

Aesthetics of Post Club and Architecture

Introduction

Architectural design and sound are and have been intertwined since music's inception through acoustics, even before we were aware of it. Spaces have always been a great inspiration for me musically, but less from an acoustics standpoint, but an aesthetic, and functional one. The style of buildings greatly influence and shape not only the sounds that happen there, but the mood and atmosphere. Capturing and expressing the things we feel internally due to our exterior visual input. The way DJs talk about some club releases is that the tracks are tools, and release “toolkits”, which are in essence a collection of tracks that are easy to mix, and made for that purpose. In the 2010s, the record label Night Slugs released a slough of EPs titled *Club Constructions*. The artwork was minimal, and featured wireframes blue print like images of different buildings, hardware, and fictional space vehicles.

A lot of the “post club” music I’ll be citing in this paper is inspired by dystopian places and ideas, from dungeons to the mecha-verses and warfare that greatly influenced Nguzunguzu’s album *Skycell* (2013) which was my first introduction to the duo. This album is what inspired me to start making club music, and live in the sonic landscape that Daniel Pineda and Asma Maroof of Nguzunguzu had created. There was nothing cooler in the world to my 13 year old self. This led me to Fatima Al Qadiri, and her EP *Genre-Specific Xperience* (2011) diving deeper into an aesthetic of cyber warfare, mechatronics and mecha as a genre. Brutalism in particular can be heard through the reverberance of many Fade to Mind releases, as well as the more minimal sonic landscape of Night Slugs and affiliated artists.

Club

When someone says they make club music today, it can mean many things, but the term club music really started in the early 90s in Baltimore, Maryland. This style was influenced by miami bass and breakbeat, and features an 8/4 beat structure, its tempo is typically around 130 bpm. Vocal samples, MCs, and Rap and R&B remixes are staples in many Baltimore club tracks and mixes. This style then spread to Jersey and Philadelphia, and Jersey club is making a comeback in popularity recently with artists like UNIIQU3 and Cookiee Kawaii. Over in the UK, dance clubs were playing more house and techno, and in the 1990s and early 2000s, garage, later morphing into grime, were big influences on the development of “post club”. In the American North East, the popular regional dance called footwork was also developing during this time in Chicago, ghetto house, electro, and Detroit techno morphed into the musical dance style known as footwork and juke. Deconstructed club as a movement really began in 2009 in New York City, when VenusX and Shayne Oliver (Hood by Air) started their party, GHE20G0TH1K. This was a space for queer kids, punks, goths, electronic dance music heads and the like. The party was formed out of frustration and boredom at the state of the club scene at the time, being run by, and gate-kept by cisgendered white men, who refused to innovate on the music and nightlife of the city. VenusXs Dj style blended beats from all over the world, and did not stick to just one genre or style. When asked to describe the party in an interview for Vice, VenusX replied with the following statement: “It's a party. It's not about going somewhere and getting so drunk that you don't care about the music. It's somewhere where you can feel comfortable and creative. It takes on an individual meaning for everyone, but to me GHE20G0TH1K means being a Dominican girl from uptown who listens to goth music and hip-hop and dresses like a morbid anime punk

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schoolgirl.” Through deconstructed remixes, and live mixing techniques, she created not just an event, but a movement, a movement that’s influence can be seen in most creative fields today.

In Los Angeles around 2012, Wu Stang’s Wildness party began at the Silver Platter, an LGBTQ+ club and bar in McArthur Park. DJ TotalFreedom, and Daniel Pineda (AKA NA) from Nguzunguzu were staples of the party, as was Asma Maroof (AKA Asmara, and DJ MA), the other half of Nguzunguzu. The duo had just moved to Los Angeles from Chicago, and had multiple releases under their belts dating back just a couple of years, starting in 2010 with their debut, self titled EP, *Nguzunguzu*’. That same year, *The Claw mixtape* was released by Nguzunguzu, TotalFreedom, and Kingdom (co-founder of the LA based record label Fade to Mind), which was a collection short and chaotic remixes with many different samples from R&B, to Trina, to dembo and reggaeton. These were the sounds of Wildness in Los Angeles, and GHE20G0TH1K in New York.

Most of the Djs were producers, and their blends would greatly inspire the music they made, and continued to add to the sound that defined deconstructed club. Kingdom incorporates more vocal samples, specifically of R&B in his music, and has now produced for artists like Tinashe, and SZA. His track “ Stalker Ha ” off his second Night Slugs release in 2011, repurposed the classic “ha” sample used in ballroom music, and became an underground club hit. Nguzunguzu has a more minimal and industrial sound, and plays more closely to it’s roots of the club, and plays off of specific themes and spaces, as does the music of Neana, most recently featured in the Mugler fashion show, SS 2021.

Fashion and club music have been in lock step for many years now. Shayne Oliver, who started GHE20G0TH1K with VenusX, pioneered the streetwear brand Hood by Air. Asmara has created many runway soundtracks, and DJ’d many fashion shows in Los Angeles and beyond.

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Another record label that is associated with this style and has runway affiliation is Naafi, out of Mexico City. Many producers with Naafi have been involved in the music of runway shows, specifically Debit, a Texas native, who has soundtracked several Barragán shows over the past few years. This music is sometimes referred to as “post club.” The Staycore collective based in Stockholm Sweden, with artists like TOXE, Mobilegirl, Dinamarca, and Mechatok, is also considered an offshoot of the visual, philosophical, and musical aesthetic of deconstructed/post club.

Brutalism

Brutalism is an architectural style that most would agree started in the early 1950s, as a reaction to the more nostalgic architecture that came before it, the art deco and expressionistic styles of the 1930s and 20s respectively. Its distinguishing characteristics are rooted in the materials being raw and unrefined; materials like brick and wood have been used, though concrete is almost synonymous with the Brutalist style. As the Club Construction volumes are rooted firmly in the club, brutalism is firmly rooted in the post-war era, and reflects the mindset and economic hardships of the time. Some would argue the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier really started the movement with his building Unité d'Habitation, which was a building of concrete apartments without many stylistic frills. Though the style may have emerged then, the term has been associated with the British architects Alison and Peter Smithson. The building designs of the Smithsons were unrefined, and left fixtures, vents, and pipes exposed, like many lofts and warehouse spaces look today. ‘Brut’ in French, means unfinished, or raw, as reflected in the materials and design choices. This is the real meaning behind the Brutalist style, not the English interpretation of brutality as violence.

The idea was to reflect the bleak, harsh realities of modern living in the post-war United Kingdom. The Smithsons were not escapists, and though their building designs were imaginative and quite beautiful, they were primarily functional, and existed within the restrictive economic budgets allowed as the United Kingdom rebuilt and reshaped its cities and neighborhoods. Though the buildings may appear dark and unwelcoming, the urban planning incorporated in the Smithsons designs were focused on community, and creating residential neighborhood areas surrounded by trees, with prominent pedestrian paths shielding these areas from the industrial traffic and bustle of the larger city they were located in.

Brutalism is a misunderstood, and confrontational architectural style. In many ways it is extremely emotional. The hard surfaces, odd shapes, and sometimes claustrophobic designs have the power to evoke a sense of dread in the viewer, or inhibitor of the structures. Brutalist buildings are purposeful, and though made with emotion in mind, the function of these buildings is never sacrificed for style, but the two feed off one another in daring unique ways. Brutalism as a movement was a rejection of fine art, and a recognition and reflection of the unrefined and chaotic world. Architect Jean Dubuffet coined the term "Art Brut" "to define art created outside of the established art-world, notably by self-taught artists, children, and the mentally ill." "Art Brut" was an artistic movement, not limited to architecture, and was the leading concept in the "Parallel of Life and Art" exhibition in 1953, featuring works curated by Allison and Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Ronald Jenkins. There was no mission statement, but they wanted the series of images to intuitively affect the viewers as an experience. "There is no single simple aim in this procedure. No watertight scientific or philosophical system is demonstrated. In short it forms a poetic-lyrical order where images create a series of cross-relationships." As with most art, it is up to the viewer to feel and respond to what they are

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seeing or listening to. In an exhibition, though a mission statement may be read on a wall or website, the pieces should flow in a way in which the viewer can intuitively understand and connect the concepts and ideas the work is exploring, or in reference to.

A Brief Introduction to Night Slugs

In the early 2010s, the label Night Slugs was formed by Bok Bok and L-vis 1990, who now runs his own label, Dance System Records, and now goes by the name Dance System. The two started putting out more modern club music, taking influence from dub, grime, house, techno, and Baltimore and Jersey club. All these styles were merging together to create something familiar, fresh, and exciting in the dance music arena.

NightSlugs used to have a very curated visual aesthetic, and each release was monochromatic (excluding black and white) often featuring a wireframe design like a blueprint. In 2012 they started releasing the “Club Construction Volumes” as well as other EPs from artists like Helix, Girl Unit, Jam City, and Lil Silva. Most of the artists on the label, notably excluding Helix, who is from and based in Atlanta, Georgia, were from the UK. The Night Slugs discography is full of minimal club gems, high energy dance bangers, and experimental genre bending tracks that exist in their own unique spaces.

The Manifesto

Intellectualist themes, dogma, and manifestos have long been a tradition of architectural styles. The dogma behind the Club Constructions collection was released on Night Slugs website in 2014, as a sort of open call to club producers. *“Tracks are as raw and stripped back as possible, built around one simple idea. Production is gritty and driven. Saturation is encouraged. No melody (3 notes or less). Tracks are stripped of emotive artifacts, they are not for escapism. They are grounded in the club. Reverb, FX and sound design reflect their environment: small,*

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dark basements or warehouses. Short reverbs are encouraged. Vocals or vocal samples to be used only if INTEGRAL.” This manifesto was in essence, the birth of a deconstructed club.

Included in the publication was this message: *“This is not a contest or a PR stunt. This is a genuine reaction to the way the CC series has developed, the music around us and the demos we receive. This is an attempt to share some of the label's culture. CC is currently an open-ended project and we don't know yet whether it will lead to new signings, EP or compilation releases, or simply to new friends and shared ideas. Please submit your Club Constructions and let's find out together!”*

The intersection between club music and architecture has in large part been curated and recognized through their inherent similarities. Dance music has many functional components, it is supposed to make you move, as buildings are for using, and inhabiting. With both dance music and architecture, if done right, they will also build an emotional space; with curated lines and curves, window placements, and layout. These all have a tremendous impact on the feel of a space, and the visitors and inhabitants' mental states while in the building.

Bringing things back to the club, these spaces are often hard, industrial, and concrete with hard edges and lines. As stated in the club construction manifesto, *“Reverb, FX and sound design reflect their environment: small, dark basements or warehouses.”* The manifesto goes on to discourage any emotive artifacts as a pushback from escapism, as the tracks should be *“grounded in the club.”* On the contrary, my music is largely for escapism. Though I am drawn, especially in my debut EP *Endurance* to lean into simple, repetitive melodies. As I grow as an artist, the emotional artifacts become a more important part of my music. Though I make what many would label as “deconstructed club” music, it has always been more of an escape for me, and less rooted in the club. This is largely due to the fact that I don't like to go out very much, so

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my experience in club environments is very limited, as is their influence on me as a space. That said, the idea and curated fictional space of “the club” is definitely a big influence on what I make, and the artificial environments in my head are tied to what I am creating. This fictional space is less about how it looks, but how it makes you feel. It makes you feel cool. It makes you feel free, and free to dive into whatever emotional space you want.

FadetoMind and Nature

In 2011, Kingdom started Fade to Mind, a record label often referred to as Night Slugs Los Angeles based younger sister label. Its first releases were the aforementioned *The Claw* mixtape, Nguzunguzu’s *Times Up* EP, and a mix by Prince William. If Night Slugs is more Brutalist, Fade to Mind releases venture into the aesthetic of Green Architecture. Ezra Rubin, AKA Kingdoms name itself is a reference to nature, as well as king-dom, as I assume Kingdom is a dom in the gay community, or at the very least is making a play on words in that vein, though this is unconfirmed. The album art, instead of going with the blueprint wireframe aesthetic of Night Slugs, is much more collage like, and features nature prominently- The *Times Up* EP (2011) cover is a waterfall, Kingdoms *Tears in the Club* (2017) release is a disintegrated chain link fence, through which blue skies, leaves, and pink flowers shine through. The music of their early releases stray from the early Night Slugs discography as the releases are more inspired texturally through nature. Dave Quam, AKA Massacooramaan’s first Fade to Mind release, *Dead Long Time* (2012) features crystals on a circular disc cutout, a nod to classic white label covers. Through Night Slugs discography, references and themes of nature are still apparent. Bok Bok’s *Your Charismatic Self* EP, with tracks like “Green House”, feature more lush sounds and vocal samples. The album artwork is of a concrete music studio atrium, looking through a paneled glass window into a greenhouse. The theme of urban decay; nature breaking through in urban

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and industrial landscapes, buildings deteriorating and metal rusting over is visually all over the Fade to Mind discography.

As time moved into the mid-late 2010's, Fade to Mind's releases began to feature more vocalists, and though the music is still under the dance music umbrella, R&B production became the focus, as Kingdom is now one of the only people who still releases on Fade to Mind.

R&B, Grime, Trap

Kelela's *Cut 4 ME* mixtape (2013) was a big turning point for the label, as well as the more minimal, club influenced production style of Fade to Mind's roster. In many ways, it is unsurprising that the style of Bok Bok, Kingdom, and Nguzunguzu would work so well with vocalists. The production is minimal, leaving lots of room for a vocal melody, and the rhythms and motifs are inspired by R&B, grime, and other musical styles that frequently feature vocalists. In an interview for Ssense in 2016, Asmara elaborates on this sentiment "That negative space, as if it were a drawing, is so important for a producer. You need to find a pocket where the singer is going to ride." The connection between R&B and grime can be heard all over American artists like Brandy, and Twista. "We're DJs that play in the club, but we don't just make music for the club." In multiple interviews the duo talk about loving DJ Mustard, and a through line can be made between the two musically. After reviewing many DJ Mustard instrumentals, they usually carry the whole groove in the bass line, and alternate between maybe 2 or 3 keys lines, as well as more traditional trap hats, and snares throughout. Dj Mustard's "Burn Rubber" instrumental is particularly minimal, but extremely impactful and grooves so well for this reason. When DJing this kind of club music, trap and hip hop mix with it extremely well, as they are made in comparable BPMs – usually 130 to 145 – and often fill out and add more complex syncopated rhythms on top of the club instrumentals.

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In 2014, Future Brown was formed. Future Brown is a producer group made up of both Daniel Pineda and Asma Maroof of Nguzunguzu, Fatima Al Quadiri, and J-Cush of Lit City Trax. Their first release was the two track EP *Wanna Party/World's Mine* featuring the rapper and singer/songwriter Tink, and the infamous grime rappers Prince Rapid, Dirty Danger, and Roachee. A few months later in 2015, they released a self titled album *Future Brown* with 11 tracks, all featuring different vocalists including Shawna, Kelela, Maluca, Riko Dan, and of course Tink and Prince Rapid, Dirty Danger, and Roachee came back with an additional song produced by the group. The beats are icy, minimal, and feature lush textural synth pads and leads. The percussion sounds are unique, and sound fresh, clean and futuristic, in a genre landscape where instrumentals are frequently driven by trends. The group's instrumental version of "MVP" titled "Marbles" was used in the fashion brand Telfar's ad campaign film for The Museum of Contemporary Art.

Conclusions

Like Brutalism, this style of club music when it first started to infiltrate the club scene was widely disliked. It was seen as bad, too minimal, and undanceable. Though it draws from ballroom, Jersey, Baltimore, techno and house music, it was ultimately something new at the time. The flavor of influences and original expression was almost radical, and though these things are easy to trace back, what Fade to Mind and Night Slugs created was truly an original sound and aesthetic, as much as anything can be. Brutalism has also had its ups and downs when it comes to popularity, and is still viewed as one of the most ugly architectural styles out there. Brutalism is polarizing, and though it does not perpetuate a luxury of lifestyle that many postmodern, and mid-century modern structures give, there is beauty in its dark, unrefined and bold designs.

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Design and construction are very similar in concept to making music. It starts with an idea, a feeling, an emotion, a need, and is built from that. Adding a brick at a time. First the foundation which can be different every time, but I like to start with the percussive elements and go from there. Not just structurally, but emotionally. Like an architect finding the best window placement for where the light will hit, an atmosphere will emerge as more elements fall into place. When songs are mixed together, there are even more possibilities, and I'll often think about this creation, like considering the neighborhood and external environment and impact of a new building in the flow of a space. The architect Zaha Hadid, one of my favorites, affectionately known as "the queen of the curve" for her biomorphic buildings, has also created hybrid buildings, taking old infrastructure, with old brick and wood, and adding an organically shaped, brand new often white or metal exterior— like fungus growing on a log. My music, if it were compared to an architectural style, would be a sort of hybrid style drawing from Green Architecture, Brutalism, and Biomorphism. Concrete, or white boxy structures, with plants built into their design, existing in line materialistically with brutalist aesthetics, but grown over with foliage.

For the musical part of this project, I was not trying to replicate any of the music I've referenced here, but explore and express my own take on some ideas and concepts, as well as my inner world and the spaces that I inhabit; emotionally and physically.

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