

Table of Contents

Acid Warriors 1

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By Drew Rogas

On Acid House and warehouse parties

Modern times demand castrated subjects formed into 'individuals': self-policing units whose potential is restricted and channelled into the abstract determination of 'self-interest'. Acid House brings the walls crashing to the ground. Desire is freed from pre-programmed linear schemas (job-car-house-retirement; seduction-marriage-children-death; etc) and let loose on an unsuspecting world. No longer aimed solely at control and possession, desire becomes itself possessed: possessed of a freedom that shatters the continuity of time and unlocks the hidden powers of the body. Circadian rhythms reprogrammed. The prison of the mind blown apart by the here and now leaving desire free to roam the body: ripples of intensity travel across its surface, just under the skin. The bassdrum kicks in and this fleeting desire melds with the music in a corporeal poetics erupting on the dancefloor.

Order is not natural, it must be imposed: a freezing of life's flux. But beneath every order reigns chaos, waiting to rise up and tear apart the fragile truths that would deny it. The tip of the iceberg is as deep as it goes; beneath lies nothing but the cool expanse of the ocean. Acid House sends us crashing through the fragile surface into the unfathomable and unformed depths. Behind us the ice sheet breaks up and returns to the ocean: motion unlocked, everything is resolved into relative energies and speeds.

But this is not pure abandon: "Chaos is not without its own directional components, which are its own ecstasies." [TP313] The fissuring of de-composition is halted on the mutating platform of the beat. Ecstasy is found not in white noise but in "complexes of sounds-durations" - the tension and texture that comprise the acoustic moment: a "rhythmic character and a melodic landscape" in a world composed of segments of the frequency spectrum.

House is "a succession of repetitive beats." But neither 0 nor 1 stands on its own: at the origin is the difference that stands (in)between - the materiality of the rhythm. Tension and texture are produced on the plateau on which assemblages of sound pass into one another in the overlaying and juxtaposing of rhythms. House is the 'interrhythmic' space within which the producer-DJ-dancer machine wreaks it havoc, the cutting edge that shreds the linear transmission of code, breaking open every assemblage of sound in the creation of something new - releasing a musical current passing between digitality and desire in an autopoietic programming dynamic that forms a positive feedback loop with no start and no finish by which "the dancer's desire, even at the neural level, is fed by and feeds back into the composition of the music."

House functions by taking a simple melody, setting it in motion, weaving it through a rhythm: "what is necessary is a simple figure in motion and a plane that is itself mobile." [TP344] The refrain is freed from any determining context or structure, only to assert itself all the more forcefully in the schizo-instant of its recurrence, its power amplified by its exquisite simplicity and space. Dancing bodies move with the drift, across peaks and plateaus, in a journey with no destination, just the intensity of the musical moment. The unnatural participations of 'body-music': music becoming embodied in dance, dancers becoming disembodied as music. A pulsed zone of intensity forever in motion in accordance with the intricacies of the beat: the non-linear dynamics of dance is a non-accumulative production beyond all utility that drifts with the current of musical energy passing through the dancefloor. A common pulse producing a polyphony of corporeal music; shouts and movements smearing the code, divergent energies united, synthesised by the drum pattern, and then spiralling off on new trajectories.

The code is passed on and shared, with connections made at and from any point. Not the communication of body language, but the excitation in resonance of body-music. Beyond the statistical reductions of the door and cash register, the crowd is pure number, and yet uncountable (bodies drift in and out of vision, glimpsed in the snap shots of the strobe, through gaps in the swirling banks of dry ice, behind other bodies). On the dancefloor is secreted a perception that Modernity has prohibited: that of a unity that does not efface difference. Individualism beyond the individual: "The people must be individualized, not according to the persons within it, but according to the affects it experiences, simultaneously or successively." [TP341] But the dance always confronts the abyss of pure simulation and recurrence of the self-same; productive polyphony risks objectification as the Nuremberg shuffle. "The problem is a truly musical one, technically musical, and all the more political for that." [TP341]

Walking the fine line between expansive creativity and introspective paranoia ("dangerous dancing") is not without its dangers or its casualties. But it is the only ticket out of the asylum of the everyday: the numbing madness that suffocates by not being seen.

Acid House was intrinsically non-oppositional, and yet found itself in direct opposition to the divisions of property relations and the striations of the legal code. Its conflict with society is not a struggle between social mores and individual desires, but a struggle over the structuring and disciplining of social space. The fenced and patrolled enclosures (both moral and spatial) of the atomistic individual were subverted by a flow of the unnamable operating outside the codes of the established institutional frameworks.

In the inner city breakout of the warehouse parties the tranquillity of the country retreat was shattered and the privacy of the individual blasted apart. Acid House invaded the countryside and seeped into the spaces abandoned by the retreating tide of industrial decline. And yet it wasn't a question of possession or even of occupation of particular spaces, but of the lack of transcendent structure and control. For house to be permitted in the eyes of the Law, it was sufficient that it be brought back from the unknown, and placed within an administrative and legalistic structure. The club replaced the warehouse: house was hermetically sealed within a private space, lured by the promise of individual freedom, then policed to extinction.

Acid warriors proved resistant to the disciplining mechanisms of modern sociality. This solicited more direct methods of State control, in which was revealed the violence that always lurks beneath the respectable facade of polite society.

This conflict may be traced in the case of one of the most intense and sustained periods of disco debauchery in the history of house. Over a two year period (1989-1990) Blackburn, a small town in the North of England that 80's economics forgot, became the focus for a series of weekly acid house parties involving up to 12000 people. An anecdotal testament to this was the renaming of the city "Boomtown" - paying homage to the anti-Thatcher dream at the same time as marking its emergent illicit economic power. The area was declared an Autonomous Zone: the alternative road signs were still in place 3 years later.

It was a continual struggle between party-goers and police, each side trying to outwit the other. A different location would be used each week. And new equipment would have to be constructed or acquired to replace that confiscated the week before. There was a need for a continual mobilization of resources, which interrupted the sedimentation of control around any particular group or individual. And the close attention of the police meant that no stars or personalities could in any case emerge.

Like an Amazonian flower, Boomtown was only visible once a week, surviving the rest of the time as an underground network of roots that had no leader but constituted a flat meshwork that linked at every point. It was continuously evolving, and so police action against a single point meant nothing as the flow simply redirected itself and swept on, forever in excess of its own achievements. You can't arrest what you can't see.

Frustrated by this elusive enemy, the police assembled a national party squad and swept Boomtown with a net that would leave no avenues of escape. At an event near Nelson in Lancashire a solid line of blue marched into the party zone, batons hitting riot shields in time with the beat of their hob-nailed boots. A pure line of control stamping order upon the chaotic mass. Blue lines operate by dissection and "sterilization" (police jargon). The chaotic mass is first blocked and hemmed in, then divided and striated, and finally annihilated in the reclaiming of the contested space.

Events such as those at Nelson changed the nature of the situation altogether. They entered the collective memory not only of the people there, but of everyone involved in the northern party scene. This welded people together and turned even blissed out hippies into hardened acid warriors. But not all warriors are dedicated only to dance. New people were attracted to the parties who went just to fight with the police. Months of violent confrontation were to follow, "repetitive beats" met with repeated beatings. There were victories on both sides: a police station was stormed and a party went off at Leeds. ("We out thought them; we out fought them; we even out danced the fuckers!") But in the final showdown, the hardcore of the acid warriors were cornered at Guildersome near Leeds. After five hours of desperate defence, the party lines were finally breached and the police arrested all 836 people present. It was one of the biggest peace-time arrests in Europe this century, and yet virtually no charges were brought.

We fought the law. But who won?

They slammed the door on Acid House. They thought they'd shut it out, but now its inside, loose within the machine.
And no-one's getting out.

Analysts say the house scene is domesticated, a poor copy of a purity forever lost. But if it had stayed 'pure' it would have turned into a tribal cult and disappeared up its own anus. The virus has mutated, implanting 'new depths' on the glittering spectacular surface of the rotting corpse of modernist authenticity. And its dilution is compensated for by the exponential increase in infection. Acid House is not a set of procedures or principals, but a volatile proliferation that respects no limits. Acid House marks a territory that is not shut in upon itself, but open to all. The doors of perception have been blown off their hinges by a wind from hell that takes no prisoners and stops for no Man.

A new intelligence beyond identity and possession is emerging, and those minds able to make the transition will be the one's hardened by explorations into other realities. Not 'name' DJs, but anonymous producers and dancers, opening the door to the future by sweeping away the past. Acid House is a sample of our unnatural future, come to haunt the present. Those who haven't tried it risk mental scarring later in life.

In the tame surroundings of the club, house has been colonized by professional DJs and promoters. No longer an anonymous agent of rupture and contagion, the DJ has been brought back within the fold. Given a name and a face, the DJ is no longer a part of the crowd, but an abstract image drawing the gaze of the crowd which He has left behind. It didn't use to matter who the DJ was, as the music did the talking and the action was on the dancefloor. But the slayer of the rock star now steps in to take his place as the new star of pop. No longer equal under the groove, dancers become passive consumers captivated by the aura of stardom, fixation replacing rapture. The crowd turns into a giant pair of girl's

knickers, moistened by the prick behind the decks. "Eyes front!"; festival of excess becomes Nuremberg rally. Prepackaged personality gets in the way of the music: pigeon holing and preconceptions prevent DJs from taking the music in new directions and exploring new realms with the crowd. The time of the DJ is past. All DJs must die! so that new forms of acid disequilibrium may arise.

In the postmodern age we're all just cogs in the machine. The machine will crush us under its weight, unless.... Unless we prevent it from settling in place, keep it moving, unable to consolidate. Invent uses it was never designed for: pervert to subvert! The cogs go into overdrive and spin the machine apart.

TP: Deleuze & Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, (Athlone, 1988)

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