

ILIADÉ ET FILMS PRESENTS



A FILM BY VALENTIN NOUJAÏM

PACIFIC CLUB

JULIEN MÉZENGE

AZEDINE BENABDELMOUENE

TAOS BERTRAND



Oyster Films



Recipient of a production grant from

مؤسسة الوحدة للأفلام
DOHA FILM INSTITUTE



PACIFIC CLUB

A film by **Valentin Noujaïm**

France, Qatar **2023**

Running time **16 minutes**

Language **French**

Shooting format **16mm/VFX/4:3**

Screening format **DCP/Digital**





Crew

Scriptwriter and director **Valentin Noujaïm**
Producer **Manon Messiant**
Production company **Iliade et Films**

DOP **Pauline Doméjean**
Assistant DOP **Lou Lavalette**
Sound engineer **Lucas Doméjean**
Editor **Dinah Ekchajzer**
VFX **Nicolas Pirus**
Sound editing **Ary Carpman**
Mixing engineer **Maxime Roy**
Music **Space Afrika**

Featuring
Azedine Benabdelmouene
Taos Bertrand
Julien Mezence

with the support of
La Région Île-de-France, en partenariat avec le CNC
Doha Film Institute
Sheriff Projects

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Synopsis

In 1979, the Pacific Club was opened in the basement of La Défense - the business district of Paris. It was the first nightclub for Arabs from the suburbs; a parallel world of dance, sweat, young loves, and one-night utopias. Azedine, 17 years old at the time, tells us the forgotten story of this club and of this generation who dreamed of integrating into France but who soon came face to face with racism, the AIDS epidemic, and heroin.

Director's note

I am obsessed with the concept of disappearance, as an event of fate but also as a political event. Why stories disappear, why entire groups are erased, why certain people decide to disappear. I make films to question this event, to question the things that we don't see, that we just feel without being able to put into words or images. Pacific Club is a film to fill the silence, to tell the story of a place that no longer exists. The only trace of this place is the memory of Azedine, that must be recorded, saved, and finally given a voice, though the time of a film.



Valentin Noujaïm

Born in 1991 in France

Lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany

 [@vnoujaïm](https://www.instagram.com/vnoujaïm)

Filmography

SATURNALIA, 2021, 11 minutes

DAUGHTERS OF DESTINY, 2022, 28 minutes

VENUS RETROGRADE, 2021, 4 minutes

THE BLUE STAR, 2019, 17 minutes

BEFORE SHE FORGETS HELIOPOLIS, 2019, 23 minutes



Bio

Born in France to Lebanese and Egyptian parents, Valentin Noujaïm is a graduate in political science of the Institut d'études politiques, Lille, FR (2015) and in screenwriting of La Fémis, Paris, FR (2020). Noujaïm's work focuses on three axes: anti-racist movements, spatial utopias, and the disappearance of communities and individuals. He brings to life marginal and strange characters, in fantasized universes inspired by the genre of tale, while relying on a research on formats, by mixing DV, 16mm, digital and special effects. Marked by social and post-colonial issues, his work questions the relationships of power and domination that are at stake in French society, through the prism of a strong ideal: revolutionary love or the love of revolution.

Noujaïm's work has been included in several group exhibitions: in 2022, Salon de Montrouge, curated by Guillaume Désanges and Coline Davenne, Montrouge, FR; Prix Utopi·e, Magasins généraux, Pantin, FR; Festival Parallèle, Marseille, FR; in 2021, The Self and the Other, curated by Barbara Matas Moris, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; festival Aflam, MUCEM, Marseille, FR. Currently completing a residency at Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, DE, Noujaïm was formerly a resident at Artagon, Marseille, FR (2022), and will attend a residency programme at Académie de France à Rome — Villa Médicis, Rome, IT (2023) and at Lafayette Anticipations, Paris, France (2023). He is currently writing his first feature film, The Night of Queens.

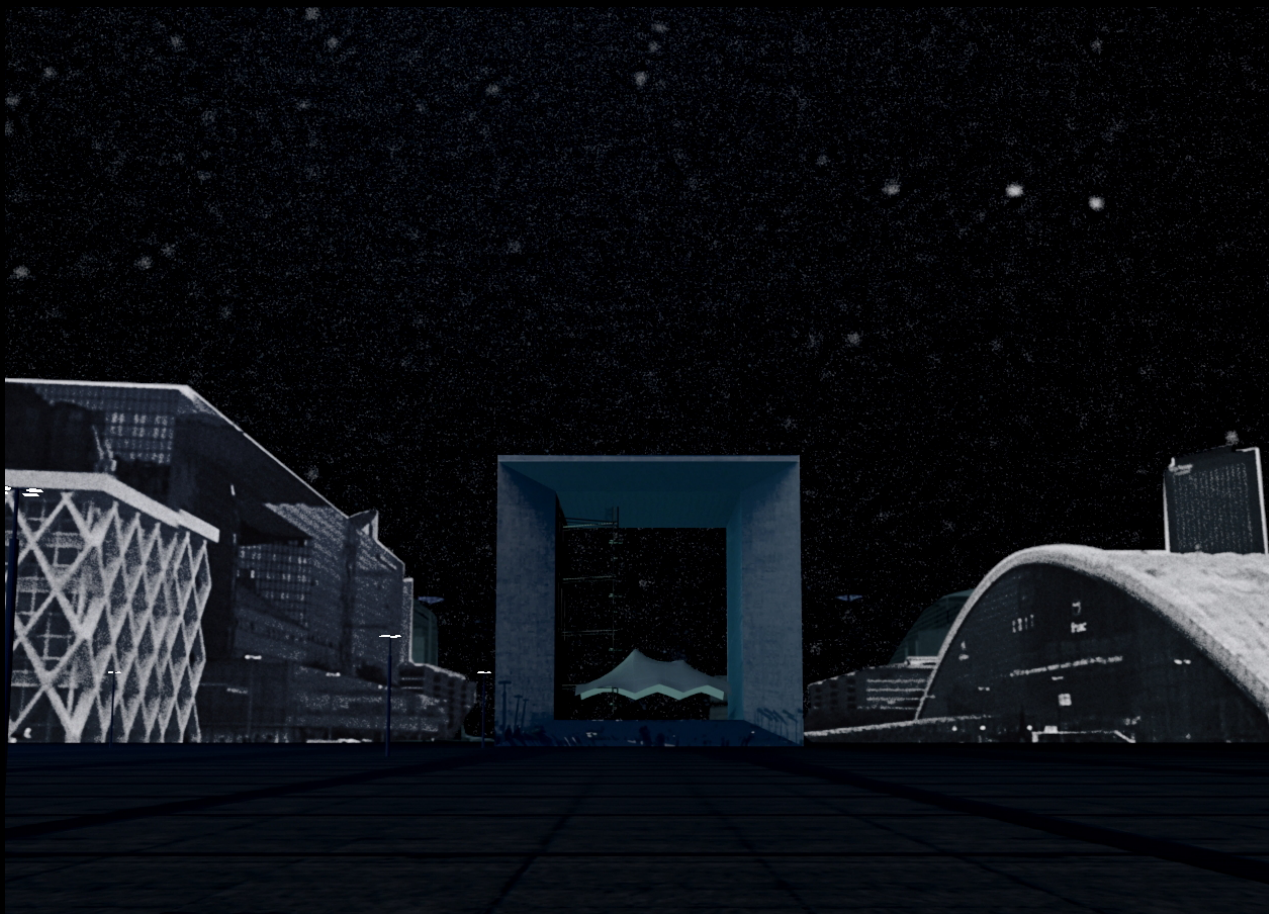
The Pacific Club

an essay by Valentin Noujaïm

originally published at <https://b-l-u-e.online/pacific-club-en/>

I met Karim, 55, during a recent move in Paris. He asked me if I liked to go out in the city and, if so, if I ever ran into any issues. He told me that in his time it was impossible to enter Parisian nightclubs as a North African man from the suburbs. Our conversation quickly turned to the racial and social segregation that operates within Parisian nightlife. He began telling me the story of the Pacific Club, which at the time was the first venue to welcome a public of second-generation immigrants, and the first to present hip hop, soul, and R&B music in 1980s France. The Pacific Club was located under the towers of the La Défense business district, just outside of Paris. I'm struck by the symbol of a nightclub located underneath this zone.

Karim and I met up again a few times to talk about his youth, the '80s, the rise of the Front National Party in France, and how the Pacific Club was once a haven for him and his friends, a place made for them. At the time of writing this, I'm working on a documentary based on the character of Karim, his friends, and this iconic place now disappeared somewhere beneath of La Défense. The film also touches on what Karim refers to as the "heroin genocide" that was happening in the French suburbs at that time. In our meetings, he remembers how many of his friends died of overdoses without concern from the state—instead, he claims the police would facilitate white dealers selling heroine to people from the suburbs so they would "die quickly." Karim also recalls fascists beating them up in groups. The Pacific became a sanctuary for him and his friends in this dark period.



After the Pacific Club, other venues opened into the '90s, including the Galaxy Club in the Sentier neighborhood, La Main Jaune, The Midnight, and the Fun Raï. These places have left very few traces behind, virtually irretrievable in either academic work or more informal and online archives. Their stories seem only to reside in the individual memories of the men and women who danced at the Pacific or the Galaxy.

In 1982, François Mitterrand inaugurated the Grande Arche de la Défense project, originally intended as the Grande Arche de la Fraternité (The Great Arch of Fraternity). Located in the center of what was a new district in a moment of full expansion, this was a monument meant for everyone: France united through a concrete arch symbolizing the French Socialist Party's utopian vision, doomed to failure. Behind (or below) this name worthy of a bad science fiction novel hides this forgotten history of dance, sweat, forgotten loves, one-night utopias, of Arabs in the underground: the story of Karim.

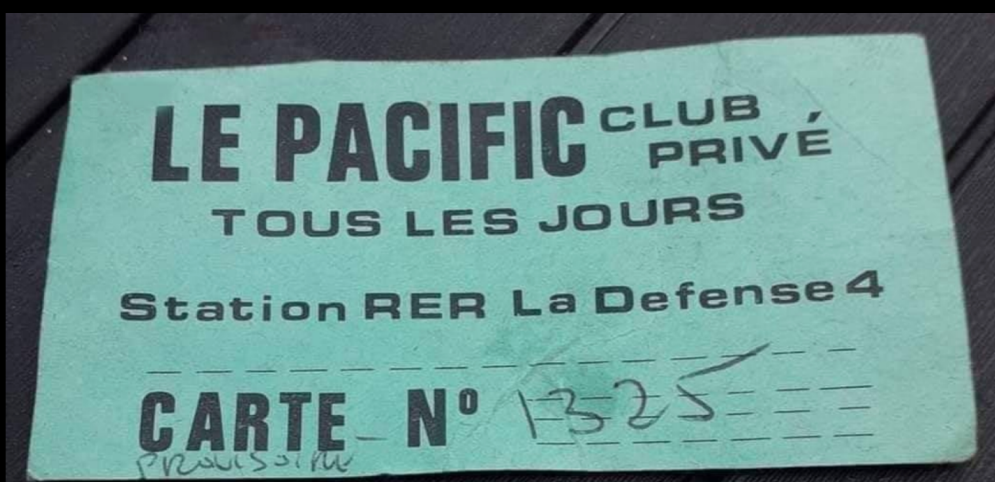
History remembers the date 1982: Arche de la fraternité, and I would like to remember 1979: Pacific Club. Two worlds that live without knowing each other, one above the other. Two parallel dimensions: the arch serving as a portal between them.

I immediately think to Fritz Lang's Metropolis. Let's build together a concrete arch, a garden of delights where we can revel. Let's live on the backs of others. I imagine the businessmen of La Défense wearing ties, walking hurriedly, the heels of their shoes hitting the ground, and right underneath them, in the underground parking lots, those they never expect to see.

La Défense is a major business district erected on the outskirts Paris, on par with the City of London. There, towers dream of Manhattan while being located in Puteaux. One of them is called La Pacific: the Pacific Tower, or Tokyo Tower as it was formerly known at the time of its construction in the early 1980s, designed by Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa. It's a simple building with smooth geometric forms, a forgettable tower housing a bank and large French business groups. Every day, men and women come and go in business suits. They work and then they leave. As evening arrives, the tower empties out. The white collar class departs and La Défense transforms into a nocturnal ghost district. The creatures of the night can finally come out.

In his essay "Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity," Marc Augé offers an analysis of these strange places that are characteristic of supermodernity: parking lots, business centers, airports, shopping centers. Augé defines supermodernity by three characteristics: 1) event overload—the fact that our current era produces an increasing number of events that in being so become difficult to locate or interpret; 2) spatial overload—moving very quickly, including through an omnipresence of images; and 3) the hyper-individualization of reference points that occurs through each person's desire to interpret the information available to them. Through these terms, non-places are the direct result of supermodernity. These sites fail to record the marks of history. Humans merely pass through, without leaving a trace of their story, never making their life there. These are places where people work and consume day-in, day-out but do not form a narrative. Five hundred years from now, what will be left of La Défense won't resemble the anthropological remains of intimate stories: only broken glass, concrete, suitcases, bills. If this is the case, the history of the Pacific Club will be lost with it, too.

Augé's fatalistic interpretation of history through supermodernity forgets the crucial element of domination—or rather, accepts it. Simply put, there will be no trace of the Pacific Club in the official history of La Défense because history does not remember the narratives of minorities, of the subaltern. This kind of history only recalls the great national narratives. The Arch was built as a utopian symbol to mark the bicentennial anniversary of the French Revolution and the ideal of Fraternity. But the true utopia lies in the Pacific Club. It is a heterotopia, in Foucault's sense: a spatial manifestation of utopia situated in Augé's non-site.



History is written by those who win. The businessmen of La Défense will leave nothing behind, yet we think of only them when we talk about this place. Something similar occurs when we talk about the history of '80s Parisian nightlife: recently-published articles idealize and fetishize this specific period, fixating on Les Bains Douches. This mythical club is the subject of countless films and essays that tend to value a narrow version of Parisian nightlife. This is a white history, a depoliticized story that remains fixed in the city center, where glamour and flashy photographs obfuscate the racism and classism that operated at the entrance of its clubs, and that continue to prevail today. In a '90s special broadcasted on French TV channel M6, *Les boîtes de nuit parisiennes*, one of the bouncers of Metropolis, the largest nightclub at the time, proudly states: "I'm not going to criticize the kids from the suburbs but we don't want any riff-raff here..."

If you search for "Parisian club 1980" online, you'll be inundated with images of famous, conventionally beautiful, mostly white people. Where were the others dancing? The people who were turned away from Les Bains Douches? The people from the banlieues (the suburbs)? The sons and daughters of immigrants?



Archival images via Facebook group Les anciens du Pacific

Karim was 18 years old in 1986. He grew up in a low-income building in the 19th arrondissement. His older brothers attended the Pacific Club when it was founded. Karim remembers seeing them wearing De Fursac suit jackets and polishing their Pierre Cardin shoes before going out, as they hoped to get into upscale nightclubs on the Champs Elysées or the Grands Boulevards—but they always ended up at La Défense. The Pacific was the first to be opened by a man known as Monsieur Martin as a club aimed for the Sephardic Jewish community, but quickly became a touch point for North African communities of all religious backgrounds.

The club wanted to be different from those of central Paris and played a new kind of music. At the time, Parisian clubs and French radio stations avoided playing genres from the United States such as soul, funk, or R&B. One had to go to the Pacific to hear these rhythms.

When Karim was old enough to go out, the fashion had changed from his brother's time. Instead, he became part of a specific fashion trend called the reurti ("shooters" in French verlan vernacular). On Friday nights, Karim would wear a white Lois turtleneck, tobacco-colored Achille Adidas sneakers, a Fatma's hand on a gold chain, and loose pants. A true Jean Genet character, he spent his weekends hanging out in the Grands Boulevards district. They were banlieusards who only dreamed of one thing: dancing and having fun. This generation, born in the '80s following the end of the Algerian War, dreamed of integrating into France, under that Arch. They were soon disappointed. Karim tells me of his 18th birthday, when they all went out to dance on New Year's Eve, but were abruptly turned away, sometimes violently, by every single club.

They only went to the Pacific on weekends. During the day they would go to the movies at the Rex, sneaking in behind security doors to avoid paying the entrance fee. Afterward, there was a restaurant on the main boulevard that served merguez and fries, it was the reurti hangout. After the movies and meal they would ride the subway to La Défense or take one of his brothers' cars.

Weekends in La Défense were empty, abandoned. Everything alive happened in the basement under the Pacific tower. Karim and his friends often had to wait in long lines. The best time to go would be Sunday afternoon, when the party would last through Monday morning. You can imagine the importance of a club like this at the time: a real breath of fresh air for people like Karim. This space could only ever exist in the suburbs, outside the protective and stifling walls of Paris. As a utopia it carried the dreams of a whole generation in a country that refused to see them.

Karim went to the club many times. He was part of the second generation to attend the Pacific. The first generation that had gone in the early '80s disappeared quickly—many dying of HIV/AIDS or heroin overdoses. Karim remembers how things changed after that epidemic. Suddenly, young people didn't dare touch any drugs, they were too scared to end up like their older brothers. The desire to live was stronger. The club was full of boys and girls from different suburbs of Paris. Sometimes some gang-related violence took place between people from different areas but mostly they flirted, drank, and danced. It was quite impossible to kiss in the club because most of the girls came along with their brothers or family friends. Karim tells me that it was quite innocent. The flirting was soft and tender.

Augé was wrong. La Défense is actually filled with the stories of men and women who lived and loved in the shadows of this non-site. But Karim is surprised when I ask about his story, his youth at the Pacific: "Why do you want to know about this? We were petty thieves, nothing interesting." Such stories are forgotten and erased because of the misconception that history can only be the official one, the one that is mythologized. We've internalized the idea that these stories are not worth telling. The truth is that the history of Parisian club culture is nourished by places like the Pacific and, later on, the Galaxy Club, which opened in central Paris in the mid '80s and welcomed a similar crowd. It was located near the Réaumur Sébastopol subway station. One of the resident DJs, DJ Hafid, recalls the dance competitions between Arab girls and boys every Wednesday afternoon, dancing to Barry White or Afro-Canadian artist Boule Noir. In the '90s other clubs appeared like Fun Raï, the first Parisian nightclub to play Raï music.⁶ By the 2000s, music that was once exclusively danced to by suburban youth had infiltrated night clubs throughout the French capital.

On a Youtube page dedicated to Pacific Club alumni, user Mo Mor reminisces, "The Pacific on Sunday afternoons: we'd plan this all week long - the perfect 501-Weston combo. Dedicated to all the guys from Nanterre - I think of you Mounir, my buddy who died so young." Further down, Ben-Amar Barry adds: "With the golf convertible and barry white, ready to spend the night at the pacific." The "old-timers of the Pacific," as they like to call themselves, didn't wait for anyone to take an interest in them and created these virtual groups where they share memories and music from the time.

Karim describes how once a year, they still get together in the suburbs of Paris to play music and hang out, proof that something very strong unites them. They decided that the Pacific had to live on in some way, even if the space itself is long gone. The Pacific survives through them, continuing to influence an entire generation through the stories of those who fight against oblivion. In the sense that it has physically disappeared, the Pacific is no longer a heterotopia. Instead it now lives in this new reality that its elders have created. As a symbol, French equality needs monuments like the Arche to convince the world that it exists. The Pacific Club does not. This casual gathering is their monument, as it always was.

¹ The Front National is the original name of the French far-right party founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, known today as the National Rally.

² Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, La Librairie du XXI^e siècle, 1992).

³ Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no 5 (1984): 46-49.

⁴ Channel M6, *Les boîtes de nuit parisiennes*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KYBx84wb-E> (see 1'10")

⁵ Boule Noire, *Aimer d'amour*, 1978: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChbsqgJvL-o>

⁶ It later closed following a tragic bloodbath in 1995: <https://www.vice.com/fr/article/3agbvv/quand-la-guerre-du-rai-agitait-lile-de-france>

⁷ See this Youtube video by "Dalida," a former Pacific attendee: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dq7znp863Lc>, or this piece: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tbj-VKan3el&list=OLAK5uy_kj1qJzS_eEukrNEgdprcRDTOr_plQmYtk&index=11



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