

4.5. The post-party: post-modernity and utopia after the end of the party

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A b s t r a c t

Made of 12 fragments, this paper seeks to speculate how elements of economic and political order have the power to affect our modes of social interaction, aesthetic fruition and leisure. It proposes that mega-clubs could be considered as examples of non-places, according to the concept developed by Marc Augé. The article also addresses problems related to the production of knowledge in the field of scientific and artistic researches. The study case is the Brazilian independent electronic scene: the techno parties in which the author appears not only as an observer, but also as a participant. The cut-up method, a technique borrowed from literature, was applied in the writing of the article.

Keywords: *party; after-party; non-place; cut-up method*



1. *Man-machine*

In the twentieth century not just Kafka, Chaplin, Duchamp or Marinetti tried to express our relationship with the machine. African American culture between the wars were an important means that enabled the adaptation to modernity's faster times. Jazz players and tap dancers promoted an aesthetic translation of industrial age's rhythms and forms (Dinerstein, 2003). They made up a social experience that would help us to reconfigure our perceptions of the world. That enterprise was an answer to the orders imposed by the new times and the new spaces created by the machine.

2. *Motor city*

Fordism had a great impact on the makings of modern sensibility. The moving assembly line was developed by Henry Ford in the 1920s and introduced the technical division of labor to the world of production. As a regime of accumulation, the method managed to supply mass production to mass consumption, establishing the American way of life. Fordism was also a mode of economic regulation, an ensemble of norms, networks and patterns spread to the whole society that ended up organizing all social relations in the post-war. The system was a sociological project that overcame the economic with deep consequences to human life. From the end of the 1960s on, some developmental tendencies within the capitalist system provoked the overcoming of Fordism. In Post-Fordism, the matrix of social relations is technology. Information and flexibility are the keys in this new system in which the production process is no longer based on manual work, but rooted on technology (Jessop, 1992). Other important features are the regime of financial speculation, the specialization of jobs and consumption, the globalization and trans-nationalization of capital. The shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism also signs the replacement from disciplinary societies to the societies of control, a technological evolution that derives, according to Deleuze (1992), from a mutation of capitalism.

3. *Dead can dance*

The zombie has already been identified with the worker who lives the alienation of capital and the exploitation of his work force. The zombie is always hungry. He is an amoral being who acts objectively, with nor reason or passion. What guides him is pure instinct. The zombie as a figure of alienation is the entranced consumer suggested by Marxian theory. It is Guy Debord's description of Brigitte Bardot as a rotten corpse and Frederic Jameson's "death of affect"; and of course what media utopianist Marshall McLuhan called "the zombie stance of the technological idiot." Thus, zombification is easily applied to the notion that capital eats up the body and mind of the worker, and that the living are exploited through dead labor (Larsen, 2010). The origin of this creature belongs to the imaginary of the African diaspora, since it is part of Haiti's voodoo. The zombie is related to colonialism and slavery. These systems enabled the accumulation of wealth that brought capitalism to its industrial phase.



Figure 4.5.1 – Cut-up Method

Source: <https://www.casaplana.org/Metodo-Cut-up>.

4. Funtime

There is a critical tradition that understands our contemporary modes of fun and leisure as expressions of the logic of the capital in the cultural field. The term Culture Industry refers to the close relation between industrial capitalism and popular culture, and the importance of mass media regarding social control. Adorno reminds us that “to amuse oneself means to be in agreement” (Adorno, 2010, p. 41)¹⁴. “The same energy dragged from the worker in the factory or at leisure turns on the turbines of power”, writes situationist Raoul Vaneigem (2016, p. 36). Guy Debord (1997) describes our times as an era of pseudo-festivities that disappoint and always promises new disappointments. Among the many contemporary ways of celebration, the culture arouse around techno music seems to reflect these problems in a very particular way. It represents “the technical development of the age of the party”, in the words of the psychoanalyst Thales Ab’Sáber (2012, p. 54). The enjoyment of techno thus dreams of reversing the order of the world. Its dream without forms is to put the world in its reverse, in its human contrary. It is a place of constant action, but without production; of exhaustive suspension of day and night, but without awakening nor fatigue; of the body turned into pure act and the spirit

¹⁴ All the translations from Portuguese sources were made by the author.

lost in infinite layers of constant flow, but without dreaming. So, the time of life could finally be the time of the party. (Ab'Saber, 2012, p. 39)

According to Ab'Saber, the new order of the party brings together mimicry of frantic work, fashion, pure body, autoeroticism and the dissolution of the self in a post-dramatic, selective and highly codified environment. In the inverted world of capital, in which all human life, including the spirit and especially the body, was subdued by rationalization and the contradictions imposed by capitalism, the techno party allows us to celebrate the fact that there is nothing to celebrate.

5. Utopia

As a musical genre techno has its origins in Detroit. The motor city whose industrial landscape gave shape to the music is an urban icon of Fordism's rise and fall. Techno was born from the reappropriation of industrial detritus, it is "a lament about what it was like to be young and black in post-industrial America" (Collin, 1998, p. 24). However, techno's development as a lifestyle occurred on the other side of the Atlantic. Berlin was a city in transformation after the fall of the wall, in 1989. The reunification is an event that marks the input of commodities in the Soviet bloc about to dissolve. There were a lot of empty buildings in the East sector where a culture based on the punk ethos of "do it yourself" was born. The music Detroit DJs were creating was the perfect soundtrack to a culture risen from ruins in which "a certain attitude was translated into architecture" (Rapp, 2010, p. 62). Almost 30 years later, due to particular circumstances present in Berlin, such as "wasteland, empty buildings and cheap rents, liberal authorities, tireless activists and techno institutions" (Rapp, 2010, p. 13), the techno lifestyle that appeared originally as a counterculture, fusing music, everyday life and politics, has been transformed into the city's official culture.

Berghain/Panorama Bar is the greatest temple of electronic music in Europe and one of the most famous Berlin tourist spots. The club is located in an old power plant that was transformed into a space of idleness and leisure. For Ab'Saber the club represents "the spirit of cultural totalization that electronic music seeks to have in our time" (Ab'Saber, 2012, p. 35-36), a "synthetic digital-utopia of consumerism" (Ab'Saber, 2012, p. 46). Fusing music, dance, lighting, fashion and architecture, it seems to update the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, since it allows us to experience the total work of art. If just we can get in. Clubs such as Berghain also represent the rise of an after-party culture that "reshaped Berlin's clubbing scene, paving the way for its current global fame" (Rapp, 2010, p. 121). Berlin became the city where the party never ends. This scene was mostly frequented by "people from the modern service industry" (Rapp, 2010, 167), most of them freelancers who work very hard. Rapp wonders if the after-party culture is linked to this way of life in which "the weekend no longer represents the counterpart to the working week (...), but simply provides a break in the generally self-determined pattern of accomplishing various tasks, ultimately belonging to the same mode of existence." (Rapp, 2010, p. 167).



Figure 4.5.2 – The After Universal History

Source: <https://medium.com/@leofelipe/mil-plat%C3%B4s-8d5ac1eb494c>.

6. *Life and death on the New York dance floor*

Tim Lawrence (2016) notes that the shift from industrialization to post-industrialization and the turning of New York into a neoliberal city led to the complete reorganization, and eventually death, of the world-famous Downtown's party culture. Madison Moore (2016) proposes that nightclubs could be seen as places where we distract ourselves from the pressures of contemporary capitalism, perform our identities and develop our creative potentials. All of those items seem to be quite related to capital's productive demands. However, the party culture from Club 57 and Studio 54 that has

already been compared to an art form is now almost extinct. In a world of surveillance, paranoia and excess, clubs have become superlatives.

7. *Non-places*

Mega-clubs offer a collective experience for a world made for solitude, individuality, and the ephemeral. Like airports and highways, they could be seen as examples of non-places. As it was defined by Augé (2013), non-places are transit zones in which we experience similarity and solitude in a collectively way. They are super-coded environments where the urgency of the moment rules. The non-place challenges the anthropological concept of place, because it is not identitary, relational nor historical. The non-place has no memory. It is the opposite of utopia, because it does exist and there is no organic society inhabiting it. Its archetype is the traveler's space. The emergence of non-places is a product of what Augé calls supermodernity. Supermodernity is a historical moment marked by the excess. According to the author, it is the body itself that will suffer the effects of the spatial construction imposed by this new historical moment. Changes of scale, acceleration of means of communication and the multiplication of images are the main effects caused by supermodernity's spatial construction.

8. *Travelling without moving*

The dance floor is also a space of excess. The identity relations that are established in it are fleeting pacts that vanish when the music or the drug effects come to an end. We share our autism in a transit zone that keeps us in motion without the need to move around. We are fixed lonely travelers performing zombie dances. Virilio (2015) has compared the experience of the car traveler, isolated inside its automobile, to that of the spectator in the movie theater. This is a similar experience to what happens on the dance floor: "Nightclubs reproduce quite well the effects of the old movie houses, dancers go there to be alone on the dance floor... alone in the crowd, protected by the activation of 7,000-watts amplifiers and laser beams" (Virilio, 2015, p. 73). The congruence of the eye and the motor happens in the dance floor by the specific rhythm of the lighting. Just as it happens in fast travels and in the accelerated transport of people and things, these are states that reproduce the effects of *picnolepsy*. It is the same effect of the epileptic attack that can change the state of consciousness, provoking "the subtraction of the subject from its perpetually repeated spatial-temporal context" (Virilio, 2015, p. 104).

9. *Dream baby dream*

Brion Gysin (1982) called *flicker* the perpetual repetition that subtracts us from the consciousness, conducting us out from space and time. It is a phenomenon caused by the modulation of alpha rays emitted by the brain. In the 1960s Gysin and Ian Sommerville conceived a series of kinetic works for the purpose of reproducing the flickering effect. They called it *dreamachines*. The dreamachine is made of a 100 watts bulb, a motor and a rotating drilled cylinder. The user of this device sits in front of it with closed eyes to experience visions produced by the flashes of light. These are induced hallucinations provoked without the ingestion of any psychoactive drug.

10. This must be the place

However, Augé (2013) observes that the anthropological place and the non-place are fugitive polarities, which never fade nor are fully realized. They are “palimpsests in which we keep scrambling the game of identity and relation” (Augé, 2013, p. 74). It would be dishonest not to admit that there is something positive in techno party culture. About a decade ago, Brazil saw the emergence of the phenomenon of the independent party collectives. The collectives are groups formed mostly by university students that began a program of politicization of the party. In this program lies the criticism on the idea of amusement. It is the attempt of having fun in disagreement to the social order and capitalism’s determinations. These groups seem to be part of the same tradition of political activism founded by the Letterists and developed later by the Situationists in their harsh view on the spectacular society.

These avant-garde movements born in postwar Europe criticized the consumer society proposing the reinvention of everyday life as a way of changing the social order. For them theory must include action. One of the main concepts created by the Letterists is the *unitary urbanism* (Home, 1998). It understands the city as a place for new visions of space (and time), and the architecture as a tool for life’s transformation. The contemporary movement of the Brazilian party collectives happens in reaction to processes of neglect and privatization of the public space. It signals the city as a territory of disputes. Previous generations sought the transgression of customs and the expression of their identity and sexuality inside the private space of the nightclub. Today it is outdoors that many youngsters operate (Bennett & Guerra, 2019). Many of the party collectives are self-managed and have horizontal organization. The occupation parties occur free of charge in run-down spaces, passageways and other unusual places that come to have new meanings on the urban tissue.

The non-place becomes a place. However, to put a free party on the street does not make it “democratic” or accessible for all. Factors such as the location, the type of music or even the dressing codes of the regulars are signs of economic marking and social exclusion that cannot be disregarded. Even so, there is a huge difference between the plurality of the party occupations and the highly selective environment of mega-clubs. Another positive factor is how gender discussions play an important role. Women participation, especially as DJs, is remarkable. The presence of transgenders in the scene, acting not just as performers but also as producers of the events, is also very important. These singularities make Brazilian independent party scene a phenomenon much distinct from Ab’Saber’s or Rapp’s study case. Governments, careless in many important questions concerning the urban space, try to restrain all this movement. The agglomerations of which the street party is part also include actions of a more explicit political nature, such as protests and demonstrations. Party collectives in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre have been finding it harder to put the PA on the street, due to new laws that impose high fines and even the arrest of organizers.

11. Before and after science

For more than two years I have been researching the Brazilian independent electronic party scene aiming the elaboration of a theory for this new age of the party. I have been attending to parties in São Paulo (Mamba Negra, Carlos Capslock, Odd), Belo Horizonte (1010, Masterplano, Mikatreta) and Porto

Alegre (Base, Vorlat, Arruaça). In Porto Alegre, I have been participating in discussions held within the collectives, working with them in the production of parties both legal and illegal. The development of this research ended up affecting my writing. It went apart from academic templates, getting closer to a more subjective format, which is often related to the artistic research. My ethnographies do not hide my participatory position. The methodology I have been exploring is based on what I have called *crítica afetiva* (affective criticism). It is an attempt to face some questions aroused by my position of observer and participant. The central question here is: is it possible to approach in a critical way something you love, something you are part of? Criticism seems to be a process of disruption, a movement of detachment from the subject that we are into.

The first result of this research is called *A História Universal do After* (*The Universal History of the After Party*). The text can be placed between genres such as fictional narrative, journalism, memoir, art criticism, theoretical essay, autoethnography. I consider it a novel. It includes elements and proceedings borrowed from fiction, poetry, critical theory and journalism, including the writing technique known as the cut-up method. The cut-up was largely used by William Burroughs (1982) in the 1960s. It is a technique based in chance and appropriation that can be compared to the concept of *détournement* of Letterists and Situationists: the kidnapping of signs aiming to expose the spectacle and break up passiveness (Debord, 1997). It is a subversive approach to writing. In *The Universal History of the After Party* I also make use of humor – inside jokes – in the attempt of creating an intimate theory for the subject I am deeply attached. The narrative is written in the first person and includes all sorts of texts, such as messages and e-mails, posts and commentaries from social media and even newspaper articles written by myself in the last years. It is a very confessional writing.

The novel tells the story of an ambitious post-scientist/partygoer whose study case is, of course, the party. I frankly describe the drug use in the scene and this use itself have become a sort of methodological procedure for the writing. I face one of the many psychological consequences of drugs consumption: the feeling of paranoia. Ideas stole from several authors appear in it. I could mention some of them: Pascal, Marx, Freud, Deleuze, Guattari, Burroughs, Chris Kraus, Eve Segdwick, Graig Saper, Maffesoli, Augé, Norman Mailer, Roger Callois, Ab'Saber. It also documents some social, affective and formative experiences that occurred in my own apartment where many after-parties took place. For me the space of the after-party is at the same time real and imaginary.

12. Genuflection¹¹⁵

A few parties ago I've started to dance with my knees bent and I can already feel the positive effects on my body. Paranoia is an accurate translation of the vicissitudes of the supreme condition of production relations. It is well known, however, that the structure of any ideology is recognized primarily by the way bodies act in a given space. The movement on the dance floor today reproduces the relation of individuals with their real conditions of adaptation to work, the immaterial work of fictitious capital. Ford's experience was made up of rationalized gestures with consequences in the sensitive world. Paranoia can be defined psychosimultaneously to a form of attention produced at the end

¹¹⁵ This section belongs to the novel *The Universal History of the After-Party*. It was translated from Portuguese to English by the author.

of the industrial age. With the new posture I've opened up more space in the floor. It was an attempt to reach the depersonalization of man as an ideological factor, this little horse clearly fearful of castration. I believed that if there wasn't any difficulty it was because the thing was not being done correctly. The determinant morphology of the subject is based on pelvis contraction.

On contrary, the zombie is always against his becoming. He is within a loop *absolutely* without ever leaving from inside of which has no outside. His hips are tied. If things were different the zombie would be an offense to the state. Possessing entities or any major assertion from the thighs and glutes would be conceived as a crime. Today, the mechanisms of post-advanced capitalism associated with the repeated execution of certain gestures (often aided by the ingestion of refined drugs) lead to a state of morbid passivity. It is up to the bodies to refuse the positions that are imposed on them.

The genuflection prioritized the material over the spiritual in the engines that propelled Christian faith and absolutism. It is a phenomenon that is related to the myth, the machine and the movement. We are dancing in answer to economic changes of the turn of the millennium, after the capitalist system refined even further its methods of production, reproduction and accumulation (hypertonic concentration) of wealth – and control. The immateriality of work connects us to it at every moment of our lives. Physical environments are not distinguished from imaginary ones. Technology can no longer be translated aesthetically from past experiences with the machine. The reconfiguration of our perception, which will enable the means of creating a new sensibility for the faster times of the inert movement, will be accomplished by dance, the static dance of fictitious capital. The institution of a new order is manifested by its symbolic power stylizing the body in a kind of rhythm experience. My concept of possession is a dogmatic insistence that such manifestations are not ambiguous nor are they natural laws: they are the embodiment of discontent.



Figure 4.5.3 – Ecarta Foundation Building decorated with graffiti sponsored by Leo Felipe

Source: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Felipe#/media/Ficheiro.

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