Clubbing:
otherness and the politics of experience

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Thesis abstract

This thesis investigates experiences of contemporary club and dance cultures in the context of postmodern aestheticisation. Its object of study is the phantasmatic and discursive complex of otherness, transgression and freedom in which contemporary British club and dance cultures are embedded. It argues that clubbing experiences are fabricated through this complex of otherness, which articulates a politics of experience. This refers to contexts that structure experiences of dance cultures. In this respect, the thesis considers the contexts of class, gender and sexuality, structures of the production and consumption of clubbing, the institutional regulation and ordering of club spaces and media discourses and imagery. In analysing socially contextualised meanings of this otherness it examines how these become relevant for the construction of identity. The theoretical agenda of the thesis is to explore *aestheticisation* as a condition for and as a form of identity construction. This engages with changing modes of reflexivity in the construction of reality and reformulates the issues of style, identity and authenticity. The empirical analysis focuses on modes of reflexivity in constructing realities of sexuality, body and self. Research of this study was carried out in London. The qualitative research design comprised narrative interviewing and ethnographic participation in clubs in central London. A criterion for sampling and for the selection of clubs and interviewees was the dimension of sexuality and the sexual differentiation and codification of club spaces. The interview sample consists of twenty-three interviews with people of mixed genders, sexualities and cultural, national backgrounds.

I declare that the research presented in this thesis is my own work.

Silvia Rief

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Introduction

> The *homo aestheticus* is a virtuoso of the 'sense of possibility' and virtualisation (Welsch 1997: 15).

1. Starting points: The politics of clubbing's otherness

This thesis started off as an investigation of practices and experiences of clubbing in London. Over the past decade, 'clubbing' has evolved into an international, if not almost global signifier of going out dancing. Yet, the kind of practices, experiences and dance spaces it signifies in different countries, cities or social contexts may vary enormously. To mention a few, clubbing may refer to dance and music events in nightclubs, to dances in venues previously designated as discotheques as well as to open-air parties in the remote countryside. Even aircrafts have been used as clubbing sceneries. In the light of the plurality of styles it seems impossible to find a definition that spells out clearly what clubbing actually is about. We may say it highlights a cultural and social practice wedding together a diverse range of mainly electronic, beat-centred music genres, dance, fashion, drugs and sexuality in various temporal and spatial contexts of co-presence. Given this broad definition this thesis does not seek to focus on a particular *style context*. Nevertheless it is confined to particular *contexts* of *clubbing experience* that I will outline at a later stage in this Introduction. In clarifying my approach to the study of clubbing experience, let me start by explaining the title of the thesis. At first glance, the notion of otherness might suggest that this thesis conceives of club cultures as spaces that are 'other'. However, this is not the case. Instead, otherness refers to the object of this investigation; that is, the phantasmatic complex in which contemporary club and dance cultures are embedded. Clubbing spaces and experiences tend to be inscribed with images of transgression, freedom or liberation. As spaces commonly associated with fun, enjoyment and leisure, they are frequently constituted as an 'other reality' or, as an 'other' to reality. This otherness implies a plane not quite the same as 'reality.' It marks a boundary or difference, for example, a boundary to the everyday. This phantasmatic complex of otherness is also weaved through academic research on the topic. Various theoretical metaphors have been invoked to give this otherness a name – 'liminality', 'sociality', 'other space' or 'heterotopia', the 'sacred',

'carnivalesque' and more. Yet, the emphasis on such otherness has frequently blinded researchers to the fact that these phantasmatic investments do not just constitute a utopian realm of freedom, but are intricately linked to a politics of experience. This research project grew out of a dissatisfaction with the celebration of rave and dance cultures as spaces of ecstasy, liberating bliss, rapture and otherness.

The phrase 'politics of experience' was coined by the psychoanalyst Robert D. Laing as far back as the late 1960s. Adopting a socio-phenomenological viewpoint, he cast experience as inter-experience, as a mediation and interrelation between self and other (Laing 1967: 16-22). Needless to say, experience is not random and detached from social processes, and neither is the experience of club cultures as spheres of otherness. The construction of dance cultural experiences in terms of otherness can take on different modalities and meanings. It is curtailed by social conditions and possibilities of experience or by discursive positions one is subjectified by. Experience carries the possibility of its negation. It is structured by processes of validation and invalidation. In contrast to Laing's humanistic and essentialist understanding of contemporary experience as estrangement or alienation, which upholds a notion of authenticity, my reading of politics of experience turns attention foremost to the structures that shape such processes of (in-)validation. Posing experience as object of sociological analysis instead of taking the 'authentic' speaking of experience as evidence also demonstrates that the category of experience need not become the murky concept that was criticised for its base in the logic of authenticity (see the stimulating discussion in Jay 1998). Rather than partaking in the (in-)validation and hierarchisation of experiences, this study investigates experience as a socially contextualised mode of interpretation or reflexivity. Bringing the two parts of the title together, this thesis analyses how experiences of club and dance culture are constructed through *socially contextualised* framings and meanings of otherness.

Another reason why the notion of experience is relevant for this study lies in the very heart of the subject matter itself. Throughout the thesis I take experience as a discursive form of signification. Hence, the thesis could also be considered an analysis of discourses of club and dance culture. Yet, experience was given preference over discourse, because it situates the project in debates about postmodern

cultural forms and practices. Experience as a discursive form of signification can be differentiated from sensation, or from a figural form of signification that works through desire rather than meaning (Lash 1990) and is crucial to practices of clubbing as well as to other spheres of postmodern culture. The phantasmatic otherness of rave and dance culture was frequently accounted for in terms of a sensational dimension that was seen to displace meaning and experience. Moreover, this sensational otherness was even couched as an undoing of the discursively fabricated structures of identity and subjectivity. To re-introduce the category of experience from this angle, therefore, puts forward the proposition that club cultures not only rest on sensation, desire and intensity, but also on reflexivity and meaning. In other words, this thesis contests the undoing of identity in the supposed otherness and liminality of dance. Instead, by focussing on otherness as discursively constructed experience, it develops the argument that identity is 'done' and articulated through and with this very otherness, through the phantasmatic complex of transgression and undoing of identity.

This brief introduction sketches out the theoretical endeavour of this thesis. That is the question; how can the construction of identity be conceptualised in relation to cultural practices that are indeed to a certain extent sensational rather than verbal, resting foremost on the auditory, the haptic and the visual. The central theoretical aim is to examine the conditions for, and the forms of, identity construction in club contexts and through club cultural experiences. This does not in the first place focus on the formation of an identity as a 'clubber.' Rather, the thesis directs attention to everyday social identities and how they interrelate with practices and experiences within club and dance culture. In this respect, the thesis explores how the contexts of class, gender and sexuality inform the construction of framings and meanings of otherness. The experience of otherness or the construction of club cultural spaces as other, therefore, articulates social location and identity. In the following part I will outline this theoretical discussion in relation to aestheticisation.

2. Identity and otherness

Economies of transgression, for example carnival, have been construed as processes of displaced abjection (Stallybrass and White 1986: 19). This suggested that carnival is not simply a symbolic inversion of the status order, but more often demonises the weaker, not the stronger social groups (ibid. 19). It would allow for a temporal release into abject, repudiated otherness, whereby identity is (re-)constituted. This has been related to the subject-formation of the middle classes, which have appropriated carnival, while repudiating the social spheres where these rites originated.[1] On a general level, the repudiation of the popular, the 'culture of the Other', has been linked to the constitution of 'high culture' itself. However, this line of thought, which emphasises otherness as expelled, yet fascinating abject otherness and identity-in-difference, is not necessarily the path I am following in conceptualising identity and otherness. I conceive of club cultures less as a domain of the carnevalesque, but rather as postmodern leisure spaces and simulated environments. These convey a different sense of otherness, which is not an otherness of exclusion or repulsion. Instead, such spaces are frequently marked as escape or inauthentic reality or, as hyperreality displacing the distinction between real and unreal. This articulates identity and otherness differently. Otherness does not appear as a complex of repudiation and abject identification, but as a horizon of possibility and virtuality, as an identification of becoming, an 'as-if'. Identity formation, from the first viewpoint, accentuates the imaginary closure and exclusion of an abject other. It emphasises a polarity of sameness and difference.[2] The second viewpoint draws more attention to the imaginary incorporation of otherness as potential becoming, emphasising the planes of oneness and plurality, continuity and discontinuity.[3] The boundary that is implied by the otherness of virtuality is not as

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[1] "The bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low' - as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating. Yet that very act of exclusion was constitutive of its identity. The low was internalised under the sign of negation and disgust" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 191).

[2] Judith Butler (1993: 113) for example, summarised this position: a coherent identity position is produced through the production, exclusion and repudiation of abject spectres that threaten those very subject-positions.

[3] These planes of oneness-plurality, resemblance-difference, continuity-discontinuity (and permanence) refer to the four components of identity in Paul Ricoeur's (1992) narrative grounding of identity.

clear-cut, but fleeting, unstable and difficult, or even impossible to mark. It also enters a different theoretical or methodological terrain. Instead of a psychoanalytical framework, virtuality – as 'other' to reality – brings up the issues of reality construction and reflexivity and situates the inquiry foremost in a hermeneutic framework.

3. Postmodern aestheticisation

This otherness of virtuality can also be understood in the context of postmodern aestheticisation, in particular, in the context of what has been called an immaterial or epistemological aestheticisation (Welsch 1997: 5). Put simply, this refers to processes that shift our modes of apprehension and conception of reality, for example, the virtualisation or de-realisation induced by electronic and media worlds, which blur the distinction between real and not real and create complex processes of authentication. Aestheticisation conjures up Baudrillard's (1983: 148) notion of simulation and the 'aesthetic hallucination of reality', the staging of events and the (re-)creation of reality through images and representations, the different forms and versions of reality we got used to living in. The notion of aestheticisation also embraces the different qualities of experience that postmodern culture affords and that change our modes of reflexivity, which links back to the starting point mentioned above; that is, sensation and the sensual and emotional features of the spectacle as well as perception, cognition and meaning. Aestheticisation and simulation evoke the notion of play, which has been central to the more recent investigation of clubbing experiences by Ben Malbon (1999). However, the idea of play-reality that this thesis will develop (Chapter 3) differs from Malbon's vitalistic concepts of play and vitality, as it will be understood as a form of reflexivity. In general terms therefore, this thesis can be read as investigation of clubbing experiences in the context of aestheticisation. More precisely, its theoretical agenda is to explore *aestheticisation* as a condition for, and as a form of, identity construction. Some of the core questions are, how does aestheticisation – as in club and dance cultures – alter modes of reflexivity? How does the otherness of virtuality shape processes of (dis-)authentication, for example, the (dis-)authentication of self and others? The thesis explores four domains of phantasms of transgression, change and othering the self. The first is the otherness projected onto dance clubs generally.

The second is the otherness attributed to states of drug inducement and to drug consumption. The third deals with moments of othering the self on a biographical plane and the fourth centres on the domain of sexuality.

4. (De-)tours of the project

4.1 The de-mystification of rave

After mapping the theoretical context of this project, I will briefly outline how this agenda and framework have developed. Initially, this project engaged with the work on subcultures and popular music, in particular, with empirical research and theorisations of rave and dance culture that had come forth since the beginning of the 1990s. Research in the first half of the 1990s was very much shaped and propelled by the media outrage over the dissemination and consumption of the drug ecstasy within rave contexts. One consequence of this was that the academic research on dance culture largely concentrated on drugs and drug consumption. It was contextualised by the condemnation of rave culture as either illegal, semi-criminal and threatening other or as hedonist, de-politicised youth culture. Counteracting this disapproval to some extent led to a mystification of rave culture as a socially and culturally progressive other and as an epitome and manifestation of social change.[4] Raving, dancing and consuming illicit drugs came to be seen as a mystery (see also Gibson and Pagan 1998: 16). Deviance became subversion. Rave culture was reconstituted as other in its academic fetishisation, which, as the first chapter will demonstrate, turned rave and dance culture almost into an aesthetic and political strategy. This othering and mystification was reflected in questions that attempted to understand people's reasons and motivations of engaging in activities like raving and drug-taking: What was 'in it' for the people involved? What did people get out of it?[5] What was so special about the experiences of raving that it attracted such a great number of people and spurred seemingly high investments and degrees of immersion?

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[4] On the ambivalence of society's reactions to youth cultures, ranging from the condemnation of delinquency to the celebration of progressiveness, see Widdicombe and Woffitt (1995: 7).

[5] See for example Malbon (1999: 188) and Pini (1997: 50). Researchers frequently attempt to inquire into people's motivations for participating in youth cultural practices (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 176).

4.2 Ethnographic experience: the mundane and the spectacular

My ethnographic work led to breaking away from this mystification that lingered on to later studies of club cultures. When I began this research (1998) the peak of rave culture and the rage about ecstasy was long over and dance culture had mostly developed into club culture. The trend towards technically well-equipped, large-capacity clubs and high admission fees supported a conception of club cultures as part of the professional entertainment or culture industry. In their routine modes of operation, their methods of organising, managing and regulating crowds and space, clubbing spheres appeared similar and ordinary rather than other to everyday contexts and service spaces. At present, during the final stages of this project, club cultures seem to be undergoing another transformation. Instead of high capacity clubs, the current trend seems to be a more hybrid, smaller type of club-venue that integrates various dimensions of going out in one place: eating, drinking, socialising and dancing (Mintel 2000b). From this point of view, it may seem rather surprising to put forward and investigate the claim that clubbing experiences are fabricated through imaginations of otherness. However, another key related concern of this thesis is a consideration of *how* this experience of otherness may be constructed in the practical encounter with spaces that are very much permeated by structures of everyday (city) life and functionality. The interrelation between dance culture and the everyday may even go so far that everyday city spaces are used as clubbing locations. Dance events on Sunday afternoons and Monday mornings, or 'after-work' clubbings also disrupt the sense of otherness derived from it as a nighttime activity. This latest promotional key of seizing spaces such as underground stations, airports and aircrafts, train stations or car parks (see Randeria 2002) however, also points to moments of otherness. Bringing entertainment and dancing to spaces (and times) that are merely associated with everyday functionality not only plays on the imagined otherness of clubbing and dancing, but also provides for the imagination of otherness in these spaces – at the same times as it renders dancing and clubbing part of the everyday.

In touching upon these issues, it becomes clear that the complex of otherness is not only inscribed by everyday identities. The politics of clubbing experience is also a question of the structures of production and consumption of club cultures. The

different styles and contexts of production bring about diverse forms and practices of consumption. Besides, in the sphere of clubbing production and consumption roles may merge quite easily. Consumers are enticed to take on producer roles. Likewise producers are to some degree inclined to view their workplace also as a space of consumption. This relation between production and consumption as well as the blurring of work and leisure roles in club cultures has rarely been considered in research. Most studies have concentrated on either production, or consumption.[6] Three of the four empirical chapters of the thesis will therefore to some extent also deal with sites of production. As will become clear, such a focus on club cultural production does not necessarily entail, as has been criticised, rendering (female) experiences invisible.[7] Sites of club cultural production, even if a sphere of male dominance, can be studied in relation to experience, and also, in relation to female experience.

4.3 The otherness of style and the everyday

'Politics of clubbing experiences' at first sight may have recalled the central debate about 1990's rave and dance culture's political significance. It has hopefully become clear by now that it is not the main concern of this project to enter this discussion about resistance, hedonism or escapism. Nevertheless, taking a critical stance on the social contexts and conditions of clubbing experiences as other, and especially focussing on class as one relevant context, necessitates engaging with the tradition of subcultural studies and its 'post-subcultural' critique. Arguing that experiences and meanings of dance culture's otherness are fabricated within the structures of everyday life and social identities clearly calls up the theoretical framework of subculture theory (Hall and Jefferson 1976). Having its roots in the study of youth deviance, within subculture theory deviant otherness was

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[6] Sarah Thornton's study (1995) combined the analysis of sites of production, for example of dance music, with an ethnographic focus on 'subcultural ideologies' and processes of distinction. However, this ethnographic account, which she described as a sort of 'ethnographic survey' (ibid. 107), is of a quite general, de-contextualised nature. Angela McRobbie's (1999a, 1999b) recent work is also an exception to this general rule.

[7] Maria Pini (2001: 6-7, 51, 55) argued that femininity has remained fairly invisible in contemporary debates of club cultures because of the strong focus on production and organisation at the expense of experiential sites of participation. This argument – also a critique levelled at Thornton's work – in some way implies that the site of production cannot be studied as a field of experience.

reformulated as resistance. At the same time, resistance through style was understood as symbolic response to structural (class) location and social subordination. Youth cultural practices, styles and attitudes were seen as the 'other'-reflection of everyday social experiences and structures. The homological level of analysis proposed by Paul Willis (1978: 191) in the wake of Levi-Strauss, aimed to investigate how particular objects of consumption and youth lifestyle paralleled and reflected the typical concerns, attitudes and feelings of the social group and how this related to the parental class culture. Dick Hebdige's (1979) notion of style as symbolic work on commodities similarly regarded style as a practice of inventing an elsewhere, as a space for expressing alternative (group) identities, as a transformation of reality through surrealist bricolage.[8] Importantly, he also pointed to (punk) style as a form of escaping the 'principle of identity'. He read punk style as a play with otherness that broke away from parent culture and from its location in social experience (ibid. 121). In this respect, his work marked a shift towards the theoretical context of 1990s research of dance culture, which departed from the framework of subculture theory in several regards. The notion of resistance was abandoned or transformed. In addressing the issue of how practices and experiences of rave dance contexts related to identities and orientations in everyday life, various new metaphors such as escapism and hedonism came to represent the social function or significance of dance and club culture. For example, it was suggested that techno culture (in the German context) brought the pleasure principle into line with daily life commitments (Anz and Walder 1995: 217-219). Similarly, Steve Miles (2000: 87-105) argued that rave cultural involvement was neither about rebellion or apathy, but that young people were going along with consumerism and dominant ways of life. However, the pleasures gained in dance culture were also seen as temporary having a good time against the odds, as happiness in-spite-of the dysfunctions of everyday life (Malbon 1999: 149) or as a temporary retreat from reality (Reynolds 1997: 108). Overall, dance cultural practices, framed as part of youth culture, continued to be inscribed with otherness (to the everyday). However, this otherness was filled with different meanings that did away with social positionings such as class. Rather than through a semiotic reading of style or a Weberian reading of the meaning attributed to styles (see Muggleton 2000), the thesis explores the dimension of class (as well as gender and sexuality), especially of middle-classness, through narrative, biography and

[8] 'Bricolage' is also borrowed from Levi-Strauss.

ethics of the self in combination with a capital model derived from Bourdieu's work (1984). Thus conceived, class is not considered or investigated as a differentiator of club scenes, but in terms of the question how class habitus provides for (ethical) precepts that inform practices of clubbing.

4.4 Revisiting authenticity

The theoretical agenda of this project, the question of aestheticisation and identity, developed in the course of the data analysis. The problematisation of reality and authenticity emerged as a broad and significant theme in the interview data. Yet, the recent works on youth and popular culture that embarked on a discussion of authenticity (e.g. Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995, Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990, Widdicombe 1993, Thornton 1995, Muggleton 2000) appeared to be of rather limited use due to their relatively narrow focus on style, membership and distinction. In briefly touching upon this discussion I will expound how the concern with aestheticisation and reflexivity evolved. Youth and popular culture studies have a long history of engaging with the issue of authenticity, which has its roots in the dichotomy of high art and popular or mass culture. Popular or (commercialised) mass culture was constituted as the inauthentic other of authentic, auratic and original artistic practices in high culture. In the course of the deconstruction of this dichotomy, in particular with the emergence of cultural studies, the focus on authenticity shifted. While subculture theory was also to some extent infused by the distinction between authentic, resistant youth cultural styles on the one hand and commercialised, media-saturated youth cultures on the other hand, the works cited above in the field of youth and dance culture have begun to address authenticity as a discourse of distinction and as a mode of (in)validating cultural practices. For example, Sarah Thornton (1995) investigated authenticity as part of the subcultural ideologies of the 'real', the 'hip' and the 'underground' versus the 'mainstream', the 'phoney' and the 'media.' Her historical account of popular music and dance cultures drew attention to the changing meanings of authenticity and to authenticity as a social process of authentication. Sue Widdicombe and Robin Woofitt (1990, 1993, 1995) as well as David Muggleton (2000) dealt with authenticity mainly in relation to the construction of youth cultural membership, identity and style. Authenticity emerged as a discourse of the way of life of a group, as a plane of (non-)

correspondence between 'being' (identity) and 'doing' (style), between essence and appearance. From a broader viewpoint, Lawrence Grossberg (1992), in his work on rock culture, described authenticity and the awareness of inauthenticity as a postmodern sensibility or structure of feeling (Raymond Williams). His notion of 'authentic inauthenticity' apparent in cynicism, irony and play pointed to the collapsing distinction between the real and the false. This widened the perspective, because it situated the issue of authenticity more generally in the context of the (postmodern) problematisation of reality. From this viewpoint, authenticity can be understood as a mode of reflexivity, as a framing of reality or play, as a form of mundane inquiry (Pollner 1987). Likewise, the notion of style, which, in the context of youth cultural studies, primarily connotes the interaction of the body with objects, needs to be opened up. Taking style as an analytic category already presupposes a construction of reality just in the very act of classifying a practice as style. Style itself therefore, as a category of classification, implies reflexivity and a particular relation to authenticity or reality. All these points considered served laying the ground for reformulating style and authenticity through the concept of aestheticisation.

In conclusion, although youth cultural studies and theory certainly provide stimulating insights for the investigation of dance cultures, they seem to be of limited use in the light of contemporary dance culture as a cultural and entertainment industry. While the majority of club-goers are in their late adolescence, which suggests that dance culture is a central element of youth and adolescent lifestyle, the ambience of clubbing attracts a wide and diverse audience in different places and cities across the country. The wide age range of people attracted to clubbing has been associated with the 'extension of youth' and the prolongation of youthful lifestyles into later life-stages.[9] However, rather than investigating the practice of clubbing as indication of such changing modes of youth or adulthood, I propose that dancing and clubbing have evolved into a more general lifestyle or aesthetic ambience and have been integrated into leisure practices of going out. The theorisation through the notion of aestheticisation embraces these changes and takes into account club dance cultures as essentially postmodern cultural practices. Over and above, due to the

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[9] Barbara Bradby pointed to the prolongation of youth in relation to femininity (1993). Pini (2001: 16) took the stance that this evidences the "formation of new modes of *adult* femininity."

constructionist viewpoint it affords by investigating how the reality of dance culture is constructed through otherness, it avoids the shortcomings of theoretical perspectives that re-inscribe dance culture with otherness.

5. Methodology and field of study

Despite the assumptions over the relationship between experiences of dance culture and everyday life practices sketched out above, research of dance and club cultures has not been very attentive to the category of the everyday. In the studies that were available at the time when I started this project, there was a noticeable lack of interest in examining social contexts of clubbing practices. Only a few qualitative and ethnographic studies had more thoroughly engaged with meaning contexts and experiences of participants.[10] Research on British club cultures was to a large extent implicitly a study of heterosexual clubbing experiences. Although a recent work stated that club culture "had never been so closely interwoven with the gay scene as during the 'decade of dance'" (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 56), sexuality and sexual codings of scenes have not ceased to be significant differentiators for clubbing (see also: Thornton 1995: 112). While it was assumed that sexual boundaries in the club scene were shifting, academic research of club cultures was for the most part staying within these (hetero)sexual boundaries and side-stepping for example, gay and lesbian club scenes.[11] Researchers sometimes tended to avoid scenes that did not correspond with their sexual identification or that they found hard to relate to.[12] A notable disregard of (lesbian) sexuality can be found in Pini's work (1997, 2001), which is even more striking in the light of her outspoken critique that females' clubbing experiences have been rendered invisible and her claim that women experienced 'sexually liberating' aspects within rave scenes. Despite having researched, amongst other scenes, "all-women events" (2001: 89), lesbian sexuality

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[10] For example Pini (1997), Malbon (1999) and Bennett (2000). For a critique of the absence of members' accounts in subcultural theory see Widdicombe (1995).

[11] An exception is the research of Measham et. al. (2001: 65). One of the three clubs they researched had largely a gay, lesbian and bisexual clientele. Only recently was published a study of queer sexuality and club cultures in New York (Buckland 2002).

[12] Malbon for example, excluded gay clubs, because his aims were gaining 'real understandings' of club scenes relatively quickly and being able to empathise with people instead of becoming an ethnographic voyeur (1998: 51).

was, if at all, mentioned as a moment of post-feminism or of 'new modes of femininity' (1997: 11, 42). Overall, lesbian sexuality or identity did not seem worth much reference in relation to the 'new feminine sexualities' (Pini 2001) and 'erotic pleasures beyond sexual boundaries' (ibid. 164-165).

In view of this I regarded a more pronounced focus on sexuality important in advancing the field of study. Aside from giving consideration to sexuality in the process of interview sampling and in circumscribing the ethnographic field, several analytical issues informed the thematisation of sexuality in this study. One intention was to investigate the claims about shifting sexual boundaries and to cast light on the relationship between different sexualities in club cultures, particularly given the emergence of various new sexual codifications of clubs in recent years. A second aim was to inquire into sexuality as a domain deeply inculcated by images of transgression and otherness. Thirdly, including a focus on gay clubbing opened up a link to the wider issue of the fetishisation of gay and queer culture. Finally, another focus of interest developed in the course of the research. This was to address sexuality in terms of aestheticisation and to examine how it came to represent aesthetic ambiences of clubbing.

In order to overcome the methodological weaknesses of previous research on dance culture, more empirical and ethnographic work and different methodological approaches were needed that allowed for a contextualisation of clubbing experiences. This thesis attempts to develop such new approaches, first, by embarking on a detailed analysis of narrative (and biographical) constructions of clubbing, and second, by using ethnography to explore institutional dimensions of club production and consumption as well as to reflect on the conditions of experiencing and narrativising clubbing. Autobiographical narratives have seldom been used within youth cultural studies.[13] Yet, the thickness and complexity of such data provides the opportunity to study dance cultural practices within the contexts of everyday identities in a detailed way. However, a drawback is that narrative interviewing and analysis, which I will describe in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5, are very time-

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[13] The analysis of biographical accounts in Widdicombe (1995) encompassed hardly any aspects of life-contexts. Biography was mainly considered in terms of affiliation, commitment and membership to youth subcultures.

consuming. Consequentially, the interview sample of this study (23) might run the risk of being perceived as relatively small, especially in the light of qualitative studies that process a greater corpus of interview data with qualitative research software. Nevertheless, the material that was generated out of the twenty-three interviews (twelve females, eleven males) is quite substantial. It comprises of approximately fifty hours of recorded talk and 570 pages of transcribed text.[14] In addition to these interviews I also interviewed a few club promoters and journalists.

In the process of generating interview data it became apparent that the respondents, were mainly of white British / European descent and have middle-class origins, nevertheless were quite mixed in terms of sexuality and cultural and national background. Different channels of approaching people for interviews, for example, black gay clubbers, proved unsuccessful. Blackness and gayness probably still mean a considerably higher degree of marginalisation, invisibility, threat and danger, which might have been one reason why I did not get any response. I will return to these issues as well as to interview sampling and interviewing in Chapter 2. Given these homogeneous elements of the sample, it should clearly be stated that the argument of this thesis is spelled out on the basis of, and is mainly confined to, white, middle-class involvement in club cultures.[15]

Acknowledging that my clubbing preferences were to some extent also related to sexual codifications and ambiences of dance clubs, in my ethnographic work I nonetheless also chose clubs that did not match my personal taste. Ethnographic fieldwork took place in a cross-section of about twenty straight, gay, gay-mixed, 'polysexual' and lesbian dance clubs in central London.[16] It also included more focussed and intensive research in two particular clubs. I visited events of various

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[14] Due to lack of time not all tapes were transcribed in full length. See also Appendix B of the thesis for a list of interviewees.

[15] Being aware of the fact that research on club cultures was frequently based on the study of white middle class, heterosexual involvement (see Malbon 1998, Pini 1997) in London club scenes (except for instance Bennett 2000, Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001), whilst including a focus on different sexualities, I was not able to overcome all of the shortcomings of previous research.

[16] It shall be noted that this, of course, remains short of covering all sexually codified dance clubs – for example, it does not include (straight, gay and mixed) 'Fetish clubs', which have become quite popular in the past few years.

musical styles (house, hard house and techno, deep house, garage)[17] and clubs that were frequented by interviewees. Some clubs were selected because they seemed to illustrate certain trends of the nightclub industry, which I will touch upon in Chapters 2 and 7. Most of the clubs referred to in this thesis are located within zone one and two in central London. This reflects practical issues of research such as access to public transport and reasonably cheap cab fares. The lack of funding for fieldwork expenses made it impossible to research club scenes in other cities. The clubbing contexts represented in this work do not include free parties or rather independently produced one-off events. All of the events were advertised in listing magazines or otherwise. The ethnographic notes, usually taken the morning after visiting the club night, comprise two hand-written manuscripts of about 230 pages altogether. Ethnographic fieldwork stretched over the period of November 1999 to March 2001. In addition to interview data and ethnography, I used survey material of the nightclubbing market and of drug-consumption, clubbing and listing magazines and Internet sites.

6. Outline of the thesis

The thesis begins with a critique of research literature on 1990s rave and dance culture. Chapter 1 discusses this research in the light of the theoretical metaphors of otherness that have been invoked to account for the particular character of dance cultural experiences in the past decade. In so doing, the chapter also examines how identity and subjectivity have been theorised in relation to these experiences. At the same time it casts light on the transformation of subcultural theory and on the adoption of terminology derived from theories of postmodernity and postmodern theory. The chapter critiques the projection of a postmodern deconstructed self into rave and club culture, which was at the centre of representing dance culture as subversive aesthetic-political strategy. It focuses on three terminological complexes of subjectivity or identity 'at-its-limits', on firstly, simulation, secondly, community, sociality and neo-tribalism and lastly, desire. The critique presented in this chapter prepares the ground for conceiving of dance culture as aestheticisation of body and

[17] Music policy, location, club atmosphere and door policy have been considered to affect the appeal of a club to certain clienteles (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 95), factors that partly codify other demographic features such as ethnicity, sexuality, age or socio-economic location.

self. It puts forward the argument that club cultures involve experience and meaning as much as sensation.

Chapter 2 reflects on the conditions for sensation, experience and the narrativisation of clubbing through an ethnographic lens. It departs from the question how the otherness of dance culture is constructed through the practical spacing of clubbing. This chapter is analytical, theoretical as well as methodological. In providing a more detailed account of my ethnographic fieldwork, it also contemplates the conditions for ethnographic experience and how this shaped the construction of the object and framework of the study. Chapter 2 can also be read as an ethnographic critique of the otherness of dance spaces as spheres of sociality, community and play, or as inversion of the everyday. It draws attention to dance clubs as service spaces and institutions, which rest on routine practices, control and instrumentality, comparable to everyday non-places (Augé 1995) in the city. Initially, the second chapter was intended as an exploration of embodiment in dance culture, arising from the question of how dance spaces intervene into bodies and their sensual organisation.[18] This became an inquiry into the sense making of and through bodies, which linked back to the problem of reflexivity and experience.

Chapter 3 is the core theoretical chapter of the thesis. It discusses the problem of aestheticisation and identity in more depth. As indicated before, this perspective originally emerged from the issues of authenticity, style and identity. Accordingly, the chapter embarks on a more comprehensive discussion of (sociological) meanings of style in relation to reality and identity, placed in the context of aestheticisation and simulation. This leads into a debate of reality construction, reflexivity and the hermeneutics of the self. Otherness is formulated as a form of mundane reason or mode of reflexivity of virtuality, structured by a politics of experience. The notion of play-reality is developed as a tool to frame the reflexivity of virtuality as part of the construction of reality. It is further elaborated on in terms of aesthetic reflexivity (Lash and Urry 1994). The chapter finally links aestheticisation and identity through aesthetic reflexivity and narrative identity / ethics of the self (Ricoeur 1992).

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[18] Within studies of dance and music cultures the body is often referred to as a site of 'reconditioning' (Richard, Klanten and Heidenreich 1998) or 'restructuring', for example, as a restructuring of affective investments (Grossberg 1990).

Chapter 4 commences the empirical analysis presented in this thesis. Based on a 'horizontal' reading of interview data it investigates how dance cultural contexts are inscribed with otherness, what meanings this otherness unfolds and how it is linked to ethical aims of the self shaped by a politics of experience. The second part of the chapter inquires into the narrativisation of drug experiences in the context of clubbing. This analysis is carried out against the backdrop of firstly, discourses of drugs and reality and secondly, the thesis of the 'normalisation of drug use' (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001). In the light of this arguable 'normalisation,' the question arises if and how drug consumption is cast as a realm of otherness and how it interrelates with the agency of the autobiographical selves. Initially, this chapter departed from the problematisation of reality and authenticity in relation to clubbing and drug experiences. The discussion of this chapter makes it apparent that the virtual otherness of becoming can also turn into a problematic otherness in terms of the ethics of the self. The chapter concludes with a hypothesis of the gendered politics of drug experiences.

The discussion of Chapter 5 is based on a 'vertical' in-depth analysis of interview data. The original intention was to explore club and dance cultural experiences in relation to everyday life and biographical meaning-contexts, resting on the assumption that the construction of experience always articulates biographical meanings. Initially, I began this analysis by asking what club cultural involvement might come to signify in different biographical stages and transitions. The separate interpretation of four cases was finally integrated into a comparative analysis that focuses on the relationship between clubbing experiences and (new) middle class identity. This investigates clubbing as an element of the aestheticisation of biography through identity projects; that is, the projecting of the self's becomings, transformations and achievements. While gender, sexuality and age are important dimensions of this analysis; the ethics of the self and the notions of responsibility and freedom are primarily regarded in terms of the articulation of class habitus. The chapter also touches on consumption and production by exploring work identities in the sphere of clubbing.

In the phantasmatic complex of otherness infusing the representation of club and dance culture, sexuality seems to be a vital element. Thus, the second empirical half of the thesis engages with this issue from different viewpoints. Initially, the intention of this analysis was to investigate frequent claims about the role of sexuality in dance and popular music cultures. These are often epitomised as realms of sexual transgression and transformation, as a "challenge [to, S.R.] hegemonic constraints on sexuality, desire and even gender construction" (Grossberg 1990: 114). Rave culture likewise, was read as a manifestation of the social transformation of gender roles, the opening up of sexual boundaries and 'new feminine sexualities' (Pini 2001). But in beginning to address the dimension of sexuality, the more elementary question arose as to how sexuality in dance culture should be conceptualised – through notions of desire, style, performance, identity or else? Eventually, the focus shifted towards the aesthetic dimension of sexuality and towards conceiving sexuality in terms of aestheticisation; that is, in terms of reflexivity and the construction of reality through the otherness of virtuality. In outlining sexuality as a play-reality, Chapter 6 will delve into the analysis of the media production of clubbing imagery and compare these to interviewees' narrative construction of sexuality and gender.

Chapter 7 compares the production and consumption of two particular dance spaces. It addresses the question how the production of clubbing interrelates with modes of consumption and with the construction of identity and otherness. It advances the debates of Chapters 2 and 6 by bringing together the issues of sexuality and the institutional dimensions of club contexts. In particular, it investigates how two possible framings of dance clubs as either community space codified by sexual identity or as service space codified as aesthetic environment, in which sexuality is integrated as aesthetic, provide structures for the imagination of otherness. In analysing modes of aesthetic reflexivity in the reading and interaction of bodies, the chapter examines in what ways these clubs become allegorical or symbolic spaces, in other words, spaces of heterogeneity and complexity or spaces of normalisation and differentiation.

In sum, the thesis addresses the politics of clubbing experience on several levels and in various methodological ways. It discusses theoretical metaphors and

discourses of dance culture that provide for the framing of dance spaces as other; it reflects on the institutional and spatial-sensational structures of clubs; it investigates everyday identities and ethics of the self; it considers discourses of drugs and media imagery of clubbing and finally, it inquires into structures and relations of club cultural production and consumption. While this still leaves many more voids to be filled, the thesis aims to make a contribution, theoretically as much as empirically, to the study of contemporary British club and dance cultures.

Chapter 1

Subjectivity at its limits? Fantasies of liberation and transgression

1. Introduction

This first chapter is designed to form a basis for conceptualising the construction of identity through practices of dancing and clubbing. I will start this discussion by examining how academic research on 1990s British dance cultures has theorised identity and subjectivity in relation to club cultures. This is therefore a selective and theoretically focussed rather than a comprehensive review of research on clubbing. As the discussion will show, rave and club cultures were often conceived of as transgressive or other spaces allowing for experiencing the limits of identity or subjectivity. Initially, academics tended to disapprove of rave as a de-politicised, hedonistic youth culture. Yet, subsequently, it was almost epitomised as an aesthetic-political strategy. More specifically, through the lens of postmodern theory it came to be re-valued and re-imagined as an aesthetic of deconstruction. This emphasised the undoing of the logic of identity through simulation, desire, sensation or sociality. Rehabilitated as a politically or socially relevant movement, rave was hailed for its liberating qualities of putting the subject at or over the limits of meaning and rationality.

Despite attempts to highlight how the late 1980s' acid house and rave cultures differed from previous dance and music contexts such as disco or punk, images of rave as a sphere of ecstatic dancing echoed earlier (theoretical) discourses about youth dance cultural practices. In addition to the concern with ecstatic feelings, academic accounts have pondered how to conceptualise the forms of togetherness, group affiliation or collective association generated by dance culture. These accounts hence transgressed the model of a subcultural formation and have given rise to new (or old) notions of community and sociality. As before, dance cultures were sometimes put on a pedestal, for cutting across boundaries of social differences. The relationship between individual and collective identities, roles or identifications in youth popular cultures and their link to everyday identities became a new theoretical challenge for 'post-subcultural' studies.

In discussing this body of literature I will criticise the glorification of 'limit experiences' and the ensuing reification of club and dance cultures as other, transgressive spaces. The chapter will conclude with the argument that, instead of viewing club cultures as aesthetic strategy, practices of dancing and clubbing should be accounted for in terms of an aestheticisation of body and self. Further, I will propose that clubbing is not only a culture of sensation, but also a culture of experience and meaning. It is not only an undoing of identity, but also a doing of identity. Nevertheless, in recasting club and dance cultures as practices of aestheticisation and in theorising identity through aestheticisation, the dimension of sensation has to be taken into account.

2. Rave, postmodern theory and some theoretical roots or routes of 'limit experience'

Before delving into the discussion of research literature, I will briefly sketch out the wider theoretical context in which this theorisation of 'limit experience' is embedded and explain why the application of postmodern thought tended to inscribe rave culture with aesthetic-political value and clarify how dance culture's otherness came to be equated with an undoing of identity.

As I mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, the three terminological complexes that I am going to discuss in this chapter are simulation (Baudrillard 1983), community, sociality and neo-tribalism (Maffesoli 1995) and desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1996). Yet, the various conceptions of the subject at-its-limits and of dance culture's otherness not only emanated from this body of thought. A very influential line of thinking was Foucault's work and in particular his notion of 'other space' (Foucault 1986).[19] The different versions of subjectivity at-its-limits, though rather implicitly, recall his understanding of 'limit experience' (Foucault 1991). These Foucauldian concepts as well as Maffesoli's notion of sociality can be traced back, amongst others, to the works of Durkheim (1971) and Bataille (1988). Of course, Foucault and Maffesoli's works also resonate with Victor Turner's notions of liminality or communitas (Turner 1969), itself influenced by the Durkheimian

[19] An example of theorising dance culture through 'other space' or 'heterotopia' can be found in Gibson and Pagan (1998).

distinction between the sacred and the profane and by the significance of collective identification. Limit experience (Foucault 1991) highlights the experience of living at the limit or extreme,[20] the 'tearing' of the subject from itself, the becoming-other of the subject, arriving at its annihilation or dissociation. Turner's (1986) understanding of limen is quite similar to limit experience. In tracking the etymology of experience and its Greek roots (perao), he likewise refers to experience as passage, as risk, attempt, danger (peril) or experiment. He distinguishes the limen as a 'subjunctive mood of culture',[21] as a 'maybe', 'might be', 'as-if', 'fantasy' and 'conjecture' from ordinary life, which is in the 'indicative mood' of cause and effect, rationality and common-sense (ibid. 42). The idea of limen has been picked up, from many other contexts, in studies of contemporary consumption spaces and simulated environments, which are also of interest here. Rob Shields (1992: 8-17) for example, has argued that consumption and leisure spaces are controlled liminal zones facilitating the emergence of new forms of identification and the creation of masks or personae (Maffesoli).[22] Yet, consumption spaces, Shields contended, are not fully liminal, because they are also within the grid of social control and repression. They allow for the carnivalesque inversion of social norms and codes within the spaces of everyday life. This understanding of liminality as being located within the everyday evokes Foucault's metaphor of 'other space' or 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1986: 24). 'Other space' marks "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." Heterotopia denotes a juxtaposition of several incompatible places in one place or a surrealist rearrangement of things out of place, evoking the grotesque body of carnival (Bakhtin 1968, Stallybrass and White 1986). The opening and closing of other space is regulated by compulsion or rites of entry (Foucault 1986: 26). This 'other' space

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[20] The Latin origin of experience, experiri, means 'placing oneself in danger' (see also Jay 1998: 73). Foucault drew on Nietzsche, Bataille and Blanchot. Bataille's understanding of experience has its roots in notions of the sacred, sacrifice and expenditure. It articulates the threshold between subject and object, self and other. Experience appears as a force of excess or experimentation, of danger and non-coherence (Jay 1998: 62).

[21] In this respect, the limen or threshold has also much in common with the aesthetic of 'as-if' and the virtual, to be discussed later in the chapter.

[22] On themed environments as in some way 'utopian spaces outside normality' see also David Chaney (1996: 110). 'Controlled limen' also echoes Featherstone's notion of 'controlled de-control' (1991: 24-25).

yet exists within the general social space. It has a function to the remaining space, either as a heterotopia of crisis, deviation or illusion. Such other spaces are privileged, sacred or forbidden places; they provide an elsewhere. Heterotopia harbours normal and everyday social space and is articulated as a function of general social space. Nevertheless it is a marker of otherness to the everyday. Although the ideas of other space or of controlled limen underscore the intricate linkage of the sacred and the profane, the way these concepts are frequently read and applied (for example to dance culture) tends to emphasise the sacred at the expense of the profane. This entails the focus being directed more towards the otherness of these spaces than towards their everyday character. Further, this otherness is often taken as an undisputed starting point instead of being investigated as to how it is constructed in the first place. Added to this, this otherness is rarely related to the politics of experience, in other words, to the socially structured conditions and possibilities of experiencing otherness or liminality. For example, "communitas emerges where social structure is not" (Turner 1969: 126). In fact it is a breach of regular, norm-governed social relations, a momentary reversal of the status order. It is the other, the 'anti-structure'.[23]

In addressing the second point about postmodern thought, which moves our focus forward to the works of Baudrillard, Maffesoli, Deleuze and Guattari and postmodern theory – in particular these theoretical complexes under discussion – in different ways aspires to overcome the shortcomings of representational thought. It questions the distinction between representation and reality and challenges the view that language or theory could simply represent a 'reality' out there. Generally speaking, it takes into account that theory is part of the construction of this reality and that it therefore has to break away from thinking in terms of representation, for example, by inventing new modes of thought and new ways of using concepts and metaphors. Thus, theory becomes a *strategy*, more precisely, an epistemological and also political strategy. These strategies are in some sense also aesthetics. To give two examples, both Baudrillard's aesthetic of disappearance (Baudrillard 1988) as well as Rosi Braidotti's nomadic aesthetics (Braidotti 1994) are reminiscent of the 'virtual' in that they deploy a notion of the 'as-if'. Baudrillard's hyper-reality represents on

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[23] Although the liminal, subjunctive anti-structure is distinguished from the quotidian, indicative social structure, they are also intertwined in a dialectical way (1980: 163-165).

the one hand a mode of signification or a contemporary form of experience (for instance in simulated worlds like film or themed environments), on the other hand a way of knowing by exaggeration: 'as if something had already become real'. As a form of critique, thoughts are pushed to logical limits until the phenomenon disappears or transforms (see: Rodaway 1995: 244-245). By contrast, Braidotti's nomadic aesthetics accords to a "philosophy of 'as if'", but as a figurative mode of connection that can be compared to Deleuze and Guattari's (1996) 'lines of escape and becoming'. 'Nomad thought' translates hybridity into a way of thinking, using mimetic forms to open up multiple new connections between experiences and concepts.

Rave and the thriving dance cultures of the 1990s represented a realm of youth popular culture that brought to the fore the limitations of subcultural theories and, as a consequence, called for new theoretical conceptions. The model of style as an expression of a group identity in youth culture theory did not seem adequate to account for the style eclecticism in the dance cultures of the 1990s, and the concept of resistance (Hall and Jefferson 1976) did not seem able to capture much of the particularity of the raving and dancing experience (see the Introduction and the section 2.1.1 below).[24] Yet, the heritage of the subcultural tradition fashioned the wider framework within which rave and dance culture was viewed initially. Partly in response to the moral panics woven around 'ecstasy culture', the criminalisation of rave and the academic disapproval of rave's hedonism,[25] other academics were also looking for progressive and subversive elements in dance culture. Postmodern theory was consulted for a new vocabulary to represent the rave and dance phenomena, but this attachment of rave and dance culture to certain theories also legitimised dance culture by bestowing upon it new cultural and social, if not political value. At the same time it legitimised and furthered the interests of new cultural, academic intermediaries who studied dance culture, which was quickly turning into a new significant field within research of youth and popular culture. They established themselves by breaking away from subcultural theory. This is not to deny that the

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[24] See also Chapters 3 and 5 on this.

[25] Pini associated the academic disapproval with 'traditional Left academia', who were invested in the notion of youth resistance (2001: 26). I do not take this line of approach, because it resorts to general judgements and may overlook the political commonalities of researchers in the field.

study of dance culture in important ways brought forward the transformation of youth cultural theory. Yet, the theoretical framing of rave within postmodern, epistemological strategies also entailed rave culture itself appearing as (aesthetic) strategy, carrying on and partly transforming old fantasies of revolutionary liberation or 'resistance'.[26]

In fact, the notion of resistance was reformulated. While subcultural studies theorised 'liberation' or 'escape' in relation to rock culture in terms of an escape from everyday reality, the research literature discussed in the following referred to an escape or undoing of identity and highlighted new forms of 'connectedness between differences'. Liberation was recast as deconstruction and framed through the notion of a postmodern de-centred self. Exploring the margins and limits of subjectivity and identity was idealised as an act of freedom. It is particularly the link to aesthetic practice that inscribed a notion of cultural empowerment and (symbolic) freedom into the cultural practice of raving and clubbing. This inevitably recalls Dick Hebdige's work (1979), which illuminated punk subculture in the light of avant-garde aesthetics.[27] In pointing to the 'escape of the principle of identity' in punk culture, his account also seems to mark the transition to the aesthetic of deconstruction that informed the theorisation of rave and club culture (Hebdige 1979: 121).

I have divided the discussion of the literature, rather deliberately, into three strands, which all in different ways emphasise subjectivity 'at-its-limits', but take slightly different angles on the subject matter. This however, shall not gloss over the points of connection and the similarities between the theoretical concepts, which will become more evident in the discussion of Chapter 3. I could have sketched out these theoretical fields separately in this section, but I decided to weave them into the discussion of the research literature in order to make clearer what particular elements have been picked up. The first of these strands, drawing on Baudrillard's notion of

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[26] I do not wish to muddle these notions. As Stuart Hall clarified, 'resistance' in *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) was actively demarcated from metaphors of 'revolutionary struggle' and denoted a form of social rupture, a challenge and negotiation of the dominant order (Hall 1996a: 294).

[27] Rosemary Hennessy (Hennessy 2000: 130) sketched how aesthetic avant-garde movements have been inscribed with revolutionary potential. There is a great deal of aspiration for social change and transformation projected on to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.

'simulation', centres on issues of style, signification and technologies of the body. Here, subjectivity and identity are confronted with limits of meaning, lack of referentiality and shifting ways of demarcating the boundary between the inside and outside of the body. The second thread, leaning on notions of community or tribal sociality (Maffesoli 1995), highlights new forms of multiple, fluid collective identifications (instead of identities), which transgress boundaries of individuality and selfhood. The third, a Deleuze-Guattarian inspired reading, suggests that subjectivity is pushed to its boundaries through desire, propelling a de-subjectified, sensational state.

2.1 Simulation

2.1.1 Styles and signs

In two different ways Jean Baudrillard's (1983, 1994) theses of hyper-reality and simulation provided a theoretical background that launched a departure from subcultural theory. This section will focus on the debate on style, while the discussion in 2.2.2 will concentrate on hyper-reality and technologies of the body. To begin with, in the light of McLuhan (1994) and Baudrillard's works, amongst others, the analytic distinction between the 'authentic' subculture and its media representations was abandoned. Media and commodification came to be conceived of as constitutive elements of the construction of youth cultural style groups and imagined communities (Redhead 1993: 23). In other words, this cast popular youth cultures as partly simulated worlds of styles without the weight of meaning that used to be attributed to them. One of the subculturalist key assumptions that (more or less unified) style is expressive of a group identity was questioned on these grounds. Clubbing and dance cultural practices were instead taken as just the perfect illustration of a postmodern, eclectic use of styles and of a 'disappearance of a culture of meaning' (Baudrillard 1982: 5) – Hebdige's *polysemy* pushed to the limits. Clubland would engender bricolage, pastiche, fragmentation, surreal juxtapositions and clubbers would cruise through a variety of styles of clothing and music,

> one month (or, indeed, one evening) plunging headfirst into the 70s [...], the next going Gothic or Techno or Fetish or New Romantic or Punk or Cowboy/girl or Hawaiian. It is this 'surfing' [...] that most tellingly identifies 'clubbing' as a post-subcultural phenomenon. And which, in so doing, defines

> this world and those within it as Post-Modern. Indeed, anyone seeking an index of the Post-Modern condition need look no further than the ever growing, ever more influential world of clubbing (Polhemus 1996: 91).

Andy Bennett (2001: 124-125) remarked that the new heterogeneity of styles signalled the end of the subcultural tradition. A more moderate stance was taken by David Muggleton (2000),[28] who carried on the subcultural concern with style, but discarded a semiotic reading in favour of a Weberian perspective taking into account the subjective meanings of the stylists. He concluded that, instead of backing up a subcultural group identity, subcultural styles are increasingly used in an individualistic way, in which members partly reject and modify subcultural identity labels (Muggleton 1997: 199). These '(post-)subculturalists' (= the members) become models for 'trying on and casting off' styles. Unlike Polhemus (1996) however, Muggleton still maintained that styles (even as free-floating signifiers) and subcultural affiliation are significant for the construction of a distinctive individual identity and that standing out is at least as important as fitting in with style groups.[29] Nonetheless, he pointed to new ways of using styles that did not necessarily rest on a correspondence between outer appearance and self-identity: one may wear punk gear, but not identify with all elements of punk or, one may feel like a punk without expressing it through bodily style. This undoing of collective, subcultural identity that is found to be at work in contemporary uses of style seems to reflect interviewees' resistance to the categorisation practices of the (sub)cultural researcher as much as a postmodern use of styles. It is thus partly an undoing of ascribed (subcultural) identity.[30]

Apart from the point that styles are seen to be less important for constituting subcultural group identities, another crucial element of subcultural theory has been

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[28] Although Muggleton's work is not a study on dance culture in particular, I integrated it into this review, as it is relevant for the discussion in Chapter 3.

[29] Why individual identity would be exempted from the impact of hyper-reality and postmodern fragmentation is an unanswered question.

[30] Muggleton's interpretation of people's devices for rejecting or modifying identity labels has to be criticised from such a methodological viewpoint. His analysis of subjective meanings of styles is merely an analysis of interviewees' argumentative, partly interactive elaborations in response to the researcher's earlier attribution of identity-labels. This fails to take into account what Widdicombe and Wooffitt's research brought to the fore, namely how "questions of clarification worked to avoid the subcultural self-definition which the interviewer's prior question was designed to elicit" (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 209-210).

challenged by more recent research on youth popular cultures. It disputed the claim that subcultural styles symbolically transform collectively experienced conditions of class situation (see for example: Muggleton 1997: 199).[31] More specifically, it seemed impossible to map rave, dance and club scenes as class groupings with a distinct socio-economic base. Instead, 1990s dance cultures, particularly rave culture, were seen to be inclusive and mixed in terms of class, gender, age and sexual orientation.[32] However, there is no agreement as to whether social differences such as the aforementioned are indeed irrelevant within dance and music scenes. Rave culture has also been linked to the tradition of working-class youth cultural practices. Simon Reynolds for example, remarked that rave "is a remnant of working-class consciousness" (Reynolds 1997: 110). The 'hardcore' branch of dance culture in particular, was associated with working-classness, with the 'underclass' or 'disenfranchised youth' (see the discussion in: Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 50). The research of Measham et al. contended that distinctions of class could be identified despite the broad popularity of dance culture. Moreover, they also pointed out that inclusiveness of the early rave dance scene did not apply to race. While rave drew from black soundtracks and music, it was predominantly white in terms of participants until black presence became more visible with the jungle scene in 1991 (ibid. 51, 54). More precisely, jungle was interpreted – not only through race, but also class – as an expression of black *and* white urban working class experience (Reynolds 1998: 247-248). While dance and music culture as a whole certainly thrives from the contributions of a plurality of ethnicities and races, the dance scenes are at the same time to some extent differentiated by ethnicity, race and sexuality (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 65). This is not to deny that there are spaces, which are more mixed than others, but the differentiation of clubbing crowds, overlapping with musical tastes, sometimes reaches right into the club and matches with internal dividing lines created by the different music policies on the various dance-floors.

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[31] This is indicative of a wider tendency to decouple culture and economy in post-marxist social and cultural theory, see the discussion in Hennessy (2000: especially Ch.3).

[32] See the discussion of this 'social inclusion thesis' in: (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 48-51). This image of the transgression of class boundaries in certain youth cultures is not a new invention. For example, mod subculture was interpreted as an expression of the youthful, progressive, classless Britain of the 1960s (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 10).

Two points need to be raised regarding style, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Firstly, if differences in styles are considered to be of little significance in constituting feelings of distinctive identities and thus style is empty of meaning, what justification is there for a focus on style? Style seems too narrow a concept to embrace the diversity of practices and experiences within club cultures. Instead, a more useful avenue to follow is to engage with stylisation as an aestheticisation of the self and to investigate the implication of aestheticisation for selfhood and identity. However, what I want to avoid is a rather limited view of identity construction as a fashioning of the self through consumption, which passes over structuring conditions that shape and constrain this seemingly meritocratic identity work. The implications of this will be considered more comprehensively at the end of this chapter. Just as style has become a somewhat problematic analytical tool, class has become an insufficient category for explaining why people engage in certain cultural practices and take up certain styles. Yet, the dimension of class may still be relevant, not just for investigating processes of differentiation of the club scenes on a macro-level, but also for exploring in what way people engage in a cultural practice such as clubbing. This leaves room to presume new grounds for considering inflections of class or other social differences, for instance fuelled by a perspective that is less concerned with styles, but takes into account the contexts of class (or gender, sexuality, etc.) as an important texture of roles, practices, orientations and interpretative schemata within the action space of clubbing (for a culturalist re-conceptualisation of class see: Eder 1993). In Chapter 5 I will expand on this issue in more detail.

2.1.2 Sensation and technologies of the body

The second reading of simulation and rave and dance culture runs more along the lines of discourses of virtual reality and an aesthetic of deconstruction. This strand links the disappearance of a culture of meaning to a new form of intervention in the body. Unlike Baudrillard's gloomy images of simulation as a disaffected sociality[33] and, quite pointedly, against his own dismissal of the discotheque (Baudrillard 1982), interpreters of dance culture, particularly in the collection of

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[33] Baudrillard conceived of the implosion of meaning in hyperreality also as a 'destructuration of the social' leading to an empty, disaffected sociality (1994: 80-81).

Steve Redhead (1993), re-valued the schizophrenic intensity of hyperreality. As a culture without content, rave was seen to provide new sensational pleasures (Reynolds 1997: 109), creating a new 'atmosphere of sociality and belonging' (Melechi 1993: 38). Baudrillard's notion of 'disappearance' is an ambiguous term, as on the one hand it refers to the shift to the hyper-reality of simulation ('the disappearance of meaning') and on the other hand it is at the heart of an aesthetic strategy against simulation. It is a form of 'seduction', whereas simulation is a form of 'production'. Production is 'forced signification', transparency of meaning, technology and intensity of the surface (Baudrillard 1988). Seduction, by contrast, alludes to depth and meaning, it is re-enchantment. Disappearance, therefore, expresses the idea of resisting the implosion of meaning. This aesthetic of disappearance relies on Marcel Mauss' (1990) interpretation of the gift as a form of symbolic exchange. Disappearance refers to the principle of reversibility that is to be re-established. In the hyperreality of information, the schizophrenic cannot 'produce himself as a mirror'. Being overexposed to the 'forced introjection of exteriority', the schizophrenic cannot externalise his interiority.[34] Reversibility in relation to the circulation of signs means that 'all that has been produced must be destroyed, and that which appears must disappear' (Baudrillard 1988: 71).

Different readings of disappearance contributed to the idealisation of the raving experience. Disappearance evoked old notions of resistance to daily life, of 'escape from identity'; overall it staged a fantasy of liberation (through the body) (Melechi 1993: 37). As Hillegonda Rietveld (1993: 43) stated, "a disappearance from daily material realities by an undoing of the constructed 'self' in a Dionysian ritual is the ultimate effect."[35] Antonio Melechi also picked up on the positive notion of disappearance. He compared the politics of the self implicated in acid house with the logic of tourism, not only because acid house flourished in the holiday contexts of Ibiza, but also because he conceived of rave as being similar to the experience of tourism. It is an undoing of 'cultural and self identity in the unculture of the hyperreal' (Melechi 1993: 32-33). It resists the 'scene of identity politics' (ibid. 38)

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[34] In a way this also resonates with Walter Benjamin's (1955) notion of 'Chok' as a destruction of experience and meaning, which I will touch upon in Chapter 2.

[35] Apart from the postmodern inflection, Rietveld's account could be compared with the first study of discotheques by L. H. Blum (1966), who deployed similar images (see: Thornton 1995: 57).

and celebrates the 'death of the scene of dance' (ibid. 33). Instead of expressing the self or alternative identities, dance is a 'disappearance into the body.' The body becomes an absorbing, hyper-stimulated screen, derailed from depth and meaning (ibid. 33-34). In a similar vein, Reynolds (1997) conceived of rave as a laboratory for adapting the nervous system and the sensorial apparatus to technological stimulants. He designated rave, which geared subjectivity and its sensorial apparatus towards hyper-stimulation, as a "dry run or acclimatisation phase for virtual reality" (ibid. 108). However, Reynolds maintained a more ambivalent perspective on rave as "resistance and acquiescence", "orgasmotron and panopticon" (ibid. 110), though the panoptical dimension of rave was not sketched out further.

This theorisation of rave and techno culture through simulation resonates with interpretations of cyberspace that emphasise electronic worlds as realms in which new (and sometimes progressive) forms of identity and subjectivity can emerge. The potential of unfixing and disrupting identity through simulating an 'inauthentic' self are common elements of these discourses (see the discussion in: Zizek 1997: 134-143). Slavoj Zizek's paraphrase of these discourses could well be taken from an account on rave and dance culture:

> [...] playing in Virtual Spaces enables me to discover new aspects of 'me', a wealth of shifting identities, of masks without a 'real' person behind them (Zizek 1997: 134).

The drug ecstasy has also been compared to virtual space, insofar as the ecstasy-experience was not seen to be about dreaming or tripping in another reality, but about the transgression of the boundaries of the individual, by merging or linking the 'inside' and the 'outside' (Plant 1999: 165-167). Zizek referred to this loss of surface that separates inside and outside as a technological colonisation of the body or as an 'endocolonisation' (Zizek 1997: 134).

The interpretation of rave and dance culture as a disappearance of meaning, does away too easily with the question of identity. Nevertheless, this body of work shall be acknowledged for having highlighted crucial features of the dance and music assemblages of the 1990s by accentuating rave as a culture of effect and body-intervention. These interpretations, departing from the vantage point of simulation,

firmly situate dance and club culture within postmodern culture. Postmodern culture has been conceptualised as an essentially anti-auratic type of figural signification working through desire and the visual rather than through meaning and contemplation (Lash and Urry 1987, Lash 1990). Its emphasis on pleasure, sensation and immediate impact was considered to deconstruct temporality, narrative and history into a series of perpetual presents or schizophrenic intensities (Jameson 1991: 25-28). As a consequence of displacing narrative and experience, the spectacle of hyperreality was also seen to disrupt and decentre identity and subjectivity. Simulation and sensation, I would argue by contrast, do not fully, but just temporarily, displace time-consciousness, experience and narrative. The questions arising from this debate, crucial for the further theoretical discussion in Chapter 3, are, how simulation and the technological colonisation of the body affect the hermeneutic horizon of experience and how the doing of identity can be conceptualised in relation to the particular sensational features of postmodern culture. Simulation not only is a form of sensation, but also evokes a dramaturgical metaphor of role-playing, posing, performing and creating 'personae' that are mediated through images, models and codes. This brings up the problem of authenticity and the construction of reality and points a way towards problematising the question of identity. But what impact do these practices have on identity if these roles and personae are seen to be empty and meaningless? Sue Widdicombe and Robin Wooffitt (1995: 27) rightly criticised, though still from a viewpoint of subcultural theory, that there is a lack of a clear conceptualisation of identity particularly in relation to role-playing. It can be added that there is also a lack of conceptualising identity in relation to postmodern cultural forms of sensation. To engage with these issues will be the task of Chapter 3. In the following section, I will discuss how the understanding of subcultural affiliation as collective identity has been refashioned.

2.2 Communities and tribes: identification

While the accounts outlined above emphasised the undoing of the self and the liberation from the 'force of identification',[36] the notion of identification is quite

[36] The discussion in Chapter 3 will show that simulation too is a form of identification.

central in the works considered here, which contextualised dance culture within debates about individualisation (Bauman 1995), fragmentation and postmodern creolisation processes (Hall 1990). Rave and club cultures were not theorised as a deconstruction, but as an expression of identifications (Malbon 1999, Pini 1997). Instead of more stable subcultural identities, the emphasis was placed on transient, multiple identifications and affiliations. While this is reminiscent of 'style surfing' (Polhemus 1996), these temporary attachments were not seen to be empty and meaningless, but were considered to bring about new forms of emotional belonging. In the light of individualisation processes and of eroding collective identities, club and dance contexts were seen to provide micro-contexts of shared sentiments and identifications, allowing for the ex-stasis of the self, for the extension of selfhood or individuality in the tactile sociality of the dance-floor. The emotionality experienced in such contexts was thought to achieve a release from 'the burden of individuality' and from the pressures of forced self-construction and self-perfection in a highly individualised society. Rietveld, for example, endorsed the view that rave (especially free parties) and the new forms of tactility and play it made possible, spurred feelings of belonging and community. These new connections were articulated against the 'collective disconnection' in 'unbridled Thatcherite enterprise culture', against political dislocation or 'homelessness' and against an authoritarian political climate that tried to keep night-life entertainment and dance culture within strict limits (Rietveld 1998a). Yet, this release from individuality was not understood, as in the first strand of research, as a general resistance to identity politics rather than as a temporary submergence of identities beneath identifications (Malbon 1999: 50). In other words, the co-presence of dance clubs was thought to engender identifications 'in presence of differences that might normally preclude the sharing of emotional space such as age, ethnicity, gender or class' (ibid. 83). As Malbon pointed out, the "quest for a sense of home" (ibid. 47-48) is constitutive for clubbing. Further, young people's experiences at clubs

> have less to do with distinction and the forging of notions of individuality and perhaps more to do with belongings and the establishment of identifications (Malbon 1999: 182).

Yet, contrary to his view of the temporary submergence of identities beneath identification, Malbon also stated that

> ecstatic sensations can actually be about an extraordinary and, for many, unparalleled and extremely precious experience of *their own identity* [his emphasis]. Crucially, this experience of identity is perceived as their 'real' identity - how they really are (and / or want to be) (Malbon 1999: 127).

These elements cast club contexts as illustrations of a tribal sociality (Maffesoli 1995). Michel Maffesoli underscores the aspect of de-individualisation in the temporary, collective bands or tribes. He argues that within postmodern tribal sociality the logic of identity is being replaced by the logic of identification. Identification, prompted, amongst others, by bodily proximity and co-presence, would transcend social differences such as class. The logic of identification is associated with the multiplicity of masks or 'personae' that postmodern selves put on in different tribes. The 'superficiality' of spectacular and sensational sociality in some way is similar to the first strand of literature (section 2.1), which highlighted the simulation and meaninglessness of roles in dance contexts. However, in contrast to Baudrillard's 'dis-affected social', persona and sociality encompass affect. Drawing on Durkheim's conscience collective or social divine and Bataille's notion of expenditure, Maffesoli considers sociality to be the 'glue' of everyday life; it is re-enchantment with the world (Maffesoli 1995: 83). The spectacle assumes the function of communion or of religiosity (ibid. 77). Maffesoli endorses the view that sociality is part, or is the very essence of postmodern everyday life.[37] Nevertheless, he distinguishes affect and the effervescence of collective identification within sociality from the instrumental rationality of the contractual social, similar to Turner's differentiation between the limen as the subjunctive and the everyday as the indicative mood (Maffesoli 1995: 11).[38] Community ethos, Maffesoli states, is not instrumentally rational, but value rational (ibid. 60).

The reading of dance and club cultures through notions of sociality or communitas (Turner 1969) tended to imagine dance spaces as back regions and spheres of play outside or on the peripheries of everyday life, where routines,

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[37] He speaks of the 'retreat' into the everyday as the formation of a collective privacy, as an unwritten law, a code of honour or clan morality (ibid. 90-91).

[38] This has been criticised. Kevin Hetherington (1998: 51) for example, suggested that the affective form of sociality and identification is not to be seen as antithesis to, but is tied together with the rational.

commitments and norms temporarily cease to be in force. This also evokes the theory of subterranean values,[39] which set apart youth cultures, leisure and hedonism from the sphere of production and formal work values. In a similar vein, sociality, affect and feelings of community were sometimes seen to be threatened by the increasing commodification and 'commercialisation' of music and dance scenes.[40] The most significant break with subcultural theory however, was the abandonment of the linkage between lifestyle and class and the analytical shift from subcultural identities to new forms of transient collective identification. Yet again, romantic images of the 'unified' and inclusive clubbing crowds tended to gloss over the significance of social differences, of exclusivity, of different degrees of commitment and of more ambivalent relations to club contexts. Just as subcultural theory had a propensity to epitomise youth cultural affiliations as the core aspect of young people's identities at the expense of everyday identities (see the critique of Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 26-27, McRobbie 1990: 68-69), which also entailed a focus on core membership (Widdicombe 1995: 26-27), some research studies on dance culture seemed to concentrate on participants who highly identify as 'clubbers' or 'ravers' (Pini 2001).[41] Yet, is it equally easy for different people to adopt new roles or identifications? Do clubbing crowds dissolve or submerge social differences or are those crowds that differentiated in the first place? If so, are those boundaries indeed that easily submerged within collective bliss and identification? Maffesoli's more dialectic view of sociality as being "based on communion and reserve, attraction and repulsion" (Maffesoli 1995: 160) perhaps deserves further consideration in order not to fall prey to an over-emphasis on sociality and shared sentiments. The premise that neo-tribal sociality is an elective form of sociality and mainly rests on "individual self-definition" (see Bauman 1992: 137) led to a disregard of the interactive negotiation and construction of membership in certain action contexts. Mechanisms of closure and conflicts were, with some exceptions, rarely brought to the fore.

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[39] This theory was formulated by Matza and Sykes back in 1961 (Matza and Sykes 1961). Subterranean values were seen to exist underneath the surface of official values of a society. See also Jock Young (1971: 126). A more detailed discussion can be found in Hebdige (1979: 76-77) and Bennett (2000: 16).

[40] See for example Halfacree and Kitchin (1996: 53).

[41] Malbon (1998: 55) "understood the clubbers first and foremost as clubbers, with aspects of their social identities and biographies emerging - to a greater or lesser extent - only at subsequent stages of the research process."

Malbon (1999) took into account that belonging was something to be worked at. However, he did not investigate this struggle for belonging in much depth. Andy Bennett considered neo-tribal affiliations of music and dance cultures in relation to the social conflicts of local urban contexts. Local appropriations of music and styles, he argued, are bound up with hegemonic struggles involving issues of identity and authenticity (Bennett 2000: 1-2). Similarly, in his study of an Australian alternative life-style-festival, Graham St John (1999) came to read this festival in terms of a 'contested community' (Bauman 1992). Far from romanticising the emotional community, he described this context as a unity in diversity with tendencies towards massification and tribalism, homogeneity and heterogeneity, inclusivity and exclusivity, operating via differentiation and distinction. Overall, as we have already seen, 'membership' is a rather elusive term requiring consideration of what and who constitutes it, as well as of how the boundaries of the collective entity or tribe one is supposed to belong to can be determined. In this respect, it seems inevitable to consider what forms of collective association clubbers' accounts bring to light and how they represent their experience of togetherness at dance events. How important are the notions of community in the experiences of clubbers? How do they negotiate individuality and collectivity? These are issues that I will return to in Chapters 2, 5 and 7.

The notions of sociality and collective identification are also loaded with a great deal of idealisation. For example, Pini stated:

> The 'ecstatic moment' can thus be seen as a release from monadic interiority - an outburst which represents less the escape of mind from body than the absorption of the individual into a wider body (1997: 215).

The celebration of such ecstatic moments is part of the 'othering' of dance spaces. Despite engaging with dance cultural practices in the context of everyday identities, Pini for example, maintained quite a clear distinction between everyday spaces and the 'elsewhere' of dance spaces. Raving would bring about an "other dimension" (Pini 1997: 214). In exploring the significance of raving and clubbing for women, she argued that dance spaces have the potential "for creating alternative fictions or narratives of being" and for "the development of new (albeit temporary, incomplete and constituted partly in fantasy) 'identities'" (Pini 2001: 2). Rave came

to be seen as "a highly significant site for explorations of the boundaries surrounding conventional modes of femininity" (ibid. 38-39) signalling a manifestation of the erosion of femininity's traditional life-course, but also as a "*consolidation* [her emphasis] of an identity" (ibid. 47). While this alludes to both, the undoing as well as the doing of identity in clubbing, assuming not only temporary new identifications, but also the transformation of identities, it remains unclear how identity may be theorised in relation to 'ecstatic moments'. In her earlier work (Pini 1997) this was conceptualised through Braidotti's notion of 'nomadic subjectivity' (see above section 2, Braidotti 1994). Female subjectivities in club cultures were read as forms of 'nomadic being', opening up new, temporary and partly contradictory identifications as well as new senses of belongingness. Again, this theorisation of rave through an aesthetic or epistemological strategy to some extent entailed its appraisal as a "'subversive' mental travel" (Pini 2001: 14). However, a somewhat different perspective on the problem of identity was opened up by her Foucauldian reading of the production and regulation of ecstatic bodies, which drew more attention to the technologies of the self and the technology of freedom (Pini 2001).

These techniques of the management of the self point to moments of rationality and control, which neo-tribal readings of dance contexts sometimes tend to gloss over in the emphasis on shared sentiments and collective identification. Likewise, the institutional ordering of club spaces and the instrumental rationality implicated in processing great numbers of people have hardly been made an object of analysis. This means that notions of community or sociality need to be considered in relation to the production and consumption of (particular) club nights and the different zones and forms of interaction within clubs. Malbon hinted at such processes of ordering:

> [...] while at first glance apparently chaotic and without 'rules', clubbing is actually heavily imbued with processes and practices of social and spatial ordering. [...] This ordering is present in clubbing in the form of the sociality that runs through and underpins social life more generally: the intricacies of style(s), the hierarchies of 'coolness', techniques of dancing, and the spacings of all the constitutive elements and moments of the night [...] (Malbon 1999: 184).

Despite these criticisms the neo-tribe thesis captures significant elements of contemporary ways of using and relating to club and dance scenes and of people's movements through a variety of tribes or style groups. Again, this strand of research

highlighted the importance of engaging with the spatial, tactile, sensational and collective dimension of club contexts. However, the heuristic potential of the neo-tribe thesis has not really been exhausted. Questions of belonging, identity and identification have not been theorised sufficiently. Pini's work pointed us to an example of how identification and becoming may be articulated through identity or through everyday experiences of class, gender, sexuality, etc. Yet, identification appeared somewhat separated from identity. This contrasting of identity and 'transient' identifications evoked a rather static understanding of identity that did not take into account that identity itself is a transient and situated accomplishment. Overall, these interpretations of dance and club cultures through Maffesoli's work over-emphasised the aesthetic dimension of tribes (= shared sentiment and collective identification) and gave too little attention to the struggle for membership and belonging, to moments of exclusivity and closure, to the differentiation of club crowds and to moments of instrumental rationality.

2.3 Body-without-organs: desire and sensation

The theorisations of dance culture that drew on Deleuze-Guattarian thought carried on subcultural theory's concern with the commodification of youth cultures. They engaged with the political meaning of pleasure by interpreting the 'rave-phenomenon' more generally in relation to politics and capitalism. This centred around the question whether rave was a form of resistance to or compliance with society, whether it was 'nihilistic, hedonistic escapism' or a 'collective political expression'.[42] Nevertheless, at the heart of this theoretical strand of research was the issue of subjectivity and its transformation through desire. The production of desire or 'ekstasis' was considered as a 'liberating' effect. However, the opinions about the political meaning of this 'liberation' diverge.[43] It was either understood as politically indifferent, as a lack of constructive politics or as a micro-political event. Aside from these disagreements the more relevant point for this discussion is their common conception of rave and dance culture in terms of desire or ecstatic, sensational states.

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[42] See Measham (2001: 29) on this point, which links to a more general debate on the political significance of youth cultures.

[43] The questions as to whether libidinal gratification can be political or can be a form of 'social revolution' and how individual liberation relates to, or is part of, social transformations have also a long tradition, see Jameson (1981: 73).

In this respect, this theoretical strand is not dissimilar to the revalorisation of the Baudrillardian 'schizophrenic intensity' as an intervention in the body and its sensorial organisation. Desire and ecstatic feelings are implicitly epitomised as the principal, essential feature of the consumption of dance and clubbing. Again, this one-dimensional view misses other facets of dance cultural practices and experiences.

One central metaphor used to highlight the pleasures and 'ecstatic feelings' was Deleuze and Guattari's notion of body-without-organs (BwO) (Deleuze and Guattari 1996). The BwO is a configuration of free flows of desire that challenges the dominant structures of investment of desire in capitalist society. This channelled structure of desire – as a deliberate creation of lack and the organisation of wants and needs – is the basis of modern, rationalist subjectivity. It is the dance that transforms this static sedentary organisation of desire into a nomadic structure of desire (Hemment 1997: 25). Hardly surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body-without-organs seemed an easily applicable concept for dance culture, not least because Deleuze and Guattari themselves, thinking 'nomadically', drew on dance as a metaphor for the body-without-organs: It is full of "gaiety, ecstasy, and dance" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 150). The body-without-organs transgresses fantasy, signifiances and subjectifications (that is signification and objectification). It dissolves interpretation and meaning in desire and schizophrenic intensities. In the body-without-organs there is no longer a self "that feels, acts and recalls" (ibid. 162); it is non-representational and non-represented (ibid. 161). However, this body-without-organs is politically ambivalent: schizophrenia can also slide into paranoia and into oppressive or repressive structures.

Tim Jordan conceived of this production of desire as a "revolutionary form of liberation" (Jordan 1995: 139). However, according to Jordan, this "ongoing inducement into a desubjectified state" (ibid. 129) is politically indifferent, as the production of desire is aimless, devoid of the attachment to political values.[44] Jeremy Gilbert's (1997) view came close to Baudrillardian interpretations. He contended that rave culture engendered a spatialisation of politics, thereby abandoning a politics of

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[44] In my view Jordan misread Deleuze and Guattari. He implied that Deleuze / Guattari ascribe a politically liberatory quality to all bodies-without-organs. Consequentially, he inferred that they remain too indifferent and uncritical towards capitalism.

the future and of representation and instead invoking a politics of the present. Further, rave would deconstruct 'the text of modernity', of authenticity and meaning, because unlike rock music, rave music was not concerned with conveying messages of protest oriented towards future change, but with creating pleasurable moments in the present. Similarly, Drew Hemment (1997) conceived of the dancer as 'a nomad in ekstasis'. This ekstasis was regarded as a disruption of the temporal structuring of experience, which was not seen to be political in itself, but was rendered as a micro-political event. Similar to the Baudrillardian 'disappearance of meaning', Hemment associated the dance-floor with a disappearance of and from language. He concluded that the "subject of enunciation becomes inoperative, and hence so does the force of objectification that it carries" (Hemment 1997: 29). This suggests once more the departure from the logic of identity, meaning and experience. Hemment's reading of dance culture maintained a distinction between the 'purer' rave and warehouse parties of the late 1980s and the 'commercialised' club cultures of the 1990s. Ekstasis, which cannot be 'measured, seen and sold' and which appears to evade and transgress commodification, seems 'authentic' in the former, whereas the latter only "*gives the impression* [my emphasis, S.R.] of an idealised sphere of maximised expression and release." While the warehouse parties produced a "strongly inclusive sense of identity", the commercialised clubs yield a "reactive identity constructed in opposition to other clubs and other sociocultural forms" (ibid. 34).

In some way this image of the desiring, dancing bodies-without-organs can be compared to constructions of queer subjectivity that draw from the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of productive desire. For example, Rosemary Hennessy (2000: 108) located similar images in Elisabeth Grosz or Elspeth Probyn's readings of queer sexuality, seen as a matter of continuing movement and making strange (Probyn 1996: 14), as a "series of intensities that throws one onto the vagaries of the other", as a site of provocations, disruptions and blurred boundaries (Grosz and Probyn 1995: 290). Yet, despite the role of capitalism in Deleuze-Guattarian thought, the queer subject as well as the versions of the 'deconstructed', dancing, raving subject seem strangely unhinged from social and material relations, from commodification, partly from particular social and local contexts and from the voices of actual agents. While 'nomadic' forms of subjectivity (as located in sexuality, virtual reality or dance) reject the notion of a centre and 'authentic' core, the concept does not quite escape the inherent modernist fantasy of liberation. Overall, these readings of

Deleuze and Guattari's thought are as one-dimensional as the interpretations of dance culture. Following their line of thought would lead us to relate the undoing of subjectivity to its redoing, as subjectivity is conceived of as a "coupling of asymmetrical flows of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation;[45] decoding and overcoding; deconstruction and reconstruction" (Doel 1995: 232). This is the viewpoint I am going to outline in the conclusion of this chapter and develop further in Chapter 3.

3. Conclusion: undoing and doing identity

Reviewing three theoretical strands of research on dance culture, one is led to assume that identity is an irrelevant category for studying experiences of dancing and clubbing, as the doing of identity is supposedly replaced by its undoing through multiple identifications and masks, and through desire and sensation. All these notions conjure up a fantasy of transgression, liberation, social transformation and innovation. To some extent this stems from framing youth and dance cultures as aesthetic spheres and from the association of aesthetics with political subversion and progressiveness. The first body of literature cast liberation as a disappearance of meaning and as a technology of the body. The second strand attributed liberating qualities to collective identification. The third, however, understood it as a kind of liberation (or proliferation) of desire.

Consideration of these three research strands suggests that the reading of rave and club cultures through postmodern theory-strategies has produced a somewhat de-contextualised view. In some accounts it has tended to stage a general, unspecific 'raving subject', decoupled from contexts of class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, locality or social discourses (see also the critique of Pini 2001: 7). This is not to say that empirical research of dance culture in general has failed to address specific dance contexts. Some ethnographic studies, as the discussion made clear, have dealt with questions of identity and with specific, historical and local processes and life-contexts in which club and dance cultural practices are embedded (especially Pini 1997, and Bennett 2000).

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[45] Deterritorialisation refers to the transformation into the body-without-organs, whereas reterritorialisation signals the stabilisation and re-establishment of the self.

There are a number of theoretical and methodological points arising from this review, which warrant further discussion. First, in criticising these postmodern readings of rave and club culture my intention was not to reject their understanding of clubbing practices as a postmodern cultural form, but to break away from the reification of dance culture as aesthetic-political strategy. Second, the critique of the undoing of identity modelled on postmodern conceptualisations of a de-centred self did not intend to call into question this conceptualisation itself. The direction I wish to pursue further in this thesis is to conceive of clubbing not only as a culture of sensation, but also as a culture of experience and meaning. This also entails complementing the focus on the undoing of identity and subjectivity with the (re)doing of identity. The discussion demonstrated that the undoing of identity in some way also appeared as a theorisation of the impossible categorisation of people through subcultural identity labels. This made clear that theorising the notions of identity or identification also requires a methodological conceptualisation. I have drawn together crucial concepts in need of further consideration in the following chapters. These are style, simulation, identification and sensation. We have seen that style has become a somewhat difficult analytical tool to work with and might better be replaced by a more general focus on the aestheticisation of body and self, which also takes into account the sensational dimension of club and dance cultures. The practice of clubbing and dancing does not simply produce endless flows of desire and sensational effects, which displace reflexivity, meaning or identity. Instead, the question that begs address is how the various forms of sensual stimulation affect the hermeneutic horizon of experience. To be more precise, these processes of aestheticisation can be understood as interventions in the modes of constructing reality and authenticity. Speaking methodologically, the undoing and doing of identity can be viewed as a problem of mundane inquiry, as a matter of understanding and reflexivity, for example, in the attempt to pin down the 'reality' of the body or the self in states of sensual stimulation. Undoing identity articulates a boundary to identity; it conveys a notion of transgression and highlights an otherness of becoming. But how do people construct such otherness and which meanings of otherness do they hold? Further, how do these relate to notions of liberation, freedom, community or individuality and, what are the politics of experience of such otherness?

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated how practices and spheres of clubbing or dance in general tend to be viewed in terms of transgression and limit experiences that are set apart from the ordinary. They are conceived of as other to everyday identities and structures of desire. The chapter has traced how this otherness has been imagined through postmodern theory. In the following chapter I will delve into the question of how this otherness may be constructed practically. This will not only give a more life-wordly introduction to the scenery of clubbing, but also serve as a preliminary step for theorising the issues under question. It will engage with the conditions for constructing clubbing as experience by coupling theory, methodology, practice and analysis. In short, this will problematise my own (ethnographically oriented) consumption of dance and clubbing contexts and situate myself as a researcher in this field of practice.

Chapter 2

Sensing and meaning the body: ethnographic experience

> Clubs however, offer other-worldly environments in which to escape; they act as interior havens with such presence that the dancers forget local time and place and sometimes even participate in an imaginary global village of dance sounds. Clubs achieve these effects with loud music, distracting interior design and lighting effects. British clubs rarely have windows through which to look into or out of the club. Classically, they have long winding corridors punctuated by a series of thresholds which separate inside from outside, private from public, the dictates of dance abandon from the routine rules of school, work and parental home (Thornton 1995: 21).

1. Introduction

While the subcultural ideologies of underground and mainstream have become rather obsolete categories in the investigation of club cultures, Sarah Thornton and many other commentators alike subscribe to a more fundamental dichotomy. They draw a clear distinction between the everyday world and the other world of dance. But where and how does this other world begin? How is it demarcated and what generates this sense of otherness, how does it come to be understood as other? What does this otherness involve and what is it other to? Thornton indicates some significant elements that might create a sense of otherness. That is, the spatial and sensational structure of clubs and the series of thresholds and boundaries one traverses in travelling through and dwelling in these spaces. As spaces of privacy, of dance abandon and ultimate sensational presence they are posed as other to the public, to routine, education, work and family commitments.[46] But is the club world really that other? Again, somewhat fortuitously perhaps, Thornton points us to the undercurrent of bliss and rapture – the *dictates* of dance abandon, the interaction order of clubs and the dialectic of letting go and control.

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[46] These are, by the way, not just responsibilities towards parents, but also clubbing parents' responsibilities of care for their offspring.

In this chapter I will investigate if and how club spaces indeed come to be practiced and experienced as such 'other worlds'. Against the reading of clubbing as simply a realm of play and otherness separate from everyday life, I endorse Lawrence Grossberg's view that dance and music cultures are operating in both, within and against the structures of everyday life (Grossberg 1990: 115). The aim of the chapter is twofold. The first intention is to further introduce the methodological approach of this study and to delineate the construction of the ethnographic field in relation to my involvement. This is crucial if ethnography is to avoid simply reinforcing the othering of the club and dance world.[47] The second purpose is to use the ethnographic reflections and the preliminary analysis to further develop the theoretical framework, which will be developed more thoroughly in the third chapter. Having set out to investigate the practice of clubbing through the poles of sensation and experience in the previous chapter, this chapter will examine practical configurations of sensation and experience. This requires exploring the related dimensions of time and narrative, which will lead into a consideration of conditions for story-ing clubbing (as other sphere). In drawing on material from the whole range of my ethnographic encounters and on interview data the main concern is not to compare and contrast specific club contexts, but to reflect on different moments of practicing and narrating otherness in contemporary club contexts.

2. The use of ethnography

Postmodern ethnography (see for example Tyler 1986, Atkinson and Hammersley 1998) or what has been called the 'new ethnography' in the field of popular culture studies (Lovatt and Purkis 1995), amongst others, presumed new ground for understanding the researcher's relationship to the field. This involves that the ethnographer is not separated from the field, which is framed as other, deviant or exotic (either as part of a different society and culture or as part of the ethnographer's own culture, which is to be looked at as if it were strange). Instead, it renders the ethnographer part of the field in which the study is undertaken. In the recent ethnographies of rave and dance culture in particular, researchers considered

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[47] On ethnographic authority and the 'othering' of the ethnographic field see James Clifford (1993: 139).

themselves very much part of the field. Or, they even chose dance contexts for study, in which they felt familiar (e.g. Malbon 1998, Pini 1997).

Malbon's (1998) methodological approach of 'being-in-touch', for example, intended to subvert traditional understandings of participant observation. He did not consider observation an appropriate way to do ethnography in clubs and defined his role as observant participant, who joined in instead of observing and taking notes (ibid. 46-58).[48] Apart from the theoretical and methodological problems involved in observation, detachment and observation in clubs may not comply with the local ethos of involvement and, especially if the ethnographer is perceived as participant, might be perceived as strange and out of place. As 'one of them' the ethnographer has to take part. Negotiating and conceptualising the tension between participation on the one hand and reflective, observing distance on the other hand is indeed a complex task. This crude distinction between observation and participation is problematic, as has been pointed out, amongst others, by feminist ethnographers (see for example: Coffey 1999). From a slightly different angle it can be formulated in terms of sensual immersion and reflective attitude. As Dorothy Smith (1987: 115) indicated, whether an ethnographic account is based on a static, motionless body or on an active, moving body in the setting makes a crucial difference. This is a point where methodological contemplations lead to analytical considerations about the object of study. In order to be able to section off and memorise meaningful segments from the constant flux of stimuli in dance clubs, one has to, at least from time to time, move in positions of mere detachment and bodily stillness. Ethnographic practice in clubs, as a construction of meaning and experience, in some way is acting against the quite inescapable distraction of nervous over-stimulation. Sensual immersion frustrates many attempts to reflect on and memorise elements of the flux of sense impressions. But the particular organisation of sense perception in dance culture only imposes a limitation on the ethnographic method, if ethnography is employed to gather evidence about certain issues.[49] Instead, an ethnographic account of clubbing can also be put to different use such as that outlined above. That is, to

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[48] Empathy and being-in-touch evoke quite a traditional construction of ethnographic authority through experience and intuitive understanding, see the critique of Clifford (1993: 127).

[49] For example, for 'evidence' of the composition and social background of the crowd, see Thornton (1995: 91, 106).

reflect more thoroughly on the conditions of meaning making and on the question of how these conditions shape the construction of the cultural practices that are being investigated? Apart from that, it can be used to turn the researcher's relation to the field into an object of analysis (Willis 2000: 118). This hopefully clarifies in what way the theoretical and the methodological endeavours of this chapter are intertwined.

The fact that 'new ethnographers' choose scenes for study in which they feel familiar or comfortable shows that ethnographic participation in dance culture is also a form of consumption, partly shaped by tastes, bodily knowledge, styles and else that the researcher shares with people in certain clubs. Understandably, one tends to side-step research sites that arouse personal fears or aversions. Yet, an exposure to environments that do not necessarily comply with the personal preferences of the researcher can also increase the heuristic potential of ethnographic work. Not only is it part of people's experience of clubbing to come across club crowds they cannot identify with, but it also makes problematic what in familiar contexts would not instigate a reflection. The experience of different settings and spatial arrangements as well as of different degrees of familiarity and strangeness opens up the possibility of comparison. While being a form of consumption, ethnographic practice is in some way also a work role in a space where other people appear to consume leisure (see also Thornton 1995: 2). Apart from the much more pronounced reflective stance, this is another aspect to take into account when reflecting on the ethnographic sense making of clubbing. The blurring of work and leisure roles sometimes produces a fair bit of confusion. Another consequence of the fact that everyday research work stretches to ethnographic work in clubs is that ethnographic experience of clubbing is not always such an otherness of fun as is commonly assumed. In fact, the (ironic) accusation that researching clubbing is extending the researcher's own leisure practices by disguising fun as work and is merely driven by private motivations or interests creates a significant mode of recognition against which the merit of such ethnographic work has to be articulated. To some extent this shapes a form of ethnographic participation that avoids certain practices of self-exposure in clubs.

The Introduction of the thesis already sketched out the ethnographic design of this study. It shall be added that most clubs were visited once or twice on different

nights of the week, apart from the clubs Heaven and Candy Bar (Chapter 7), which I had visited about six times each.

3. The use of interviews

3.1 Approaching interviewees and constructing the sample

In addition to the aim of creating as mixed an interview sample as possible, in particular in terms of sexuality – the rationale of which was outlined in the Introduction – another objective was to avoid constructing a sample around 'core' participants, as other studies tended to do (see Chapter 1). The first attempt of contacting people was a letter placed on notice boards of colleges and of a (gay) pre-club bar as well as a small ad in a lesbian and gay weekly paper. The latter two attempts, however, remained unsuccessful. This letter, introducing the research as a study about people's clubbing experiences, was quite broad in terms of the music and dance contexts and the people I was looking for, with the exception that gay, lesbian or bisexual people were invited explicitly. I did not put any constraint on the type of participation in club cultures and also encouraged people who did not go clubbing regularly or had stopped clubbing altogether. A number of people responded to the college letter. These constituted a group of mainly student interviewees (Steven, Walter, Giselle, Clare, Kay, Emine, Chuck, Erik, Lennie). This first group set in motion a process of snowballing, which proved to be quite successful in attracting people from different contexts (Aniela, Andrew, Gary, Gia, Hailey, Yong, Sally, Sheila). A few people were found through friends and acquaintances (Valerie, Lisa, Nike). With one exception (Costa) I had not met them before. Finally, two interviewees (Alex, Sven) were approached through a person I had met in a club and who suggested, after my request, some friends for an interview. In trying other channels to find people for interviews, I made contact with black gay and lesbian community associations, which invited me to place a brief ad in their newsletter. Yet, this proved unsuccessful. The clientele contacted through that channel may not have had much interest in clubbing, or for reasons mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, were hesitant to respond. I did not deliberately approach and ask people in

clubs to be interviewed, because of the fear of being too obtrusive.[50] Due to limited time resources and also because the data generated so far promised to allow for quite focussed interpretation in relation to the concerns of the project, I finally decided to work with the sample I had got. Without wanting to excuse or justify this homogeneity, this points not only to the difficulties I had in getting access to certain groups, but also to the impossibility of representing, not just blackness, but the whole range of ethnicities, skin colours, sexualities and more in a small qualitative sample. The interviewees of this study were mixed in terms of age, national, cultural background and sexuality. The sample includes people identifying as hetero-, bisexual, gay or lesbian or 'pansexual'. Most interviewees were aged between twenty and thirty. Except for three cases (Alex, Sally, Sheila), the sample can be related to a middle class (family) background, which is also reflected in current occupations. Given the local diversification of British club scenes, 'a' demographic profile of British club-goers is difficult to pin down[51] and consequentially, it is a bit difficult to point out whether this sample is in any other way unusual apart from the homogeneous elements already mentioned (whiteness, middle-classness). Some findings echoed in most of the surveys[52] however, were that the core consumer group of nightclubs – despite being drawn from all social, ethnic and age backgrounds – was aged between 18 and 24, had a strong base in the middle income groups and tended to be single. Students were considered to form a significant part of nightclub clientele. Many of the students in this sample were also working or had worked prior to their studies. Appendix B of the thesis lists all interviewees by (changed) name, age, country of origin and occupation.

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[50] While the large-scale research of Fiona Measham et. al. (2001: 74-76, 90) as well as other studies such as Release (1997) demonstrate the feasibility of undertaking research in clubs, they also tell of the number of practical and ethical problems involved in doing in-situ research with (intoxicated) people in high-noise settings of clubs.

[51] On the impossibility of achieving representativeness due to the diversification of the club scene see Measham (2001: 63-65).

[52] (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001, Mintel 2000b, Release 1997). On local variations in relation to employment status of club visitors see Forsyth (1998). Mintel market research (Mintel 2000b: 7), which includes a very wide range of nighttime venues, found that slightly more men and singles are among what the survey classified as the 'heavy visitors' (those going out once a fortnight or more).

3.2 Interviewing

One of the strengths of the method of narrative interviewing is that it enables interviewees to build their own frame of reference in relation to the topic under study instead of just guiding them with questions related to the pre-conceptions of the researcher. Narrative talk, stimulated by non-directive and open questions instead of 'why' questions, which tend to trigger argumentative reflections and justifications, can generate detailed and complex accounts of social settings, situations, actions and courses of events. Such detailed accounts, as for example presented in stories, provide many indirect hints at people's meaning accomplishments. The particular method used in this study was originally devised by Fritz Schütze (1978) and further developed in contexts of biographical, and social-historical research.[53] It rests on the assumption that concentrated narrating may unfold a mimetic stream of remembering and re-living. This does not mean that narrative represents 'lived experience', but that its formal organisation bears more similarities to structures of action and motivational relevances than argumentative discourse (Schütze 1978). This method of interviewing comprises different stages and modes of questioning, with the purpose of giving interviewees room to talk with as little intervention as necessary from the interviewer. The valuation of narrative does not imply that only story-parts of interviews are considered useful or worthy elements for interpretation. Argumentative elements are also to be included in the analysis, which frequently open up interesting contrasts to narrative sequences.

The interviews for this research were usually conducted at college or in people's homes. I explained the procedure of interviewing and my research interests (the wider life contexts, dancing and the body, sexuality, interaction on dance-floors and in clubs) to the interviewees beforehand. In particular, I indicated and agreed with them that they would have room to talk casually without me interrupting them. Generally, this was accepted, some interviewees however, became a bit nervous on being asked to talk about themselves without much guidance. Nevertheless, after reassuring that I would help with questions if they found it too hard, most

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[53] I am particularly indebted to the works of Gabriele Rosenthal (1995) and Reinhard Sieder (1982). An English speaking discussion of this German speaking methodological context can be found in Chamberlayne (2000).

interviewees started to narrate. My initial question usually was: "Can you tell me about your involvement in different dance and clubbing scenes and how this related to your life in general?" In response to this, interviewees kept talking between ten minutes or three hours, on average this narration lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. This question was occasionally perceived to be too open as a starting point, in response to which I again specified some areas in order to help them (for example, 'remember when you started going out clubbing'). Being prepared to talk about clubbing, some interviewees were, despite my previous explanations, a bit hesitant to talk about their life contexts. However, I pointed out that it was entirely up to them what they wanted to touch upon and I guaranteed confidentiality. After interviewees had finished with the initial narration, I would pick up questions about topics they had covered and ask them to elaborate on certain issues in a more detailed way, stimulating further narrative parts. In a third stage I started to ask questions about issues they had not yet mentioned, in some way more geared to my 'interests' or 'pre-conceptions.' Towards the end of the interview I sometimes adopted a mode of direct questioning, which did not aim at stimulating further narrations, but at reconstructing detailed memories of a recent night out. These questions would cover things like 'choosing', 'organising' and 'preparing' for the club night, anything they remembered about queuing and admission, any conversations they had, what they perceived, what their first impressions of the space were, how they moved around in the club, their experiences of dancing and interacting etc. Most interviews lasted about two hours altogether. With some persons I arranged a second interview (see the list in Appendix B). By merely being a sympathetic and attentive listener, some interviewees were not used to the lack of reciprocity in the conversation. They also wished to know things about me such as which places I went to, what clubs I was researching, whether I had similar experiences, why I came to do a PhD about clubbing, in other words, they tended to construct me as a participant too. In my responses, which I tried to postpone until after the interview, I usually shared similar experiences or opinions, but was fairly cautious about expressing different views in order not to invalidate or question their experiences.

The use of interview data in this chapter is merely geared to explore possible practical spacings of clubbing and moments of story-ing otherness. I will therefore be rather inattentive to interactive accomplishments of the interviewer and interviewee.

Chapter 4 builds on a horizontal, thematic reading of interview data and in Chapter 5 in particular, I will return to narrative analysis, which makes the autobiographical narration itself a topic of inquiry. In Chapters 6 and 7 I will again use interview data in relation to the thematic focus of the chapters.

4. Narrative, time and space

Gaining an experience of clubbing involves first and foremost a temporal ordering of partly simultaneous sense impressions, which present themselves without beginnings or ends, into sequences of action. Phenomenologically, experience, as a retrospective attention to the stream of consciousness, in some way can be understood as a registration of otherness, as it sections off or synthesises elements that are different from the ordinary (Luckmann 1983: 75). As a unit of disturbance, it 'stands out from the evenness of passing time' (see the discussion of Dilthey in: Turner 1986: 35). Or, more precisely, it ties together the extraordinary and the ordinary (Abrahams 1986: 49) in 'summoning up precedents and likenesses' from sedimented previous experiences (Turner 1986: 35). The representation of ethnographic experience is traditionally strongly shaped by narrative structure and by particular story-types,[54] and unsurprisingly, story-ing is also significant in constructing clubbing as experience. Malbon pointed at 'the night out' as a crucial, if not dominant form in which clubbers organise and communicate memories of clubbing in daily conversations (Malbon 1998: 60). His own representation of clubbing reproduces this temporal structure of different stages of a night – that includes 'getting into it' (motivations for clubbing, preparing for the night, entry to the club),[55] 'dancing crowds' and 'moments of ecstasy' as well as 'reflections and afterglow'. Significantly, this situates reflection after the 'ecstasy' of a club night. This temporal structure inscribes not only a certain narrative into the practice of clubbing, but also epitomises a story line of a successful night, centring on peak moments or phases of 'ecstatic dance'. While the following narrative of my ethnographic encounter with clubbing spaces hinges on a similar structure, I wish to

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[54] On ethnography as narrative see for example Bruner (1986a) and Clifford (1986).

[55] A similar account can also be found in Fiona Buckland's (2002) book, particularly in the chapter 'The Currency of Fabulousness'. However, this book became available only at the very end of writing this study and could therefore not be integrated into the discussion.

avoid this kind of *narrativising* discourse, which constructs 'ecstatic feelings' as the normal experience and essence of a club night and as the ultimate goal people in clubs are striving for. The following ethnographic discourse intends instead to *narrate* without imposing a story-structure of beginning, middle and end.[56] It is guided by the question if and how one comes to understand club spaces as spheres of 'ecstatic feelings' and of otherness through the spatial and temporal practices engendered within clubbing and its context.

To narrate without a story means to disrupt the story-ing inherent in my own ethnographic notes. While pulling together different experiences from a number of club-nights runs the risk of becoming a sort of meta-narration that universalises particulars, linking and contrasting these encounters is one way of disturbing the tendency towards a unified story-line. It illuminates the type and scope of possible meanings and draws from a series of situations and instances instead of favouring one in particular (Willis 2000: 115, Baszanger and Dodier 1997: 16-17). Narrating attempts to circumvent narrative closure – the illusion of an unproblematic representation of reality – by opening up voids and by destabilising the object that is being constructed (see also Martin's outline of an ethnography of dance, 1997: 322). The representation of this ethnography will remain fragmentary. It does not attempt to compile as comprehensive an account as possible including all relevant practices, but accentuates several moments that illustrate configurations of experience.

The temporal structure of narrative is also linked to a spatial structure, to movement and change in space. Narrative composes a path through space. The descriptions of changes in space and the modalities of these changes constitute a 'walking rhetorics' (de Certeau 1984: 99-100). 'Walking rhetorics' expresses the dialectic of narrative and practice. Narrative develops a scenario of practices in time and space. Practice – as articulation of time and space, or movement through space – has a narrative dimension. As Michel de Certeau pointed out (ibid.), walking is like a speech-act, it is an enunciation through the body. The walker makes bodily statements, actualises certain spatial and bodily possibilities and makes selections.

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[56] Hayden White (1987: 2, 14) distinguished between narrativising and narrating. Narrativising makes the world speak itself as a story and renders the narrator invisible. Story-ing is also a form of moralising reality.

Yet, these bodily enunciations are ways of writing without a directing author (of the ego). The following ethnographic narration therefore not only articulates a temporal and spatial structure, but is also shaped by the temporal and spatial structure of my practice. This involves repetitive practices or routines as well as movements out of the ordinary.

Through the location of the 'I' in space, which creates a here – there relationship, 'other' is introduced in relation to this 'I' (de Certeau 1984: 99) – or the 'I' is constructed as 'other'. The negotiation of identity is thus a very spatial process. Mapping my own journey through different contexts of clubbing will bring to light how practices solidify into certain regularities and how these practices may crystallise into more stable and recurring roles or identities. This account will hopefully render my ethnographic practice of clubbing in relation to and relative to those of other people. Narrating my perception of clubbing contexts and of their agents, which will be linked where possible to people's perceptions of me, should bring out some clues of what shaped my ethnographic attentiveness.

Narrative would not work if it only rested on regularities and routines. Clubbing as experience similarly depends on the construction of special moments and extraordinary events or states that are sectioned off from the continuum of sense impressions. And yet, it is important to see that the special, extraordinary moments, are situated against the backdrop of regularity and routine, just as transgression implies boundaries, and de-control or letting go imply notions of control. Like the dimension of control, the routinisation of clubbing practices is easily glossed over in the celebrations of ecstasy, communitas or play. In reflecting upon 'Chok Erlebnis'[57] Walter Benjamin (1955: 207) argued that the more an organism is used to certain stimuli (such as those triggered by drugs), the less traumatising and intoxicating they are, the less sensational is their effect. If we endorse this view, important questions

[57] 'Chok' refers to the instinctive reaction of the nervous system to the sensual irritations of, for example, urban space. It accentuates the mode of pre-reflective, sensual '*Erlebnis*' rather than 'Erfahrung' (= experience). There is no adequate English translation for 'Erlebnis', which is therefore usually also translated as experience. In Benjamin's view, modern, urban 'chok Erlebnisse' (also in film) displace experience, that is, the reflective processing of stimuli, for example, through memory or narrative. Modern 'chok Erlebnis' demolishes aura, contemplation and meaning (Benjamin 1955: 240).

arise: how can clubbing provide for the construction of special, spectacular, sensational moments; how can routinisation and habituation be sidestepped?[58]

To summarise, the temporal and spatial structuring, in writing as in practice, can be described as marking off regions from the temporal and spatial continuum. A region is not just a physical territory, but relates to the structuration of practice by creating frames for interaction (Giddens 1984: 110-139). These regions, which I will call spacings, can be looked at in terms of duration, span, form and character of the boundaries (ibid. 121) as well as their insertion in, and relation to higher-order spaces of the club, the city, or relations of production. The following ethnographic narration can be read as a spacing of clubbing. It marks off regions of interactive practice, investigates their possible temporal and spatial extension, the character of their boundaries and their relation to more general social spacings. Exploring the construction of boundaries, demarcations, thresholds and intersections is one way of approaching the question how club and dance spaces become narrated and experienced as other. This spacing of clubbing is, apart from the spatial and institutional structuring and other contexts to be explored later in the thesis, intricately linked to subjective practice and experience. It reflects both, routinisation and otherness.

5. Spacings of clubbing

5.1 The city and everyday life

Stories start with beginnings. The first aim therefore, is to deconstruct 'a' beginning. Indeed, to determine a point where and when club-nights start and hence to set a marker for the (ethnographic) spacing of clubbing is a rather arbitrary matter. This could open up a whole range of aspects of everyday life. However, I am confining myself here to spacings in close (spatial or temporal) relation to clubbing. Many of my club nights started with travelling to the club, with traversing the city on public transport. Most of the times I was on my own. This leaves aside clubbing-

[58] This also affects ethnography, as the ethnographer as well undergoes a process of habituation and this reduces the attentiveness for making out or constructing meaningful moments. I will come back to this issue in Chapter 3, which discusses the unhinging of habit as a form of 'becoming-other' (see Massumi 1992: 99).

related practices in the private space or other beginnings in the city's leisure and entertainment life. It marks a first difference: unlike some interviewees, who demarcated their beginnings as a ritualised preparation of dressing up, having drinks with friends, then going to the club together by cab or car, my way into the club was much more instrumental, restricting the spacing of clubbing in its span and duration. As a consequence, my everyday life of work (as well as that of some interviewees) stretched into the spacing of clubbing. Yet, the symbolic space of clubbing also reached into 'non-clubbing' zones: by spotting clubbers on the train into town or in other daily life contexts, where clubbing frequently became a topic of conversation.

The particular location of a club within the city is important for the spacing of clubbing in another sense. It affects the character of the boundaries between the club and its surroundings and invokes other spacings of the city. Most of the clubs of this research were in central London areas, except for a few clubs, which were located in more remote areas, in de-industrialised wasteland or in back streets less safe to walk in in the middle of the night. This added an edge of nervousness to ethnographic practice. Female interviewees who went out on their own reflected similar concerns. Walking through these spaces or 'Umwelten'[59] conjured up a sense of being on the periphery making the whole undertaking a bit questionable as to its 'fun-moments'. These city areas may become somewhat alien territory to be quickly passed through in order to reach the destined island of the club – if it ever turns up (i.e. can be found) and has not been closed down. Despite the relief when discovering and approaching the safe haven, the club could turn out to be as alien or strange as its surroundings instead of providing the cosiness of the hoped-for island. By contrast, clubs that were located in an entertainment zone of the city, articulated a less rigid boundary to the surrounding spacings. Clubbing there is embedded in a context of similar practices and spaces of nightlife entertainment and going out. Yet, the lively areas such as London's West End, Brixton or Old Street sometimes highlighted other boundaries. They brought into consciousness that clubbing was part of a nighttime economy of the city and rendered more visible social as well as urban differences. For instance, the spacing of clubbing can be placed next to the struggle for survival. To give some

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[59] Goffman (1972: 252) defined 'Umwelt' as the region around the individual where potential sources of alarm are found, where the individual's ease is disrupted and self-preserving action has to be maintained.

examples: while queuing for a club in Brixton (*Mass*; 08-04-2000), South London, I watched a man walk by the queue, asking for change. A woman collected signatures and money for a project for homeless people. Queuing for a gay night in central London bore similar uneasy encounters (*Heaven*; 06-10-2000):

> *The queue moves on pretty quickly. Next to the station [Charing Cross], about three metres away from the queue are two or three drunken men, who provoke the crowd with abusive comments, shouting 'fagheads' and other things. Nobody reacts – one man turns round and looks at them, but everybody tries to ignore them. The queue moves round the corner, where two homeless men sit at the wall, right next to the queue, reading newspapers* [Ethnographic Notes II: 31].

The modern subject, as Simmel (1997: first published in 1903) pointed out almost a century ago, has acquired a certain adjustment to cope with the rapid change of images and stimuli of the city. He called it the *blasé attitude*, which provides a shield against 'threatening currents and discrepancies' of the environment. While objects are perceived, they are experienced as insubstantial and irrelevant and so are the contradictions that they might expose. But in the queue, one is at a standstill. The fleeting, onrushing impressions hitting the nervous system of the moving and walking body in the city, turn into more lasting impressions, which are less easy to exclude from awareness. Bodily proximity makes these impressions even more unsettling. The ethnographic note of the above situations demonstrates that this contradictory landscape of entertainment and poverty cannot quite be moved through with indifference. Yet, the absence of a note of my feelings in the above quote also reveals reservation. As Simmel remarked, the reserve is still haunted by the contradictions and is agitated in strangeness (Simmel 1997: 179). Such disturbing impressions may be coped with via blasé or, they may not be noticed at all if one is deeply involved in social interaction with friends in the queue. Nevertheless, everyday social differences reach right to the entrance of the club-world. But also, the framing of clubbing as fun may render contradictory impressions such as everyday poverty more visible and disturbing and may increase the effort of distantiation.

The spacing of clubbing in the city has another dimension. Clubs are not only placed on a pathway of a range of leisure and entertainment places. But the different clubs also relate to each other. They create stations and routes on a map of clubbing,

which spawn an ensemble of movements between clubs interrupted by travelling, eating and 'chilling out'. A club may be part of a clubbing route through the city; it may be one of a series of stations on a night (or on the nights) out. As a contemporary of the late 1980s acid house and Ibiza style parties commented about this period:

> London was transformed into a magical city, transacted by new pathways and highly charged itineraries. 'During the day, Charing Cross and The Strand and the journey to South London would mean one thing – I might go to the bank or Sainsbury's – but once the sun went down, it was a route, stretching from Heaven to Shoom to Clink Street' (Louise Gray quoted by Reynolds 1998: 48).

Here it is not single clubs that are each imagined creating an other world, but the connection between clubs is seen to form a different, a nighttime route or map overlaying or superseding the day-to-day map. Symbolically, club and dance cultures are often represented as an other world, yet practically, clubbing is very entrenched with everyday identities and routines. It is because of this symbolic separation that the transformation of everyday non-places into dance spacings may produce spectacular effects. As a journalist pointed out, "any public space can host a club night" (Randeria 2002). The everyday may also become a topic of conversation in club contexts, just as clubbing is a frequent topic of conversations in everyday contexts. For example, in the queue for the same club-night at the club *Mass* in Brixton referred to before, I met a young man, G. and his friend:

> *We start chatting about where we come from, what we are doing and similar things. They both live in Reading. G. has a degree in Computer Science and works in London. They travel down for clubbing every couple of weeks. We talk about and discuss other clubs like 'Fabric' and 'The End' [clubs in central London]. G. says, he quite likes Fabric, although it is often quite packed, but, as he points out, it is close to where he works* [*Mass*; 08-04-2000; Ethnographic Notes I: 65].

G.'s remark about the closeness of a club to his work place demonstrates the sense of instrumentality that is part of accounting for the selection of clubs, similar to the ethnographic rationale of minimising the effort of travelling. This suggests that clubs not only lie on a nighttime route of entertainment, but that they may be selected on the basis of their compatibility with day time routes through the city. Nevertheless, he also mentioned the travelling that he and his friend are prepared to

do in order to go clubbing. This conversation – or rather the ethnographic memory of it – not only highlights (my perspective on) routines of clubbing, but it hints at the point that the experience of particular clubs evokes and builds on previous experiences of other clubs and on expectations of unknown clubs to be visited in the future. To have experience of clubbing means to have direct or indirect knowledge of a number of contexts. In a related way, therefore, a club is part of a symbolic route of clubbing or dance histories, of narratives that spawn meaningful connections between clubs or other dance cultural experiences. This symbolic map provides a backdrop of comparison for constructing experience of 'a' club.

The above interaction has another dimension. It alludes to and reinforces the reserve that tries to avoid the disturbing signs of poverty in the spacing of queuing. Talking about everyday and clubbing routines makes it possible to cover the void created by the interference of social relations. This points ahead to my next section, which will deal with other moments of separation from the everyday and of aggregation to the sphere of dance in the spacing of the queue. As we shall see, this process of marking off the dance world from the everyday is indeed not always a straightforward one.

5.2 Queuing as act of separation, aggregation, othering and passing

After the journey on public transport and the walk to the club, queuing in front of a club is an intermediary spacing similar to other everyday situations in Britain. It appears as a non-place to be moved through, as a necessary means to an end.[60] Yet, this passing through may meet several obstacles and turn into a more permanent station. While past experiences of the day are still on the mind, queuing also instigates a more concrete future projection of the inside of the club – however vague the destination one is aiming for may be (if it is not already familiar): in most cases the entrance of the club does not reveal much about its inside.[61] In this respect, the

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[60] Marc Augé (1995: 94) defined non-places as spaces formed in relation to certain ends. They create a solitary contractuality and a shared identity of passengers or customers. Non-places are spaces to be passed through and are therefore measured in units of time (ibid. 103-104).

[61] One could compare this to Simmel's (1992: 704) comments about darkness: fantasy inflates darkness with possibilities and threats, it becomes infinite and vague, it opens up and confines.

people in the queue give a first impression of what the crowd of the club will be like. Though, in my experience this first impression was often overturned after entering the club.

The sense of sameness created by the shared experience of the queuing situation allows for the interaction with other people and opens up the possibility of aggregating to the spacing of clubbing. In this respect, the queue is the first region that fosters a sense of sameness and collective agency. The particular arrangement of bodies creates a boundary. It separates a group of people from the environment and from other passers-by, as we saw in the above section. This collectivity, one could imagine, fuels the 'disappearance' of the self or integrates the 'single' into the 'with'.[62] Usually the ethnographic notes of queuing situations inscribed the ethnographic self into a collective subject ('we'). However, being out without friends or acquaintances may expose selves as monads in the midst of assemblages of people and groups. Just as the verbal interaction with people in the crowd thematised identities, such a monad position may spur the reflection on identity and may create an experience of difference, thereby othering the monad self. Queuing therefore, involves two dimensions, it not only collectivises but also individualises (see also Malbon 1999: 74).

The spacing of queuing differentiates in other ways: in terms of the different body experiences and positions that it accentuates. Being processed as part of a crowd recalls disciplined bodies of other everyday non-places. While the logistic endeavours at securing an ordered entry of a crowd of people into a club is for the safety of the clubbers themselves, semi-military styles of conduct, where people become bodies-to-be-searched and part of a crowd to be regulated may alienate club visitors. The similarity to other everyday non-places, for example, electronic body screens that call up security measures at airports (*Heaven* in central London), may make the separation from the everyday difficult. However, next to the disciplined bodies there may be 'stylish', dressed-up or otherwise spectacular bodies, transforming the spacing of the queue or the entrance of the club into a stage and claiming a special status or identity. The sensuality of spectacular bodies evokes a

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[62] A 'single' in Goffman's sense is a "party of one, a person who has come alone", whereas a 'with' is a "party of more than one whose members are perceived to be 'together'" (Goffman 1972: 19).

sense of otherness by constituting special, memorable moments. Watching the spectacular 'spectacularises' the onlooker so to speak. Just as the staging of the spectacular, being spectacularised may create an otherness of difference, articulating a moment of identity. The performance of such spectacular bodies at a garage night in central London ('Twice as Nice' at *The End; 18-06-2000*) recalled images of a fashion show. Small groups of people would descend from cabs and walk straight into the club evoking a star like status. The spectacular can hardly be imagined to submit to the regime of surveillance that is installed to govern the people in the queue. It desires to be looked at and admired rather than overseen and ordered. Instead of queuing up, it wants to stand out from the ordinary crowd by securing immediate entrance to the club. This points to other differentiation processes in the queue, which have a bearing on the spacing of queuing and on the character of the boundary it represents for different people.

A queue can be described as a temporalised, hierarchised order of access to a space or commodity, in Goffman's terms a *turn*.[63] This ordering at the door of clubs, as Sarah Thornton (1995) has pointed out, is one important instrument to compose a certain mixture of people. More precisely, it is rather the final element in a chain of such composing strategies (such as music policy or advertising). Sometimes referred to as 'door policy', it first evokes the terms and conditions for the admission or rejection of individuals. But there are at least two more important dimensions of regulating and channelling people's access to clubs: one has to do with time (when one is admitted); the other is money (on what financial terms). This differentiation of the crowd by terms and conditions of access is often spatialised through dividing people into various queues. Unsurprisingly, this sometimes causes confusion. The 'ordinary' queue may be superimposed by the 'guest list' and other queues of people with 'queue jump' or pre-paid tickets.

On the part of club consumers the spacing of the queue and the door has an important imaginative function: it is often constructed as an encounter with authorities one has to submit to or who may be challenged or transgressed. What

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[63] The turn involves a decision rule (or rather a set of rules), which orders participants categorically or individually, or both ways (Goffman 1972: 35-38).

would entering a club be like without a queue and without the supervision of people's access? But the logistic ordering of the crowd in front of a club presents a different boundary than, for example, a police barrier in the days of rave and warehouse parties, which tried to prevent a whole crowd from appropriating a space. To refer to the channelling of people's access to clubs as 'door policy' however, is fairly misleading given that this regulation may work in a very subtle way and unlike a policy is founded on rather shadowy and covert principles. The spacing of admission consists of complex discursive visual practices of reading, cataloguing and evaluating characteristics of bodies. Some interviewees read the practice of door supervisors as unjust, accusing staff of basing their decisions on personal motives and sympathies or on aesthetic principles, perceived to be unethical.[64] Sally, a young mother living in South London, now in her early twenties, used to pass the door of a club despite being under age. But then she and her friend turned down an 'invitation' of the door supervisors to go out with them:[65]

> Sally: I'll never forget that, because basically what it was, we went to go into the Fridge [club in Brixton; S.R.] one night and the bouncers had like been on our case to like go out with us and we just weren't having it, we went to go in there like the following week they wouldn't let us in, they were like "oh have you got any ID", they were just being right wankers and they wouldn't let us in and we were just like "What?" (Interview 11-10-2000: 11).

This illustrates that the interaction frame of access to a club provides loopholes for negotiation, which may twist official regulations; or else that personal motives might overlay seemingly rule-bound decisions. Thereby the rules rather appear as the official legitimisation for decisions made on the basis of other criteria. Another example shows that admission 'rules' deployed at the door of a club are sometimes established there and then instead of being laid out as an official code of practice. Further, that these principles would hardly be acceptable if being publicised in flyers or advertisements. Aesthetic criteria, for example, are, if at all, usually launched as incitement or as general rules and dress codes. At a mid-week garage and hip hop

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[64] Concern about admission practices was also reflected in a recent survey on clubbing (Mintel 2000b: 8). More than half of frequent club-goers support the licensing of door supervision, which may be introduced in near future. See also Measham (2001: 165-167), who reported that clubbers frequently feel intimidated and hassled by door staff and the body searches at the door.

[65] See also Pini (2001: 35), who elaborated on images of 'hard' machismo and of 'street masculinity' in women's accounts, arguing that women merely associate predatory male behaviour and attitude with 'pre-rave' events or traditional nightclubs.

night in central London (*Hanover Grand*; 26-01-00), decisions for admitting people were guided by the principle of equalising the number of men and women in the club.[66] However, this was not made explicit, but could only be inferred from the way this was accomplished. The door-supervisors announced that:

> *'Single men won't get in tonight, couples only. Ladies-only come first, are there more single ladies?'* [Ethnographic Notes I: 42]

Subsequently, all men who were on their own tried to chat up a woman in the queue to fake female company. This strategy was certainly noticed and tolerated by the staff at the door. Had the intention been to effectively reduce the number of single men, men categorised as single could just have been turned away without advance announcement. As nobody in the queue complained, this seemed like a routine practice, with which the regulars were familiar. Their attempt to pretend being a couple seemed rather effortless.

Guest lists are another way of regulating the crowd by way of differentiation and hierarchisation. Some clubs offer guest list admission for regulars or publicise the possibility of being put on the guest list, for example, via mailing lists. A social or symbolic connection to the sphere of production, by knowing people who work for a club or promoter, helps access the privilege of speeded up and cheaper or even free entry to a club. Again, the rules for access via the guest list are not set in stone, but merge into a fluid, flexible hybrid of managing the people at the door. The implicit rights of a guest list member may be redefined in the course of the night. Sometimes the guest list might not even deliver on its promise, for example, when a club is already filled to capacity or, when the club prefers to boost income by making people pay full admission.[67] The guest list itself may be superseded by people who are granted access immediately, which, for 'ordinary' visitors, is often beyond comprehension. One of my interviewees, a white, Canadian media student in his late twenties, recounted an illustrative example at the club-night DTPM (*Fabric*; central London).

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[66] As the Mintel survey of 1996 (1996: 15) suggested, many operators strived for a gender ratio of 60:40 in favour of women, while in practice the crowds are usually equally split or lean towards a majority of men.

[67] On guest lists see Osborne (1999: 120-121).

> Gary: We went to DTPM, [...] with my friend P., a friend of his does the lighting for DTPM. [...] So we'd been, got us listed for that and we showed up there at, probably about half eleven thinking there won't be any trouble whatsoever to get in and the guest-list queue was probably the longest queue I'd ever seen, and we were both standing in the guest queue, thinking 'this can't be right, this can't be the guest queue, there's gotta be something wrong here'. So I went and looked at the other side, to the regular queue and it, I've never ever ever ever seen a queue like it before, it was just endless [...] and then the bouncers came out and barricaded about twenty people of the regular queue and just said 'okay, people who are barricaded in, you're getting in, everybody else go away, the club is full.' Then the bouncer was coming over and saying that we guest list people will gonna have to wait, while they got these people in and then they gonna let us in and ten minutes later they came back and said to the person like two people in front of me, 'this guy here with', he had some spiky hair, he said 'he's, I know what he looks like, he is the last person in the guest list queue [...]. So everybody wrapped like that in front of and behind, [...] and then they barricaded us in and we were all standing there and it was going on and going on [...] and we had been there for about 45 minutes, and the bouncer came back and said that it wasn't gonna be a guest-list anymore, that we all had to pay full price and he tried to get more people out of the queue [...] and we got, finally got in and had to pay (Interview 13-10-2000: 11-12).

Here the spacing of the queue and the admission to the club gave rise to the composition of a story. The boundary represented by the blockade of the door constituted special, memorable moments. Thwarted expectations about the guest-list narrative (how it should normally proceed) provided for the construction of a clubbing experience. Despite the annoyance felt in the situation, this experience appears as a fun story in retrospect. Or, it is the discursive framing of clubbing as fun that led to a distantiation from less enjoyable, aggravating experiences and to their representation in terms of enjoyment. As Gary concluded the story of the night:

> Gary: It just seemed like it was a nightmare while we were there, but it was, I guess, coming out of it, by the end of it we were just having more fun with, you just can't, you still gotta take the experience of it (Interview 13-10-2000: 13).

Stories usually finish with a moral and they fashion a character of the storied self. Aside from displaying a fun attitude, Gary comes up with a moral as to how to best deal with door-supervisors. While some interviewees, such as Sally above, victimise themselves as having been subject to the power of the guards of the door, Gary proposes the formula: "Don't give the door-men grief, it changes your whole night." This alludes to the point that the narrative of a night might change as a result

of difficulties with negotiating admission. He recommends a strategic politeness towards the door supervisors instead of letting off steam or being provocative. Yet, the experience of the boundary of the door may not only change the night for the worse, but also for the better, for example, when it is successfully transgressed. On another night (*The End*, central London), Gary abandoned his principle of subordination, which marked an adventurous, fun moment. He and his friends 'just pushed themselves through the door and ran downstairs despite the bouncers yelling' at them (Interview 13-10-2000: 10). The extended spacing of queuing, as Gary encountered it at DTPM, affects the imagination of the club's inside. Impatience feeds doubts about whether it is worth waiting, given the vagueness as to whether or not one would be able to enter the club.

5.3 Boundaries and thresholds

These examples prompt a reflection on the nature of the border that the restricted, channelled and hierarchised access to a club represents. In this respect, it is useful to differentiate between two aspects, thresholds on the one side and boundaries or borders on the other side. Borders regulate access to spaces and goods. The handling of a club's door clearly represents a guarded border, which may be crossed if certain criteria (however transparent and explicit they may be) are fulfilled. On the other hand, the practices in the queue and at the door may also provide for a threshold experience, which accentuates the movement from a here to a there or between different spheres of experience. The threshold, so to speak, is a transitional space of in-between-ness and openness, where something is in the air and is undecided (Waldenfels 1999: 9). It is not traversed easily; otherwise it would not constitute a threshold. It therefore may emerge from a border, from an extended blockade of movement. Being refused to cross a border heightens the imagination and contributes to the construction of the 'other' side. In addition, it makes a difference whether one is *allowed* to cross a border or whether a border is *violated*. The way a boundary is traversed sets the scene for the experience of the club's inside.

Before moving on to the different inside regions, let me summarise some crucial points to be gleaned from the analysis so far. First, it brought out how the

spacing of clubbing is intricately linked to everyday identities and practices. In contrast to the notion of sociality, the spacing of the queue partly rests on instrumental rationality and routine and spurs differentiation processes of the crowd. The structures and social relations of everyday life may unsettle the expectancies of pleasure, fun and enjoyment. In other words, queuing is closely related to practices that disrupt the narrative of enjoyment that shapes practices of clubbing. Sometimes these disturbing impressions have to be warded off through a *blasé* attitude, or by attending to moments which create the other, desired club world, for example spectacular bodies, or else by re-signifying negative experiences into fun experiences. Nevertheless, the fun framing may reinforce the awareness of non-fun aspects. Nuisances that are tolerable in everyday life may be less so in fun and enjoyment spacings – just as the ride on the night-bus may feel much worse after an enjoyable night out clubbing. Yet, the queue can also be a significant boundary for imagining the other side. The spacing of the queue bears another tension. It collectivises by creating a shared experience, and it individualises by differentiating people and stimulating competition. In several regards it is a space for negotiating and marking identities.

Having crossed the border of the door with the consent of its guards passes one into sameness, passes one as an acceptable identity. But this sameness is vague and ambiguous, which can be illustrated by drawing on feminist and queer theory's notion of 'passing': here passing refers to the desire to hide a difference, to escape a representational construction that could become the source of embarrassment or shame. It is the wish to simulate and to be authenticated as someone who one is not, or, to be read within an acceptable identity (see for example Skeggs 1997: 84). Yet, passing also rests on an "uncanny feeling of uncertainty about a difference which is not quite invisible"; "it opens as a space of difference in the heart of the same" (Tyler 1994: 212). Thus, it troubles the homogeneity of the group and the identification with one another. Queuing and entering clubs sometimes prompts such uncanny feelings of difference, of having passed. This may follow from a comment from, or a short conversation with, the staff at the door, or people in the queue, as well as from looks or non-verbal gestures. Therefore, feelings of sameness and difference are

ambiguously mixed up with each other, partly overlapping with the degrees of strangeness or familiarity constituted in different contexts.[68]

5.4 A moment of otherness and difference: being on one's own

Despite divergent findings of other studies, being out on one's own in a club seems to be a marker of difference and strangeness, particularly as a woman.[69] 'Who are you here with' is a familiar question, as a common assumption in clubs is that people are there with friends. A club is not simply a space of sociality that can be joined in easily even if people on their own are occasionally welcomed and congratulated for bravery. Instead, 'sociality', for instance, embodied in the emotional connection between friends, has to be brought into the club. As is also frequently the case, groups and circles of people in clubs are less tight cliques of friends, but rather coincidental gatherings of loose acquaintances who met in a bar or pub prior to clubbing. As interviewee Valerie pointed out:

> Valerie: Clubbing is nice to do with a big group of people, who you know reasonably well, so that if you go to a club, you've got a base and then you kind of go wandering off and you can make your friends and you can kind of buzz around and then you can sort of go back to the nucleus (Interview 04-10-2000: 7).

Other interviewees, females and males alike mentioned that being on one's own spoils the enjoyment of clubbing, that it may present a barrier by exposing the self to the looks of others or that it may even be a source of embarrassment. Men who are on their own in a club might meet less wonderment, yet, for example Lennie, a male in his late twenties, explicated:

> Lennie: You don't expect people in clubs totally on their own. You think it's a bit strange, if there is somebody in a club, dancing on their own all night. [...] If somebody is dancing on their own, you start to think you stick out a bit (Interview 18-11-1999: 19).

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[68] See Simmel's notion of the stranger. The stranger embodies the "unity of nearness and remoteness" (Simmel 1950b: 402, 404).

[69] McRobbie pointed to the positioning of girls out on their own as deviant, as a "sign either of having no friends, or of being on the look-out and therefore morally out of line" (McRobbie 1984: 143). Pini (2001: 34-35), by contrast, argued, as part of her thesis about 'new modes of femininity in 'post-rave' scenes, that women feel comfortable going out on their own.

5.5 Moments of entry

The logistic ordering of the crowd continues after entering the club. People are directed to ticket counters and cloakrooms, which are usually separate from the actual bar and dance space. This may involve two more stations to queue, occasionally another temporal impasse if there is only one ticket or cloak counter. Some clubs are better equipped than others to process crowds, for example one of the more recently launched clubs such as *Fabric* in central London, which opened in 1999. Right after the door people are diverted to different, decentralised counters for the purchase of tickets as well as cloakrooms. On visiting this club for the first time shortly after it opened (26-11-1999), I was struck by the efficiency of these procedures. Within minutes I *was* checked in, rid of some money and clothes. This non-place character emanating from the nearly perfect management and ordering of people on the one hand felt strange and out of place, which exposes an underlying expectation – that a dance club is a space of a messy, more chaotic gathering of bodies and movements. On the other hand this extraordinary non-place aspect attracted my attention and produced an experience of otherness. *Fabric* provides a number of different passages into the centre of the club. The path my friend and I were brought on to that first night led down some brightly illuminated and relatively sterile stairs. In the course of walking down these stairs around a number of corners my sense of spatial orientation vanished except for the impression that we were descending several floors. We did not see any other people, which felt strange after having been processed as part of a queuing crowd. Hardly anything indicated what the dance space that we were about to enter would be like. Eventually we arrived at two swing doors made of light-toned timber. Upon opening, we were right in a back corner of a huge room packed with a dancing crowd, a drum and bass floor. The space was not only defined, but also dominated by sound and movement.

> *The crowd seems like one block, like a machine moved by the 'body-sonic' floor.*[70] *It feels odd, having just walked down the stairs, the movement of the crowd takes over – I cannot help but start some awkward dance moves, not because the groove of the music captures me and makes me want to dance, but more because I feel I am forced to dance, there is no walking, standing or anything else. After a few minutes of not very confident hopping we look at*

[70] This feature of the 'body-sonic' floor was written about in magazine articles at the time.

each other and drift through a small corridor into another room [*Fabric*; 26-11-1999; Ethnographic Notes I: 27].

The morning after, when writing up these notes, this experience forged the association of going to a swimming pool, of passing into another element, which abruptly imposes a new movement. Similar to Benjamin's (1955: 222-223) reading of Marx's notion that the machine applies and drills the worker's body rather than the other way round, this assemblage of space, music and people made my body react to the sensational 'chok'. Yet, this figural intensity of sense impressions was not all absorbing. This moment of entering instigated a 'chok', which incited a mimetic adaptation to the space first, but then led to a resistant closure, a step back. The dance-floor is not a place to rest and step back. Distantiation spurs a search for such a place, which makes it possible to take in some of the stimuli of the club. The visual sense is actualised as an instrument of detachment[71] and of orienting the self in space. Such a point of 'rooting' the body can be the spacing of a bar. Other scenarios of entry into clubs, as for example depicted by Gary above, speak of an instant immersion into the sensational presence. However, if sense impressions are too overwhelming, they may be followed by detachment in order to acclimatise to the space, similarly so probably, when the first impression of a club space arouses feelings of strangeness, when the space is rather empty or other people are also in positions of detachment. Remaining in a still position or in-control may create a new boundary, which further displaces states of sensation and involvement (e.g. through dance). But this already leads me on to the next sections, which will look at the tension between involvement and detachment in more detail.

5.6 Detachment and the visual

The above section indicated that involvement and detachment are linked to spatial positionings of the body. Detachment and bodily stillness are relegated to corridors, galleries, balconies, corners and bars. Detachment accentuates different senses and subsequently encloses a space one can attend to. Moving and dancing mostly turns attention to the immediate surroundings. In a similar vein, talking to

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[71] See Paul Rodaway's remark: "We feel more detached from a visual world than an auditory one. Auditory phenomena penetrate us from all directions at all times" (Rodaway 1994: 91-92).

people confines the spatial circle of attention mostly to the interaction itself. By contrast, the visual sense may extend this space. It has a propensity to enlarge the distance of the detached or observing subject by expanding the field of vision. Involvement in dancing situates the self in a milieu of movement and tends to dissolve static backgrounds. Visual perception depends on the relativity of one against the other, of foreground and background, motion and stability. At the same time the visual keeps at bay other bodily senses (see Rodaway 1994: 123-125). This visual engagement in clubs may consist of different modes of looking (Waldenfels 1999). For example, a look particularly difficult to avoid in ethnographic practice is the observing look. It may be guided by ideas of what to look for (such as the spatial structuring of the clubs, the distribution, regulation and ensemble of movements of bodies and their relations to each other). The observing look tends to fashion a panoptical model and employs the visual as a means of scanning and reading the space and the other. Yet, such ordering, observing looks may be disrupted by overwhelming impressions, which make it impossible to separate a foreground and a background and to circumscribe sequences of action. Such detached looking may also be a more passive act of attentive looking, waiting for, or suddenly disturbed by, finding an object of interest. The observing look might also merge with, or develop into, a desiring look, a look in search for the aesthetic or the erotic.[72] But the visual sense may of course become part of interactive involvement in a reciprocal relationship of seeing and being seen by the other. In this respect, another look in the visual space of clubbing, somehow in contrast to the observing look, which avoids being seen, is a look that seemingly avoids 'seeing'. This directionless and ostensibly disengaged look displays a cool indifference that flows into mis-meetings.

5.7 Involvement and the visual: it starts with the eyes

As Giddens pointed out, the regionalisation of encounters in social gatherings is usually indicated by body postures and gestures (Giddens 1984: 121). The reciprocity of looking into the eyes of another person can suddenly lift the social distance and blasé attitude of metropolitan life. Visual engagement may be a pre-step to haptic or verbal interaction. Involvement and interaction with strangers – rather

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[72] As Marjorie Garber (1992: 161) noted: "For decoding itself is an erotics – in fact, one of the most powerful we know."

avoided in city life – is not only allowed, but in some way almost expected as part of the code of behaviour in clubs: 'Be up for it!'[73] The following situation occurred in a dance-bar[74] in central London, which I visited with a friend. It was an early Wednesday night and different aesthetic tribes populated the space. Men and women in suits, presumably office professionals, were standing at the bar having drinks. On the other side of the space a younger, arty, student-type crowd was lounging on the sofas.

> *We [my friend and I] are sitting on the edge or border between the sitting area and the standing or dancing area. I remember that last time people were dancing, but not tonight, except for one, blond, long-haired woman in a dress and black leather coat. She starts dancing and tries to persuade a man to dance with her. Every now and then I look at her, watching her movements and her body. Eventually our eyes meet. She responds to my looks, smiles and finally comes up to us, wanting us to dance with her. "Come on girls, let's party, come on!" I do not feel like dancing partly, because I feel different and cannot relate to her. My friend is not 'up for it' either. The people on the sofas are watching. When we politely refuse, she seems to be upset as if we had broken a code. We let her down after she had made the effort to approach us* [Aka-Bar; 03-11-1999; Ethnographic Notes I: 2].

In this situation, aesthetic boundaries seemed to have prevailed over the realisation of 'sociality' and the overcoming of social distance. My bodily, spatial and symbolic affiliation with the sitting crowd created a boundary or inhibition that prevented my being 'up-for-it' and entering into the dance. Different codes of behaviour seemed to be at work: the bodily disengagement of the watching and chatting crowd made the one and only person who was dancing seem a bit out of place; just as bodily stillness next to or within a dancing and moving crowd would come across as strange. Also, this sequence shows that interactive engagement in clubs and the practical reading of other bodies and selves involves a great deal of indeterminacy and uncertainty as to motives and intentions of the other.

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[73] Listing magazines and advertisements often sell a club-night for its 'up-for-it' crowd.

[74] A survey of the nightclub industry found that such new hybrid dance-bars that merge aspects of clubbing (DJ, dance-floor) with late night drinking are increasingly significant on the market (Mintel 2000b) See also Chapter 7.

5.8 Exposures of the self: individuality and collectivity

A counter-part to the uneasy exposure of a self who is marked as a 'strange loner', is the exposure of 'posing' or of a sought-after state of 'being noticed', of being looked at and singled out as a significant figure of the crowd. These spacings of the exposure of the self, which provide a stage for performance and the construction of spectacular bodies or personae, emphasise individuality. Instead of a 'de-individualisation' of selves in the crowd (see Chapter 1, the discussion of Maffesoli's sociality), some spacings in clubs generate an ambiguous tension between individuality and collectivity. The following sections will look at three such regions, which highlight this tension. One is the spacing of dress and fashion, the second is the spatial contexts of podiums and stage-like spaces and the third is the dance-floor. This discussion will also delve into constructions of 'transgressive' aspects and show how they are infused with notions of individuality and collectivity. Interpretations of clubbing that emphasise the playfulness, ecstasy, and collective bliss easily gloss over the potential fissures and sources of conflict in clubs. My attention was drawn to different forms in which individuality is articulated: either within a moral of collectivity, or as being set apart from the collective entity of the crowd, or in relation to other individuals.

5.8.1 Stylisation through fashion or costume

As I proposed in Chapter 1, following the recent critiques expressed by studies on youth cultures, the semiotic reading of particular styles does not seem to attend to the significance of practices of stylisation we encounter, for example in dance and club cultures. While club contexts to a different extent promote aesthetic ambiences ('casual', 'street-wear') or more rigid dress codes (e.g. 'fetish' or 'school uniform'), these codes allow for and even require being accomplished in individual ways. An underlying premise of dressing up fashionably or of wearing extraordinary costumes is the oscillation between collectivity and individuality, between fitting in and sticking out.[75] As Gary indicated, he wants to fit in with the 'flavour of the club' and

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[75] Muggleton (2000) and Miles (1997b) pointed at the significance of individualistic 'sticking out' through practices of stylisation or through individualistic articulations of 'subcultural' identities in youth cultures.

still be a bit 'different from the crowd' (Interview 13-10-2000: 23). What matters are not so much the *particular* styles, but having style and displaying a spark of originality. In addition to being stylish or fashionable, creating a persona or character through a costume or outfit seems to be an increasingly significant practice of stylisation – at least in the carnivalesque imagery of club culture. While interviewees rarely mentioned issues of dress and fashion, they fabricated stories around the personae they embodied and which provoked responses from other people. In other words, the creation of a persona is an interactive accomplishment. Although in the following case, Gary's outfit met some disapproval, which led to an aggressive scuffle that disrupted the frame of play, this encounter transformed him into a significant character within the club, a character that bore a transgressive element because of sticking out in a certain way. Moreover, it constituted a special, partly irritating experience that yet again was storied as fun. Individuality, constructed through original ways of stylisation in the spacing of clubbing, can become a means of setting apart an element of otherness from the everyday.

> Gary: I wore sort of unwashed blue jeans, and a black policeman shirt of New York City with a black tie on and this guy came up to me and started going on that I was a fascist and he was like kind of drunk and I was like "yeah yeah, big old fascist me, I'm here to signing up, did you wanna sign up our membership?" making a joke out of it, and this guy started getting really aggro at me and finally I started to get a bit aggro with him as well, "okay, that's beyond the joke now, leave me alone" and he was going like "you ... arty student type" ... my tie and I was like pushing him away and stuff, and a friend of us stepped in, but then he went around and like people were coming up to me "so you are the Canadian fascist" and I was like "what?" like he was walking around, "here is this American-Canadian fascist" going round in the club (Interview 13-10-2000: 24).

5.8.2 Regions of exposure: podiums

The exposure of the self, just as detachment, is linked to spatial positionings of the body and to visual structures in clubs. Some zones are symbolically coded for the performance of selves, for instance, stages or podiums for dancing. However, other regions, when illuminated by spotlights, or columns can also become stage-like spacings. Podiums are particularly interesting, because they may create a spacing of production (used by professional club dancers) or a spacing of consumption (used by

visitors of the club).[76] The use of podiums by dancers employed by the club constitutes a boundary for potential conflict or transgression. It differentiates producer identities and 'ordinary' consumers. While club dancers are supposed to spur energy and create an atmosphere of sociality, their elevated, special status also frequently arouses hostility. The podium or stage spacing allows for appropriation by members of the crowd outside the time reserved for the professional dancers. In Sally's example below, this is couched as a symbolic act of transgression.[77] In 'conquering' the podium, the crowd almost stages a 'collective revolution.' It re-signifies the space for collective instead of individual action and overturns the social hierarchy represented in the exclusivity of this space. Nevertheless, the peak of this transgressive moment is narrated in the first person singular; it is inscribed into individual agency.

> Sally: [...] they had these podiums, they were set up on the dance-floor and when the dancers had fucked off of the podium all these people got on the podiums and I am now on the podium fucking giving it loads, sniffing the poppers out of my edge it was great, absolutely great (Interview 11-10-2000: 11).

In a similar vein, Lennie, a straight male interviewee in his early thirties, described dancing on a podium as part of a *collective* act of letting go of the *self*. In his view, the podium was a space, where one was not expected to be dancing in a group, but where being on one's own was tolerable and did not seem strange. The negative image of being by oneself can be transformed into the more positive exposure of the self, of its individuality. However, his account also displayed a moral of not sticking out too much, of keeping individuality at bay within the collectivity.

> Lennie: You just get up and start dancing, actually what it is, you feel part of the crowd then, yeah we are all here together and everyone is letting themselves go a bit and it's not just one or two people just showing off, I think it's a group thing. [...] People are loosing their ambitions a bit, getting up and dancing, maybe posing a bit, but not to the extent 'I am' sort of thing, people mostly would get up on the podium for a laugh (Interview 18-11-1999: 18-19).

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[76] This shall not gloss over that such work roles also can be forms of consumption.

[77] This experience was before she started to work as a club dancer herself.

In Goffman's terms these and other regions inside clubs can be described as a combination of stalls and personal space. With only a few external markers for stall units on podiums, it is the personal territories of individuals that claim the stall as situational preserves on an 'all-or-none' basis. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of claiming personal space is relative and ever shifting, depending, amongst others, on the 'population density' in the setting. Therefore, allocation of podium stalls rests on a situational negotiation that often involves competition for the best place to look, to dance, or the best spot to be seen (Goffman 1972: 29-34). But in terms of the temporal limitation of the use of podium (or dance-floor) territory there is hardly any code of practice, except for the time that is reserved for the dancers working in a club and the temporal confines of the club-night as such. In fact, one can occupy a spot on a podium as long as desired unless other people develop strategies to gain access to the stall, for example, through subtle bodily techniques or through a more upfront challenge. In such instances of conflict, when codes of 'non-violent' interaction are under threat of 'transgression', people count on the presence and support of the control agency of the club security to avoid violence.

The social distance inscribed in the relationship between professional dancers and people in the crowd, which is reflected in both dancers' view of themselves in relation to the crowd (being same, 'one of them' and different, 'more special') as well as people's ambivalent readings of dancers' otherness (as stars or near-prostitutes), also allows for its transgression: a visual exchange of looking-at and being-looked-at between a (professional) dancer on a podium and a dancer on the dance-floor may affirm both their individuality through a sensual connection. While the podium dancer notices attention from the audience, the person on the floor is singled out for visual interaction.

However, Lennie's account serves as a contrasting example. His consumption of professional dancers is cast as a state of more passive observation rather than as an active interaction with dancers. He frames the podium spacing in the context of other nightlife spaces of the sex-industry, for instance, table-dancing clubs. His relation to this spacing invokes, but also seems to necessitate a repudiation of an identity position or of a notion of inappropriate consumption that this is seen to come close to.

> Lennie: We wouldn't be standing and look at her, we just wouldn't do it, because a) it was a bit boring and, you might think I'm being a bit of a letch, you don't want to be seen watching this girl all night. [...] It's interesting, because I have never really thought about going to a lap-dancing club or anything like that (Interview 18-11-1999: 16).

5.8.3 Dance-floor: controlled de-control, meanings of transgression and individuality

The practice of dancing is often epitomised as the essence or the main motivation to go clubbing, so that for example Clare, a graduate in her early twenties, says that she "never understood people who go to clubs and don't dance" (Interview 01-02-2000: 3). Dancing is closely associated with other meanings that are central in narratives of clubbing, such as 'having a good time', 'letting go', 'giving it loads' and more, which circumscribe the spacing of clubbing with different notions of otherness – for example as enjoyment, transgression and excess. In this respect, dancing may constitute another threshold that involves a transition from a here to an elsewhere, or the construction and transgression of boundaries. The discussion in Chapter 1 demonstrated that the dance-floor, in connection with the music, is often conceived of as a crucial spacing for the production of sensation and schizophrenic intensities. Dancing therefore appears to be at the heart of the undoing of identity and subjectivity, of the de-structuration of temporality and meaning. One of the situations sketched above (*Fabric;* 26-11-1999) referred to such a sensational moment that provoked a bodily reaction. Nevertheless, such sensational states may become moments of experience and meaning, for example, through symbolisation (the translation into language) or association (the correlation of sensations with particular situations, connoting other contexts, see Rodaway 1994: 146).

How do spacings of sensational states, such as the dance-floor is supposed to be, relate to surrounding spacings? Are they that strictly separated from practices that involve awareness and meaning? Due to the fact that music disperses into different sub-regions of the club, the boundaries that separate space coded for dancing from non-dance space are quite fluid. It is bodies and body movements that construct dance space, however, mostly in zones specifically designated for dancing. As a

region within the club it is embedded in the routinisation of practice.[78] A body in a non-dance state and space may easily change into dance-movement, especially if hit by, or reacting to 'choks' of the nervous system incited by the beats, the lighting or movements of other people. Yet, there may be barriers that deter bodies from immersion into movement. Interviewees experienced such inhibition, when visual structures of mutual observation dominated over other forms of engagement, when dance-floors were empty or the music imparted too little sensual stimulation, when friends were in states of detachment, or, when problematic everyday experiences reached into the spacing of clubbing and affected the mood for enjoyment.

In contrast to being incited to dance by sensational 'choks', Lennie, already cited above, delineated a more controlled and reflexive way of immersion into dance space. Getting into dancing appeared as a process of settling in slowly and gradually. Moments of immersion are followed and accompanied by a step back into more detached positions enabling him to get visual control of the situation and to structure future movement within the space in order to find a place within the dancing crowd. After entering the club with his friends, they would get a drink, stand a bit, walk around "just to see who was in the club", making comments and then, "we'd say, 'when are we gonna hit the dance-floor?'" This instantaneous immersion, evoking images of a collision with a target, is carefully planned in terms of the time and the spot where to start. He assesses spatial scenarios and territories and anticipates potential trouble. A scenario of trouble that he has in mind is, when 'hitting' the target challenges the situational territory of other men.

> Lennie: You wander around, you assess where you're gonna stand and that's quite important as well, [...] and if there is maybe three or four lads, you don't necessarily wanna get into them, you don't wanna get close to them, because you feel you might be infringing their space (Interview 18-11-1999: 17).

Again, after a couple of minutes of trying a particular spot on the dance-floor, ideally in an energetic zone in the middle of the dance-floor, Lennie adopts a reflective attitude, helping him decide further action. By picking up people's looks and gestures he gauges their willingness to accept him into their territory and, finally he makes up his mind whether to stay or move on. In addition to dancing, a general

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[78] As Giddens noted, "'Regionalisation' should be understood not merely as localisation in space but as referring to the zoning of time-space in relation to routinised social practices" (Giddens 1984: 119).

motivation for Lennie to go clubbing is to meet women. He perceives the dance-floor as a central spacing for achieving this goal. Accordingly, the situational territories he chooses and competes for with other men are often formed around situational territories of females on the dance-floor. He reasons that the aim of meeting women is best achieved if one is not 'trying too hard' by constantly looking for visual interaction. Instead, Lennie's formula of success is a combination of self-relatedness and other-relatedness, which involves a paradoxical intertwinement of instrumental non-instrumentality. He discovered 'letting go' and 'enjoying oneself' as the best methods to gain attention.

This example shows that letting go is not simply a disappearance of meaning. Lennie's practice of letting go is integrated in and framed by a great deal of reflexivity and control and an awareness of himself in relation to other people. Second, it implies an understanding of the opposite of letting go as well as a notion of what forms of letting go are tolerable. In this respect, it also rests on ethical practice towards the self and others. Third, letting go in his case was also explicated in terms of a particular motivational structure for action. By discussing some other examples of people's understanding of 'letting go' it will become apparent that accounting for sensation and de-control constitutes a moment of doing identity. Meanings and practices of letting go, of enjoyment, of excess and bliss are closely related to (everyday) identity positions of gender, age, class, profession, sexuality and more.

Erik, a gay male interviewee in his late twenties, also linked the haptic sensual involvement of dancing to a visual engagement with other people on the dance-floor. Dancing, for him, is also partly a practice of flirting and finding sexual partners. Constructing the self as an aestheticised and erotic body and affirming desirability through the attention of others, regardless of whether they become sexual partners or not, can provide enjoyment. But unlike Lennie, Erik does not mitigate or justify showing off and standing out as an individual by invoking a group ethos of collectivity and sameness. Nevertheless, his ethics of individualistic self-presentation and -exhibition may reflect values of the gay collective he (partly) identifies with. To develop the point made in the previous paragraph, meanings of dancing or letting go are also shaped in specific local and social contexts of clubbing. Notably, Lennie's as

well as Erik's notions of letting go and enjoyment are closely linked to some sort of achievement.

> Erik: [...] to be outstanding to the rest of the people around me, I want to be the better dancer, so people actually look at me, which I achieve. And I think, the more people look at me, the better I feel. It's almost like an exhibition of mine [...] and as I said, the more people look at me the more I enjoy it (Interview 10-02-2000: 13-14).

Unlike Lennie, whose practices of dance involved a careful consideration of people's territories on the dance-floor, Giselle, a trained female dancer in her early twenties, cast the expansion of her situational territory and the extension of the spacing of dancing into non-dance space as a transgressive, enjoyable element. Breaking the codes of movement and space, for example, by rolling around on the floor, is infused by discourses of dance as an artistic practice of performance, which again highlights individuality (Interview 18-04-2000). Her way of dancing is not described as setting aside bodily control, but as inventing a different aesthetic code. This evokes a classical body of beauty, proportion and balance rather than an intoxicated, disproportionate or grotesque body out of control.[79]

Nevertheless, what an interviewee calls the 'individual type of interpretive or expressive' dance may be perceived as a bit out of place in clubs (Gary; Interview 13-10-2000: 20). Showing off the self by spacing the dance-floor as a stage for performance may break not only the group ethos and the values of the collectivity, but also codes of cool. It may result in the opposite, the 'ruining of the self on the dance-floor' (Gary; Interview 13-10-2000: 22).

In contrast to Giselle, other interviewees associated otherness with dancing while under the influence of drugs and losing control over the body, or with challenging the spatial and institutional ordering of the club. Alex, a gay male interviewee in his early forties, storied himself as a grotesque body by expounding how he fell asleep on top of some speakers after excessive intoxication (Interview 06-11-2000: 4). Such loss of control over the body through excessive intoxication can become a sign of conspicuous consumption, which may win a form of prestige or

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[79] This distinction of the classical and the grotesque body stems from Bakhtin (1968, see also Featherstone 1991: 79, Stallybrass and White 1986).

notoriety (Falk 1994: 121). The ironic story-ing of the self as a grotesque body also moderates the emphasis on individuality.

> Gary: My fantastic usual way of getting noticed is getting absolutely shit-faced, usually falling, falling downstairs (Interview 13-10-2000: 22).

Despite the different mitigations of individuality through group ethos or self-irony, a common thread emerges in all these accounts. This is the significance of being noticed and of gaining symbolic recognition, whether measured by the success of flirting, the looks and attention for dancing, the responses to fashion and costumes, or the reputation gained for losing control over the body.

6. Conclusion: narrative, spectacle and the 'other world' of dance

In several ways this preliminary investigation showed that the different spacings of clubbing do highlight identity. The various ways in which people use club spaces touched upon the politics of experience. Notably, the pleasure of clubbing was not just linked to collective identification, but was also connected to constructions of individuality. Clubbing may promise a 'removal from the day-to-day' (Pini 2001: 191), yet this cannot be taken for granted. The sphere of dance and club culture is not such a clearly and easily demarcated other world of fun, enjoyment and leisure as academic accounts often assume. The othering or separation from the everyday is something to be worked at. In the spacing of clubbing people have to endure and put up with the occasionally aggravating interference of structures of everyday life.

This chapter presented an ethnographically informed construction of clubbing experience in relation to institutional regulation and interaction orders of club spaces. At the same time it tried to pin down what structures the experience and the story-ing of clubbing. While everyday routines and social relations reach into the spacing of clubbing, clubbing experience often rests on the imagination of boundaries and thresholds that make it possible to mark it off as an other sphere. Everyday routinisation and habituation as well as practices of ordering are implicated in this otherness, which provides the flesh for narratives of clubbing. While narratives compose special moments set off from the ordinary, they also highlight the ordinary.

Special moments are often framed as states of sensation. Importantly, these sensational states are intricately linked to reflective practice and to the structuration of time and space.

My practices of walking through and inhabiting club spaces, hinged on my role as a describer of these spaces. The spacings of clubbing have as their backdrop common narratives and ways of story-ing such dance cultural practices. These narratives not only inform retrospective reflection, but clubbing as a series of spacings is inscribed with certain emplotments. Thus, narrative already shapes the practical appropriation of club spaces by marking out boundaries and making possible the isolation of distinct spacings.[80] Narratives symbolically traverse and organise places. Sensations and events can only become part of experience when integrated into a temporalised, narrative tour. Put differently, narrative structures sensation and transgression, just as it depends on the otherness of, for example, spectacles, events or intensities of the present. This interdependence of narrative and spectacle, Paul Rodaway has argued, is a key aspect of postmodern simulated environments, such as film.

> The narrative needs the visual pleasure of the spectacle and its rich evocation of place, yet if the spectacle is the only focus it soon loses its rationale without the narrative and the fascination fades (Rodaway 1994: 162-164).

I am suggesting that clubbing is a discursive, narrative practice and experience in as much as it involves sensation and spectacle. However, the dimension of sensation and 'chok' – as the 'de-struction' of experience – is only accessible as 're-constructed' experience. Such 'limit experience' of sensation therefore, appears as a retrospective construction of an experience 'of limit'. This reconstructed experience rests on narrative structure, which designs otherness. In conceptualising Victor Turner's model of ritual structure[81] as a narrative structure, Kevin Murray (1989) considered the imagination of otherness as liminal or transgressive distance to the social order to be essential for the construction of identity. This understanding of

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[80] Victor Turner (1980) raised the point that social processes or performances are emplotted or structured as stories. Riceour (1992: 157) likewise spoke of the 'narrative prefiguration' or the 'prenarrative quality' of practices.

[81] This structure consists of three (or four) elements, that is, breach, crisis, redress and reintegration / schism or, in different words, separation, margin and reaggregation (see Turner 1980, Turner 1969).

liminality or otherness as narrative structure points us forward to the next chapter, which will return to the issue of aestheticisation and develop the notion of undoing and doing of identity through the concept of narrative identity.

Chapter 3

Aestheticisation and identity: hermeneutics of the self

> Whenever I objectify myself, I am myself more than this object, namely, I am that being which can thus objectify itself. (Karl Jaspers, Reason and Existence, 1955: 73)

1. Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis proposed that clubbing and dancing should be conceived in terms of the aestheticisation of body and self. It criticised the idealisation of dance culture as aesthetic strategy, which contributed to the proliferation of images of transgression, freedom and liberation. The discussion of the research literature indicated that it was particularly the sensational dimension of dance culture that was considered an undoing of the principles of identity and subjectivity. Sensation or the various notions of ecstatic feelings or ecstatic bodies became the emblems of subjectivity 'at-its-limits'. Chapter 2 explored configurations of sensation and experience in the practical spacing of clubbing. It advanced the argument that in this spacing narrative and spectacle, experience and sensation are intricately linked. The supposed otherness of ecstasy and sensation is a retrospective experience of otherness. This experience may not only fashion the dance space as other, but also 'other realities' of the self. It is to the construction of these (other) realities of the self that I now turn, with the purpose of working towards a clearer understanding of how otherness is articulated through a politics of experience and how it highlights identity. More generally, my aim in this chapter is to develop a framework for investigating identity in relation to aestheticisation, especially the forms of aestheticisation we encounter in club cultures. This requires us, first, to engage in more detail with aestheticisation and second, to clarify our understanding of identity. The problem arising in this theoretical endeavour is that identity, as a form of recognition or classification in the most basic sense, involves a (temporary) construction of reality, whereas aestheticisation conjures up processes that disrupt the construction of 'a' reality. How can we then conceptualise the doing of reality and identity out of and through its undoing? In approaching this question, it can be

suggested, we have to deal with the issue of reflexivity or the hermeneutics of the self. After a brief reflection on the notion of the politics of experience, the chapter will delve into the discussion of aestheticisation and simulation. I will then develop the notion of aesthetic reflexivity as a form of hermeneutic practice. The final part of the chapter tackles the question of identity and creates a link between identity and aestheticisation through the concepts of aesthetic reflexivity and narrative identity.

2. Experience as mundane reason

While sensation disrupts the making of experience by disturbing time-consciousness, sensational states circumscribed as 'letting go' and 'ecstasy' are also structured by the cord of reflexivity. They are thereby placed in temporal horizons and motivational meaning contexts, which synthesise past acts and future projects.[82] While club and dance cultures certainly feature states of sensation and over-stimulation, these are not separated from awareness; an awareness which may be merely bodily, but which provides a basis for verbalisation and meaning. Sensations may be made meaningful through retrospective reflection and experience. Instead of celebrating sensational, ecstatic bodies as transgressions of selfhood and identity, I will regard 'ecstatic bodies' as a form of mundane reasoning[83] or meaning construction. In other words, it is mundane reason or experience that may construct the reality of dance cultural practices, spaces or selves in terms of a boundary or difference to 'reality'.

The (de-)construction of reality[84] through the dialectic of sensation and experience is not just a phenomenological problem, but it involves a politics of experience (Laing 1967, Pollner 1987: 70). This suggests that ways of intervention in and through experience are pragmatically and socially structured. As Alfred Schütz (1967: 74) argued, the reflective glance depends on pragmatic interests in the

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[82] I am drawing on Schütz' phenomenology (1967) here, which advanced the argument that meaning is a form of time-consciousness, a retrospective turning-toward the flux of sense-impressions or the flow of duration.

[83] This notion was formulated by Pollner (1987), who understood mundane reasoning as language game creating networks of beliefs about reality.

[84] When I refer to the 'construction of reality' I mean the ontological plane of beliefs about reality, not the reality constituted in the natural attitude.

intersubjective sphere. Pragmatic interests determine which one of the different types of reflective attention a socially located ego will adopt – whether attention is driven by memory, judgement, will, belief, presumption, valuation, pleasure or others (Lash 1999: 143). Politics of experience structures the validation and the invalidation of experience, whereby some experiences are authorised and others discredited as representations of reality.[85] Experiences are inserted in a context of experiences and related to interpretative schemes. These interpretative schemes or modes of classification are shaped by social location, amongst others, by class, gender and sexuality. Politics of experience is linked to discourses of authenticity. It rests first, on idealisations of mundaneity, that is, assumptions about the coherence and the non-contradictory character of aspects of the real.[86] Second, it hinges on a backdrop of beliefs about the essence of reality or the essence of different identities. To inquire into processes of constructing realities of the self through reflexivity and mundane reason is therefore a form of investigating the (re)production of social order. Meanings of transgression and otherness are contextualised by a politics of experience and construct realities and identities. Yet, I have also said that processes of aestheticisation disrupt the construction of reality and it is this issue, which needs to be discussed in more detail.

3. Aestheticisation and reality

The question arises, *how* do processes of aestheticisation disrupt the construction of reality? Aestheticisation has been problematised as a key aspect of postmodernity. Mike Featherstone's account of the aestheticisation of everyday life outlined three related dimensions (1991: 66-68). Firstly, he spoke of the 'effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life' in artistic subcultures, of the de-auraticisation of art and the de-differentiation of the aesthetic and the social realm. Secondly, he discussed aestheticisation in relation to life-styles and pointed to the desire of 'turning life into a work of art' and of transforming and inventing the self by searching for new sensations. The pursuit of tastes and sensations, aesthetic

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[85] Pollner referred to the dismissal of some experiences as deficient representations of reality as 'ironicising', for example, through notions of 'illusion', 'repression' or 'hallucinations' (Pollner 1987: 70-71).

[86] For instance, a common idealisation is that a car cannot go forwards and backwards simultaneously (Pollner 1987: 26).

consumption, he argued, is at the centre of mass consumer culture. Everyday practices and objects are re-coded with aesthetic values that afford pleasure either through beauty or originality or new sensations. Thirdly, he referred to the increasing saturation of everyday life with signs and images, which blurs the distinction between reality and image.

Aestheticisation through the flow of images and through sensation has also been described as a figural rather than discursive form of signification (Lash 1990). The figural evokes desire and bodily involvement instead of meaning, immersion and immediacy instead of distance from – and contemplation of – the object. The figural form of signification collapses the signifier into signified and referent (ibid. xi). In contrast to modernism, which destabilised the relationship between the signifier and the real, postmodernism turns the real itself into a signifier (ibid. 167). The saturation of everyday life with images and signs, which stage the real, is commonly referred to as simulation, which suggests that it is impossible to distinguish between what is real and what is a sign or image of the real, as every aspect of reality is bound up with and enmeshed in the production and circulation of signs. It is this aspect which aestheticises and de-realises reality (Featherstone 1991: 68). In Baudrillard's view, the end of the real and the end of art implode in hyper-reality, so that reality is nothing but an 'aesthetic' hallucination (1983: 148).

4. Simulation

Having briefly looked at how postmodern aestheticisation has been conceptualised in relation to reality, I will now focus in more detail on forms of aestheticisation within club and dance cultures. The discussion in the first chapter touched upon several notions that have been employed to encapsulate these practices: style, sensation, personae and identification. I will again engage with these aspects of aestheticisation or simulation, which can, for analytical reasons, crudely be differentiated based on the mode of reflexivity and meaning they entail. In other words, we can think about two poles of simulation.[87] One pole sways towards a

[87] These two poles can also be related to the two meanings of *aesthesis*, that is, perception and sensation. While perception is a more cognitive and reflexive evaluation favouring long-range senses, sensation is a more sensual evaluation of pleasure or displeasure related to vital interests of the body (see Welsch 1997: 60-64).

subjunctive type of acting 'as-if' and harbours the notions of stylisation, performative practice, identification and persona. Stylisation and performance do not only stage reality, but as simulative and mimetic practices they are modelled on images and codes.[88] The second pole can be thought of as a more direct intervention in the nervous system of the body and its structuration of desire and reflexivity. It highlights the sensational dimension and the disruption of time-consciousness. The following sections will elaborate on these two dimensions of simulation as stylisation and sensation.

4.1 Stylisation

If we assume that all acting or social practice is performative and hence is a form of simulation insofar as it mimetically enacts images or codes,[89] how can we at all circumscribe practices of stylisation as a special form of (simulative) acting? From a commonsensical viewpoint, stylisation could be described as a practice of decorating or masquerading the body through dress, outfit, make-up and hairstyle, costumes and more. Stylisation is a form of symbolic investment. This also extends to body action, the decoration of the body with gestures, postures and movements. Stylisation may contribute to the enactment of roles or, it may be part of creating a more complex persona. The concept of a persona suggests the embodiment of a more unified, coherent, yet imaginary character, a character that is understood to stage a less real or unreal self. But how does, for example, fashionable club-wear, if we view it as a form of aestheticising the body, destabilise the construction of reality? In what sense is it an 'as-if'? Do people want to appear less real by being fashionable? Before addressing these questions, I will turn back to the problems of (sociological) meanings of style and the relationship between stylisation and reality.

Georg Simmel (1997: 188f, 194) pointed out that fashion harbours the dialectic of imitation and differentiation. It renders possible satisfying the need for social adaptation and integration and at the same time the need for individual

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[88] See Jameson (1991: 18), who referred to Plato's conception of the simulacrum. It is the copy for which no original has ever existed. See also Simmel (1997: 211), who defined style as a general law of form.

[89] Even personhood was described as simulacra (see Deleuze and Guattari 1984). This is a point I will come back to in a later section of the chapter.

differentiation. This dialectic also shaped a more general theoretical perspective on lifestyles, informed by Weberian theory. It views the symbolic use of goods, i.e. lifestyles, as a form of status differentiation and status grouping operating through inclusion and exclusion (see the overview in Chaney 1996). This suggests that meanings of styles are constituted in practice. They are members' categories or interpretive resources used in the intersubjective negotiation and evaluation of symbolic competence. Practices of stylisation and fashion therefore involve reflexivity. From this viewpoint, styles are integral in constructing realities of social status and group membership. They are read as meaningful signs by implicit reference to a system of differences. More specifically, they are read in terms of a body symbolism, whereby body appearance is seen to represent qualities (or 'realities', essences) of self, status or identity.

How styles and practices of stylisation contribute to the construction of membership, status and identity (and hence construct meanings of the 'real') was also the central focus of concern within (post-)subcultural studies and sociological conceptions of youth styles. Subcultural theory framed youth styles as symbolic transformations of social experience, in particular of the experience of class position and parent culture (Clarke et al. 1976). As symbolic transformations, styles were also cast as 'other to' or as 'resistance' to reality while being a means for constituting subcultural (status) groups, which were conceived of as responses to class location. Despite the distinctiveness of these stylisations of life, they were also seen to embody outlooks similar to their class identity and parent culture. Thus, the sociological meaning of styles was that they transformed, but also reproduced and represented the social reality of class. In the work of Hebdige (1979), style, as symbolic work on commodities, was regarded as aesthetic (or signifying) practice. He demonstrated how such aesthetic intervention subverted the meanings of objects, by producing new meanings or disrupting the sign relation – between signifier, signified and referent – altogether (see Hebdige's notions of surrealist bricolage and polysemy). Thus conceived, practices of stylisation transform reality by rearranging and combining objects from different social contexts. This semiotic and poststructuralist reading of style understands the intervention of style into reality as a displacement of meanings that are thought of as *intrinsic* to particular items and their cultural connotations within a system of differences. Nevertheless, sociologically

these signifying practices are still considered to be markers or representations of the 'reality' of subcultural groups. While the notion of constructing group identities or identifications has partly lived on, the expression of class identities through styles has largely disappeared from sociological interpretations of youth styles. This shift in sociological understandings of youth cultural styles can be traced through Paul Willis' work: from expressing class locations, symbolic work came to be understood as expression of social structure and process, and as transformation of structures of everyday life (Willis 1990, Willis 2000). His latest work marked another variation by pointing out that styles, whilst they signify, do not have the sole purpose of signifying (Willis 2000: 19). Symbolic, creative work was now framed within a humanist understanding of self-affirmation, as a means of satisfaction and fulfilment through the practical, sensuous knowledge of cultural practice. Styles somewhat lost their status as symbolisations of the social. As I mentioned in the first chapter, sociological meanings of youth styles have shifted again with the adoption of postmodern theory, in particular of the Baudrillardian notion of simulation. Styles became empty, meaningless signs (Polhemus 1996), neither expressive of class identities, nor necessarily expressive of feelings of personal or group identity. Stylisation and style eclecticism were interpreted in terms of a postmodern inauthenticity and playfulness that seemingly disrupted and destabilised the symbolic coding and reading of the body (= the interpretive device that takes the outside as expression of the inside and vice verse, reading meaning through a system of difference). The first chapter traced this debate particularly through Muggleton's work (2000). Despite styles being used in a more ephemeral, transient and superficial way that celebrates postmodern inauthenticity and disrupts symbolic codings and meanings (ibid. 47), Muggleton nevertheless argued that styles still have some kind of bearing on constructing realities of the self, for example, on forming a 'distinctive individuality' (ibid. 63). But the question which remained unanswered was how authenticity or meaning may be constructed out of the 'inauthenticity' or meaninglessness of postmodern stylisation. The answer may be that the types of meaning and the way stylisation becomes meaningful in social practice may be rather different from what these theoretical and methodological perspectives suggested.

To pursue this question further, we need to consider another point that the framework of (post-)subcultural theory mostly failed to take into account or that was regarded as yet another element of the meaninglessness of styles. From a Baudrillardian perspective, fashion, as a particular form of stylisation, is an example of the 'third order of simulacra': a form of representation that does not refer outside its own discourse – it is self-referential. In other words, fashion and styles work as spectacular or figural signs. They provide enjoyment through the theatricality of the surface by engaging the visual sense and intervening in the affectual plane (Baudrillard 1993: 94, Chaney 1996: 54). This visuality and immediacy of the spectacle therefore in some way supersedes meaning. Yet, this does not prevent meanings arising out of the use of such spectacular signs in the action contexts in which they are embedded. This alludes to the tension between narrative and spectacle mentioned at the end of the last chapter. It is this interactive dimension and the side of pragmatics[90] that are worth exploring in relation to the question of reality, meaning and identity. Pragmatics refers to practice and to the use and perception of signs in relation to meaning contexts of action. This is similar to speech act theory (Austin 1962), which inquires into the meanings of signs from an action viewpoint – what Austin defined as the illocutionary or perlocutionary dimension of speech acts. Pragmatics highlights the relation between signs, and agents who use these signs, as well as the effects of this use in interaction. From a viewpoint of pragmatics it is hard to imagine that stylisation is ever meaningless or empty. It may not be the symbolic dimension of stylised bodies that becomes the main source of meaning, but what these bodies, for example, as spectacular, figural signs contribute to practical spacings. In other words, more relevant may be the forms of bodily engagement and the meanings arising in interaction.

The example of Gary, quoted in the last chapter, underscores the importance of considering interactive meaning constructions. It illustrated a form of symbolic encoding and decoding of stylisation and touched upon the issue of status differentiation. Gary's particular body stylisation combining unwashed jeans and a policeman's shirt was – if not just taken on in a spectacular, visual mode – probably

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[90] By contrast, semantics confines itself to the relation between signs and the relation between signs and referents. Semantics informed the semiotic way of reading style items as signs with intrinsic meaning independent of their use.

encoded as a sign of originality and of a sense of fashion. It then may have worked as a spectacular sign arousing the affectual response of another clubber who subsequently felt inclined to approach him. The reflective attention of this clubber pointed to a body symbolism, in classifying Gary's appearance not as fashionable style, but as representation of a fascist persona or identity. This reading opened a reality disjuncture, as it differed from what Gary claimed as his look or identity. But this is not the only meaning at play here. This negotiation also set off a reality construction through the illocutionary meaning of this speech-act. It appeared as serious allegation or ironic provocation and brought about a particular type of interaction. This example shows how stylisation may challenge the construction of reality and identity through incongruous readings of style items (the 'innovative aesthete' versus the 'fascist'). Yet, despite this disjuncture, this body aestheticisation through dress and the ensuing interaction points to the construction or negotiation of reality – the reality of status or identity.

Nonetheless, we can examine the challenge to reality construction (of self and others) through practices of 'as-if' or simulation from another viewpoint. Simmel, in his essay on the *Philosophy of Fashion* (Simmel 1997) noted that fashion always remains somewhat external to the individual. The ephemerality and the mutability of fashion are in tension to the sense of self as a continuous, enduring entity. Fashion is at the "periphery of the personality" (ibid. 198). He defined the essence of style[91] likewise as "the unburdening and concealment of the personal" (Simmel 1997: 216). Clearly, this alludes to the 'inauthenticity' and artificiality of practices of stylisation. But that aside, it draws attention to the question of how individuals make sense of the 'as-if' at the 'periphery of personality.' Put differently, it thematises the 'as-if' as a particular way of making sense of the self.

As became clear in the above discussion, fashion seems a way of aestheticisation that expresses realities of the self. However, we also saw that Gary's style of dress was not decoded as fashion, but read as a persona (or possibly real fascist identity). This makes apparent that these concepts, as well as style, are forms of classification based on reflexivity. Following on from this, as language-games

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[91] See his essay *The Problem of Style.*

they are also ways of framing (non-)reality. This appears particularly clear when considering the notion of persona to which I will now turn and which will lead to a brief reflection on acting or sense making in the 'as-if' mode.

Thinking of an outfit, which is en-/decoded as a mask and not as expression of someone's identity involves a tacit agreement upon a frame of play, within which not to take the mask for real. This entails abstaining from a symbolic reading of the body that infers essences of the self who is wearing that mask. Simmel defined play as a form of sociation (or interaction) that renders the content insignificant. But, as he pointed out, the play-form of sociability may become entangled with 'reality', once the interactive exchange becomes an instrument for purposive contents (Simmel 1950a: 49, also Simmel 1997: 125). The boundary between play and reality is fuzzy and vague. Zizek drew a distinction in relation to the adoption of roles and personae in cyberspace that will help clarify in the course of the chapter why this boundary is so ambiguous (Zizek 1997: 137-139). In reading Lacan's statement that truth has the structure of a fiction, Zizek stated that fiction, or the play-form of the 'as-if',[92] also has the character of truth. He distinguished, drawing from Lacan, between imaginary or projection-identification on the one hand and symbolic identification on the other hand. Imaginary identification is a play with what one considers to be false images of the self (as Gary adopted it as a form of parodying the allegation of being a fascist). Yet, these false images are not simply false, but more ambiguous:

> When I construct a 'false' image of myself which stands for me in a virtual community in which I participate [...] the emotions I feel and 'feign' as part of my screen persona are not simply false: although (what I experience as) my 'true self' does not feel them, they are none the less in a sense 'true' [...] (Zizek 1997: 109).

The (screen) persona or the practice of masking and disguising the self can also be used in another way, if it is based on symbolic identification and on 'acceptance through disavowal'. This means that fantasies or truths of the self can be expressed through a persona by passing them off as, and by counting on them being taken for, a game. But the boundary between game and reality is ambiguous, not just because of the reality disjunctures that might occur in interactive practices, but also because

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[92] It will become clear later that the 'as-if' is not necessarily identical with 'fiction'.

'reality' and the 'real self' are indeterminable. This is a point to be explored later in the chapter, but suffice it to note for now that aestheticisation as stylisation is a framing of 'play-realities'. This framing in the 'as-if' mode, or simulation generally is rooted in identification. It can accentuate the becoming of the self into a desired other, or the staging of the self-as-other or the miming of the other. These play-realities serve, in other words, as phantasmic hypertexts on which the construction of reality is based.[93] Before examining of what kind these play-realities are, and how the boundary to reality is drawn, let me expand on sensation, the second dimension of simulation.

4.2 Sensation

Sensation can be characterised as a figural form of signification. It is a more direct intervention into the body's sense system and structuration of desire. Yet, how does sensation aestheticise or challenge the construction of reality? First, we can borrow here from Rodaway's argument on the transformation of the senses, in which he implied that an intervention into the sensual organisation of the body at the same time entails a shift in modes of constructing reality (Rodaway 1994: 145). Second, and more specifically, we can return to Zizek's argument about virtual space quoted in the first chapter. It proposed that the problematisation of reality stems from the blurring boundary between the inside and outside of the body, from the technological colonisation of the body (Zizek 1997: 134). From this viewpoint, sensation also constitutes a play-reality: 'as if' the outside was actually the inside or the inside was the outside. The consumption of drugs or other stimulants – by being absorbed into the body – is a form of endocolonisation. These interventions into the sense-system of the body help construct particular sense-states, but they neither necessarily trigger sensational intensities nor do they completely displace time-consciousness. They do not give rise to a problematisation of reality per se. Thinking of drugs, in particular psychedelic drugs, alludes, first of all, to the problematisation of reality arising from 'hallucinatory' perception or dream-like states. Apart from the fact that this only accounts for a particular group of stimulants, it does not strike the crucial point. The problematisation of reality arises when sensations disrupt the stimuli-response

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[93] Zizek (1997: 143) argued that every access to (social) reality has to be supported by an implicit phantasmic hypertext.

circuit, the habits and routines of the body. Brian Massumi's reading of 'becoming', I think, can be borrowed here to explain how constructing the reality of the self may be challenged by sensation:

> Becoming is bodily thought, beyond the realm of possibility, in the world of the virtual. [...] Thought is an unhinging of habit. As a body matures, it develops a repertory of stimulus-response circuits. The regularity of the normalised situations within which the body is placed is inscribed in it in the form of autonomic reactions. Same input, same output. Same stimulus, same response. On schedule. The circularity of the everyday. But something happens when habits of speech and action start to accumulate. Each scheduled stimulus takes its place in a growing constellation of others 'like' it, to which there is a correspondingly increased constellation of 'like' responses. [...] for each stimulus, there is now a host of analogous responses that might be substituted for the 'right' one. If the body selects one of those responses, its habitual course [...] may be ever so slightly deflected. A crack has opened in habit, a 'zone of indeterminacy' is glimpsed in the hyphen between the stimulus and the response (Massumi 1992: 99).

This opening up of the body's response habits and the disturbance of routines may be pleasurable for the weakening of control over the body-habits, but it may also evoke anxiety, for example, if sensational states are painful. Why this de-routinisation of the body disrupts the construction of reality can further be explained by drawing on Giddens' theorisation of routinisation: The unhinging of habit confuses the 'ontological security' warranted by routines (Giddens 1984: 60).[94] This security not only rests on the routinisation of practice, but also on our 'embodied knowledge' of the body (rather than on a 'reflexive monitoring' as Giddens suggested, ibid. 64), which makes the body's reactions and states somewhat predictable. This familiarity with the body's stimuli-response habits, the understanding of what we can expect from our bodies provides the possibility of being deeply surprised by what we find them to be doing (Pollner 1987: 161). While the play-realities of styles and personae tend to accentuate imagination – a hermeneutics of the body-self in relation to other (in interactive contexts or the other in the self), sensation instigates a sensual hermeneutics of one's body. But likewise it facilitates the becoming into an as-if or an other body-reality of the self. The experience of the body's habits provides a backdrop against which sensations can be classified, for instance, as new or as stages of intoxication. Nonetheless, the last

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[94] Giddens noted, "routine is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities [...]" (Giddens 1984: 60).

chapter highlighted that habituation, supported by the regionalisation of sensation in clubs, can at the same time be an obstacle for sensation. New sensations are prone to repetition and routinisation, and to discursivisation through being integrated into the realm of experience.[95] Yet, how are sense-states of the body turned into experience and meaning in the blurring boundaries of simulation?

5. Simulation, play-reality and aesthetic reflexivity

Before going on to explore how reality, in particular the reality of the self, is constructed in contexts of aestheticisation, I shall briefly summarise in what way aestheticisation challenges or disrupts the construction of reality. The aestheticisation of body and self emphasises transformation, (temporal) change, mutability or the disruption of habit. This transformational potential can be understood as an 'as-if'. It constructs play-realities with an unstable boundary to the real. If we endorse the view that identity and selfhood rest on the construction of continuity and mark the temporary fixing of a process of becoming, it becomes clear that the 'as-if', as a mode of becoming other, is articulated against continuity and sameness. Aestheticisation in dance culture is to some extent, as we have seen, an endocolonisation of the body, which challenges the construction of reality because of the blurring or shifting boundary between inside and outside (Zizek 1997: 134). Zizek elaborated three different dimensions of boundary work. First, he noted the destabilisation of the boundaries between true life and its mechanical simulation, second, between objective reality and our illusory perception and third, between fleeting affects, feelings and attitudes and the 'hard core' of self (Zizek 1997: 133).

The notion of play-reality certainly alludes to interpretations of simulated or themed environments of leisure, tourism and consumption. For example, John Urry has elaborated on a particular mode of tourist gaze that views tourism as a game and is reflexive as to its constructedness (Urry 1990: 100). But instead of just referring to such framings as game or play, the hyphenated version of 'play-reality' in my view is a better way of indicating the blurring boundaries referred to above. These are not boundaries of either-or (of either play or reality). 'Play-reality' highlights the

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[95] On the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation underlying the acquisition of habit and the significance of habit for the construction of identity see Ricoeur (1992: 121-122).

simultaneity of, or the oscillation between, real *and not* real. From this viewpoint, play-reality, understood as 'hypertext to the real', is not set apart from, but is part of reality. This point arrives again at Baudrillard's notion of the hyper-real. In some way play-reality can be compared to Deleuze's reflections on the actual and the virtual as two indiscernible sides of the 'crystal image' (2000: 68-71). He argued the actual and the virtual stand in a relation of reversibility or of reciprocal presupposition. The virtual can turn into the actual and vice versa. For example, an actor makes the virtual image of a role actual, in the process of which the actual image of the actor becomes opaque. The notion of play-reality can be seen as such a continuum or spectrum embracing the actual and the virtual as two poles relative to each other. Nevertheless, the reversibility between the two poles also implies that time-consciousness or reflective judgement may temporarily determine the virtual in relation to the actual (and vice versa), which surpasses the simultaneity of the and-not. This leads on to the problem of reflexivity, more precisely to the question of whether and how reality is constructed through play-reality.

In section 2 of this chapter I have noted that the construction of club spaces as other to reality is a form of experience or mundane reasoning that involves a politics of experience. This refers to the social structuring of validating and invalidating experiences as representations of the real. Yet, speaking of validating and invalidating implies a boundary of either-or and seems not really adequate to account for otherness as a form of play-reality of and-not. The question arises, whether the play-realities indeed involve a reflexivity of validating and invalidating or whether the blurred boundaries of the hyper-real and the constant reversibility of the actual and virtual render processes of authentication irrelevant altogether, as is commonly assumed in discussions of simulation. This provokes a debate about the logic of authenticity or the politics of experience in postmodern contexts of aestheticisation, to which I will briefly turn in the following. On the one hand, it was argued that postmodern sensibility is a displacement of the logic of authenticity; on the other hand, the increasing significance of an ethic of authenticity was noted.

In reflecting upon cultural practices (of music), Grossberg, for example, put forward the notion of 'authentic inauthenticity'. This (ironic) nihilism of contemporary cultural practice "renounces both its claim to represent reality and its

place in a representational economy" (Grossberg 1992: 224). Authentic inauthenticity is the result of alienation as the taken-for-granted ground in postmodern lives, where reality can no longer be taken seriously (ibid. 225). His notion of inauthenticity recalls insincerity, deception, role-distance and disaffection. It is a lack of affective investments or a lack of anchoring the display of affects in real affects. Grossberg distinguished four poses towards affective investment: an ironic,[96] a sentimental, a hyper-real and a grotesque attitude. The insignificance of the boundary between the authentic and inauthentic (Grossberg 1992: 227-233) was also stressed in Massumi's reflections on Deleuze-Guattarian thought, in which he contended that the logic of authenticity – as a concurrence between interiority (thought-feeling) and exteriority (speech-action) – is in the process of displacement (Massumi 1992: 136). This means that interiority can deviate from the simulation of official identity categories. The fact that one no longer has to believe in, or invest affect in, the staging of identity would create a situation of 'structural cynicism', comparable to Grossberg's notion of irony. This recalls Iain Chambers' remark about the subjunctive mode of acting or reflexivity. He stated, "we are now beginning to learn to act in the subjunctive mode, 'as if we had' a full identity, while recognising that such a fullness is a fiction, an inevitable failure" (Chambers 1994: 25).

In contrast to these conceptions of irony and inauthenticity, the logic of authenticity is still deemed to be influential, for example for the framing of life-narratives. This conjures up the tales and story-types of personal liberation modelled on counter-cultural discourses since the 1960s. Inauthenticity here figures as self-alienation, and authenticity as a form of self-realisation.[97] In Nikolas Rose's view the logic of authenticity is at the heart of what he called the 'ethicalisation of existence'. This process, seen as a response to disintegrating external moralities, intensifies the demands on the self to take responsibility. It rests on a culture of confession and a constant interrogation if and how exteriority expresses or disguises inner personal truths (Rose 1989: 264-267, 271-272, see also the afterword). It has also been

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[96] This can be compared to the 'flaneur' as a stance of ironic distance; see the discussion in David Chaney's book (1996: 54). Likewise it calls up the idea that urban popular culture is a celebration of artificiality and superficiality (Featherstone 1991: 24).

[97] On the discourses of authenticity see the work of Marshall Berman (1971: 58). In his reading of Pascal he pointed to these two shades of inauthenticity as either *insincerity* or *self-alienation*.

suggested that the quest for authenticity is invoked in the 'romantic structure of feeling' central in contemporary expressive and neo-romantic life forms (in relation to health, therapy, New Age cultures or new social movements) (Hetherington 1998: 8, 69, 76-77). In his re-conceptualisation of class theory, Klaus Eder (1993) has identified this counter-cultural tradition and the ethics of authenticity within the habitus of the new middle classes. Coming back to post-subcultural studies on youth and dance culture, several works have investigated discourses of authenticity in young people's accounts of style or popular music (Widdicombe 1993, Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990, Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995, Thornton 1995).

The first of these strands of thought points to a mode of reflexivity that abstains from (in)validating experience as either real or not real or as either actual or virtual. By contrast, the second strand highlights a mode of reflexivity that implies a judgement and a (temporary) determination of the actual or the real. These positions need not be regarded as contradictory. Instead, the ethic of authenticity may be considered as a counter-effect of aestheticisation (see also Welsch 1997: 183). We can translate these different views of the logic of authenticity into different modes of (aesthetic) reflexivity as outlined by Scott Lash and John Urry (1994: 44-59) and further developed by Lash (1999). They argued that the semioticisation and the high-speed flow of signs in postmodern culture-society not only produce a flattening or emptying-out of the self, but also a deepening of the self in terms of reflexivity, not only a depletion of meaning, but also a recasting of meaning (ibid. 3, 31). Zizek's reflections on the effects of the simulated environment of cyberspace on the hermeneutic horizon of experience are somewhat along these lines. He argued, as we saw, that simulation changes rather than completely displaces the construction of reality. Thus, we might conclude that the emergence of new reality disjunctures also generates new devices for resolving or dealing with them.

Aesthetic reflexivity seems to be a helpful analytical tool, because it can account for both the flattening as well as the deepening of the self in contexts of aestheticisation. This notion captures not only the shifting boundary between actual and virtual, but also the particular types of this boundary work (as and-not or either-or). Aesthetic reflexivity is a hermeneutics, a practical, aesthetic reasoning based on the aesthetic content of signs rather than a cognitive self-monitoring that is based on

the informational content of signs. Unlike a self-monitoring, which rests on a split of subject and object (the ego monitoring the body), aesthetic reflexivity is understood as a bodily form of reflexivity. It is at the same time a being-in-the-world and a practice (Lash and Urry 1994: 5, especially Chapter 2). Therefore, in my understanding, it oscillates between a natural attitude and a reflective attitude, not dissimilar to the above-mentioned 'becoming as bodily thought' (Massumi 1992: 99). Derived from Durkheim and Mauss' *Primitive Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss 1970) and Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement, aesthetic reflexivity is a mode of judgement that involves the subsumption of particulars by particulars. This is in contrast to cognitive and moral judgements, which rest on the subsumption of particulars by universals. The categories of classification are concrete, rooted in place, in the particular (Lash and Urry 1994: 47), for example the classifiers 'mainstream' or 'underground' are more abstract than if a particular sound was characterised as very 'South London', or even more specifically, as 'fatboy-slimish' (which refers to the DJ and producer Fatboy Slim). Aesthetic classification highlights the sense dimension of perception over the cognitive part of abstraction. It works on a low level of mediation; one may think of symbolisation – the representation of sense impressions through symbolic or metaphorical language – or association – the correlation of sensuous experience with particular situations or emotions (Rodaway 1994: 146).[98] Lash and Urry sketched out two modes of aesthetic reflexivity. These are not only regarded as significant cultural and political sensibilities, but also as 'moral sources of the contemporary self' (Lash and Urry 1994: 53-54). This is firstly, a symbolic signification, which is grounded in a unity of form and content, and secondly, an allegoric signification, which separates this unity. It either privileges the signifier over the referent or the referent over the signifier. Allegory can be a figural, a surrealist juxtaposition of signifiers denying (one) meaning at the favour of affect and complexity. While symbol embraces the either-or, allegory fits in with the and-not.[99] Aesthetic reflexivity provides a useful tool for conceptualising the particular entrenchment of the doing and undoing of reality through aestheticisation. It helps

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[98] See for example my ethnographic account in Chapter 2, section 5.5.

[99] Unlike the traditional notion of allegory as double-coded message (see Featherstone 1991: 23) and as mimesis of an objective order (see Lash and Urry 1994: 52), this notion of allegory is more along the lines of Walter Benjamin's use of the term, which refers to the fragmentation of stable and coherent meanings in the phantasmagoria of commodities as dream images, which summon up associations and illusions (see Featherstone 1991: 23).

advance the concern of the thesis in several regards, because it serves as a hub for the different theoretical problems and approaches brought up in this and the previous chapters. It encapsulates the dimension of constructing reality through and with the layers of otherness. But importantly, it harbours reflexivity and practice, understanding and doing, the side of encoding and the side of decoding,[100] the sensual and the discursive as well as subjects and objects. Another advantage is that practices of stylisation or aesthetic practice need not be defined and differentiated from other social practices. The point that aesthetic reflexivity can inform any social practice displaces this problem. As a cultural and political sensibility it can also be conceived of as a politics of experience, a socially structured type of attention that classifies, authorises and validates, but also partly transcends clear-cut classification, authorisation and validation. For that reason, it may produce a mode of experience that does not rest on authentication.[101] In the remaining sections of this chapter I will deal with the issues that I have not touched upon so far. This involves the problems of identity and selfhood and, in relation to that, narrative. The question arises, how aesthetic reflexivity as a particular way of (sensual, bodily, discursive) sense making can be related to narrative and to the construction of identity.

6. Selfhood and identity

What is the 'real' self, if not a fiction? Not only are social practices or aesthetic practices forms of simulation, but it has also been argued that personhood itself is a simulation, a never quite succeeding 'becoming-the-same',[102] an image of unity where there is none.

> Persons are simulacra derived from a social aggregate whose code is invested for its own sake (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 366).

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[100] See the discussion of (post-)subculturalist theorisation of styles (Introduction, Chapter 1), and the tendency to privilege the encoding, the symbolic work of stylisation.

[101] This also defies poststructuralist critiques of the notion of experience, which assume that experience always privileges a humanist notion of authenticity and that it presupposes coherence, holism, unification and a subject present to itself (see the discussion in Jay 1998: 62-78).

[102] Becoming alludes to the dynamic, the process and duration of actuality. While becoming-the-same is an imitation of a model or code, becoming-other is a simulation that overthrows the model (Massumi 1992: 37, 181).

Identity is a code or category that implies sameness and difference, the logic of either-or (Sampson 1989: 12). Identity is always a provisional, a wobbly fixing. In applying a code to a body it signifies becoming into being. In assuming relations of coherence between categories (e.g. between gender, desire, sexual practice) it renders bodies intelligible. It partly hinges on the logic of a concurring outside and inside. However, the inbuilt indeterminacy of the body's becoming surpasses and overthrows the signification of being. Identity is a centring of the subject, which is fundamentally decentred. It suggests continuity, unity and self-sameness, where there is also discontinuity, diversity and multiplicity. Authenticity and inauthenticity, the reality of the self, is indeterminable, because self-objectification is never complete.[103] Stylisation and personae are not simply deliberate, manipulative fashionings of a self that is self-present and transparent. Body habitus and the unconscious pose limits not only to the transformation, but also to the intelligibility, of the self.

> Decentrement thus first designates the ambiguity, the oscillation between symbolic and imaginary identification - the undecidability as to where my true point is, in my 'real' self or in my external mask, with the possible implication that my symbolic mask can be 'more true' than what it conceals, the 'true face' behind it (Zizek 1997: 141).

Decentred subjectivity is therefore, due to this indeterminacy of the self, not dissimilar to allegorical signification (see also Lash and Urry 1994: 53) or to 'differance' as a logic of both-and (Sampson 1989: 12), while the expressive unity of symbolic signification can be related to the temporal anchoring of a real self. Despite the indeterminacy or decentredness of subjectivity, the self entertains a relation to itself. More precisely, this relation is a form of hermeneutic practice. As Foucault's history of subjectivity suggested, modern subjectivity was constituted as a particular hermeneutic of the self, which entailed an ethical practice of governing or taking care of the self in the name of truth (Rabinow 1997: 87-92). Experience is a mode of such a hermeneutic of the self. However, as the discussion on aestheticisation showed, this hermeneutic of the self is not a simple, clear-cut determination of sameness and authenticity, but involves a more complex engagement with the potential otherness of the self, with phantasmic hypertexts of the real. The ethics of authenticity may

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[103] See also Massumi on the boundary work between self and other (1992: 80): "The self remains susceptible to identity crises brought on by confusions between 'inside' and 'outside'."

point to the fact that even the wobbly fixing of becoming may become ever more difficult.

This discussion so far has touched upon otherness on two levels, which requires clarification. This was either otherness in relation to theoretical perspectives on identity or, otherness as an object of the hermeneutic practice of the self, as a way of sense making. Firstly, selfhood and identity have been theorised as being essentially intertwined with otherness. For example, a psychoanalytical, Lacanian perspective casts identity in terms of the exclusion of and the simultaneous fascination by an abject other.[104] From a philosophical, or deconstructionist Derridian viewpoint identity is a *relation* of difference, as each meaning or term contains itself and its other, A and non-A (Sampson 1989: 8). Similarly, Ricoeur, in his philosophical-linguistic conceptualisation of selfhood, argued that identity (as *ipse* or selfhood, see below) involves a "dialectic of *self* and the *other than self*" (Ricoeur 1992: 3), which does not just evoke the comparison between self and other, but which means that otherness, through identification, is constitutive of selfhood.[105] Secondly, I have spoken of a *discourse* of transgression, which structures the experience of the otherness of dance cultural spaces, of clubbing practices and of the selves participating in these spaces. Here, otherness appears as a particular way of sense making on the level of the politics of experience.

I have used the notion of aesthetic reflexivity to account for different forms of constructing play-realities. I will now look at aesthetic reflexivity more specifically as a hermeneutic practice of the self in relation to narrative identity. Let me expound what Ricoeur conceived of as the three major features of the hermeneutics of self, first the "detour of reflection by way of analysis", second the "dialectic of selfhood and sameness" and finally, the "dialectic of selfhood and otherness" (Ricoeur 1992: 16). The latter two correspond to the two meanings of identity as either sameness (*idem*) or selfhood (*ipse*) (ibid. 116). Sameness evokes four different components or sets of relations that all involve time and memory, in that time is a "factor of

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[104] See for example Butler (1993: 113) and the Introduction of the thesis (section 2). I will come back to this in Chapter 6.

[105] "*Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms" (Ricoeur 1992: 3).

dissemblance, divergence and difference" (ibid. 117).[106] First there is the numerical sense of identity. This is identity as oneness: two occurrences are recognised or identified as one and the same thing. Here identity or sameness is opposed to *plurality*. The second dimension is a qualitative sense of identity. This is identity as extreme resemblance of two things. Identity then is opposed to *difference*. In a third sense, identity may refer to the uninterrupted continuity of the same individual beyond the changes over time that might have destabilised similitude. Identity then becomes the reverse of *discontinuity*. But change is only conceivable on the basis of the fourth principle of identity, which is permanence in time. This is identity as an immutable, invariant structure that remains despite changes. This permanence of sameness- or idem-identity overlaps with selfhood or ipse-identity (Ricoeur 1991b: 189-191). The search for this permanence in time is the very problematic of personal identity (Ricoeur 1992: 116-118). I have mentioned before that aestheticisation, in its accentuation of transformation and mutability, fragmentation, juxtaposition and incongruity – in other words, its allegorical side – challenges the construction of sameness or identity. For example, the creation of masks or personae disrupts similitude and continuity. The image of dance cultural spaces as transgressive or other similarly presents a marker of difference or discontinuity. However, aesthetic reflexivity of the symbol may underpin sameness and identity, for instance, if styles, fashion or dancing are seen as expressions of a character, if body gestures are interpreted as signs of identity or else, if the otherness of dance spaces is constructed in terms of its enabling potential for the development of the sameness-identity of the self.[107]

7. Narrative identity, aesthetic reflexivity and ethics

These final comments of the preceding paragraph turn attention to the dialectics of continuity and discontinuity, of sameness and difference, of permanence

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[106] "It is indeed by comparing a thing with itself in different times that we form the ideas of identity and diversity" (Ricoeur 1992: 125).

[107] Malbon (1999: 127) hinted at such a concurrence of the otherness of practices of dance with the sameness or potential becoming of the self: "[...] ecstatic sensations can actually be about an extraordinary and, for many, unparalleled and extremely precious experience of *their own identity*. Crucially, this experience of identity is perceived as their 'real' identity - how they really are (and / or want to be)."

and change that are crucial to personal identity. In Ricoeur's grounding of identity in temporality and narrative, it is narrative emplotment that mediates and integrates this dynamic of concordance and discordance (Ricoeur 1992: 140-141). The particular emplotment of a story maps otherness and sameness on to the self and marks either a discontinuity or continuity of the character. It constructs reality, play-reality or non-reality of the self. This emplotment is set against the backdrop of discourses of authenticity. An experience – if we consider narrative as a mode of constructing experience – "is something you come out of changed" (Foucault 1991: 27), while at the same time this modelling of change is part of developing durable properties of a character, the "set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognised" (Ricoeur 1992: 121). Narrative can also be conceived of as a sense making through aesthetic reflexivity insofar as it adopts metaphoric language and is indebted to literary genres and story-types. It is allegorical in the sense that it remains indeterminate. It refuses a clear-cut meaning of the real self or a centring of subjectivity – it is never closed. But it is also symbolic, because it focuses on events and changes in terms of their meaning for sameness-identity and hence attempts to produce a closure of the self. The conception of aesthetic reflexivity as a form of hermeneutics and ethical practice of the self is not to be mistaken for an 'aesthetics of existence', the ethics of self-determination and -exploration that Foucault suggested as a strategy against processes of normalisation (see McNay 1992: 157-162). Yet, it has been noted that aesthetic reflexivity or the aestheticisation of everyday life are significant for contemporary life-practices and ethics of the self. Art and aesthetics came to be inscribed with the value of the good life (Featherstone 1991: 31). In the final part of this chapter I will address the dimension of ethics, which will be an important element in the empirical analysis of the politics of clubbing experience to follow in the next chapters.

Narrative, just as aesthetic reflexivity, has an ethical and moral dimension. As Ricoeur argued, narrative serves as a propaedeutic to ethics. There is no ethically neutral narrative (Ricoeur 1992: 115), because narrative is a transition between description and prescription (ibid. 170). It mediates between action as the *capacity* to act and ethics as the *obligation* to act in certain ways (ibid. 152). Especially the evaluation of actions and agents is considered to be the threshold to ethics. In relation to the poles of selfhood and sameness, the ethical dimension – as accountability of a person for his or her acts – emerges on the level of the permanence of selfhood. This

is self-constancy, as for example implied in the act of keeping a promise (Ricoeur 1992: 165). Action itself is modelled on precepts, which can be technical, strategic, aesthetic, ethical or moral (ibid. 169-170). Further, narrative not only relates to ethical aims of the self, but also to the moral order of the social system, as Hayden White pointed out:

> Where there is ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the status of the legal system, which is the form in which the subject encounters most immediately the social system in which he is enjoined to achieve a full humanity, the ground on which any closure of a story one might wish to tell about a past, whether it be a public or a private past, is lacking. And this suggests that narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralise reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine (White 1987: 14).

This 'exercise of practical wisdom' and exchange of experiences through story telling oscillates between what Ricoeur called the *teleological* and the *deontological* perspective.[108] This means, narrative is articulated through *ethical* aims of an accomplished life and through the *moral norms* through which this aim passes (Ricoeur 1992: 170). Ricoeur postulated a primacy of ethics over morality from a philosophical viewpoint (ibid. 170-171). So does Nikolas Rose from a more historical, empirical viewpoint, when speaking of the 'ethicalisation of existence' (see above Rose 1989). Having inquired into the relation between aestheticisation and reality, the similar question arises regarding the relationship between ethics and reality. Ethics has been conceived of as a practice of the self in relation to the permitted and the forbidden, the desirable and the undesirable, in other words, in relation to the true and the false (Rose 1996: 153). This suggests that ethics presupposes the authentication of the self. Instead, I would argue that ethical practice may as well be propelled by the indeterminacy of the self and may be a presupposition for, if not an attempt at, authenticating and anchoring the self.

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[108] These two perspectives relate to the Aristotelian tradition of ethics as the aim for the good and the Kantian notion of morality as obligation to respect the norm (Ricoeur 1992: 170).

8. Conclusion

This leads me to the end of this chapter and an outlook towards the adaptation of this framework in the empirical part of the thesis. Summarising the main points, this chapter further advanced the argument of the preceding chapter that the othering of club and dance spaces is a mode of experience intricately linked to narrative structure. Through Ricoeur's understanding of narrative identity we were able to conceptualise the undoing and doing of identity through narrative structure. Narrative, as a synthesis of concordance and discordance (Ricoeur 1992: 147-148), implies that identity is only conceivable in terms of the dialectic of sameness and otherness. Otherness therefore, is a form of narrative sense making and, it is a way of framing reality, play, becoming or else. It was stressed that this otherness is not simply one of play on the one end and reality on the other, but that this otherness articulates an unstable, fluid boundary to the real. Therefore, this is less a boundary rather than another layer of reality. The notion of play-reality was put forward to illustrate the simultaneity of the real and not real and the relativity of the actual and virtual in the simulated environment of clubbing. As for the relation between aestheticisation and identity, the crucial point to be gleaned from this discussion is the significance of such play-reality of otherness (the potential becoming of the self) for the authentication or temporary closure of the real self. Play-reality is not to be misunderstood as aesthetic strategy of the 'as-if' such as those examples mentioned in the first chapter (Baudrillard, Braidotti, Deleuze), but should, I would suggest, be regarded as a form of sense making or mundane reasoning in contexts of simulation. The possible, potential identity one could realise, one wants to or one avoids becoming, (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 132) forms a horizon of fascination or anxiety and instigates the ethical and hermeneutic practice of the self. Yet, hermeneutic attempts to anchor the self's reality remain always indeterminate. It is first, the ethical dimension of narrative, and second, aesthetic reflexivity that will be a focus of attention in the investigations of identity in the following empirical parts of the thesis. The next two chapters in particular, will rest on the analysis of narratives. They will investigate how dance cultural contexts and selfhood in dance clubs are constructed as other to reality or as play-realities. The important point to note is that I do not understand play-realities simply as forms of 'self-fashioning',

but as being contextualised by classificatory schemes and modes of reflexivity that are shaped by a politics of experience.

Chapter 4

Thresholds of reality: clubbing, drugs and agency

> Kay: There's this strange sort of seductive kind of you could, I mean, I-I felt over the summer like 'don't get too carried away with this', you know, because, it's not really, it's not reality, you know, it's great to go and do it and for, you know, five or six hours just, it's, you know, you're in a completely different world almost, you know, you're not you're not doing any of those things you'd have to do everyday, you know, which is, sort of, you know, I suppose, escapism, escapism, is kind of, I find that quite attractive (Interview 17-11-1999: 7).

> Yong: I can see both sides of the two worlds and I choose to stay in between, because the world we live in today is an amazing world as well, the big cities, the technology, the communication. It has a lot of bad shit happening, but that's life and at the same time do your work to live in this world, when you have to, you go to this other world, this underground world of dancing (Interview 26-01-2001: 8).

1. Introduction

Reading these two quotes we are confronted with two accounts of the dance world as an other world. Yet, it is apparent that this otherness unfolds quite different meanings. While neither of these viewpoints sketches the club sphere as a liminal, transgressive space of a pleasurable status reversal, its otherness is articulated in different ways. Yong holds a kind of dualistic worldview in which the dance world is regarded as underground, but equally valid reality. These two worlds, not only recalling the sacred and the profane, but also dualistic principles of religious ontologies, seem to complement rather than oppose one another. Evoking diverse forms of being and knowing, the city, technology and communication on the one hand and dancing on the other hand constitute two spheres, between which the self moves back and forth, depending on its needs. Kay, by contrast, expounds a dualism that casts a hierarchical relationship between the two worlds, one that is more, and another that is less real and valid. It recalls Platonic philosophy and its dualism of the

true realm of ideas and the less reliable sensual realm of the body. The lack of validity of the dance reality extends to the self and its ethical practice: Whilst delightful, the 'underworld' of dance is cast as a sensual sphere of temptation and seduction corrupting and distracting the self from its everyday commitments.

These examples demonstrate that the different meanings of the otherness of dancing and clubbing attribute particular values to these spheres. Moreover, they are tied up with the demarcation of the agency of the self and its ethical aims. This points to the main concern of this chapter, which is to investigate the complex of otherness in relation to the agency and ethics of the self. The first part of the chapter will explore meaning constructions of clubbing contexts more generally, while the second part will concentrate on drugs and drug-consumption as a way of othering the self and the dance-world. These other realities of drug-states involve meanings of pleasure and excess, but also invoke responsibility and control. In discussing different examples of how these notions are weaved into the story-ing of drugs, I will formulate a hypothesis about a gendered politics of drug-experiences.

2. Other realities and other selves

> The lure of mass culture, after all has traditionally been described as the threat of losing oneself in dreams and delusions and merely consuming rather than producing (Huyssen 1986: 55).

The above introduction indicated that the reality-status attributed to nightclubbing at the same time confers a certain reality-status on the clubbing self. The following section will discuss and compare different examples of the otherness of dance and club contexts in relation to the construction of sameness-identity.[109] I will begin this analysis by further dwelling on Yong and Kay's accounts. Alluding to the falseness of the simulacrum, Kay, an art graduate in her mid-twenties, stated that the dance world is not to be taken for real. While she did not offer a clear reason for this viewpoint, her reference to everyday commitments or routines suggests that the artificiality of the club context stems from the fact that its order and the ways of

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[109] See Chapter 3, the discussion of narrative identity in section 6.

being and modes of practice it engenders cannot be sustained forever, but just temporarily. After a couple of hours they would give way to the demands of the everyday again.[110] Otherness appears as a temporary, pleasurable spacing of a non-reality (of the self). Yet, Kay's prescriptive self-appeal ('don't get too carried away') also reveals how indeterminate and ambiguous the reality-status of the different spheres as well as the authentication of her self is. This is probably why she passed off the dance world as unreal escape world. By contrast, Yong's, a Korean media student, notion of underground reality is clearly marked off from the world of work and technology. His account invokes a pragmatic attitude of being in control of moving from one world or reality to the other. Wandering between these worlds does not seem to confuse the self's realities and agendas. While Kay's reflections oscillate between the either-or (one world is real, the other is not) and the and-not (it is real and not real), Yong's version asserts two different worlds equally real. Kay's assessment of the dance-world as other, but not real also correlates with how she views herself as participant. She frames her role and participation in clubs as insincere, cynical and disaffected partaking, which is not to be taken seriously. Yong, by contrast, derives symbolic value from his involvement, which becomes part of his identity project[111] as a DJ, and which is cast as a significant cultural producer role.[112] The way he described his work – in terms of communicating with people and intervening into sensual states of bodies by mastering music technology – suggests that the dance world is not so different from and not so other to the city after all.

> Yong: It's like this space-ship, people are dancing, you're taking the space-ship, taking them on a voyage, you start with a slower, let's say, a 135bpm, duv-duv-duv, minimal, you start more minimal, simpler and then gradually you start taking up the speed, you start taking more elements into, and more noises and then around midnight, you start getting full on and you see the people, because you put the track, you put it in, you hear it on your headphone, then you put the fader up and it's like, it's a bit like having sex, you do your move, you do what you know you can do and you see the people just reacting to it, jumping, screaming (Interview 26-01-2001: 18).

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[110] This also recalls the discursive link between the short-lived character of drug-induced states and artificiality (Plant 1999: 127-128).

[111] Chapter 5 will elaborate on this term.

[112] He developed his DJing also into music production. His future plan is to become a film director. The next chapter will expand on this issue of cultural production and work involvement in dance culture.

These examples of Yong and Kay stage on the one hand a 'pragmatic' self, whose sense of control and technology casts into doubt the otherness attributed to the dance world, and, on the other hand a 'seduced' self, who, fearing the loss of control, rejects and degrades the otherness. In turning to a different example, Costa, a Greek, gay student in his mid-twenties, evaluated club contexts twofold, combining two layers of authenticity. One was his tourist experience of London, which highlighted the London club scene as the authentic origin of a cultural practice. Before coming to live in London he had experienced clubbing in Greece and Spain, but the club scenes he had encountered there only tried to 'imitate' or 'follow' London. In searching for the real clubbing, he credited London clubs a status of place. That is, that they express local experiences, identity and history.[113] In his view, clubbing is an "English movement"; it was "originally born here." Therefore, when going out in London,

> Costa: you don't feel like you're in a London like club, you *are* in London, you experience the main thing, you are going to clubs that have been running for nine years so far, and it is so nice knowing that you are in a club that changed so much throughout all these nine years, and so many different people had been in that club, the same dance-floor that you are dancing, so many DJs have changed [...] that is exciting for me being a foreigner and coming to London, it's the thing, you enter in a club scene, where everything is so, not updated, it's so the real thing, it's not following London, you *are* in London (Interview 04-07-1999: 1-2).

While London clubs figure as origin of club culture, the very setting of clubbing as such is accounted for as constructed environment. This second layer of authenticity recalls Kay's notion of a simulated escape world, yet Costa did not ridicule and moralise the practice of clubbing as escapism. The constructed, illusory dimension of clubbing meant that the club-sphere was other, because the 'real self' was transcended. Couched in the theoretical terms set out in the last chapter, the sameness of the self is temporarily disrupted or suspended and what remains is selfhood without sameness. As the following quote demonstrates, Costa maintained a more neutral or balanced stance as to the value of this other reality of the self:

> Costa: It's a club, it's an illusion, you are not the same person, you can't be the same person, even if you are natural, on a natural high, without any drugs, you may be a bit pissed as well, so you are not the same anyway, or even when you

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[113] See Augé's (1995: 77) differentiation of place and non-place.

> are not drunk as well, you are not the same anyway, because it's dark, and it can't show, so you are different, physically or emotionally, you are different, I mean nothing is real in a club, from the way you dress, you may be dressed more glamorous [...], your mental state is not the same, you are much more relaxed, not that frustrated [...] nothing is real, you are another person, better or worse, you are another person and that's why it's nice going to the clubs as well (Interview 04-07-1999: 3).

Costa's image of club and dance contexts seems to imply a simultaneity of real and-not real referred to as play-reality in Chapter 3. Yet, to be precise, in both quotes he evaluates the authenticity of club contexts through the either-or. In one sense the clubs are the 'real thing' as opposed to the copy and in another sense they are less real than everyday reality. In both instances Costa comes to a clear judgement regarding the reality-status of the club-context and of selfhood in a club. Like Yong he draws symbolic value from the realness of London dance scenes. Taking part in the authentic club cultures in London is an important component of his process of assimilation and integration as a 'foreigner'. At the same time his reflections on the non-real aspects of a club, envisage the otherness of the club setting as allegorical space, in which attempts of symbolic readings of the self as well as of others fail. Nevertheless, despite being regarded an unreliable form of authenticating other selves, symbolic reading of gestures or body style is used as a form of estimation. The otherness of club space in this case is not paired with a 'pragmatic' or 'seduced' self, but with a 'deluded' self. Yet, self and others are not blamed for being inauthentic, but this non-real aspect is rationalised and externalised as normal characteristic of a club context. This otherness of the self and of others is not so much in need of control. It does however provide a device for interpreting and reflecting upon experiences and encounters made in clubs. This explanatory scheme becomes a form of emotional distantiation by diminishing the expectations and desires projected on to clubbing and by relieving the self from responsibility for choices and acts.

> Costa: Most of the time, you go to a nightclub trying to find a boyfriend, but you end up finding a one-night-stand, which is really normal as well, whether it makes you sad after that or happy, that's it, when you go to a club you can't expect anything more, because you can't analyse the character of anybody there, you just see – the body-language, the movements, the gestures, the style, way of dressing, that's it, so you just go guess, so you go there, you sleep with somebody and then you realise that it wasn't the way you thought it would be (Interview 04-07-1999: 3).

This device of delusion or disillusionment about relationships or friendships formed in club contexts is quite a common way of evaluating reality-status. On the one hand, new connections with people in clubs are frequently cast as an experience out of the ordinary. On the other hand, the authenticity or realness of these new links is often denied later on, which puts into question the conception of club and dance contexts as realms of sociality.[114] While the emotional bond seems real in the club, it seems false in retrospect. The actual-virtual poles change with the time passing. Unlike Costa, Hailey, an Australian student in her early twenties, has a more pronounced attitude, infused by the 'ethics of authenticity', which becomes the yardstick of evaluating friendships formed in a club. Again, the self is 'deluded' by a symbolic reading of people's behaviour, decoded as expression of their whole personality or character. But this disillusion is more clearly articulated as disappointment and results in the moral not to trust friendships built through clubbing.

> Hailey: You do feel very connected to a lot of people and you meet people and everyone is quite friendly ah and then ah, and then suddenly I found myself surrounded with a couple of people, who were really negative and they weren't very nice people [...] and I dropped back a bit and went 'these people aren't real', you know 'these people are messed up' (Interview 25-10-2000: 2).

> Hailey: People are being personal and the next day you think back, maybe not even the next day, maybe the next week, the next month, when that person isn't in your life anymore, you sit back and think, 'how, how true is all that?' [...] I don't think it's a healthy place to form friendships mostly by going out clubbing (Interview 25-10-2000: 5, 7-8).

In all the examples discussed so far reality was framed in an either-or mode, which highlighted dance spaces and selves as real or not real. By contrast, in the and-not mode of play-reality, sameness-identity is annihilated and sustained at the same time, which deters the narrative closure of the self within sameness. The two extracts below frame a play-reality of and-not, staging club sociality as simultaneously real and not real, authentic and inauthentic. However, despite the proposed concurrence of these poles, both the quotes still emphasise either one or the other. While Clare took account of the artificiality of the club environment, she nevertheless emphasised the realness of the feelings she experienced in a club. Hailey, as before, tended to disavow the reality-status of clubbing. Her renunciation of this reality includes a

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[114] See the critique of this concept in Chapter 1.

displacement (of responsibility) from the self to the body as well as a separation of the self and the body. This is similar to Costa's externalisation of the non-real dimension. Yet, Hailey did not attribute it to the club as such, but located the origin of this non-reality in the body. Her evaluation of the clubbing self rested on a Cartesian dichotomy of self / mind and body and a related opposition of knowing and feeling, which cast the body as a source of deception. (The significant parts of her quote are highlighted in italics).

> Clare: It's not real in a club, it's not, it's a constructed environment, totally artificial, but the feelings that you get are very genuine and true feelings of joy and happiness (Interview 01-02-2000: 22).

> Hailey: When you go out with people and you meet people, you sort of feel it's real, [...] you feel, I can have this connection with everyone, which isn't real and *you know* at the time that it's not real, *but you, something inside your brain feels* like it is (Interview 25-10-2000: 5).

Both Costa as well as Hailey used the device of illusion and disillusion. Costa made this part of his reflexivity of using dance spaces for certain ends (finding a boyfriend or sexual partner). He accepted the symbolic way of reading others as a way of inferring a reality that was nevertheless likely to delude the self ('you guess'). This could be characterised as an allegorical use of symbolic classification. Hailey, by contrast, assessed and criticised selfhood in clubs in terms of an ethics of authenticity, which made her wary of disappointments resulting from the involvement with other people in clubs. In her view, what caused this non-reality in clubs was the manipulation of the body through drugs. Two lesbian interviewees shared this ethical stance towards authenticity. They disapproved of the non-real selves in women's clubs. In these cases the non-real aspect was not put down to drug-consumption, but to the role-playing and the need or desire to perform lesbian identity cues and codes of cool. Aniela, for example, a lesbian woman aged thirty, criticised the put-on and play with certain styles, certain ways of moving and attitudes and instead preferred people who were "themselves". Nevertheless, taking part in this game also constituted a pleasurable other side for herself once in a while. Overall, in Aniela's account dance spaces provided for both, a disruption of sameness-identity as well as a dis-alienating articulation of sameness – when she dances and feels that she does not "have to play anything" (Interview 02-02-2000: 8). She shared with Costa the twofold evaluation of dance space as either simulated,

inauthentic environment or as a space of authenticity. Her narrative did not underscore the authenticity of a cultural practice, but of the self.[115]

Thus far, I have begun to explore the link between accounts of the reality of dance contexts and the narrative configuration of selfhood and sameness. In so doing, it became apparent that the dis-authentication of clubs and clubbing selves disrupted and displaced sameness-identity. It articulated an ironicised,[116] other dimension of the self. By contrast, the validation of the otherness of club contexts affirmed sameness-identity (e.g. Yong), while the and-not device oscillated between sameness and otherness bypassing narrative closure. These evaluations of dance clubs and of the practices of clubbing selves also provided for different ethical precepts of how to best practice clubbing. Some extracts have shown how clubbing, while in several regards making possible the realisation of ethical aims of the good life, was also considered to be detrimental to the pursuit of others (e.g. forming friendships and relationships). It is ethically ambivalent. This preliminary analysis also showed that the dis-authentication of clubbing as a problematic otherness was more pronounced in the women's narratives.

Taking these points further, I will now go on to examine the significance of drugs and drug-consumption for the construction of reality and identity. Before continuing the analysis of interview data, I will first reflect more generally on the construction of sameness and otherness in drug narratives. This will provide a backdrop for analysing narrative identities in relation to clubbing and drug-taking. Then I will sketch out the context of drug consumption in British club cultures from a rather different methodological viewpoint. In order to analyse the complex of otherness constructed through drugs, the discussion has to take account of the thesis of the normalisation of drug use. As this thesis was formulated merely on the basis of quantitative research on drug consumption, this requires briefly turning to some survey data. It will become clear that a quantitative methodology alone is insufficient in addressing the issue of normalisation and needs to be complemented by qualitative

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[115] A similar example of the imagination of a dance club as a space of dis-alienation, freedom, security and home can be found in Measham (2001: 163). See also Pini's (2001) argument of new forms of belongingness.

[116] See Pollner (1987: 70-71) and the discussion in Chapter 3 (section 2).

research. The last part of the chapter will prepare some grounds by interpreting narratives of clubbing and drugs, which, despite indicating aspects of 'normalisation', point to the ethical and moral ambivalence of the otherness of drugs.

3. Drugs and reality

Discourses of drugs, for example literary narratives, are heavily inscribed with otherness and images of other reality. From the angle of narrative identity this can be regarded as an intervention into sameness-identity, and in part as an undermining of personal identity. Such narratives have configured drugs as a technology, manipulating the body and altering its sensations and ways of perception. This can be compared to the technological imaginations of science fiction, which render the corporeal condition contingent and variable (Ricoeur 1992: 150-151).[117] Opium, for example, in nineteenth century Romantic poetry and fiction, was praised for its inspiring qualities of assisting the faculty of dreaming, spurring aesthetic creativity by creating a wealth of imagination and new insights into lost memories.[118] The power and agency ascribed to opium was such that it was seen to seriously confuse and blur the different realities and even annihilate the agency and hence accountability of the self (Plant 1999: 21, 24, see also Ricoeur 1992: 151). Cannabis, by contrast, was not seen to be so extreme, but similarly it was associated with a reconfiguration of the senses and an increased sensitivity and capacity of perception, for example, through synaesthetic effects[119] that opened the depths of an otherwise superficial world (Plant 1999: 33-36). It allowed for a sort of time-out experience, slowing down and fixing the present against the speeded-up life in nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation (ibid. 49). However, Baudelaire, for instance, himself an explorer of cannabis, bemoaned it for its artificiality. He considered its effect as a mere 'exaggeration of the natural', insisting that it annihilated the 'power

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[117] This is in contrast to literary fiction, which constitutes imaginative, mimetic variations around the presupposed invariant of the corporeal existence and possibilities of acting in the world (Ricoeur 1992: 150).

[118] Sadie Plant (1999), writing the history of drug use into cultural and literary history, provides very useful insights into different constructions of other reality through drugs. Her essayistic account takes the popularisation of opium consumption in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe as a starting point.

[119] Synaesthesy is the simultaneous agitation of a secondary sense not directly implicated in a perception, for example, the visualisation of sound or the smell of colours.

of the will' (see Plant 1999: 37, 42).[120] These examples indicate how drug-use was linked to the 'aestheticisation of existence' and to artistic practice, not least because one goal that art and drug-taking had in common was to explore new sensations and to expand the capacity of imagination. But there are also other strands of meaning. For example, it is more the boost of energy, strength and euphoria, rather than access to a world of dreams and fantasies that cocaine was considered to bring about by increasing the (erotic) agility of the body (Plant 1999: 59-77). Cocaine narratives also invoked a sense of split identity giving birth to an alter ego previously secreted within everyday identities and states of mind.[121] While this intervenes in sameness-identity, it does not undermine identity in the way the imagination of opium agency does. Instead of wiping out the agency and sameness of the self, it creates an alternative thread of sameness-identity. Narratives of LSD provide another variant of interference with sameness, for example, the metamorphosis into a different species as the transmutation into an animal. Similar to cannabis, the trip into 'another reality' is a temporary annulment of sameness, but not only that, the journey into the inside also tells of a transformation of sameness through a reconfiguration of body and mind (Plant 1999: 108).

The meanings of other reality ascribed to the effects of different drugs are various, and so are the ways of validating or invalidating these realities as more or less true or artificial, as distortion and illusory transformation of the self or as liberatory dis-alienation staging the surface of a more 'real' self. The dance drug ecstasy added a new dimension to these discourses. Like cocaine it was interpreted as amplifier – of emotional and psychic states, of the sense-apparatus of the body, of the desire and capability to connect with people. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the otherness of ecstasy was less regarded as a hallucinogenic plane of imagination and fantasy, rather than as a sensational plane of increased body involvement. It was cast as the body's immersion in the immediacy of the here and now, as a turning

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[120] See his essays on hashish collected under the title: *Les Paradis artificiels: opium and haschisch.* Paris: Flammarion 1966.

[121] Such a notion of split identity can be found in the cocaine inspired fiction of R. L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.* See the chapter White Lines in Plant (1999: 63).

outwards rather than a turning inwards – the body becoming sound and rhythm, fusing the inside and outside. As Plant noted about ecstasy-induced clubbers,

> They are dancers, rhythms, speeds and beats, disorganised and dispersed beyond their own individuation, overwhelmed by their own connectivity (1999: 167).

Echoing the interpretations of 1990s dance culture (see Chapter 1), Plant suggested that the sensational engineering of the body through ecstasy "steals identity away" (ibid. 168), that it 'possesses and entrances' the dancers and blurs the boundaries between interiority and exteriority. She implied that sameness-identity is not only displaced, but has been made irrelevant "by the simulacra of a digital age that cares little for such distinctions" (ibid. 170). Sensation here is grasped independently from experience, a perspective that the preceding chapters of this thesis, elaborating on the intricate linkage between sensation and experience, proved limited. Perception, time-consciousness and meaning are not necessarily removed by intense sensations of the body, but instead, in particular with the drug ecstasy, the senses may be fine-tuned to perceive even more acutely and subtly. Correspondingly, rave and ecstasy-culture has not only been interpreted as a sensational 'rush culture' of thrills and spectacular effects, but has maintained a symbolic attachment to the transcendentalist, psychedelic discourse of higher planes of consciousness (Reynolds 1998: xix-xx). Reynolds spoke of a double coding built into the politics of ecstasy. On the one hand he referred to the use of the drug as 'consciousness-*razing*' stimulant in tandem with amphetamines in a 'working-class weekender lifestyle', on the other hand, combined with LSD or other hallucinogens it would run along the lines of the middle class 'bohemian' or counter-cultural project of 'consciousness-*raising*' (ibid. 405-407). While the association with class-inflected lifestyles may be a bit far-fetched and unfounded, this points to different forms of using the drug. However, how does ecstasy relate to the construction of reality and sameness/otherness, given this increased capacity to perceive does not necessarily generate a hallucinogenic experience of a dream or fantasy reality, but intensify awareness and emotional connection within contexts of co-presence? How do ecstasy-narratives mould sameness-identity? While the displacement of identity may apply to sensational moments, it is also apparent that such moments become embedded in narratives that construct reality and identity. When use of ecstasy spread across the dance scenes in the late 1980s it not only caused media outrage, but

it also triggered and partly revived a phantasmatic complex of change. On the collective plane this registered as the new dance culture that was infused by a revived communal spirit. On the individual plane ecstasy culture gave rise to narratives of transformation, for instance, to images of a therapeutic transformation of personality – not articulated or placed in an 'other reality', but within reality. It conjured up the notion that the drug could enhance or underline a person's capacity to love and relate to others, helping overcome inhibitions. Moreover, it fuelled a fantasy of rebirth, often cast as estrangement of the body and as a configuration of new bodily experiences one has to come to terms with.[122] These metaphors of change and transformation make the liminal otherness concordant with sameness-identity.

This section attempted to illustrate that drug-experiences cannot be simply generalised as a form of escape or 'getting away from reality'. By briefly sketching the variety of drug-discourses, it drew attention to different ways of constructing reality and identity through otherness attributed to drugs. These modes of intervention into sameness-identity highlighted at the same time different starting points for the related dimensions of agency and ethics. In terms of agency and ethics the versions of other reality opened up not only a pole of constrained agency, but also a pole of enhanced or altered capacities to act and to experience. While a restricted agency corresponds with a lessened accountability of the self, the question arises, as to whether an enhanced, but manipulated agency (through the technological intervention of a drug) also corresponds with an increased responsibility of the self. This interrelation of agency and ethics, closes the circle, as its configuration is dependent on the status of reality conferred upon otherness. However, drugs, drug-consumption and drug-users have also been attached to a more negatively connoted otherness. Drugs have not only been represented as keys to an other world or dimension of reality, but they have also been socially marked and condemned as other, as deviant, criminal and threatening. That these social markings are undergoing a transformation is what the thesis of normalisation, to which I will now turn, argues.

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[122] A commentator at the end of the 1980s remarked, "a lot of people were born again. [...] They gave up their relatively normal lives, 'cos they thought 'Why am I doing this shitty job?' You got all these people suddenly deciding to go off and travel" (quoted by Reynolds 1998: 46-47). Melissa Harrison's collection of clubbers' accounts contains more examples (Harrison 1998: 19-23, 26-27).

4. Normalisation and otherness

Recent research suggested that the UK hosts the most drug-experienced young adult population (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 1). This assumption was illustrated by reference to a comparative survey, carried out in ten European countries (Griffiths et al. 1997), which found that Britain had life-time and past-year rates[123] of drug use over twice as high as the next placed country (quoted from Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 11). The apparent prevalence and significant increase of drug use particularly for recreational purposes was regarded as indicator of a process of normalisation, suggesting that the use of illicit drugs had become more acceptable and tolerable. More precisely, the move towards normalisation was considered to become evident through the factors of "availability, trying, rates of use, user population characteristics and cultural accommodation measures" (e.g. the attitude of 'sensible' recreational drug use) (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 2-4). A key to the argument of normalisation was the 'extent and pace at which very young people in teenage years become or have become experienced drug consumers' (ibid. 102-103, 109). However, the most central evidence on which the thesis of normalisation was formulated, were findings about the popularisation of recreational drug use in rave and dance culture.

Clubbing and dancing is not the sole but indeed a very significant leisure sphere for consuming drugs. Measham et. al. (2001: 17) asserted, along with other studies (for example Release 1997), that drug use of clubbers is significantly higher than of the overall adolescent and adult population. Their research, based on extensive field research in three nightclubs in an unspecified city in northwest England,[124] found that two thirds of a club crowd had usually taken or were planning to take an illicit drug in the club night. The most widely used drugs in these clubs were cannabis, ecstasy and amphetamines (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 96, 107).[125] But it was suggested that the selection and use of drugs also differs by the

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[123] Life-time rate = having used the drug at least once in life. Past-year and past-month rate are defined accordingly.

[124] It is based on 2000 brief interviews and 362 in-depth interviews.

[125] Similar findings were discussed in the *Release* survey carried out in London and based on a sample size close to 500. Appendix A of the thesis can be consulted for a more detailed discussion of survey research on drug consumption.

type and genre of dance club. People in techno clubs would tend to use a wider range of drugs (cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamine, LSD, ketamine) than the clientele of garage clubs (alcohol, cocaine) (O'Hagan 1999). Further, a common image among clubbers is the divide of the club scene between 'drinking clubs' and 'drug clubs'. Due to the diversification of the club scene, therefore, these figures have to be treated with caution. Such data that may suggest a widespread drug use in club cultures are not representative of the club scene generally. In addition to the claim that 'dancing on drugs' was common among club-goers, Measham et. al. (2001: 69) also asserted that drug consumers in clubs are regular users.[126] Despite different criticisms that have been raised against the thesis of normalisation, particularly regarding the general population,[127] various researches certainly demonstrated the popularity of drug-consumption within club cultures, which may be seen to indicate an element of normalisation in this context. Clubbing is closely associated with drugs, to the extent that drugs are very much perceived not just as a normal, but also a central part of going out clubbing. In some way drug use is part of the image of an 'authentic clubber.' For example, Hailey, whose account was discussed in section 2 of this chapter, accounted for drugs as the source of the non-real aspect of clubbing. Yet, she also reflected on the significance of drug-use for being a 'real clubber'. As she remarked, ironicising her possible identification as a clubber, "I'm a clubber, I take drugs" (Interview 6-12-2000: 27). Similarly, Kay hinted at the almost normative dimension of drug-taking in clubs and the sense of exclusion created when abstaining from drug consumption (Interview 17-11-1999: 3). Endorsing the view of a certain normalisation of drug use in dance contexts, the important question arising for our discussion is what it entails for the construction of otherness. If drug consumption in the context of clubbing goes along, as suggested by Measham, with the belief that drug-consumption can be made compatible with everyday activities and commitments (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 12) and is a regular, somehow routinised activity, how may drug-taking become a form of constructing special

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[126] Most surveys define 'regular' as weekly, fortnightly, monthly or at least once every three months.

[127] See Shiner and Newburn's critique (1999). The findings of the British Crime Survey 2000 (see Appendix A of the thesis, Sharp et al. 2001) suggest that speaking of a 'normalisation' of drug use in the general population may indeed be exaggerated, especially if measured by life-time rates. Apart from the problematical question of how normalisation can be defined in relation to consumption rates, normalisation, if at all, applies foremost to the use of cannabis.

experiences that are set off from the ordinary and from routines?[128] Is drug-taking a way of sidestepping the routinisation of clubbing and the habituation of club-environments? Have traditional images of the ethically and morally problematic otherness of drugs disappeared? As Nigel South (1999a) commented on academic views of drugs as escape routes from reality and as a means of constructing experiences out of the ordinary,[129] drugs have moved away from the status of an exception and, despite their political condemnation and the moral panics of the tabloids, they have become 'facts of everyday life':[130]

> [...] whereby in just over twenty years, experimentation with or use of drugs has become so closely woven into the experiential and cultural fabric of 'ordinary' everyday life in Western society. Drug use may still represent a route to 'unreality' and a means to slip away from the constraints of routine, but today, in many more different ways for many more different people, drug use is actually a part of the 'paramount reality' of everyday life (South 1999a: 4).

Despite the normalisation or prevalence of drug use in dance clubs and the association of clubbing with drugs (South 1999a: 7), drugs have remained illicit. This also puts club managers in the awkward position of finding a way round the dilemma of complying with legal regulations and offering a space for people who wish to engage in partly illegal consumption practices. The Mintel study of 1996 (Mintel 1996) found that the close association of clubs with drug-taking posed an image problem for clubs, presumably because public rumour arose that (some) clubs were mainly used as market-places for drugs and that club spaces lent themselves readily to the acquisition of new drug-consumers preyed on by partly violent criminal gangs, which infiltrated the clubs and either blackmailed or cooperated with club managers and staff.[131] As a response, the club industry introduced some measures to counter this negative image, for example, thorough door searches and CCTV supervision or posters aimed at customers urging them to inform the staff about drug-consumption

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[128] See Chapter 2, which elaborated on narrative and experience in relation to habituation and routinisation in more detail.

[129] Such as Cohen (1993), originally published in 1976.

[130] See on this debate also Gilbert (1999).

[131] On this discourse of 'gangsters in clubland' and the organisation of drugs trade in clubs see also Measham (2001: 142-156).

in the club (Mintel 1996: 8). While most managers or clubs would declare or even publicly display their zero-tolerance of illicit drug use on the venues, the clubs' ways of tackling drug-consumption on their premises varies. The extent of drug use in some clubs almost certainly implies a considerable degree of tolerance on the side of club managements, even if they are taking visible measures of clamping down on the use of drugs.[132] This ambiguity, inherent in the prevalence yet prohibition of drug-consumption in clubs, means that drugs remain a symbol of transgression and otherness by being relegated to a more or less necessary status of secrecy. However, in addressing the problem of otherness in relation to aspects of normalisation we also need to return to the politics of experience.

5. Drugs, meaning and gender

The research discussed above provided insights into the scale and patterns of drug use in dance culture, yet did not offer much depth in relation to the subjective meanings of drug use and how these negotiate, in complex and ambivalent ways, normalisation and otherness. For example, Hailey's quote 'I'm a clubber, I take drugs' conveyed the view of the normal and partly normative aspect of drug-use in dance clubs and still alluded to the social construction of drug users as deviant outsiders or resistant others. The investigation as to how drugs are integrated into experience and narratives has largely been neglected by recent research despite the classic outline of Howard Becker (1967) and the works that he inspired (e.g. Willis 1976). Their common point was that a drug experience is not only determined by the pharmacological properties of a drug, but also depends on the meanings individuals ascribe to a drug by drawing on symbolic systems at hand. Yet, this does not catch much attention of researchers these days.[133]

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[132] All the three clubs researched by Measham et.al. had drug distribution systems operating in the club, partly sanctioned and assisted by bar, door or security staff. Yet, their fieldwork also brought to light examples how security staff were surveilling customers for drugs (ibid. 167).

[133] Some of the more recent qualitative studies that dealt with meanings of drug use primarily investigated decision-making processes (Boys and Fountain 2000, Measham, Parker and Aldridge 1998a), underscoring people's employment of coping strategies and rational cost-benefit assessments in relation to recreational drug use. On long-term dimensions of drug-consumption see for example Parker (1998). The work of Plant (1992) discussed causes of drug use. The collection of South (1999b) provides useful discussions. The following essayistic accounts are also helpful e.g. Garratt (1998), Collin (1997), Reynolds (1998) and Saunders (1995, 1997).

What is the politics, in particular the gendered politics, of dance-drug-experience? Recent quantitative and qualitative research has found little difference in the drug practices of men and women in clubs, except for some variances in the quantity and frequency of use. Both genders seem to prefer the same types of drugs. However, gender differences have been noted in terms of the effects sought after. It was suggested that females give more emphasis to physical stimulation and increase in energy by using amphetamines, whereas males are slightly more inclined towards hallucinatory experiences and perceptual distortions achieved by drugs such as LSD (Boys and Fountain 2000: 37-38, Release 1997: 12). Measham et. al. found that fewer women than men take illicit drugs in clubs (2001: 109), and women more frequently report negative physical side- or after-effects such as nausea or headaches (ibid. 129, also: Release 1997: 22-24). In returning to the complex of otherness, we need to address a more significant gender dimension. Feminist critiques of drug discourses and research have exposed that female drug-taking in particular has been associated with a socially marked otherness. They pointed to two main discursive threads of representing women's drug practices: on the one hand women's victimisation, on the other hand their immoralisation. While the first stressed the increased vulnerability of, and threats to, women's safety, the second referred to the abuse and undermining of women's nature – their reproductive capacity. Hence, by virtue of the coding of women as body and nature, the choice to take drugs came to be seen as unethical, 'unfeminine' act (Henderson 1999: 37, Ettorre 1992: 10, Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 36-37). However, recent research on women in clubbing scenes (Pini 2001: 12-13) has emphasised, along the lines of the thesis of normalisation, that female drug-taking as well as 'being out of it' has become more socially acceptable and is no longer so heavily associated with personal pathology.[134]

6. 'Excess', agency and ethics

The above quoted work of Pini as well as the thesis of the normalisation of drug use suggests that the ethically or morally problematic otherness in which

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[134] See the discussion of Pini's work in Chapter 1. On drugs and gender see also the papers of: Collison (1996) and Hänninen (1999). Hänninen's paper concentrated on (gendered) narratives of recovery from addictive behaviours more generally (including alcohol, polydrug use, smoking, eating disorders and others).

(female) drug-taking was inscribed is becoming increasingly neutralised. In contrast to this, the following narrative analysis will demonstrate that the otherness of drugs is still ethically and morally ambivalent. This ethical and moral ambiguity casts into doubt that drug use, despite high rates of consumption within dance culture, has become fully normalised. In fact, heavy consumption may instigate consumers even more to reflect on, and to problematise their drug practices. Therefore, inferring a normalisation of drug use solely from the quantity and regularity of drug-consumption in dance contexts is a too limited perspective. This touches on the issue that the following analysis of drug narratives will address. It will illuminate notions of excessive drug-consumption as a particular form of othering dance-contexts and selves. The various ways in which the otherness of excess interrelates with agency and ethics will highlight some examples of a gendered politics of drug experience. However, I must point out that the analysis of aspects of a gendered discourse of drugs is merely a hypothetical endeavour. The focus on excess does not suggest that these interviewees were excessive users of drugs, but is directed to the story-ing of drug-taking through images of excess. Nikolas Rose (1989: 266) argued that the contemporary regime of freedom is characterised by two 'pathologies' or moral limits: one is non-consensual conduct, the second, which is more relevant in this context, is excessive conduct. Both limits tend to be represented as a lack of exercise of will and choice.[135] However, within the story-ings of the self through dance culture, excess has a more ambiguous meaning. Excess can represent pleasure and transgression signified, for example, as freedom. Yet, such transgression may not only be celebrated as freedom, but may also invoke an ethical reflection on the loss of freedom and control. It may open up a potentially pathological otherness of the self that threatens agency and will (e.g. the fear of dependency).[136] In this case, the *mastery* of excess and the maintenance of the sameness of the self can also become markers of freedom, agency, willpower and self-responsibility. Following on from this comes the question as to whether excess can be aligned with the ethics of the self only if framed as having been overcome or as being under control. The following

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[135] See also Valverde (1998) and Sedgwick (1992).

[136] Dependency in relation to dance-drugs was usually not reflected on as substance addiction, but more in terms of a 'process-addictive behaviour' in the action-space of clubbing. Process-addiction accentuates drugs as integral part of a series of addictive activities or interactions. This differentiation between forms of addiction was made by Anne W. Schaef and Diane Fassel (1988, quoted from Ettorre 1992: 130).

discussion should not be misread as one that considers the construction of other reality or of an otherness of excess to be the main, explicit motive of dance drug consumers.[137] Instead, the angle of this analysis is to read narratives of drug-use as ways of constructing realities of the self, in other words, as interventions in sameness-identity, agency and ethics. This reading of the data that I am presenting here is selective. It does not illuminate all relevant meaning-structures of narratives on dancing and drugs.

A slight majority, fifteen of the twenty-three interviewees of this study have been regular users of drugs for a certain period in their lives. Most have had experiences of more than one drug. The remainder have either abstained from or have tried drugs without entering a period of regular use. Similar to the above-discussed findings about typical drug repertoires of club consumers, the interviewees mainly referred to cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines and acid.[138] None of them spoke of experiences with heroin. In outlining some general characteristics of the narrativisation of drugs and its implication within the politics of experience, a first remarkable point is that generally drug-consumption tended to be narrated from a *retrospective* point of view. This means, the most intensive period of clubbing and drug-taking was assigned to the past. The narrated present was often designed as a reorientation towards slowing down and stopping, which draws attention to the ethical undercurrent of mastering and taming the self. Secondly, while interviewees compared and contrasted the effects and experiences of different drugs at some point, they also tended to generalise their experiences without always differentiating between the types of drugs. The questions arise firstly, as to whether these condensed accounts implicitly privilege the experience of a particular drug(s), and secondly, whether they single out particular effect(s) of a drug. A third point to consider is the function of drugs in narratives of clubbing. Drugs and clubbing may be embedded in general plot lines of biographical change and/or progress. In some cases though, evaluations of clubbing, and of drugs in particular, were intricately tied up with and

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[137] The *Release* study (Release 1997: 21) listed the positive meanings and effects that dance drug users attribute to different drugs. Depending on the drug, clubbers mentioned energy, happiness, escape from worries, humour, relaxation, confidence, understanding, feelings of oneness with the world, sociability, empathy, sexual excitement and heightened perception.

[138] Other drugs, more rarely mentioned, were cocaine, magic mushrooms, poppers, ketamine, rohypnol and GHB.

conveyed a, if not *the* biographical meaning. This means that drugs were at the centre of biographical evaluations, being referred to in accounting for significant changes of the life history. The self's drug-history could even become the plot structure of the autobiographical narration, structured by certain periods and phases of clubbing and drug-consumption. This general plot line of the drug history was often threefold, sketching a period of initiation (the 'honeymoon'), a period of accustomisation and intensification ('excess') delineating the potential danger of excess tipping over into compulsion, and a period of reorientation (the 'comedown') (see also Collin 1997: 8-9).[139]

Despite sharing this general plot-structure and employing similar story-types, the narratives of women and men investigated in this study shed light on several aspects of a gendered politics of drug experiences. This gendered discourse hangs not only on women's victimisation and immoralisation, but, more generally, on the construction of reality and the assignment of agency to the self and the drug. Both men as well as women ascribed a considerable degree of power and agency to drugs, which in some ways enhanced the agency of the self and in others, constrained it. The strengthening of emotional bonds that encourages romantic relationships or affirms friendships was one way of sketching the enhancement of the self's agency against the backdrop of sameness-identity. However, the agency of drugs could also serve to construct an other dimension of the 'illusioned', intoxicated and therefore less accountable self. While all narratives embraced excess as pleasure and emphasised the great times of being 'totally off it', women's accounts tended to allude to the immorality of excess and to the discourse of victimisation. Victimisation, understood generally as constrained agency and accountability, could also serve to justify or mitigate excess. Men's stories, by contrast, celebrated excess and being out of control in terms of risk and adventure. Men also had a propensity to stress the transformative potential of drugs clinging on to discourses of 'consciousness-raising' and designing a transformation and progress of personality. Where metaphors of transformation registered in women's stories they were strongly tied to romance and sexuality (which does not suggest that sexuality and romance are not touched upon in men's narratives). However, in all narratives images of excessive drug-consumption not only constructed a positive otherness. Excess was

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[139] This recalls Turner's (1969, 1980) structure of ritual, of separation, margin and reaggregation.

also reflected upon its danger of getting out of hand, of possibly creating an otherness of compulsion. Conversion stories that explain a withdrawal from drugs highlighted health concerns and commitments in education and work life. Frequently, the experience of significant others, such as good friends whose excessive drug-taking had led to breakdowns and severe problems, was drawn on to illustrate a reorientation. Despite these similarities, women tended to give more emphasis to health problems (e.g. 'bad-trip' stories) and to the disillusionment about relationships and friendships. Quite frequently they formulated their self-responsibility through family and respectability. Men were more inclined to highlight self-responsibility through work and career. If they had not withdrawn from drugs, excess was usually framed within the self-controlling reflection on boundaries and limits.[140]

To begin with, a significant dimension of 'other reality' for women is constituted when they feel they have to conceal their drug-taking not only from the authorities of dance clubs, but also from parents or family members who disapprove of and worry about the drug-consumption of their kins. The consignment of drug practices to a secreted realm of life opens up a symbolic, 'transgressive' and not normalised space. A positive notion of this otherness fashioned through drugs was closely linked to sexuality. Sally, for instance, a young mother in her early twenties living in South London, related how clubbing and drug-taking enabled her to experiment with sexual practices and relationships that deviated from the model of the heterosexual, monogamous relationship. In this respect, the drug-agency enhanced her agency. Taking Pini's (2001) stance, this would probably appear as an articulation of 'new modes of femininity'. But a closer look at the narrative reveals also more traditional articulations of femininity. For example, a significant meaning-context of Sally's drug-experiences was romance and relationships. Drugs were ascribed quite a powerful agency helping foster emotional bonds, even to the extent that she happened to fall in love with a man she had always disliked before.

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[140] In some way this also reflects the category of age, as some of the men referred to in the analysis were significantly older whereas most of the women referred to were in their late adolescence and early twenties.

> Sally: Then there was this guy that I used to go to school with called R. We were sort of friends in school, but I never really liked him, because he used to treat girls like shit, and just, shit all over them and anyway. [...] As soon as he came out with us and we got on so well, I mean we were both off our heads like on pills and ah, we got on so well and we ended up going out together (Interview 11-10-2000: 2).

In this case drugs, or more precisely, ecstasy, created an otherness of the self that appeared as quite a forceful disruption of sameness-identity. It not only carved out a space of a temporary other club reality/self, but also brought on the way a transformation of the self. Ecstasy, and drugs in general, became metaphors for a significant change in her life:

> Sally: And I ended up staying with him [...] and having the child with him. It's just quite bizarre really and I think, to be honest with you, I put that all down to drugs really, because, I found it sort of quite bizarre, because, ah, I think, if it hadn't been for drugs, then we would never have got together and then I would never have my daughter, which is quite a weird thing (Interview 10-11-2000: 2).

However, the above quote hints at the fact that the relationship terminated – after two and a half years. In retrospect this other reality of the self that had been integrated into sameness, was devalued as illusory and again relegated to a less valid otherness, which de-thematised the agency of the self in favour of the agency and powerful impact of drugs. Drugs came to figure the creation of an illusion and a process of disillusionment substituting other explanations for the failed relationship with the child's father. Yet, this dis-authenticated reality remains tied in with reality (e.g. the reality of parenthood) in the mode of and-not, of having been real and not real at the same time.

> Sally: We never actually got on really. The only, the only reason we stayed together, we got on fine until I was pregnant, because when I was pregnant, obviously I stopped taking drugs and you see people in a different light. [...] I think they really discolour your judgement of people, I think they really do (Interview 11-10-2000: 3).

Correspondingly, Sally reinterpreted the sexual adventures that she had in the context of drug-inducement through the disillusionment device. The retrospect revealed the 'truth' of these experiences so to speak, of having partly been used as a sexual object (the otherness of victimisation). This ironicisation of the experiences of

sexual adventures did not fully dis-authenticate, but counterbalance the emphasis on sexual adventures. It prevents a straightforward interpretation of these experiences as an articulation of a new mode of femininity. Drug intoxication here was storied also as a disabling otherness. However, all these disillusions were superseded by the climax of Sally's story, a new romantic love relationship that started off in a club context and led to her engagement. Despite indicating that she brought her drug-consumption to a halt whilst pregnant, Sally's narration did not moralise about drug-taking and parenthood, which again might be considered an aspect of normalisation of drug use. The withdrawal from drug-consumption was sketched almost as a beneficial side effect of her becoming a mother. Nevertheless, her evaluation below, casting an other reality in the subjunctive mode, illustrates the implicit ethical and moral considerations in which drug use is embedded. In speculating on the potential impact drugs could have had on her, she stated:

> Sally: Maybe I'd be totally fucked up on drugs now from doing too much clubbing and being burned out, if it hadn't been for me like having her, because, you know, it's only really 'cause I had her that I, you know, you chill out a bit and you mellow up (Interview 10-11-2000: 12).

Clare, a heterosexual female in her mid-twenties, like Sally, described the en-/disabling effect that drugs had on her sexual roles and practices. Again, drugs and ecstasy were wedded to the construction of romance and the enhancement of heterosexual agency, but they were also significant in creating a positive otherness disrupting heterosexuality and respectability. Drugs were part of her lifestyle as a professional dancer; more precisely, as dancer for a so called Fetish Crew on the one hand and as a table-dancer on the other hand, both of which constituted the self as other and unconventional. For example, as fetish dancer she performed bisexual roles. The plot-structure of Clare's narration suggests that at the beginning, drugs supported her agency and enabled her to experiment with otherness, with what she identified as a 'secreted side of her personality'. But in the long run drugs seemed to undermine her agency. Clare problematised her drug-consumption as almost addictive behaviour. In her clubbing past she sometimes felt like she "had failed", if she "didn't have something to take in the course of the night" (Interview 01-02-2000: 7). But this reflection on the possibly addictive nature of drug-taking mainly referred to her job as a table-dancer, which propelled her intake of cocaine. This dependency was cast as 'process addictive behaviour' (see Schaef and Fassel 1988) related to the

whole action context of table-dancing, which made her feel like 'being sucked in'. This articulates the third element of the plot-structure: overcoming excess and withdrawal from drugs. Her general evaluation of her clubbing-history converged on this change, from "taking huge amounts of drugs to nothing" (Interview 01-02-2000: 13). In this regard Clare mingled a 'love-story' with a 'mastery story' (see the analysis of these story types in: Hänninen and Koski-Jännes 1999). The retrieval of agency and control was brought on the way by a new relationship, which made her give up the job as a table-dancer and reduce her drug intake. But again, drugs were assigned a cardinal function[141] in narrating the beginning of this heterosexual relationship. The agency of a drug, GHB,[142] enhanced the self's sexual agency and subsequently the protagonist succeeded in seducing her later boyfriend. Drugs were inscribed into sameness.

> Clare: So you know, if it hadn't been, you know, if it hadn't been for the fact that I was wearing a rubber bikini and I had taken this drug, I don't think we would have got together (Interview 01-02-2000: 13).

Yet, on the 'bisexual' or homosexual plane the intervention of drugs into sameness-identity was more ambiguous. While drugs opened up a homosexual agency enacted in her dancing, intoxicated states displaced the self's agency in homosexual experiences, in which Clare cast herself as victim of predatory sexual advances. In Clare's narration therefore, drugs helped constitute spheres of otherness as well as they supported sameness. This otherness, as became clear, represented a side of experimentation, but also tended to slide into negatively connoted notions of 'excess' and 'addiction', which displaced her agency and accountability. If enhancing her agency, drugs did not appear to set aside her responsibility, but still left her responsible and accountable for her acts, for example, for having made a good 'choice'. Drug experiences were also thematised in relation to friendships. At the beginning of the chapter (section 2) Clare's quote ranked the realness of feelings in clubs over the artificiality of the club environment. However, with regards to drugs and friendships built in clubs she also endorsed a view similar to Sally and Hailey, employing the disillusion-device. With the drugs wearing off, the special

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[141] See Roland Barthes' (1977: 94) model of structural analysis of narrative.

[142] GHB is a salty liquid that has a reputation as an aphrodisiac (Reynolds 1998: 308).

otherness of close emotional encounters with strangers wore off too. The reality-status of these friendships was denied in retrospect. The actual turned into the virtual with the drug-influence disappearing. Clare's withdrawal from drugs and her new critical perspective of their simulational effect however, did not lead to a complete dis-authentication of the feelings she had when being on drugs. By contrast, in Hailey's use of 'disillusion' (see also section 2 of the chapter), the very reality of the drug-induced state and feelings was put into question.

By contrast, Alex, a gay clubber aged forty, in narrating his initiation into drugs, modelled an ecstasy experience as an and-not reality of friendship and love. This experience fashioned ecstasy in terms of sameness and otherness simultaneously. Ecstasy enhanced his feelings (sameness) and removed his inhibitions to express them (otherness). Like Hailey, Alex was cognisant of the artificiality of this enhancement. Significantly, despite this ambiguous and-not reality, Alex did not, like Hailey, dis-authenticate these feelings. Instead, the narration underscored the realness of this emotional connection.

> Alex: So we all did it [= the drug ecstasy, S.R.] together and it was just like 'wow', when I did it with like mates and it was like fucking hell, because like I love these two people, like genuinely love them, but I don't think I would ever say it, but all of a sudden it was like, I felt it big time and I was telling them and they were telling me and we really meant it and we knew it was drugs, but we also knew it was true, that's the big thing about the friendship thing, when you're on it it's like, you *know* that you're on drugs and you *know* that you're sort of everything is heightened and it's all sort of like 'oh I love you' and blabla, you know it's a bit sort of wishy washy like that, but at the same time you know it's true, you, I mean, I-I do genuinely feel like I know it's true (Interview 06-11-2000: 17).

Other men's narratives similarly evaluated the agency of drugs and the realness of ecstasy and other drug-induced states as life changing and transformative. However, unlike the women quoted above, men less often deployed the device of illusion and disillusionment, in particular regarding relationships. Instead, more emphasis was put on integrating the discordant elements of otherness into sameness by designing a narrative of progress. This was for example scripted through the notion of the amplification, strengthening or liberation of the 'real' self – its 'disalienation'. Spiritual insight, fine-tuned perception, a special connection with oneself, the enhancement or clarification of feelings, staged the surfacing of the

'real' self. Alex referred to ecstasy as the 'truth drug', alluding to the use of ecstasy in therapeutic contexts.[143] He accounted for a nervous breakdown that he had by reasoning that the regular use of ecstasy might have revealed and magnified his 'baggage' of negative feelings, which eventually erupted and caused the breakdown.[144] Despite this severe disruption, he did not change his view and dismiss the drug, but evaluate it quite positively as having enabled him to deal with, and to overcome, his problems.

A different dimension of self-realisation was highlighted by Yong, the Korean media student and DJ introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Having explored quite a range of drugs, he expounded a much more positive notion of heightened awareness, which figured sameness and otherness at the same time. Speaking of cannabis he illustrated his improved artistic agency:

> Yong: Your mind is stimulated and you start thinking things. It's like there is this invisible flow of inspiration and because you are under the effect of this hash, you just grab inspiration. If you start drawing, the drawings become much more artistic. I write a lot of poetry when I smoke this, poetry just comes out really beautifully (Interview 26-01-2001: 10).

Far from blocking out the awareness of reality, drugs would lift the barriers that usually prevented non-drug-induced people from receiving and processing all impressions in terms of the information and meaning they contain. This clings on to psychedelic discourses of the late 1960s, which celebrated drugs, in particular LSD, as intensification of the self's potential to perceive internal or external reality. In Yong's narration the drug-induced self was cast as 'more real', 'whole' and 'connected' than the non-drug induced self, whose capacity to penetrate into the (other) depths of the world is constrained by the routines of everyday life.

> Yong: The human brain is made in a certain way that you block out certain information and so, that's the world that we see, that we hear, that we smell. But if we were to be able to receive all the information that there is around the world, our brain would have to be this size. So taking these drugs just works parts of your brain that aren't worked usual, why, because you get up in the

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[143] Before its delegalisation, MDMA was used in some therapeutic settings in the US (Reynolds 1998: xxiii).

[144] The view that drug use may exacerbate pre-existing depressive states was also expressed in research (Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 130).

> morning, you go sleep at that night, we go work, we do certain things – that don't – block – it's a good life like that, it's just a certain kind of life, so LSD, what I think LSD does, is, it just connects you (Interview 26-01-2001: 29).

While all the women, who spoke about drugs in relation to family or relatives, referred to silence, taboo, guilt feelings or lack of understanding, Yong problematised family in a different way, which again cast drug agency (cannabis) as an affirmation of his agency and self. The daily joint-smoking ritual in his youth made him meditate and 'see through his life' and gave him the courage to object to his parents' educational plans. Breaking through the tradition of obedience, the protagonist convinced his parents and enforced his own identity project of studying media in order to become a film director. Despite this transformative potential, excessive drug consumption was articulated as possibly creating a threatening otherness of the self, of losing hold of life. Like Clare, Yong sketched a period when he was afraid of 'being sucked in' by the increasing intensity of the drug and dance lifestyle. He began to carefully reconsider his drug-consumption. This was partly instigated by a significant other, a friend who had 'gone crazy' as a result of 'having taken too many drugs.' When Yong was on the verge of 'dropping out and going off travelling', his parents dissuaded him from his plans. This did not lead to a withdrawal from drug-consumption altogether, but prompted a 'controlled', more pragmatic approach to drug-taking that enabled him to stay in 'both worlds'.

Going off travelling was what Chuck did, a male design-teacher, now in his late thirties. A year after his initiation into rave and ecstasy culture in 1989, he decided to terminate his 'yuppie-lifestyle' and to go to Australia. His narration, modelled on the ecstasy-rebirth-myth, sketched a significant relation between drugs and sexuality. The experience of his first 'E' was narrated as a severe disruption of sameness-identity, as a disorienting experience of homoeroticism. Coming to terms with it, he tried to separate the inside and outside and to determine "whether it's me and only me or whatever" (Interview 24-01-2001: 33). Eventually, the homosexual desire was not, as in Clare's case, disavowed as inauthentic by being externalised and put down to the drug, but was integrated into sameness through the redefinition of his sexual identity as bisexual. In retrospect, therefore, ecstasy seems to have propelled the 'coming-out' of his 'real' homosexual desire. As in the cases of Clare and Sally,

drugs also accompanied his exploration of different sexual roles and practices enhancing his agency and opening up a dimension of special otherness.

The image of strengthened agency and awareness that we encountered in Yong's case was also invoked in Chuck's narrative. In two stories in particular, he depicted his confrontation with the police.[145] In one instance he thought to have identified undercover police at a dance event. He concluded:

> Chuck: You sometimes feel that you get extra sensory perception when you are on drugs and when I'd been on drugs I felt that, when I've taken E, I felt that, when I've taken trips I felt that (Interview 24-01-2001: 27).[146]

In the second story the protagonist was stopped and searched on the street in relation to a robbery that had taken place. The police failed to recognise that 'he was tripping off his skull.' By virtue of heightened sensitivity and imagination, the self managed to make up all sorts of stories in order to conceal his status as an illegal immigrant in Australia. Thereby he outwitted the police. In contrast to these stories, Chuck also recalled situations where drug-agency not only enhanced his agency, but also led to a complete loss of control. One time he climbed on top of a lorry after having done two 'Es'. On another occasion, he woke up underneath a standing train after having had rohypnol. Anecdotes of losing control in women's accounts were often related to body and health and couched in terms of risk. They came to explain a conversion of the self's drug-practices. On the contrary, losing control after excessive drug intake in the men's narrations often conveyed a sense of fun and adventure, featuring a temporary otherness of the self as tragic-comic hero. References to bodily translocation or 'being out of place' (often induced by acid) seemed to be a male register too, whereas the two instances of women's hallucinatory experiences on acid carved out the metamorphosis of the self or the socially shared metamorphosis of reality. For example, Clare recounted how she turned into a cat in the mirror and Sheila, a woman in her early twenties, recalled how she and her friends perceived a light spinning out of a cup. Chuck, like Yong and others, constructed a dichotomy of two worlds, a hedonistic sphere of clubbing,

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[145] Encounters with the police appeared as a frequent story-type in men's narratives.

[146] This may be due to 'cocktail' pills that contained MDA rather than MDMA. MDA may have hallucinatory effects similar to LSD (Reynolds 1998: 192).

drugs, sexuality and nightlife and a normal sphere of the everyday grind of work and routine. The following quote demonstrates a different hierarchisation from Kay (see the beginning of this chapter). Chuck privileged and authenticated the nightlife over the day life.

> Chuck: I remember a couple of times coming out of clubs at five or six o'clock in the morning and just watching people going about their daily lives, you know the street cleaners, the newspaper deliverers, the vans stocking up the shop, the bus-drivers, you know the early morning people that are around at about, people going off to work early; and you think I am so far away from this and I don't want anything to do with it, you know. What is their life, what is this business of getting up in the morning? The morning, I am going home, I'm gonna spend a day in the sunshine (Interview 24-01-2001: 29).

However, unlike Yong, who had decided to stay in both worlds and make them compatible, Chuck reflected on his reorientation to return to the normal way of life, fuelled by the decision to stop taking drugs. Like Clare and Sally he sketched his disillusionment and reversed the reality-status of both worlds. The dance and nightlife world again became the other, less valid and ethically somewhat problematic reality, subordinated to the ethical values and (material) needs of work and day life.

> Chuck: You know it's very hedonistic, it's extremely in that way, it's self- ah yeah, it's self-indulgent, it's knocked from reality, but you know it's another kind of reality that would be lovely if it was possible (laughs); and for a while it was possible and for a while I believed it was gonna be possible forever, but well, I mean I can't keep on taking drugs forever and when you stop, you stop believing it, because you start believing other things as well that you need to work and you need to go and get an education and a job and pay into the system (Interview 24-01-2001: 29).

As part of his conversion story he narrated another disillusionment, which happened to have coincided with his best experience on ecstasy: He mistook certain gestures of somebody he was in love with for real affection. While this is reminiscent of the women's accounts of the flawed judgement of people and emotional connections, Chuck's narrative of disillusion was not linked to a dis-authentication of the person he was in love with, but to his symbolic reading of somebody's gestures, similar to Costa (see section 2). This is quite different from the notions of victimisation that some of the women's narrations clang on to. Despite these disillusionments and the withdrawal from drugs, his clubbing- and drug-centred

lifestyle overall was evaluated and integrated in the general ethics of authenticity, having helped him reform his personality.

> Chuck: It was very important to find the vehicle to be true to myself, all my life I've felt that and you know at that time drugs and clubbing and you know their relationship was a way of doing that for me, of finding truth about myself and things (Interview 24-01-2001: 30).

7. Conclusion

This chapter began to explore the interrelation between reality, agency and ethics. It became apparent that the ways of othering the dance world and the self through clubbing are manifold and intricately linked to the politics of experience. The second part of the chapter examined the role of drugs in the narrative construction of otherness. This analysis was placed in the context of normalising tendencies in the consumption of dance drugs and in the discursive context of drug-use. Despite, or because of, the normalisation of drug use in dance contexts, drug consumption is a significant form of othering the self through clubbing and of attaching the practice of clubbing to the ethical aim of the good life. However, the plot-structure of dance drug experiences, of overcoming, taming or controlling (excessive) drug-taking, illustrated ethical and moral concerns that challenge the thesis of normalisation. While excess and de-control can be imagined as positive otherness, the use of drugs and their potentially de-controlling impact also underlies a careful reflection of the self. The analysis compiled facets of the politics of gender. It highlighted that the women, while emphasising their pleasures and transgressive other selves on drugs and the biographical change brought on the way, had a greater propensity to ironicise, devalue and dis-authenticate the other reality of their dance and drug practices.[147] By contrast, despite the ethical and moral problematisation of (excessive) drug-use, men tended to integrate this potentially dangerous otherness into a narrative of personal and psychological transformation and self-realisation. While emphasising the enhancement of agency, masculinity was also more easily articulated than femininity through the loss of agency and control. Returning to the

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[147] The fact that women in some way tend to dis-authenticate their experiences also puts Pini's (2001: 60) contention that club cultural criticism and academic commentary did not take seriously enough women's claims about liberating aspects of club cultural involvement in a different perspective.

question as to whether these accounts of drug-experiences implicitly epitomise particular effects, men indeed gave more emphasis to the psychedelic, consciousness-raising features. In the women's narratives drugs were assigned a cardinal function in the self's transformation through relationships, romance and sexuality. They stressed how drugs could enhance, but also undermine their (sexual) agency, making them prone to victimisation. Clearly, the ways in which men and women narrated their drug experiences pointed to a process of normalisation and to the acceptance of drug use by both genders. Especially women, for whom drugs used to spell sexual danger and victimisation, traces of which were still noticeable, have started to embrace drug consumption also as a form of sexual adventure. Nevertheless, the ambivalence of the notion of excess illustrated that drug consumption has not simply become normalised and accepted.

This chapter confined the investigation of the ethics of the self to clubbing and to the practices of drug consumption. It began to incorporate diachronic aspects of narratives. Broadening the perspective on the ethics of the self will be the concern of the next chapter. Firstly, the involvement in dance culture will be reflected upon its relationship to wider ethical aims of the good life in the life contexts of participants. Secondly, these different ethics and identity projects will be viewed against a broader backdrop of social and political discourses of responsibility, achievement and freedom. The question arising from the above analysis and informing the subsequent discussion is, whether the ethics of the self that were brought to light so far not also speak the language of class, in particular the language of the (new) middle classes.

Chapter 5

Identity projects and spectacular selves

> Giselle: I always felt like I was made for clubbing and I was stuck in Norfolk. I feel like I still haven't done the clubbing that I need to do [...] I still feel like I haven't got where I wanted to be (Interview 18-04-2000: 5, 16).

> Chuck: I suppose I was in the place at the right time, when a scene was beginning and part of the things that I did, helped to establish it (Interview 24-01-2001: 10).

> Clare: When you're clubbing, it makes you feel privileged to be young, you feel like you're living the youth culture where you're participating and giving to the youth culture and that's quite powerful, because there is an awareness of how much of the future lies in our hands (Interview 01-02-2000: 22).

1. Introduction

The process of postmodern aestheticisation has been linked, not only to the significance of aesthetics in the realms of production and consumption or to the immaterial, 'epistemological' aestheticisation of consciousness (Welsch 1997: 5), but also to the 'practical' aestheticisation of the self, which Mike Featherstone couched as 'turning of one's life into a work of art' (1991: 66-67). While this is quite a marked and overstated metaphor, it certainly strikes the point that biographical constructions in contemporary Western societies are less structured by traditional life-course norms, but have become part of individualised life-projects connected to the task of becoming the author of one's life. This projecting of possible and desirable becomings of the self, which is permeated by cultural and social discourses of the good life, means that individuals are confronted with more choice, but also with more responsibility of making an effort in turning chance and contingency into a narrative of success. Aestheticisation, as has already been pointed out, is therefore intricately linked to the ethics of the self, to the extent that the ethical

accomplishment of one's life may be privileged over, yet is not dissolved from the disintegrating and diversifying moral norms. While structural and material relations and social positionings still inform, shape and limit biographical constructions and 'fashionings of the self', aestheticisation alludes to the potential of transformation, change, and the othering of the self. It emphasises the changeability of the body-self facilitated by practices of stylisation, by the search for sensations and ways of well-being, and by identifications of the self with an otherness that confers symbolic values on one's life. The pursuit of aestheticised life-forms and modes of biographical construction via aesthetic-ethical precepts have been associated with the new middle classes in particular (Eder 1993).

This chapter investigates how involvement in club and dance cultures is imagined as a realisation of the good life. In other words, it examines how practices of clubbing are bound up with an ethical practice of the self. It analyses how club cultural practices are narrated through a dimension of otherness or becoming of the self, cast in various notions of transgression, transformation or liberation. However, it also casts light on the ethical ambivalence that this dimension of otherness may unfold, which may give rise to formulations of identity projects. The case studies discussed in this chapter will provide examples of the narrative construction of clubbing as identity project. In exploring these projects in relation to life-contexts (of leisure, professional and work life, family and relationships etc.), this chapter will demonstrate that the ways of othering the self and the meanings of otherness are informed by class-habitus, gender and sexuality. In particular, it analyses such ethical projects against the backdrop of the habitus of a particular new middle class stratum. This analytical approach necessitates a brief discussion of youth and popular culture studies and class theory (section 2). In section 3 I will turn to the debate about the new middle classes and introduce another perspective on the ethics of self. This will then lead me to address the issues of biography and narrative and to sketch out the method of narrative analysis that was adopted for the case studies on which this chapter is based (section 4). The main part of the analysis starts in section 5.

2. Class and culture

By revealing the links between particular ways of othering and transforming the self through dance cultural involvement and the ethical values of the everyday selves, the analysis deconstructs the dichotomy between the everyday and the world of dance. Clubbing experiences are fabricated within and against the structures of everyday life (Grossberg 1990: 115) and are entrenched with a (re)doing or construction of identity through ethics. That clubbing experiences cannot be seen separately from everyday life contexts, and moreover, from biographical contexts, seems fairly straightforward. Yet, relating club cultural practices to positionings in social space, also comes close to a social reproduction model as developed by subcultural theory (Hall and Jefferson 1976), which centred on the core claim that subcultural styles were symbolic transformations of structural (class) relations in society.[148] Chapter 3 suggested not only replacing the semiotic reading of styles as texts, but also substituting the notion of style for the more general concept of aesthetic reflexivity. Aesthetic reflexivity was conceived of as a mode of understanding, practice and experience. Following on from this, attention was drawn to pragmatically contextualised meaning-attributions and to the hermeneutics of the self. These are for example articulated in autobiographical narrative, which is at the same time an ethics of the self. This points to the focus of analysis. It did not depart from style practices or from affiliation to certain stylistic or aesthetic environments, reading these as expression of a group (or individual) identity in the context of class location. Instead, the following analysis started from the hermeneutics and ethics of the self in narratives about clubbing and examined how these were inflected by class habitus. For example, the four people whose narrations were selected for the in-depth analysis of this chapter were involved in very different local, musical or sexually coded dance scenes at different points in time and yet, they reveal common issues of concerns and share certain ethical parameters. However, this commonality is neither indicative of a collective identity nor does it express identification with a particular (style) group or tribe.

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[148] See the discussion in Chapters 1 and 3.

This perspective departs from a rigid symbolic reading of (life-)styles as an unambiguous sign of status groups produced by class habitus. It conceives of culture not simply as extension of class. However, the perspective is also different from a (postmodern) understanding of (life-)styles as an autonomous, playful space for a more or less arbitrary, symbolic fashioning of the self. It conceives of culture not as fully separated from social structure. It takes into account that culture has its own dynamics, but interrelates with the social. In this point, I am following recent reconceptualisations of class theory, which gave different emphasis to the realm of culture, leisure and consumption. Klaus Eder (1993) regarded class as structural variable, generating positions that stand for (lack of) opportunities to act. Following Bourdieu (1984), he stressed the increasing significance of cultural capital for the structural determination of life-chances (Eder 1993: 64, 67). Yet, in addition to the structural delimitation of action spaces, he argued that choices and life forms are also symbolically or culturally defined (ibid. 6-12). This cultural logic or texture of organised discourses was seen to have its own dynamics, despite interrelating with the structural layer. Discussing the findings of a case study on the leisure practices of new middle classes, Derek Wynne (1998: 147) similarly argued that the interrelations between work, leisure, place and class are undergoing a transformation. Postmodern consumer culture, as a more pervasive form of cultural change affecting the wider social structure, was seen to undermine Bourdieu's theoretical schema of distinction as a practice of constructing or affirming social positions (ibid. 149-150). Nevertheless, much along the lines of Bourdieu, he contended that, "cultural practices and tastes have an economy of their own, associated with occupational position but not determined by it" (ibid. 143). His analysis underscored the significance of education as a differentiator for lifestyles, together with the variables of occupation, social origin and gender. However, he pointed to the shortcomings of a quantifying methodology that solely recorded the frequency and distribution of certain leisure practices (ibid. 142) and called instead for a complementing qualitative or ethnographic methodology, which could also "uncover the ways in which 'going for a drink' or 'playing tennis or squash' are accomplished" (Wynne 1998: 93). While the pursuit of contemporary leisure practices may be spread across class groupings and, to that extent, transcends the category of class, the ways of participating in these contexts and of accomplishing certain leisure practices may

articulate aspects of class habitus.[149] Another criticism raised against lifestyle analyses in the wake of Bourdieu's work was that these failed to address the links between lifestyle and tastes and the ethical and moral contexts of consumption. Thus, the need to explore lifestyles and taste in relation to the ethics of the self and to morality was emphasised (see the discussion in Lury 1996: 108).

3. The new middle classes and their ethical precepts

Theories and research of the new middle classes in Britain have frequently departed from Bourdieu's seminal project of *Distinction* (1984) and his outline of the 'new petit bourgeoisie'. Generally, the new middle classes were located within the lower service industries, involved with the production of symbolic goods and services, including public as well as private services in the social, financial or cultural sector. A particular fraction of the new middle classes was seen to constitute the 'new cultural intermediaries' sensitised to postmodern culture. They were described as "consumer[s] par excellence of post-modern cultural products" (Lash and Urry 1987: 292). Three of the cases in the analysis of this chapter manifest what has been highlighted as a typical feature of the capital structure of the cultural stratum of the new middle classes. That is, status-inconsistency and a downward mobility compared with their social origin, either because of their non-certified cultural capital or, because of a level of educational qualification lower than that expected of their background, or because of the lack of chance to convert cultural into economic capital. As a rehabilitation strategy, it was argued, the new cultural intermediaries try to utilise their sense for postmodern culture and their non-certified cultural capital within the new economy of culture (Bourdieu 1984, Lash and Urry 1987: 295-296). Mike Featherstone proposed that this ambiguous relationship to education makes this new middle class stratum prone to adopting an investment orientation or autodidact learning mode to compensate for their insecure position (Featherstone 1991: 90-92). Likewise, the concern with body-culture and self-presentation was seen to reflect their uneasiness with their bodies and with their social location. Arguments about the lifestyles of the new middle classes also

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[149] Lash and Urry (1994: 58) pointed to different temporal modes of culture consumption. They argued that the *use* of time in order to accumulate cultural capital reflected a middle class habitus. Consuming culture through 'wasting time' or 'passing time' was considered to be more typical of a working class habitus.

frequently considered the sphere of consumption to be increasingly important for articulations of identity.[150] This alluded to Bourdieu's point that the "morality of duty" has mutated into a "morality of pleasure as a duty" informing consumption practices and the care for the self (Bourdieu 1984: 367, Eder 1993: 73). In a similar vein, the new middle classes were seen to be engulfed with individualised identity projects concentrating the search for happiness in the life-world, embracing a new romanticism (of nature), direct experience (Eder 1993: 145-148) and expressive lifestyles (Featherstone 1991). Featherstone suggested that the 'new heroes of consumer culture' turn lifestyle into a life project for displaying individuality. Being prepared to experiment and to calculate risks, they would construct their pleasure in the form of a calculating hedonism (ibid. 86).

In returning to the issue of ethics from a theoretical viewpoint, ethical practice in terms of the good life constitutes, according to Ricoeur, a hermeneutical circle, in which the choices one has and the decisions one makes are measured against the ideals and dreams of achievement (1992: 179). While Riceour argued that ethics passes through norm and morality (ibid. 170), Nikolas Rose spoke of an ethicalisation of existence in the light of disintegrating and diversifying moralities (Rose 1989).[151] Following Ricoeur, I suggest analysing ethical practices of selves in relation to discourses of morality. This relation may not be one of accordance, but of conflict. Further, not only the meanings of the good life, but also the ways of accomplishing these aims make up different ethical precepts, which are of interest in the analysis. However, Rose's work provides a useful tool in another way. In relation to the ethicalisation of existence he investigated the history of freedom discourses that not only shaped notions of modern government, but also incited individuals to work upon themselves in the 'name of freedom' (Rose 1999: 65). Although this argument is neither attached to the ethics of the new middle classes nor any class in particular, given the symbolic inscription of dance culture with notions of freedom and liberation, it is worth considering these discourses for the analysis of ethics and narratives of clubbing. The main three threads of this discursive complex are freedom as *discipline*, freedom as *solidarity* and freedom as *autonomy*. The first

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[150] For example Lash and Urry (1987) and Wynne (1998: 30, 70).

[151] See also the discussion in Chapter 3.

strand of freedom as discipline and mastery works through technologies of responsibilisation implemented to domesticate passions and vice that could get out of hand in the market, civil society or the family. The second thread highlights webs of social solidarities and interdependencies as realms of freedom and the third one carves out a symbolic space for the individual as autonomous being, for example in the domains of consumption or therapeutics, where individuals are supposed to enact their lives in terms of choice (ibid. 66-87). Needless to say, these various meanings or aims of freedom are not necessarily compatible, but may provoke ethical conflicts.

It is mainly the strands of autonomy and solidarity that inform notions of the otherness of dance contexts, for example, in terms of the freedom of consumption and aspects of self-realisation or in terms of a freedom of solidarity and community. However, as we already saw in the previous chapter, this otherness is also in danger of losing its status as freedom and of becoming dis-authenticated, devalued (as obsession, excess or addiction) and replaced or counteracted by a freedom of mastery (discipline) or other versions of autonomy. The analysis of drug-narratives highlighted the ambiguity of the otherness of excessive drug consumption. The plot-structure of initiation, intensification and reorientation illustrated the tension between a freedom of autonomy (choosing to consume illegal drugs) and a freedom of discipline and mastery.

4. Biography, narrative, narrative analysis and case studies

The analysis of narrative identity and biography provides a methodological device that makes it possible to anchor accomplishments of leisure practices such as clubbing and the meanings attributed to them in the hermeneutics and ethical / moral agendas of the self. Unlike the focus on a particular scene or club, the angle on biography also highlights people's different and changing affiliations to club, dance and leisure cultures. It allows for investigating the long-term development of club cultural practices. Only rarely were life-contexts taken into account within the research of club culture. If they were addressed, discussion dwelled foremost on aspects of everyday life, without considering wider life-historical contexts. The following analysis not only concentrates on the semantic space of narrative identity, but also traces the trajectory of these lives in social space, in terms of the distribution

and composition of cultural, economic and social capitals. It follows up value systems that correlate with class and explores meaning-structures that are part of a cultural texture more general than class, such as discourses of gender, sexuality, politics, or popular culture (e.g. romantic discourses of love and stardom).

The focus on biography touches upon a different sociological interpretation of aestheticisation. In this respect, the question is raised as to whether aestheticisation reflects less the habitus of a particular grouping in social space rather than a new status passage or mode of biographical construction. In other words, this suggests that aestheticisation of the self, for example, through hedonist lifestyles, constitutes a certain biographical period or frames a second moratorium (Alheit 1996: 119-124). In view of demographic data and biographical patterns, clubbing indeed appears to be a 'phase' in people's lives across the middle income and class groupings,[152] predominantly in the age span of 18 to 25. To mention a few possible biographical contexts, it accompanies teenage years and late adolescence, or, more particularly, educational migration to (foreign) cities, time-out periods of travelling or sexual coming-outs. While this theoretical angle defies the argument that 'hedonist lifestyles' can be attributed to a particular class grouping, it does not rule out the implication of class within practices of clubbing. Although involvement in club and dance culture is a significant aspect of the cultural dynamics of youth lifestyle generally, class, gender or other factors may nevertheless provide scripts for different ways of participation and modes of experience.

The discussion of this chapter rests on a detailed narrative analysis of four fully transcribed interviews. Only a small segment of these in-depth studies, originally comprising a manuscript of 80 pages can be presented here. The selection of these cases was guided by the principle of mixing different social and class backgrounds, gender and sexual orientations. Additionally, the 'thickness' of the narratives was considered important for this kind of analysis, especially the extent to which the narratives covered life-aspects and contexts other than the club and dance involvement and therefore made it possible to relate the clubbing narrative to the

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[152] See Mintel (1996: 5).

general ethics of the self.[153] Aside from this, a reason for selecting these narratives was their emphasis on individuality and transformative otherness. In this respect, these cases are not typical of the whole sample, but of a group of about eight interviewees. They were chosen, because they seemed to offer the clearest illustrations of the texture of the new middle classes. Given that some of these cases were already part of the analysis of Chapter 4, this might appear as a somewhat selective use of data. However, these in-depth case studies inevitably produced analytical results more elaborate and complex than the horizontal reading of data. Including them in the previous chapter was also a way of presenting additional elements of these narratives, especially the drug narratives. The issue of drugs therefore, will hardly be touched upon here.

The method of narrative analysis deployed in these case studies, followed the principle of the narrative interview method outlined in Chapter 2, by paying attention to the interviewee's own frame of reference. Accordingly, the interview transcript, particularly of the initial narration following my first question, was approached as a process (or social action). In other words, the narration was interpreted in the light of the course of its generation and of its composition. This method of interpretation was loosely based on sequential analysis (Rosenthal 1995, Oevermann 1993)[154] and thematic analysis. However, they were theoretically focussed on in terms of narrative identity (Ricoeur 1992). Thematic analysis did not just involve the identification of significant and recurring themes, but crucially, it encompassed investigating thematic lines and connections of the narrative. In briefly explaining sequential analysis, its underlying assumption is that a narration is a series of selections out of a range of possible narrative acts. A selection determines the horizon of possible narrative acts in the future. For analytical purposes the text is therefore compartmentalised into a series of sequences. Each of these sequences is interpreted in terms of these

[153] Giselle's case is an exception. The narration generated in the first interview concentrated very much on clubbing and covered only a few aspects of her life-context. While the second interview started in a similar way, it generated more narrations about her life-context.

[154] Unfortunately I have not come across yet any English description of this particular or a similar method that I could refer to.

principles: selection and determination. Overall, the aim is to formulate a hypothesis about systematic rules of selection through a process of falsification.[155]

Below I will briefly introduce the four persons in terms of their social origins, genders, sexualities and the trajectories of capital accumulation they sketched in their narratives. In the light of these different backgrounds it becomes clear that the class-dimension cannot be distilled and separated from the contexts of gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, race, locality etc. However, in the presentation of these cases (section 5) these elements cannot be given the attention they deserve. Due to the limited space, I can sometimes only refer to these interrelations in footnotes. The style of presentation in section 5 may appear to be framed by a somewhat authorial, interpretative voice that meshes data presentation and interpretation and that turns the ambiguity of these autobiographical narrations into a seemingly coherent line of interpretation. However, I have not omitted to give consideration to these methodological points. In drawing together these separate analyses I had to be very selective and concise, which is why, to some extent at least, I was neither able to integrate detailed discussions or interviewee quotes nor to elaborate on interactive meaning constructions in the interview situation. The initial case analyses did not start from any hypothesis, whereas this second process of writing up was already quite focussed on the argument of the chapter.

Case 1: Clare

Clare, in her mid twenties, traced an affluent middle class origin, 'a privileged family background' as she said. Growing up in a quiet suburban area in South London, she attended an all-girls local school before going on to quite a prestigious boarding school outside London, where she gained an International diploma equivalent to A-levels. Straight after school she went on to university, expanding her institutionalised cultural capital by doing a BA degree in English. However, she did

[155] This procedure of interpretation is neither inductive nor deductive, but abductive, see Charles S. Peirce (Hartsphorne and Weiss 1980: 7.218). For example, a certain isolated datum or sequence is interpreted in terms of what it might entail, whereby a context of possibilities is construed (ideally in a group of interpreters). The following datum is considered in the light of this context. Certain interpretations will be ruled out. This procedure is repeated with a series of sequences, in the course of which certain interpretations will not have been falsified and more systematic selections might become apparent.

not study at such a high-status university her secondary education would ideally have prepared her for. Clare did not thematise the transition to university as a significant personal choice and decision. Her future career aspirations of becoming an environmental campaigner in a non-governmental organisation suggest that she will probably not convert her cultural capital into a degree of economic capital and a social position similar to her parental background. Clare identifies as heterosexual and is engaged.

Case 2: Giselle

Giselle, also in her mid twenties, comes from a less affluent, but culturally hybrid and geographically mobile middle class family of German and French descent. Her parents were self-employed and worked in the service industry in the Norfolk countryside. Giselle stressed how the false perception of her family as 'economically privileged incomers' by Norfolk 'locals', contributed to her marginalisation within and distance from the rural 'working class' community. This social division, in her view, also shaped her education in a local all-girls convent school and sixth form college, both of which mainly served a middle class clientele. One or two years after her A-levels and a break in which she travelled and worked in agricultural production and social care, she started studying mathematics. Eventually she decided to switch to dance and after a foundation course she migrated to London where she had been accepted into an academic institution of dance. However, Giselle quit her studies before obtaining her degree and went back to care work and factory work in Norfolk. Again, the conversion of relatively high cultural (inherited and partly institutionalised) capital into economic and social capital did not occur. Whilst studying, Giselle came out as a lesbian.

Case 3: Chuck

Chuck, in his late thirties, like Clare, comes from a fairly affluent middle class family and enjoyed a Catholic upbringing in a wealthy area outside London. But, due to the divorce of his parents during his teens he experienced a sudden decrease of economic capital in his family. As he said, a side effect of this family crisis was that he, 'went a bit off the rails', and eventually dropped out of school shortly before his

A-levels. Yet, he managed to find work in profitable businesses of the time and gained a considerable amount of economic capital. Then, whilst working as a self-employed sales-manager for a company selling computers, he accumulated large debts – his second experience of the loss of economic capital. After having paid them off, he decided to drop out of this 'yuppie lifestyle' and went travelling to Australia, where he ended up living for a couple of years getting involved in cultural activities, amongst others in dance culture, and in social work. After returning to England he began to institutionalise the cultural knowledge he had acquired by starting an art foundation course. However, during this year he found out that 'he was not going to make it as an artist' and subsequently changed to design education. Chuck began to explore his sexuality during his stay in Australia and labels himself bisexual.

Case 4: Alex

Alex, in his early forties, originally comes from a North London working class background. By his current occupation as a primary school teacher however, he is part of the middle class stratum. His upward social trajectory differs from the other three downwardly mobile cases. He did not thematise his life course to a great extent, but from his narration it can be gathered that he had identified as a punk, played in a punk band and had worked, amongst others, as a cat-walker, strip dancer and actor, before having arrived at the 'respectable' career of a teacher. He has always lived in London and similar to Chuck, finished his university degree in his thirties. Alex identifies as gay and has lived in several relationships, some of them long-term. At the time of the interview he was cohabiting with his partner.

5. Clubbing and identity projects

The introductory chapter of this thesis discussed one strand of research that emphasised the collective nature and the particular form of togetherness in club and dance cultures. The conceptualisation of this togetherness through Maffesoli's notion of sociality (1995) brought to the fore the 'de-individualising' force of dancing crowds. This liminal quality of sociality was partly circumscribed within the discourse of freedom (in the sense of solidarity or community). In contrast to the notion of collective identification, the narratives discussed in the following passages

reveal quite a pronounced accentuation of individuality. This becomes apparent, for instance, through the discourses of stardom they cling on to or through the construction of a 'spectacular' self. While the strong sense of individuality does not preclude a thematisation of its relation to collectivity, it is one significant element that illustrates how the participation in club cultures can be framed as a project of the self. The term 'project' suggests that it is linked to certain goals and aims of achievement. This does not imply that these four people chose to get involved in dance culture, because they found it to be a suitable context for pursuing certain objectives that had been on their mind beforehand (as 'in-order-to' motive projecting an act in the future). Instead, what I propose is that their narrative identity construction articulates clubbing experiences in terms of different personal achievements (more in the sense of 'because' motives and retrospect meaning-constructions) (see Schütz 1967: 86-95). Not all the narratives of interviewees who could structurally be located within the new middle classes framed their experiences in terms of such highly meaningful projects of the self. Even though such projects, which render clubbing a biographically 'meaningful' experience, partly emanate from the self-hermeneutics incited by the autobiographical genre, I suggest that they, especially in their emphasis on individuality, progress and achievement nevertheless also reflect aspects of a new middle class habitus. The accentuation of achievement, framed by a perspective on the acquisition of capitals, can be seen along the lines of an investment orientation or learning mode to life.

As for achievement and progress, let me review these notions of change against the backdrop of narrative identity before going on to elaborate on the notion of identity project. I argued that otherness is an intervention into sameness identity insofar as it highlights a change of the self (the possible oppositions to sameness being plurality, difference and discontinuity). Two central metaphors relevant in this context are transformation and transgression. While transformation implies a permanent integration of (perhaps transgressive) otherness into sameness (discordance and concordance synthesised, as through achievement), transgression suggests a temporary (or regular, but transitory) disruption of sameness. The otherness of transgression is only provisionally combined with sameness. Either it is eventually dis-authenticated, relegated to the past, and excluded from sameness, or it is invoked as an otherness subordinate to the present reality of the self (as less real or

valid). Another version that we already encountered is the construction of club contexts and selves within – as expression or even amplification of – sameness. Narrative identity also symbolises ethical aims and concerns. A corollary of the dialectic of discordance and concordance (otherness and sameness) is that clubbing not just features as an unequivocal sphere for realising certain ethical aims, but is also problematised and questioned as to its ethical value. The construction of a project of the self, therefore, may also be connected to a problematisation of clubbing and be part of a reorientation of the self. Likewise, framing experiences in terms of an identity project does not imply that the identity project was successful. Achievement can be thematised also from the point of view of failure.

Some examples of the last chapter help clarify how meanings of the 'other reality' of dance culture or the otherness of the self may come to demarcate an identity project. Biographical evaluations of clubbing, whilst significant for identity construction, are not necessarily part of an identity *project*, a wider phantasmatic, future-oriented complex of transforming (and improving) the self into an individualised identity. Yong's example in the last chapter showed that the reality-status that he ascribed to the otherness of the dance world made it possible to symbolise it as a step towards the accomplishment of his identity project as artist. Sally, by contrast, although she evaluated the experience of clubbing and the agency of drugs in terms of its impact on her life, did not construct it as a project of the self. Her heterosexual romance narrative, which could appear to represent such a project as well, was mainly structured by meanings of luck and coincidence rather than by achievement. It is this emphasis on achievement, self-development and the active shaping of one's life which, I argue, moulds experiences into projects of the self. While life narratives and experiences are formed in retrospect, there is a difference between biographical evaluations of certain events just as meaningful outcome and as realisation of what appears to have been a goal (or part of a general goal) all along actively brought on the way by the self. Following on from this, it is possible to suppose that the ironicisation of clubbing experiences or realities (as less real or valid) forecloses the construction of a project. However, while the examples of Kay or Hailey discussed in Chapter 4 illustrate that this applies to some extent, the dis-authentication of clubbing reality does not rule out the connection to a different identity-project. For example, in Giselle's case, clubbing served as such a project for

some time, but its revaluation was linked to the formation of a new project. Similarly, Clare ironicised a homosexual self as intoxicated and unreal, nevertheless, this self was integrated in a wider project of experimenting with unconventional practices. Therefore, there is no direct correlation between the reality-status ascribed to dance contexts and the framing of clubbing experiences as a project of the self. Alex, for instance, inscribed his clubbing-self with notions of authenticity and yet, he did not formulate this in terms of an identity project. His narrative, as well as Sally's, will be integrated in the discussion as contrasting examples.

Having outlined the notion of identity project and how it relates to construction of otherness and to the aestheticisation of the self, I will now introduce the four narratives in terms of three dimensions: firstly, the general configuration of continuity and change, secondly, the biographical spacing (= the temporal and spatial structuring) of clubbing and lastly, the involvement in dance culture as (part of) identity project(s) of the self. While all the four narratives elaborated on changes that shaped their lives, they gave different emphasis and meaning to these changes. Chuck delineated the most fervent interventions in sameness identity, not only in terms of his sexual identity, but also in terms of his character that was transformed from a late 1980s 'yuppie' towards a post-materialistic attitude.[156] The involvement in dance culture was quite clearly marked off as a phase, as a sort of time-out experience during his stay in Australia, except for the initiation into rave and ecstasy culture that took place in England. Since his return he goes out clubbing only occasionally. The clubbing period in Australia was accounted for in terms of several projects, first a 'hedonist' phase of sex, drugs and clubbing, which then evolved into a period of work involvement in the dance scene and in other communities, such as AIDS and drugs counselling and Mardi Gras. This work role and the acquisition of artistic skills constituted central components in his project. Initially, this self-realisation through taking up a role of responsibility within the dance scene was linked to a 'freedom of community', before being related to individualised purposes. A third project emerging from these previous ones was the successful institutionalisation of his artistic skills into educational capital. All these projects

[156] His narrative is also reminiscent of the Christian story type of the 'prodigal son returning home'. However, this cannot be followed up here.

finally served to illustrate his general project of personal 'reformation'. The otherness of dance culture became a marker of discontinuity of his identity.

In contrast to Chuck's narrative, Giselle's story maintained more sense of continuity, yet indicated two significant 'psychological' changes. This was first, her sexual coming-out, which was linked to a problematisation of femininity, and second, a period of depression, in the course of which she decided to give up her dance studies. Aside from these changes, Giselle's narrative built up a tension between continuity and change; whilst clinging on to romantic discourses of the vocation to be or become a dancer, Giselle also stressed her desire to constantly 'reinvent' herself, to start new things and move to new places. Giselle's clubbing accompanied her years and contexts of studying and was narrated very much in the context of sameness-identity. She withdrew from clubbing when she quit her dance studies and when she moved out of London again. Her project of clubbing was mainly circumscribed by sexuality, but it was also linked to her aim of becoming a dancer. She storied her self through the story-ing of a series of chronologically arranged clubbing-experiences. The club nights were processed and evaluated extensively whereby clubbing appeared as a test ground for the self rather than as a community context in which belonging could be forged. This high degree of reflexivity about the development of particular skills, roles, body looks and practices illustrates a 'learning mode to life' (Featherstone 1991: 90-92), as she evaluated her performance and enjoyment of particular nights and reworked these experiences into anticipations of future self-enactments in clubs. Her withdrawal from clubbing and dance went along with a revaluation and questioning of (her self in) these action contexts and was followed by a reformulation of her identity project, likewise emphasising discontinuity of her self.

Clare moulded her character through a strong sense of continuity throughout different experiences of otherness. Yet, her narrative embraced several dimensions. It sketched a temporary transgressive otherness of clubbing that was superseded by sameness, further, a transformative otherness integrated into sameness, as well as a dialectic of sameness and otherness, which cast elements of club involvement as part of her 'secreted' sameness. However, the general changes of the self were not framed as crucial psychological transformations that marked off the present from a dis-

authenticated previous self (or reality). Instead, they were embedded in the sameness of her gender and sexual identity, almost expected and normal in the script of her identity. Apart from her work as a club dancer, which was inscribed by romantic discourses of becoming a dancer, the most significant change in this respect was the engagement with her boyfriend. Clare sketched her clubbing as a past period, at the time of her secondary education and her university studies. Her 'real' clubbing, as she said, was followed by her work involvement as a dancer. This whole period of clubbing and working in clubs was framed as a sort of alternative, unconventional, transgressive track of her life that allowed for the occasional 'coming-out' of an alter ego running alongside her everyday life of education. Although it did not lead to a transformation of certain life-course orientations (for instance regarding her career), clubbing appeared as quite an encompassing lifestyle, serving as a spacing that pulled together several other aspects of her life such as leisure, work, friends and relationship. Her projects centred on her dancing, informed by notions of stardom, and on a 'transgressive' play with sexual roles and different personae. Her 'individualised' identity as a star-dancer, the meanings she derived from her work and the way she defined her relation to the 'crowd' are crucial in the formation of this project. But clubbing was also linked to another life-project – that of love and marriage. Her withdrawal from clubbing and dance work did not rest on such a fervent dis-authentication or critique as in Giselle's case (apart from her table-dancing), not least, because her boyfriend and fiancée was also part of her clubbing-life. The change, located within her sameness, was cast as a fade-out and development into something else.

Alex, similar to Giselle and Chuck, expressed change in his life strongly in terms of psychological progress. His relatively new, present relationship constituted a point of re-interpretation and biographical evaluation that drew a discontinuity to a previous self and his dis-authenticated relationships. The crisis caused by a nervous breakdown was also evaluated as progress because of the self-problematisation and therapeutic change it brought on the way. Apart from these issues, Alex' talk focused on his present life and cast spots into the past rather than having been structured by a story of the self and the change it endured. This synchronic talk in the mode of self-introspection exemplified the self's struggle with ethics and morality. Clubbing, in Alex' narration, was not narrated as past activity, but as a regular, routinised

weekend activity of relaxation, temporary excess and otherness. This otherness was constructed as transgression of symbolic relations, of ritualised structures and routines and was also articulated through the image of excessive consumption. The problematic side of the otherness of clubbing was much more pronounced than in the narrations above. Although he evaluated clubbing as biographically meaningful (he met his partner on the Millennium night and goes clubbing with him regularly), he did not design it as a project that symbolised achievement. The model of romantic love, his contemplation about relationships, as well as his attempts to make ethical aims and moral norms compatible and to harmonise the different spheres and activities of life came closest to such a project of the self.

5.1 Identity projects in the context of clubbing

The following analysis will proceed in two ways. In the first part I will discuss three particular identity projects formed through the otherness of dance culture: firstly, work involvement and artistic practices; secondly, dance and sexuality and thirdly, romantic love and relationships. Each of the sections will feature certain cases, yet, as the various identity projects are closely related (e.g. Clare), I decided to discuss Clare's work involvement as part of the dance project. In elaborating on these projects I will also expand on the life contexts and the more general ethical precepts that are highlighted in the narratives. Taking the lines of some of the narratives, the second part of the analysis (5.2) will discuss an identity project that arose from, or is articulated against, the problematisation of clubbing.

5.1.1 Cultural producers

Angela McRobbie, in several recent writings (1999a, 1999b), drew attention to popular culture as a site of production. She pointed out that the emerging micro-economies of culture are becoming increasingly important as an alternative labour market. Following on from this, she called for attention to be directed towards the issue of cultural producers, largely absent within research, as well as to the (inter-)relation between production and consumption. Arguing that employment in these economies traverses the boundaries of class, ethnicity and gender, she emphasised that eking out a living in this field has become crucial especially for (young, black)

working-class people "as an escape from the inevitability of unemployment, or in preference to an unrewarding job in the service sector" (McRobbie 1999a: 27). This is a new perspective, as it was often the new middle classes, who were considered to be of significance in the new economy of culture (Bourdieu 1984, Lash and Urry 1987). Following Paul du Gay's (1996) point about the de-differentiation of work and leisure roles through the language of self-enhancement and creativity, McRobbie contended that the notion of personal creativity "provides them [= people working in dance culture, S.R.] with a utopian idea of breaking down the distinction between dull work and enjoyable leisure" (McRobbie 1999a: 148). While this argument alludes to the theme that work involvement, for example in dance culture, can become a project of the self, it remains inattentive to the variety of work roles within dance culture that involve not only (different degrees of) creativity, but also dullness and monotony. It overlooks the gender divide within work in dance and music culture that McRobbie (1994) herself had drawn attention to in previous writings. Moreover, the politics of experience that shape the accomplishment of work roles, and the meaning derived from such work, passes unremarked. While I agree with McRobbie that the production of club and dance culture cannot be attributed to a core class base, the subsequent discussion will provide some examples that testify that gender and class are significant parameters in the scripting of (club) work experiences. Nowhere is this more clearly evidenced than within different meaning-constructions of identical work roles and even contexts, as in the cases of Clare and Sally. The following analysis also suggests that the discourse of self-enhancement and creativity may particularly serve as a texture for identity projects of (new) middle class producers. What is to be noted is that production roles in clubbing, if framed in terms of an identity project, spawn different meanings. They are cast as roles of responsibility within a collective, as artistic practice, as a mission, as personal development and fulfilment; crucially, they are everything else but a job.[157]

Chuck's role as a cultural producer in the dance scene is part of his narrative of personal reformation. Apart from invoking the biblical story-type, this narrative of reforming the self is also illustrative of Thatcherite political discourse. The various identity projects that Chuck outlined, despite being foremost contextualised by post-

[157] This can also be seen as a characteristic of 'postindustrial service spaces' (Lash and Urry 1994: 199). Chapter 7 will elaborate on this point in more detail.

Thatcherite Britain, can be mapped on to models of the self that were propagated by Thatcherist 'character reform.' This political discourse itself was informed by two partly incompatible ethics (Heelas 1991). That is, an individualistic utilitarian ethic of evaluating acts in terms of their good consequences for the self and an ethic of identifying acts as right or wrong by recourse to an authoritative source. Paul Heelas has sketched four different characters or (partly) contradictory aspects of the self that Thatcherite discourse propagated based on these ethics. It featured an energetic, persuasive and competitive 'enterprising self', a 'sovereign consumer' centred on the extension of choice, an 'active citizen' committed to taking up responsibilities for the community and a 'conservative self' oriented to values of hard work, family and education (ibid. 73-76).

Chuck's narration is structured by a frame of loss and gain, which the story-ing of his first clubbing experience right at the beginning of his narration illustrates. In the late 1970s, at the time of the crisis around the divorce of his parents, Chuck attended soul parties of the African-Caribbean community in his town. In an acrobatic frenzy of human pyramid building, people were trying to 'get as high as possible, before everything collapsed and passed into nothing'. However, this sense of taking part in a community context contrasts with the 'enterprise self' that he sketches in relation to his first work experiences in computer business several years later. As he says, in his early twenties he was an

> archetypal yuppie in as much that my only goal was my career and making lots of money and I really didn't give a shit about anybody else apart from my family (Interview 24-01-2001: 12).

Yet, the 'enterprise' culture of the company he worked for and the lifestyle of his colleagues hardly corresponded with the ideal of Thatcherite politics. Instead of a morality of responsibility and hard work that was to curtail the utilitarian individualism, these 'enterprising' selves engaged in conspicuous, 'hedonistic' consumption, excessive alcohol drinking and, as for Chuck, ran up debts, which again emphasises loss. Freedom of consumption is also conjured up in Chuck's narration about his 'wild life' of sex, drugs and clubbing in Australia, at the beginning of the 1990s, in which the 'sovereign consumer' had almost shed off the duty to be productive. This lifestyle, set 'outside of his world', turned upside down

the routine of a 'normal' working life. He was going out seven nights a week, getting up late, going for coffee at lunchtime, spending the afternoon on the beach and going out clubbing at night.

> Chuck: We were having sit-ins and love-ins and some of these events were, for me personally, were, they were great fun; they were great exploratory experiences, I mean, sexually and also, in the club world and in drugs. [...] I was bisexual at that time and had ah, I had a girlfriend and two or three boyfriends and I was also working as a male prostitute, so I was having a lot of sex (laughs) (Interview 24-01-2001: 7).

All these spheres of explorative and transgressive otherness, however, eventually led to a form of economic capitalisation enabling him to earn a living as a non-legalised immigrant lacking a work permit. In this respect, the newly awakened 'enterprising self', making money by supplying drugs to friends, is evaluated and justified through recourse to an authoritative ethic of right and wrong. Likewise, the potentially problematic otherness of prostitution is counterbalanced by the positive otherness of the 'sovereign consumer'. Prostitution is portrayed as a lifestyle in the line of the intensification and exploration of sexual pleasure.

The third work involvement in the realm of the production of clubbing though, indicates an important transition and fusion of the different Thatcherite selves embodied in Chuck's narration. The 'enterprising self', now committing his abilities to the service of the dance community, adopted the traits of the 'active citizen'. Two Australians in their late 30s had accumulated a 'warehouse full of furniture, carpets and tables' to set up chill-out areas at parties and raves. Withdrawing from the dance scene, they handed the equipment over to Chuck sending him on the mission to make good use of it for the dance community, 'to keep it going'. Chuck described this transfer of capital in terms of the kinship responsibility that it entailed. This new work involvement is associated with the 'spirit of collectivism' that gave him a lot of hope and further spurred his affiliation to environments of artistic practice. It is also coupled with a notion of mastery, as it helped him cut down 'excessive' drug-consumption. Yet, Chuck also delineated his disillusion about the community of the dance scene. In the course of his nine-months involvement he came to realise that some individuals subordinated the collective purpose to their private business

interests.[158] For some time his idealism made him put up with 'menace', 'violence' and the 'ugly commercial side' of some promoters, who would withhold his pay; until however, his whole equipment got destroyed at a party. In this story the protagonist appears as a failing enterprising self, who had miscalculated the risks of this enterprise because of having been tempted to participate in the production of a large-scale party. In the further course of events he upset the promoter's private interest by acting responsibly for the community, which led to a big argument. Chuck's story accentuates how his care and engagement for collective interests thwarted his individual interests, and, moreover, were punished rather than rewarded. Additionally, the breakdown of his individual business is cast as a disruption of the hereditary relationship he had entered into. Instead of using and preserving the capital stock for the son of the friend who had given it to him, he had ruined the heritage. The story therefore sketches the failure to fulfil his responsibility on three levels: in terms of the responsibility for the self as enterprising individual, for friends and family and for the community or dance scene.

Despite the disillusionment about community values in the party business Chuck did not withdraw from, but found new work roles in other community related contexts. After working for the Sydney Mardi Gras, he took up an educational and social work role in an AIDS counselling body embarking on safety and information campaigns aimed at young heroin users. At the same time he started again to take part in clubbing as a consumer. This phase – connected to a newly opened S&M club and marked once more as sexual exploration – designates a further transition towards individualised roles and identity projects (later continuing outside clubbing). His (artistic) participation within the collective context of the dance scene is cast in a new, individualistic way: not at the service of a community, but as a spectacular body and star. Describing how he made 'really elaborate costumes' in order to be noticed and be given a VIP-pass, he pointed to his public recognition in the magazines. In contrast to earlier accounts of various club-nights, the protagonist now was not in a passive state of being staggered by the influx of extraordinary impressions, but in the active state of making the environment gaping at *him* as the source of the spectacular.

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[158] In relation to traveller culture and free festivals, Kevin Hetherington (1992: 95) pointed to the entanglement of the ethos of gift with real cutthroat business.

Similar to his introduction to clubbing, Chuck's decision to return home and to withdraw from the clubbing lifestyle was related to a family affair. In particular, it was initiated by his father's intervention. Implicitly this inscribes the family with the task and capacity to "domesticate and familialise the dangerous passions of adults, tearing them away from public vice" (Rose 1999: 74). It stages the Thatcherite 'conservative self' oriented to values of education, family and work. This contrasts with Simon Reynolds' contention that ecstasy and rave culture marked an end of the Thatcher inculcated work ethic (1998: 47). But Reynolds also noted the continuity to Thatcherite politics in the "rampant hedonism" of youth and dance culture.

> Acid house's pleasure-principled euphoria was very much a product of the eighties: a kind of *spiritual materialism*, a greed for intense experiences (ibid. 47).

This quote alludes to a shift in the utilitarian ethic of consumption, a shift from material consumption to the consumption of experiences, which Chuck turned to inward-oriented self-development, as his emphasis of extraordinary experiences illustrated. Equally, the consecutive mode of his narrative, which focussed on the succession of actions and events and staged unexpected consequences, highlighted the utilitarian evaluation of consequences. His present, occasional clubbing is embedded in a similar individualistic or therapeutic framework. Clubbing, as he said, enables him to balance his emotions. It represents a certain 'outlook on the world'. Overall, it is evaluated for its impact on his psychological transformation: having helped him open up to people, become less judgemental, build trust, and 'forgive' and forget about problematic aspects of his own biography. In other words, it is a psychological apparatus. Chuck's example framed cultural production in dance culture as an identity project strongly linked to values of community. By contrast, the following discussion will touch on identity projects of cultural production expressed through leadership roles (Clare and Yong).

5.1.2 Dance

The constitution of identity projects through dance is a device particularly appealing to women. As an art form, dance accentuates individuality and evokes an

articulation of collectivity different from the mode of solidarity and community discussed above. Romantic tales of becoming a dancer include aspects of luck as well as achievement, notions of talent as well as hard work (McRobbie 1984, 1997a). Before focussing on dance as a cultural production role in clubbing (Clare), I will discuss Giselle's example, which links the consumption of dance in clubbing contexts to an identity project.

For Giselle, clubbing and dancing alike are projects inscribed into her sameness-identity. The passion for dancing appeared as a feature of her character, if not as 'natural predisposition'. She marked significant beginnings of her dancing and going out history at the ages of six and nine. Dance is attached to a body symbolism, by being seen to represent personality traits such as individuality, confidence, creativity, innovation and erotic power. It is a practice of gaining recognition or symbolic capital. Her practice of dancing in a club conjoins dance as art form with the pursuit of sexual interests and the construction of a flirtatious self. Both, the sexually charged, flirtatious aspect as well as the artistic, experimental aspect are connected to certain goals and evaluated upon their achievement in terms of attention and recognition. In contrast to Clare's project of sexual experimentation, Giselle's practice of club dance as a sexual identity project highlights the 'excess' of (lesbian) 'cruising', of securing as many erotic flirts as possible. Her self-image as a sort of femme fatal who optimises her choice and manages her contacts is textured by the freedom of consumption. However, in taking into account the possible offence of her playful attitude and in limiting the pursuit of all erotic interests, she appears as a self-critical, responsible femme-fatal. Constraint is also discernible in her identity project of becoming a professional (art) dancer. Here the self is in a constant struggle between the successful liberation, expression or coming-out of the authentic self and its repression and constraint due to mechanisms of social closure, in particular in the dance institution. The lack of opportunity to realise her vocation of dance is put down to the unjust hierarchisation of certain body types. As these body types are seen as apparently natural, unchangeable dispositions, the self who lacks a 'dancer's body' is deprived of the chance of achieving. Not buying into the institutional culture of egocentrism, self-indulgence and competition is another factor that Giselle named as a reason for the lack of achievement. Instead, because of adhering to values such as a bodily consideration for other people in the dance class, Giselle felt that she had

to constrain her movements in the dance class. As a result, the self's potential for developing 'crazy', 'special', extravagant movements remained unfulfilled and unrecognised. The notion of exclusion and marginalisation, typical of new cultural intermediaries (Lash and Urry 1987: 296, see also Rose 1989: 268) is emphasised throughout Giselle's narration and intricately linked to femininity. Her vocation to dance, contrasts with the construction of her body as other. It does not pass as feminine. From her childhood on, Giselle's body was not seen as 'naturally' feminine, but as a body to be worked at in order to become more feminine. Body height and weight, ways of walking and sitting, were targets of her mother's regime of correction and monitoring. Emphasising her French background, Giselle described her mother as having been keen to teach her daughter a 'feminine' comportment. However, Giselle's body was not only marked by a negative difference ('clumsy, messy, tall'), but more ambivalently, the mother's interventions also affirmed her confidence and encouraged her to perform the body. At the age of nine Giselle was sent to dance training as part of her middle class upbringing. Against the marked deficiencies of femininity, Giselle thus posed her pre-mature accomplishments of femininity. She related this image-consciousness and insecurity to her parents' concern with look and their view of children as 'products'. As Beverley Skeggs has noted, "the appearance of women, via their lack of/or associations with femininity, is often the means by which class becomes read as embodied" (2000: 133). Femininity in Giselle's narration was doubly coded; it appeared as the source of exclusion and difference as well as a vehicle of class distinction and of upholding middle class identity in the scenario of a downward social mobility. In this respect, the association of lesbian sexual identity with working class butchness,[159] created a possible otherness against which Giselle articulated her gender and middle-classness through the construction of femininity. Dance and education seemed to counterbalance the challenge posed by the possible recognition through devaluated otherness. Yet, as we saw, this counterbalance through femininity did not succeed because of the lack of a 'feminine dancer's body'. The complex of femininity therefore narrated the experience of incompatible worlds, of spheres with contradictory values. Both the lack of, as well as the association with, femininity was constructed as cause for social marginalisation, either in the dance class or within lesbian culture. Not only was

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[159] Beverley Skeggs (1997: 118) explained how the category 'lesbian' was produced through association with black and white working-class women.

femininity the means to read class as embodied, but in some way it also articulated an embodied reading of the self's class location. The emphasis on the constraint of the self's freedom, agency and potential of achievement, contrasts with the accentuation of the otherness of Giselle's sexual identity project in clubbing.

While the issue of femininity posed a constraint on Giselle's identity projects, Clare made heterosexual femininity compatible with transgression, otherness and her identity projects. Clare's self-construction as a dancer similarly alluded to a romantic discourse, combining notions of talent and natural predisposition with work and achievement. Although the naturalisation of female labour, especially of dance, qualifies achievement,[160] Clare nevertheless affirmed her agency through the identity project of dance work. On the one hand her narrative sketched overall achievement, on the other hand success was illustrated through stories in which she appeared as a rather passive agent (see below). Having fulfilled her desire to become a dancer despite lacking the 'ideal' body, Clare conceived of the (club) dance world in terms of a utopian egalitarianism (McRobbie 1984: 135), which warranted recognition of her talent despite an 'imperfect' body. Her role as a cultural producer oscillates between the notion of work and job on the one hand and self-fulfilment through artistic expression and sexual experimentation on the other hand. Yet, the cultural practice of dance, due to its association with body and sexuality, is also in danger of being othered as immoral, less respectable or serious artistic practice and is therefore in more need of justification. Yong, for example, in describing his role as a DJ, articulated mind, knowledge (of the music genre) and the mastery of technology. Despite the status work of keeping up to date and in the know about music and technology, he framed his cultural practice as artistic profession and never as work. Clare presented the otherness of her dance in line with her own otherness, in fact a secreted dimension of her sameness as a 'naughty, adventurous and transgressive' character. In addition to the self-fulfilment that she sketched, she also accounted for her dance as socially valuable. These social values attached to her work speak of the discursive positionings Clare was subjectified by in her secondary education, which provided, as I suggest, a significant texture for her role as a cultural producer. The boarding school she attended combined the academic education of a 'social elite'

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[160] Work, if inscribed into a notion of feminine nature and its predispositions, for instance, a disposition for self-presentation, is not acknowledged as skill and work.

with a 'life-world' education of socially responsible citizens. It conveyed values of confidence, hard work, self-discipline and leadership along with an interest for arts, creativity, self-development and an awareness of the reality of less privileged people. Against the backdrop of the propagated openness to the surrounding life-world and service to the community certain compulsory courses were implemented such as the so-called 'Creativity, Action and Service Programme'. This comprised art or theatre work, service for special needs groups or involvement in environmental work and community organisations.

Clare was involved in different types of dance work, in fetish dancing, table-dancing and podium dancing. Having been selected on the spot when meeting the agent of the 'Fetish Crew' through a friend,[161] Clare associated the Fetish dance work with achieving celebrity status within the club dance scene. The shift to a producer role appeared as a process of maturation and growing up. However, similar to Chuck's work as prostitute, fetish dancing was also cast as consumption of a lifestyle connected to an exploratory attitude towards sexuality and drugs. In this respect, Clare endorsed the view that fetish dancing fulfilled her personal interest in fetish, yet she confined it to wearing fetish outfits instead of actually practising it sexually. A moral perspective framed this otherness of experimentation. The interest in fetish was awakened in a 'discovery' on the first, 'coincidental occasion' (or set-up test-situation) of trying on a fetish outfit and was affirmed by the dance agent. Discourses of stardom, as Richard Dyer (1979: 43) has noted, construct the star as ordinary and special character, as one of the crowd, yet different. Accordingly, Clare emphasised her difference and distinctiveness. As somebody who adds atmosphere to a club night, she thought she should be allowed in free in clubs even if not working. Instead of dancing with the crowd, she felt the stage was the right space for her extravagant free-style dancing. Clare articulated the tension between leadership and egalitarianism also by speaking on behalf of the ordinary customer and sketching out her policies as the would-be mayor of clubbing, proposing that *everyone* should be allowed in free in clubs. She justified distinction and being noticed by referring to 'professionalism' and to the duties of the job, which would require being outstandingly crazy and creative. The narcissistic gain of being watched and noticed

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[161] This can be compared to Valerie Walkerdine's (1984: 173) analysis of feminine agency in narratives of romance as 'actively passive' state of waiting for being found and selected.

was justified by pointing to the reciprocity of her dancing. She viewed herself as a role model with the mission to transmit encouraging and emancipatory social messages to female clubbers. She wished to inspire them, support their self-confidence and open up people's minds, for example, through displaying 'bisexuality' in her dancing. The leadership image however, was coupled with notions of responsibility and care, of bettering people's lives and making them happy. Similarly, she likened her work as a table-dancer with the role of a psychiatrist, who listens to the problems of clients. By contrast, Yong's role as transmitter of symbolic goods (messages and moods), whilst also embedded in a discourse of leadership and stardom, conjured up images of masculinity and sexual potency (see Chapter 4, section 2). Carrying out her 'duty of pleasure', Clare repeatedly emphasised her dance role as personal fulfilment. The downsides of it as a 'job' were thematised less explicitly. As a result of extending her dance work into podium dancing the fun aspect diminished and its facet as emotional work came to the fore. In contrast to the lifestyle of her work as a freestyle fetish dancer, which was connected to partying with other people of the 'Crew', her podium dancing of fifteen minutes choreographed sets is fairly routinised and not part of her own leisure practices. This is also because her podium dance work is situated in clubs that do not match with her taste of clubbing. That is, as she called them, 'meat market' clubs, where she is frequently confronted with aggression and abusive behaviour of punters.

Considering the identity projects of Yong and Clare, another difference is to be noted. Yong, similar to Chuck, intended to further capitalise on his role as cultural producer by expanding into other artistic activities and eventually into a profession as a film director. DJ-ing is but the first step of his ambitions. Clare, on the other hand, did not link her club dance profession to other (artistic) identity projects, but preferred to keep it separate from her official career and curriculum vitae. She planned to reduce and partly to replace her dance work by a day job after graduating. If at all, she imagined adopting a managerial role in the entrepreneurial activities of her fiancé, who she envisaged setting up his business as a dance agent for clubs. Despite the separation of the dance work from the official career path, dance work was a relevant element of Clare's biographical construction. Indeed, her achievements as a dancer supported a general optimistic outlook of being able to realise other aspirations or identity projects alike.

> Clare: As things have been turning out so far, a few years ago I wished to be a dancer and now I am, when I started my degree, I wished to get a two-one and now I have one, so. Hopefully, I will get into ... [= environmental NGO, S.R.] (Interview 05-07-2000: 52).

Sally, a mother in her early twenties from South London, worked for the same agencies and did the same types of dance work as Clare. She started her dance work after having worked as a dental nurse for one year. In contrast to Clare her dance work started with table-dancing before she got into club dancing. She conceived of her dance work much more in terms of a more or less enjoyable job that she was doing for some time in order to earn her living and to make money.

> Sally: It wasn't very interesting at all, it was just a way of getting money every week to go out and get mashed up at the weekend (Interview 11-10-2000: 14).

Sally weaved aspects of her dance work into her narration, but, unlike Clare, did not topicalise it. As she said, "there is not really much to tell about that" (Interview 11-10-2000: 16). It was merely by 'chance and luck' that she was 'at the right place at the right time' and got involved in dance work. In contrast to Clare's evaluation of the Fetish Crew as lifestyle, consumption and personal fulfilment, Sally did not attach this work context to any identity project of transformation and achievement. While underscoring the 'wicked feelings' of dancing and interacting with the crowd as well as her fondness of gaining attention and admiration, she somewhat dis-authenticated the otherness of her dance work.

> Sally: For me the Fetish Crew is a big act, a big act to go on stage with a bit; it's not something that I take home with me. It's something purely for the stage [...] it's all pretend for me, all fiction, not really true (Interview 11-10-2000: 17-18).

5.1.3 Love

Several research studies have emphasised that for women taking part in rave culture, dancing and socialising gained priority over romantic or sexual encounters (for example Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 31). In a similar vein, it was suggested that rave and ecstasy culture signalled a shift in gender relations, in patterns of interactions and, in particular, an end of predatory male behaviour.

However, as recent surveys indicated, clubs are at least to some extent perceived as contexts where partners can be found (Mintel 1996: 29). A couple of my interviewees evaluated clubbing in terms of a romantic relationship that was brought on in this context. In the following passages I will compare Clare's identity project of romantic love with a similar narration provided by Alex. Clare's story-ing of the relationship and engagement with her partner was intricately linked to her identity project as a dancer. Not only was her boyfriend a club dancer himself, but he also brought her in touch with other dance agencies. The relationship therefore also extended to the work sphere. They started to dance together, make their costumes together and perform as a couple. Moreover, her boyfriend appeared as a 'rescuer', as the relationship instigated her to withdraw from drug-taking and table-dancing. In this respect, the narrative of love was interweaved with the narrative of mastery. The relationship project not only constituted the grid of her overall story of success, but it also came to serve as a justification of other projects, especially the (sexually experimental) fetish dance work. The classic closure of the heterosexual female narrative (engagement and the prospect of marriage) is thereby spiced up with a spark of unconventionality contextualised by a discourse of stardom. The story-ing of the engagement ritual, recalling Hollywood fairy tales, illustrates this. The engagement took place in the Millennium night when both Clare and her boyfriend were performing in a club. Having been surprised by her boyfriend's proposal on stage at midnight, this story articulated the self in terms of a very mixed capacity to act (agency). On the one it appeared as a rather passive agent. The action context created by others almost forced Clare into a certain role.[162] On the other hand, the self was also cast as a star, of being not only the centre of attention, but also the integral part of the Millennium event, whose success was partly tied in with the accomplishment of the engagement. Despite this 'actively passive' agency and the moments of luck that Clare sketched in her narration, it also conveyed a strong sense of achievement (see Chapter 4, which noted how she narrated the successful seduction of her boyfriend).

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[162] Zizek elaborated this point quite neatly: "Therein lies the paradox of the notion of the 'performative' or speech act: in the very gesture of accomplishing an act by uttering words, I am deprived of authorship; the 'big Other' (the symbolic institution) speaks through me. It is no wonder then, that there is something puppet-like about people whose professional function is essentially performative (judges, kings...): they are reduced to a living embodiment of the symbolic institution" (Zizek 1997: 110).

Narratives of romantic love often resort to symbolisms by bringing events, times, objects and people into meaningful relationships with each other and by unifying different coincidental parts in terms of their representation of a teleological or holistic 'whole'. In their emphasis on teleology, contemporary romance narratives are also entrenched with a discourse of authenticity and self-realisation. Alex' narration cast, similar to Clare, a concurrence of the general with the particular. The general caesura of the Millennium night coincided with a significant caesura in his life. The beginning of a romantic relationship marked this private caesura. The story-ing of this event situated the protagonist in a position of desire for something to happen in the Millennium celebrations. This desire did not lead to an active, 'instrumental search', but instead, the appearance of a possible object of desire happened by chance.

> Alex: I walked in and I saw him and that was it (claps his hands). I was like 'I want to be with him' (Interview 06-11-2000: 3).

At this point Alex engaged in an active pursuit of his interest, inviting his future boyfriend to join him to another club night. In the following course of events the self went through a 'transgressive', liminal state of losing control and consciousness having taken too many drugs. Similar to Clare, his to-be boyfriend became his 'rescuer' and looked after him, sparking off the romance. As mentioned above, Alex' concern with relationships was a narrative element that came close to constituting an identity project. His reflections on previous relationships and on the psychological progress he made carried a notion of achievement. Nevertheless, the notion of achievement was offset by the de-thematisation of his agency either through luck and coincidence or through the epitomisation of the psyche. The psyche was in some way reified as independent agency, constraining the self by spinning 'terrible wheels' of recurring events and sustaining self-perpetuating structures of behaviour difficult to break away from. Alex' transformation appeared fragile in the light of his worries of 'slipping back into his old self'. While Giselle was hindered in realising her identity projects because of the constraint imposed by the 'outside', Alex' constraint of agency emerged from his 'inside'. His transformation conveyed less the notion of achievement rather than a 'coming to terms' with, and a sense of control of, his emotional burdens. Although he thematised his self-development, Alex did not highlight otherness as an aim of becoming and transforming the self

into another identity, of inventing new roles, learning, achieving or acquiring capital. Instead, his focus was directed to maintaining control and preventing the disintegration of everyday social identities. The construction of otherness and transgression through clubbing was not integrated into sameness as transformation on a linear time plane. Neither was it dis-authenticated and 'othered' as problematic. Instead, it was problematised in terms of the harmonisation of partly conflicting life spheres on a cyclical time plane. This emphasis on integration and synthesisation is evident in the following evaluation.

> Alex: I've got my job, I've got my love and I've got my life (Interview 06-11-2000: 24).

Yet, harmonising different roles and areas of life went along with a sense of concern about possible incongruities. The freedom (or duty) of pleasure was balanced by social responsibility and a morality of duty. Alex described himself as being infused with morality, in other words, with ideas of good and bad. With respect to the characters propagated by Thatcherite political discourse, Alex's narration could be said to stage a 'conservative self', policing and setting limits to the 'sovereign consumer' who tends to forget the duty of work. In contrast to the identity projects discussed above, Alex' consumption of club culture did not involve the use of time in order to accumulate (sub)cultural capital by developing artistic abilities and professions, but rather appeared as expenditure, as a practice of *wasting* time (Lash and Urry 1994: 58). However, the freedom of consumption and excess, the expenditure of time through clubbing and drug-taking, was kept at bay by a freedom of discipline (the instrumental calculation and management of time for work and other aspects of life). On the one hand clubbing figured as a practice of relaxation providing for a temporary distantiation from daily routines, on the other hand the disruption of ritualised, cyclical time structures and practices, the de-routinisation, aroused fear and worries. Unlike Chuck, who glorified the liberation from daily routines of work during his stay in Australia, Alex disapproved of the reversal of day and night time structures. Overall, the otherness constituted by his involvement in dance culture was a source of moral concern in as much as it was inscribed with pleasure. This leads me on to the final discussion of the chapter, which focuses once again on Giselle's narration in order to trace her identity projects that followed from the dis-authentication of clubbing reality.

5.2 The problematisation of clubbing and new identity projects

Both this and the preceding chapter have elaborated on the ethical ambivalence of otherness imagined in clubbing experience. This could even fuel the argument that the construction of identity projects or the biographical evaluations of personal change induced by clubbing are anchored in, if not sometimes developed out of, the danger of otherness becoming problematic. For example, while Clare cast the Fetish Crew as an action context of personal fulfilment, she also described it as overwhelming and absorbing. Talking about her worthy identity projects of work and relationship balanced the negative otherness inherent in her narrative of drug experiences. Chuck, Alex and Clare, as well as other interviewees, problematised the excess of consumption – mainly in relation to drugs and time. In a similar vein, Giselle's reorientation to new identity projects rested on a critique and dis-authentication of the self dancing, clubbing and flirting 'obsessively'. These practices were relegated from the sameness of the self to its then dis-authenticated otherness. Giselle associated these practices with a 'decoration' of herself with images, similar to the work of femininity and the creation of looks. The ethical aim of authenticity was re-directed to her 'inner self' and her emotions. Rather than 'working from the outside in', she said, she needed to 'work from the inside out.'[163] After quitting her studies in the final year due to severe disruptions caused by health problems, Giselle moved back to Norfolk, started to work in the local sugar beat production, began to write prose and poetry and to explore other creative skills. Similar to her accounts of clubbing, the move to Norfolk appeared as an identity project linked to certain goals. The narrative imagination of literary production conjured up the image of a 'writer in the countryside', living at a distance from the local people, 'who are really much in their own culture.' Giselle's writer self, similar to Clare's dancer self, was cast as missionary role, evoking a notion of infusing the rural culture with progressive ideas and worldviews. Correspondingly, work in the sugar beat production was narrated not as being driven by economic necessity, but as

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[163] This has also an interesting resonance with different techniques of acting. One is to base the performance of feelings on observation and mimicry, with the actor maintaining an inner distance to the role. Another one was Stanislavsky's technique, which proposed that a performer should come to live the character and should use one's memory of certain feelings as a source for authentic performance. This opposition is also sometimes referred to as 'acting from the outside in versus acting from the inside out' (See Dyer 1979: 132).

a cultural practice and self-immersion in the local community and culture. This new identity project was linked to a therapeutic fantasy of transforming the self through reworking past place identities and not least, class identity. Taking a semi-permanent exile from her own culture and consciously exposing herself to a cultural context from which she had always felt alien resembles an experiential and existential mode of tourism (Hetherington 1998: 117). The romance of dance was replaced by the romance of nature and by the aestheticisation of the countryside as an other environment (Urry 1990: 100).[164] Although Giselle did not construct herself through the discourse of stardom, her post-materialist, ascetic life-style, embodying an alternative and subversive 'rebel' type of an 'independent woman' and bohemian déclassé, clang on to such discourses (Dyer 1979: 52, 54).

In summarising the discussion and analysis of the formation of identity projects through clubbing, I will briefly review these case studies in the light of the complex of ethics and morality. Clare's narrative exhibited individualistic optimism. The transgression into otherness through clubbing enabled her, amongst others, to extend her role repertoire. Yet, the change that she sketched was brought on the way through delimiting or overcoming this otherness. By contrast, Chuck's identity project of transgression, having developed into his permanent transformation, was part of a narrative of discontinuity. It recalled Christian plot structures and ethics of reformation and salvation. Giselle similarly displayed a strong sense of transformation and reformation. However, her narrative outlined the failure of her identity projects connected to dance and club culture. The dis-authentication of her clubbing-self and the re-orientation to new projects revealed what could be called an ethical asceticism. Alex' narrative, while being infused with an ethics of pleasure, was nevertheless strongly shaped by a puritanical moralism. The otherness of dancing and clubbing was cast as pleasurable, but dangerous at the same time and was carefully controlled and justified in terms of a morality of duty and responsibility in relation to work and family. All the four narratives were interweaved with discourses of freedom, a consideration of which brings up another significant point. It was predominantly the freedom of autonomy (either as the freedom of choice in the consumption of drugs, of sexuality and desire or as a

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[164] For a discussion of the middle classes in the countryside see also Urry (1995), Cloke (1995), Fielding (1995) and Howkins (2001).

dimension of self-realisation) that was invoked to illustrate positive as well as problematic aspects of the otherness of clubbing. While Giselle and Chuck's narrations illustrated a shift of freedom-investments into other notions of autonomy, Alex' case indicated most fervently, despite his references to self-development, the balancing of the freedom of consumption by a freedom through mastery and discipline. The analysis also highlighted that Giselle, Chuck and Alex' narratives in particular strived towards an aim of authenticity, of becoming or finding their true selves. This discourse of alienation and dis-alienation conjures up the dimension of sexual identity, especially the coming-out narrative, which has been left unmentioned so far, but which was, next to gender and class, also a significant structure in these narratives of the self.

6. Conclusion

In Chapter 3 I argued that aestheticisation could be conceived of as a construction of play-realities. This realm of play or as-if implied a disruption of sameness identity or an otherness of potential or virtual becomings of the self. The horizon of potentiality can accentuate desirable becomings and positive transformations. This provides for the possibility of attaching otherness to identity projects. Nevertheless, this otherness can also take on problematic elements that need to be held in check. This ambivalence suggests that such aestheticisation of the self does not displace morality, but even instigate ethics and morality. This chapter and the previous one dealt with such ethical and moral issues cropping up in the construction of 'other realities' of the self. While Chapter 4 pointed to ethical precepts textured by discourses of gender, this chapter attempted to show that ethical precepts informing experience and aestheticisation of the self through clubbing are also textured by class. In this respect, it is necessary to link the findings of these two chapters and consider their mutual implications. This chapter demonstrated examples how clubbing experiences could be narrated as identity projects. The analysis of these projects revealed traits of the habitus of the new middle classes. This does not imply however, that clubbing experiences of members of the (new) middle classes are necessarily narrated as projects of the self. In relation to the gendered politics of drug experiences, the analysis in the last chapter found indications of women's tendency to dis-authenticate the 'other reality' of clubbing and drugs despite

accounting for biographical changes incurred through drug-consumption. By contrast, men's narratives emphasised the transformative potential of the otherness of drug-consumption. To this can be added a modification that takes into account the inflection of class habitus. The two cases that were textured by a working class social origin (Alex and Sally), underscored biographically relevant transformation and change in relation to their experience with drugs, but did not focus on these changes in terms of an individualised identity project, emphasising the self's agency and achievement. In relation to the cases textured by middle class-ness, even if the agency of the self appeared to a certain extent constrained through drug-inducement, this did not rule out the construction of an identity project through a narrative of achievement (Clare). Likewise, the dis-authentication of clubbing reality could be grounded in a re-orientation towards new identity projects (Giselle). What can therefore be concluded from this analysis is that these narratives and experiences of clubbing were to some extent gendered and classed. The invalidation and problematisation of otherness and other realities of the self reflected the discursive positioning of femininity and working class-ness as other.

Chapter 6

Between style and desire: sexual play-realities

> [...] and that is why the emergence over the past two hundred years, and in a rush since the 1960s, of alternative or oppositional sexualised identities – lesbian and gay, 'queer', bisexual, transvestite and transsexual, sadomasochistic, an exotic parade dancing into history with a potentially infinite series of scripts and choreographies – is seen as subversive by sexual conservatives. They breach boundaries, disrupt order and call into question the fixity of inherited identities of all kinds (Weeks 1995: 88).

> There are domains in which heterosexuality can concede its lack of originality and naturalness but still hold on to its power. [...] Indeed, one might argue that such films are functional in providing a ritualistic release for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness, and that this displaced production and resolution of homosexual panic actually fortifies the heterosexual regime in its self-perpetuating task (Butler 1993: 126).

1. Introduction

The previous chapters began to explore meanings of the reality and otherness of dance and club contexts. Apart from drug consumption, dance and work involvement, another crucial domain of othering the self appeared to be sexuality. The liminality of clubbing spaces is often cast in terms of sexual transgression or, put differently, in terms of transgressive sexualities. The last chapter in particular, has shed some light on the significance of sexuality in the formation of identity projects. In this respect, several dimensions of 'other sexuality' have surfaced in the discussion. Summarising these aspects briefly, a notion of experimentation informed the temporary transgression of heterosexuality and of the model of the dual, monogamous relationship. Similarly, novelty and excess were emphasised in narrating sexual practices and roles, for example, in images of the excessive consumption of sex and erotic flirts. Such images were framed by the discursive

complex of the freedom of autonomy, which also, if coupled with an ethic of authenticity, backed up stories of the liberation of homosexuality. Love and romance were also moments of special otherness. One of the cases discussed in Chapter 5 (Clare) alluded to the increasing popularity of fetish, which is reflected in the growing number of fetish club nights on offer. This chapter will engage with identity, sexuality and clubbing in more depth, especially by investigating sexuality in the context of aestheticisation and aesthetic reflexivity.

I have chosen the above quotes for opening the debate of the chapter for they stake out different positions in relation to the contemporary politics of sexuality, which are more than relevant for inquiring into the construction of sexual identities through practices of clubbing. In the light of Jeffrey Weeks' point about the fragmentation and diversification of sexual scripts, the question arises as to what extent club and dance cultures, having been integral to the formation of gay culture and lifestyle, might be conceived of as contexts "where dissident or oppositional sexual identities" can be formed and where the boundaries of sexual identities are weakened. Such a perspective echoes academic accounts of music and dance culture that investigated these cultural practices in terms of their bearing on gender roles and sexual practices.[165] Research on rave and 1990s club cultures similarly noted changing modes of enactments of gender and sexuality (McRobbie 1994, Pini 2001, more moderately Malbon 1999). The supposed liminality of clubbing spaces was frequently seen to catalyse new forms of sexual expression, facilitated by an atmosphere of tolerance and open-mindedness.[166] Recently, this liberalising ambience of club and dance cultures was underlined in Andy Bennett's work on popular music:

> [...] club culture has produced new forms of gender relations due to the non-violent and non-sexist sensibilities which underpin the scene and liberate clubbers, particularly female clubbers, from the more oppressive atmosphere associated with mainstream nightclubs, bars and pubs (Bennett 2001: 134).

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[165] See for example Simon Frith's (1978: 239-240) work about rock culture.

[166] Such views were for example aired in the discussion of 'Clubbing and Bisexuality' embarked on in the academic mailing list 'Subcultural styles' (http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/subcultural-styles; February 2000).

In contrast to this viewpoint, Judith Butler's remark about the drag balls and the culture of voguing documented in Jennie Livingston's film *Paris is Burning* (1990), suggests a more sceptical stance towards the transgressive or transformative potential ascribed to dance cultures. Her line of argument puts the liberalising atmosphere in a different perspective. From that point of view, displacements of normative sexual identities, for example, through the experimentation with otherness in dance contexts, appear to serve the reproduction and reinforcement of 'heterosexual normativity'. This theoretical view implies that otherness or other sexualities are constituted as 'abjects' of heterosexuality and are thereby reinforced as other (Butler 1993: 96, 113). It presumes that the heterosexual regime is stabilised through the activation and disavowal of its others, for example, its homosexual others, in a 'logic of repudiation' (ibid. 93).[167] This means that the ontological boundaries of heterosexuality are secured through a temporary opening and identification with, but definite closure against, otherness. This closure or abjection is not a refusal to identify, but an identification that is disavowed and '*must never show*' (ibid. 112). Identification with an abject (homo)sexuality may thus be at the heart of heterosexual identification (ibid. 111). Following on from this, Butler suggests that heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually exclusive phenomena and "that they can only be made to coincide through rendering the one culturally viable and the other a transient and imaginary affair" (ibid. 111-112). In general, more simplistic terms, this stages otherness as only temporary displacement within, and intricately linked to, the reproduction of (heterosexual) sameness.[168]

Rather than engaging in the confrontation and discussion of these two positions, this chapter, by framing the question of sexuality in terms of aestheticisation, develops a third viewpoint building on and expanding the framework of the third chapter. That is, to examine sexuality and identity construction in terms of an otherness of play-reality, in terms of an allegorical otherness or horizon of potentiality with an unstable boundary to the real. In other words, it links the issue of sexual identity with the notion of aesthetic reflexivity and

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[167] An example of this can be found in Diana Fuss' (1992a) paper on the homospectatorial look.

[168] Relating these positions to the analysis of the last two chapters, Chuck's narration could be read as evidence of the first argument, and Clare's narration could be interpreted as illustration of the second argument.

the hermeneutics of the self, which turns attention to the ways of reading and authenticating sexuality and sexual identity. In particular, this chapter will investigate such forms of mundane inquiry through the imagery of sexuality in club cultural media. In discussing sexuality more generally in relation to commodification, consumption and the clubbing media, the following section will deploy the notion of 'cultural scenario' (Simon 1996) for investigating clubbing imagery. Before going on to explore some of these scenarios in more depth, I will identify the discourses that inform these scenarios. I will then concentrate on the cultural scenario constituted by imageries of seemingly queer sexualities and of female same-sex or homo-sensuality. In particular, I will discuss the aesthetic sensibility that these images bring into play. This will also prepare the ground for the case studies to follow in Chapter 7, which are concerned with lesbian and gay clubbing scenes. The final part of the analysis will look at some interview data and, by analysing women's narratives of othering the self through sexuality, will confront the imagery of sexual play-realities with their construction of heterosexual identity.

2. Cultural scenarios and aesthetic reflexivity

The consumption of clubbing is tied in with the consumption and articulation of sexuality, sexual desire and sexual identity. It is the media such as clubbing magazines which help to define clubbing space as sexual and design clubbing as a sexualised spectacle. Images of sexuality are invoked to 'other' clubbing contexts. Thereby they are elevated above the realm of the everyday. This aestheticisation through the vehicle of sexuality contributes to the construction of clubbing as an object of desire. The clubbing imagery promoted within the media rests on and shapes patterns of aesthetic reflexivity. It offers ways of understanding gendered, sexed and sexualised bodies. Thereby, such imagery, as a semiotic system, creates frameworks and boundaries for possible enactments of sexual identities, roles and practices. Borrowing William Simon's (1996) concept, this imagery could be called a *cultural scenario*:

> *Cultural scenarios* are the instructional guides that exist at the level of collective life. All institutions and institutionalised arrangements can be read as semiotic systems through which the requirements and practices of specific roles are given. Cultural scenarios essentially instruct in the narrative requirements of specific roles. They provide the understandings that make role

> entry, performance, and / or exit plausible for both self and others (Simon 1996: 40).

In conceiving of imagery in magazines as cultural scenarios however, less emphasis shall be put on their function as '*instructional* guides', which would suggest that they present explicit and clear-cut rules. Instead, they shall be considered as configurations of an aesthetic ambience that expounds play-realities; or, in other words, that intervenes in the aesthetic reflexivity of bodies and sexualities in such a way that certain enactments (or certain dimensions of role enactments) are recognised as 'real' and others as 'play'; or likewise, as allegorical enactments that displace the question of reality. Allegorical play-realities, in the context of sexuality, defy the intelligibility of bodies. That is, in Butler's terms, they disrupt the "relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire" (Butler 1990: 17).[169] Allegory plays with or emerges out of in-coherences. Allegory therefore intervenes in mundane reason, in other words, in mundane suppositions, stereo-typisations or 'idealisations of reality' (Pollner 1987: 34, see also Chapter 3). These idealisations and their possible disruptions are threefold: idealisations of the object (e.g. sexual identity), idealisations of a commonly shared world and idealisations of shared analytic procedures, that is, modes of reflexivity (Pollner 1987: 50). If one of these idealisations is severely disrupted, the objectification of 'a' reality becomes impossible.

What kind of cultural scenarios of clubbing and sexuality are presented in mainstream clubbing magazines?[170] How is sexual imagery used to constitute clubbing as object of desire? These questions create an important link to the issue of consumption. As Pasi Falk has noted, a crucial element of desire in modern

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[169] See Butler on intelligibility: "In other words, the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility." And: "'Intelligible' genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire" (Butler 1990: 17).

[170] This analysis of clubbing imagery is confined to the magazines *Mixmag* and *Ministry*. These magazines were chosen because, unlike other magazines, such as *Muzik* or *DJ*, which are more focussed on music and technology, they include reviews and photography of club nights and make extensive use of spectacular signs. The selection of three scenarios does not present a comprehensive analysis of this clubbing imagery. Further, these scenarios were particularly manifest in the period of this research (2000) and may not be as prevalent any more.

consumer society is "the endless longing for the new" and the constant renewal of desire (Falk 1994: 59, 94). Such novelty, as the following analysis will show, is firstly brought about by the re-valuation of the otherness of once stigmatised sexualities and sexual practices. This infuses the practice of clubbing with a sense of transgression and spectacle. However, the emphasis is on once, as this re-marking does not incorporate sexualities that are still socially stigmatised. While being inspired by a pornographic view, the clubbing imagery is not an example of pornography as an "anti-aesthetic" or of an "aesthetics of the ugly" (see Falk 1994: 186). It represents a more moderate transgressiveness through fetishising and aestheticising practices that are still *connoted* with stigma (Simon 1996: 46), yet also presentable as normal and acceptable. Secondly, sexuality comes to stand in for novelty in another sense. In these scenarios it is presented as a stylisation of body and self. It signifies change and other dimensions of everyday selves, and it highlights the process of transformation, invention and becoming new. This imagery of becoming other is infused with and intertwines two discursive threads, on the one hand, what could be called a *liberal* notion of choice and lifestyle, on the other hand a notion of *liberation* of desire. Couched in terms of freedom discourses (Rose 1989, see Chapter 5), this calls to mind the freedom of autonomy. It evokes first, the promised sovereignty of consumption and second, the freedom of expression. The liberatory strand can be seen in the context of the bohemian tradition of adventurousness, spontaneity and passion, which rests on the belief that the truth of oneself resides in one's sexual being, in particular the transgressiveness of sexuality (Wilson 1999: 21). It may be connected to an ethics of authenticity and a therapeutic narrative of freeing one's true desire, which appears as destiny. By contrast, the liberal strand highlights transgression not as ability to open up to one's repressed or quieted true potential, but as a matter of choice, invention, stylisation and self-construction. As Elizabeth Wilson (1999: 22) suggested, "homosexual relations are increasingly perceived as a lifestyle choice rather than a transgressive destiny." This emphasis on stylisation and lifestyle articulates sexuality in some sense also as a reworking of desire through image, as the creation of a carnivalesque, virtual-actual and hybrid sexual persona.

From a more general viewpoint, the question emerges, how these discursive strands interrelate with each other. Further, what significance has the aestheticisation

of self through sexual play-realities for authenticity projects centring on sexuality? Is aestheticisation through sexuality not rather one of several pathways to constructing a sense of self-transformation, in which truth or authenticity of sexual desire and identity are fairly insignificant parameters? Simon Frith (1978: 246-247) for example, conceived of sexuality in disco as a 'constructed erotic'. Similarly, academic accounts of rave culture have represented these dance scenes as spaces of simulation and virtuality, in which sexual gestures and signs were unhinged from their referential anchor of sexual motivations or desires (Böpple and Knüfer 1998: 166, Richard, Klanten and Heidenreich 1998: 16, 19, Anz and Walder 1995: 198-207). This links back to the debate about simulation and reality and about the construction of identity through aestheticisation opened in the third chapter. In a similar vein, these discursive strands, the liberatory as well as the liberal dimension, can be related to aesthetic reflexivity. Crudely speaking, the liberatory strand can be seen to promote the mode of the symbol and the liberal strand can be considered to spur allegorical significations. With respect to the allegorical, constructed dimension of sexuality highlighted in the work quoted above, gay dance culture and its camp aesthetic provides an example that illustrates how allegory and the constructed erotic may nevertheless take on a symbolic function in the celebratory expression and exploration of what one holds as one's true sexuality. In other words, in practice signs may unfold an allegorical or a symbolic dimension, depending on the mode of recognition – either as sensation or as perception framed by a (particular) reflective stance. Clearly, the following analysis of these scenarios will be situated in the symbolic realm. In conclusion, both discursive threads that are weaved into the clubbing imagery stress not just a becoming-other of the self through sexuality, but also the becoming-other of sexuality, in other words, the transformability of sexuality and sexual identity. This is either articulated through the liberation of desire or through choice and self-stylisation. Needless to say, this emphasis on the mutability of and the aestheticisation through sexuality in the media imagery brings up the related question of the construction of gender. The following discussion of some of these scenarios will address this point in more depth.

2.1 Naughty girls

Historically, working and middle class femininity and respectability have been based on the exclusion of the public display of sexuality. To openly perform sexuality could easily jeopardise one's feminine and respectable status (for a discussion about femininity, sexuality and class see: Skeggs 1997). (Black) working class women in particular, were under risk of being othered and disclaimed respectability through the construction of their sexuality as deviant. The respectable body was white, desexualised, hetero-feminine and middle class (ibid. 82). However, notions of respectable womanhood have been changing. The past decades have seen, as has been noted frequently, various revaluations of sexual practices once considered disreputable and perverse (see: Hennessy 2000: 201). In the light of these changing meanings of respectability, clubbing, and dance scenes in general provide a public context where the performance of sexuality can generate symbolic value and, if carefully coded and mantled in an image of glamour, can be brought into line with respectability and, with femininity. As Beverley Skeggs pointed out, "glamour is the mechanism by which the marks of middle-class respectability are transposed onto the sexual body" (Skeggs 1997: 110). Glamour emphasises attitude, appearance, desirability and stardom. Speaking of changing articulations of femininity and female sexuality in 1990s Britain, inevitably calls up Angela McRobbie's (1997c) work on girls and women's magazines. Investigating representations of young women's sexuality, she noted a break with conventions of feminine behaviour and drew attention to the portrayal of active, lustful, pleasure-seeking and confident women, who were up for 'shagging, snogging and having a good time' (ibid. 195-196). Information about sexual practices was combined with irony, 'naughty' humor and exaggerated silliness, imitating a tabloid style of gossip and sex scandal (ibid. 197-198). McRobbie also remarked that lesbian issues were addressed much more directly in these magazines (ibid. 202). The examples in image 1[171] can broadly be categorised along these lines. However, the point not to be missed is that such representations of young women's 'new sexualities' are partly constructed as allegorical play-realities.

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[171] The images I am referring to in the following discussion are reprinted at the end of this chapter.

In its opening pages *Mixmag* magazine (July 2000: 4) introduced a number of clubbers by letting them reveal a personal secret under the heading "What rumour would you start about yourself?" Among them are several females who are attributed transgressive sexual roles or practices, evoking images of the feisty 'bad girl' or 'sex-radical'. These 'naughty girls', in their outfits and costumes, stage spectacular, expressive bodies. The images codify self-confidence, creativity and irony and highlight naughtiness as identity, ability and practice. Female sexuality is imagined through a positive notion of excess. The women appear experienced and knowledgeable in sexual matters. While the disclosure of a personal rumour clings on to the liberatory discourse, the visual appearance, supporting the realness of this otherness, already signifies a liberated and open mind. The liberatory coming-out is wedded to a liberal choice of funny and naughty play-roles. The identity claims attributed to them are anchored in allegory and are unhinged from referentiality. These images work as spectacular signs and count on a decoding of the identity claims as 'rumour', as disguise, as (ironic) failed passing, as masquerade (Skeggs 1997: 85). The otherness of sexuality is presented as *diversity*, as a carnivalesque range of individual personae. The carnivalesque, allegorical or simulative ambience of these images puts emphasis on the *act* of dressing up and decorating oneself; it highlights the ability of stylisation. In this respect, these scenarios rest on symbol and allegory. The allegorical sexual masking, working as spectacular or figural sign on the readers, at the same time symbolises, not through a body-symbolism (inside-outside), but in a pragmatic sense. This is not least because the fictive sexual characters are anchored in the 'real' identities of the women uncovered by name, age, profession and residence. Thereby, the allegorical, carnivalesque playfulness is awarded symbolic recognition. These real persons appear as celebrities having made it into a magazine for their spectacular self-construction. These images are also symbolic in another way by inscribing club spheres as a liberatory public (enabling people to act out their desires) as well as a liberal, tolerant public (accepting otherness and providing the possibility of choice and individuality, and making possible the realisation of the self through style).

The articulation or aestheticisation of female sexuality through an allegorical otherness can be compared with, and has even been put down to pop star Madonna (Andermahr 1994). Apart from new semantic contents of female sexuality as

powerful, aggressive, pleasurable and insatiable, the case of Madonna was used to illustrate the use of sexuality as a public performance spectacularising sexual scandal. This performative dimension was seen to emphasise the plurality of in-authentic sexual personae or profiles instead of a sexual identity (ibid. 30).[172] Madonna's multiple sexual personae created through constant self/body-transformations were considered to lack an essential kernel, much along the lines of a notion of postmodern style-eclecticism. The continuously renewed sexual characters display such ephemerality and transience that the authentication of being gives way to the spectacle of masking and acting. As a cultural scenario it favours allegory over symbol, yet does not fully displace symbol. The imagery of a plural, diverse and discontinuous persona (instead of a singular, similar and continuous identity) suggests highly flexible entries into and exits out of allegorical otherness. It stages sexuality as a game of indeterminacy.

The 'naughty girls' scenario alludes to such a self-construction through sexuality, by emphasising performance and changeability through aestheticisation. It touches on what was once the other of traditional respectability by embracing, for example, notions of excess and prostitution. However, due to the liberatory thread of the disclosure of a (visibly grounded) personal secret or rumour there is less weight on ephemerality and transience. This imagery of moderate and nice 'bad-girls' or 'sex-radicals' does not play with ambiguity or ambivalence. Instead, it presents quite clear-cut sexual profiles of otherness in the context of an unambiguous feminine gender. Sexual otherness is embedded in respectable everyday personhood.

2.2 Queer as drag

> Could it be that gay love is the lens through which heterosexual society is desperately peering at its own problematic practices? [...] Lesbian and gay love still struggling against prohibition, acts as a strange, illicit utopia of renewed desire by contrast with the clapped-out world of heterosexuality (Elizabeth Wilson, quoted by Hamer and Budge 1994: 5).[173]

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[172] On the link between stardom and sexual spectacle see also Dyer (1979: 21). Images of stardom often play on sexual ambiguity (ibid. 58).

[173] Wilson (1990).

Recent writings on sexuality have not only noted an increasing visibility of, and public attention to, gay or queer culture and sexuality, but have also begun to address this issue in terms of a fetishisation of queerness. Fetishisation hints at a particular relation between self and other, between a fetishised object and a fetishising subject. A fetishised object has been attributed a value that can become part of symbolic exchange, for instance, as sign-value of a commodity. The fetish is the 'signifier of the desire of the Other' (Phelan 1993: 188). It is that part of an object whose idealisation constitutes desirability. In this respect, the notion of the fetishisation of queerness suggests that queer has become a sign-value that serves the 'renewal of desire'. Rosemary Hennessy (2000) in particular, has shed light on the interplay between sexuality and commodification and has pointed out that gay and non-normative sexual identities play a significant part in aestheticisation processes of consumer culture. They would allow for creating marketing niches (ibid. 108)[174] and would infuse straight consumer space with a gay sensibility (ibid. 128). She has even denounced postmodern theories of a gender-flexible playful, queer, performative subject as an ideological upshot of such fetishisation in the context of neo-liberalism and the values of mobility and adaptability it promotes. Turning our attention to club and dance culture the question arises whether a similar process of gay or queer visibility can be noted and whether it can be accounted for as a fetishisation of queerness. Does fetishisation not rather undermine queerness to the extent that it becomes a codified identity working through symbol? The fetish, as Caroline Tyler's (1994: 226) essay on passing demonstrated, fixes identity and ignores difference.[175]

> Any object, including a (post)modernist object like the queer ego, must have some principle of coherence if it is to be recognised as an object or whole (*gestalt*) at all, but that principle is necessarily in the eye of the beholder - like the fetish (Tyler 1994: 238).

This suggests, that, in other words, the fetish constitutes a principle of coherence and sameness, a (sign-)value that guarantees recognition. From this viewpoint, fetishisation can be related to the aesthetic reflexivity of the symbol.

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[174] Mintel market survey (2000a: 20) suggested that gay consumers are perceived as 'cutting-edge' brand adopters. Products that fail in straight spaces are sometimes re-launched in the gay scene.

[175] On fetishisation as a transformation of difference into sameness see also Phelan (1993: 5).

However, this recognition in the process of symbolic exchange also works in an allegorical way insofar as the fetish, as a signifier of *desire*, surpasses the construction of reality and meaning. A further question arising from this is, to what extent fetishised practices – such as those identified as symbolisations of homosexuality or queerness – do serve as a "new and (still) shocking arena" of otherness (see Hamer and Budge 1994: 6).

In relation to the first of these questions, my research brought to light two examples of how practices which connote gay, homosexual or queer spectacle enter the arena of straight consumption of clubbing. This became apparent, first, in the popularity that gay male clubbing space enjoys among a heterosexual audience, especially women (see on that point: Skeggs 2000). This will be addressed in more detail in the subsequent chapter. A second aspect, which I will concentrate on in the following discussion, came to the fore in the adoption of a particular imagery of drag style and female homo-sensuality/sexuality in the media scenarios of mainly straight clubbing. With respect to the issue of fetishisation of queerness or homosexuality, it can therefore be noted that it is these particular elements that seem to come close to symbolising a sense of queerness and to bestowing a sign-value of other or transgressive sexuality on club cultures. Male homosexuality or -sensuality that would be classified as gay, by contrast, was not or only rarely part of these cultural scenarios.

In looking at this sense of otherness and queerness more closely, the examples in images 2 to 8 demonstrate that both elements of this fetishisation work as spectacular or figural signs, that is, through immediate effect on the senses. In the case of the imagery of drag, it is the gaiety and colourfulness of costumes. Images of female homosexuality partly fulfil a pornographic or eroticising effect. Turning to the symbolic plane, it becomes clear that, similar to the first scenario outlined above, representation of drag style is shrouded by a notion of ironic stardom, glamour and ostentatious sexual posing. This allusion to stardom is supported by the tradition of drag culture, which is not only about wearing outrageous or spectacular outfits, but also about taking up a persona, or an individual character. These images of drag are allegorical not only as spectacular signs, but also in the sense that they disrupt a body symbolism (the inference of desire, identities, characters of the particular person).

Yet, they also rest on symbolism in being classified as drag. The symbolic dimension of this fetishisation, therefore, does not facilitate recognition of queerness, but of drag costumes. It is less about queer sexualities rather than about drag aesthetic. Another point to be noted is that the aesthetic of drag, as for example enacted in the culture of voguing (Butler 1993), emphasises the performativity, mutability and transformability of gender, contrary to the other two scenarios of female sexuality. These, as I suggest, highlight the performativity and transformability of (hetero)sexuality against the backdrop of a stable, feminine gender.

2.3 'Hot lesbo action'

> [...] While their kiss cannot undo the historicity of the ways in which men produce their space as the site of the production of gender (Woman) for another (men), the fact that a woman materialises another woman as the object of her desire does go some way in rearticulating that space. The enactment of desire here can begin to skewer the lines of force that seek to constitute women as Woman, as object of the masculine gaze...making out in straight space can be a turn-on, one articulation of desire that bends and queers a masculine place allowing for a momentarily sexed lesbian space (Probyn 1995: 81).

The representations of lesbian love or identity in a context of glamour was uncommon prior to the 1990s imagery of lipstick lesbianism (Skeggs 1997: 122, see also Hamer and Budge 1994: 11). At first glance, this clubbing imagery (images 4 to 8) suggests a representation of lesbianism articulating a lesbian space. Same-sex sensuality or desire among women as well as men in the context of clubbing was frequently put down to effects of drugs such as ecstasy. Other readings of lesbian performance or masquerade in dance spaces highlighted it as a strategy of creating a safe, hassle-free space or as enhancement of heterosexual desirability leaving intact heterosexual identity (Skeggs 1997: 135). By interpreting these images in terms of the aesthetic configuration of symbol and allegory, I will show that these images frame articulations of homosexuality as a dimension of heterosexuality in straight clubbing contexts. This becomes evident by considering the semi-pornographic framework of these representations, which comes to the fore most clearly in the journalistic commentary of the photographs. What I further propose is that this

pornographic fetishisation that is tied in with a male gaze makes the otherness of female-to-female eroticism compatible with the sameness of heterosexual femininity to the extent that it appears as an affirmation of feminine gender and not necessarily as a queering of heterosexual space. While this scenario invokes the allegorical reading of sexual gestures, it counts on the symbolism of feminine appearance.

First of all, this cultural scenario of female same-sex eroticism designs homosexuality not as *identity*, but as *act*. These homosexual acts are ambiguously coded as normal - 'who cares?' on the one hand and as transgressive - 'look-at-this!' on the other hand. The differentiation between same-sex eroticisms as *actions/acts* or as eroticisms that are anchored in a *lesbian identity* becomes apparent, not only through the commentary but also by comparing images 4 to 8 with image 9. The latter, being placed in the context of the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras night indicated by the journalistic reference, highlights lesbian identity through the symbolism of butch style.[176] By contrast, the women in the other photographs are, if viewed through discourses of lesbianism, inscribed into a symbolism of the femme, whose sexual identity is clouded by ambiguity and confusion.[177] Taking this further, these representations of female homosexuality/-sensuality also play on the stereotype of the femme as the inauthentic lesbian.

Thus, these images of erotic contacts between women do not represent female homosexual *identities*. This mode of representation subverts and simultaneously slots in with the 'ideology of the visible' that presumes a smoothly mimetic relationship between representation and identity (see Phelan 1993: 7). On the one hand, the referentiality of the erotic signs (in terms of representing real desire or identity) is displaced by the allegorical effect of signifying desire. On the other hand, the symbolism of sexual gestures and postures is dislocated by a symbolism of gender, which, by clinging on to the politics of lesbian identity, allows for a construction of a play-reality of homosexuality.

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[176] See the discussions of how the cultural configuration of butch style occupied the place of real lesbian identity in Harding (1998: 131) and Munt (1998b: 54).

[177] On this point see Lisa Walker's essay, in which she stated that what has been defined as feminine style "is tacitly constructed as evidence of her desire to pass for straight and not of her desire of other women" (Walker 1993: 879).

Lipstick lesbian discourse, as Beverley Skeggs noted, "enables straight women who are invested in glamour to 'pass' as lesbian" (Skeggs 1997: 135). This could be turned around into an argument that the traditional discourse of lesbianism enables straight women engaging in lesbian acts, to pass as feminine and to affirm their heterosexual desirability. But passing as bi/heterosexual in a homosexual/-sensual pose requires an unquestionable feminine appearance. Instead of a fetishisation of lesbianism, I suggest that this scenario fetishises and re-signifies femininity. It does so by anchoring the homosexual pose in a performance that is recognised as feminine. Accordingly, while it alludes to the opening up or fluidity of heterosexuality, it hints at the stability of gender.

The example of image 10 illustrates the pattern of reifying gender through ironic, failed passing not only *through* a masquerade, but also through the *failure of* masquerade(-ing). A man is dressed and made up, as one may assume after the first few sequences, in drag and glamour, which touches upon the performativity of gender. However, this does not quite succeed – it appears as a rather clumsy attempt to go drag. His masculinity continues to be visible and he passes, not as female or as a man in drag, but as a man in a bad drag outfit without even a slight chance to perform his gender differently and to pass as female. Subsequently, he resorts to a different masquerade, exemplified by the T-shirt that says, "Nobody knows I'm a lesbian". This sentence claims a secreted lesbian identity. On the one hand, this identity claim is supported by the 'ideology of the visible' by alluding to images of butch style. On the other hand, the irony derives from the inauthentic embodiment of *gender*, from the bad imitation of womanness, which would nevertheless be necessary for passing as lesbian. In this respect, his visual appearance undermines the identity claim of a lesbian. Lesbian identity in this narrative then is less a secreted or closeted identity than an 'unbelievable' identity in the light of the visibility of his masculinity, which cannot be hidden in his masquerade. This play of masquerading appears as experimentation with gender and sexuality. The ambiguity of gender is also alluded to in the title of this image ("Substance girlies! Suits you sir or madam?"). Yet, it not only re-signifies lesbian identity through the image of butchness (rendered incompatible with glam style), but it also re-essentialises gender. The imperfect performance or mimicry of otherness, which remains other, disclaims the performativity of gender, which drag aesthetic suggests. In staging transgression,

the aestheticisation, transgression or transformation of the masculine self is denied and masculinity reaffirmed. Although this image evokes an allegorical juxtaposition of signs, it constitutes a play-reality that foremost rests on symbolic reflexivity and the authentication of reality.

The analysis of this scenario 'lesbo action' demonstrated that female homosexuality was made visible in two ways, either as identity, or as an action or act. In contrast to the invention of the homosexual as an identity in the late nineteenth century (Foucault 1995), homosexuality here was reinvented as a series of acts. The image of stereotypical real lesbianism exposed the female homoerotic scenarios ever more as a play-reality of lesbianism. This play-reality prepared the grounds for a gaze or mode of recognition of female-to-female eroticism untouched by the identity category lesbian, in particular through an affirmation of femininity. Alternatively to both, the 'ritualistic release' for, as well as the 'subversion' of, a heterosexual economy, we can propose that, in that way, the ontological boundaries of female heterosexuality are extended to include practices that were traditionally marked as other to heterosexuality. To some extent this sketches a scenario of 'bisexuality'.[178] What the discussion of the last two scenarios brought to light was not a fetishisation of queerness or of gay or lesbian identity. Instead drag style on the one hand and homosexual/sensual acting in the framework of femininity on the other hand lent themselves to fetishisation. While this was based on the otherness of lesbianism, it also transformed this otherness into sameness by allowing for it being integrated into femininity. If we take this point further, due to the anchorage in feminine identity and femininity's symbolic attachment to heterosexuality, homosexual otherness is not in need of repudiation in order to construct a heterosexual identity. Coming back to the questions addressed earlier, and the role that was attributed to non-normative sexual identities in aestheticisation processes of consumer culture, we can relate this discussion to Hennessy's argument that contemporary media images in "overdeveloped capitalist centers especially" allow and even promote "more permeable, fluid, ambiguously coded sexual identities" (Hennessy 2000: 107). While this may apply to some extent to the third of these

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[178] This seems particularly interesting in the light of Mariam Fraser's (1999b: 156) point regarding the politics of visibility and bisexuality. She argued that bisexuality is something that is 'beyond representation'. Similarly, Butler (1993: 111-112) pointed out that the logic of repudiation is reiterated in the failure to recognise bisexuality.

scenarios, it also became clear that these play-realities of sexuality did not extend to an allegory or ambiguity of gender.[179] In the light of the analysis of these media-scenarios, the arising question, whose address, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter, is as to what extent the 'freedom' of female sexual stylisation and performance rests on an otherwise respectable body that is white, hetero-feminine and middle class.

3. Allegorical bodies

The final part of this chapter relates the analysis of the media-scenarios to female interviewees' construction of meanings of sexuality and gender. Here I ask how they account for dimensions of otherness as part of their sexual identity. How do they use play-realities in re-defining, re-bordering or re-articulating heterosexuality and femininity? Do they articulate gender and sexuality in terms of ambiguity and fluidity? In the third chapter I have noted that play-realities entail a relativity and reversibility of the actual and virtual. Hermeneutic practice and reflexivity may temporarily fix the poles of actuality and virtuality and thereby try to render intelligible the indeterminate reality of the self.

The last chapter, especially the analysis of Clare's narrative, provided an example of how female heterosexual identity was scripted through practices that were accounted for as unconventional, for instance, her 'bisexual' posing as a dancer. This seems to illustrate Hamer and Budge's argument regarding popular culture's flirtation with homosexuality. Given the conventionality of many of the heterosexual representations, it is the need for good stories that spurs the search for transgressive otherness.

> So little is now forbidden within a heterosexual landscape that new metaphors must constantly be sought out. Homosexuality serves as a new and (still) shocking arena for the reworking of stories of sex and love, romance and desire (Hamer and Budge 1994: 6).

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[179] This contrasts with Clare Hemming's (1997: 17) findings of an increasing acceptance of androgyny in nightclubs.

Being read as a lesbian in a heterosexually coded club space, as some lesbian interviewees indicated, is sometimes the source of offensive face-threats regarding their sexual identity or gender performance. Emine, a media student in her mid twenties, originally from Turkey, related some incidents in which her gender and heterosexuality were '*mis*'-interpreted. However, in her story-ing these mis-interpretations were not framed as offence, but as fun arising from allegory. First, visiting a gay and mixed club in Paris with her boyfriend, she was approached by a woman who read her as lesbian or bisexual, a phenomenon that happened quite frequently, as she emphasised. Despite her persistent verbal disclaim, the symbolic reading of her body appearance and performance could not be disrupted. She narrated how she effectively passed as gay female in the light of her rejection of this attribution that was even underlined by referring to her boyfriend as a symbol of her sexual identity.

> Emine: Once I went with my boyfriend, and it was funny, because there was this girl, she came to talk to me, thinking I was totally a lesbian and he came, she came with a gay friend of hers and he was thinking my boyfriend was gay as well, so they were both like trying to, you know, open up a conversation and she was totally convinced I was, and at the end she asked me 'are you gay or' you know, 'bisexual?' and I said 'I'm afraid, I'm not' and so 'come on, don't wind me up', 'seriously, I'm not, I mean, it's even my boyfriend', and she totally didn't believe he was, 'he looks very skinny and he is more like feminine than he is masculine'. She didn't believe (Interview 03-02-2000: 1-2).

Yet, as her boyfriend was read as gay, which added confusion and incoherence, his presence did not suffice to symbolise her 'real' sexuality and to bring about a common understanding. While Emine provided an explanation why her boyfriend was perceived as gay ('effeminate'), she did not suggest in what way her bodily appearance or practice produced markers that were used as symbols of a lesbian identity (e.g. a bodily look that was recognised as masculine or her way of interacting with other women etc). However, *her* reading of lesbian women as 'demanding' or 'pushy' invokes the image of a 'masculine lesbian'.[180] In addition to the attribution of lesbian identity, Emine narrated another story that unfolded how her gender was dis-authenticated. In a club she was questioned by transvestites or transsexuals whether her gender performance indeed corresponded with her

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[180] On the issue of the masculinisation of lesbian identity see also the analysis in Harding (1998: 133).

biological sex, in other words, she was asked whether she was a 'real' woman with 'real' breasts or a transsexual who had had a surgery. Being asked to authenticate herself clings on to the coming-out discourse. Yet, the irony of the situation might also have been that she was authenticated as female but teased and ridiculed in an allegoric play-reality.

> Emine: The funniest is with transsexuals, because in that club we used to go in Paris, there was a lot of transsexuals as well and it was so funny, because, I have a friend and she is really pretty, but sometimes you can think she looks like a transvestite or and sometimes not believe I'm a woman, but then, you see your breasts, they see your breasts and they are like totally, 'are these real' kind of thing and they are always making these comments, you know, 'did you have a surgery? Are you a man, are you a woman?' to my friend as well, she has curly, long hair and they're like 'is this a wig, is this real? Are you a woman, are you a man?' you know, it's just their relationship towards women is the funniest. (Interview 03-02-2000: 2).

What is emphasised in this narration is not her ability to aestheticise and trans-/per-form herself into a different gender or into a particular sexual persona. Neither does it evoke the naughty girl image or the 'lesbian masquerade'. Emine *is* aestheticised as other through the recognition of the other. Her narration does not depict an allegorical masking or stylisation of the self, but her body as such is narrated as allegorical, incoherent and un-intelligible, arousing puzzlement and attracting attention. She seems to *be* – without having to *do* anything – an aesthetic body that resists stereotypical authentication by others. This aesthetic body thus appears as a (passively) transgressive body without the *act* of transgressing, not dissimilar to the construction of female agency as 'actively passive' (see chapter 5, Walkerdine 1984: 173). It is not her homoerotic acting or posing, but simply the association of her appearance with lesbianism that introduces a dimension of otherness. Emine's disclaiming of this lesbian otherness and the invocation of abject homosexuality (the masculinised lesbian) could be interpreted, in Butler's line of argument (Butler 1993), as a form of repudiation. Yet, hers is not an abject identification that 'does not show'. Instead, the association with homosexuality is incorporated into Emine's narrative construction of heterosexual identity as a dis-authenticated, but nevertheless 'funny' otherness. In terms of the hermeneutics of the self, this allegorical body circulating in interaction does not seem to touch upon or displace the reality construction of the self. Without having to work on a sexual

persona through stylisation, she seems to embody a persona that passes in diverse genders and sexualities.

In a similar vein, Clare, the club dancer in her mid twenties, whose narrative was already part of the analysis in Chapter 5, fashioned her heterosexuality through dimensions of other sexuality. In contrast to Emine, the association with this otherness was forged through the symbolic recognition of her *acts* of sexual otherness, for example, in her performance as a fetish dancer. As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, this otherness of fetish was integrated into her sameness through the notion of liberated personal desire. However, in this respect, Clare differentiated between 'wearing' (fetish outfits) and 'doing' (fetish sexuality). The following extract expounds this otherness of bisexuality, which is less related to desire than cast as an element of 'personality'.

> Clare: With the freestyle dancing that I do for the Fetish Crew, it's really, it's quite sexual, it's quite suggestive with the girls and the guys and I really enjoy that, because I think everyone has an element of bisexuality in their personality and although I don't sort of actively go out and have sex with girls to be able to sort of simulate that on stage, is, it makes me feel brilliant because it's non-committal, and it's ah, it's not me actually saying 'I am bisexual', it's just the suggestion of being bisexual, which I really enjoy, I like girls, but I wouldn't want to have a relationship with a girl or actually have sex with a girl necessarily, but just to be able to play with a girl and make the crowd think that I'm, you know and vice versa, even though we not actually do anything, we just making it look like we are doing, it's a very powerful feeling, especially the guys you know, they are standing, like they are really amazed because two girls are messing around on stage (Interview 01-02-2000: 12).

Bisexual otherness here is dis-authenticated as staging and simulation and seems to illustrate the pornographic framework of 'lesbo action' discussed before. It appears as allegorical and figural sign, whose *effect* is to stimulate the crowd's desire and the self's desirability and which transcends the question of authenticity. The homoerotic scenario is presented as stylisation and is detached from (homoerotic) desire. The integration of bisexual otherness into sameness therefore rests on a similar differentiation between 'putting on' and 'doing'/'being'. The identification with this otherness as a simulative *act* entails a rejection of bisexuality as *identity*. Clare does not present a case of passing as bisexual or as lesbian. Her account confirms the mode of recognition of female homoerotic enactment in clubs as play. This performative construction of a spectacular sign, which constitutes sites of

affective investment rather than meaning, also becomes a discursive, meaningful sign in the narrative. While invoking the liberatory discourse of freeing desire and opening up transgression, it does not accentuate the expression of a 'real' sexuality, but the ability and open-mindedness to simulate and construct the self in other erotic roles. It highlights the ability and confidence to perform a sexual persona. This 'freedom' of stylisation alludes to the performativity of sexuality, but not of sexual *identity*.

The 'naughty sex-radical' becomes part of narrative sameness, yet also represents otherness, as Clare counts on it being read as a masquerade. In other words, it oscillates between imaginary and symbolic identification and moulds a play-reality of and-not.[181] This is because the bisexual persona *did* also experience same-sex eroticisms.[182] The reality-status of her bisexual otherness, therefore, becomes more ambiguous and indeterminate. As to whether the homoerotic dimension is anchored in authentic desire or whether it is one of several erotic roles of her 'adventurous' sexual persona is something that Clare is "not a one hundred percent comfortable with yet" (Interview 05-07-2000: 40). To that extent the narrative representation of her sexuality remains incoherent and her sexuality appears unintelligible and allegorical. On the one hand homoeroticism is dis-authenticated as merely aesthetic practice of stylisation (as imaginary as-if), on the other hand it appears as homoerotic desire (the symbolic as-if expressed in a virtual context of play-reality). This homoerotic desire however, is also in need of mitigation.

> Clare: I mean I've had a couple of experiences with girls before, but not really, always when I've been on drugs or when I've been drunk, never ahm, never really straight [...] I like kissing girls, but I don't really like sleeping with girls (Interview 05-07-2000: 39).

> Clare: I just see it as taking a friendship one stage further, ah, especially if it's just kissing. And kissing a girl is completely different from kissing a guy, it's fun and it's silly and it's like little secret, naughty thing. [...] I mean I've slept with probably ah twenty guys and one girl really, two girls, so it's not an even balance and I think bisexuality is balanced, isn't it, and like I said you can see

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[181] See the discussion in Chapter 3. Imaginary identification is a play with 'false' images of the self, whereas in symbolic identification fantasies or 'truths' of the self are expressed as 'play'. A play-reality of and-not highlights an ambiguous simultaneity of real and not real.

[182] See also Chapter 4, which dealt with the construction of sexuality in the context of drug-consumption.

> yourself in a relationship with somebody of the same sex, which I can't. You know, I want to be with a man, but occasionally I see a girl and think 'mhm, she is really nice' (Interview 05-07-2000: 41).

Homoerotic experiences are relegated to states of restricted consciousness or intoxication.[183] Same-sex eroticism is limited to specific acts such as kissing or is linked to a state of passivity. Homosexuality is viewed as naughty and silly secret in the framework of friendship rather than relationship. In addition, the reference to the substantially larger number of heterosexual encounters serves as another element in disclaiming a 'bisexual identity'.

Nevertheless this other sexuality is integrated into the narrative construction of the self, which articulates heterosexual identity through an unconventional, ambiguous and transgressive overflow. In this respect, the clubbing context can provide a cultural scenario (as a shared understanding or code) that allows for expressing a 'bisexual dimension' without the (self-)recognition as bisexual. Despite the dis-authentication and disavowal of homosexual desire, homosexuality does not just appear as abject, disavowed identification, but as potential reality through which the self is imagined and fabricated. Thereby, this case demonstrates that heterosexual femininity is neither subverted nor just reproduced through occasional ritualistic releases of homoeroticism, but it appears to be scripted through having another sexuality as *possible* reality, sometimes actual, sometimes virtual, attached to it.

4. Conclusion

Visual analysis is always tied in with the look of the researcher. To some extent it also involves, or cannot avoid, entering into and extending the logic of fetishisation. This is the limitation to be acknowledged in concluding the discussion of this chapter. The analytical focus itself can be criticised for its fetishisation of femininity and female sexuality at the expense of masculinity. Moreover, the mode of analytical recognition – for instance, in decoding certain visual representations of women in terms of femininity – is vested in the politics of experience and a particular

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[183] While in this context drugs seem to have compromised her agency and will, in the context of heterosexuality, when first seducing her later fiancé, a drug helped to increase her agency, lust and confidence (see Chapter 4).

configuration of the aesthetic reflexivity of the symbol (of femininity). The analysis of the aesthetic reflexivity implicated in these images is therefore to be read not as a study of the encoding of these images, but of processes of decoding. Having said this, the discussion also surpassed the logic of fetishisation by analysing particular ways of decoding and their political, discursive backdrops.

The argument of this chapter took as its starting point two strands of understanding of the complex politics of sexuality and gender. On the one hand, it criticised arguments about transgressive sexualities within club cultures and the opening up of sexual identities or gender roles. On the other hand, it questioned the reproduction of heterosexual normativity through the 'logic of repudiation' of abject other sexualities (Butler 1993). By contrast, it viewed sexuality in the context of club dance cultures through processes of aestheticisation and thereby drew attention to the mundane reasoning and reflexivity of sexuality (as other). The analysis demonstrated, by drawing on an example of female heterosexuality, how sexual identity might be crafted in relation to sexual play-realities of possible becomings or identifications of the self. Unlike abject identifications, these identifications were not repressed or unconscious, but as play-realities of as-if they were part of the media imagery and of the hermeneutics of the self.

Mundane reasoning and understanding of bodies, genders and sexualities involves and challenges modes of aesthetic reflexivity in crucial ways. In particular, it contests symbolic readings by disrupting and destabilising the idealisations and stereotypisations with regards to the assumed coherence between desire, desirability, identity, sexual practices and performance. Yet, this destabilisation, as we saw, did not displace symbolic reflexivity, but was followed and framed by different attempts of solving allegorical reality disjunctures. What can thus be gleaned from this analysis on a theoretical level is that allegorical and symbolic modes of reflexivity are very much entwined; for example, the allegorical diversification of sexual scripts may lead to a re-symbolisation of bodies and (sexual) practices, which renders these intelligible. The discussion of the media-scenarios of sexuality has illustrated this point by laying bare how the allegorical play with sexual roles was anchored in symbolic codings of femininity.

The previous chapters pointed to the ambiguity of otherness constructed through experiences of clubbing. Especially with regards to drug consumption, the positive otherness was in danger of losing its status as freedom or pleasure and tipping over into problematic otherness causing ethical and moral concerns about controlling excess. By contrast, the media-scenarios of sexuality, for example the notion of excess connoted by the image of the 'sex-radical', naughty girl, did not articulate otherness as problematic. However, two of the cases discussed in the previous chapter illustrated that sexuality could also turn into problematic otherness (Giselle's 'obsessive flirting' and Clare's table-dancing). The excessive consumption of sexuality was less problematised or immoralised by one of the male interviewees (Chuck), which again points to the dimension of gender in the framing of clubbing experiences. The media imagery can also be compared to the analysis of Chapter 5 in terms of its allusion to the framework of stardom and the construction of spectacular selves/bodies. Both the imagery as well as the narratives of clubbing suggests that the domain of sexuality in the context of clubbing promises a great deal of agency and power, constituting a fundamental phantasmatic complex of othering and transforming the self.

The final chapter of the thesis will further discuss the issue of aestheticisation and sexuality in relation to the production and consumption of two particular, sexually codified clubbing scenes. It will place this enquiry in the context of the sign-valuing, the market position and the institutional practices of a 'gay-mixed' and a 'lesbian' club. It will analyse modes of aesthetic reflexivity that are employed in the interactive readings of bodies, genders and sexualities. Following on from the discussion of this chapter, questions arise if spaces that are codified as gay and mixed allow for a queering of sexuality and gender or if they also rest on processes of fetishisation that articulate ontological boundaries of (homo)sexual identities. Does the 'homosexual economy' police *its* boundaries against the 'invasion of heterosexuality'? Further, how significant are play-realities of sexual otherness for the construction of gay and lesbian identity? Of particular interest in this regard is whether or not the homosexual play-reality framed by femininity and heterosexual fetishisation has any impact on symbolisations of lesbianism. Following up on the media-scenario of drag, Chapter 7 will also explore how this resonates with the role of drag in a gay-mixed clubbing space.

Image 1: Mixmag, July 2000

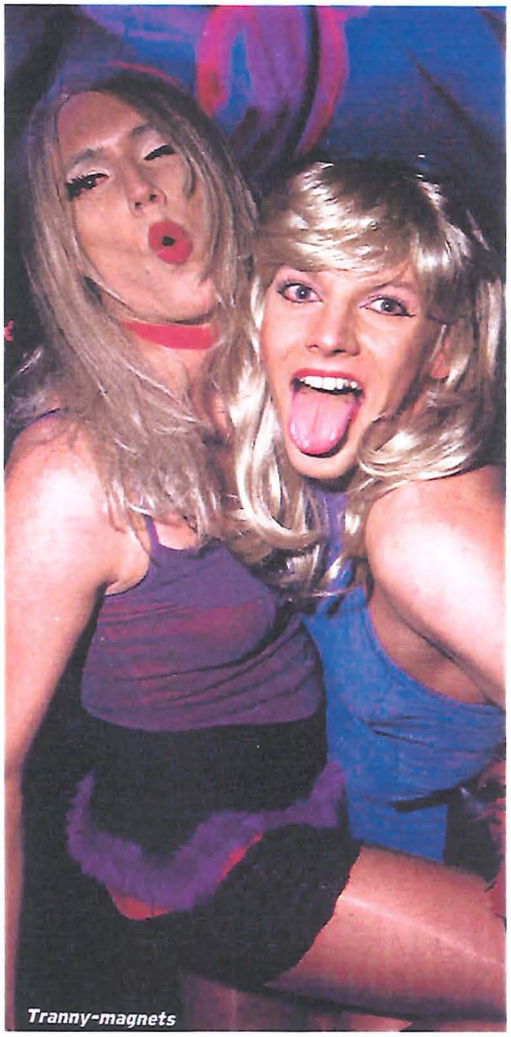

Image 2: Mixmag, May 2000: 'Tranny-magnets'

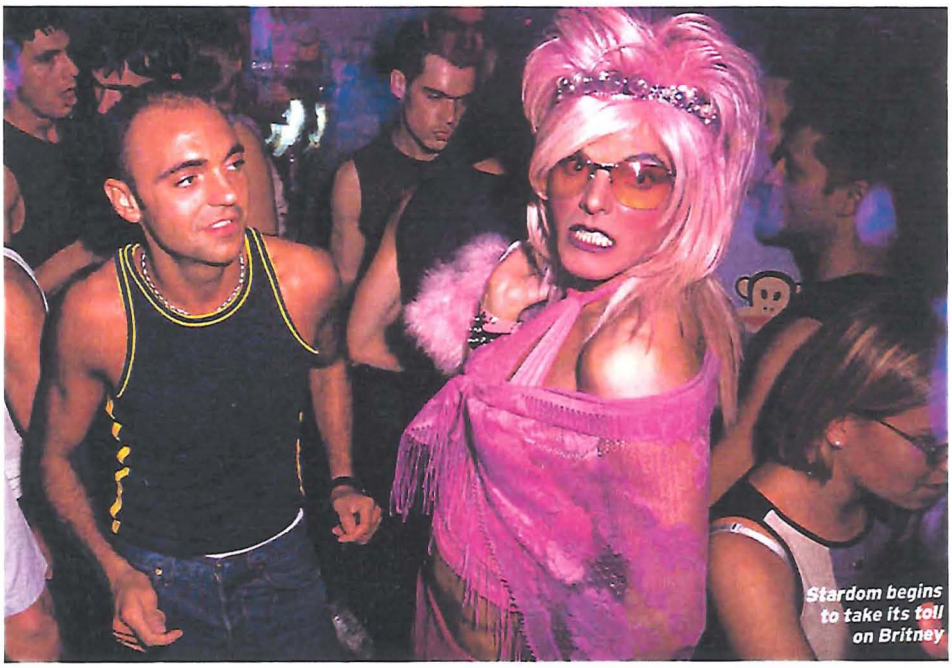

Image 3: Mixmag, June 2000: 'Stardom'

"Are you sure this is how you check for hyperthermia?"

Image 4: Mixmag, July 2000

"Mixmag photographers fall for this every time."

Image 5: Mixmag, April 2000

"Two girls kissing. Lovely. Now really, where's the harm in that?"

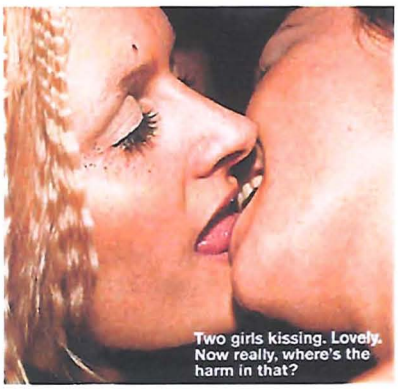

Image 6: Ministry, December 1999

Image 7: Ministry, July 2000

"Two of *Ministry's* new Scottish friends. 'Fancy engaging in hot lesbo action for us then?' 'Nae chance, son. Piss off!'"

"That'll teach you to chew your glowstick."

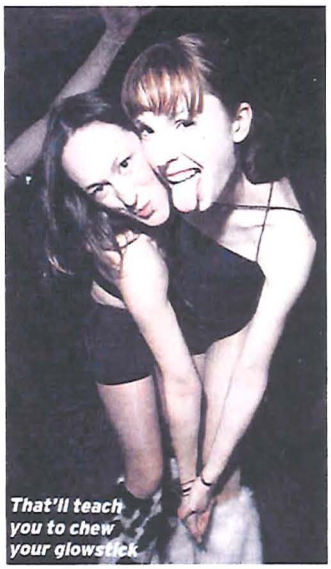

Image 8: Mixmag, May 2000

"Liam and Noel's new look shook everyone."

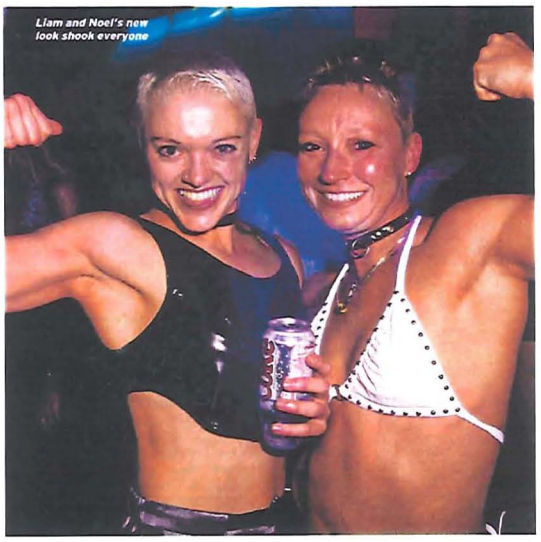

Image 9: Mixmag, September 2000

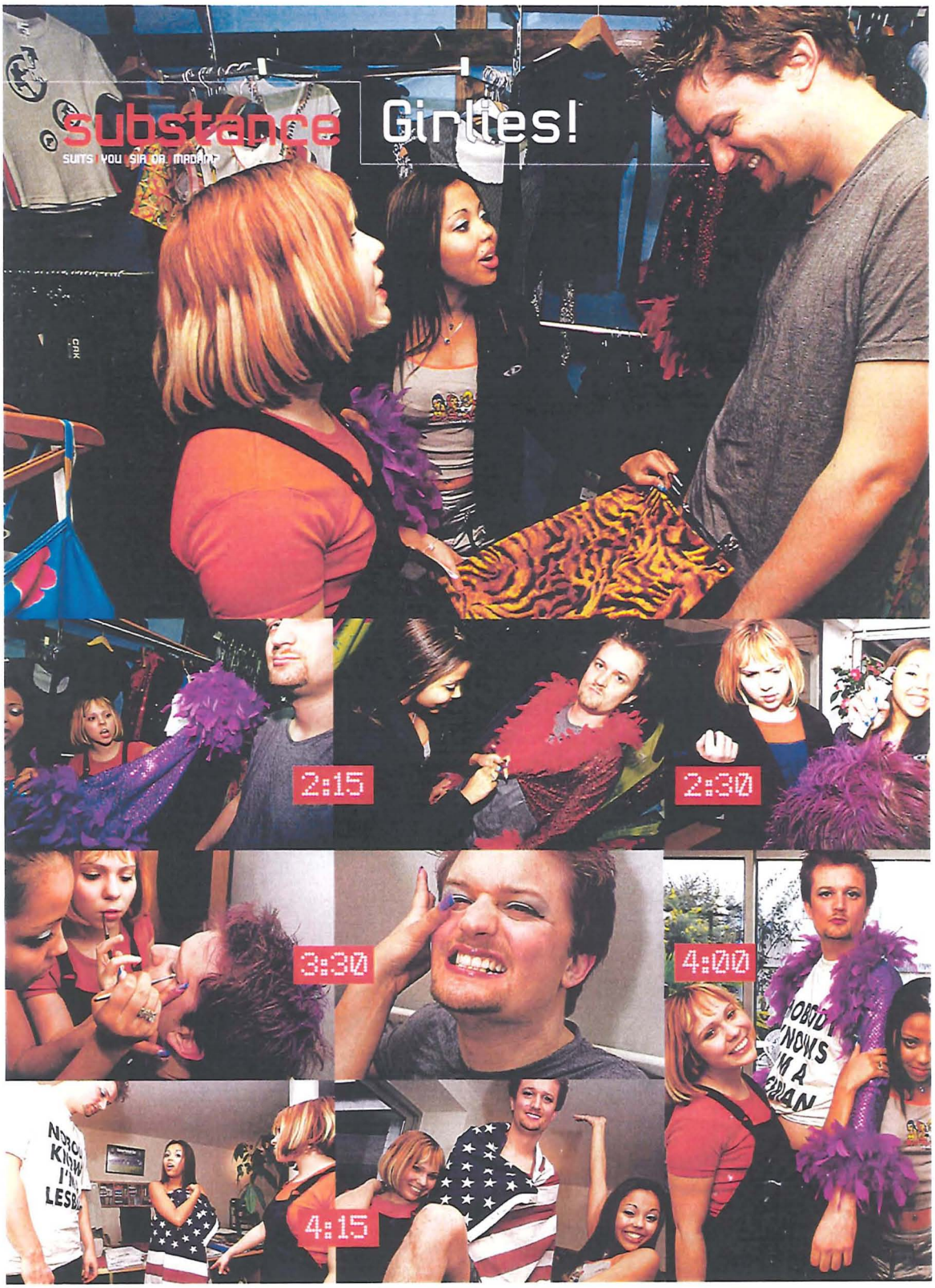

Image 10: Ministry, May 2000

Chapter 7

Allegorical anarchy, symbolic security?

1. Introduction

I will start this chapter with two moments of personal ethnographic experience in the two clubs which constitute the object of the analysis. These particular experiences, I suggest, not only reflect my personal idiosyncrasy and its complex entanglement with the ethnographic self, but they also point towards the hypothesis I will put forward as regards the structuration of social relations in these clubs. Being out on my own in the women's club-bar and having a drink at the bar, I got talking with a woman, who not long after asked me to dance. Having spent a while on the dance-floor we went back to the bar. In getting to know each other, I told her about my research project. Nevertheless, 'I' was also constructed as a participant and the conversation remained quite casual. She told me that she was out with a friend who had already 'chatted up' and kissed a couple of women, whereas the women she fancied herself were not interested or had gone off. On asking me if I was 'after anything', I mentioned that I was in a relationship. Still, she started to pay me compliments, which evoked a flirtatious play. My ambiguous, hesitant yet friendly gestures might have been quite difficult for her to read. For me, the boundaries between work and leisure, detachment and involvement were blurring and unclear. After a while we stepped back onto the dance floor and in the middle of dancing she threw a comment at me, "You are as bad a dancer as I am," which made me a bit speechless except for a blunt "oh, thank you." This complex interaction, which I cannot unfold here in more detail, continued until the bar closed. The interesting question for this discussion is not necessarily what bodily cues this woman used in judging I was a bad dancer, but in what way this judgement articulates a structure of experience in this club context. Note that this brief description indicated at least two moments of social differentiation – against the otherness of successful 'cruising' and against the otherness of being a good dancer.

The second experience in the gay club speaks of a different kind of ethnographic and personal involvement. I visited a mixed Friday night with a female

friend. We were lounging in one of the bars with a small dance floor and simply talking and watching people dance, when my eyes were drawn to an interaction between two men and a woman on the dance-floor. Initially, I briefly decoded the two men, who were dancing with each other, as gay. However, the matter became more complicated, but did not really concern me yet, when they started dancing closely with the woman, who I thought did not feel quite comfortable. After some time, quite rapidly, one of the men dragged my friend onto the dance floor. Probably as surprised as I was, she entered the dance and within minutes she was enclosed by the two men. This caused some concern on my part, which probably provoked the woman who had danced with them before to come up to me and reassure that her friends were all right. Pointing at one of them she disclosed that he was her brother and was gay. Explaining his behaviour, she said that he was just trying to shake off the other man, who he had just met, by 'messing around with the women.' This interaction between all of us went on for quite a while. Nevertheless, despite these explanations I was still wondering what was really going on, as the brother's bodily enactments and his sister's explanations did not quite seem to cohere. Just as the man was wondering about the sexual identity of my friend, I was unable to read his sexual identity or motivation. The 'straight acting' seemed so straight I could not see the acting. Surprisingly or not I did not use the device 'bisexual' to solve this reality disjuncture. Again, the interesting point to glean from this scenario is that otherness in this sexually mixed, heterogeneous environment became less a moment of differentiation, but of ambiguity and virtuality as regards the 'reality' of bodies and sexualities, much in the sense of an allegorical play-reality. These different processes of constructing identity through otherness and in particular, the destabilisation of stereotypical ways of reading bodies made me contemplate the use of aesthetic reflexivity, allegory and symbol in these spaces.

The assumption that these encounters reflect general structures of experience and social relations in these clubs points to the theoretical and methodological framework on which the analysis of this chapter builds. It is indebted Dorothy Smith's model of 'institutional ethnography' (Smith 1987). Following the three main steps of analysis proposed by her (ibid. 166), the subsequent investigation of the two club settings will inquire into ideological procedures (e.g. promotion and image work), institutional processes (the organisation of production and consumption) and

social relations that integrate such processes as courses of action. Without wishing to embark on a detailed discussion of Smith's construct of institutional ethnography, it should be noted that I have made two modifications for my own usage. First, the notion of ideology is substituted for (aesthetic) reflexivity. This acknowledges that ideological procedures not only rest on discursive significations on the semantic plane, but also on figural significations on the planes of desire, sensation and the visual. It takes into account the postmodern 'symbolic violence of the spectacle' (Lash and Urry 1994: 15-16), which is crucial in the club cultures.[184] Ideological procedures are devices being used to render the work organisation in institutions accountable (Smith 1987: 166). In other words, they are modes of reflexivity employed in constructing reality. However, aesthetic reflexivity, as developed in Chapter 3, emphasised the *way* practices and contexts are rendered accountable. In relation to the second modification, I argue that the starting point of such an institutional ethnography – the determination of the 'distinctive function' of an institution[185] – already crosses the boundary to members' categorisation practices. Describing the function of an institution to some extent partakes in the institutional procedures or the politics of experience by which people's experiences of the institution are shaped. Therefore, this requires that the analysis depart from elaborating frameworks that seem to provide significant requisites for members' categorisation practices and for the framing of social relations and interactions in these spaces. In the following section I will outline two frameworks before staking out a hypothesis regarding the two club settings of this comparative study. I will then outline the lesbian and gay-mixed clubbing contexts in which these two clubs are situated. As for aspects of production I will deal with the issues of ownership, history, promotion and management. The next section, in linking aspects of production and consumption, will discuss the boundary work involved in the clubs' door policies. The final part of the analysis will address modes of reflexivity by focusing on people's experiences of social relations in these spaces.

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[184] Guy Debord (1994: 215) posed the spectacle as "the ideology par excellence."

[185] An institution, as Smith pointed out, is "a complex of relations [...] organised around a distinctive function" (Smith 1987: 160).

2. Community or service space?

There are two institutional ideologies, modes of experience / reflexivity or discursive frameworks that I consider relevant to the particular club contexts with which this discussion is concerned. I will investigate how these two models, which emphasise different sets of functions, social relations and institutional processes, shape practices and experiences of these clubs. They are, however, merely separated for analytical purposes and in practice, as we shall see, are interrelated. On the one hand, dance spaces constructed around minoritarian, gay and lesbian sexualities have been associated with identity politics and political emancipation processes of counter-cultural social movements (see: Castells 1997).[186] This draws attention to the symbolic and expressivist dimension of these spaces, a dimension that underlines sameness and collective identification, for instance, as actualisation of an imagined lesbian and/or gay community. Given the everyday otherness of these sexualities as marginalised or fetishised, their otherness to the everyday seems very much constituted through the emphasis on sameness in the dance club. This also suggests that these spaces facilitate the enactment of sexuality in compliance with the 'gay' or 'lesbian' codification (and not least with the authenticated homosexual desire) rather than instigating the othering of the self through play-realities of different sexual identities. The enactment of sexuality, therefore, appears much in the form of the symbol. Further, it might be supposed that the accentuation of sameness is coupled with and rooted in the institutional boundary work geared to preserve the security and/or sexual codification of these spaces. In couching this structure in terms of community I foremost wish to accentuate the framing of the space as a bordered territory of identity rather than underlining the framing as emotional community.

On the other hand, over the past decade the production of sexually codified dance space, similar to clubbing spaces generally, has developed into a 'clubbing industry'. Contemporary dance clubs are also postindustrial service spaces (Lash and Urry 1994: 193-220) They are situated in a market context and constitute a specialised realm of (leisure and nightlife) consumption. In this respect, their main

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[186] On the construction of lesbian identity in relation to feminism and counterculture see also Bell (1994: 41).

distinctive function is to provide dance, music, a sexual market or sociality. Equally, social relations would be circumscribed as service relations invoking a framework of consumption, consumer choice and a concern with quality and sign-values, which emphasises the aesthetic next to the sexual codification. For their emphasis on style, design, spectacle and performance, dance clubs as service spaces could be seen as allegorical spaces, in which sexuality is highlighted as allegory (e.g. camp aesthetic). It might be supposed that the institutional boundary work is more open and less concerned with maintaining a strict sexual codification. Yet, this is not to say that the symbolic component is irrelevant. The struggle to preserve or increase sign-value, while making use of allegorical signs, bears a symbolic dimension insofar as sign-valuing latches on to classification practices of consumers.

These frameworks could again be related to the 'liberatory' discourse of sexual identity as an authenticity project and to the 'liberal' discourse of play, style and consumption that the preceding chapter elaborated on. I suggest that both, the community and authenticity discourse as well as the framework of consumption and service, are implicated and sometimes also intricately linked in the encoding and decoding of contemporary gay, mixed and lesbian dance spaces. Although they are probably more clearly accentuated as consumption spaces – and the analysis itself cannot escape the language of consumption – the community discourse is nevertheless still of significance in the politics of gay and lesbian clubbing experience. Although I have emphasised the symbolic dimension of the community framework and the allegorical dimension of the service space, both spaces, however, include and combine symbolic and allegorical modes of reflexivity. By focussing on symbol and allegory in particular spaces of gay-mixed and lesbian sexualities, it should not go unnoticed that lesbian and gay identities generally are highly differentiated and engulfed with symbolic modes of reflexivity and classification as well as with allegory and mimesis.

3. (Non-)belonging and moving-through

Before delving into the analysis let me sketch out the hypothesis I will put forward.[187] Both venues have quite a unique and well-established status within their sexual sub-scenes. The lesbian venue, Candy Bar, of relatively small capacity, has to some extent a monopoly status in a market of scarce supply. Its launch in the late 1990s and its location in London's Soho are strongly tied in with the gay and stylish place image of the area. As a seven-days women's bar, its management – not dissimilar to other venues – faces the challenge that the bar-space is a restricted commodity at certain times and is less demanded at others.[188] The second venue, Heaven, a well-known gay and mixed club of greater capacity, operates in a more saturated market and is confronted with the challenge of distinction. It is also located in central London but not in a gay codified area. Although the club is promoted as gay, it has to coordinate the needs and wants of a sexually differentiated clientele. Both venues claim originality and novelty for having left a stamp on the history and character of lesbian and gay, as well as straight clubbing. Moreover, they are both destinations of lesbian and gay tourism. In this respect, they are highly symbolic spaces. In different ways both clubs capitalise on brand awareness. Market surveys have shown that most clubs tend to be individually branded, as club visitors prefer clubs that they perceive as individual and special instead of going to a club that is part of a big clubbing brand or company (Mintel 2000b: 4-6).[189] However, a few companies have managed to fashion a brand or specific aesthetic environment that can be exploited for the expansion of the company. The Candy Bar is one such example. As a privately owned, independent company it is able to pursue the strategy of creating a lesbian brand that can be exported and recreated elsewhere, on a

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[187] I wish to emphasise that the interview data relating to these case studies and therefore the analysis itself covers a specific period; that is, mainly the years 1999 to 2001. Apart from interviews with 'consumers' of these spaces, I have used image material (obtained from the venues' websites), media articles and advertisements as well as interviews with the manager/owner of the lesbian venue and the promoter of the gay club. These interviews relate to the present year of writing up this study (2002). Due to the ever-changing nature of clubbing contexts, which was also witnessed in several visits at the end of this research project, the findings of this analysis may not necessarily reflect or indicate present, let alone future developments.

[188] Although there are a considerable number of clubbing events on offer mid-week, recent statistics showed that in general the weekend is still the most frequented time for clubbing (Mintel 2000b: 4-6).

[189] An exception to this is the recreation of certain clubs in other places, for example, the touring of clubs or the promotion of events in Ibiza or in other clubbing holiday destinations, see Sellars (1998).

national, and perhaps also on an international level. By contrast, Heaven, being part of Richard Branson's Virgin Corporation, has never been marketed through the Virgin brand, but has tried to create an individual brand out of its name.[190]

The starting point for the analysis of the women's bar was the observation that the lesbian interviewees of this study (five of the total interview sample), who all knew and frequented the Candy Bar at some point, framed their experiences in the category of belonging or non-belonging. This was not so much an issue of being admitted to the space, but of feeling part of its culture and of being able to relate to the crowd. The monopoly-like character of the women's bar, being a focal point for the nightlife activities of lesbians, might suggest an allegorical hotpot of aesthetic styles of lesbianism[191] and / or a strengthening of collective identification. It also gives rise to the assumption that a steady audience is secured easily due to the scarcity of lesbian codified space in the city. Equally, it might be expected that the management attempts to exploit the lesbian consumer segment and therefore targets specific sub-groups at different times and events. Yet, I will show that the ambitious and successful efforts of the management to cultivate and symbolise a particular lesbian life-style and image, shaped a symbolic space that to some extent, whilst having a strong, appealing sign-value, tended to be decoded as a closed and standardised, if not normative aesthetic environment.

By contrast, experiences of the gay club, as represented in the interviews of this research, were not so much framed by the issue of belonging. Instead, the club tended to be decoded as a 'space-to-move-through'. Interestingly, this non-place[192] aspect not only appeared on the level of a night out, but was also indicated by individuals' long-term clubbing pathways. Punters new to the gay club scene

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[190] Heaven's promoter Angela Reed pointed out, "Richard has always understood that if the club was Virgin branded it will not work at all. Heaven has to be seen as a brand in itself. If people felt that we are part of a big corporation it wouldn't feel as much as a place where they could go. Especially years ago, it was quite secret" [that Heaven was owned by Virgin, S.R.] (Interview 18-10-02: 3).

[191] Gill Valentine (1993: 245-246) argued that due to the "lack of space, financial resources and numbers" different lesbian tribes often (have to) share the same spaces, but nevertheless keep to their corners of the dance-floor.

[192] See Augé (1995) and the discussion in Chapter 2. Augé noted, "if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (ibid. 77-78). Yet, non-places do not exist in pure form, as places are reconstituted in non-places.

regarded Heaven as a good place to start. However, eventually they moved on to explore other clubs. In this case, the image work of the club was or is less tight or well defined in terms of a specific gay tribe, but is kept more generally as 'the most famous gay nightclub' (www.heaven-london.com). The actualisation of a historical and tourist sign-value makes the club visible and accessible. On most nights Heaven's audience is mixed in terms of gender and sexuality. All this might suggest that the gay clubbing space is more heterogeneous and tallies foremost with an allegorical aesthetic.[193] The question to be addressed is why the gay(-mixed) club nevertheless brings about different processes that re-border the allegorical into homogeneous structures. One reason for this is, as I will propose, the closure of the club as gay, the maintenance of 'gay' as a *sexual* codification. This seems to serve as a precondition not only for keeping a gay audience, but also for using 'gay' as an *aesthetic* sign-value that appeals to the taste of a certain non-gay consumer segment.

In both cases the sexual categories are at the same time used as aesthetic codifications. In the women's bar this aesthetic codification turned into a symbolic system insofar as styles tended to be perceived as symbols of status, attitude, personality etc. By contrast, in the gay club the aesthetic dimension was invoked primarily through allegorical, spectacular signs that fostered sensation. This gay aesthetic induced a symbolic perception on a more general level, being decoded as a symbol of glam, flamboyance and pleasure. It was not about cultivating a *particular* gay style and it did not latch on to differentiation and classification processes among the gay audience. The notions of (non-)belonging and moving-through suggest that the women's club accentuates the framework of community and the gay-mixed club the framework of the service space. Nevertheless both these frameworks are relevant in each of the two club spaces. Further, the parameters of belonging or moving-through cannot only be put down to the clubs' image work alone. To a certain extent they are also shaped by general structures of lesbian and gay identity formations and the lesbian and gay clubbing contexts, to which I will now turn.

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[193] See Lash and Urry (1994: 54-56), who argued that the allegorical mode revolves around urban complexity.

4. Contexts of lesbian and gay clubbing: the constraint of consumer choice?

A recent survey of the gay entertainment market suggested that gay consumers have higher disposable incomes and tend to maintain 'youthful spending habits' and lifestyles for longer than the 'average' population. Gay people were perceived to be a socially active niche group and frequent users of bars, pubs, clubs and restaurants (Mintel 2000a: 1). The market survey indicated further that gay people keep visiting nightclubs until much later life stages than heterosexual club consumers (ibid. 11). However, it also showed that gay men are more likely to be frequent users of gay pubs or clubs than gay women (ibid. 30-33), which seems to be reflected in, or correlate with, the clubbing events on offer. Another finding of the survey was that the gay scene did not cater well enough for the diversity of the gay consumer segment (ibid. 64). Both genders equally – 66 per cent of all the respondents[194] – articulated the desire for a better variety of gay venues (Mintel 2000a: 12). In the following sections I will expand on the (market) contexts in which the two clubs of this analysis are operating. Clubbers sometimes perceived London's gay male clubbing scene as a saturated market of sameness with only limited possibility of choice despite the abundance of events on offer. Accounts of the lesbian clubbing scene brought to light the constraint of consumer choice in a different way. The main issue seemed to be the scarcity of clubbing events for women.

4.1 Gay clubbing and Heaven

> The problem with the [gay S.R.] clubs in London is that they are all the same. It's all skinheads and lots of muscle Marys and the music isn't important. If you book a big name DJ they don't know who's playing (quoted by Chris Blue in Time Out, December 12-19, 2001: 118).

> Sven: You could always find a club you liked, but then after a while I realised they are all the same, it's the same people at different nights, different clubs, it's the same people that goes from club to club to club, so if you've been to one, you've been to all of them, I feel now, it's not much difference. [...] We look the same and we behave the same like we are clones of each other (Interview 01-12-2000: 1-2).

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[194] Base = 838. The survey was carried out at Mardi Gras festival 2000.

These quotes reflect the findings of the market survey that attested to a lack of variety in gay nightlife venues. Moreover, they not only critically reflect on the gay clubs themselves, but also conjure up images of the gay consumers, which hardly match the notion of the refined and cutting-edge gay consumer (see Chapter 6, 2.2). Instead, the gay club visitors are pictured as rather tasteless in music and short of individual style. The second quote further suggests that it is the same gay consumer segment that frequents different gay clubs. Hence, it implies that the *specific* image work of a gay club may not be of such great significance in attracting gay audiences. It also hints at the idea that visiting a club may be part of a route of moving through spaces, depending on what is on offer (see also Chapter 2). In this respect, what comes to mind is a 'weekend row' of going out clubbing. The following quote, again from Sven, a gay male from Sweden in his late twenties, even indicates a weekly cycle of gay clubbing events. His first year of living in London was very much shaped by a clubbing lifestyle and he was an example, of a gay consumer that went 'from club to club'. This aspect of routine in gay clubbing lifestyle also raises the question if and how gay clubbing experiences are framed through dimensions of otherness (for example as other to the everyday).[195]

> Sven: [...] certain clubs we went to, like Monday, we went to one place, I think it was Heaven on Mondays, Tuesday it was Substation, Wednesday was Heaven again, Thursday was G.A.Y., Friday was one club and Saturday was one club (Interview 01-12-2000: 4).

It is beyond the scope of this research to determine how widespread such patterns of clubbing are among gay men, yet, what can be assumed is that a crucial element in the promotion of gay club nights is to find the right, or to generate a new, time slot within the time-space routes of their following.

The sexual play-realities sketched in Chapter 6 suggested openness and tolerance towards, as well as recognition, if not even a fetishisation, of, heterosexuality's others in the context of clubbing. However, this contrasts with the sexual divide that dominates the clubbing scene, although in London this is probably

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[195] The case studies of Chapter 5 provided two examples on this point (see Chuck and Alex, who both constructed otherness to the everyday through a notion of excess and freedom of consumption).

less so than in other British cities.[196] There is only a small segment of the clubbing market that explicitly promotes sexually mixed club environments. As the Introduction of the thesis indicated, sexuality is quite a significant differentiator within club cultures in the sense that sexual identification to an extent informs choices of club nights. While straight dance scenes are usually unmarked in terms of their (practically hetero-) sexual codification,[197] gay and lesbian clubbing scenes have traditionally been defined through sexuality. Nevertheless, club cultures also provide a significant interface between sexualities. More specifically, clubbing is one of a few arenas where gay culture is endowed with visibility and moreover, with accessibility. In gay clubs gay culture can be consumed by people who do not identify as gay. While straight or unmarked dance scenes may be implicitly sexually mixed, it is mostly clubs which started off as gay which have since opened up their boundaries and have adopted an explicit policy of mixture. A gay mixed club first of all suggests that this space caters for a male and female *gay* audience. While several gay or mixed nights attract lesbian women, the majority of the audience at most gay or mixed nights is male. 'Gay mixed' may also signify a club that accepts and welcomes people of sexual identifications other than gay (however difficult it is to practically implement a reading of sexual identity). In this respect, there are two different ways in which clubs define their boundary work. On the one hand, gay clubs may accept straight visitors as 'guests' of a predominantly gay crowd.[198] On the other hand, some clubs have replaced their principal codification as gay by a sexual policy that explicitly invites people of various sexual identifications. A popular marker that has emerged in recent years is the term 'polysexual'. Yet, this may not necessarily fully sidestep the gay codification. 'Polysexual' might in fact be based on a gay majority policy, employed in order to avoid alienating the original gay core market.[199] Despite the differentiation of the clubbing market into unmarked

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[196] Except for Manchester, see Stephen Whittle's collection (1994).

[197] This is not to say that they do not welcome or admit different sexualities.

[198] See also the study of Measham et. al. (2001: 163-164), who found that the gay club they researched only conditionally accepted heterosexual clubbers, with the door policy stating, 'gays/lesbians and straight friends'. Groups of straight people would not have been let in.

[199] Lee Freeman, the promoter of the Sunday club 'DTPM', clarified that the label 'polysexual', mainly used by media advertisers, was to highlight a non-discriminate and indiscriminate atmosphere, in which sexual labels could be rendered irrelevant. Yet, in practice it would mean 70-75 per cent gay clubbers. As he pointed out, "we would always keep a balance in the favour of gay" in order to make sure that gay customers feel secure (Interview 08-11-2000: 2). See also Mintel (2000a: 64).

scenes and gay codified scenes, sexual labels such as 'gay', 'gay-mixed' or 'polysexual' may also be invoked to circumscribe and symbolise a particular aesthetic environment that is believed to appeal to the taste of a fashion-centred, cutting-edge consumer segment.[200]

The gay clubbing scene in London is a market of stable supply. While clubnights come and go, there is generally a range of nights on offer each night of the week. Another element of stability and permanence is that there are several clubbing events and clubs that are well established and have a long history (of more than ten years).[201] This indicates that the perception of the sameness of gay clubs may also arise from a perceived lack of change. Nevertheless, these long histories may ever more so spawn a rhetoric of change and re-invention.

4.1.1 Heaven

Image 11: 'Saturdays' (www.heaven-london.com/ October 2002)

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[200] For instance, the promoter of 'DTPM' also noted that he mainly aimed for an audience with taste and understanding of music and fashion. Similarly, the Mintel survey expected Gay Pride to be increasingly perceived not just as a gay and lesbian festival, but also as a celebration of diversity more generally (2000a: 64).

[201] See also gay interviewee Costa quoted in Chapter 4, who emphasised the long history of clubs.

This image represents what Heaven's promoter Angela Reed called the club's 'flagship night'; the traditional weekly Saturday 'men-only' night, with which the club started off as long ago as 1979. The club had moved into a venue that had hosted a Roller-disco in the 1970s. This venue was owned by British Rail,[202] which secured a relatively cheap rent under the arches of Charing Cross Station in London. In the late 1990s the club underwent a major refurbishment. It now consists of three dance-floors and several bars with an overall capacity of 1695.[203] This 'record' history of more than twenty years constitutes a significant part of the club's sign-value. Heaven has a reputation for having shaped the new character of the 1980s and 1990s London dance scene, not only because it was one of the first of a new generation of extensive, technically well-equipped dance spaces, but also because it was one of the first places to promote house music, by hosting Ibiza-influenced dance nights at the end of the 1980s. This is also why the club became well known among a straight audience. Another cause of even wider public attention was the moral panics revolving around the drug ecstasy. In the late 1980s the club was drawn into the *Sun's* acid house and ecstasy campaign, when the paper headlined 'Scandal of the £5 drug trip to Heaven' (see Garratt 1998: 132). Since the early 1990s other gay club nights emerged, which changed the gay clubbing context as well as Heaven's market position. The early Sunday morning club 'Trade' was the first dance night to get a 24-hour music and dance licence in 1990. In 1991 Heaven was bought by Richard Branson and since then has been part of the Virgin empire. Although managers or promoters hardly ever disclose profits of clubs, the turnover of a club with a similar capacity as Heaven might nevertheless give some idea of the financial dimensions. In 1999, the company Ministry of Sound Ltd., which, unlike Heaven, includes other businesses such as a magazine and radio show, record labels, etc. had a turnover of 2.8 million pounds (excluding VAT, as indicated by Mintel 2000b: 22). According to Heaven's promoter, between 8000 and 10000 customers pass through the door per week. It employs about 100 people.

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[202] At present the venue is leased from Railtrack.

[203] Until the mid-1990s Heaven had the largest capacity for a gay club. It was superseded by the gay night 'G.A.Y.' at the Astoria in 1994 (Mintel 2000a: 21).

4.2 Lesbian clubbing and the Candy Bar

> Nike: [...] how little space lesbian clubs have now (Interview 17-02-2000: 5).
>
> Aniela: I like to go to places for women and it's hard to find women-only places, there is less things going on, they are shutting down every single club (Interview 24-11-2000: 27).
>
> Gia: [...] as somebody who regularly on a Friday night is stuck for somewhere to go and part of that is a sexuality issue, a lot of that is a sexuality issue [...] (Interview 30-11-2000: 18).

The above quotes seem to suggest that clubbing times and spaces that are codified as lesbian are scarce. The perceived scarcity not only alludes to a lack of choice due to the short supply of lesbian club nights, but also draws attention to a feature of lesbian clubbing spaces. Most lesbian dance events take place in small venues with tiny dance-floors, which involve a dynamic visual interaction rather than affording the opportunity to disappear and be anonymous in a crowd.[204] All of the lesbian interviewees touched upon this scarcity of lesbian codified space and time. A weekly cycle of purely lesbian clubbing would be impossible, as most dance events take place at weekends and there is hardly ever a mid-week women's dance night. This scarcity also goes along with transience, that is, a high fluctuation of events.[205] Most of the dance and clubbing events tailored at a lesbian audience are set up as either fortnightly or monthly (more rarely, weekly) events in spaces that are otherwise mostly codified and run as either gay (and lesbian) or as straight. Only a few spaces are more permanently geared to a lesbian audience. Some of these are located in Soho or central London, which creates, together with the gay venues in the area, a more stable cluster for the nightlife activities of lesbian women. Unlike gay or straight clubbing contexts, lesbian clubbing spaces are, with a few exceptions, more or less closed to, or are less willing to admit a straight (or male) audience. If they do so, their advertisements announce that male (gay or straight) and straight female friends will be let in as guests. Because of the ephemerality of lesbian clubbing events, going out clubbing to a women's event may require a lot more information

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[204] Some exceptions in the early and mid 1990s were for example the night 'Venus Rising' at the Fridge in Brixton (see Pini 1997) and the techno night 'Kitty Lips' (see Dixit 1996).

[205] On the transience of lesbian night- and entertainment life see also Wolfe (1992: 151).

gathering. As in other clubbing contexts too, word-of-mouth is a significant element of such information work or promotion of events.

4.2.2 Candy Bar

Image 12: 'Smile' (www.candy-bar.co.uk / January 2002)

As this picture illustrates, the Candy Bar, is not a strictly women-only lesbian bar. To some extent, the representation of genders and sexualities other than female and lesbian is part of its construction of a normal, non-discriminatory and inclusive space. Aside from this normality suggested through diversity and openness, a symbolic as well as economic and structural dimension of the bar as an enterprise is its attachment to the place image of Soho and to gay sign-values of fun, style and cruising. The Candy Bar is a limited company, owned by Kim Lucas. Having been involved in club promoting for a long time, she organised women's nights and participated in queer festivals such as Mardi Gras and Summerites. The idea to open a women's bar took shape in the first half of the 1990s, when the gay men's bars started up in Soho. In 1997 the bar opened in a quiet back street of Soho. One of the main problems of setting up the company was, as Kim pointed out, finding a venue, which she eventually rented from promoters of a big gay club night. "I felt the only way I was going to get any sort of backing was to put my ideas into gay men's heads."[206] In summer 2000, the Candy Bar moved to another venue closer to the

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[206] Kim Lucas, quoted in Sarah Garett's article "Talking about a revolution" in the *Pink Paper*, February 18, 2000: 13.

sparkling centre of Old Compton Street, a publicly much more visible position, not least because of the glass front of the bar. A few months later was opened a bar of a similar size under the same name in Brighton.[207] Reasons for moving to a new venue in London were that the bar could not meet the costs of the old venue. Without a contract, the bar's residence in the old venue was not very secure. The new venue had a slightly bigger capacity, more seating and a longer licence (until 3am at weekends). But again, there was no contractual arrangement and the bar operated as part of another company. After eighteen months, in February 2002, the Candy Bar re-opened in the old venue after having left the 'new' venue over night. At the time of the interview with the owner (June 2002), negotiations about buying the lease for the venue were under way.

As a venue with a relatively small capacity of 150 and a weekend licence until 2 am, the Candy Bar is a hybrid bar-club.[208] In other words, it is a (late-night)[209] drinking venue with a small dance-floor. The latest market analysis found that in general the club market has come under pressure from competitive late night outlets, especially from "chameleon bars" that integrate several dimensions of going out in one place (Mintel 2000b: 1, 4-6). In the context of the lesbian nightlife market and the consumption practices of lesbians, a bar-club with a late licence may not necessarily be an advantage. As the main source of revenue for clubs (and bars) is wet sales,[210] the area of competition is late-night drinking, in the case of the Candy Bar much more the early evening peak drinking. In this respect, a disadvantage of the venue with the longer weekend licence (until 3 am) was, as Kim Lucas explained, that the bar became mainly a late-night venue, which women would frequent after other women's bars had closed. The bar therefore lost some share of the peak drinking (Interview 20-06-2002: 1). Overall, the profit or turnover of the bar is

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[207] It was beyond the time scope of this research to integrate the Brighton venue in the analysis, which is therefore confined to the London bar(s).

[208] Some developments in the past few years have shown that the distinctions between pubs, bars, nightclubs and dance clubs are blurring (see Measham, Parker and Aldridge 2001: 4). Operators increasingly seek to combine eating out, late night drinking and dancing in one site.

[209] Late-night drinking = after 11 pm.

[210] See Mintel (2000b: 15). Roughly 65 per cent of the sales of clubs is wet sales (alcohol and soft drinks), 25 per cent is admission fees (including box-office and cloak-room).

difficult to gauge, as the owner did not disclose any figures[211] and data of comparable venues were not available.

Candy Bar, as indicated previously, has quite a unique position on the market of lesbian nightlife and clubbing. Clubbers sometimes perceived the bar as a sort of monopoly. This is more linked to its perceived uniqueness, rather than its enterprising mode. It offers the most lesbian codified time (seven days) in one central London space, which is moreover situated in a highly symbolic part of the city. In terms of practices of clubbing and dancing, other women's dance nights in central London may have longer licences and offer bigger dance-floors, yet they are less frequent and regular. While the Candy Bar is the only permanent lesbian bar in Soho and London's West End, there are a few other lesbian bars in suburban areas with a high lesbian population.

5. Sign-valuing, promotion and management

This section will explore the management and image work of the two clubs in more depth. At the same time, it will introduce and give an overview of the different events and nights offered by the clubs. I pointed out that both clubs claim a leading position by playing on superlatives. While Heaven keeps its image work quite general, Candy Bar very actively pursues the strategy of creating a brand, one that latches on to a particular image of '1990s' lesbian style. In discussing these issues I will start with the women's bar. The question arises, whether the monopoly-like status of the bar resonates with or entails also a symbolic hegemony in terms of the lesbian style and aesthetic promoted by the bar. The image work of Heaven gives rise to the question how the club integrates and implements the ambivalent strategy of opening and closing, of being a gay club and a club for everyone at the same time.

[211] The only hint was the evasive statement that there was not much profit to gain, but that financial survival was secured.

5.1 Candy Bar

In the age of the spectacle, one way of establishing a symbolic hegemony is the presence of signs. This rests not only on the discursive element of signs, but also increasingly on the figural or sensational dimension of signs. What is evoked with this is the impact of signs through their repetitive, sensual presence that becomes the basis of recognition and awareness. If this can be said to apply, the Candy Bar has gained quite a supreme symbolic position just through the widespread presence, dissemination and recognition of its logo. The following extracts, taken from a general London listing magazine and from the bar's website, shed some light on the discursive sign-valuing of the bar and its changes over the past few years.

> [...] a 7 nights-a-week lesbian bar (the UK's first) on three floors bang in the heart of Soho. Men welcome as guests (Time Out November 1999).
>
> London's leading venue for lesbians, bisexual women and their gay male guests, with extended opening hours and live DJs. No dress code (Time Out December 2001).
>
> [...] the premier meeting place for Lesbians, where ever we are (www.candy-bar.co.uk / January 2002).

This series of performative statements indicates some shifts in the promotion and management concept of the bar. While the first statement capitalises on time, space, locality and novelty, the second comprises a specification of who would be accepted as a member or guest of the bar. It opens up the female audience group to include bisexual women and implicitly excludes straight men and women. This suggests quite a closed space. Other women's bar's advertisements of the time were advertised as 'women-only' or even 'women-only members' bar. Compared with these other lesbian bars therefore, the Candy Bar's ad nevertheless signifies openness ('no dress code').[212] The third of the above quotes, merely addressing lesbians who already know of the bar, markedly shifts away from the emphasis on symbolic locality. It accentuates mobility by alluding to the two different venues of the bar as well as to its presence in various other spaces (at festivals, as part of holidays outside

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[212] For example, the advertisements of another bar at the time highlight this struggle for symbolic hegemony: "London's largest women-only members bar on two floors. Pub prices. Dress: smart/casual" (Time Out November 1999).

the country etc). But moreover, it attempts to transform 'Candy Bar' from a name to a sign. It tries to create a symbol of a certain aesthetic ambience or imagined community. As Kim Lucas elaborated on her most recent plans to franchise the brand to breweries, who would open up women's bars in different parts of the country, "it [= Candy Bar, S.R.] has become a phenomenon in a way [...], it's a package, it's a sellable item" that can be recreated elsewhere (Interview 20-06-2002: 3). Television and press coverage, the 'mainstreaming' of the bar, therefore, is not something that the bar tends to avoid, as is sometimes the case with dance clubs that play on a notion of underground. Instead, it is actively sought after. Marketing through a brand not only entails spatial mobility of the product, but often also a diversification into related products and services for the purpose of exhausting the buying power of the consumer segment.[213] However, diversification may sometimes be hard to distinguish from, or go hand in hand with, promotion. The Candy Bar started different projects that may appear as diversification; for example, in cooperation with other companies it organised women's holidays. According to Kim, these, however, mainly had the purpose of being documented by television.[214]

Clubbing and sexual cruising is an important element of the gay-influenced lesbian aesthetic and lifestyle that the bar taps into. Yet, as a hybrid between a bar and a club, the Candy Bar cannot really compete as a clubbing space. Nevertheless it tries to affiliate itself to the ambience of clubbing. For example, the company's Internet site (www.candy-bar.co.uk / January 2002) referred to the venues as 'The London club' and 'The Brighton club'. In the new venue in London, to which the bar had moved in 2000, the sign-value of clubbing was even more difficult to materialise. The space that could theoretically be used as a dance-floor was very small and tended to become a space for verbal interaction. This alienated some of the customers, especially because a drinking venue was not seen to justify an admission

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[213] Within the context of clubbing the *Ministry of Sound* provides such an example of spreading out into other areas of the entertainment industry. It consists not only of the club (and club promotion in other cities and countries), but it also comprises(d) record production, a magazine, radio and TV ventures and clubbing tourism.

[214] Organising such holidays, as she stated, "is very hard work, unless a TV crew wanna come and do a documentary about it, that's the only point" (Interview 20-06-2002: 4). The most recent documentary about a women's holiday in Sichez, Spain was shown on Channel 5 in July 2002.

fee in the early evening.[215] As a strategy of realising the sign-value of clubbing, the Candy Bar has therefore always promoted monthly and fortnightly club nights in bigger venues in London and Brighton. Additionally, the bar is mostly the only lesbian venue offering a dance tent for women at gay and lesbian festivals, which also helps affirm the bar's dance and clubbing ambience. While the Candy Bar started off with a relatively tight focus on a stylish, fashionable, young crowd, the latest promotional plans and activities suggest the marketing to a wider audience as well as the spreading out into new lesbian consumer segments. The most recent club promotion in London was designed as a large-scale monthly event striving for an audience of 700 to 900 women by providing different dance-floors that featured various music genres. Another plan is to open a women's members' club aimed at higher-income professionals and laid out as an informal networking and business place. Most of the club nights that the Candy Bar attempted to launch as regular events over the past few years, however, were of a similar transience as other women's dance nights.

In the light of the fleetingness of lesbian clubbing events and nightlife, it may be supposed that a space that is more permanently codified as lesbian, such as the Candy Bar itself, draws advantage from this situation (see the advertisement at the beginning of this section). However, the reliability of a bar that is available seven days a week may take on a more ambiguous meaning. The bar may be the first, taken-for-granted choice, but, especially if it appears as the only option, it may also turn into the last resort to fall back on.[216] In order to avoid this devaluation of sign-value resulting from being on offer all the time and in order to attract people throughout the week, the Candy Bar nights are themed and codified. Each night carries an individual title. Many of them used to connote sexuality, sexual style or

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[215] See interviewee Gary, who used to frequent the bar with his lesbian friend: "In the old bar you could spend your whole night, now it's a pre-club bar where you can only drink" (Interview 13-10-2000: 17). Compared to the late night, post-peak drinking in the bar pointed to before (4.2.2), this indicates another pattern of use.

[216] The London lesbian online guide 'Gingerbeer', an independent lesbian portal, noted: "Women tend to either love or hate this place... 'Where shall we meet?' 'Great, see you at The Candy Bar' or 'Where shall we meet?' 'Please, anywhere but The Candy Bar'" (www.gingerbeer.co.uk / January 2002). Similarly one of my interviewees, Gia, remarked pointedly: "Candy Bar is always there if you are desperate to go out" (Interview 30-11-2000: 21).

attitude, ironically alluding to polygamy or prostitution.[217] A focus on sexuality and 'cruising' was also created by a women's sauna and a mid-week strip night that was running a few years ago. More recently, the nights seem to be named in relation to the music or DJ of the night.

In service spaces, the social composition of the staff and the customers as well as the quality of interaction is part of the product and sign-value (Lash and Urry 1994: 193-222). The members of the Candy Bar staff usually wear shirts with the brand logo. But they also turn into allegorical signs through the sensational effect of their bodywork, which is even more significant in a space that is constructed around sexuality. Bar staff are part of the sign-valuing of the bar, for example, they were represented on the bar's homepage. In this respect, the style of lesbianism embodied by the staff unfolds a symbolic dimension. The following picture and quote of the bar owner indicate how body look and habitus are assessed in selecting employees and in creating an image of the bar.

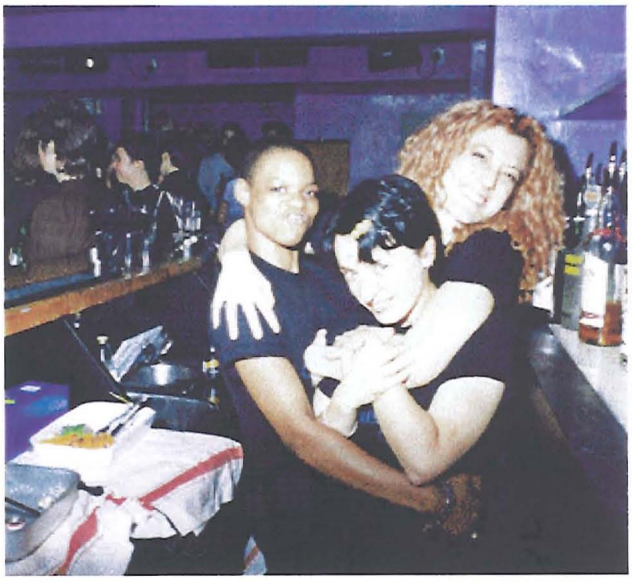

Image 13: 'Candy Bar Girls' (www.candy-bar.co.uk / January 2002)

Kim: [...] usually they got to be just friendly, attractive to different types of women, lively [...] so that hopefully all the women can come in here and find

[217] Some of the themes were 'Opportunity Knockers', 'Loose', 'Booby Trap', 'Dolly Mixtures' and 'Luscious Ladies'. Older themes were for example 'Tunes', 'Precious Brown', 'Suffragette City', 'Firmed Up', 'Sweethearts', 'Bounce'.

> at least one member of staff that they consider to be an attractive person (Interview 20-06-2002: 2).

The bar staff represented in this picture indeed symbolise different characters and looks. The image underlines the skill and willingness to perform and pose. It presents a fun-attitude to work. The bodily connection of three bodies folding into one appears as symbol of emotional connection between the members of staff. Kim emphasised that corporate identity and the staff's identification with the bar is important to her. However, she suggested that for her employees the bar is not only a work place, but to some extent also a significant site of consumption and identity work. The work place was at the same time cast as a family or community space implying that the necessary identification with the bar also grants emotional gratification:[218]

> Kim: [...] because it's not just a job, if you can understand what working for the Candy Bar is, it's a, it's a family ... feeling, it's yeah, [...] I know it's sounds corny; I say that, because it really feels like that. They work together, they socialise together; they end up moving into each other's flats. If they have relationship dramas they come here, the first place they come if they have any problems. I don't know; it is creating a family in a way (Interview 20-06-2002: 2-3).

Under-titled 'Candy Bar Girls', the above picture constructs the bar staff as part of the crowd. Yet, it also evokes a separation between the events happening on either side of the bar. The marker 'Candy Bar Girls' forms a synecdoche. The staff come to stand in for all the girls of the bar – producers and consumers alike. They appear as role models or as celebrities of the bar, as a special group among the women in the bar. Branding is not only the activity of producers, but, as Lash and Urry have pointed out, is realised "through the complicity of producers and consumers" (1994: 15), when consumers turn products into signs. In my reading, the role-play of the staff was ambiguous in terms of how they related to the crowd. It was a mixture of social distance towards, and of socialising with, the crowd. In this respect, the expressive forms of interaction with each other and with friends coming in could create the impression of a closed group differentiated from ordinary punters. On the other hand, when they shed off their instrumental work or staff role and

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[218] See also Maffesoli (1995: 69), who pointed to the revaluation of the structure of the 'extended family' in postmodern affinity groupings.

engaged in practices of consuming, they partly became members of the crowd, while still being recognisable as members of staff through their shirts with the Candy Bar logo.

When the Candy Bar was located in the 'new' venue, relationships between the staff and the visitors were affected by structural relations of ownership. As Kim pointed out, the bar was then operating as part of another company. Staff were aware of this fact and were not on very good terms with the owner, 'so they became rude to the customers, the customers then became rude to them' (Interview 20-06-2002: 1). This was also articulated by some interviewees, who complained about the 'unfriendliness' of the bar, which, however, mainly related to the security staff at the new venue. Apart from this image-defect, the bar staff were rarely talked about in the interviews and did not evoke positive evaluations, which might suggest that they are in fact not such significant elements in consuming or in constructing experiences of the bar.[219] One of my interviewees, however, reflected on the issue of how employees in a bar or club may become a vehicle of the identity work of customers and also, how a work role in a bar may become a site of identity. Gia, a media graduate in her mid-twenties, who worked in a women's bar nearby the Candy Bar, explained that when working behind the bar or at the door, one is singled out as a significant person to perceive, to approach, to interact with or to think about (Interview 30-11-2000: 13). Moreover, Gia referred to the notion of the in-crowd in the Candy Bar, which not only illustrates the imagined community of an elite clique in the bar, but also indicates that the bar-staff may be regarded as a crucial constituent of such an in-crowd.[220] At work Gia met a woman with whom she started to go out, who worked at the Candy Bar. They not only both worked at women's bars, but also frequented their workplaces for leisure. Furthermore, Gia expounded

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[219] For example Gia: "The staff are notoriously rude, yeah, not very friendly place" (Interview 30-11-2000: 12). Ambiguous views were expressed in reviews: "My first impression of this place was that I felt at home. The bar staff are charming and I like the lighting and the music is a good mix between old and new." And: "The bar staff are friendly (yes they are, just try smiling) and the security guards can sometimes manage a grin too" (www.gingerbeer.co.uk / January 2002).

[220] Gia: "The in-crowd is all about image [...] and the bar-staff tend to be the staple of that" (Interview 30-11-2000: 11).

how her work role and in particular, her affiliation with a member of the Candy Bar staff, changed her status in these contexts.[221]

> Gia: I started to think that I was part of the in-crowd, [...] not because I felt different or because I felt she gave me status, [...] but it just meant that different people who weren't talking to me before were now talking to me, because I was somebody with a name, whereas before obviously I was just another person [...]. It made me known among everybody who worked in the Candy Bar. I don't know if it meant anything major, but got served quicker, got let in, all these kind of things, not really life changing; it counts on a Friday night I guess (Interview 30-11-2000: 13).

5.2 Heaven

> The most famous gay nightclub in the world (www.heaven-london.com / October 2002).

Like the Candy Bar, Heaven's key promotional proclamation plays on superlatives and capitalises on the club's well-known status rather than on an underground image. Its promoter Angela Reed advocated rather than disapproved of commercialism and the mainstream. She openly acknowledged that the club is an enterprise with the purpose of making money.

> Angela: Heaven hopefully is relevant to a large cross-section of people. By our very sheer size we have to have an air of commercialism about us [...] We want to as much as we can appeal to everyone. [...] Heaven is on the side of the mainstream (Interview 18-10-02: 1-2).

Despite its long history and its mainstream strategy Heaven seems to be able to resist its devaluation and maintains a position in the clubbing market. In contrast to the Candy Bar or other clubs, Heaven does not embark on tight image work and niche marketing. However, the club has, amongst other groups of audiences, occupied and targeted a particular segment in the pathways of fresh club-goers who are looking for an accessible, non-intimidating, 'learning' space.[222] A significant part

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[221] This can also be compared to the case studies in Chapter 5, in which work roles in the dance and club scene were associated with insider status (Clare, Chuck).

[222] Heaven's promoter remarked, "most the people that go out clubbing on the gay scene – everyone will have visited Heaven at one point in time" (Interview 18-10-2002: 2).

of its clientele is made up of young audiences, newcomers to the scene as well as of gay people living in suburban areas or out of London. The club is also hired to out-house promoters, who bring their own, not necessarily gay, consumer following. This concept of an open, accessible, mainstream club works, because it maintains a focus on a gay niche-market at the same time. However, in terms of the sexual codification of Heaven, the club promoter articulated ambiguous views and policies that reflect the ambivalence of opening and closing. On the one hand, she implied that the club wants to provide a safe space for a gay and lesbian clientele, particularly for people who have had their sexual coming-out and wish to start getting involved in the gay scene. On the other hand, she endorsed the view that sexuality has become secondary to taste and aesthetics, and suggested that people's sexual identification is not their primary focus in selecting a club night. Accordingly, she regarded Heaven as an aesthetic ambience cutting across sexual boundaries. She thought that Heaven makes less of an issue of sexuality than other gay or 'polysexual' clubs. This ambiguity, which is also illustrated by the promoter's quotes below, may indicate a current transformation in the (sexual) policy of the club. In the course of this research, between 1998 and 2002, the codification of the Saturday night as 'strictly gay' has continuously been toned down and reformulated ('for a mainly gay male crowd'). At present, the website does not mention a sexual codification for the Saturday night.

> Angela: Basically, what Heaven wants to be is predominantly a gay and lesbian club (Interview 18-10-02: 1).

> Angela: Nowadays it's not so much of a gay thing or a straight thing, it's a club thing. [...] Much less than other clubs we make sexuality an issue. [...] Entry into Heaven isn't about your sexuality, isn't about whether you're a boy or a girl, it's about your attitude and if you fit in (Interview 18-10-02: 1-2).

In contrast to the life-style and lesbian niche marketing of the Candy Bar, Heaven follows a different form of diversification that crosses the boundaries of the gay niche market and taps into an aesthetic ambience of popular culture. The club offers its venues for concerts, small gigs for pop-stars, film settings, premiere parties, corporate launches, award ceremonies, shows of the London fashion week, exhibitions and even salsa dance classes. Although these events are not open to the public at large, nevertheless they articulate the club as a product and service rather than community space. As the promoter pointed out,

> Angela: It [= the club, S.R.] can be anything you want it to be (Interview 18-10-2002: 4).

At the same time as the club promotes a diverse, multi-functional, open space, it themes its club nights and tries to tailor them to a more specific yet mixed audience. According to the club's website, its in-house nights[223] invite a mix of people. However, these club events are otherwise only advertised in the gay press and gay scene. This might suggest that word-of-mouth secures a non-gay audience; but may not be enough to secure a gay audience. Advertising regular, long-standing nights in the gay scene and gay press may also be aimed at gay consumers new to the gay club scene, who consult the gay press for information. The Monday night at Heaven, called 'Popcorn', is geared to a young, student audience. It offers cheap drinks and features disco, indie and funky house music. It invites "gays, strays, straights, bendy boys and girlie girls" (www.heaven-london.com / March 2002). 'Fruit Machine' on Wednesdays is announced as "hyperactive mid-week club night" and as a "busy hedonistic party night attracting a multi-coloured crowd" (www.heaven-london.com / March 2002). The music being played is house, garage, soul and R&B. As Angela Reed described, it attracts a more "mature, experienced London crowd" (Interview 18-10-2002: 3). Saturdays, by contrast, draws people from out of town for the "big Saturday night out" (ibid.). The promoter depicted its music policy as more commercial and accessible. All these in-house productions, but especially the Wednesday night, incorporate or even centre on an element of drag. Not only does the club encourage members of the crowd to dress up in drag, but it also employs a team of six to eight drag queens in order to foster a party atmosphere. Their task is to go around the club, interact with people and make them feel part of the night. This illustrates that drag is less a symbol of a queer enactment of sexuality or gender rather than a spectacular, allegorical sign, which also echoes the discussion of the media-scenario of drag in the previous chapter.[224] If at all drag symbolises glam and flamboyance and a certain aesthetic or attitude. In other words, the connotation of queer sexuality is used as an aesthetic marker. Heaven's promoter elaborated on this use of drag:

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[223] These are the weekly nights run by Heaven's promoter (Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays).

[224] See also the discussion in Chapter 1 (2.2) on Maffesoli's (1995) notion of the persona as a moment of spectacle, sensation and communion.

> Angela: Drag in its very nature has changed over the years as well. It used to be a very big part of gay culture of years ago. Now it's a different sort of drag, it's all about glam, it's all about the dressing up and that's why we incorporate the drag into, not because 'oh, look there is a bloke in a dress' [...]. It's sort of added value. [...] Drag is a focal point, it's very visual, it's very exciting, it's very escapist [...]. It's an entertainment (Interview 18-10-2002: 3).

Image 14: 'The drag queens' (www.heaven-london.com / October 2002)

Apart from these three in-house nights, the Friday, and occasionally also the Thursday club nights are produced by out-house promoters. These nights mainly cater for and attract a straight crowd. The Friday night until recently seemed to be coded and used as an after-work and end-of week cheap night out,[225] pulling a crowd after their drinking in West End pubs. Lately however, not only the Thursday, but also the Friday night have been attached to well-known and prominent clubbing events. This type of management and image work aimed at a large cross-section of people suggests that Heaven, whilst being codified as gay, nevertheless becomes a 'polysexual' or allegorical space of urban difference, unfolding a diversity of narratives and experiences. If and how this resonates with the use and consumption of the space shall be considered in the final two sections.

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[225] See the advertisement, "one of London's cheapest and best Fridays" (Time Out January 2000: 58).

> Angela: The customers that come to each individual night, everyone has got a different version of their Heaven. [...] Everyone's got a story of Heaven [...] and they are all different, so it means many different things to many different people (Interview 18-10-2002: 2).

6. Membership, boundary work and door policies

As Chapter 2 indicated, the regulation of people's access to clubs is a significant element of the institutional process of clubbing. It involves a visual classification of bodies and a simultaneous evaluation of whether or not these bodies fit in with the club space. In the context of clubs that adopt a door policy[226] in line with sexual definitions of the space, this visual practice rests on and stimulates an awareness or reflexivity[227] of symbols (or stereotypes) of gender and in particular, of sexual identities. It hinges on a politics of visibility. These are invoked in authenticating or dis-authenticating people as 'really' gay, lesbian, straight, etc. However, the discussion of the previous sections has highlighted that aesthetic dimensions overlay sexual identity categories. For example, Heaven's promoter claimed that entry into a gay club is not based on sexual identification, but on attitude and style, which suggests that a different classificatory system, deployed to evaluate the overall body aesthetic, supersedes the sexual categorisation. The door policies and interactive procedures at the door of both clubs show a complex entanglement between a community discourse that relates opening and closure to identity and belonging and a service space structure that tends to open up and tries to attract (and deter) customers by defining an aesthetic environment. While inclusion in and exclusion from a community space is exercised through a determination of who is a member of the community, a consumption and service space cannot that easily establish explicit aesthetic criteria as legitimate and accepted basis of exclusion.[228] Referring to aesthetic criteria in excluding people from a community space that defines membership through identity would hardly be acceptable.

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[226] On door policy more generally see Chapter 2.

[227] In some sense this can be compared to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) theorisation of awareness context, that is, the different expectations or suspicions people hold of each other in interactions as regards somebody's 'true' identity. Measham et. al.'s (2001: 163-164) fieldwork in a gay club found that visual assessment of people's appearance was complemented by checking the gay cultural knowledge of customers (clubs, magazines).

[228] Aesthetic judgements can more easily be instituted as legitimate criteria in relation to inclusion, for example when clubs offer discounts or rewards for spectacular outfits.

However, a service space may also create or re-invoke notions of community through special membership schemes as promotional tool. A sexually defined club space clings on to the community discourse just by highlighting the issue of membership. But such a sexual codification may circumscribe a wider or smaller circle of people than the club may wish to attract as a service space. In other words, the targeted aesthetic of consumers,[229] for example, if the club wants to attract a certain aesthetic segment of a sexual consumer group, may not or only partly coincide with the target group defined by sexuality. In the following analysis I will elaborate on these issues by discussing two interviewees' examples of how they accounted for situations where their access to Candy Bar and Heaven was impeded. In singling out these cases, however, I do not want to suggest that these represent regular patterns of the clubs' admission practices. Instead, these examples of difficult or refused entries into a club lay open more general expectations and understandings of these two clubs.

6.1 Candy Bar

Earlier I set out the hypothesis that the category of belonging appeared to be a significant element of women's narratives of the Candy Bar and of lesbian scenes more generally. Despite being conceptualised as inclusive lesbian space that opens its doors also to bisexual women and friends of lesbians, the Candy Bar tended to be perceived as a somewhat closed or normative aesthetic environment. Put differently, it was decoded as aesthetic *community*, in which belonging was seen to be defined not only by sexual identity, but also by style. Aesthetics were not just a matter of taste preferences, but became a matter of membership and belonging; aesthetics became a boundary, a differentiator. The notions of family and in-crowd that were discussed in section 4.1 alluded to the discourse of community. The in-crowd image in particular, indicated that the bar was seen to trigger processes of differentiation, hierarchisation and closure.

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[229] These aesthetic criteria may nevertheless also represent or evoke other factors such as income, age etc.

Access to the Candy Bar becomes an issue at times of high demand. Due to the small capacity of the bar, if it is full at peak times during the weekend nights, there is a low fluctuation of visitors. In the following example, not only were the clientele of the bar decoded as partly an aesthetic community, but aesthetic norms were also perceived as a boundary for getting access to the bar. When the Candy Bar opened in 1997, it started off with a members' licence, which meant that all visitors, on entering the bar, had to sign up their name and address and were issued a membership card.

> Kay: I went to the Candy Bar not so long ago. [...] I've sort of signed the book months ago, never got a card, [...] but then you know, because, I've got longish kind of hair, I mean the door-women were just insisting that I wasn't going in, and it was just, there you go, put my name in the book, I'm a member of here, but I haven't got a card. [...] I just stood there saying 'My name is in the book, my name is in the book, give me the book and I bloody show you my name!' And in the end she was like, 'oh, okay, okay, you'll have to sign a new card and you have to fill your details in again.' [...] I couldn't figure it out (Interview 17-11-1999: 17).

In this situation access to the bar comes into view as a negotiation about formal, contractual matters of membership. The issue at stake is the fulfilment of these rules and procedures, which, however, did not appear consistent and systematic to Kay. These inconsistencies gave rise to her suspicion that the official admission procedure presented in the mode of a service space was just invoked to conceal the (aesthetic) judgement of her body appearance ('long hair'). The bar was decoded not as a service space, but as a cliquey community regulating access by aesthetic judgements of people. While access and membership to the bar was re-established in the end, the bar was perceived as a style environment privileging expensive, short haircuts, a certain body height and a toned, sporty body (Kay, Interview 17-11-1999: 18). This called upon and reinforced Kay's reflexivity of symbolic systems circulating in lesbian contexts. Further, it incited a classification of herself and her position in relation to the bar crowd. In referring to her 'longish hair', which alluded to femme style, the notion of non-belonging oscillated between failing to pass as a member of the sexual community and failing to pass as a member of the aesthetic community.

Membership schemes, admission fees and procedures of the Candy Bar indeed tended to give rise to much confusion. The membership based on a membership card seemed to be quite meaningless, yet it signalled a space that rested on closure. As Kim, the owner of the bar, explained, with obtaining a public licence this sign-up membership 'fizzled out' (Interview 20-06-2002: 2). Despite not having a members' licence or a membership scheme any longer, the new bar displayed a sign 'members only' at the entrance. This sign, which left the category member undefined, transcended the sexual codification of the bar and articulated the bar as a service space with formal membership. Its purpose, according to the owner, was to indicate a boundary to people who were passing by the bar and were not considered members of the sexual category or the aesthetic of the bar, 'dodgy men, tourists, foreigners, strangers, drunk people' (Interview 20-06-2002: 2). Also, the presentation of the bar as a service space with formal membership rather than as a space that defined membership on the grounds of sexuality or gender intended to avoid discussions about the discriminatory nature of identity boundaries. Yet, this service space boundary, as might be expected, at first also signalled a closure to, or caused puzzlement among the lesbian clientele. Theoretically, it could have provided a basis on which women who claimed access as lesbians could also be excluded. Nonetheless, as the example below demonstrates, this sign could also be decoded differently. Instead of non-belonging, it could emphasise belonging in another sense. Against the backdrop of the marked otherness of 'women-only' spaces, 'members-only' added value to the bar,[230] in the sense that acceptance into the bar not only affirmed the belonging to a sexual community or lesbian aesthetic, but also the belonging to a wider aesthetic ambience, for example the taste context of Soho.

> Giselle: I've been to the new Candy bar, which I like, because it seems just like another bar in Soho and it says 'members only', but it's not really that particular, it doesn't say 'women only' or anything, so it feels quite nice to be in there, it feels like I'm a member of this bar, but I'm not singling myself out and saying, 'it's just because we are gay, we have to come here.' So I quite like it, I feel I'm part of Soho, the wider Soho, not just the gay part of Soho (Interview 26-02-2001: 44).

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[230] In relation to belonging and exclusivity Maffesoli noted: "the feeling of belonging proceeds if not by exclusion then at least by exclusiveness" (Maffesoli 1995: 140-142).

6.2 Heaven

Having proposed that Heaven tended to be decoded as a space-to-move-through, which echoes the promotion of the club as accessible space aimed at a 'large cross-section of people', it might be inferred that its door policy also reflects openness and easy access. Indeed, as I pointed to in Chapter 2 (section 5.2), queuing and entering the club is a fairly routine procedure that accentuates passing through a non-place. Yet, the image work and sexual codification of Heaven also suggested moments of closure, in particular on the Saturday night. In the past, Heaven's website used to make this closure very explicit by stating, "please note that a strict door-policy operates, Heaven on Saturday is for gay men and women only" (www.heaven-london.com/October 1999). The club's promoter justified a "guidance policy" in order to secure that the club can live up to its promoted image as a gay club.

> Angela: If you dilute that with opening the doors to everyone, then people are gonna think, 'well you say that you're a gay club, but you're not. [...] If you don't have any kind of guidance policy, then you are gonna dilute the atmosphere and you're not gonna be what you've set out to be (Interview 18-10-2002: 2).

The following example relates to the experience of a female who identifies as heterosexual and who was turned away from the club on a Saturday night. Lisa initially started going out clubbing with bisexual and gay friends she had met at college. One of the first clubs she was introduced to was Heaven. In the beginning, a gay club or a club in general appeared to her as a closed or rather inaccessible space. She felt that she almost had to be 'invited to go clubbing' (Interview 18-02-2000: 2). After a while, however, she started going out without her gay male friends supposing that she would meet them inside the clubs. In the extract below, Lisa recounted how she and her female friend, both dressed up in nurses' outfits, queued up for a Saturday night at Heaven. At the top of the queue, a man in front of them was negotiating with the door-staff about his entry.

> Lisa: He said, 'look, why can't I get in, why can't I get in, I mean, you're gonna let those two in, aren't you?', pointing at us, and I was pretty sure, that if he had not opened his trap, she would have let us in. And she then turned to us and said, 'you do know, this is a gay club, don't you?' 'yes, we do', and she

> said, 'well, are you gay?', and we both went 'yeah' [very high voice, S.R.] and she then sort of said, 'well, you're very welcome to come back on a Wednesday or Friday night or Monday but I can't let you in tonight.' And I just stood there and said, 'Do you really think, if I was straight, I'd be wearing an outfit like this?' And she went, 'I don't know, do I?' (Interview 18-02-2002: 7).

This negotiation does not revolve around a contractual or formal issue of membership. Entry is not about fulfilling certain procedures, but seems to be about claiming sexual identity. On the one hand, this narration demonstrates the construction, recognition and acceptance of the club as a space for a sexual, a gay and lesbian community. These defined boundaries were not challenged, criticised or questioned as discriminatory. On the other hand, the fact that Lisa and her friend chose Heaven's Saturday gay night suggests that they either expected the door-policy to be rather flexible or that they counted on passing as lesbians. Equally they might have assumed that they could get access even without passing as lesbians and just by conforming to the aesthetic of the space by wearing a spectacular or special outfit. However, this particular situation proved these expectations wrong. Nevertheless, the first lines suggest that being turned away was an unexpected situational outcome resulting from the security staff's attempt to display firmness in order to be seen as rule-consistent. Thus, the club night, despite having been announced as a space for a particular sexual community, was rather decoded as a service space with weak boundaries. This extract further demonstrates that the security staff rendered visual assessment more reliable than verbal questioning.[231] Also, Lisa tried to counter this assessment by invoking a symbolic reading of their outfit. Officially the security staff justified exclusion on the basis of sexual categorisation rather than aesthetic evaluation. Lisa implied that they were turned away not for aesthetic reasons, but for failing to pass as members of the sexual community ("apparently we looked too straight" / Interview 18-02-2002: 6). In this respect, the club was reconstructed as community space. Yet, it was also decoded as an allegorical space. Sexual identity claims were articulated as body aesthetic and as mere look or performative enactment. The visual plane of sexuality, while inciting symbolic classification and reflexivity, was used in an allegorical way, which produced a paradoxical outcome. While negating the possibility of identifying the young women's sexual orientation

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[231] This can also be compared to the narrative of Emine, discussed in Chapter 6, whose verbal identity claim could not disrupt the symbolic reading of her body.

through a symbolic reading of the costume, the door-staff implicitly used visual signs, such as the outfit, to identify or categorise the young women as 'not gay'.

As these examples demonstrate, both clubs were decoded as aesthetic environments as much as being recognised as sexually defined spaces. However, in the case of the Candy Bar, aesthetics or style were seen to reinforce the boundary posed by the sexual codification and were seen to demarcate, in line with the branding, a special or smaller segment *within* the sexual consumer group. Aesthetics appeared to be integrated into the sexual definition of the space to the extent that the sexual community was deciphered as aesthetic community. By contrast, in the context of the gay club, aesthetics was seen as a key to open the sexual boundaries, even though this expectation was thwarted in the particular situation. Aesthetics appeared to demarcate an additional segment *outside* the main sexual consumer group to the extent that the sexual community seemed to be part of, or symbolise, a wider aesthetic ambience. Although the Candy Bar was articulated as a service space for a particular sexual community, it was decoded as a somewhat cliquey, closed aesthetic community not very consistent and transparent in its door policy and access schemes. Heaven's Saturday night, while (once) advertised as a space for a sexual community, was yet decoded as a service space that was more open and inconsistent than the announced door-policy suggested.

7. Identity and otherness

In the final part of this analysis I will focus on modes of reflexivity in interactive articulations of identity and in the framing of social relations in these spaces. In both club contexts, sexual codification and the clubs' image work impacted on people's expectations of these spaces and their crowds. However, interviewees' narratives of these spaces did not necessarily reveal experiences that matched the propagated images of the club. The internal spacing of the clubs by visitors, that is, the framing and regionalisation of interaction rests on reflexivity (see Chapter 2). As we saw, interaction in club spaces – especially so in sexually charged atmospheres, where different pragmatic meanings or narrative emplotments overlap (such as clubbing, dancing, cruising, socialising) – engenders a high degree of bodily reflexivity. In realising certain spacings, people engage in processes of

objectification or (dis-)authentication by attempting to render other people's identities, interests, motives and attitudes intelligible. Again, this is a very visual practice, which is framed by an awareness context of suspicion and pretension, for example, in making assumptions about people's identities or in pretending identities in the 'as-if' mode (see Chapter 3). In other words, these framings of reality involve a high degree of reflexivity of virtual otherness. The following analysis will return to this issue of otherness by comparing different types of boundary work through otherness in the construction of identity in these spaces.

7.1 Candy Bar

> The music differs from night to night [...] but the crowd seldom does. There are your usual 'candy bar girls', (twenty somethings with attitude), but there can also be an assortment of over-zealous tourists, dyke mikes and girls who want to party, not pull, but don't know where else to go (www.gingerbeer.co.uk / January 2002).

This quote reiterates the epitomisation of the bar employees as celebrities and style models of the bar and the imagination of an in-crowd of 'Candy Bar girls'. It also suggests that the bar crowd is quite homogeneous, apart from an additional assortment of (dis-authenticated) others, who would fall back on the bar for lacking knowledge of better alternatives. The analysis in the previous section (6.1) indicated that hairstyle was an important symbolic sign and differentiator in the women's bar. Longer hair as well as its association with femininity was decoded as marginalised style. Indeed, the awareness of certain aesthetic norms was echoed in other interviewees' accounts. Feminine appearance, body height and the lack of the right fashion labels emerged as markers of otherness that hindered the imaginary belonging to the aesthetic community. Moreover, they aroused feelings of non-belonging. This highlights the bar as a space that spawns symbolic classification based on difference and closure against otherness rather than instigating ambiguous play-realities of otherness. The otherness of difference and non-belonging is emphasised over the otherness of becoming. However, neither the imagery of the bar nor my fieldwork confirmed that the crowd of the bar was homogeneous or that femininity was a marginalised style. Various enactments of lesbianism and diverse

aesthetic styles were present in the bar. The differentiation processes, nevertheless, might indicate a symbolic hegemony of a certain style, attitude or other elements that people recognised as symbols of belonging to the (in-)crowd. Alternatively, it might be that social relations in the bar generally tended to be perceived and framed in terms of style hierarchies and differentiation regardless of which particular style was privileged.

Giselle, a lesbian woman in her mid-twenties, alluded to different readings of hairstyle. Having visited the bar with long hair she felt being perceived (or 'blanked') as 'special', 'novelty' and 'possibly not even gay'. By contrast, when she frequented the bar with a shaved head, she felt 'more accepted', 'respected' and part 'of the gang' (Interview 18-04-2000: 26f, 34). Nevertheless, in the following extract Giselle related an incident in which this status gained through hairstyle was disclaimed.[232] This account of being 'othered' and dis-authenticated leans on her reflexivity of body symbols, through which Giselle came to understand why she did not pass as a 'real' member.

> Giselle: I went in there [= Candy Bar, S.R.] recently and I had short hair and I was wearing jeans, but had a tight top on, and so I was classified as girlie by this woman [...]. She was like, 'oh, yeah', you've cut your hair, but you're still a bit of girlie, aren't you?' (Interview 18-04-2000: 34-35).

Moreover, the classification as a 'girlie' entailed a further categorisation and hierarchisation of sexual motives and attitudes. This converged on the opposition of a 'cruisy', casual sex attitude on the one hand and a 'relationship approach' on the other.

> Giselle: She was like 'I am really into one-night-stands. I bet you girls [Giselle and her friend, S.R.] are nice girls, aren't you, I bet you girls are', you know, 'just want a relationship', she was implying that sort of thing, and yeah, it's just so weird that suddenly she just feels she has to say this kind of attitude,

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[232] Passing as gay, belonging and the issue of hairstyle in women's contexts have to be considered in relation to passing and belonging in straight contexts, a point that cannot be followed up here in detail. Suffice to note two examples. Both Kay as well as Giselle expressed that they did not pass as gay or as members of the (aesthetic) lesbian community, but were decoded as gay in straight club contexts. While Kay's long hair became a marker of otherness and inauthenticity in the women's bar, she was read as gay in a heterosexual club despite her long hair. Giselle, despite her short hair or shaved head was attributed femininity in the gay women's context, while being questioned upon her gender and femininity in a straight context. See also the analysis of femininity in Giselle's narrative in Chapter 5 (section 5.1.2).

> this kind of analysing us and saying what we have been like, just because we look a bit less, we're not hiding our bodies (Interview 18-04-2000: 34-35).

Giselle resented the fact of being classified and rendered intelligible. However, the last statement indicates how she refuted this evaluation of her body by establishing a different scheme of classification. This not only re-validated her appearance in terms of confidence with her body presentation, but also hinted at the otherness of the 'butch' body and its 'lack' of femininity. In the light of Giselle's project of 'cruising' and excessive flirting (see Chapter 5), this mis-recognition as a 'nice girl looking for a relationship' amounted to a certain failure of realising her project and of being authenticated in line with the image or sign-value of the space. Incongruous perceptions of the self and / or their incongruity with the image of the space or else the divergence of personal experience from the sign-value that the space is recognised for, may be other sources of non-belonging. In conclusion, due to the relatively strict definition of the bar as 'lesbian' (with guests), boundary work and otherness is primarily related to differentiation processes within the category 'lesbian' instead of evoking external others. However, these differentiation processes may to some extent also involve the demarcation of boundaries against external others, for instance, against the heterosexual other that is articulated in the image of the femme as the 'inauthentic' lesbian.

7.2 Heaven

Image 11 (section 4.1.1), which shows quite a casually dressed gay male crowd on a Saturday night, creates the impression that Heaven's audiences are a bit less spectacular and 'multi-coloured' than its drag queens and advertising suggest. Nevertheless Heaven attracts, on different nights, a clientele that is (sexually) more diverse than that of the Candy Bar. The composition of the audience, a bigger capacity, fluctuation or 'turnover' of people and a spatial setting that makes visual observation and classification more difficult, give rise to the assumption that the internal differentiation processes (within the category 'gay') are less prevalent. Instead, differentiation processes may rather be related to external otherness. For example, there is reason to presume that the openness of the club towards a straight audience causes concern among the gay clientele, which, as we shall see, partly rests on the framing of the space as 'our territory' in terms of a sexual community.

However, it might also be supposed that symbol and classification give way to an allegorical mode of reflexivity, which renders bodies less intelligible and coherent and involves a reflexivity of virtual, possible realities of bodies. Moreover, allegory, in terms of the figural and sensational may point to a different way of relating to bodies altogether – namely, not in the mode of visual perception and classification, but in the mode of mimesis and action (see Lash 1999: 103, 114).

Nowadays many clubs offer several dance-floors and musical styles in order to cater for diverse (musical) tastes of their audience. Yet, such variety of spaces frequently turns into a structure of differentiation and segregation.[233] Bruce, a gay male interviewee in his late twenties, found that such processes of separation were at work at Heaven. Informed by a symbolic reading and authentication of people, he noticed that straight and gay people were converging on different dance-floors. While he regarded this segregation 'odd', he also articulated unease about straight people, in particular about straight men who perform their sexuality ostentatiously. He framed the gay club as a territory for gay people in the first place and wished straight clubbers would be more aware of their 'guest' role.

> Bruce: You're in my space, you are here and I mean it is not your right to be here, you are privileged and the privilege is probably granted by the fact that you know a gay person who brought you here tonight. [...] I probably want to see a little bit more humbleness, a little bit more, 'okay I am here as a guest.' (Interview 8-11-2000: 8).

Other gay male clubbers, however, were quite fond of mixed spaces. Sven, for example, preferred gender- and sexually mixed clubs, as the presence of women would "take away a lot of the competition." Yet, he perceived most mixed clubs he had been to as predominantly gay male, with the exception of Heaven's Wednesday night (Interview 01-12-2000: 7). From a point of view of lesbians, heterosexuality in gay clubs, in particular female heterosexuality, again appeared to be a different issue. It was sometimes accounted for as an invasion of identity territory leading to their re-

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[233] To some extent this may overlap with musical preferences, when music becomes a marker of community formed around sexuality, race or ethnicity.

minoritisation and reinforcing their otherness of difference and non-belonging.[234] Gia, who was quoted above (5.1), evaluated a gay-mixed club night at the club Home in central London:

> Gia: [...] it was very typical gay men, straight women kind of thing, the classical pair [...]. I don't have an issue with it, but quite often, you have, you end, if you're not, I'm not either of that, so I'm always a minority, even though it's supposed to be a gay space, I still end up being a minority (Interview 30-11-2000: 18-19).

Heterosexual women rarely framed their experience of gay clubs through notions of community, belonging or in terms of a minority position. Chapter 6 (section 2.3) has engaged with arguments in relation to heterosexual women's affiliation to lesbianism (see Skeggs 1997). In contrast to these, Lisa's example indicated that her visits to gay clubs were more about affiliating to gay male culture rather than to lesbian sexuality. She did not emphasise the safe and non-predatory atmosphere of a gay club and her participation in gay spaces was not simply a matter of accompanying her friends or of trying a lesbian masquerade. Instead, socialising with gay men, who symbolised fun, humour and amusement, was cast as something special. Similarly, interacting with gay men in a gay club could embrace a sexual play-reality of flirting. However, despite the fun and gratification afforded by the recognition of the other, she also articulated disappointment that the play-reality for the most part remained play and did not turn into 'reality' (Interview 18-02-2000: 8).

Another example demonstrates the different types of boundary work through otherness and their impact on the construction of experience and identity. That is, on the one hand, the differentiation against otherness in a community / 'our territory' framework and on the other hand, the otherness of allegorical play-reality. Hailey, a female interviewee in her early twenties, recounted how she became involved in an argument with a group of lesbian women when kissing her boyfriend in Heaven.

> Hailey: I was with my boyfriend and we were having a kiss in the corner or whatever and all these lesbians got really angry with us, started throwing lemons at us and things, because we were having a snog and they were like "get to your own place blablabla" and I can understand that to a degree, but it's

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[234] See also Skeggs (2000: 140), who pointed to the displacement effects of 'straightification' on lesbian women, reflected in images of devaluated otherness of obtrusive, infantile, sexualised heterosexual women, who would colonise and invade 'their', lesbian space.

> really rude. So then my boyfriend turns around and starts and snogs my friend Ted and then snogs this friend, I mean, it was just, we were just being really silly (Interview 25-10-2000: 15).

The lesbian women appeared to have framed this situation as 'straight colonisation' of 'their' space. Their reaction comes to the fore as a result of their social positioning as other in heterosexual space (Hailey quotes them saying, "we could never do that in a straight club", Interview 25-10-2000: 16). Hailey's friends mimetically resisted their 'othering' as heterosexual by creating a sexual play-reality, a performative enactment of homosexuality. This moment of queering played on the problematic politics of visibility the sexual community spacing relies on. Similar to other examples that were discussed elsewhere[235], homo- or bisexuality was articulated as performative, 'silly' act. It emerged as a pointed subordination to the club's identity norm and highlighted the ability of simulating the self in a role of otherness. Again, this play-reality of otherness had an unstable and unclear boundary to the 'real.' The same-sex act appeared not as abject identification with homosexuality, but as possible reality. It destabilised, yet was also part of the reflection and construction of reality and identity.

> Hailey: He [her boyfriend, S.R.] feels comfortable in his sexuality, my boyfriend knows, I think he knows that he is not gay, maybe he is, maybe that's the problem, could be actually, ahm no but no, but he feels very comfortable, he likes being with women and you know, he is-is not gay, which is why he can have a laugh with my friends and have a snog, which has happened a couple of times. I think that was the first time for him that he was around that many gay people that sort of showed him another side of it as well (Interview 25-10-2000: 16).

This analysis suggests that the gay club tended to be perceived and framed as a symbolic or community space by gay and lesbian visitors, while for 'heterosexual' clubbers it tended to become a space for creating sexual play-realities. Experience and identity with regards to the first, in particular for lesbian women, seemed to be structured by the otherness of difference from an external other, while for 'heterosexual' visitors and to some extent for gay visitors too, the external other was integrated as virtual, 'adventurous' or 'experimental' otherness. However, being confronted with territorial and symbolic claims the issue of belonging was also

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[235] See section 6 of this chapter (Membership and door policies) and Chapter 6, sections 2.3 ('Hot lesbo action') and 3 (Allegorical bodies).

brought up for heterosexual visitors. These examples reinforce the ambiguity of openness and closure articulated in the image work of the club as a 'gay club for everyone.'

8. Conclusion

This institutional ethnography of dance clubs attempted to develop a new methodological perspective for exploring the politics of clubbing experience. Yet, it may have become apparent that it opens a very wide field of research and a project in itself. As only one of several empirical approaches in this thesis, this chapter could only uncover some ground. Several issues which were touched upon need to be addressed in more depth and require a more comprehensive focus on the different dimensions of clubs as 'institutions'.

Having said this, both the club spaces that were discussed in this chapter showed features of community and service spaces. The structuring of experience in terms of (non-)belonging in the case of the women's bar in some way was a reflection of the degree to which visitors gained recognition of their compliance with the sign-values of the space. It was partly decoded in terms of closure. It maintained a clear sexual definition, but accepted external others in small numbers. The analysis indicated internal differentiation processes that rested on symbolic classification and the hierarchisation of styles. Nevertheless the marketing of the bar to a wider audience and the expansion into new consumer segments suggest that this might become less of an issue, especially when the number of people moving through increases. The issues of belonging, differentiation and identity formation through closure against otherness also have to be considered in terms of lesbian identity and culture more generally, particularly as the category of belonging was also highlighted in lesbians' experiences of gay clubs. It raises the question whether the positioning and self-recognition through otherness and difference makes play-realities of otherness more irrelevant or more difficult in the context of lesbian identity formation. In view of the homosexual play-reality framed by femininity and hetero-/ bisexuality (Chapter 6), the question that begs address in the study of contemporary sexual politics is what impact the integration of 'other' sexualities as a horizon of potentiality and becoming into heterosexual identity has on these very 'other'

sexualities. Does the female same-sex scenario entail a tightening or re-symbolisation of lesbian identity? The point that can be gleaned from this analysis is that despite the presence of 'femininity' in lesbian club contexts, femininity appeared to remain a marker of otherness hindering the passing as a member.

The gay male and mixed club, having a higher turnover of visitors, was quite an open space in terms of its acceptance of external others. It illustrated a more general trend towards shedding off sexual codification. Yet, the obstacle in this respect seems to be that the marker 'gay' is not only a sexual codification, but also circumscribes a certain aesthetic or style environment. In other words, it symbolises aesthetic or sign-value. The (partial) closure of the space, however difficult to enforce, seemed on the one hand to be motivated by keeping the sexually defined consumer segment and on the other hand, a precondition for maintaining the sign-value of 'gay'. The opening of the space to some extent reinforced the invocation of a community framework among the gay audience. In the light of present shifts in the promotion of the club, the questions arise whether the displacement of the official sexual marker will allow for a heterogeneous space of sociality or whether its unmarking will foster heterosexual homogenisation and struggles for 'gay' territory. From a wider viewpoint, these struggles against 'colonisation' as well as the structure of non-belonging that came to the fore in lesbian clubbing experiences also challenge research on club cultures that, being largely based on heterosexual contexts, put great emphasis on sociality and new forms of belongingness (e.g. Pini 2001).

Both the club spaces discussed in this chapter are (increasingly) aesthetic environments as much as sexually defined contexts. Their production rests on aesthetics and, to a different degree, they are also consumed as aesthetic spaces. While in the women's bar the aesthetic dimension was integrated into the sexual codification and appeared to be an important element of revaluing the marked otherness of lesbian space, in the gay club the aesthetic dimension appeared to transcend the sexual definition, demarcating a wider ambience of which the sexual codification was part. This became most evident in the role and use of drag, which was less a symbolisation of sexuality or gender rather than a way of aestheticising space through allegory. In a similar vein, the current popularity of fetish clubbing can

be seen in the context of aestheticisation. As for the aestheticisation of sexuality, a crucial question for future investigations would be to what extent sexualities in general are increasingly constructed through becomings and play-realities, through a notion of transformation and a horizon of potentiality. Such an integration of potential otherness must necessarily destabilise relations of coherence that render bodies intelligible. In returning to the question whether or not boundaries between sexual identities are weakened or reinforced (see Chapter 6), it can be proposed that the 'weakening of boundaries' is a destabilisation of mundane reason. Idealisations or stereotypisations of sexual identities as well as shared procedures and devices for reading sexuality and sexual identities may undergo a transformation. If this leads to the formation of 'oppositional sexual identities', queer sexualities and propels plurality, fluidity and ambiguity, is a different question. Nevertheless, we also saw the opposite at work; the reinforcement of boundaries and stereotypes. Whilst aware of the shortcomings of a body symbolism, everyday/night actors, as mundane inquirers, hold on to practices of authentication, attempting to construct intelligible bodies despite the in-coherences they may face in the reading of the other.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the discursive and phantasmatic complex of otherness, transgression and transformation that informs practices and experiences of contemporary club cultures. It does not claim that this is the prevalent or single mode of fabricating clubbing experiences. Instead of reading experiences of club cultures as illustrations of theoretical metaphors of otherness, its main aim was to investigate what structures these experiences of otherness. It argued that this otherness, which can appear in various framings and ambivalent meanings, is not just an undoing of identity, but is also a doing of identity. The thesis investigated several moments of this structure (or politics) of experience. It examined theoretical metaphors, practical spacings of clubbing, dimensions of gender, class and sexuality, autobiographical meaning contexts and narrative, discourses of drugs, media imagery of sexuality and clubbing, the production and consumption of club spaces, their modes of ordering and the sensational character of these spaces. The attempt to delve into the structures of clubbing experience, however, has only touched upon many of these issues, which certainly need to be addressed more comprehensively. The conclusions of this study will first summarise the course of the argument. This will be followed by a brief reflection on the methodological and theoretical framework of the thesis as to how it has confined and enabled the analysis of the construction of otherness. In reviewing the results of this analysis, I will return to the complex of otherness from a broader perspective. Further, I will point out the implications of the argument that has been put forth and consider how research on the politics of club cultures could be developed. These issues will not be discussed separately, but will be weaved together.

The thesis began with a critique of the idealisation of dance and club cultures as aesthetic-political strategy. This idealisation emanated from a particular reading of mainly postmodern theory. The theoretical metaphors of otherness centring on simulation, sociality and desire emphasised the undoing of identity. In contrast to this, I proposed that club cultures should be conceived of as postmodern cultural practices in the context of aestheticisation. I argued that these practices do not simply induce an undoing of identity. However, in conceptualising the doing of identity through dance cultural practices, the dimensions of simulation and sensation had to

be taken into account (Chapter 1). The ethnographic investigation of practical spacings of clubbing further advanced the argument that simulation and sensation are intricately linked to reflexivity, narrative and experience. It established the claim that the otherness of sensation comes to the fore as a retrospective experience of otherness (Chapter 2). The notion of the politics of experience highlighted that experience is socially contextualised and related to social location and everyday identities. The doing of identity through dance cultural practices was theorised through the concepts of aesthetic reflexivity and play-reality, hermeneutics of the self and narrative identity. Otherness, as an object of investigation, was defined as a form of mundane reason and mode of reflexivity, not to be confused with otherness implicated in theoretical notions of selfhood and narrative identity (Chapter 3). The empirical analysis demonstrated that club cultural spaces and experiences were structured through and contextualised by the everyday. Moments of othering emerged through and within the 'everyday' functionality of institutionally ordered club spaces (Chapter 2). Further, it was claimed that otherness, constructed through experiences and narratives of clubbing, highlights ethics of the self and is ethically ambivalent. Processes of validation and invalidation of clubbing realities and selves reflected ethical precepts and discourses of class, gender and sexuality (Chapters 4 and 5). The complex of otherness was not only investigated as part of the consumption, but also as part of the production of club cultures. Production contexts tended to construct otherness through the spectacular. Media imagery offered scenarios of otherness that allowed for being decoded in the context of sameness (Chapter 6). The particular market situation in which clubs are operating and the (sexual) codification and differentiation of clubbing scenes combined with institutional processes and forms of boundary work were found to be significant structures providing for different framings and meanings of otherness as well as sameness (Chapter 7).

1. Methodology and theory

One intention of this project was to engage in more depth with the issue of sexuality, which constituted the main criterion for circumscribing the ethnographic field and for generating the interview sample. Despite not being able to investigate the dimensions of race, ethnicity, geography and locality as social contexts of

experiences of otherness, this thesis challenged the invisibility of lesbian and gay sexualities in the representation and analysis of mainly heterosexual clubbing experiences. Overall it showed that sexuality generally is an important element of the politics of clubbing experience. The social composition of the interview sample also suggested addressing the question of class. This was one attempt of avoiding the epitomisation of middle class experiences as the typical or general mode of clubbing experiences. Although the argument of this thesis is closely linked to the empirical data, I think that the complex of otherness is a more fundamental structure that may inform the construction of clubbing experiences also in other social contexts (see discussion below, section 2).

With regards to the methodological design of this research, which used narrative interviewing as a method of generating data, it is necessary to revisit narrative as a structure that enables otherness. Like the practice of story-ing generally, the story-ing of club nights as well as reading or listening to narrations invokes otherness. It rests and partly concentrates on moments and courses of action that are special. The concept of narrative identity likewise rests on the dialectic of sameness and otherness (Ricoeur 1992). Having said this, the complex of otherness analysed in this study cannot be reduced to the structure of experience or narrative. Not every experience of dance culture – as a more basic element of otherness or as a difference or disrupted expectation of sameness – clings on to the imagination of the dance world as other. This discursive complex of otherness does not simply mark a boundary between the ordinary and the special, but as we saw, it rests on a more fundamental dichotomy and mode of reality construction emanating from the *politics* of experience. Despite the implication of narrative within otherness, the use and analysis of narratives also opened up the possibility of studying the construction of otherness in relation to everyday life contexts and identities. This revealed how this very otherness is embedded in the everyday and in identities shaped by class, gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, the aforementioned point about experience, narrative and story-ing suggests that these elements to some extent instigate processes of othering and it exposes what might hinder the investigation of clubbing narratives as a framing of ordinariness or non-other. This framing as ordinary, as a likely or possible counterbalance to otherness, certainly deserves and requires more attention in future studies. Looking back at the end of this project or looking forward to its

further advancement, I propose to develop a more pronounced focus on the dialectic of the ordinary and extraordinary. In other words, analysing how the complex of otherness informs the fabrication of clubbing experiences and how it is articulated through a politics of experience was but the first step of breaking away from theorising (and idealising) such dance spaces as other. Tracing the construction of otherness in the context of the everyday and identity was the beginning of writing the everyday back into the study of dance cultures. While investigating narratives of club spaces as other, this research critically reflected on the construction of otherness in ethnographic experience and narrative in order to avoid the othering of such dance spaces on a theoretical or analytical level (see Chapter 2). The use of ethnography, in particular the methodological perspective developed out of institutional ethnography in Chapter 7 (Smith 1987), made it possible to adjoin the dimensions of production and consumption in analysing clubbing experiences. This kind of approach also offered a new perspective on the issue of commodification – less in terms of a general, abstract debate about the resistant or escapist nature of dance culture – but more in terms of the politics of experience and the practical spacing of clubbing. While the use of case analysis, which several chapters relied on, could be construed as overly selective, the strength of this approach is its ideographic character. This allowed for a rich description of settings and contexts and for a thorough analysis of the complexities and ambiguities of lived practices.

Otherness as a form of mundane reason was not only investigated in terms of the meanings it articulated, but also as a particular mode of reflexivity in constructing reality. Theoretically, contemporary club cultures were situated in the context of postmodern aestheticisation and simulated environments. Simulation refers to the displacement of the distinction between reality and artificiality, in other words, to the 'insertion of artifice into the heart of reality' (Hennessy 2000: 132). The term play-reality was coined to take into account the simultaneity and indeterminacy of real and not real, virtual and actual, and authenticity and inauthenticity. This notion allowed for the investigation of postmodern aestheticisation and simulation processes in terms of mundane reason or hermeneutic practice. Play-reality refers to a mode of reasoning in the horizon of fleeting and ambiguous meanings of reality on a spectrum of play and reality. Importantly, it also accommodates the possibility of authentication and of (temporary) constructions of

reality. To conceive of club and dance cultures as simulated environments in the context of postmodern aestheticisation, therefore, was not to understand these environments as spaces of play and artificiality. Instead it suggested that they spawn a particular mode of reflexivity that could be called a hermeneutics of play-reality and that allows for authentication in all directions. This challenged the view that simulation simply dispenses with the real. It implied that identity, as a particular construction of reality, could be thought of not only as a boundary to difference, but also as a boundary to virtuality, play, potentiality, artificiality, becoming and discontinuity. The otherness of the virtual in processes of identification and simulation recalls Simon Reynolds' comment that rave was a dry run to virtual reality by adapting the nervous system and the perceptual and sensorial apparatus to sensual hyper-stimulation (1997: 108). However, what is more significant about this dimension of virtuality and hyperstimulation is its impact on modes of reflexivity and on the construction of reality. Politics of experience refers to socially structured processes of validation and invalidation of experience. The politics of clubbing experience then, from the angle of aestheticisation and simulation, can be seen as a structure for the *framing* of experience in the spectrum of play-reality and as a structure for *meanings* of play-reality. This theoretical framework clearly tried to break away from the theoretical metaphors and concepts of otherness that have dominated the study of dance culture for a long time. It also opened up youth and popular culture studies' concern with authenticity and with processes of authentication. I consider this to be the theoretical contribution that this thesis makes. It has prepared the ground for bringing together aestheticisation, dance and popular culture and identity. In advancing this theoretical approach, a wider and more elaborate focus on forms of reflexivity and identity formation in popular cultures needs to be developed. This, crucially, has to integrate the sensational, figural or allegorical dimensions of these cultural practices.

2. Otherness and the politics of clubbing experience

In assessing the different dimensions of the politics of experience considered in this study, biographical contexts, gender, class and sexuality turned out to be significant textures of clubbing experience. By and large, the otherness of club cultural practices was neither signified as resistance or apathy nor as happiness

against the odds, but rather as escapism or becoming, and as freedom of consumption and excess (see Chapters 4 and 5, which delineated constructions of otherness in relation to class and gender). However, the essential point that can be gleaned from these chapters is that dance spaces are not simply imagined in terms of a positive otherness such as freedom (see Pini 1997: 67-68). Instead, otherness attributed to them may be ethically and morally ambivalent. At the same time as it spurs the investment of desire and positive notions of transgression, it provides for the problematisation and invalidation of dance spaces and dance cultural experiences. This may not be an entirely surprising conclusion, but in the light of accounts that suggest that the 'elsewhere' of club culture is merely cast as a landscape for alternative and 'liberating' narratives of being, it seems important to be stated. The construction of dance culture as a sphere of otherness can be related to another discursive structure, which has not yet been addressed so far. Rather than the mainstream – underground distinction, which was believed to be a prevalent mode of (dis-)authenticating cultural practices and selves within the dance scene (Pini 2001, Thornton 1995), the dichotomies of mass culture and pure, modernist art, of consumption and production, of the dance world and the everyday world seemed much more significant (Huyssen 1986: 53).[236] The ethics of the self in relation to participating in dance culture partly conjured up the invalidation of mass culture. Interestingly, the gendered, devaluated otherness of mass culture was in some way reflected in the gendered and classed narratives of dance culture as other. Transcending and othering the self through the 'seductive lure' of clubbing was at the same time accompanied by the problematisation of this reality. It was framed by the fear of losing oneself in dreams and delusions and by the immoralisation of excessive consumption. The ethical problematisation of clubbing was more prevalent within femininity and working classness, while masculinity and middle classness tended to embrace the otherness of club cultures as a positive play-reality of transformation. In none of the narratives was the dance world unambiguously other and devoid of reality-status. The otherness threatened by devaluation could turn into a virtual otherness of becoming and transformation. This became evident through the identity projects that were formed around practices and experiences of clubbing (Chapter 5). These projects, essentially ethical and moral, re-introduced aspects of

[236] Of course the mainstream-underground can also be seen as an inflection of these general dichotomies.

(cultural, artistic) production, of agency, control and mastery and of individual progress and achievement. The reality principle was reinstated, either by being united with or by superseding the pleasure principle. The restorative function of these identity projects testifies that to some extent white, middle class participation in the realm of popular culture such as club and dance culture seems to have as its undercurrent the dichotomy of modernism and mass culture. While the deconstruction of this dichotomy has long been on the agenda of cultural theory, having been key to the argument of postmodern aestheticisation, the imaginary complex of mass culture remained the seductive spectre that haunted these clubbing selves. This also accentuates the otherness of abjection and difference next to the otherness of potentiality and becoming. Moreover, in view of these identity projects, the question arises, if not the phantasmatic complex of otherness as such is framed by middle classness and its deep-seated ethical project of turning identifications with devaluated otherness into an ethically and morally justifiable otherness of becoming and transformation. Nonetheless, my view is that this complex of otherness is of more general significance for the framing of club dance spaces, cutting across class locations. Fabricating experiences of dance culture through the complex of otherness does not necessarily entail narrating an identity project.

What appeared to be a novel form of transgressive as well as problematic otherness, particularly in the context of the white middle class sample of this study, was the image of excessive consumption, for example, excessive consumption of drugs. The otherness and problematisation of drugs partly coincided with the otherness and its problematisation formed around friendship, romance and sexuality. The authenticity of affectual bonds forged in the context of clubbing was frequently called into question. As a recurrent theme in various narratives, these 'disillusion'-stories related to the 'come-down' from drugs need to be taken account of when making assumptions about new forms of belonging. While the narrativisation of drug consumption indicated elements of normalisation, the plot-structure of mastery revealed the undercurrent of problematic otherness. Cultural production or the adoption of work roles (in the dance scene) appeared as significant narratives of mastering problematic otherness. Some of the cases studied in Chapter 5 pointed to the blurring boundaries between work and leisure roles in dance culture. While these work roles necessarily entailed some degree of routinisation, the integration into

identity projects demonstrated how work involvement could be narrated as a form of othering and transforming the self. The different sites of production can therefore themselves become experiential spacings of otherness.

The transformative potential of otherness constructed in the context of femininity was notably tied in with another structure of devaluated otherness, that is, with body and sexuality. In contrast to Pini's findings (Pini 2001: 17-18), however, the interviewees' narratives generated in this research did not make such *explicit* reference to the 'liberation' from traditional or respectable femininity (except for Giselle, whose narrative was linked to a sexual coming-out). The analysis of heterosexual females' narratives in Chapters 4 and 5 has shown that these notions of change and transformation, while conveying a sense of sexual exploration and of the normality of drug consumption, were notably tied in with what could be considered quite traditional modes of heterosexual femininity, for example, the heterosexual romance closure and the romantic tales of becoming a dancer. Likewise, the scenarios of female gender and sexuality, fetishised in the male produced media imagery of clubbing, demonstrated that entry into sexual otherness (for example homosexual roles) was firmly textured by fairly 'traditional' articulations of feminine gender (Chapter 6).

Men's narratives tended to relate transformation to psychological self-realisation and to work, career and artistic agency in music and design. Masculinity was also tied to knowledge of music and codes of 'cool' in interaction contexts. Despite taking issue with the problematic side of 'drug excess', men more easily embraced the 'freedom of excess' through narratives of adventure, risk and a total loss of control, featuring a grotesque and comic body out-of-balance or out-of-place. Sexuality was much less an issue in the (heterosexual) men's narratives of this study, which, amongst other reasons, may have been a result of interview rapport. Nevertheless, a more explicit focus on the experiential site of masculinity could be another way forward in the study of British club cultures.

A different point that can clearly be made in relation to arguments about aestheticisation is that ethics did not appear as a subsidiary to aesthetics (Welsch 1997: 19), but rather as a frame for the aestheticisation of self. The analytical focus

on ethics of the self helped take account of the fact that otherness could become problematic. This Foucauldian line of thought could well be expanded, as the integration of Nikolas Rose's work (1999) on the discourses of freedom into the analysis of drug narratives and of identity projects demonstrated. As we saw, 'liberation' or 'freedom' may be articulated in various ways and these different notions of freedom also cling on to political discourses and morals. Overall, the focus on the ethics of the self rather than on limit experience or other space seems to me the most fruitful direction to pursue when making use of Foucault's work for the study of dance cultural experiences.

In drawing attention to the contemporary concern with the search for experiences and sensations, the notion of aestheticisation can be compared to Michel Maffesoli's contention that postmodern sociality spurs sensual forms of social life (Maffesoli 1989: 2). However, this thesis challenged the application of the concepts of neo-tribalism and sociality to dance cultures on a number of counts. Part of the argument about postmodern sociality is that the logic of identity is being replaced by the logic of identification (see the discussion in this thesis, Chapter 1, 2.2). Maffesoli's notion of identification relates to the idea of the multiplicity of the self as a person with various, changeable masks (personae), much in the sense of simulation and acting 'as-if', but also in terms of spectacular, sensational signs. Yet, the analysis of the aestheticisation of self in dance culture has shown that identification through simulation was very much embedded in and textured by identity and social location. Rather than speaking of a temporary submergence of identity beneath identifications (Malbon 1999), it seems more apt to speak of an emergence of identity through and within identifications. Of course, the question of identity and identification touches on a wider issue. Maffesoli and similarly Zygmunt Bauman (1992) argued that neo-tribal forms of identification and of collective affiliation have replaced identifications based on class backgrounds. While class may not be the main source of identity and collective identification any more, class habitus certainly shaped outlooks and identifications within dance cultural practices. In this respect, we may modify the above statement in arguing that we saw the emergence, or at least the glimmer, of

class habitus in identifications with otherness and 'neo-tribal' affiliations.[237] The dis-authentication of affectual bonds pointed to above, as well as the rationales and routines in ordering club crowds, call into question a clear-cut conception of co-presence in dance clubs in terms of sociality, emotional community and belonging. Chapters 2 and 5 have touched upon the accentuation of individuality in the narratives of clubbing. This does not necessarily contradict, but at least contrast with the assumption that club and dance cultures provide a spacing of community or sociality fostering de-individualisation and collective bonding. Additionally, the processes of differentiation and the multiplicity of tribes that characterised the co-presence of the two clubs analysed in Chapter 7 require us to rethink in what way the notion of neo-tribal sociality might be applied to club crowds.

The final chapter of the thesis in some way arrived at and links back to the beginning of the thesis, which started, amongst others, from a critique of theorising club dance cultures through notions of community. In investigating two particular production and consumption contexts of sexually codified clubs, it not only delineated processes of differentiation within club crowds, but also illustrated that the discourse of community circulated as a frame of sameness, identity and 'our territory' rather than as a frame of emotional bonding and shared sentiment. While this provokes a reconsideration of the notion of community, albeit from a somewhat different viewpoint, it also made clear that such a frame is at the same time very much embedded in, and intricately linked to, the service frame and to the relations of production and consumption. It was beyond the scope of this chapter and this thesis to address the crucial question as to what extent the frames of community (as identity territory structured by relations of solidarity) and service (as aesthetic consumption space structured by market relations) shape experiences and expectations of dance culture in general. In this respect, I can only point to the link between the analysis of Chapter 7 and the discourses of freedom thematised in Chapters 4 and 5, which also echoed the issues of community and consumption.

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[237] This is in some way along the lines of Kevin Hetherington's (Hetherington 1998) point that identifications and identities may not entail a complete dissociation from structural factors. "We can still talk about class, gender and ethnicity alongside neo-tribes" (ibid. 53).

With regards to sexuality, Chapters 6 and 7 provided important insights in relation to the claims that I discussed at the outset of this thesis and in Chapter 6. These comprised arguments about dance and music cultures' challenges to constraints on sexuality, desire and gender, about the weakening of sexual boundaries and the formation of oppositional sexual identities, the tolerance of sexual difference and the increasing amalgamation of straight and gay dance scenes in Britain. The most interesting point to be noted is that despite the probably unprecedented number of sexually mixed dance scenes, London club contexts, for the most part, are fairly clearly demarcated in terms of the primary sexual codification. Different sexual identities remain relatively clearly distributed in sexually stratified spaces. Also, some of the accounts which stress new articulations of gender (for example Pini 2001) draw too clear a distinction between 'post-rave' scenes and 'traditional nightclubs'. Nevertheless, the opening of sexual boundaries registers in a different way. A key to the entry into sexual otherness as well as to the mixture of dance scenes is aestheticisation. Firstly, the aesthetic ambience of styles, attitude and fashion may act as a more general codification superseding sexual orientation. Sexual codifications may increasingly come to signify aesthetic ambiences of clubbing. Secondly, material aestheticisation (see Welsch 1997: 5) may turn sexually connoted costumes, outfits or enactments into spectacular signs. Thirdly, this may be tied in with immaterial aestheticisation, which prepares for shifting reflexivities and commonsense notions of sexual identity. This aestheticisation of sexuality can be considered an opening up of possible identifications and of ambiguous play-realities rather than a formation of oppositional identities. Instead, it is within identity boundaries that new scenarios of understanding, for example, female heterosexual and bisexual enactments begin to emerge.

In addition to the above, I wish to emphasise the importance of the mix of methodological approaches, in particular the use of narrative, for the study of club cultures. In advancing this field of research, it is indispensable to contextualise dance cultural experiences within structures of production and consumption, within the institutional framework of dance clubs and within the everyday. Further developing the analysis of class, gender and sexuality, criticising the theoretical construction of dance spaces as other and engaging with the issue of authenticity and reflexivity

appear to me the most crucial steps this work has made forward. However, even a critical perspective on the politics of clubbing's otherness runs the risk of re-inscribing dance culture with otherness, just by the very fact of making it a topic of analysis. What this work has shown is, that despite the ordinary, routine, everyday character of club and dance culture as part of the entertainment industry and even with the routinisation of clubbing lifestyle and practices, the ethical and moral complex of otherness, having its roots in the formation of modernity, still seems to be a significant structure for the representation and story-ing of white middle class clubbing experiences. Nonetheless, it is time to move on – or to move back – to the ordinary and mundane within the 'elsewhere'.

Appendix A: Statistics and survey research on drug consumption

British Crime Survey 2000:

This large-scale household survey (Sharp et al. 2001) investigated drug use in the general population. It suggested that around 50 per cent of young people aged 16 to 24 have tried drugs in their lives (= life-time rate), with 29 per cent having consumed an illicit drug within the year (= past-year rate) and 18 per cent within the month preceding the survey (= past-month rate). Generally, the report sketched a broadly stable picture of Class A[238] drug use among young people (16 to 24 year-olds), except for an increase of cocaine use. Depending on the drug, between 1 and 5 per cent of all 16 to 24-year-olds have used Class A drugs in the preceding year, with London having the highest rates for use of any drug including Class A drugs. The most widely used drug in all age groups, however, was cannabis, with a life-time rate of 44 per cent and a past-month rate of 14 per cent among 16 to 29 year-olds, followed by amphetamines with a life-time rate of 22 per cent and a past-month rate of 2 per cent. While the life-time rates give the impression of widespread drug-use in the youth population, the past-year and past-month rates point out that current and regular consumption of drugs is limited to a significantly smaller share of young people.

Release survey 1997:

This survey, based on a sample size of about 500, was carried out in London clubs. It found that clubbers' drug-taking by far exceeded the consumption levels of the general population (Release 1997: 10). Yet, the survey also indicated that drug use was only the fifth most popular reason for attending events (after music, socialising, atmosphere and dancing) (ibid. 5). According to *Release,* 87 per cent of the punters would use at least one illegal drug on the night when being interviewed, the favourite drugs for men and women being cannabis (59 per cent) and ecstasy (53

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[238] The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 classifies drugs on the basis of the supposed harm they may cause. Class A comprises heroin, cocaine and ecstasy, Class B includes amphetamines, barbiturates and cannabis. Class C includes steroids, benzodiazepines and growth hormones. Home Secretary, David Blunkett, in a recent announcement of the government's drug policy, ruled out a legalisation of cannabis, but revealed the plan to reclassify it to Class C (Guardian, July 12, 2002).

per cent), followed by amphetamines (39 per cent), LSD (16 per cent) and cocaine (8 per cent) (Release 1997: 12-13). Men were somewhat more likely to favour hallucinogens (ibid. 15). Compared with the British Crime Survey of 1994, the club population researched by *Release* was three times more likely than the general population to have tried cannabis and fourteen times more likely to have tried ecstasy (Ecstasy: 81 per cent of the club population versus 6 per cent of the general population). *Release* uncovered a comparable gap in relation to LSD, poppers, magic mushrooms and cocaine. About two thirds had tried them (Release 1997: 12). Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of these drugs, the most widely used drug, *Release* found, was alcohol.

Appendix B: List of Interviewees

Aniela, 02-02-2000, 24-11-2000, 30, Poland, law student and interpreter

Alex, 06-11-2000, 40, UK, primary school teacher

Bruce, 08-11-2000, 29, Canada, secondary school teacher

Clare, 01-02-2000, 05-07-2000, early 20s, UK, graduate in English, club dancer

Chuck, 24-01-2001, late 30s, UK, studying and working in design education

Emine, 03-02-2000, mid 20s, Turkey, media student, free-lance journalism

Erik, 10-02-2000, late 20s, Germany, self-employed masseur

Gary, 13-10-2000, late 20s, Canada, media student

Costa, 04-07-1999, mid 20s, Greece, art student

Gia, 30-11-2000, late 20s, UK, media graduate, cutter in film production

Hailey, 25-10-2000, 06-12-2000, early 20s, Australia, media student, works in television

Giselle, 18-04-2000, 26-02-2001, early 20s, UK, German-French, dance student, factory work in Norfolk

Kay, 17-11-1999, mid 20s, UK, art graduate, works in administration

Lisa, 18-02-2000, 18, UK, drama student

Lennie, 18-11-1999, late 20s, UK, office professional

Nike, 17-02-2000, early 40s, Greece, writer and artist

Sven, 01-12-2000, late 20s, Sweden, translator

Sheila, 06-11-2000, early 20s, UK, student in social work, shop assistant

Valerie, 04-10-2000, early 30s, UK, office professional

Sally, 11-10-2000, early 20s, UK, club dancer

Walter, 09-02-2000, early 20s, UK, student

Steven, 11-11-1999, early 20s, UK, media student

Yong, 26-01-2001, early 20s, Italy, Korean descent, media student

Age = at the time of the interview / Country = the country of origin

At the time of the interview all interviewees were resident in London (except for Giselle).

All the interviews were treated confidentially; names were changed.

Interviews with club promoters and managers

Kim Lucas, Candy Bar	20-06-2002
Angela Reed, Heaven	18-10-2002
Lee Freeman, DTPM	08-11-2000
Tubbs West, Fabric	05-10-2000

Interviews with journalists

Ben McArdle, Ministry magazine	05-10-2000

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