
APOCALYPSO DISCO: LA RAVE-O-LUZIONE DELLA POST TECHNO

RICCARDO BALLI

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An absolute insider of the international underground electronic music scene for 20 years or so, Riccardo Balli is the best conceivable Charon for those who weren't there and want to get at least a flavour of what it was—and still is—all about. But beware, Balli is neither a music critic nor a music historian. Rather, a DJ, label owner, composer, novelist, live performer and, above all, a relentless experimenter in every domain of cultural production, Balli has now released a book whose main aim is to *resist* historification—a process which, as anyone acquainted with the Situationists knows, is inherently akin to museification and death (or, worse, sell out).

Apocalypso Disco mixes fiction, autobiographic memories, interviews, recipe books, alchemical hints, sci-fi scenes and philosophical-anthropological asides to cheer up the reader during an intense, disorderly yet coherent promenade to the netherworld of unconventional electronics. One additional clarification: the subtitle of *Apocalypso Disco*, which reads “The rave-o-lution of post-techno”, is best understood as *not* implying that there is something inherently revolutionary about rave music. Far from that. Indeed, the whole of Balli's book can be read as a call to bring the revolution *into* conventional rave and hardcore dance music, which are but the mirror of the zombie culture in which we currently live.

The quintessential embodiment of *décadence* and “postindustrial alienation”, these genres still carry with them a dormant potential of resistance, which can only be shaken by the Nietzschean cry that cuts across the pages of *Apocalypso Disco*: “Noize is politics!”. In a Philip K. Dick-inspired pastiche, “Folly for seven ghettoblaster”, with reference to the short novel *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, Balli fictionally stages such a deadly *meeting of styles*, where delegates from different music tribes—house, gabber, Goa trance, minimal, hip-hop, dub/ragga, jungle—need to face jointly an illegal entry into their territories by a mysterious dr Snorri Sturlason, former researcher at the Rhythm Department and currently suspected of being involved with the no less mysterious Fulcanelli Records. All the tribes are quite aware that, with his load of illicit mixadelic substances, Sturlason poses a grave threat to their society of “Psychic Release” . . .

Such is the allure of the anti-historification exercise entertained by Balli in *Apocalypso Disco*. Contrary to other genres of underground music, Balli claims, electronic music has the potential to directly set “the brainframe” of the dancer—yes, a mind-control talk that comes straight out of a 1950s sci-fi movie. Yet Balli’s emphasis on the directly *affective* experience of the electronic dance floor is well understandable by anyone who has ever attended one of his sulphurous DJ sets: with joyful irreverence, parody, prankish attitude, and a certain nerdish citationist *goût* for obscure trash-pop references appositely mixed with occultist and high-brow sources, DJ Balli routinely serves his mash-up of sounds, a hotchpotch that is the essential counterpart to the theory and analyses outlined in the pages of his book.

So, *Apocalypso Disco* is really a book that comes straight out of lived experience—as the funny slice-of-life sketch about vinyl self-distribution in Central-Eastern Europe makes clear. This is also why a large chunk of the book, nearly half of it, is left to the voices of Balli’s “comrades in arms”, including musicians, machine builders, party organizers, turntablists, innovators of all sorts, who are the undisputed protagonists of the underground electronic music scene since the Dead by Dawn parties at the anarchist 121 Centre in early-1990s Brixton, London. With names such as Christoph Fringeli, Aphasic, Slepicy, Eitherherd and Sansculotte, it is difficult to resist the temptation of historification, yet Balli manages to actually have them talk a lot about music at the technical level and, *ça va sans dire*, at the political level.

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