ASCOSI LASCITI

Babaloo, Potenza Picena (MC).
Photo Credit: Alessandro Tesei, Ascosi Lasciti, 2014.

The Parabola of Italian Discotheques: Between Radical Architecture and Spaghetti Dance

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> I like the night, I actually love it
> I see so many sunrises and very few mornings,
> The night has adopted me and offered me a job
> that I like a lot, indeed I adore.
> My name is JOVANOTTI and I'm a deejay
> I never go to sleep before six a.m.
> –Jovanotti[1]

Atmosphere. When you talk or write about nightlife and discotheques, you feel an urge to recall their atmospheric environments in order to describe them. The senses and the bodily experience of the discotheque are deeply entangled with its atmosphere: scent, light, sound, movement, touch, and memories. Because going to the discotheque is an ephemeral experience that you do in the dark, once the light is on it has come to an end. But the architecture stays. Italian disco culture saw more than 7,000 discotheques dispersed around its territory into the 1980s,[2] only about 2,500 of which have survived until today.[3] A few of them are still running; others have changed function, but many of them have shut down and been abandoned.

In recent years, growing interest in the long-ignored "parabola" of Italian discotheques, from the 1960s to the present, has led to the rise of art works, research projects, and books. The 2014 Venice Biennale officially opened the door for discos to enter the Olympus of Art and Architecture, with a big A. For the MondoItalia pavilion at the Arsenale in Venice, the Biennale showcased projects foregrounding the current socio-cultural situation of architecture in the country today, and there was a focus on the night and Italian disco culture. A number of projects

(Above, right) Babaloo, Potenza Picena (MC).
Photo Credit: Alessandro Tesei, Ascosi Lasciti, 2014.

were commissioned and displayed, all of them treating discos as an experimental and radical object of research and investigation for understanding contemporary Italian nightlife culture. A project called Space Electronics Then and Now, curated by researcher Catharine Rossi, dealt with the Radical Architecture movement that characterized the nocturnal atmosphere of avant-garde discos in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. The project focused particularly on Space Electronic, a discotheque designed by Gruppo 9999 in 1969 that is still running in Florence. In late 2015–early 2016, Rossi also co-curated, with Sumitra Upham, a broader exhibit on the Radical Architecture movement and discotheques at the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, under the title "Radical Disco: Architecture and Nightlife in Italy 1965–1975." At the 2014 Biennale, Italian magazine Zero presented Notte Italiana: online project collecting stories by architects, DJs, musicians, event promoters, designers, musical producers, and researchers, as well as movies and soundtracks of Italian disco culture since the 1960s.[4] Artists Marco Fusinato, Felicity D. Scott, and Mark Wasiuta produced the installation La fine del mondo, bringing to dialogue the radical aesthetics of 1960s discotheques, specifically Turin's Piper Club, with the antagonistic politics of occupied and self-managed social centers in Milan, such as Leoncavallo, Cox18, and Virus. Finally, a visual installation called Nightswimming, by photographer Giovanna Silva, delved into the history and evolution of experimental architecture in Italian discotheques from 1960 to 1990, as well as the following crisis that forced many of them to close their doors. Other recent and ongoing photographic projects have drawn on this crisis, portraying the decadence and ruin of many abandoned Italian discos around the country today, such as Paradise Discotheque (by Antonio La Grotta, third place at Sony World Photography Awards 2015–architecture category), as well as blogs like Memories on a Dancefloor (by Jessica Da Ros) and Ascosi Lasciti (by Alessandro Tesei).[5] The liminal, lunatic, hidden-yet-visible aspect of the discotheque has begun receiving attention at a moment when interest in the nightlife economy is growing at an impressive rhythm, and in a country that in the 1980s and 1990s was at the forefront of nocturnal experimentation in the cultural and political scenes.[6]

From the mid-1980s through the 1990s, Italian municipal politics turned its attention to the temporal dimension, thanks to the work done by academics, feminist activists, and workers' unions, opening the door to what the geographer Luc Gwiazdzinski has called "chrono-urbanism": an urbanism that looks at time management as a collective issue in urban areas.[7] During this time, the Italian Ministry for Scientific and Technological Research funded time-oriented academic projects that led to the development of

technological tools and techniques for better understanding and implementing temporal politics.[8] In 1990, law 142/90 was adopted in order to make it possible for municipalities to coordinate public services hours with citizens needs. Following the law, which established that cities with more than 30,000 inhabitants create time-related offices, some Italian cities such as Milan, Venice, Rome, Genoa, Catania, and Bolzano created the Ufficio tempi della città dedicated to time management in urban areas. As sociologist Sandra Bonfiglioli recalls, the need to reconcile working time with private time, especially for women struggling with the competing requirements of family and career, shifted from being a personal condition to a collective matter, and so became the centre of political debates.[9] Inspired by law 142/90, in 1990 the National Women's Section of the Italian Communist Party proposed a draft law called: "Women Change Times." Following these struggles, law 53/2000 was adopted in 2000 (also known as legge Turco, after Livia Turco, a prominent politician who supported it), which had two major items: the first was mostly aimed at regulating parental leave, while the second had a broader focus on temporal coordination and regulation in urban areas with the institution of a "Fund for Time Harmonization in the City" (Fondo per l'armonizzazione dei tempi delle città) and Time Banks. While the first part of the law on parental leave was foregrounded and implemented, the second proposition on urban time regulation was never developed in its entirety, due to further changes in the ruling government. The legge Turco established that Italian regions adopt specific time-oriented local norms for temporal coordination between public and private services, creating an office and a wider territorial plan for time regulation, as well as time banks to improve "solidarity in local communities."[10] The law provided a general and pioneering framework on urban time regulation and coordination, without specifying guidelines or procedures for applying the law at a local level. However, this was a turning point that led to discussions of time-oriented politics in the context of urbanism.[11] These first experimentations produced an awareness not only of questions of work-life balance, gender equality, and regulation of the relationship between work time and private time, but also of temporal issues in city planning, especially concerning the nighttime economy. Following these first steps and amidst growth in the role of the nighttime economy, other countries and cities, especially in France and the Netherlands who today lead the field, began to approach temporal politics with a particular focus on the night, to the point that over the last ten years many European cities have adopted "nighttime mayors" and held public debates about nighttime economies and cultures.[12]

RADICAL DISCOS BETWEEN 1960 AND 1970

The interest in the architecture and design of Italian discotheques, as an object of study and research outside the experimental and avant-garde movement, can be traced back to the 1990s, the same period in which the public debate on temporal politics was taking place. Fulvio Ferrari's milestone book Discoteca 1968: L'architettura straordinaria appeared in 1989, celebrating the radical design of nightclubs in the 1960s and 1970s. Interviewed by Giovanna Silva following the 2014 Venice Biennale, Ferrari underlines the ephemerality of a nightclub's existence and aesthetic: "As I was preparing the book Discoteca 1968. L'architettura straordinaria (Allemandi 1990) it dawned on me that the nightclubs of my early years no longer existed. A club needs to be consistently revamped; it must continuously transform so as to be up-to-the-minute."[13]

The first discotheques of the 1960s were born out of the avant-garde architectural movement that emerged during this time, and which in 1966 artist and art critic Germano Celant referred to as "Radical Architecture." Members of this movement were especially interested in the design of objects and situations, in the creation of atmospheres through the interplay of technology and multimedia. Groups such as UFO,

MEMORIES ON THE DANCEFLOOR

Divina, Caraglio (CN). Photo Credit: Jessica da Ross, Memories on the Dancefloor, 2013.

(Above, right) Piper2000, Viareggio (LU). Photo Credit: Jessica da Ross, Memories on the Dancefloor, 2015

Garden, Ponte della Priula (TV). Photo Credit: Jessica da Ross, Memories on the Dancefloor, 2012.

Gheodrome, San Mauro a Mare (FC). Photo Credit: Jessica da Ross, Memories on the Dancefloor, 2014.

Ciao Ciao, Marano Vicentino (VI). Photo Credit: Jessica da Ross, Memories on the Dancefloor, 2015.

Superstudio, Gruppo 9999, and Archizoom originated in such conditions, and out of all-night discussions. Their aesthetic choices had a political bent: they were interested in questioning the established norms of cultural production, seeking social change, and challenging the role of architecture in modern Italian society. The design magazines Domus and Casabella also played a vital role for the movement as "radical magazines," foregrounding work of the avant-garde groups and students.[14] In their pages we can read the stories of radical architects, their aesthetico-political values and counter-design strategies. According to Antonio Negri, Italy at that time was going through a "magazine period," when magazines, leaflets, and posters were the preferred media for circulating new and burgeoning theories and ideas. This happened not only in the context of the worker and student movements, but also in the field of design and architecture. However, beyond Domus and Casabella, and occasional articles published in other Italian magazines, the radical movement didn't receive much local attention until it was internationally acclaimed by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with the 1972 exhibition "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape." The MOMA celebrated the Radical Architecture movement overseas by showcasing Italian interior design through objects, interior spaces, and commodities, though very little attention was given to discotheques.

During this decade, the first discos were sites for interdisciplinary intersections between music, design, visual art, performance, theatre, and many other forms of art and nightlife experiences. Influenced by American pop art, British music and architectural experimentations (such as the Archigram group), the Viennese avant-garde (including the radical architects Hans Hollein and Walter Pichler), as well an expanding mass media culture, the peculiarity of the first nightclubs that arose in this period in Italy is deeply linked to the historical moment and socio-cultural background. In particular, the design and architecture of some of the most memorable discos of the time have their roots in universities and research. Many schools of architecture at that time contained influential thinkers, and were starting to be occupied by students who formed groups that would then be identified as part of the avant-garde movement. Moreover, the '68 effect in Italy lasted longer than in other countries, such as France and the United States, expanding through the late 1970s with the subsequent radicalization of activist and militant groups. This particular social context allowed for a span of ten years of design and architectural projects by young artists eager to innovate and discard prevalent architectural, socio-cultural, and aesthetico-political codes and paradigms.

The schools of architecture at the Universities of Florence and Turin, as well as the Polytechnic University of Milan, were extremely active during this decade. In particular, the School of Architecture at the University of Florence saw the formation of many groups of students exploring design and architectural thinking in different and radically new ways. They were influenced not only by architects such as Leonardo Savioli, but also by thinkers from other disciplines such as Umberto Eco.[15] The Italian semiotician was at that time teaching at the School of Architecture of the University of Florence and played a substantial role in its theoretical approach to design. With the growing interest in mass media and popular culture, at the time Eco was engaged in expanding the role of semiotics, the study of the production and interpretation of signs, outside the linguistic circle. He provided these young architects, who were looking to broaden their horizons and were frustrated by the crisis of modernism in architecture, with an answer. Together with Marshal McLuhan—who published his influential works in the 1960s (The Gutenberg Galaxy, 1962; Understanding Media, 1964; The Medium is the Message, 1967)—Eco examined the emerging mass media, and proposed a reading of the city and architecture through the lenses of communication and media theories. For his course on visual language at the University of Florence, Eco proposed

the study of architecture as a form of media, challenging the notion of "function."[16] By that time, disappointed by the modernist theories in architecture, the very idea that a function of a building could be at once not only denotative (primary function) but also connotative (secondary functions), gave much inspiration to these young artists who felt liberated in their experimentations with changing and mutable design objects and spaces, which were open to multiple interpretations.[17] In the preface to the catalogue of The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943–1968, an exhibition organized at the Guggenheim museum in New York in 1994, Umberto Eco writes about his experience during these years in the School of Architecture at the University of Florence:

> We spent nights discussing things together; ideas were provoked by visual offerings; the visual offerings were determined according to the spaces; the spaces were delineated on the basis of sound suggestions given by the musicians. [...] At the time I was teaching in the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence. I remember that the Archizoom group had already appeared even before the start of the events of 1968, while the UFO group emerged during the occupation of the university... Architecture departments became the arena in which everything was debated, because the architect felt responsible for society as a whole.[18]

During that time, architect Leonardo Savioli was teaching in the same department as Eco, and the notion of "function" was at the heart of his research as well. His course in Interior Design for the academic year 1966–67 questioned the relationship between built space and "users," re-thinking the one-dimensional notion of function in architecture.[19] Savioli aimed to discard the one-to-one association between the formal, aesthetic, and material aspects of a building, and its precise function and related use. According to the architect, this univocal and categorical relationship predominated in past architectural forms, precluding all kinds of unforeseen, new, and emerging interpretations of space and genres combinations. The discotheque, or piper, as it was named after the first night-club that opened in Rome in 1965, opened up the field to new interdisciplinary intersections, as well as relational and changing ecologies between space and time. And the design of pipers was the task that Savioli gave to students for their final work. The course was centred on the theme "space and participation,"[20] and aimed at proposing a new kind of participation within the built environment, starting from the architectural project itself. Students were asked to design spaces wherein users could actively relate and operate, being themselves able to create constantly changing environments based on the relationship between space, time, and their individual or collective presence. Such research projects were the playground for the realization of experimental discos throughout Il bel paese.

Piper (1965, Rome, by M. F. Cavalli and G. Capolei), Piper (1966, Turin, by Gruppo Strum), Barbarella (1972, Dubbione di Pinasca, by Studio65), Bamba Issa (1969, Forte dei Marmi, by Gruppo UFO), L'Altro Mondo Club (1967, Rimini, by Gruppo Strum), Space Electronic (1969, Florence, by Gruppo 9999), and Mach 2 (1967, Florence, by Superstudio) were some of the first nightclubs that began populating Italian cities in the 1960s. These spaces were home to what Tommaso Trini defined at the time, in a 1968 Domus article, as divertimentifici (entertainment factories). The term was not yet imbued with a dysphoric aura, as it later would be in the 1980s, and it still referred to a kind of wonder and amusement in relation to the discos' potential to create a new aesthetico-political paradigm. As Fulvio Ferrari writes in Discoteca 1968, "the spell of conceiving a disco is to design something that stays under, under our conscious, where you feel immersed in the fluid of your unknown origins, where the magic of lights and sounds that disorient you is part of a project that no Polytechnic can initiate."[21]

Discos allowed, then, not only for the application of new theories learned and practiced in academic circles, but also the emergence of interdisciplinary experimentations no longer possible in other architectural contexts. The Piper in Turin was a perfect example of this, as a flight of musical stairs conceived by Sergio Liberovici welcomed people to the dance floor. The music was generated by bodies moving on the stairs, through photoelectric cells and a combination of forty tracks combined randomly by body movement. Bruno Munari had designed a light machine that shifted through a longitudinal rail hung on the ceiling and projected four different luminous effects on the walls. Other rails on the ceiling and walls permitted the adding of projectors, lights, other objects, and art works. The floor could be re-shaped through mobile parallelepiped structures, creating multiple layers and stages for shows.[22] There were no boundaries between artistic forms here, just as there were no limits to design experimentations—interdisciplinarity was the key word. Fulvio Ferrari again provides a useful account of these cross-disciplinary experiments and their protagonists: "Artists moved easily in this laboratory. Mario Merz used to dance with stainless steel columns; Marisa used to smile; Pistoletto and Mondino challenged each other in happenings made of talcum powder and tens of meters of polyethylene; the Living Theatre was a constant visitor."[23]

The Living Theatre, a renowned New York-based experimental theatre company, also performed at the Space Electronic in Florence in 1969, together with well-known Italian theatre artists like the Nobel-prize-winning Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Space Electronic, designed by Gruppo 9999, was a disco at night and an experimental school of architecture during the day, called S-Space (Scuola separata per l'architettura concettuale espansa—the Separated School for Expanded Conceptual Architecture). In 1971, together with Superstudio, Gruppo 9999 organized the Mondial Festival, an exhibition dedicated to "Life, Death, and Miracles of Architecture."[24] For this event, they created a vegetable garden on Space Electronic's dance floor, a project that would be showcased at the 1972 MOMA exhibit celebrating the Radical Architecture movement. Created out of an old engine repair shop and "furnished with discarded washing drums, refrigerator casings, and the latest technologies,"[25] Space Electronic is one of the few discos of the era to have survived the massive disco-culture explosion of the late 1970s and 1980s, and the subsequent crisis period. Researcher and curator Catharine Rossi has discussed the role that Space Electronic, as well as other discos designed by radical architects, played in Italian nightlife and architectural culture, in the 2014 Venice Biennale and her more recent ICA exhibition in London. Reflecting upon the evolution and legacy of such a space, and on the situation of Italian discos today, she asks: "Is Space Electronic a metaphor for Italy for the apparent disappearance of an earlier radical energy? But who is to say whether what happens in, or outside, of Space Electronic is more or less radical in the 1970s or today?"[26]

In the mid-1970s the radical movement saw a dramatic shift, as did discos. Piper and similar venues that survived became more commercial and less experimental. Space Electronic bears witness to this important change, evidenced by the Biennale exhibition, as journalist Bruno Casini underlines:

"In retrospect, Space Electronic enables us to follow the transition that occurred between the 60s and 70s, during that generational switch from beatnik to rock. Following the protests in '77, and the release of Saturday Night Fever, the venue was transformed into a discotheque."[27] During the 1970s Italy went through a period of violent protests and repressions, and saw a radicalization of the student, worker and union movements. The ten-year experience that began in 1968 mutated, and then came to an end in 1977. Terrorist attacks disrupted the social and political scene, leading to a period called anni di piombo, or "years of lead," which lasted through the end of

the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. In the meantime, the aesthetics of discos, as well as their relationship to the politics of the night, had changed. The socio-political scene experienced a drastic shift, from the dreamlike expressions of cultural potential and the economic boom which marked the rapid industrialization and post-war reconstruction of the 1960s, to the harsh reality and radicalization of social movements in the 1970s. Italy was at that point the leading country in industrial design, and its specific economic configuration was tied to its geography and characterised by small- and medium-sized factories concentrated mostly in the north of the country, with consequent internal migration from the south. Slowly, designers started to leave big factories and companies to open their own studios in cities, especially in Milan, which became the global design capital. According to Negri, during this decade "Milan became a productive metropolis and we experienced the passage from the 'mass worker' through the 'social worker' to the 'cognitive worker'."[28] The young designers of the avant-garde left the experimental circles and joined the new cognitive economy, while discos, reacting to a newly burgeoning nighttime entertainment economy, were infected by the contagious "night-fever" of the late 1970s. The hidden, open, mutable, and radical design of 1960s–1970s nightclubs was thus replaced by a staged architecture.

FROM THE BOOM OF SPAGHETTI-DANCE IN 1980 TO THE RECENT CRISIS

In the 1980s a new disco culture arose. Discotheques were sprouting up in every corner of Italy, leaving cities and moving to suburban, coastal, and internal areas. From the seaside to the central hills and mountains, big, glorious, and pompous discos appeared, mimicking ancient Egypt or Rome, exotic beach resorts, luxurious boats, and magnificent theatres. They became part of the landscape, drawing upon the availability and openness of space outside urban areas, more affordable rental costs, and greater flexibility concerning issues such as noise complaints that discos may attract in city centres. The Italian musical scene actively participated in this new disco economy, producing what became internationally known as Italo-Disco, or more sardonically, "Spaghetti-Dance," as the documentary "Italo-Disco: The Sound of Spaghetti Dance" by Pierpaolo De Iulis suggests.[29] New disco professionals were born out of this rising economy, including PR professionals, event organizers, disco owners, DJs, and other characters who populated the night. In 1991, Jovanotti, Italian DJ and songwriter, released the track "Gente della notte" (people of the night), a quote from which opens this essay, reflecting the burgeoning disco culture of this decade. Moreover, discos were in the process of diversifying their offerings with restaurants, swimming pools, shops, and other services in their space.

In the 1980s, more than 7,000 discos opened in Italy, a proliferation that continued into the 1990s. La Riviera Romagnola on the Adriatic coast became the setting of the new Italian nightlife, with discos such as Baia Imperiale (1984, Gabicce Monte, by Studio Tausani Ferrini and Lucchi); Bounty (1991, Rimini, by Antonello Mambelli,); Cocoricò (1989, Riccione, by Alessandra Brunelli and Mirko Guidi); Embassy (1990, Rimini, by Giuseppe Nosel); Pascià (1988, Riccione, by Sudio Tausain, Ferrini and Lucchi), Prince (1990, Riccione, by Studio Tausain, Ferrini and Lucchi) and later Babaloo (2000, Porto Potenza Picena). The building exterior came to the forefront of the new disco aesthetic, while in the past much more attention had been given to interior design. The façade thus became the glittery entry point to a nighttime experience in a grandiose interior.

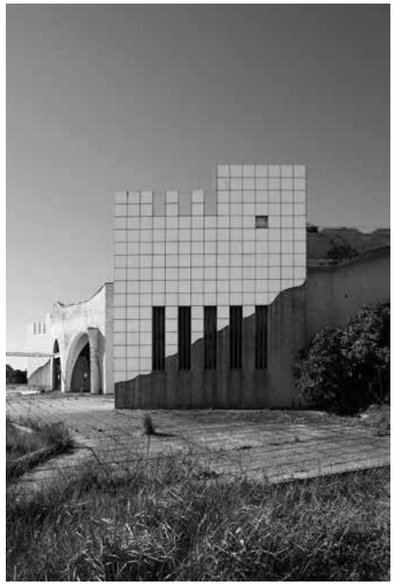
Baia Imperiale, which opened in 1984, is one of the few discos that bears witness today of the grandeur of Italian nightclub culture from this era. The club, previously called Baia degli Angeli when it first opened in 1975, is located in a building that formerly hosted a sports club, on a hilltop overlooking the Adriatic coast in Gabicce Monte. As Notte

PARADISE DISCOTHEQUE

La Nave, Tarsogno Tornolo, Parma. Photo Credit: Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque, 2014–2015.

Marabù, Cella, Reggio-Emilia. Photo Credit: Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque, 2016.

Marabù, Cella, Reggio-Emilia. Photo Credit: Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque, 2016.



(Left) Topkapi, Lido di Spina, Ferrara. Photo Credit: Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque, 2014–2015.

Woodpecker, Milano Marittima, Cervia. Photo Credit: Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque, 2014–2015.

Expò, Altavilla Vicentina (VI). Photo Credit: Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque, 2014–2015.

Italiana recalls: "Not even the United States has had a place like Baia degli Angeli: a former sea-view gym with swimming pools, terraces and ballrooms with a console in a glass elevator. Giancarlo Tirotti, the entrepreneur who created the Baia, was more visionary than Steve Rubell of the famous Studio 54, which would open in 1977."[30] With two resident DJs from the United States, Tom Season and Bob Day, two consoles, and an impressive setting, in the late 1970s Baia degli Angeli became the most famous and internationally renowned disco of the Italian Riviera. A laser projected into the dark sky guided night owls through the streets that climbed the hills from the seaside. Baia degli Angeli ran through 1979, when a man was found dead of a drug overdose in the parking lot.[31] The first issues related to drug and alcohol abuse started haunting disco lovers. In 1984, the place re-opened under the name of Baia Imperiale and expressed the grandiosity of 1980s disco architecture. Its impressive imitation classical architecture recalls the glory of ancient times. The entrance and exterior settings are spectacular: a flight of stairs decorated with a fountain and Roman statues brings guests to the doors, which are flanked by fifteen-metre-tall columns. The garden contains an outdoor, Roman-bath-like swimming pool, as well as a small theatre. Through the glass walls, interior and exterior merge in a spectacular setting: the interior space of this majestic building fuses with breathtaking views of the Adriatic coast. Three dance floors on different levels welcome patrons and offer multiple music options. Silvio San Pietro and Carlo Branzaglia dedicated a photographic book, Discodesign in Italia, to the glory of discotheque design during the 1980–1990s. According to the authors, Baia Imperiale is one of the main symbols of this grandiose era, and "forms part of the collective imagination." Here is how they describe its interior design and the role it has played in Italian discos of its time:

> The dark underground dance floor has been designed to conjure up the ancient catacombs. The lounge itself becomes the Stage of Caesars, lending a touch or irony to the game of stylistic references. In a redecoration carried out in 1996 the citations have assumed Egyptian tones, with hieroglyphs recounting the story of the lovers Antony and Cleopatra. Unique and inimitable, this discotheque has become one of the monuments of the Riviera Romagnola, drawing large numbers of dancers as well as coaches filled with the merely curious, anxious to have their pictures taken in front of its majestic entrance.[32]

During the 1980s, discos were celebrated and demonized at the same time. In 1985, Domus published an article by Gini Alhadeff titled "Il divertimentificio," or "Factory of Entertainment" in the English translation.[33] In it, Alhadeff uses the term divertimentificio in a more negative way than Trini did in the 1960s when writing about l'Altro Mondo Club and the Piper in Turin. His critical article refers to the brand new disco opened in New York in 1985, Palladium. Previously a concert hall, Palladium was taken over by entrepreneurs Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, after their success with one of the most famous New York nightclubs, Studio 54 (1977–1981). They awarded the commission for the Palladium's interior design to the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, whose article "The Palladium: Immaterial Building" shared the same page with Alhadeff's critical perspective in Domus. Alhadeff writes:

> We couldn't wait for it to open. It was going to be the most sophisticated club in New York: the one made with space done by an architect and the décor done by artists. [...] It was going to have more speakers, more video screens, more lights, more DJs, more space that any other club in New York. It does. [...] But who has more than one perfect body to take it all in? Who has more than one pair of eyes to see it all? Who has more than one pair of ears to hear it all? [...] Who are you here? A feverish molecule in a disco dictatorship trying to catch desire by the tail. But dictatorships think only of the masses. [...] It's like a large department store: they have everything but you can't find what you are looking for. It's like an airport, or a train station (without planes or trains to take you places): a space so huge you become anonymous in it. It's like the first day at school, only at night, and in a class of 3,000. That's entertainment in the post-Orwell metropolis.[34]

Discos appeared then as the site of mass, voluptuous, and empty entertainment, linked to the spreading consumerism of the 1980s and 1990s. Italy was heavily affected by this phenomenon of "disco-dictatorship." The pervasive presence of discos through the Italian landscape and nighttime cultural scene concentrated the attention of the media. While radio stations played a big role in the spread and production of disco music, television and newspapers actively participated in the demystification of discotheques through an emphasis on what was called "stragi del sabato sera" (Saturday night carnage), referring to the nocturnal car accidents that occurred among disco-lovers travelling to or from clubs late at night. But if clubs were being demystified as centres of empty and pointless entertainment, they were being celebrated as well. In 1991, the city council of Campi Bisenzio in Florence promoted the exhibition La scena della notte ("The Night Scene"), celebrating the design and cultural activities of the local disco-club Manila, together with some of the most important discotheques of the 1980s and 1990s, including Palladium in New York, Haçienda in Manchester, and Le Palace in Paris. As many of its contemporaries, Manila was located out of town, close to Florence. Brunella Settesoldi, town councillor of Campi Bisenzio at the time, introduces the catalogue of the exhibit by drawing upon the idea of discos as "scapegoats" in the debate over divertimentifici, stragi del sabato sera, and consumerism:

> Can a nightclub be a place to make culture and to benefit from it? In recent months, a debate took place over opening hours, over the fact that discos are the most striking aspect of

> the so-called “divertimentificio” that happens on the Adriatic coast and beyond; discos have become, in fact, scapegoats of accusations concerning the lifestyles of the youth that, beyond many real problems, seems more a desire for total control over their lives from adults that can only lead to generational clashes, today as always. Without wanting to divide nightclubs into two distinct groups (those of series A and series B), there exist some areas where sheer fun is constantly accompanied by an effort to create cultural production and exchange, expressed not only in the quality of proposals that present everything that is trendy, but also in the design of a space that is, indeed, ephemeral, but not architecturally insignificant.[35]

The Manila disco-club was, in fact, a cultural and design experiment. Its interior design was re-invented throughout the years, from the Egypt settings of Manila sul Nilo (Manile on the Nile) in 1986, to the rougher style of the Manila Sexy Garage in 1987, from a warmer Spanish influence in Manila Me Gusta in 1988, to the more local rationalistic architecture of the Manila Italia in 1989, and the international breath of Manila Europa in 1990. Night-owls frequenting the Manila ranged from local youth, to fashion stars like Cavallini, rock bands like Spandau Ballet, theatre companies such Falso Movimento, designers and so on.[36] Cesare Pergola, the architect who designed the Manila, underlines the central place that discos still had in 1980, during the emergence of new interdisciplinary research in architecture:

> The interest for discotheques has concerned several architects, some of them very well known, who have found in that the possibility to express a design research otherwise impracticable. Arata Isozaki, one of the greatest contemporary architects, with New York’s Palladium has realized one of the most interesting plans of this design area, and states: “The discotheque is a place for amusement as theatre and cabaret were in the past. However, it is only incidentally considered. Generally, in a museum or in a Concert-Hall only the arts recognized as institutional are exhibited or represented. This hardly encourages an event in which something new or unknown may emerge. However, it could well be the discotheque itself, the right place to generate something new.”[37]

A common thread runs through the aesthetic metamorphosis of the Italian discotheque, from the first discos of the 1960s to those of 1990s: their marginality within architecture and cultural production, which has been their force. Discos offered the potential for design experimentation, for the emergence of new artistic, music, and fashion trends, as well as serving as very important indicators of social, economic, and cultural practices related to the economy of the night, then and now. For this reason, they should be taken into consideration today in the creation of politics related to time and rhythm in urban areas. In fact, after the grandeur of the 1980s and early 1990s, the mid-1990s saw the birth of a new kind of nightclub that went back to urban or suburban areas, reoccupying the dismissed, empty, and abandoned ruins left by the slow de-industrialization of Italy (a development that occurred in many other Western countries as well). Some of the experimental nightclubs opened in this era include: Magazzini Generali (1995, Milan, by Massimo Iosa Ghini and Giancarlo Soresina), La Gare (1994, Milan, Ismaele Marrone), Link (1994, Bologna), Guerra e Pace (1996, Casoria, by Gnosis Architettura), and Stop Line (1995, Curno, by Studio Archea). As renowned Italian DJ and music producer Claudio Coccoluto explains in Nightswimming:

> The discotheque’s architectural concept, a legacy from the 70s with its dance halls and disco-club, has become somewhat obsolete. No evolution occurred. Nowadays, a disco is any space that can accommodate large numbers. In recent years this type of venue has become less palatable than other club formats, like those in industrial warehouses, underground parking lots or a deconsecrated church. These times we are more inclined to dance in a museum than in a nightclub.[38]

The crisis that saw the number of discos decrease by two-thirds in recent years, from 7,000 in the 1980s to barely 2,500 today, is linked to many economic, cultural, social, and political factors that need to be given more attention, and which are also found outside Italy. As scholar Everardo Minardi pointed out, after studying the current socio-economic situation of discos (especially along the Riviera), the ephemerality of events taking place in new spaces dedicated to other functions, or found in temporary and often illegal locations disseminated through social media, the growing festival culture and the revamping of city centres with smaller night-clubs whose attractions were more diverse, led to a decline in interest in discotheques. Moreover, discos have suffered growing competition from events that populate the night in a more informal way, often without having obtained the correct permit nor paying taxes. As a recent report in La Repubblica points out, the crisis of discos is more rooted in changes in the interests and habits of partygoers, and from the rise in competing events that are often illegal, than it is in the general economic crisis, since “the economy of the night, the one related to entertainment, has never been so prosperous: 70 billion euros, 4% of Italy’s GDP.”[39]. But discos continue to close their doors. On the one hand, they are not able to compete amidst the growing diversification of entertainment options, with new kinds of entertainment spaces that have re-invented themselves under these new conditions of nighttime urban culture. On the other, as registered entertainment spaces which officially contribute to Italy’s nighttime economy, they are confronted with high taxation and illegal competition.

Nevertheless, discos have been important actors of the night. They have opened the door to a public, political debate over the necessity of regulating and co-ordinating nighttime opening hours and services, as well as shedding light on the different needs of the diverse actors and groups who populate the night. City councils and regions are thus left looking for solutions to nighttime entertainment-related issues. Ascendant interest in the night and in the histories of Italian disco culture, from the Venice Biennale through media features to academic research, attest to the interest in studying discos from an interdisciplinary perspective. Always marginal within critical and mainstream architectural discourse, populated by youth and denigrated by media, discotheques may be seen as radical sites of experimentation in the aesthetics and politics of the urban night. Their potential for generating something new is deeply linked to the marginal and ephemeral position they have occupied in space, but also in time. In conclusion, and to invoke both the historical debate over the place of discos within nighttime economies and cultures, and the title of this journal itself, discos have been “scapegoats,” bearing “the burden of the city and its sins.” As Everardo Minardi states, after the massive disco-culture of the 1980s and 1990s, discos have reached today an entrepreneurial organization contributing to the rising of the nighttime economy. However, they maintain a “wild, not domesticated, and maybe impossible to tame” aspect[40], leading to the magical atmosphere that allows for the aesthetico-political experimentations foregrounded above.

NOTES

1 Jovanotti, Gente della notte (London: Ibiza Records, 1990). Original text: “A me piace la notte gli voglio bene / che vedo tante albe e pochissime mattine, / la notte mi ha adottato e mi ha dato un lavoro / che mi piace un sacco anzi io l’adoro. / Mi chiamo JOVANOTTI e faccio il deejay, / non vado mai a dormire prima delle sei.” (My translation.)

2 Giovanna Silva and Chiara Carpenter, Nightswimming: Discotheques from the 1960s to the Present (London: Bedford Press, 2015), 129.

3 Giulia Foschi and Carmine Saviano, “In Europa crolla la febbre del sabato sera,” La Repubblica, 22 February 2016, http://inchieste.repubblica.it/it/repubblica/rep-it/2016/02/22/news/in_europa_crolla_la_febbre_del_sabato_sera-132722162.

4 Notte Italiana, http://www.notteitaliana.eu.

5 See Antonio La Grotta, Paradise Discotheque,

2014/2015, http://www.antoniolagrotta.eu/paradise-discotheque.html; Jessica Da Ros, Memories on a Dancefloor, http://memoriesonadancefloor.blogspot.ca; and Alessandro Tesei, Ascosi Lasciti, https://ascosilasciti.com.

6 See Sandra Mallet, "Aménager les rythmes: politiques temporelles et urbanisme," EspacesTemps, 15 April 2013, http://www.espacestemps.net/en/articles/amenager-les-rythmes-politiques-temporelles-et-urbanisme; Nico Bortoletto, Sistemi produttivi e consumi simbolici nel mondo delle discoteche in Emilia-Romagna (Faenza: Homeless Book, 2012); and Everardo Minardi, Economia e sociologia della notte (Faenza: Homeless Book, 2015).

7 Luc Gwiazdzinski, "Urbanisme des temps," L'observatoire 43 (Winter 2013): 3–8.

8 Sandra Bonfiglioli, "Politiche dei tempi urbani in Italia per una conciliazione tra tempi di vita e orari di lavoro," in Questioni di genere, questioni di politica, ed. A. Simonazzi (Roma: Carrocci, 2006).

9 Sandra Bonfiglioli, "Tempi sociali e tempi urbani: un progetto di città," Tempi e spazi, January 2002, http://www.tempiespazi.it/spazi/bonfig.

10 "Law 53/2000," Gazzetta Ufficiale 60, 13 March 2000, http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/00053l.htm.

11 According to scholar Sandra Mallet, the debate over temporal politics that took place in France in the 1990s was inspired by the pioneer work done in Italy by the Feminist and union movements. (Mallet, "Aménager les rythmes," 2.)

12 In 2014, SILB, the Italian association for entertainment and nightclubs, joined, with France and Spain in the European Nightlife Association, the first European organization dedicated to nightlife businesses. Many cities are holding summits on the nighttime economy, as Paris did in 2010, and are appointing "night mayors" to co-ordinate the different needs of the night.

13 Silva and Carpenter, Nightswimming, 131.

14 Joseph Grima, Alessandro Mendini and Vera Sacchetti, "The Role of Radical Magazines," in The Italian Avant-garde 1968–1976, ed. Catharine Rossi and Alex Coles (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 7–22.

15 More precisely Eco was Lecturer in Aesthetics at the University of Torino, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia and at the Polytechnic of Milano, Facoltà di Architettura, 1961–1964; Associate Professor of Visual Communication, Facoltà di Architettura, University of Firenze, 1966–1969; and Associate Professor of Semiotics, Facoltà di Architettura, Polytechnic di Milano, 1969–1971.

16 Umberto Eco, "L'architettura come comunicazione di massa?" in La struttura assente (Milano: Bompiani, 1968).

17 In an article published by the radical group Superstudio in 1969 in Domus, the group underlines the link between their projects and the theory Eco was developing during that time, referring to the notion of opera aperta (open work): "only in the ambiguity, in the non-solution, in the plurality of possible lectures, occurs the necessary tension that leads to keep the work open and 'in-progess'." Original text: "Solo dall'ambiguità, dalla non-soluzione, dalla pluralità delle possibili letture, nasce la tensione necessaria a mantenere l'opera aperta e 'in progress'." (My translation.) Superstudio, "Superstudio: Projects and Thoughts," Domus 479 (October 1969), http://www.domusweb.it/en/from-the-archive/2012/02/11/superstudio-projects-and-thoughts.html.

18 Umberto Eco, "Preface," in The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943–1968, ed. Germano Celant (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1994), xiv.

19 Leonardo Savioli, Lara Vinca Masini and Leonardo Ricci, Ipotesi di spazio (Firenze: Giglio e Garisenda, 1972).

20 Ibid., 2. "Spazio e coinvolgimento." (My translation.)

21 Ferrari, Discoteca 1968: L'architettura straordinaria (Torino: Allemandi, 1990), 22. Original text: "L'incantesimo del progetto della discoteca è disegnare qualcosa che sta sotto, sotto il nostro conscio, dove ti immerge nel fluido delle tue origini che non sai, dove la magia delle luci e dei suoni che ti stralunano è parte del progetto a cui nessun politecnico inizia." (My translation.)

22 Ibid., 32.

23 Ibid., 24. Original text: "Si muovevano efficacemente gli artisti in questo laboratorio. Mario Merz ballava con le colonne di acciaio inox, Marisa sorrideva, Pistoletto e Mondino si sfidavano in happenings di borotalco e decine di metri di teli di polietilene, il Living Theatre era di casa." (My translation.)

24 9999-Superstudio, S-Space presents: Vita, morte e miracoli dell'architettura / Life, Death and Miracles of Architecture (Firenze: Festival catalogue, 9–11 November 1971).

25 Catharine Rossi, "Architecture at the Disco: Radicals, Rhythms and the 1970s Avant-Garde," Space Electronic, 4 June 2014, https://spaceelectronic.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/article-architecture-at-the-disco.

26 Ibid.

27 Silva and Carpenter, Nightswimming, 139.

28 Antonio Negri, "The Real Radical?" in The Italian Avant-garde 1968–1976, ed. Catharine Rossi and Alex Coles (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 201–219.

29 Pierpaolo De Iulis, Italo Disco: The Sound of Spaghetti Dance (Rome: Rave Up Multimedia, 2009).

30 "Baia degli Angeli," Notte Italiana, http://notteitaliana.eu/locale/baia-degli-angeli. Original text: "Neanche l'America ha avuto un posto come la Baia degli angeli: un'ex palestra affacciata sul mare con piscine, terrazze e sale da ballo con tanto consolle in un ascensore di vetro. Giancarlo Tirotti, l'imprenditore che ha dato vita alla Baia, è stato più visionario di Steve Rubell dello storico Studio 54, che aprirà solo nel 1977." (My translation.)

31 Matteo Tassinari, "Baia degli angeli: cielo, speranza, crollo," Notti notturne, 28 January 2012, http://mattax-mattax.blogspot.ca/2012/01/la-baia-degli-angeli-il-mito.html.

32 Silvio San Pietro and Carlo Branzaglia, Disco-Design in Italia (Milano: Edizioni L'archivolto, 1996), 19.

33 Gini Alhadeff, "Divertimentifici," Domus 666 (1985): 38.

34 Ibid.

35 Brunella Settesoldi, "Preface," in La scena della notte, ed. Cesare Pergola (Firenze: Alinea, 1991), 4. Original text: "Una discoteca può essere un luogo dove si fa cultura e dove si fruisce della stessa? Pensiamo alle polemiche di questi ultimi mesi, sugli orari di apertura, sul fatto che sono l'aspetto più eclatante del divertimentificio che coinvolge la riviera adriatica e non solo; sono diventate, di fatto, il capro espiatorio di un j'accuse che cerca di coinvolgere in toto la vita dei giovani e che somiglia, al di là di tanti problemi reali, ad una volontà di totale controllo degli adulti che non può non portare, oggi come sempre, a scontri generazionali. Senza voler dividere le discoteche in due gruppi distinti (quelle di serie A e serie B), esistono però alcune realtà dove il puro e semplice divertimento è permanentemente affiancato da uno sforzo di produzione e scambio culturale che si estrinseca in proposte di qualità in una presentazione di tutto ciò che fa tendenza, ma anche nella progettazione di uno spazio sì effimero, ma non per questo architettonicamente poco rilevante." (My translation.)

36 Cesare Pergola, La scena della notte (Firenze: Alinea, 1991), 9.

37 Ibid., 9.

38 Quoted in Silva and Carpenter, Nightswimming, 146.

39 Foschi and Saviano, "In Europa." Original text: "L'economia della notte, quella legata al divertimento, non è mai stata così florida: 70 miliardi di euro, il 4% del Pil." (My translation.)

40 Everardo Minardi, "La discoteca, la sua organizzazione e la sua gestione: un caso di impresa selvatica?" Libero, 2002, http://digilander.libero.it/sociologiateramo/Nighttime.htm.

A SECRET

You reach
the morning

by riding
the night.