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“I certify that this piece of work is entirely my/our own and that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of others is duly acknowledged.”

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FIREWORKS
AND
COBBLESTONES
Screenshot from *They Call it Acid*, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film
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The text you are about to read addresses the architecture of dance culture. The architecture of dance culture is a polyhedral phenomenon that, by its nature, escapes a synthetic definition. The following text will not provide you with an analysis of a historical case in order to extract a conclusion. It is not going to interpose a specific lens through which to look back at it; but it will just add another layer of information to the existent facts. The architecture of dance culture has been constructed from the amplitude of sensual experience rather than from the concreteness of ideas; it can hardly be reduced to a verbal description and in consequence, it cannot be directly defined. Henceforth, multiple interconnected narratives will relate the material expressions of dance culture with the cultural context(s) in which it developed. The aim is not to define it but to expand its reality. It is not the intention of the text to conceal it in a closed historical episode, but to open the door again to the problems it carried. It was a phenomenon forged in popular culture, which could be said never existed in a pure form, but rather was manifested in numerous impure declensions. Its multiple expressions give an account of its magnitude; its importance, though, cannot be measured as far as “importance” as a concept implies a logocentric discourse of which dance culture architecture does not participate. You will find four chapters: Eroticism, Flash versus Photography, Ecology and Gratuity. Despite having points of connection, each chapter addresses the phenomenon from a different perspective: its philosophical background, its social construction, its material expressions and its political implications. The reader is given the possibility to freely relate different aspects of dance culture architecture addressed in the chapters, enabling her to construct its own narrative. The chapters could be read in any order.
Good architecture must be conceived, erected and burned in vain. The greatest architecture of all is the fireworks': it perfectly shows the gratuitous consumption of pleasure.

Eroticism
Suicide Centre states the title of a student’s drawing preserved in the Architectural Association archive. The design shows a building organised around an ascending pilgrimage up through 8 levels to reach a platform on the top. From there, you are supposed to jump into the void. The facial expression of the dying is filmed and screened. It is an architecture to enact the ultimate transgression: that of dying. Suicide means to cross a border, to enter a state from which you might never return. Although, suicide can also be read as the ultimate erotic act. The Suicide Centre in Covent Garden, designed by Murray John in the mid-70s, plays with the recurrent fantasy of death, ironically institutionalising a transgressive practice in the same manner that London’s metropolitan authorities institutionalised certain leisure activities through community centres. The exaltation of the extreme experience of death points to the frontiers of human behaviour while announcing its opposite state: the persistence of life. In the Suicide Centre you face death but you might eventually be caught by a net before hitting the ground.

Erotization exists because of the reconciliation of apparent opposites¹

Death is the obverse of sexual reproduction; and these two are the domains to which the fundamental prohibitions of mankind are imposed. Two apparently opposite and mutually excluding entities that in fact constitute a sole ethos. To address death is to implicitly talk about sex, Bataille would affirm. At the key moment when life moves toward death, there can

no longer be reproduction but only sex; since eroticism implies sex without reproduction, the transit from life to death is an erotic act.

Bataille had in the 1930s “entertained the possibility of creating a neo-pagan society, organized around sacred rituals of death and human sacrifice (…) but then the World War II broke out, spoiling the point of the gesture.” In the need to canalise his experiences in the 50s, he published the philosophical text *Eroticism* where he connects the ideas of God, sex and death to elaborate a theory around the concept of transgression as a means to reach a superior state of consciousness. *Eroticism*, intrigued philosophers like Michel Foucault but also the architect and theoretician Bernard Tschumi. In 1962 the text was published in Britain, but it was in the 70s, around the time John was designing the *Suicide Centre*, when the text would meet the interests of the architect. A bold young Tschumi would say: “The moment of architecture is that moment when architecture is life and death at the same time.”

Tschumi’s *moment of architecture* is a metaphor to represent the idea of complementary opposites. It is a way to express which would be the ideal state of architecture; the place where architecture can happen. For Tschumi, architecture must be somewhere in-between two lands. The reconciliation of opposites he is talking about is between the sensual experience and the intellectual construct. He would say architecture can be “the ultimate erotic object” if it is “brought to the level of excess” that reveals “both the traces of history and its own immediate experiential truth.” The idea of architecture as resulting from the encounter between intellectual and sensual experience – from the erotic tension between two apparently irreconcilable statuses – was exposed in the short text *Architecture and Transgression* published in 1976 while he was teaching in the Architectural Association. The influence of Bataille in the thought of Tschumi was evident. The idea that architecture had been polarised and needed to reconstruct its ethos through the reconciliation of its mental and sensual expressions, was parallel to the vision on death and sex offered by Bataille. To “look death in the face,” Bataille would say, was “to perceive in death the pathway into unknowable and incomprehensible continuity.”

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3 *Eroticism* was originally published in French in 1957 by Editions de Minuit, Paris, France; and later originally published in English in 1962 by Calder & Boyars Ltd., London.


5 Ibid, p.71

6 Bataille, op.cit., p.23
had to be found in architecture, suggested Tschumi. The continuity sought by Bataille, could be translated as completeness: a fulfilling sensation gained when facing the void.

Both Bataille and Tschumi where proposing to experiment with a “negative experience.” Either through sex or through architecture the objective was to reach a state where the unconscious and unthinkable aspects of the existence would spring. A negative experience that would be turned into something positive: through hate and aggression architecture would merge materiality and concept. Bataille saw a uniquely creative way to grapple this state in eroticism taken to its most extreme limits in sado-masochist practices. On other hand, Tschumi would draw a parallel between sado-masochism and the negation of architecture itself:

Architecture seems to survive in its erotic capacity only whenever it negates itself, where it transcends its paradoxical nature by negating the form that society expects of it. In other words, it is not a matter of destruction or avant-garde subversion but of transgression.\(^7\)

Transgression would be the means to set a new kind of architectural ethos for Tschumi and the key to a new state of consciousness for Bataille. Foucault, in an article in homage to Bataille after his death would address the possibilities of transgression this way:

Transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more scintillating.\(^9\)

Transgression was a door to an unmediated and profound contact with reality; a kind of experience which hadn’t a space of its own within traditional systems of representation and meaning:

Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory,

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\(^7\) The "negative experience" was understood by Foucault and Bataille as instrument to reach otherwise unconscious and unthinkable aspects of life. Hate, violence or pain in its more pure and profound expressions could be transformed into something positive leading to superior state of consciousness not far from the idea of God.

\(^8\) Tschumi, op. cit., p.78

even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses.\textsuperscript{10}

Transgression happens on the infinitely narrow space defined by the line that separates two worlds. The division line, though, has to be traversable in order to be transgressed. From life to death, from the intellectual to the sensual, regardless of the poles, the border between them has to be penetrable. If it were uncrossable, the limit as such would not exist. Transgression comes out of the possibility of crossing from one side to the other – merging one substance with the other – of two opposite states. The limit has to exist; it cannot be merely a shadow or an illusion if it has to produce the friction that we will call eroticism. It is in the same act of crossing, out of the pressure produced by the confluence of two realities, where transgression happens. As Foucault puts it:

Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another, nor does it achieve its purpose through mockery or by upsetting the solidity of foundations; it does not transform the other side of the mirror, beyond an invisible and uncrossable line, into a glittering expanse. (...) Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time. But correspondingly this affirmation contains nothing positive: no content can bind it, since, by definition, no limit can possibly restrict it. Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division; but only insofar as division is not understood to mean a cutting gesture, or the establishment of a separation or the measuring of a distance, only retaining that in which may designate the existence of difference.\textsuperscript{11}

The “affirmation of division” is in itself the erotic act. Division has not to be understood as an equivalent of contradiction. Transgression is built out of the coalescence of two worlds. Eroticism is the experiential side of transgression, which is not sustained over contradiction. Contradiction would be the opposition of two entities that never converge, that preserve their relative positions in an eternal unresolved fight. In fact, contradiction is in the base of the language of dialectics, precisely the form of thought transgression is challenging. Transgression offers us a new space, a new reality, which emerges from the manipulation of the limit between the two opposites. What language could the “philosophy of eroticism” – as Foucault named it – adopt then? Foucault would say that the language capable of framing

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid, p.33
\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p.35
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this new reality is yet to come; “no established discourse can supply its model, its foundation, or even the riches of its vocabulary.”¹² What would be then the natural space that this form of thought could possess? The sado-masochist philosophers left these questions without answer – Foucault even suggested it to be an already ruined project – but Tschumi didn’t concede. He distilled the philosophy of eroticism to adapt it to architecture in a pragmatic, slightly disappointing version:

Whether through literal or phenomenal transgression, architecture is seen here as the momentary and sacrilegious convergence of real space and ideal space. Limits remain, for transgression does not mean the methodical destruction of any code or rule that concerns space or architecture. On the contrary, it introduces new articulations between inside and outside, between concept and experience. Very simply it means overcoming unacceptable prevalences.¹³

Tschumi understood transgression as an instrument capable to make two exclusive experiences coalesce to offer a “the greatest architecture.” It was a vision of architecture as an autonomous entity; the context in which it existed was never mentioned. The necessity he felt for unifying the real space and the ideal space – in other words, the sensual experience and the intellectual experience of architecture – made him neglect the possibilities the philosophy of eroticism offered also to rethink the social dimension of architecture. On the other hand though, the philosopher and social critic Herbert Marcuse was offering a social approach to eroticism. Tschumi was writing around the idea of transgression in late 70’s, a time when the British welfare state had entered a prolonged crisis. In England there was a widespread disillusionment amongst working class people with the Labour Party and Parliamentary politics in general. The economy was faltering and people struggled to find a job or adequate housing. Society started to realise that post-war policies, aimed at progressive improvement of social and economic status, would not last forever. For the very first time it was evident that consumerism was not going to provide happiness. Traditional well-established communities were fading at the very same time that industrial disputes would flare up with shutdowns and picket line clashes. The topography of the city was mutating, leaving life-long inhabitants without references. The new economic and production forces were not only transforming the citizen’s communal environment but also disrupting their identity, once built in close relation to the urban topography. By the late 70’s there was a general sense of decadence to which the theories on eroticism of the German philosopher

¹² Ibid, p.40
¹³ Tschumi, op. cit., p.78
Herbert Marcuse could perfectly respond to. In his book *Eros and Civilization*\(^{14}\), written shortly after Bataille’s *Eroticism*, he gives an approach to the idea of eroticism that transforms the more abstract and philosophical position of Bataille into a psycho-social analysis that can easily be related with the specific circumstances that characterised the end of the 1970’s. Dan Graham explains Marcuse’s theories as the crossroads where “American ‘60s counterculture met the liberation politics of May ’68 Paris,”\(^{15}\) but is in late 70’s in England when social, economic and political changes hatched the English counterculture of the 80’s and recognised the worst post-modern panorama the students of May ’68 could have ever imagined. It is then, when Marcuse’s observations can probably be more rightly applied. The pull of death and the will of survival are related by Marcuse with the power structures of society; the energies of death and life instincts, he would say, have been historically manipulated as a means of social control and should be liberated of this destructive aspect. In order to assure the progress of society, a conflict arose between the lower and higher faculties of man; man’s sensuous faculties were repressively subjugated to reason and manipulated for social needs.

Reality, says Marcuse, ought to be liberated of the repression inflicted over human instinct in order to allow humanity to achieve a state of freedom and bliss. “Man is free when the ‘reality loses its seriousness’ and when its necessity ‘becomes light.’”\(^{16}\) He is talking about the inhumane reality of want and need; the reality of the man who has to fight for survival, to struggle to cover its basic biological needs. When “wants and needs [will be] satisfied without alienating labour,” man will be “free to ‘play’ with his faculties and potentialities and with those of nature”\(^{17}\) constructing thus a genuinely humane civilisation. By the end of the 70’s, despite the adversities urban life could carry, a great sector of British society – and specially those young generations born after the Second World War – was in a position of material comfort never seen in history before. Actually, at beginning of the 70s delocalisation of manufacturing industries would provoke a displacement of the working forces to the service sector or directly leave them unemployed. A large proportion of the population was thus liberated from manual labour. As far as the welfare state would provide the most disadvantaged with benefits, British reached a state – with all the nuances involved –where life “lost its seriousness,” or at least displaced its serious concerns beyond basic


\(^{16}\) Marcuse, op. cit., p.188

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.188
needs. Somehow, the utopian situation that Marcuse envisioned for an adult and freed society in the 50s was spontaneously happening due to the new economic organisation by the late 70’s. At that point, the idealistic and materialistic critiques of culture could meet:

Both agree that non repressive order of culture becomes possible only at the highest maturity of civilization, when all basic needs can be satisfied with a minimum expenditure of physical and mental energy in a minimum of time. (…) The realm of freedom is envisioned as lying beyond the realm of necessity: freedom is not within but outside the ‘struggle for existence’.

Man and nature would be fulfilled, leaving behind domination and exploitation and their inherent libidinal forces would finally be released. This is the moment when philosophy of eroticism meets the sociological approach of Marcuse:

Only with the entire body non-repressively re-eroticized, could alienating labour, grounded in the non-genital areas of the body, be overcome.

The sexual tyranny of the genitals would be replaced by a return to the childlike state of polymorphous perversity; then “aesthetic play would replace work.” Aesthetic in the sense of a perception that comes out of intuition rather than notion: a liberation of the senses giving society a firmer basis and greatly enhancing its potential. The aesthetic function would “harmonize feelings and affections with the ideas of reason”, using Schiller's words as quoted by Marcuse, deprive the “laws of reason of their moral compulsion” and “reconcile them with the interest of the senses.” Recalling the original meaning and function of aesthetic, Marcuse would write:

This task involves demonstration of the inner connection between pleasure, sensuousness, beauty, truth, art, and freedom – a connection revealed in the philosophical history of the term aesthetic. There the term aims at a realm which preserves the truth of the senses and reconciles, in the reality of freedom, the “lower” and the “higher” faculties of the man, sensuousness and intellect, pleasure and reason.

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18 Ibid, p.195
19 Ibid, p.172
20 Ibid, p.172
21 Ibid, p.172
Here we meet Tschumi again. The idea of architecture as the unification of the mental and sensual experience finds a parallel in the manner Marcuse understands aesthetics as the medium through which senses and intellect meet each other. Both bet for the recovery of the cognitive function of sensuousness after having been systematically minimized under the prominence of rationalism; for Marcuse was the key to a new social subject and for Tschumi the key to good architecture. For Marcuse the nature of sensuousness was “‘receptivity,’ cognition through being affected by given objects.” The aesthetic perception that accompanied the experience would always imply a certain kind of pleasure. Tschumi would add that eroticism is “not the excess of pleasure, but the pleasure of excess.” The pleasure of excess implied in the erotic experience, according to Bataille, has a transcendental dimension: “Eroticism can say what mysticism never could” he would affirm; furthermore, “God is nothing if not the surpassing of God in every sense of vulgar being, in that of horror or impurity; and ultimately in the sense of nothing” that pleasurable experience contains. This is just a note to understand the profundity that can be given to transgression, eroticism and the experience of pleasure. We will not deeply explore here the transcendental side of the philosophy of eroticism, nevertheless it is important to see were Tschumi and a theory around pleasure in architecture had its roots.

“Consciousness as well as voluptuousness” is required in the cognitive act lead by erotisation would say Tschumi. In the experience of voluptuousness, sensuality would generate universally valid principles for an objective order in the very same way that consciousness does. Eroticism would be a form of cognition as valid as reason. It would place sensual impulse and mental construct at the same level producing a friction that will dissolve the strange paradox Tschumi says to haunt architecture: “the impossibility of simultaneously questioning the nature of space and, at the same time, making or experiencing a real space.” What we called friction here is what Tschumi would name “the rotten point”:

In the paradox of architecture, the contradiction between architectural concept and sensual experience of space resolves itself at one point of tangency: the rotten point, the very point that taboos and culture have always rejected. This

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22 Ibid, p.176
23 Tschumi, op. cit., p.70
24 Foucault, op. cit., p.33
26 Tschumi, Architecture and Transgression, op. cit., p.66
metaphorical rot is where architecture lies. Rot bridges sensory pleasure and reason.\textsuperscript{27}

Modern architecture did fight against rot, decay and atrophy. It was a product of the tyranny of reason. Modernity has negated the sensual aspect of architecture. In its fear of showing the rotten matter of which architecture is constituted has only tolerated buildings that are as incorrupt as bones. Bataille would say of bones to be the only acceptable representation of death, as they are its only un-rotten trace. Tschumi, on the contrary, wants to plunge into rottenness. The erotic dimension of the rotten, the corruption inherent to its physicality needs to be incorporated into architecture. If we embrace the erotics of the rotten flesh, that will open up a new dimension for architecture. Using a quote from The Second Manifesto of André Breton he would suggest:

It appears that there is a certain point in the mind wherefrom life and death, reality and imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable cease to be perceived in a contradictory way.\textsuperscript{28}

To reach that “point in the mind,” sensual experience has to be activated and the mind needs to be freed from the constraints of reason. We need to accept the material condition of perception, where life and death are one. Architecture should, under the voice of Tschumi, be able to communicate the incommunicable, and that is why architecture should have “the same status, the same function, and the same meaning as eroticism.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Tschumi, op. cit., p.76

\textsuperscript{28} André Breton, The Second Manifesto, published in La Révolution Surréaliste issue 12, December 1929 (Paris: La Révolution Surréaliste, 1929)

\textsuperscript{29} Tschumi, op. cit., p.71
Sensuality has been known to overcome even the most rational of buildings.

Architecture is the ultimate erotic act. Carry it to excess and it will reveal both the traces of reason and the sensual experience of space. Simultaneously.

Photography versus Flash
Ackroydon State, Dancing in Club Room, 1955
Screenshot from They Call it Acid, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Here we have two images: Youngsters dancing in the colour picture could feasibly be the kids of the couples dancing in the black and white one. Between these two images, these two generations, there is only a gap of 30 years; the thirty years that transformed modern post-war Britain into a hedonist society rendered to leisure.

In the black and white picture, we see an image of a ball in the social club at Ackroydon Estate in South-West London. It is the mid-1950s and in an interior space were dozens of couples dancing in an orderly fashion. They are inside a rectangular white box rhythmically subdivided by the building’s supporting structure made of concrete girders and pillars. The lamps on the ceiling are equally distributed and the whole scene is dominated by an atmosphere of regularity, purity and cleanness. Nothing disturbs the sense of correctness; to the point of it being unthinkable that anything beyond the norm could occur in here. The same adjectives would be difficult to apply to the second picture. The colour image is a scene from an illegal party not far from London, where thousands of youngsters congregated in a large empty industrial warehouse 27 May 1989. Here we can see crowds of people mingled together forming an arbitrary amorphous mass. The structure of the building sheltering the crowd is hardly visible; the blinding light emanating from one of the extremes conquers the space and bathes the bodies that meld as if they were one. Nothing is predictable; nothing is imposed, yet is apparently self-regulated in a natural and fluid way. Where lies the key for such a radical transformation that produced these two extremely distant architectural experiences?

May 1968 has been used as a persistent sign of the change of paradigm the western world faced in the second half of the twentieth century. The economic and social system born from the industrial revolution went through a profound transformation impelled by new means of communication and exploded in a social
vindication unifying all society's semi-pariahs against consumerist society. Somehow though, it could be said that the claims of May 1968 were to a certain extent naïve and old fashioned in their forms. They were protesting against an order of things that would soon naturally give way to a more sophisticated and invisible distribution of power, and the weapons used to fight it were cobblestones. If we look at England it seems that those vindications wouldn't apply in the swinging 60s, but that was in the 70s when the economic and social conditions became harsh and the need for a certain kind of liberation would be felt. It was not a fight against the alienating forces of capitalism like in the 68; it was a question of identity and fight against the alienation implied in the problems of leisure time and consumption. The real turning point in England occurred a decade later in 1979. That year can be taken as a new sign of a paradigm shift, not only for England but for western society. The analysis of a constellation of local and global factors that took place in 1979 reveals the end of the decade to be a turning point for post-fordist society towards new dynamics of capitalism that would affect all spheres of society. The profound political, social and economic transformations that Britain was experiencing by the end of the decade would radically change modes of production and social structures. In consequence, the way the city was experienced also undergoes a profound transformation. The deindustrialization of the western world and a new notion of productivity based on communicative interchanges directly modified both the topography of the city and the status of architecture. New possibilities for architecture's material and social expressions would be essayed, if not in the academia or official sphere, in an informal, even illegal way.

The decade of the 70s was marked by growing disenchantment with social democracy, leading to Margaret Thatcher assuming the office of Prime Minister in 1979. Thatcher became a symbol used here to represent the shift from welfare or socially concerned policies to a neo-liberal conception of society and work. The turn of the political course was parallel to the displacement of production forces from manufactured goods to a non-tangible production based on information. New immaterial production strategies were to configure the factory of the Twenty-first Century, and also to exchange the relative status of work and leisure. 1979 is when the

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1 In 2011 was held the exhibition 1979, A Monument to Radical Instants, in La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona. Curated by Carles Guerra, it was an historical revision of 1979 suggesting the end of the decade of the 70s as a turning point for western capitalist societies and also for the whole globalized world. Revolutions in Nicaragua and Iran, the end of an intense political decade in Italy, the empowerment of Margaret Thatcher and an infinite list of minor events radically changed the social, cultural and economic western paradigm.
first Walkman by Sony\(^2\) is launched, when Jean-François Lyotard publishes *The Postmodern Condition*\(^3\), when Antonio Negri\(^4\) is imprisoned for his part in the Autonomy Movement, and when Foucault finishes dictating a series of lectures on biopolitics\(^5\) in the Collège de France. It is not a coincidence that it was at that moment when culture started to be used as a biopolitical weapon and cultural industries saw an unprecedented growth. A whole generation of youngsters born after the Second World War, which had grown up safeguarded by the welfare state, was, by the end of the 70s, facing unemployment and institutional disenchantment with enough money in their pockets – from benefits – to invest in culture consumption and leisure. A new social class had been constituted; that of the young. The changes in the education system consequent upon the 1944 Butler Act, and the creation of a market designed to absorb the relative increase in the spending power of the youth, were factors that contributed to the emergence of a generational consciousness after the young. Despite youth identity was still rooted in a generalised experience of class, it was manifested in ways which were different from, and in some cases openly antithetical to, traditional identity expressions. It was, in fact, through culture and leisure consumption – firstly in an informal subterranean way but by the 80s completely incorporated in the industrial mechanisms – that identity could be rebuild and certain resistance against capitalistic structures pursuit. *Subculture. The Meaning of Style*\(^6\) by Dick Hebdige, scholar at the Birmingham University’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, was also coincidentally published in 1979. From that point on the term “subculture” used to name the alternative cultural expressions of the 70s entered the wider non-academic lexicon carrying with it a consciousness of its cultural value, but also its market value.

Leisure in Britain would, over the course of 30 years, be displaced from state control to subcultural self-production and self-consumption. After the devastation of the

\(^2\) The model TPS-L2 by Sony was the first Walkman to be commercialized. Of this model and its latest versions Sony sold millions of units around the world. With this small device, for the very first time people could walk through the city while listening to music. The Walkman would provide new possibilities to the experience of the streets, architecture and the body within the city.

\(^3\) Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. James Strachey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). In this book Lyotard extends the definition of postmodernism as the aftermath of the modern industrial age when technology developed dynamically. He focus on the status of science, technology, and the arts, the significance of technocracy, and the way the flow of information and knowledge are controlled in the western world.

\(^4\) 7 April 1979 Antonio Negri – a Marxist philosopher and intellectual – is arrested being accused of various offences, between them, of being the intellectual author of the murder of Aldo Moro.

\(^5\) 10 January 1979 Michel Foucault dictated his first lecture on Biopolitics, a term and concept that would become widely influential in the following decades.

blitz, ordinary life had to be recomposed and that was taken as the opportunity to finally overcome the decaying Victorian city as a breeding ground for social misery and moral danger. Britain in the immediate post-war and up to the 60s was dominated by a reform spirit expressed through public patronage. As Richard Hornsey shrewdly depicted in his book *The Spiv and the Architect* a “new civic order” was proclaimed “that inextricably fused the aesthetic with the moral, establishing an empathic cultural agenda that continued to shape both official discourse and the popular media.” Along with the promotion of a revitalised and collective civic life, would raise the necessity to regulate the way citizens moved through and socialized within the built environment of the city. Hornsey again:

The type of remodeled space here being offered contained two important mechanisms through which a future of social order and community cohesion might be pursued. On one level, their functional accessible and open designs were understood by their architects to clearly express a legible set of civic virtues that would instill in the viewer the required sensibility of willful consensus. Yet, far less overtly, such sites were quietly being programmed with a more insidious form of strategic social management.8

In the case of London metropolitan area, two institutions would represent this aim to regenerate and reorganize urban life: The LCC – London City Council, created in 1889 and disappearing in 1965 – and the GLC – Greater London Council, created to replace the LCC in 1965, lasted for a couple of decades until Thatcher’s Government abolished it in 1985. Through schemes of “total planning”, these two institutions would intervene in the city in order to “fix paid labor, domesticity and recreational leisure within their own discrete locations, as distinct and manageable components of everyday life.”9 The pressure on the congested urban districts would be eased by a chain of new towns created around London, in the north and in Scotland. Commercial, industrial and domestic segregations were applied everywhere. Local and regional plans were “founded on a basic modular unit: the individual’s minimum ‘general living conditions’ - defined as a fixed quantity of essential ‘living space’ and ‘play space’ per

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8 Ibid, p.15
9 Ibid, p.48
The final objective was to create local interclass communities that would have in the geographic center of each district specific architectures for educational, health, commercial, spiritual, administrative and, also, recreational purposes. Of course, “leisure activities where not to be left to chance, but were to be already programmed,” and as Hornsey suggest “this was not just a question of organising space but of organizing time as well.”

By tacitly orchestrating the individual's daily practices and managing the conditions under which they ordinary lived, disordered activities and moments of dissent might effectively be precluded. (...) If social order was to be both established and maintained, citizens had to be reoriented away from the pernicious temptations of the unstable metropolis via the prescriptive inculcation of a more controlled – and controllable – form of metropolitan sensibility.

If up to the 70s leisure was subject to the spatial and time regulations imposed by the government, during that decade it was converted by subcultural movements in a progressively visible contestation weapon. A very obvious example could be punk movement, of which Hebdige would say:

In the gloomy, apocalyptic ambience of the late 1970s – with massive unemployment, with the ominous violence of the Notting Hill Carnival, Grunwick, Lewisham and Ladywood – it was fitting that the punks should present themselves as degenerates; as signs of the highly publicized decay which perfectly represented the atrophied condition of Great Britain.

As is depicted here punk was a way to face, and by pushing it to the extreme, redeem the problems Britain was facing during that time. It could be thought as a May of 68, extended over time; with the difference that their weapons where not cobblestones and barricades, but music, fashion, drugs and new architectural experiences. As Hebdige would point out, the “tensions between dominant and subordinate groups, can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture – in the styles

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10 Ibid, p.46
11 Ibid, p.48
12 Ibid, p.11
13 Hebdige, op. cit., p.87
made up of mundane objects."¹⁴ During the 70’s an increasing hostility towards minorities – ethnic, sexual, or otherwise – who appeared to question the normative values of “English” culture would make even more urgent to reformulate and intensify the idea of personal identity. In September 1982, Robert Elms would expose in The Face magazine:

Youth Culture now represents not a rebellion but a tradition or rather a series of traditions that date back to the advent of teenager and continue to grow along a compound continuum of action and reaction. Imagine a spiral that begins with a birth out of affluence and post-war liberation and moves through time propelled by its own mythology and its own contrariness and is affected by technology and whimsy and economics. It is cyclical, but the circle is never completed because it is also evolutionary, therefore patterns repeat but they are never quite the same.¹⁵

A series of different subcultures would have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century in England; from moods, to punk and new-romantics, all of them were constructed around what could be considerate superficial elements like fashion and popular music. In fact, since being an easily commercialised and distributed product, music would especially play a central role in order to construct and transmit the values that would define each subculture. Thus, leisure and leisure venues used to celebrate gigs or gatherings would become progressively important: nightclubs, discothèques, squads, etc. were very specific space-time manifestations participating of identity construction. A new topology of the city emerged; the new modes of use and administration of space that subculture would carry changed the manner architecture was experienced. From the beginning of the eighties, an upcoming movement also grounded on music, would unify many of those previous subculture movements in one. There was no more the need to rethink and reconstruct non-normative identities like in the 70s; the question now was how to naturalise them. Dance culture – not to say subculture, as some would point that subculture by the turn to the 70s was already history – would emerge in the early 80s in Britain to create a space and a time of inclusion. Consciously self-identified as a “sub-movement”, would contest to the precepts of modern urbanity and capitalism through specific leisure practices. Dance

¹⁴ Ibid, p.8
culture architectures appeared as “a fantasy of liberation; (...) a place where nobody is, but everyone belongs.”

The colour picture we saw at the beginning of the chapter shows dance culture architecture in action; a great amount of people is melted together as if a single pulsating body ruled by the rhythm of the music and the lights. The type of space-time experience which dance culture offered drastically transformed the materials, the tempos and the status of architecture as had been widely conceived. Post-war reconstruction programs and 60s imperative public commissions bringing developments of infrastructures, housing and public buildings – like leisure centres – followed the modern precepts of efficiency and decency and were inscribed within a classical idea of architecture. Modern architecture, which after 1951 Festival of Britain was popularly embraced becoming a symbol of a progressive country, would be the last expression of a classical tradition that conceived architecture as timeless, meaningful and true. In opposition to this belief, dance culture architecture was fashionable, meaningless, and false. In other words: the space-time experience of dance culture was not coming out of a perennial ideal of architecture like St. Paul’s Cathedral was; it was not representative as the Houses of the Parliament were; and was not constructed on the idea of sincerity like Leicester Engineering Faculty but on the idea of artificiality. Also, and from a material point of view, the spaces conditioned for dance where dynamic, ephemeral and shapeless and evidently opposed the static, tectonic and formal architectures that would define after war leisure and living spaces. Thus, the dance culture architecture of the eighties was conceptually and materially challenging the precepts that had been the base of architecture for centuries.

The opposite nature of modern architecture – or classical architecture – and dance culture architecture becomes evident through the examination of secondary materials surrounding them: both, project materials and register materials. The schools, houses, hospitals, dance halls, etc. of modernity were built after the project had been conceived through a detailed set of technical drawings that would define the design of each part. The shape of the building was clearly fixed – and was not to be changed. The materials, colours, textures were specified – and would remain this way until the inclemency of the passing time will eventually erase them. Conversely, architectural

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17 For a further insight on the subject see Peter Eisenman, The End of the Classical: the End of the Beginning, the End of the End, originally published in Perspecta, Vol. 21, (New Heaven, CT: Yale School of Architecture, 1984) p.154-173
devices for dance would generally have no plans and were not directly but indirectly built; a disposed set of technologies and a certain amount of bodies would virtually mount a very specific fleeting architecture. It is even more evident the ephemeral and shapeless nature of dance culture architecture in the amount and kind of registration materials it generated in comparison with modern architecture. The advent of photography, as the medium par excellence to register architectural works, could be said to run parallel to the development of modern architecture. Modern architecture used the photography and the camera both as a metaphor to construct its own meaning and as a very effective means for transmitting certain values. Modern architecture was the first architectural movement to be largely documented; a set of iconic images were produced – both using photography and drawing – through which the movement reaffirmed itself and made propaganda. Architectural history books and archives have preserved all the visual material that constitutes a fundamental part of the modern project, but we won’t find this kind of material surrounding dance culture architecture. The main reason for not having as much register materials is that it was technically unfeasible to represent dance culture architectural experiences with traditional means. The power of communication derived from the picture of The Post Office Tower in Central London (1956-62) - designed by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works - or an axonometric drawing of the Queen’s College (1966) by James Stirling, has no parallel in dance culture. These two are clear images of a stable architectural object with a defined shape; and two examples of how modern architecture used a very specific visual language that cannot be applied to dance culture. As we will see it afterwards, somehow dance culture refuses language itself. Very rarely, pictures of the dynamic space-time devices that constituted dance culture architecture can be found. The few ones that attempted to capture the essence of the architectural experience through photography completely missed its most important elements. Neither drawing nor photography can put down the richness of the changing lights, the energy of the pulsating bodies or the rhythm of the music, especially if the space is filled with artificial smoke. It might not be a coincidence neither that Sony launched videocassette recorders in the early 70s, which were then used in the 80s to record some the parties. Although they offer a much better register of those architectures, the intensity of the moment is still lost: flashing lights, lasers, temperature, bass vibrations, etc., cannot be retained. Time and movement though, at least, would be represented in a certain manner.

Ephemeral as they were, no other trace was left than the effect imprinted on those who participated in the parties and few recorded moving images of the moment.
Video recordings are important because they constitute the very few materials that proof the existence of those architectures. Video registrations, as opposed to photography, by having certain duration, manifest one of the key aspects of dance culture architecture: time. Those architectures had a finite duration that in most cases did not exceed several hours. The technological appliances were transported, mounted and designed to be switched on when the party started and to be switched off and dismantled as soon as it had finished. The architectural experience was definitely time dependant; not only because of the temporality of its existence but also because of the incorporation of continuous changes of atmosphere that could only be experienced through time. It was an experience totally opposed to the contemplation of the axonometric drawing of Stirling, and opposed too to the idea of a timeless ideal image of architecture. Time found a non-narrative development in dance culture; the experience of the party has no beginning and no end, but is constructed over a continuous mutating progression. It is all apotheoses. Dance culture is not a static image that can be preserved through time but the intensity of the fleeting flash.

The recorded moving images definitely help in the understanding of the unstable and mutable nature of those architectures, but when we attempt to break the video in still-frames, to extract a clear static image, the result is the loss of all apparent coherence. The static nature of the still-frame works as radiography; not showing the architecture as it was experienced in situ but showing its depths. The void, the sweetened and mingled bodies, the grotesque technological machines, the absolutely astonishing lights, the blinding smoke, etc., all these different elements hardly distinguishable in the moving video – and even less separately appreciable when being lively there – appear in the still frame. If with modern architecture the static picture showed an external iconic image, here shows the never visible technologies behind the experience. If we want to get a closer image of the real experience, time and movement need to be represented. In fact, movement would be another key element to understand dance culture architecture. It was not the first time architecture was interested in movement; after the war, British architects had paid an increased attention to movement and trajectory – in part, probably explicable because of the English planners’ celebration of the playfulness of picturesque tradition – but in that case, it was not separated from the interest in the planned environment as a tool for social manipulation. The kind of movement considered was that of the citizens within the city; to manipulate these movements the architect would still use static instruments: buildings, windows, streets, balconies, corridors, etc. Thought as instruments of representation and space distribution they would organise the life of the citizens and
make it more productive and morally high. In that sense, neither the objective nor the means with which the architects faced up to the idea of movement after the war, corresponds to the way it was incorporated in dance culture architecture. An important example and perhaps the most paradigmatic one of the use of dynamic devices by post-war architecture is the automated traffic light. It was introduced onto London’s streets in the 30s, as a technology that with its rhythmic continuous shifting lights aims to regulate both the traffic of vehicles and pedestrians. Far from the purpose lights are used for in dance culture’s architecture, traffic lights would – in an impersonal and equitable manner – express the functionalist ambitions of spatial management within the post-war city. It was not until the 70s when the use of dynamic lights and more generally movement shifted from being a regulatory instrument, to being a constituent part of architecture.

Not only do changing lights express movement in dance culture architecture, but also the vibrating particles through which music was propagated, the bodies dancing freely, the expanding smoke and, perhaps being it its most important aspect, movement constituted an intrinsic quality of an architecture constituted of constant atmospheric changes. Because of the constant evolution of the configuration of light, temperature, sound, smoke and moving bodies, the definition of its shape is barely possible; it reveals an amorphous architecture. If in a modern building space was one of its defining entities, on the dance floor space was just a secondary element. The experience was not made up of time and space but of time and effects. There was no defined space; neither an enclosed room nor a fluid clearness. Dance culture architecture created an experience relying on the participating bodies more than in the exteriority of the spaces that sheltered them. Instead of being the body inscribed in a defined space, a vast undefined space was subscribed in the mind of the dancer. If we had to describe the shape of that architecture we would say it to be an amorphous mass of bodies of changing color rhythmically pulsating like a heart. But that would be an external visual description, which is to say a classical way of registering architecture. If we compare the modern experience with the dance culture experience, we will see that in the modern city the relation of architecture with the body happens on the exteriority and is articulated through the eye and the visual. Le Corbusier would even compare the fenêtre en longeur with a diaphragm, and by extension the building to a camera that frames the surroundings converting the scene of the landscape in a “categorical view”\(^\text{18}\). That would be exactly the opposite way in which the gaze is

articulated in dance culture’s architecture: if the modern building is a categorising tool directing the glance towards the outside, dance culture’s architecture turns the eye inwards to contemplate a phenomenon that negates categorisation. The controlling glance is obliterated in the dance floor, in fact, there is no glance at all as it is completely blocked by the artificial smoke. It is not the eye and reason who rules the experience in dance culture architecture but the whole body and affection.
Ben Kelly, The Haçienda.
RIP Club, London. Early-80’s.
Screenshot from They Call it Acid, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Spectrum party, late-80s.
Screenshot from They Call it Acid, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Ecology
The rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.¹

The impression that the magnificent, modern, metropolis would project by the dawn of the twentieth century was depicted well by the words of Georg Simmel. The relationship between the man and the city was understood here as a relationship with a unique direction between an emitter and a recipient. "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality" would consist in the "intensification of nervous stimulation"² produced by the scintillating effervescence of the city. The modern metropolis offered – beyond the regulative and hygienic contribution of modern architecture – a spectacle of light and movement produced by the introduction of electric light and the accumulation of persons and goods that had to be transported from one place to another. A parallel can be found between the effect the modern urban phenomenon had on the citizen and the type of architectural experience produced in dance culture. On the dance floor, there is also an intensification of nervous stimulation provoked by an always changing environment, filled with light, smoke, sound and bodies, but with a very fundamental difference: In the modern metropolis the role of the citizen – or the flâneur – observing the hustle and bustle is that of spectator, while on the dance floor everybody is a conscious actor participating in the spectacle. The electric lights illuminating modern towers, train stations and commercial scenography, powered by the electric stations that flourished with

² Ibid, pp.409-424
industrialisation, in the 70s on the dance floor, bathe the spectator converting him in the protagonist. The dancer would be at the very same time emitter and recipient. The alienating functionalist spectacle that the modern city would impose would be overturned on the dance floor in favour of more existential connection between habitat and inhabitant.

Dance culture environmental experiences, which started in the discotheque of the 70s transformed the relationship between the urban inhabitant and architecture. Nigel Coates, a disciple of Bernard Tschumi in the Architectural Association, exclaimed in an article published in 1983 in NATO Magazine

London may be the same old buildings but it is very different to live in.

NATO became the official platform for a group of architects related with the Architectural Association that had a new attitude towards architecture. The magazine offered an expanded view on architecture embracing other previously completely dismissed disciplines like fashion and music. When it was launched in the early 80s, London was still caught in the undertow of the urban crisis suffered during the 70s. It was a city in decline but full of opportunities. Many of the industries that used to bring productive and commercial activity to British cities had, by late 70s, been dismantled, displaced to specific urban areas or even relocated to other countries. Abandoned buildings were common inside the city; even central areas became squatting hot spots. By that time, key figures of subculture movements like Boy George and Marilyn were living in occupied houses next to the Scala Cinema, a very central London venue in Goodge Street. Coates would depict the situation in the following way:

Here, on the one hand, we watch the demise of great industries leaving decay and barren landscapes and, on the other, the music-based lifestyle of Britain’s youth signalling far-reaching changes in aspiration, in terms of identity culture and even economy. This is not to say that either broken buildings or youth culture can supply architecture with new

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3 NATO Magazine was published by the collective NATO – which included Nigel Coates – in association with the Architectural Association. Three issues of the magazine were launched in total between 1983 and 1984. NATO would describe the labor and intention of the collective with the following words published in the first issue of the magazine: “Prompted by views and vehicles on an apparently separate course from the mainstream of architecture, NATO was born in July 1983. Its pursuance of the current life style as the sustaining parallel to the design of cities forms the basis of its spirit of optimism. As an elastic organization its activity can vary from practice to product, from building to drawing, from vision to video, from talk to magazine... hence to take what began in the AA one step further.”

values or tools. Rather, my argument is that they stem from the same city ground. They are concurrent and mutually supporting even if each of them engages with time in quite different ways.\(^5\)

Despite Coates seems not to trust the possibility of music-based life-style having a profound influence on architecture, he recognizes three key elements constituting dance culture architecture: music, time, and then the barren landscape of industries on decay which would be the necessary background infrastructure for dance culture architecture to happen. The small electronic gadgets on which dance culture architecture was built — loudspeakers, spotlights, strobe lights, mirror balls, smoke machines, etc. — wouldn’t be enough to guarantee an artificial atmosphere. The abandoned old factory was the perfect place to lay out all the technological devices protected from the rain, and often a space big enough to shelter an incredibly great amount of people. In the eighties the occupation of factories by thousands of people for parties was regularly major front page news. Despite this, Coates would complain that people still preferred “buildings to be well-behaved and to fit in, even though this hardly matches tastes in music, films, nightclubs — which tend to be noisier more outgoing.”\(^6\) The problem probably was that Coates was still thinking of architecture as being a tectonic device, but the fact was that in the frenzy of the dance floor the protective structure that separated the dancer from the inclemency of the weather was nothing more than a backdrop.

The relationship between pre-existing industrial structures, electronic gadgets and the body is well illustrated in a photogram of the film *Hail the New Puritan*, starring the dancer and choreographer Michael Clark. The film depicts a day in his life; starting with a fanciful dream and ending on the dance floor. It shows the living / working / partying space of Michael Clark. In one of the scenes we see him dancing in the middle of a wide warehouse. In the background rests the functional building offering a vast uninterrupted space; in the foreground appear diverse electronic devices. In between these two planes the body of the dancer moves freely in the space. The building isn’t perceived anymore as an imposing instrument that segregates and classifies. Now, it offers a wide space open to multiple possibilities. The abandoned industries and warehouses offered a “generic space” capable of accommodating any kind of

\(^5\) Ibid, p.9


\(^7\) Charles Atlas (dir.), Michael Clark (Choreo.), *Hail the New Puritan*. United Kingdom 1984. Film.
productive activity, even those not based on manual labour. The void contained in their interior could be the dwelling of continuously changing different activities. Coates says:

New spirit wired-up says “not another concrete Mansard, change the angle.” Most architects seem only to fix on square footage and marble curtain walls. No wonder we’d rather live in old factories.8

But they were not only living there, but working, socializing and partying. Factory Records, a Manchester based independent record label started in 1978, would represent the re-appropriation of post-industrial spaces to convert them in places for production and diffusion. The record label also had The Haçienda in Manchester, a club occupying a former yachting showroom. The space designed by the architect Ben Kelly used every day material to maximum effect and became an emblem of re-appropriation. In London many clubs, like the Cha Chas in Hungerford Lane, were occupying industrial type of spaces, and artists and night stars like Derek Jarman and Andrew Logan were working and living in big abandoned industrial complexes like Butler’s Wharf. This nineteen century building, currently housing luxury flats and restaurants, was once a complex reputed for being the largest tea warehouse in the world. In the mid-70s though, an artistic community settled there converting it in a hot spot within subculture scene. The building became an experiment of what would be the factory of the twenty-first century; a place for production of immaterial goods based on social relations and non-physical labour. Butler’s Wharf hosted parties and gigs; in 1976, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren celebrated there the Valentine’s Ball which brought to media attention the punk band Sex Pistols. The only handicap was that all those activities were, in fact, illegal. It was at mid-80s when the law was changed to permit a space take in different activities at the same time, but by the turn of the 70s it was illegal to work, live and party in the same space. Despite the legal impediments, a new architectonic culture arose from those illegal experiments. The new modes of dwelling and using existing buildings would inform the way dance culture would find its own space. As Coates greedily said, factories would become “an automatic undercurrent, with cogs free to turn crowds rather than chains.”9 But it didn’t lasted for long, soon real state speculative activities would put as much pressure on those new desirable spaces as to make nearly impossible to find one available by the end of the eighties. Violent acts would also be commonly perpetrated to oblige the dwellers to abandon factories and warehouses in order to refurbish them later. In the

8 Coates, op. cit., p.2

9 Coates, op. cit., p.2
case of Butler’s Warf a provoked fire pushed all its occupants to leave the building in 1979.

The post-industrial buildings were there, and were to be used, but were not the protagonists of the scene. The real protagonist was the crowd. People would be a new material for architecture and the key to the renovation of urban experience. Malcolm McLaren, a key figure of the British music and fashion scene in late 70s would say:

You keep walking down those streets and they never bloody change! It’s been the same old streets for the last five hundred years. It makes you put everything in your visual appearance, that’s the only way you can step out of your own environment. You have to wear a skirt if you are a boy, you have to wear a head-dress, you gotta [sic] look loud!10

In a moment when the resources to build were scarce, other means had to be found to pursue the constant changes and redefinitions that characterise the city. In the period compressed between the emergence of social relations as productive machinery in the 70s and its total incorporation in the capitalistic market by the mid-80s, is when technologies around the body become central. Fashion was one of these technologies: “in a city of this density what really matters is how bright your shirt is and then the haircut.”11 Urban life style, ruled by increasingly faster patterns of consumption, marked the rhythm of the city. Architecture, as traditionally understood, could not get adapted to the permanent changes imposed by the vogue. Architecture tempos – of production but also its “ideal time” – were not fast enough to provide the citizen with the continuous stimuli that music and fashion would offer; at least, not with its traditional means. Street culture was riding the pulse of the city. Despite being an ephemeral and continuously evolving phenomenon it was manifested in a fixed urban network: news-stands, street-corners, pubs, shops, and clubs in discarded buildings were its topological symptoms. The difference lived in the faster evolution they had in comparison to ordinary institutions. Of all of them, the dance club was the spatial manifestation that really condensate, from an architectural point of view, the pulse of the new driving forces of the city. Thatcher’s government, who rapidly identified the economic potential of some of those activities, would push to industrialize them. Of course, at the very same time that they were incorporated into the market and became mainstream, their value as cultural manifestations would decay in favour of its commercial value. In 1983 the

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10 Malcom McLaren as quoted by Nigel Coates in Ghetto & Globe, op.cit., p.9

British Fashion Council (BFC) was created and Margaret Thatcher would, from 1979 to 1990, host in Downing Street multiple receptions for the sector. She summarised the importance fashion had for Britain by declaring: “Fashion is important because it raises the quality of life when people take the trouble to dress well and also provides employment for many, many people.”¹² Fashion, though, was not the only creative expression that the capitalistic market was about to swallow. Music was also going to be converted in a wealthy industry. If it first happened with rock, a decade later, formerly subcultural manifestations like punk, new-age, electro-pop, etc. became totally commercial and consumer-exploitative musical forms. What we propose here though is to look back at the very short period compressed between the emergence of a subcultural movement and the moment it is both eradicated and swallowed by the capitalistic and institutional powers. In the case of dance music culture, this would happen in the decade compressed between late 70s and late 80s. It was the moment when the body would become the recipient of all kind of technologies to stimulate the senses; and in the case of dance culture this would happen still beyond commercial interests.

The 70’s was the decade when all kind of small-scale electric devices were developed. Little mechanisms ready to be consumed reached all the spaces of everyday life: word processors in the office, time-tills in the bank, videos at home, Walkman in the streets and laser lights in the discotheque. What was new with all these technological gadgets was its scale; it challenged traditional architecture precepts. From the 60s, architecture had embraced technology not only incorporating it in terms of functional advances but also in its aesthetic discourse. In *A History of English Architecture*¹³, published in 1979 a passage would point out that historically the possibilities of technology were neglected, but that was in the 60s when the mechanical servicing found explicit expression. That would become known as the architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment championed by the critic Reyner Banham. A beautiful example of that special sensibility towards building installations is the 1972 unrealised *Gloria* project by Alex Marshall. Preserved in the Architectural Association Archive, a great amount of the project’s documentation is devoted to the mechanical servicing that would provide an adequate atmosphere to the restaurants, saunas, dance floors, and other spaces for leisure and socialisation that contained the “pleasure centre” *Gloria*.

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Already existed by then a preoccupation for giving the body a completely artificial environment, but the technologies that would make it possible were still treated as traditional compositional elements of the building. Despite offering a surrounding atmosphere, the building was still an object to be regarded more than architecture to be felt. The climax of the techno-aesthetics was reached in Britain with the South Bank Arts Centre (1963-68), designed by a special L.C.C. architectural team led by Norman Engelback, including the Archigram propagandists for technological expressionism, Ron Herron, Warren Chalk and Dennis Crompton. Opposing that attitude, as Paul Virilio would point, in the 70s there was a growing obsession to miniaturise the technological devices. The scale, though, was not the only change confronting technology. If in the 60s a building like the Pompidou Centre in Paris, had given to high-tech architecture the same representative status than the Parthenon or the Ville Savoye had hold for years, in the 70s technology would be relegated by the body. As if tracing back the path to the anthropocentrism of Michel Angelo, the body would occupy a central position in the architectural experiments of dance culture. Although, this time, it was not the measure through which to understand the world but seen as the container of the world itself.

To understand the idea of the body that informs dance culture architecture we need to look back to the social changes carried by the post-war policies. After the war, and under the welfare state, the idea of citizenship covered a new dimension. Through the schemes of “total planning” social inequalities were neutralised; the objective was to achieve a balanced community that if it would not lead to a classless society it would at least bring a certain kind of class justice.

It was something of a cliché to talk of the period after the Second World War as one of enormous upheaval in which the traditional patterns of life in Britain were swept aside to be replaced by a new and superficially less-class ridden system. Sociologists have dwelt in particular upon the disintegration of the working class community and have demonstrated how the demolition of the traditional environment of back-to-backs and corner shops merely signified deeper and more intangible changes. As Berger (1967) points out, landmarks are not only ‘geographic but also

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14 Le Beaubourg, or also known as Centre Georges Pompidou, is a building designed by the British architect Richard Rogers in collaboration with the Italian architects Renzo Piano and Gianfranco Franchini. The project dated from 1971 but it was officially inaugurated on 31 January 1977 and it was the apotheosis of high-tec style. It was an aesthetic celebration of the possibilities of new technologies to offer society a functional but representative architecture of the post-war democratic state.
biographical and personal', and the disappearance of the familiar landmarks after the War presaged a collapse of a whole way of life.\textsuperscript{15}

As Hebdige putted it, while citizen-ship reached its most expanded formulation in a society of egalitarian will, the social networks that communitarian traditional life had drawn were disappearing overcame by an increasingly individualized society. What the raft of postwar welfare legislation brought was an independent and equal citizen no longer identified with its class or community. He learned what it meant to have an insurance card that had to be regularly stamped, or to collect children’s allowances or pensions from the post office. It meant that everybody had the same status; identity could not be found through class differences but needed to be defined by other means. It had to be reconfigured within a post-colonial society where music and fashion industries would have an increasing presence and where identity questions addressing sexuality, gender or race would be directly faced. The works of the American artist Keith Haring vividly illustrate the political and social dimension the body would achieve by that time. His drawings of schematic bodies in movement presented a playful individual, but were at the very same time a protest against the social stigmatizations based on race, sexuality or gender. The body of the individual citizen – as not being inscribed in a predetermined class system anymore – was seen as the receptor and container of profound political implications itself. New emerging identities had to be constructed as opposed to the normative and hegemonic patriarchal society. The 60s and 70s saw the birth of the consciousness of minority; from sexual to ethnic minorities sought during the 70s to gain acceptance within society. It is important to point out, that the formation of the sense of community within minorities would many times respond to a specific spatial phenomenon: the existence of specific places for meeting – spaces with a determined environment where very specific music was played – would definitely participate of identity definitions. The night club, the discotheque or the dance party would become a place to rethink and reconstruct identity through leisure.

If we refer to dance culture in England, it has to be understood as an evolution of the first gay clubs in London where acid house music would hit the dance floor. If at the very beginning dance culture was borne out of the homosexual male community, its evolution and what would finally define the phenomenon was the inclusion of all the different bodies regardless of their ethnic group, sexuality, gender, wealth etc. “If disco had provided the space for the articulation of the non-hegemonic sexualities” would say Jeremy Gilbert, dance culture provided a space “in which the ecstatic pleasures of

\textsuperscript{15} Dick Hebdige, \textit{Subculture. The Meaning of Style} (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1979) p.74
dancing would be experienced according to terms which not make the expression of sexuality its primary aim.”16 It was the apotheosis of a process – starting with the minority struggles of the 60s and 70s and ending with the inclusion of subcultural phenomena within market strategies – that found in the pleasurable experience of dance an including socio-political instrument. Light, sound, smoke, and the body were the most tangible materials of a culture that would create an architectural device capable of offering a time and space for personal freedom. With the help of the effects produced by the set of technological devices that constituted dance culture architecture the body could be reinterpreted, accepted and included. The blinding smoke and the flash piercing the night were a contestation to the iconographical status of architecture as the representation of the ruling patriarchal society; and music broke, through the materiality of sound, the distance that traditionally separated the body from the building; which is to say to the safe distance between the citizen and power infliction instruments. It might be just a coincidence, but talking with people who participated of dance culture movement, many signaled that a great amount of its participants had grown up in modern new towns like Milton Keynes.

Light, smoke and sound would produce intensified sensory effects to stimulate all the senses of the body. As if being immersed in a contemporary phantasmagoria, the body would be overwhelmed and impressed by intense sensations reaching another dimension of consciousness. All kinds of technologies would be developed and adapted in order to provide the maximum variety and intensity of stimulus. Already discotheques and clubs of the 70s were using all kind of tricks to cheat the senses, the mirror ball becoming the most representative icon of an exalted state of perception. The strobe light, for example, originally invented for scientific purposes in 1931, would start to be used for recreational ends during the 60’s in order to enhance the effects of LCD trips; laser lighting displays would be also popularized during the 70s after laser diodes were perfected a decade before. Light, though, is a pure visual stimulus which only affects one sense and few organs of the body, but music has what Roland Barthes called “grain.”17 Music has a certain thickness, a materiality that overcomes the sense of hearing. Physicians have differentiated energy from matter in relation to the speed at which their constituent particles vibrate; to matter correspond the slower vibrations.


17 Roland Barthes in his essay The Grain of the Voice denounces the priority given to the aesthetic analysis of singing and reclaims giving more thought to the significance of timber in the understanding of musical pleasure. In other words, he defends the importance of materiality in the voice of a singer beyond the verbal message the song is announcing.
Sound waves vibrate slower than light; that’s what gives music a higher degree of materiality. Music is constituted of sound waves that make particles vibrate advancing through objects and the air until they get to the eardrum. Then, the brain, if the vibrations follow certain patterns, understands them as music, if not as sound. Even the cognitive process of music is close to the experience of physical form; Richard Middleton’s “theory of gesture,”\(^\text{18}\) argues that “how we feel and how we understand musical sounds is organised through processual shapes which seem to be analogous to physical gestures.”\(^\text{19}\) Plus, it is important that unlike the eye viewing the image, the ear is not alone when registering sound; vibrations are registered on some level throughout all the body organs and flesh. Music – like all sound – would say Jeremy Gilbert in his book Discographies, “is registered on a fundamentally different level to language or modes of visual communication,”\(^\text{20}\) and he would add:

Music is understood by the western tradition as being problematic in its capacity to affect us in ways which seem to bypass the acceptable channels of language, reason and contemplation. In particular, it is music apparent physicality, its status as a source of physical pleasure, which is problematic.\(^\text{21}\)

The pleasure experienced on the dance floor would be a challenge to the hegemonic forms of cognition. It becomes clear for the partier that music isn’t only registered in the brain when a 25kW bass-line pumps through the floor and the vibrations go through all their body tissues. The bass lines used in the kind of music – house, acid house, techno, etc. – played in the 80s dance parties used all the potency of the end of the frequency spectrum – comprising the slowest vibrating sound waves – to provide dancers with the most material, most directly corporeal, type of experience. The bass and the sub-bass constituting the base of dance music are “felt at least as much as they are heard.”\(^\text{22}\) The total experience of light, music and bodies provided by dance culture devices should be read as an affective experience rather than a cognitive

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\(^\text{18}\) Richard Middleton has written on the corporeality of music experience articulating a theory which demonstrates the relation between music experience and the listener’s experience of their own body. See Richard Middleton, *Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap*, in *Popular Music* vol.12, n.2, 1993 p.179


\(^\text{21}\) Ibid, p.42

\(^\text{22}\) Ibid, p.46
experience. Stimulating all the senses, and totally immersing the body in a perceptual
euphoria, dance culture architecture appeals not to the rational but to the emotional
side of us. Who submits himself to the intensity of this machinery will react in an almost
intuitive way, manifesting its directness through the very act of dancing. Gilbert would
describe it with the following words:

> A crowd of people immersing themselves in a collective experience of
the materiality of music, each individual losing themselves in a shared
ecstasy whose medium is bass and rhythm; an experience of music not
at all as an object of rational contemplation but as affect itself, whose
chief mode of expression is a wordless cheer.\(^{23}\)

Affect overcomes intellect on the dance floor; our rational modes of cognition are
threatened by a space-time experience that provokes an altered state of
consciousness. The artificial experience produced on the dance floor is not far from the
experience of an alternative reality proportioned by the exposition of our organism to
certain chemical substances. The commonly called drugs cannot only produce a similar
kind of experience; they would rather be a very important element of dance culture.
Drugs would intensify the already impressive effects produced by dance machinery and
should be considered as another of the technologies constituting dance culture
architecture. If architecture is understood as a certain experience of materiality and
time, then, drugs are one of its technologies, mediating the way in which we experience
space, light and sound. Despite not being indispensable, drugs constituted a central
element to dance culture architecture. In the 70s, in the smaller clubs of the time, the
most consumed drugs were opium, cocaine and heroin; in the eighties new synthetic
drugs would be introduced in the British night scene. Acid and ecstasy would become
the kings of the night; even it could be said that “dance culture” and “ecstasy culture”
became synonymous terms. It was not the drug itself, thought, what provoked the
phenomenon. ‘E’ – or in other words MDMA – had been available in the developed
world for most of the twentieth century, but it was not until the 80s that, because of the
social and cultural context, people found a specific set of uses for the substance. The
very same way it happened with music or lights; it was not the emergence of the
technology that provoked dance culture architecture, but the necessity to reformulate
certain aspects of the social and urban experiences that found specific uses for them.
The lights, the smoke, the music, the body and the drugs all together proclaimed a

\(^{23}\) Ibid, p.60
celebratory, ecstatic, and common experience that challenged through radical leisure activities the political and social structures of the time.

The sum of these technologies around the body constructed a new scenario for sociability. It was the antithesis of the affirmation space rock had created: white and heterosexual. It was an environment distant enough from the real social scenario to permit a neutral approach to the subject. The body was seen as un-gendered, asexual, un-raced, etc. in its entire material dimension. At the very same time, the dance floor was offering the possibility to establish real relationships. It was a liminal space-time experience, somewhere in between reality and fiction. The physical affectivity of music and light would predispose the bodies to dance freely reconfiguring the pre-established relations that in the outside social context tie them. People were important. Not only because without the bodies filling the dance floors lights and the music lost all its significance, but because of the sociability implied. Rusty Egan, the front man with Steve Strange for Camden Palace – a 1000-plus capacity pleasure-dome five nights in London – would declare in Time Out Magazine in 1982: “That’s the key to the Palace success – the people who turn up.”\(^24\) If in the first disco venues of the late 60s class and status could still be a requisite to enter, by the 80s, as Gilbert suggests, a quasi-utopian social inclusion momentum forged on the heterogeneous chemical alliance of its participants would be created on the dance floor. Gilbert would use Deleuze to depict that:

In this respect acid house and the rave movement it spawned represented (…) what Deleuze has termed singularity, an example of systemic self-organization when previously disconnected elements reach a point at which they begin to cooperate (or oscillate) as a larger molarity. In Deleuze’s non-linear philosophical schema, such agglomerations are difficult to predict and, importantly, are transient: they coalesce for a limited time and then disperse, leaving traces, affective ripples in the cultural waters.\(^25\)

A peculiar collective effect was reached through dance culture. It could be said it constituted a sort of "complementary city." Flashing lights, blurring smoke, ticklish bass-lines, affected bodies and physiological chemical alterations did catalyse an entirely


\(^{25}\) Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, Op. Cit., p.28
new notion of the social sphere. Dance culture devices functioned as friendship incubators, as laboratories for social and emotional relations. Dance culture architecture described a provisional social ecology.
Keith Haring, *untitled drawing* from a series of eight. 1980
Sound technologies being unloaded during party preparations.  
Screenshot from They Call it Acid, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Screenshot from *They Call it Acid*, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Screenshot from *They Call it Acid*, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Unidentified party.
Screenshot from *They Call it Acid*, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Ben Kelly, The Hacienda.
Camdem Palace. Early-80s. Blitz Kids online Archive.
<http://www.theblitzkids.com/site_archive/theblitzkids/camdenpalace.html>
People dancing in RIP Club, London. Early-80’s.
Screenshot from They Call it Acid, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Unidentified party.
Screenshot from *They Call it Acid*, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
Gratuity
The ancient idea of pleasure still seems sacrilegious to contemporary architectural theory. For many generations any architect who aimed for or attempted to experience pleasure in architecture was considered decadent. Politically, the socially conscious have been suspicious of the slightest trace of hedonism in architectural endeavours and have rejected it as a reactionary concern. And in the same way, architectural conservatives have relegated to the Left everything remotely intellectual or political, including the discourse of pleasure. On both sides, the idea that architecture can possibly exist without either moral or functional justification, or even responsibility, has been considered distasteful.¹

Bernard Tschumi would publish a year after *Architecture and Transgression*, another short essay titled *The Pleasure of Architecture*. In that text he would denounce pleasure had been obliterated both from architecture discourse and architecture experience in favour of efficient rationality – were it functional or moral. He would understand the contempt for pleasure in favour of reason as the suppression of Dionysius’ erotic and sensual impulses; Apollo was ruling the play, and would impose its ethical and spiritual mindscapes. “Architecture as an empirical event that concentrates on the senses, on the experience of space” represented an impossible alternative to “a thing of the mind, a dematerialized or conceptual discipline with its typological and morphological variations.” Again, appears the idea – already exposed in *Architecture and Transgression* – of two opposites, one of which dominates the other; two poles of a sole entity that should be reconcile and merged again. Architecture should aim to find the erotic moment when its two sides meet each other; and it seems this could be found in between the rose bushes.

The garden, says Tschumi in *The Pleasure of Architecture*, is a laboratory for a kind of architecture that transgresses the principle of efficiency. In the garden an experience beyond the limits within which architecture is confined can be reached:

Built exclusively for delight, gardens are like the earliest experiments in that part of architecture that is so difficult to express with words or drawings; pleasure and eroticism. Whether romantic or classical, gardens merge the sensual pleasure of space with the pleasure of reason in a most useless manner.2

The garden is a piece of architecture that not only seduces or fulfils some utilitarian function, but is an artefact that “sets in motion the operations of seduction and the unconscious.” In the garden, a very similar experience that the one inflicted by dance culture architecture is produced. As Paul Spencer has said dance is “an end in itself that transcends utility”3 in the very same way that the promenade between smelling flowers does. In fact, dance culture architectures can be considered a kind of technological garden; a garden 2.0. The difference would be that, despite both are useless, beyond the fact that can produce a certain kind of temporal and spatial experience, each is associated with a different kind of non-productive time. If dance culture can be seen as a safety valve to relieve the anxieties produced by the post-fordist society, the contemplation of the garden is more easily associated with the leisure pastimes of nineteenth century upper class. Being both of them non-productive activities, they had completely different meanings and happened in totally distinct contexts. Thorstein Veblen, who published in 1899 The History of Leisure Class, pointed:

> From the days of the Greek philosophers to the present, a degree of leisure and exemption from contact with such industrial processes as serve the immediate everyday purposes of human life has ever been recognised by thoughtful men as a prerequisite to a worthy or beautiful, or even blameless, human life. In itself and in its consequences the life of leisure is beautiful and ennobling in all civilised men’s eyes.4

Leisure was a means from gaining the respect from others in the wealthy statements of the class ruled society. But the dissolution – or at least dissimulation – of class structures and institutions after the war was accompanied by the imposition of the idea that non-productive activities were morally indefensible and that efficiency and utility were the new totems. Contradictory as it might seem, efficiency can be said to have its ideological roots on leftist thinkers viewing productivity as a requisite for social equality; the problem was that this principle reverted later against them, becoming the dogma of a consumerist and over-exploited society. After the war, London large gardens and private playing fields were to be appropriated for public interest and reconverted in spaces of controlled social recreation. The pleasure produced by non-productive leisure activities that once upon a time was seen “not only an honorific or meritorious act, but (...) to be requisite of decency,”5 was in the 70s and 80s on the

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2 Tschumi, op. cit., p.86


5 Ibid, p.31
brink of illegality. A couple of centuries before, certain King of France had, in the absence of the functionary whose office it was to shift his master's seat, "sat uncomplainingly before the fire and suffered his royal person to be toasted beyond recovery. But in so doing he saved his Most Christian Majesty from menial contamination." This case, as explained by Veblen, histrionically exemplifies the negative value given to manual labour and menial activities historically as opposed to the negative value that non-productive consumption of time would have by the end of the twentieth century. Then, a weird relation around the idea of leisure – understood as the non-productive consumption of time, energy or any kind of resource – appears between Tschumi's text, dance culture architecture and Veblen's theory. If Veblen is talking about a totally gratuitous consumption of time as an evidence of social worth, Tschumi is endorsing the non-productive consumption of time and resources that implies architecture as a political weapon against the hegemonic institutions.

Once again, if there has been some reason to doubt the necessity of architecture, then the necessity of architecture may well be its non-necessity. Such totally gratuitous consumption of architecture is ironically political in that it disturbs established structures. It is also pleasurable.7

As if a synthesis of what dance culture architecture was, this words by Tschumi give another dimension to the phenomenon. If we regard at the party experiences of the 80s as a totally unnecessary deployment of architecture and a completely unproductive consumption of time and energy, we can assume they were also political. What is important here is how, after pleasure had become something paradoxically both officially offered and controlled but morally forbidden during the post-war years, by the 70s and 80s a specific kind of architecture offering an unregulated space and time for pleasure could become a weapon of contestation against the establishment. And what is even more fascinating is that at the very same time those experiences were felt as a threat to society, were persecuted, but also incorporated in late capitalist production and commercial systems. Today, if we enter an Abercrombie & Fitch shop, we will see many of the devices that constituted the dance culture experience used as marketing tools. We can say that the spatial and temporal expressions of dance culture were ephemeral both in essence and in historical time. Of course, afterwards many parties have been held and many discotheques are running, but the radicalism of those moments lies in the fact that they happened outside the market structures of capital. What is relevant is how formal and spatial expression engages with a specific socio-political moment to create an architecture which was transcendent in its futility. The ecstatic experience of dance culture, not only was an escapist salvation for the alienation produced by the problems of leisure time and consumption derived of an opulent society, but challenged the higher ontological space reserved for rational practices.

In 1995, the term sorted, which was a euphemism for being on “E”, became the slogan of an anti-drug campaign. Not only the spatial and formal expressions of dance

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6 Ibid, p.33
7 Tschumi, op. cit., p.87
culture had been completely incorporated into the ruling system but also its surrounding linguistic expressions. By that time subculture had definitely became history, in part because of the repression inflicted by the government – during Thatcher’s years a police operation called Alkaline was launched to combat acid parties – but also because to some extent the law became more permissible making dance culture transgressive practices irrelevant. As Gilbert puts it:

Since 1990 licencing had been extended, clubs would offer longer opening hours, and a progression of all-dayers and all-nighters, festivals and bank holidays specials have created calendar periods within which the really dedicated can party for anything between 30 and 72 hours. Notions of deviance, or subcultural marginality, are hard to maintain in the face of the post-rave explosion of UK club culture.8

The incorporation of those critical practices in to a regulated system would secure the continuation of capitalism within the decades to come. Those discotheques and clubs still running have, in fact, become controlled by the brewing industry, which was from the beginning interested in repressing dance culture, especially because of its non-commercial aspect. The race in popularity and availability of dance drugs had brought undoubtedly a drop in alcohol consumption that had to be regained. As Reynolds would say the death of dance culture refers not to the exhaustion of the music and architecture formal possibilities, but to “the seeping away of meaning, the loss of collective sense of going somewhere.”9 In September 1995 Pulp released the single Sorted for E’s and Wizz10; the inlay carried the following text:

The summer of ’89: Centreforce FM, Santa Pod, Sunrise 5000, “Ecstasy Airport”, ride the white horse, the strings of life, dancing at motorway service stations, falling sleep on the wheel on the way home. There’s so many people – it’s got to mean something, it needs to mean something, surely it must mean something. IT DIDN’T MEAN NOTHING.


9 Simon Reynolds, *Death of Rave*, in Redhead et al. (eds), The Clubcultures Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) pp. 102-111

Epilogue
La petite mort, is an idiom referring to the refractory experience following the sexual orgasm. The intense pleasure and the liberation of “living forces” during the sexual act bring back a sensation that could be described as a “little death”. The feeling of intense pleasure and that of death are thus tied not only in Bataille’s writings but in popular culture. On the dance floor, the moments of ecstasy experienced when the intensity of sensations render the dancer blind and doomed to the void is a petite mort. Dance culture architecture flirted with death; it caressed death not only in the ecstatic, artificial experience of the dance floor, but losing many of its participants due to drugs abuse or the HIV pandemic. “Today I mile when I see an old Mudd Clubber, and we silently congratulate ourselves for surviving while reminiscing about the ‘good old days’”¹ says a former Club 57 attendee. Dance culture was transgressive in two different ways: by challenging capitalist productive structures through the gratuity of its nature, and by leading pleasure as far as to graze death. “Pushing the fleeting pleasures of the body to their limits,” would say Dan Graham, was “just another way of transcending the forces of history”².

In the same way that Foucault and Bataille understood extreme sexual practices, contemporary discourse has characterized social dance – from disco onwards – as a ritual for the encounter of otherness. Both sexual and non-sexual eroticism can be related to dance culture architecture. Sexual pleasure / pain experiences find their parallel in the extreme pleasure of the body submitted to the stimulus of dance culture machinery, while eroticism is also used as a theoretical

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²Dan Graham, Rock / Music Writings (New York: Primary Information / Dan Graham, 2009) p.170
concept to describe the double nature – rational/sensual – of the dance culture architecture. Despite finding different approaches in Bataille, Marcuse or Tschumi, the two alternatives meet at a certain point: both extreme pleasure and the conjunction of rational and sensual worlds lead to the experience of otherness. Reformulating it we could say: the intense pleasure provoked by the conjunction of rational and sensual experience in dance culture architecture brings us close to the unknowable.

In dance culture, the materiality of the means of signification – which is to say its architecture – interrupts meaning. The body as experienced in dance culture shifts from being a discursive entity – experienced within the terms of the political and social context – to being perceived in its pure materiality. The dancer under the effects of dance technologies – light, music, smoke, drugs – enters a state of *jouissance*. Roland Barthes used this term to describe a kind of pleasure that operates particularly at the level of the body’s materiality. *Jouissance* is pleasure outside the horizon of meaning – and according to Lacan can be reached either through a pleasurable experience or unbearable pain. Both extremes imply the dislocation of the subject by exposing it to what subjectivity by definition cannot tolerate. That might be the reason why the Frankfurt School rejected social dancing, as it was a threat to the way in which the discourses of metaphysics and possessive individualism were mutually articulated; and may also be the reason why dance culture architecture hasn’t been officially addressed. Dance culture architecture seems to occupy a critical space beyond the grasp of reason; it is an incommensurable experience that cannot be reduced to verbal forms. The affect produced by dance culture resists familiar modes of communicating either value or meaning. It is, as Tschumi putted, an invisible movement “neither a part of language nor of structure (language or structure are words specific to a mode of reading architecture that does not fully apply in the context of pleasure); it is nothing but a constant and mobile relationship inside language itself.”3 The affect produced by the lights, music, smoke, drugs and bodies involves a certain loss of our rational cognition; but despite the normal relation to the symbolic order is disrupted our rational subject is never completely nullified. In fact, the possibility of going into and coming back from *jouissance* to a rational state of cognition is what converts dance culture architecture in a transgressive act. Although common verbal communication is lost to a certain degree, the experience is never completely free of verbal concepts and

constructions of reality. The subjacent logocentric notion of the experience is what converts it in a social fact. It is in this transient moment between logos and affect when a new social ecology can be build. Reason, self-presence, the mind, masculinity, sight and individuality are threatened by an architecture that constitutes a space and time for irrationality, diffidence, the body, inter-sexuality, and sociality. Dance culture architecture was a recreational workshop that, concealed behind the idea that pleasure was oblivion and that it was not carrying moral consequences, emerged as a subtle socio-political weapon. It was futile as fireworks but hurtful as a cobblestone.

Two laws approved in the early nineties brought somehow to an end dance culture and consequently dance culture architecture. The 1990 Increased Penalties Bill still found kind of a resistance in between the partygoers. 27 January 1990 eight thousands people gathered in Trafalgar Square to participate in a peaceful demonstration under the banner “Freedom to Party”. Their message was clear: “all we wanna [sic] do is dance.” An after party attended by thousands was celebrated following the act in a wide warehouse; for many that was the “last party.” Later, in 1994, came the Criminal Justice Act, which didn’t found much opposition. In 2009 Bernard Tschumi re-staged his project Fireworks 1974 in the Architectural Association on the occasion of the exhibition First Works: Emerging Architectural Experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s. The spectacle of fire that found in that occasion a rainy night, was not carrying the transgressive implications that it had 30 years before. In 2009, Fireworks 1974, the very same way that discothèques, after-hours and night clubs running today, was just a relic. The limits have been displaced somewhere else although the questions remain the same.
Screenshot from They Call it Acid, Gordon Mason. England, 2009. Film.
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