



# Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race

*Arun Saldanha*

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"*Psychedelic White* is one of the most innovative, refreshingly different analyses of race I have read in the last decade." —Elizabeth Grosz, author of *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*

The village of Anjuna, located in the coastal Indian state of Goa, has been one of the premier destinations on the global rave scene for nearly two decades. The birthplace of Goa trance, the most psychedelic variety of electronic dance music, Anjuna first attracted adventurous Westerners in the 1970s who were drawn there by its tropical beaches, tolerant locals, and readily available drugs. Today, rave tourists travel to Goa to take part in round-the-clock dance parties and lose themselves in the crowds, the music, and the drugs. But do they really escape where they come from and who they are?

A rich and theoretically sophisticated ethnography, *Psychedelic White* explains how race plays out in Goa's white counterculture and grapples with how to make sense of racism when it is not supposed to be there. Goa is a site of particularly revealing forms of interracial collision, and contrary to author Arun Saldanha's expectations that the nature of rave would create an inclusive atmosphere, he repeatedly witnessed stark segregation between white and Indian tourists. He came to understand race in its creative dimension as a shifting and fuzzy assemblage of practices, environments, sounds, and substances—dance skills, sunlight, conversation, cannabis, and tea. In doing so, his work shows how the rave scene in Goa harbors conflicting tendencies regarding race. The complicated intersection of cultures and phenotypes, Saldanha asserts, helps to consolidate whiteness. Race emerges not through rigid boundaries but rather through what he terms *viscosity*, the degree to which bodies gather together for pleasure and self-transformation.

Challenging the prevailing conception of racial difference as a purely social construction and offering building on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Psychedelic White* presents nothing less than a new materialist approach to race.

Arun Saldanha is assistant professor of geography at the University of Minnesota.

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