emotions. Records like World 2 World or Strings of Life constitute my life’s soundtrack. I listen to them for the thousandth time of my life and I still feel my hairs grow up. This richness can’t be bought. It’s called sincerity.