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THE PLANET'S MOST
FUTURISTIC CLUBS

DANCE MUSIC HAS
ALWAYS BEEN DRIVEN
BY THE FUTURE BUT
NOW TECHNOLOGY IS
CHANGING CLUBLAND
FASTER THAN EVER,
CAN YOU KEEP UP?
TECHNO PROPHET
RICHIE HAWTIN
INTRODUCES OUR
FUTURE ISSUE —
YOUR GUIDE TO THE
NEXT LEVEL OF RAVE

Words Gavin Hartley Photography www.coneytjay.com

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SMALL SLICE OF the future lies in the palm of Richie Hawtin's hand. "This will be to dance music what guitars were to rock 'n' roll," he says triumphantly, his eyes blazing with excitement as he offers up a sleek black gadget for closer inspection. This hand-held device, he explains, is basically the iPod of the turntable world, squeezing all the capabilities of a set of decks and a mixer into a device not much larger than a remote control. He discovered the Pacemaker, made by Swedish company Tonium, with his father and fellow geek outside Barcelona's Soñar festival in June of this year. "I saw a huge growd gathered around a girl DJing with this small black device," he says. "It was a huge moment."

It is moments and discoveries like this that make Richie Hawtin's life complete. Ever since he heard the alien sounds of Jeff Mills' prototype electronic music show on Detroit radio as a teenager in the 1980s, techno's reigning innovator has been captivated by the future. Since his early days DJing as a teenager with a makeshift delay effect at Detroit club Shelter, Richie has strived to push the boundaries of electronic music. His 'Dex, Fx & 909' tours of the early 1990s (captured on one of the first *Mixmag* covermount CDs) advanced the idea of what a DJ could do beyond just mixing one record into another. Records like his groundbreaking 'Spastik' spearheaded mutant strains of techno that have come full circle to influence today's thriving techno scene. From his new home of Berlin his Minus record label is unwaveringly dedicated to discovering new ways of creating dance music, and his 'DE 9 Transitions' CD rewired the way DJs approach mix CDs (instead of a sequence of tracks Richie spliced his favourite records into individual slivers and reassembled them as one whole new piece of music using revolutionary DJ/production software Ableton Live).

Hawtin's fascination with new technologies and ways of thinking about club music has earned him a reputation as dance music's authority on the future, not to mention work as a consultant for pioneering companies like Beatport and Allen & Heath. He can thank his lifestyle as a globe-trotting DJ for granting him a unique perspective on the world. In the past two weeks he's been to LA, New York, Windsor in Canada, back to Germany and on to London, Tokyo, then Mount Fuji, on to Sapporo and back to Tokyo, before flying to Ibiza. He's been in this constant flux of time-zones and jet lag for almost 17 years. "I distinctly remember a conversation I had with Jeff Mills a few years back about being futurists," he says. "Not only because we tried to make futuristic music, but because we were living 20 years ahead of the mass population. Travel doesn't mean anything to us; skipping over to Tokyo and back to New York in twenty-four hours is part of our routine."

Today, firing off a volley of texts from his smartphone at the end of the Ibiza season, Richie Hawtin is as alive as he's ever been. A blonde mop of hair makes him look far younger than his 37 years. In three days' time he'll host his Minus party at futuristic superclub Amnesia. It's one of the most hotly anticipated dates on the techno calendar and a taster for what's to come in electronic music — perfect timing, then, to pick the brains of one of dance music's fastest imaginations on the future of club culture.

So why do you keep coming back to the future?

Because I don't want to get old. I want to feel young and connected to the pulse of life. To me, life is an ever-changing, evolving world of travelling, meeting new people and searching for something new or exciting or better. Plus I get bored very easily.

What's next for clubs?

I've been reading a lot about 'tele-presence' — £500,000 communication systems designed for the world of corporate America. You sit around half of a circular desk looking at screens showing a group of people on the other side of the world sitting around a similar-looking, other half of a circular desk. Imagine that in a club. To have two rooms, one Womb in Tokyo and the other Womb in London, and a dividing wall that would be a mirror image of the other city. Or imagine if you build a new club and the interior surfaces of that

"I DON'T WANT TO GET OLD. I WANT TO FEEL YOUNG AND CONNECTED TO THE PULSE OF LIFE. I GET BORED VERY EASILY"



room are made from projections or high resolution displays, so that it can be a black club or it can be anywhere or anything. It could start to become a pseudo-holodeck, like in *Star Trek*. The technology is already there. Daft Punk's LED light pyramid is an example of an object built out of a high resolution display whose images can be manipulated to move with the music.

The world is changing incredibly fast. Is it a good or a bad thing?

I have this overwhelming optimism that technology will save the day. My friends are from all over the world. Older people, especially parents, can't understand how I can have friends like that – but physical presence doesn't make connections between people any more. It solidifies a connection, but you don't need it to maintain that connection. Social networking technology allows me to feel that I'm connected to my friends when I'm not physically present. Now, the scariest thing for me is that when I get old I won't be able to travel so much and maintain these connections that I've made by travelling physically. But I'm optimistic that there'll be a new way of connecting when I get to that point in my life. And I hope another advance will come when I really need it: a set of bionic ears!

How has technology changed your life as a DJ since you began playing?

A DJ's life has changed more than that of any other performer. We're touring all the time and this lifestyle has only become possible in the last 15 years because of advancements in technology. When I first started playing, we did everything by fax. Travelling was a very lonely experience. Now in airports I have Bluetooth connectivity with my computer so that even when I'm in a taxi I'm ichatting to my mum, dad or brother or sending a file or an email. No matter where I travel, I'm still connected to my world.

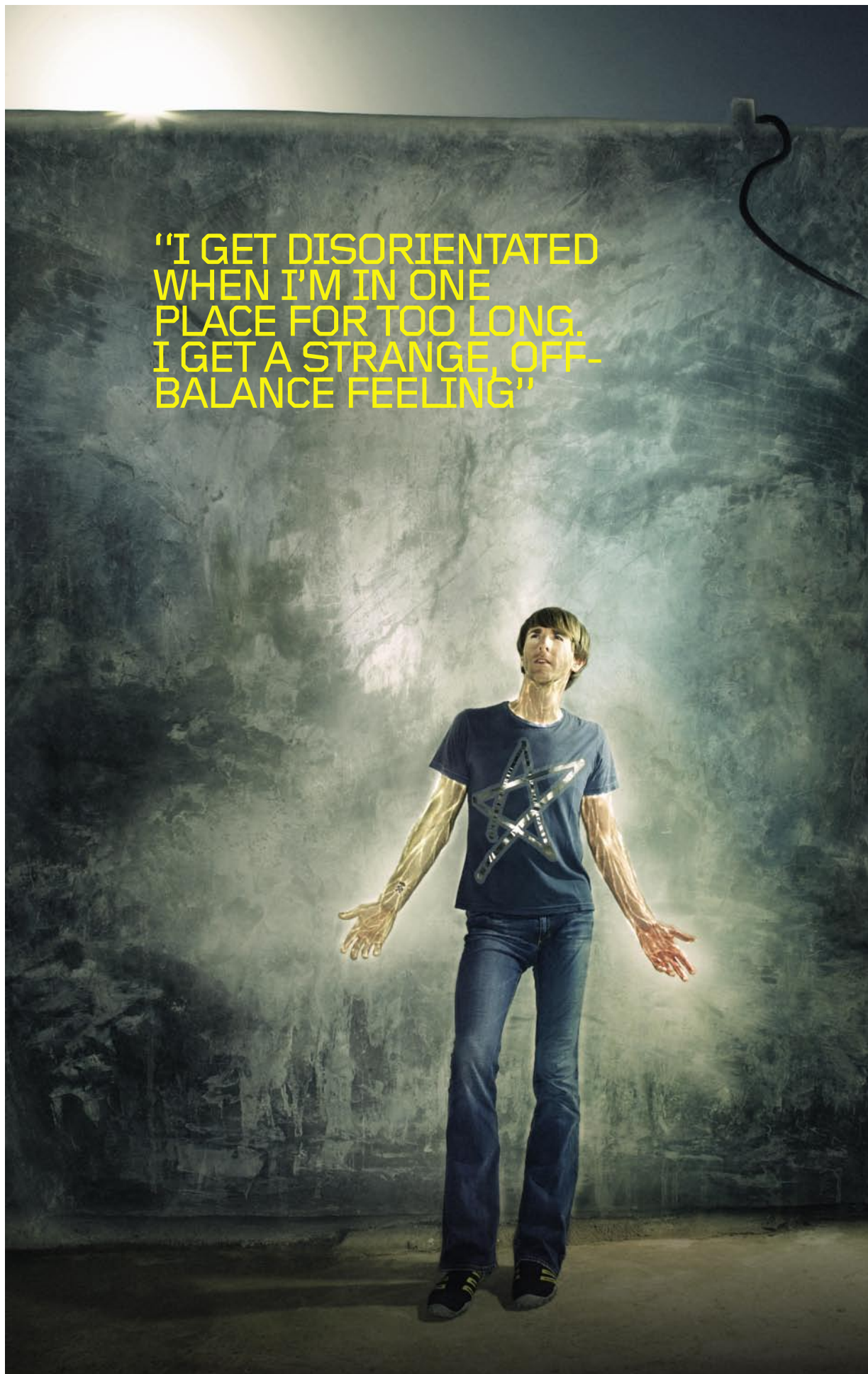
It must be weird constantly moving between time zones. Do you ever wake up disorientated, not knowing where you are?

I get disorientated when I'm in one place for too long. If I'm home for two weeks I get this strange, off-balance feeling that everything should change.

Thanks to low-cost airlines the ravers must be catching up!

Definitely. You're now experiencing what we've been doing for 15 years. The advent of low-cost airlines, the creation of the EU and the Euro – all these things have made clubland explode again. Quite often these days I'll do a series of gigs in different countries and see the same people at each one. Now it's cheaper to go to Berlin for a night without a hotel than it is to travel nationally and drink beer all night. And thanks to social networking there's more connectivity between people. They're more open to different ideas, and that's opening up new

"I GET DISORIENTATED WHEN I'M IN ONE PLACE FOR TOO LONG. I GET A STRANGE, OFF-BALANCE FEELING"



musical and artistic ways of thinking. **You're one of the first DJs to actually do something about global warming. When did the threat start to hit home?**

DJs are racking up more air miles than any other musicians. I started looking out at these beautiful sunsets while taking off from São Paulo or wherever, and thinking, 'This is amazing, but is my enjoyment of this moment going to take away this possible moment for my son?'

So how are you making a difference?

The first idea was offsetting my carbon footprint. It was easy to calculate how many miles I was flying and by extension how much CO₂ I was putting into the atmosphere. We found a carbon offsetting company based in Berlin who calculate how much carbon you produce by flying or driving, and from whom you can buy an offset. The money then goes to environmentally conscious projects around the world. DJs make good livings, and if we can't put a little bit of that back then perhaps we don't deserve to live the lavish lifestyles that some of us enjoy.

But will it really help?

A colleague of mine argued that it's not going to make a difference, so why bother? That's fucking bullshit. The worst thing that could happen is that OK, maybe it doesn't make much of a difference. But at least I've tried.

You've been the midwife at the birth of both Final Scratch [software that allows you to use your laptop to mix records] and Beatport. What's next?

The Pacemaker is a whole new way for kids to become excited about music. This is something you put in your pocket and when you're at school in the playground you can pull it out and start mixing tracks.

Does it scare you that a whole generation of kids are growing up not knowing what vinyl is?

For me I'll always have a fascination with records because I grew up with them, but do I *need* them? Not really. Not only do they take up way too much space, they're technically limiting and environmentally unfriendly. We're moving to a point where vinyl will be a limited specialised market for people who choose to collect records as pieces of art.

Many DJs like your close friends Zip and Ricardo Villalobos argue that vinyl is far superior...

You could choose to sell vinyl to that small, non-expanding market, close your eyes to what's happening, let everyone copy your music and just be cynical about it. Or you can choose to find a way to appease both of those things. The quality of digital is as good if not better than vinyl. Music begins life as a digital WAV file before it is mastered and turned into vinyl. But as a performer I have to learn new tools and ways of thinking in order to move forward in my art, so these arguments



"DJS MAKE GOOD LIVINGS. IF WE CAN'T PUT A LITTLE BIT BACK THEN PERHAPS WE DON'T DESERVE THEM"

are irrelevant for me.

So is digital technology making music better?

Technology is democratising music and allowing more people than ever to enjoy what we do. I don't want to explain to a kid in Ecuador why my song isn't available on the internet if it's only available on vinyl. I want him to hear my song, get into what we're doing and maybe that might send him on a new direction in his life.

Now that digital music has taken sound experience close to perfection, can it get any better?

The next step for clubs is to build immersive sound environments. Instead of four stacks of speakers they'll use, perhaps, 36 micro-speakers to spread the sound around you. This opens lots of possibilities. Now music performance is so loop-based, imagine if you could make one side of the room experience something slightly different from what people on the other side are hearing.

How is technology changing the art of DJing?

I'm a little bit bored by only being able to manipulate things in a record paradigm. When we started Final Scratch [Richie was one of the first investors in the company] we saw it as a technology bridge from the analogue to the digital world, and I feel it's time to get off the bridge. A further step would be a larger, iPhone-style multi-touch screen. And further from that some kind of wireless hand interaction where you can manipulate different components of sound by changing the movement of your hands. It's hard to visualise, but imagine something like the screens they use in [sci-fi film] *Minority Report*. You're still using your body to interact with something digital, but through moving and pinching and grabbing you're able to go deeper into the possibilities of how you work it. Technology can only work for a performer if it's visually interesting for

a crowd to watch.

MySpace and Facebook have changed how we make friends and plan our social lives. What's next for social networking?

I know people working on internet sites that will one day be to music what YouTube is to video. For our scene a really good social network based upon music could be amazing. The next step could also be social networks merging with phones and next-generation GPS systems to create a device that can tell you which of your friends are nearby, and what people in a club you're in have similar interests.

Will downloading kill music?

Last year Minus wrote our biggest royalty cheques ever because of digital sales. If people can buy stuff digitally at a good price they generally will. People don't want to rip other people off as long as they don't feel they're getting ripped off themselves. To do this properly you need to be able to track what's happening with a record and bring people into an on-demand service. Why own 100 records when you can have anything you want, whenever you want? There's a company called Sound Cloud looking at sharing music on a global scale. But you could take things even further. Right now an MP3's tags can tell you basic information about a track like its name or artist. But what if you could encode more than that? You could break each track down into its individual loops and elements, and each of these elements and loops would be encoded with information about what influenced them or who made them. Then you could start to build a way of tracing how a track came to be. It would work like a genetic code so that in ten years' time you could trace a track's family tree, looking at where it came from and the software or machines that created it.

So are you saying we should get rid of ownership of music?

I'd like to get to a place where I don't even have to carry a computer or a mechanical storage device for music. I don't care if I have some physical object that contains these non physical assets, I'd like all my music stored somewhere and to be able bring that list down whenever I need it. So imagine if you had this cloud where all these songs were stored and encoded and you could pluck them down in real time during a performance? But what if you want to get deeper and you want to have just the high hats from a track and map them over the sound from another song playing. This kind of interactivity is where I want to get to. Getting down to the molecular level of songs. That would be amazing. ☺

The new Minus EP 'Expansion Contraction' (including a new Plastikman track) is out now