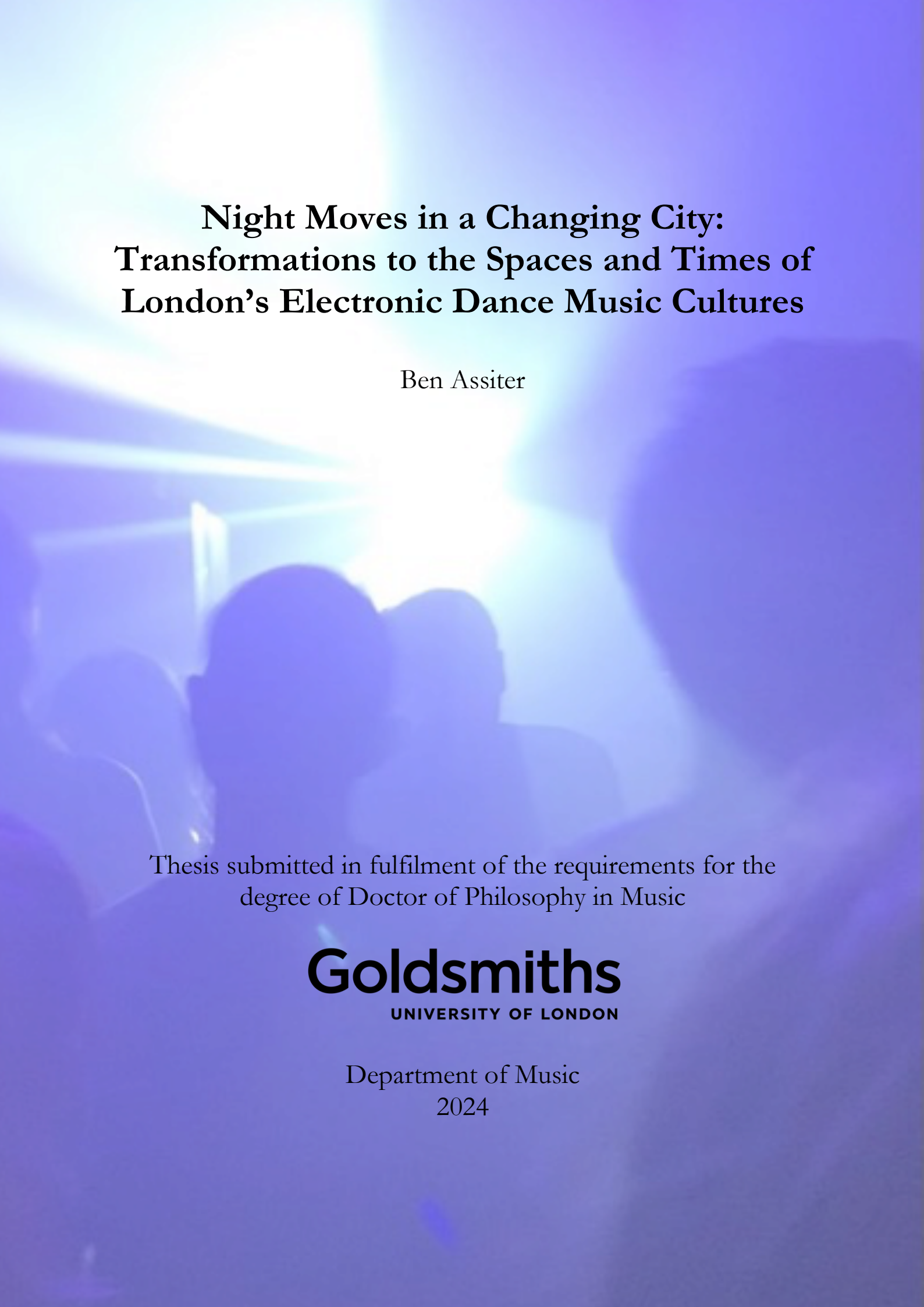

Night Moves in a Changing City: Transformations to the Spaces and Times of London's Electronic Dance Music Cultures

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Abstract

In the 2010s, London lost half of its nightclubs. Gentrification and restrictive licensing legislation contributed toward a state of spatialised precarity, later intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Popular and academic discourses focussed on a narrative of loss, but this failed to account for the emergence of new spaces and events during this period, reflecting more nuanced transformations to the space-time cultures and economies of London's night.

In this thesis, I explore electronic dance music's relationship to contested notions of the night-time as cultural territory, economic category, and site of urban governance. I argue how urban transformations, institutionalisation, and technology are shaping contemporary nightlife, with a particular focus on how these factors impact dance music culture's potential to produce unique forms of collectivity. My research is built around a series of case studies, representing examples of a spatio-temporal shift in London's club culture from night into day. I explore daytime events and temporary urbanism at super club Printworks; listening practices and culture-led regeneration at an audiophile bar in King's Cross; electronic music programming at museums and galleries; ideologies of wellness at sober event Morning Gloryville; as well as audiovisual livestreaming and the role it played in sustaining musical communities during the pandemic.

Building on the emergent field of 'night studies', I conceptualise the urban night as a time-space of alterity and possibility. Following this, I situate club culture's temporal shifts within profit driven colonisations of the night, refracted through ostensibly supportive attempts to reimagine London as a '24-hour city'. At the same time, my thesis highlights emergent nightlife practices, which complicate structural narratives of commercialisation. These draw attention not only to the radical potential of nightlife's reimagined spaces and times, but also to the complicity of many dance music practitioners in reproducing the institutional logics of the night-time economy.

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Introduction. Spaces of dancing and the urban night-time

Electronic dance music culture is closely entangled with the spaces and times of the night. Electronic dance music adds sonic dimensions to the architectures of nightclubs, animating nights out into the social and cultural worlds of nightlife. Yet the night is more than just a stable, temporal container. Like many other popular music forms, electronic dance music and the night function via a reciprocal relation, in which 'each feeds and amplifies the other's intensity' (Bottà and Stahl 2019: 4-6). The night shapes the meaning of musical practices, while music enhances the affective associations of the night. Together, electronic dance music and the night-time produce a variety of effects, including associations with alterity and transgression (Gilbert and Pearson 1999; Palmer 2000; Rietveld 2022); opportunities for greater intimacy and encounter (Garcia 2013a, 2023); as well as spaces of safety and self-expression for marginalised groups (Fikentscher 2000; Lawrence 2011; Adeyemi et al 2021). Despite this vital and seemingly inextricable relation, the last decade or so has witnessed increasing examples of electronic dance music culture relocating from the spaces and times of the night. This thesis explores these transformations, assessing their impact on the hitherto nocturnal cultures and politics of electronic dance music. I use these transformations to develop existing theories of the night's colonisation by day (Koslofsky 2011; Crary 2013; Gwiadzinski 2014), and examine what they can tell us about the recent history of electronic dance music and nightlife cultures in London and elsewhere.

In most studies of electronic dance music, the night is mentioned only in passing. Moreover, most research on the night-time tends to be oriented toward wider questions of urban life, paying less attention to the specific concerns of musical (sub)cultures and communities. In one respect, this thesis seeks to bridge these disciplinary gaps, arguing that the night-time – as it has been theorised primarily by geographers, urban planners, and sociologists – provides a useful spatial and temporal framework through which to approach the study of electronic dance music culture, as well as its ongoing transformation. This work is fundamentally interdisciplinary, and my thesis may in part be situated within the growing body of literature that explores electronic dance music and nightlife in relation to the production of cities (Mateo and Eldridge 2018; Stahl and Bottà 2019; Darchen et al. 2021), contributing to night and nightlife studies, as well as electronic dance music and popular music studies. More than this however, I aim to show how an approach attuned to the distinctions between day and night, as well as the spaces and times of culture more broadly, has relevance beyond the urban and geographic questions which have characterised much of night studies.

Among scholars of the night, it is generally argued that the unique qualities of nocturnal life and culture are at risk of colonisation by the day, forming flattened, 24/7 temporalities (Koslofsky 2011; Crary 2013; Gwiadzinksi 2014). Building on these critiques, I argue that many recent developments in electronic dance music culture may be grouped together as part of a transition from night to day, including: the emergence of daytime events and spaces; the relocation of electronic dance music into museums, galleries,

and static listening venues; as well as the rapid growth of livestreaming, which dissolves many distinctions between day and night culture. This spatial and temporal framework helps to make sense of seemingly disparate developments in electronic dance music culture, as well as their relation to dynamics of urban transformation, institutionalisation, and technological change. Where the colonisation of night by day tends to frame notions of the night-time as threatened by the 'temporal … expansion of capital' (Shaw 2018: 141), my thesis foregrounds the contradictory and ambivalent nature of the night. Much like electronic dance music, the affective power of the night can serve to obscure its capacities to reproduce exclusions, inequalities, and dominant economic logics. In this sense, my thesis also demonstrates how the emergent spaces and times of electronic dance music culture present novel opportunities for aesthetic and social transformation. This perspective counters reductionist narratives of cultural and spatial decline; complicates spatio-temporal typologies of 'underground' and 'mainstream'; and challenges lingering assumptions of radicalism in nightlife and electronic dance music culture.

Before proceeding with the rest of this introduction, I will clarify some key terminology. 'Electronic dance music' is an umbrella term referring to the broad spectrum of post-disco dance musics produced using synthesisers, samplers, and other electronic technologies. In the academy, it is differentiated from 'electronic music', which in musicological contexts has generally referred to electroacoustic music and related lineages of electronically composed Western art music. Electronic dance music encompasses a wide range of different (sub-)genres (e.g. house, techno, trance, drum and bass, dubstep etc), as well as space/venue-based distinctions (e.g. club or rave). Among scholars of electronic dance music, including *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, there has been a tendency to use the acronym 'EDM' (e.g. Fikenstcher 2000; Butler 2006; Fraser 2012), however, I avoid use of this acronym due to its colloquial and journalistic association with the set of genres that reached mainstream popularity in the USA during the 2010s (see Matos 2015). In electronic dance music communities and much of journalistic discourse, 'dance music', 'electronic music', and 'electronic dance music' are largely interchangeable and I adopt this approach in my thesis.[1] In part, this makes for a less repetitive read, but further, it reflects my own positionality as both researcher and practitioner, with concern for discourse as produced by journalists and participant communities, as well as within the academy.[2]

'Nightlife' is another broad term, which I use to refer to the urban ecology of night-time leisure spaces, including pubs, bars, and live music venues, as well as nightclubs. Like Chatterton and Hollands' (2002: 113) category of 'urban playscapes', my definition of nightlife focusses less on cinemas, theatres, and restaurants, which involve distinct social and cultural practices, as well as different relationships with prevailing conceptions of culture and (anti-)sociability. As my thesis will demonstrate however, these distinctions are dynamic rather than fixed, and there are numerous examples of increasingly hybridised nightlife spaces. Among scholars of night studies, some use 'nightlife' in a broader and more literal sense, to include all aspects of nocturnal social life (Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz 2023). However, I define nightlife in

[1] See, for example https://ra.co/about
[2] See Anita Jóri (2022) for further discussion on the contested meanings of 'electronic dance music' and 'EDM'.

line with its colloquial usage, and I use the terms 'nocturnal life', 'nocturnal culture', and 'night-time culture' to denote the broader social and cultural worlds of the urban night.

Spaces of dancing

Though focussed on London, this is not a story about the sound of the city, nor its localised dance music forms. Numerous studies have explored the lineages of jungle, U.K. garage, dubstep, and grime, which emerged primarily from transatlantic, postcolonial exchanges between Jamaica and London (Bradley 2013; Brunner 2013; Melville 2020; Brar 2021). While there is still much to add to this history, my focus is less about narrations of genre and stylistic change, instead drawing attention to emergent reorderings of the spaces and times in which dance music culture takes place. In recent years, many commentators have argued that electronic music has reached a point of creative stasis, leading Shawn Reynaldo (2022) to suggest we conceive of it as a 'kind of folk art', no longer organised around 'innovation, futurism and pushing the envelope.' Where this thesis is a debatable one – particularly considering the emergence of new electronic music forms in the Global South – I suggest that a focus on spatial and temporal transformations affords new ways of conceptualising developments in electronic dance music, divorced from trajectories of genre, as well as the cyclical decline and renewal of nightclubs and their related social and spatial ecologies.

With the dance floor at its core, the spaces of dance music culture – including nightclubs, and informal, repurposed venues – shape its development and historical imaginary as much as the DJs and producers of the music. Historians of electronic music have long recognised this, and emergent literatures are drawing further attention to the social and physical architectures of nightclubs (Haslam 2015; Kries et al. 2018; Rietveld 2022; Gillen 2023). Where this body of research adds important spatial dimensions to social, cultural, and musical histories of dance music culture, it can be developed by considering the new spaces and times of electronic dance music. Alongside work which documents the histories of nightclubs and music venues, I argue that narratives of spatial decline (and renewal) can be augmented with reference to the diversity of spatial and temporal transformations that have taken place through the 2010s and 2020s. I explore these transformations in the chapters that follow, examining dance music culture in temporary nightclubs; listening bars; museums and galleries; pre-work events; as well as the digital spaces of livestreaming. These spatial and temporal reorderings expose reinscribed processes of corporatisation, institutionalisation, and gentrification, while simultaneously affording new possibilities of aesthetic and social transformation.

I first began thinking about this project in the latter half of 2016, when London's dance music scenes were negotiating a rapidly changing spatial, political, and social context. As was widely noted in the press, London lost almost half of its nightclubs between 2005 and 2015. For a city that had birthed the sounds of jungle, UK garage, and dubstep, and played a key role in various stylistic offshoots of house and techno, this epidemic of venue closures was at odds with London's historic and ongoing legacies as a centre

of dance music culture. These transformations were symptomatic of London's contested urban imaginary, in which the ongoing financialisation of the city's property market reproduced a vision of London as a haven for wealthy, global elites (Campkin 2013; Moreno 2014; Minton 2017). Where this reputation was also linked to perceptions of cultural vibrancy, decades of market-led urban policy have contributed to the ongoing displacement of many of the spaces and communities responsible for London's unique cultural ecologies.

Political transformations took place with the emergence of new modes of nocturnal governance. Following the lead of Amsterdam, Amy Lamé was appointed as London's first Night Czar in 2016, tasked with the promotion and safeguarding of nightlife venues. New municipal interest in the value of urban nightlife reflected the extent of London's spatial crisis, but also the ways in which night-time cultures had become increasingly intertwined with the lucrative infrastructures of creative cities and economies. For City Hall, the night-time economy became more than just an extended terrain of production and consumption – it was recognised as a core metric of city-branding, at local and global scales (Kolioulis 2018).

Alongside these urban and political developments, dance music communities revaluated their own relationships with the social space of the dance floor. Against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements in the mid-2010s, activists drew attention to the lack of diversity in DJ line ups, as well as the forms of harassment and exclusion faced by many women, LGBTQ+ communities, and people of colour at dance music events. These reappraisals destabilised the fragile utopianism that has continued to frame much of rave and club culture since the late 1980s. In London, party collectives such as Resis'dance, BBZ, Uniti, and SIREN sought to (re)centre dance music culture's significance for marginalised groups, exploring safe(r) space strategies at their events (SIREN 2016).

My personal relationship with the spaces of dance music culture also transformed around this time. During my late teens and early 20s, my formative experiences of London's nightlife were shaped primarily by FWD>> at Plastic People and DMZ at Brixton Mass, which incubated the emergent, and distinctly local, sound of dubstep. Reimagining the bass-heavy legacies of dub and reggae, these events afforded largely meditative, introspective atmospheres (Stirling 2016). These were largely male-dominated spaces, although they were diverse in terms of race, age, and class. I was aware of these social aspects, but my main reasons for attending were musical – listening out for unreleased dubplates and the moments of joyful affirmation when you recognised a track. During the early 2010s, the local sonic spaces of dubstep became increasingly deterritorialised, culminating with the closure of Plastic People in 2015. It had been the home of FWD>> for many years, with a carefully tuned Funktion-One sound system that was synonymous with the frequencies of dubstep. The closure of this venue mirrored the rapidly changing Shoreditch area, as well as broader musical and geographical transformations. The dubstep scene had mutated into a series of offshoots labelled variously as post-dubstep and bass music, drawing many UK producers closer to the rhythms and tempos of house and techno. The dubwise aesthetics that had emerged from a close-knit ecology of South London producers including Digital Mystikz, Skream, and Loefah, were reimagined as the

maximal sounds of EDM, which soundtracked a growing industry of outdoor festivals in the US (Matos 2015).

Following these processes of sonic and territorial splintering, my interest in electronic music briefly waned. FWD>> and DMZ had functioned as social and spatial anchors. Without them, my relationship with London nightlife felt confused and untethered. This changed in mid-2015 when I discovered World Unknown, a small community-oriented party run by Andy Blake and Amy Alsop – long-term veterans of London's club culture. World Unknown started out in a railway arch in Loughborough Junction in 2009. By the time I started attending, it had moved to The Flying Dutchman in Camberwell. From the outside, this former local pub looked as though it had shut down, but it hosted occasional parties, with a focus on local alternative culture, LGBTQ+, and kink/fetish events. World Unknown took place once a month, drawing a mix of regulars and curious newcomers. I would regularly attend events alone, knowing that I would bump into friendly faces or make new connections. Events were soundtracked by the two resident DJs, Andy Blake and Joe Hart, who would take turns playing records between the hours 10pm and 6am. They drew on a wide mix of genres, jumping wildly between styles and tempos including disco, progressive house, acid, rock, techno, new wave, tech house, and trance. The DJ booth was hidden behind a curtain in a separate room, meaning that the dancefloor was a directionless space. With no sense of a front or back, dancers and dancing were the focus in this dark, smoke-filled basement.

What struck me most about World Unknown was the way that music was just one component of what Pol Esteve (2018: 146) has termed a 'total space'. Such spaces are produced at the intersection of sound, architecture, and bodies, refracted through other spatial technologies including smoke, lighting, and drugs.[3] As a musician who had grown up with a 'trainspotting' mentality toward electronic music, this reordering of music's role changed my relationship with nightlife. Where I had previously attended parties to hear specific DJs or the acoustics of a particular sound system, I now considered music as part of a more holistic ecology, including space, crowd, and the elusive, affective qualities of the atmosphere or 'vibe'. Within this ecological conception of dance music, my relationship with music shifted toward its capacities to be 'initiatory of socio-spatial relations' (Born 2013: 23). As Luis-Manuel Garcia notes, the spaces of electronic dance music afford the possibility of 'liquid solidarity' – a form of unique but ambivalent social intimacy (2013: 242; 2023). Such intimacies articulate the potential of a wider politics: 'to make possible new forms of community and new networks of relation' (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 183). Crucially, the social capacities of dance music culture are dependent on infrastructures of space and time. These refer to the physical architectures of nightclubs and other venues, as well as the temporality of the night-time, which contributes toward the dance floor's 'space of loosening and unravelling' (Garcia 2013a: 242).

[3] Throughout this thesis, 'drugs' refers to the range of predominantly illegal psychoactive substances used in electronic dance music culture. Drug use varies between scenes, spaces, and times, but some of the more commonly used substances across club and rave settings include MDMA (ecstasy), ketamine, amphetamine (speed), cocaine, GHB, LSD (acid), psilocybin (magic mushrooms), and cannabis.

The urban night

My research builds on the emergent, interdisciplinary field of 'night studies', which draws attention to the spatial and temporal category of the night-time – and the urban night in particular – as a distinct of object study. Geographers have conceived of the urban night as a time-space with its own atmosphere, in which practices gain meaning and traction in a different context from the day. Formed at the rhythmic intersection of the 'biogeoastronomical' and the socio-cultural, the atmosphere of the urban night is simultaneously an 'intensified urban form of living' as well as a territory in which the 'city loses many of its inherent characteristics' (Shaw 2018: 119). The atmospheres of the night are formed through the assembly of 'people, objects, ideas, affects and discourses', which while 'often ephemeral and affect-driven, emerge from culturally contingent representational context' (Shaw 2014: 8-13). Atmosphere, beyond its everyday usage to connote a collective mood or feeling, draws attention to the intersections between 'people, things and spaces', without becoming 'reducible to such entities' and retaining a 'quasi-autonomous' function (Anderson 2009: 80). By envisaging the night as a series of atmospheres, Shaw counters economically-driven attempts to define a singular notion of the urban night, and draws attention to the ways in which particular atmospheres may be regulated, or encouraged to thrive in particular places over others.

For American sociologist and pioneering nocturnal theorist Murray Melbin, the urban night is a particular kind of social space, with attendant behaviours and norms. In his classic study, 'Night as Frontier', he likened the urban night to the 19th century American frontier, which occupied a space that sits in between the density of a settlement and the emptiness of the wilderness. Where the frontier provided tranquillity and solitude with 'fewer social constraints', the night offers a space for those seeking solace from prying eyes, providing an 'insulating function that averts possible tensions from unwanted encounters.' Popular conceptions of the night conjure up images of evil and danger sitting 'outside of ordinary social control', harbouring a space in which strange characters and deviance are 'tolerated and even expected.' In conjunction with perceptions of heightened fear and crime, Melbin argued that the night also creates a space for greater helpfulness and friendliness, in which people are more likely to form fleeting forms of alliance within an atmosphere of perceived peril. Operating outside of daytime's more structured and rationalised routines, the night-time affords the freedom for diverse social possibilities (1978: 9-11). Such possibilities are heightened by the sparse demography of the night – with a reduced social presence on the street, 'interactions which do occur are more intense' (Shaw 2018: 74).

Historians of the urban night have focussed much attention on the ways it has been shaped by developments in lighting technologies, while noting the ways in which the night-time is socially constituted. Peter C. Baldwin argues that while artificial lighting allowed the city to expand in both time and space,

predictions that the night would turn into day were disrupted by the perpetuation of norms formed during the pre-industrial night. Despite attempts to technologically reconfigure the possibilities of nocturnal urban life, socially and culturally established codes of behaviour proved resilient, 'preserving the night as an incompletely civilized realm within the modern city.' For Baldwin, the night-time is a 'startling intensification of the urban experience', exaggerating both anonymity and diverse possibilities of encounter (2012: 202-3). He concurs with Melbin in suggesting that the urban night offers certain freedoms, but is cautious to note that the 'urban night should not be romanticised as offering a haven from oppression' (Ibid. 6). Documenting the development of the night-time in nineteenth and early twentieth century American cities, he argues that the right to the newly colonised urban night belonged especially to young, often drunk men. Freedom for some was thus dependent on the exclusion of others – an atmosphere attractive to one demographic may simultaneously be intimidating to another. Such dynamics continue in contemporary contexts through the ways in which urban night-time economies may often work to 'reinforce existing inequalities in access and freedom to use public space' (Shaw 2018: 75).

Bryan D. Palmer sees a similar ambivalence in his history of the night-time as a real and metaphorical setting for transgression. As the natural home for 'estrangement and marginality', night-time's transgressions can be contradictory:

> This domicile could be one of comfort and escape or, on occasion, a nursery of revolt. But so too could it be darkness within darkness, a discomforting anarchy of alienation and distress that shattered the brittle securities of daylight in fearful and terrifying dangers, in tensions and self-destructive behaviours all the more tragic for their relative autonomy from the powers that conditioned them and bore ultimate responsibility for their history of hurt. Transgression was not always heroic, and it was certainly not only about resistance (2000: 18).

Like Bahktin's carnival, the night can represent both release and revolt, as a bounded rather than lasting suspension of norms. Where marginality is both externally imposed and internally constituted within the subject, the night may be seen to function as a spatialised form of transgression, which is rarely able to 'undergo the difficult translation into languages that could restructure the day.' Thus for Palmer, rather than leading to transformative moments of conflict and change, night-time transgressions have 'sustained more quietly clandestine histories: times, places, spaces where human expression was not as easily subjected to the surveillance of high noon or blinded by the light of day' (2000: 19). The night functions as a safe terrain for marginality, in which 'oppression's meanings are negotiated', yet it remains in reciprocal relation to daytime's politics of production and exchange as its constituent other. Gallan and Gibson (2011) argue that binaristic conceptions of day and night serve to reinforce problematic dualisms of normal and deviant behaviour. Historically, the night has been a space of refuge and excitement, as well as site of exile for the 'the sad, the mad, the bad' (Beaumont 2015: 3). Where night-time transgressions may pose little threat once the working day begins, the night functions an important time-space for marginality and difference, even if it does little to contest marginality itself. Nocturnal time-spaces of marginality are key to the histories of

many dance music cultures, which have functioned as alternate public spheres and social infrastructures for queer communities and people of colour (Fikentscher 2000; Buckland 2002; Garcia 2014; Wark 2023).

Symbolically, where the night-time represents magic and madness, its existence is necessary to sustain the rationality of the day. Day and night thus exist in an eternally irreconcilable dialectic, such that the mythical, mysticism of the night 'is a precondition for the spirit of the Enlightenment to succeed' (Bronfen 2013: 16). As Foucault argues:

> the most vivid and concrete opposition, that of *day and night*…is the universal but absolutely divided time of brightness and darkness…The circle of day and night is the law of the classical world: the most reduced but the most demanding of the world's necessities, the most inevitable but the simplest of nature's legalities.
>
> A law which excludes all dialectic and all reconciliation; which establishes, consequently, both the flawless unity of knowledge and the uncompromising division of tragic existence; it rules over a world without twilight, which knows no effusion, nor the attenuated cares of lyricism; everything must be either waking or dream, truth or darkness, the light of being or the nothingness of shadow. Such a law prescribes an inevitable order, a serene division which makes truth possible and confirms it forever' (2001: 103).

Here the night becomes not only a time-space with its own symbolism and history, but the basis of an epistemology. Considering the ways in which the 'natural' law of diurnal rhythms is increasingly blurred, inverted, and fragmented, possibilities of difference dissolve into a homogenous present. As Jonathan Crary argues, 'a 24/7 world is a disenchanted one in its eradication of shadows and obscurity and of alternate temporalities…A 24/7 world produces an apparent equivalence between what is immediately available, accessible, or utilizable and what exists' (2013: 19).

Considering different disciplinary approaches to the study of the urban night emphasises the diversity of factors through which night-time social and cultural practices gain meaning. Although the night-time tends to be understood within a binary framework that privileges the sanctity of natural rhythms or advocates further colonisation of the night, it is important to recognise that in the urban environment most of all, there is not night – but 'nights' (Khan and Preiser 2017). Where divergent visions exist for the status of the urban night, 'temporal conflicts' (Gwiadzinski 2014: 2) inevitably emerge, which must be situated within wider networks of power and influence. Recognising this, what is the significance of the night for urban communities, cultures, and spaces? How are they affected by the changing status of the urban night? How can the analysis of spatio-temporal transformations and the night-time inform ways of understanding and supporting culture? With multiple, contested understandings of the night, it is unproductive to attempt to frame it in the terms of any inherent sense of transgression or resistance. Rather, in the words of Nick Dunn (2016: 10), the night is perhaps best understood as a 'a time-place to imagine alternatives.'

Night-time culture, night-time economy

Within the socially constituted time-spaces of the urban day and night, artistic and cultural forms are generally distributed across fixed timeframes, in accordance with long standing moral codes and behavioural norms. Will Straw maps these cultural rhythms on to variations in bodily, mental and sensorial activity, suggesting that 'increased movement and exuberance replace stasis as night replaces day', accompanied by 'an increase in levels of oral (rather than visual or printed) communication, a heightening of the proximity between people, and the joining together of different sense-based experiences' (2014: 197). In the day-time, cultural offerings are provided by the 'static textuality' of museums and galleries, which moves through the arts of performance – including concerts and the theatre – toward the conviviality of nightclubs. Across this continuum, activities move from a focus on individual modes of reflection and consumption in the day time, towards a nocturnal intensification of collectivity and interaction. Save for a few specific examples, these temporal categorisations generally remain discrete, although Straw notes how up until the 1960s, dancing, drinking, eating, and listening to music would often occur all in the same place. Alongside historical changes, we can also note the place-based variations in the way that social spaces are temporally organised, contrasting for example, the fluid functionality of the Parisian café with the more defined spatio-temporal typologies of the pub, restaurant, and coffee shop in the UK.

Conflicting versions of the night play out in the spatial and temporal distribution of night-time cultures and spaces. Much of this takes place within the moralised domains of licensing law (Chevigny 1991), but it is the popularity of the 'night-time economy' framework that presents the most significant and complex reconfiguration of the urban night: as 'territory to be occupied, controlled, developed and represented' (Straw and Pearson 2017). The closely-related concepts of the 'night-time economy' and the '24-hour city' grew out of the circle of academics based around Charles Landry's Comedia think tank in the early 1990s. They argued for a new approach to urban regeneration via the deregulation of the night-time, which would provide an opportunity for the 'doubling' of a city's economy (Bianchini 1995). The night-time economy framework repositioned nightlife and night-time culture as new modes of cultural production while the UK recovered from recession in the early 1990s (Shaw 2014). While predominantly an economic policy recommendation, the '24-hour-city' concept also contained a cultural component, emphasising notions of 'vitality' and 'vibrancy' through the promotion of the European café lifestyle, as well as the privileging of music venues, cinemas and theatres over more traditional working-class spaces such as pubs and bingo halls (Shaw 2010). Early formulations of the night-time economy framework functioned not only as an attempt to expand cities' horizons of production and consumption, but also as a means through which to remould city centres in a particular image – what has been termed the 'nightlife fix' (Hae 2012).

Subsequent academic critiques of night-time economy policy have centred largely on its binaristic and often contradictory focus on profit and regulation. Chatterton and Holland (2002) explore the ways in which the 'urban playscapes' of major cities in the UK were subject to processes of corporatisation, surveillance, and segmentation, such that a dominant mode of nightlife emerged at the expense of diversity.

Talbot (2009) advocates for a more complex consideration of nightlife, arguing that most policy has traditionally encouraged practices based solely around alcohol consumption, while simultaneously constructing a regulatory discourse based primarily around issues of 'alcohol-related disorder'. Talbot also emphasises the ways in which the night-time economy emerged concurrently out of strategies to regenerate decaying inner city areas, as well as part of attempts to drive rave culture into 'private and licensed space, thus rendering them visible and considered' (2009: 16). Rowe and Bavinton argue that most nightlife policy is based on dualistic conceptions of order and disorder. Where such an approach assumes a linear, monocausal relationship between policy and outcome, they suggest a model in which 'urban nightlife is seen as a specific manifestation of cultural complexity' (2011: 817), engaging with the often ambiguous, dynamic, and unpredictable realities of nightlife as lived experience. Similarly, Shaw (2010) recommends a focus on the interplays between the multiple subjectivities which emerge within the city at night. By considering the social complexities of the night-time economy, we can understand the multiple, co-dependent, and conflicting subjectivities which emerge from within it. Approaches to the urban night which recognise complexity and multiple subjectivities afford a new 'epistemology of the night' (Shaw 2014: 6). This change in focus allows the night-time economy to be understood in terms of its social and cultural value to specific communities, rather than as a singular, economic entity. My own research considers complexity and diversity within the night-time cultures and economies of electronic dance music and nightlife, situating the social and aesthetic qualities of different nightlife spaces within wider geographies and contexts. I focus on a range of different scenes and spaces, exploring their transformation in relation to contexts of spatial precarity; emergent forms of municipal and institutional support; as well as social and ideological shifts within dance music communities and wider social publics.

Notes on method

My research is interdisciplinary in approach. I draw on literature from music studies along with work including sociology, cultural studies, media studies, geography, and urban planning. Aside from the sections of this introduction that discuss existing work on the urban night-time and night-time economy, my reviews of existing literature are integrated throughout the remainder of the thesis. Each chapter builds on different bodies of research, relevant to the spatial and temporal transformations of each case study. Where my broad focus considers electronic dance music in urban contexts, this approach affords the possibility of exploring transformations to urban nightlife at multiple scales, drawing in debates around temporary urbanism; listening; institutions; work and leisure; and the impacts of digital technology.

My own background is in musicology and popular music studies, and I have worked as a professional musician for over 15 years. This has primarily been as a touring drummer, although my own creative practice has increasingly involved electronic music production and DJing since 2015. I have released several EPs under the moniker, Mr Assister, and run a small independent record label, BEAM.

Considering this background, my research seeks to stimulate conversation between disciplines and practitioners, exploring music and nightlife as situated in urban contexts. Moreover, my involvements in nightlife – both as a practitioner and partygoer – mean that my research is largely written from an 'inside' perspective, with a vested interest in the sustained reproduction of nightlife and spaces of dancing. As such, while I adopt a critical position regarding the relation between specific nightlife spaces and processes of gentrification, corporatisation, and institutionalisation, I write from a starting point that includes social dancing as part of a broader 'right to the city', that 'enriches the cultural as well as the social and political lives of cities' (Hae 2012: 40).

Given dance music culture's experiential qualities, as well as its ongoing cultural life, ethnographic methods are key to understanding contemporary spaces of dancing. My research draws on ethnographic techniques, including participant-observation and interviews. There are numerous ethnographies of rave and club culture, including those by Rietveld (1998a), Malbon (1999), Buckland (2002), Anderson (2009), and Garcia (2023) which are useful for their explorations of the sensory and social aspects of dance environments. However, as electronic dance music culture enters its fourth decade of history, along with an ever-growing body of attendant academic literature, it has become increasingly difficult to write ethnographic reflections on nightclub spaces that tell us anything new. My focus on the transformed spaces and times of contemporary dance music culture is, in part at least, a methodological response to the saturation of writing on club and rave spaces. Where descriptions of drug-taking and dance floor experiences may have been novel in the 1990s, the mainstreaming of club culture means that an increasing number of readers will have had these experiences themselves. This is not to deny the possibility of useful and evocative fieldwork – which can play a vital role in documenting the ephemeral histories of spaces of dancing – but rather, to avoid the reproduction of descriptive and linguistic tropes. Of course, questions of readership and audience are key: within certain (inter)disciplinary contexts, descriptions of dance music spaces may still be useful and necessary. However, for work that seeks relevance within dance music communities in particular, observation and description need to go further in capturing the concealed affective and social nuances of dance floors. As Graham St John (2013) argues, 'while the gulf between lived experience and expression … is essentially unbridgeable, researchers are nevertheless obliged, indeed compelled, to find creative rhetorical techniques to transpose their experience'. Some of the most evocative work in this regard might be classified as creative non-fiction, using poetic and reflexive techniques to replicate the affective, experiential qualities of dance music culture (e.g. Bell 2018; Cagney 2022; Wark 2023).

In parts of this thesis, I use participant-observation to document my own experiences at different dance music events and spaces. In certain cases, I attended events with a specific observational practice in mind, though my research is also informed by my longer-term participations in dance music culture as a partygoer, DJ, and event organiser in London – what Clifford Geertz termed 'deep hanging out' (1998). Some sections of my writing switch into a more reflexive, personal register, narrating my attendance at specific events. Elsewhere, my experiences are integrated as part of analytical prose, drawing on repeated interactions with different dance music scenes, spaces, and communities. Ongoing participant-observation

helps to construct an 'archive of experience', informing a more intuitive understanding of cultural meanings, practices, and values (Garcia 2013b: 8-9). To develop my observational practice, I spent 3 months in the lead up to my PhD keeping a diary of my experiences at approximately 20 different gigs and dance music events. While in attendance, I would focus on 'being there' (Ibid.), and then note down my reflections once I got home or woke up the following morning. During this period, and in my subsequent field research, I would aim to describe as much about different spaces and events as possible, even if certain details didn't necessarily appear relevant at the time (Stock 2004: 23). In this respect, I was also influenced by George Perec (2010) and his attempt to document the everyday life of a square in Paris, by 'exhausting' apparently mundane details including the passage of buses and pedestrians.

Where this kind of 'at home' fieldwork affords greater ease of access and trust, it demands an emphasis on 'reflexive, non-objectivist scholarship' (Cooley and Barz 2008: 19). With the boundaries blurred between life, cultural practice, and research, domestic fieldwork is at once more *and* less intense, divorced from the discrete temporal and geographic separations of more distant research sites (Stock and Chiener 2008: 116). In this way, it has been important for me to revisit and critique many of my own received assumptions about different music scenes, spaces, and events. This process has not always been an easy one, but I have endeavoured to be reflexive of the ways in which my own musical tastes and affinities may confuse broader questions of social and cultural value. Of course, such separation is impossible in any objective sense, meaning that the empirical aspects of ethnography are best understood as 'a potentially useful strategy for discovery rather than a belief about how the world is' (Huron 1999).

My research also draws on interviews with nightlife stakeholders including DJs, venue managers/programmers, and a regular attendee at Bagley's, as well as a gallery curator and architect involved in nightclub design and planning. Three of these were hour-long interviews conducted in person, with one over the phone and another on zoom. Another five interviews were conducted over email, four of which I used to write an article for Ransom Note in 2017, discussing the state of London's nightlife (See appendix: list of interviews). The main interviews were semi-structured. I approached them with a set of prepared questions and themes, but allowed the conversation to unfold in an open-ended manner, with room for unexpected directions and tangents (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002). Email interviews were organised around sets of five to ten questions, with a more specific thematic focus.

The people I interviewed represented a range of different race, gender, and class identities, although I primarily used interviews to gain insight into the concealed workings of specific spaces and events, rather than as a way of seeking to represent London's dance music cultures in any broader sense. Given that many of my case studies explore spaces and times in dance music culture that have yet to be researched, there is certainly room for future ethnographic research that would engage with a wider range of voices associated with each specific space or event.

As part of my research for Chapter 4, I conducted an interview on foot, using a walk around Coal Drops Yard in Kings Cross to stimulate memories and reflections regarding the area's heritage and legacies in club culture. Walking can function as a useful method for engaging with the interwoven material and

immaterial histories of cities, 'a slow, forensic exercise that reveals elements of unnoticed livelihood, traces of profound mutations, and scars that will hardly heal' (Joseph-Lester et al. 2016: 6). Beyond this interview, walking (and cycling) formed a core component of my ethnographic work. It helped me to situate musical spaces within wider urban geographies, as well as to reflect on the ways that journeys to and from events mediate musical and social experiences. Adventurous journeys to illegal raves are a recurring theme in studies of dance music culture (Collin 1997; Peter 2020), but these journeys can be expanded to include more mundane and habitual movements through urban (and rural) space. As Negus and Sledmere (2022) note, walking can afford a more creative and non-prescriptive approach to the study of music, space, and place, less constrained by disciplinary protocol.

My research received ethical approval from Goldsmiths in June 2018. In terms of research ethics, I ensured that all interviewees were aware of the scope and outputs of my research. They had the option to remain anonymous in my writing, although in certain cases, their identity and role form a key part of my research data. In my participant-observation practice, it was impractical to obtain permissions from everyone in attendance at a research site. However, any reference I make to behaviours in a crowd tends to be vague and individual identities remain confidential. Illegal drug use is prevalent within much of dance music culture, though it doesn't form a significant part of my research. Any mention of illegal activities refers only to wider tendencies, without focussing on the activities of specific individuals.

Regarding method, it is also worth acknowledging the impacts of COVID-19 on my research. Aside from the first year of my PhD, the remainder of my work was undertaken on a part-time basis. This meant that the period of lockdown restrictions in 2020 and 2021 occurred during the crucial middle stages of my research. With nightlife on hold for much of these two years, in-person fieldwork was impossible, and this placed limitations on much of the data I was able to gather. I was forced to come up with novel research practices, and my idea for a walking interview started out as a practical response to the limits on indoor socialising. Like many others, I was also faced with the much broader challenge of finding the motivation to continue researching and writing about a culture, which during much this period, was almost unrecognisable from its pre-pandemic workings. After many months of struggling how to proceed, I realised that the transformations of dance music culture during the pandemic were in many ways intensifications of processes that I was already exploring in my research (Assiter 2020). COVID-19 thus became part an integral part of the story, adding new layers of social, spatial, and technological complexity. I examine livestreaming during the pandemic in chapter 6, though I have also integrated reflections on the impacts of COVID-19 on dance music culture throughout the rest of the thesis.

Structure

This thesis is organised into five chapter-long case studies, which explore different spatio-temporal reorderings of electronic dance music culture. Each case study represents in different ways a relocation of

dance music culture from the time-space of the night. To an extent, each chapter functions as a self-contained, standalone study. Aside from chapter one, as well as some short transitional passages, the remainder of the chapters could be read in multiple orders. I have positioned them in a way that affords a degree of flow between sections, but they do not follow a strict chronological or discursive narrative. Rather, I intend for the chapters to paint a nuanced and complex picture of London's nightlife in relation to issues of commercialisation, gentrification, and institutionalisation, while making room for emergent dance music spaces and practices, which present alternatives to these wider structural forces.

Chapter 1 outlines the historical and urban contexts which frame the rest of my research. I consider the emergence of a media discourse lamenting 'the death of nightlife', arguing that narratives of decline simplify how urban transformations have impacted different nightlife spaces and communities. I sketch out the contexts of spatialised precarity which have shaped London's dance music cultures between 2015 and 2023, while highlighting the importance of a qualitative rather than quantitative approach, that focusses on transformations rather than loss. In this section, I also reflect on the integration of nightlife within discourses of 'global city' status, considering the role of the Night Czar in managing the image and reputation London's nightlife.

Chapter 2 explores transformations to London nightclubs in relation to factors of time and duration. Along with the contexts of day and night, I argue that temporality affords an important framework for understanding nightlife in changing urban contexts. To examine this, I construct a history of temporary events and spaces in dance music culture, moving from rave and free party culture in the 1980s and 1990s, through temporary events notices (TENs) in the 2000s and 2010s, to more recent examples of nightlife as temporary urbanism. The main body of the chapter examines two contrasting case studies of 'meanwhile use' nightclubs, Grow Tottenham, and Printworks. These draw attention to the ambivalence of temporary urbanism in nightlife. In certain cases, it can provide space for grassroots and community venues, while in others, it is emerging as an urban industrial-complex, that deploys nightlife spaces within placemaking and regeneration strategies.

Chapter 3 draws attention to issues of sound, listening, and attention as a way of understanding and categorising urban musical spaces. It focuses on London's 'audiophile bars', considering their static modes of listening within hierarchies of culture, distinction, and (anti-)sociability. I argue that such hierarchies help explain the growth of audiophile bars in contexts that were unfavourable to many other nightlife spaces. In the final section of the chapter, I focus on Spiritland in King's Cross, exploring its status within the Coal Drops Yard development and its inaudible heritage as a former centre for club and rave culture.

Chapter 4 explores the relocation of dance music culture into museums and galleries. Tensions arise as institutional spaces become increasingly entangled with the creative and night-time economies, but I argue that emergent collaborations between institutions and nightlife are creating newly interdependent economic infrastructures, as well as new critical, cultural, and social practices. The chapter is structured as a three-part history, examining dance music in museum and gallery 'Lates'; large-scale retrospectives on

rave and club culture; and a case study of the ICA, which is programming electronic dance music as part of exhibition–performance hybrids. Given the precarity of many public and privately funded cultural forms, I argue that such collaborations can centre the needs of marginalised groups, while invigorating both dance music culture and the institutional cultural sector.

Chapter 5 looks at dance music culture in relation to distinctions of work and leisure. It focuses on a pre-work event, Morning Gloryville, which evokes dance music as part of ideologies of wellness and productivity. Where this event may be understood as part of a growing contemporary relationship between culture, urban space, and the wellness industries, I also use this chapter as a way of reflecting on the histories of electronic dance music culture more broadly. Many discourses surrounding club and rave culture assume that it exists as an 'outside' cultural, social, and leisure space, distinct from ideologies of work. I call this utopianism into question by drawing attention to acid house entrepreneurialism, as well as the entanglements between West Coast rave culture and Silicon Valley. In this way, where Morning Gloryville might represent the co-option of dance music culture by the 'wellness industry' and 24/7 capitalism, I argue for a more reflexive approach toward dance music culture itself, which highlights its own contributions toward the 'countercultural logics' (Hancock 2019) of contemporary capitalism.

Chapters 1 to 5 explore spatial and temporal reorderings of dance music culture within the physical geographies of the city. Chapter 6 considers dance music culture's relocations into technologically mediated and digital spaces. I situate the livestreaming practices that emerged during COVID-19 as part of a longer history of dance music's audiovisual mediation, including jungle pirate radio, grime YouTube videos, and Boiler Room. While Boiler Room normalised livestreaming as part of a spatially fragmented and increasingly corporatised infrastructure, other audiovisual practices – before and during COVID-19 – have played a vital role in sustaining musical and social communities.

Chapter 1. Contexts: the death of nightlife?

This chapter outlines some context for the case studies that follow, exploring London's nightclub and venue closure in the mid-2010s, alongside the emergence of new modes of nocturnal governance. My argument is that the broad narrative of decline that took hold around 2015 simplifies a much more complex story of the relationship between London's nightlife scenes and the city's broader urban transformations. In this chapter, I move beyond a reductionist narrative of loss, drawing attention to the social, cultural, and urban dynamics that mediated the perceived decline of London's nightlife. In this way, I set things up for the subsequent chapters, which focus on the spatial and temporal transformations – rather than loss – of London's nightlife and dance music cultures. These case studies highlight processes of gentrification, corporatisation, and institutionalisation, while simultaneously drawing attention to the ways in which these new nightlife spaces and practices afford the possibility of novel cultural and economic infrastructures, as well as ongoing possibilities of social transformation.

This chapter provides a broad snapshot of changes to London's club culture in the years approximately 2015 to 2020. London's dance music and nightlife scenes are wide-ranging and dynamic, such that I make no claim to forming an exhaustive history of this period. However, by drawing attention to a variety of representative spaces, localities, and musical communities, I highlight some of the key issues in the relation between dance music scenes and wider processes of urban transformation. I build on research which highlights how the development of electronic dance music is affected by cultural policy, nightlife regulations, and urban planning (Darchen et al. 2021), whilst simultaneously ascribing agency to dance music scenes in the spatial, cultural, and economic production of the city.

I begin by discussing narratives of decline in dance music culture, exploring the interplay between cycles of taste, nostalgia, and creativity. Where many broad histories of electronic music have narrated a perceived decline in relation to its commercialisation, I argue that such narratives fail to account for the particularities of local contexts, as well as the shifting influence of specific scenes and genres. From here, I turn to London, to interrogate the emergence of a media discourse narrating the death of the city's nightlife around 2015. I explore how journalists sought to explain the closure of music venues through a combination of factors including changing consumer behaviours, gentrification, and austerity politics. I argue that the focus on statistics and an overall narrative of decline failed to engage with the more nuanced dynamics at play, including the emergence of new nightlife practices during this period, as well as the ways in which venue closures disproportionately affected venues serving LGBTQ+, people of colour, and working-class communities. The closure of venues was also accompanied by regulatory legislation including Form 696, which compounded the spatial pressures impacting London's Black musical cultures. Following this, I examine the ways in which the media narrative of decline shifted to one of geographic relocation, arguing that its focus on the development of new peripheral scenes lacked critical consideration of the relationship between the movement of nightlife spaces and urban displacement.

I then turn attention to Berlin, exploring how a set of urban and economic conditions, in combination with city branding discourses, contributed toward its emergence as an international centre for dance music culture. Where this afforded the gravitational relocation of dance music culture on an international scale, I highlight the tensions that arose during this mythologisation of Berlin, including the musical and racialised homogenisation of a Berlin 'sound', as well as the intensification of local urban transformations in Berlin.

In the final part of the chapter, I narrate the temporary closure of Fabric and its coincidence with the inauguration of London's Night Czar, arguing that the role functioned largely to manage the local and global reputation of London's nightlife scenes. Where the Night Czar was upheld as an intervention into the death of London's nightlife, I highlight the political limitations of the role, as well as the generalised lack of activism and organising from within London's nightlife scenes.

Narratives of decline in dance music culture

Narratives of decline are a familiar trope in popular music. As Keith Negus notes, 'comments have been made about the death … of nearly every genre you might be able to think of, whether rock, soul, jazz and rhythm and blues or death metal, dengue bop and techno' (1999: 26). Genres, scenes, and spaces are often seen to have finite cultural lives, mediated via cycles of creativity and the shifting demands of musical markets. The construction of these narratives is variable and contested, produced via music industry and media discourses, as well as the perceptions of cultural producers and consumers. What in one context may be understood as the waning musical innovation of a genre, may in other, be understood as a more gradual, dynamic process of stylistic transformation (Ibid.). In this way, where narratives of musical decline are shaped by intersecting temporalities of taste, artistic practice, and market logics, they must also be understood as socially produced. Who has the authority to proclaim the death of a genre or scene? How and why do such narratives emerge at specific moments in time? How might public discourses of decline impact the ongoing cultural life of music genres, scenes, and spaces?

As a DJ-oriented culture, electronic dance music is heavily shaped by cycles of taste. New scenes and styles emerge out of the curation and juxtaposition of existing musical recordings, as much as the production of new music. As Sarah Thornton argues, 'club cultures are *taste cultures',* in which subcultural capital functions as a mode of social distinction (1995: 15). Markers of authenticity, expressed variously as 'underground' or 'mainstream', mediate the formation of musical communities, as well as their shifting relation to different genres, scenes, and spaces. Where Thornton's argument is useful for understanding some of the internal dynamics of dance music culture, it is also important to situate these within wider structural contexts. Club culture is fundamentally a dance culture, such that its creative practices, economies, and communities are closely bound up with spaces and events. In turn, this spatial and temporal ecology is

shaped by its location in urban (and rural) space. In this way, narrations of genre and scene formation in dance music culture are entangled with rhythms of urban transformation, as well as broader market forces.

Narrations of decline have mediated much historical writing on dance music culture. Most writers identify a moment of radicalism and innovation between the late 1980s and early 1990s, which deteriorated as it was rapidly commercialised. Discussing UK dance music culture, Matthew Collin (1997: 270-1) argues that as early as 1994,

> the dance scene had become transformed into a dance industry. Its secret codes had been cracked and nothing could remain 'underground' for long … house had become a bloated, conservative mainstream, formulaic and predictable, dominated by a self-satisfied, self-serving elite.

This mainstreaming was a double-edged sword: in one sense representing the reassertion of a corporate cultural hegemony, but also a victory – via economic metrics at least – for the entrepreneurial impulses that had shaped much of rave culture since its inception.

The commercialisation of dance music culture was seen by many to disrupt the radical socialities of rave, trading collectivity for individualism. For Ott and Herman,

> the underground rave locates its transgressive character in the logic of communion … the commercialization of rave by the music industry subverts the logic of communion in favour of commodity spectacle through the relocation of dance culture into clubs and redefinition of the DJ as superstar (2003: 250).

The traditional anonymity of the DJ was incompatible with music industry models of marketisation, such that the superstar DJ emerged out of the need to create a commodifiable, artist figure. Where Ott and Herman are cautious about assumptions that 'underground rave culture' is 'inherently resistive' (Ibid. 264), their argument draws attention to the social and cultural effects of dance music's commercialisation.

For Simon Reynolds, the economic growth of dance music culture was also a barrier to musical creativity. By the end of the 1990s

> the scene got even bigger, yet the music stayed stuck, its development arrested … the boom turned to bust, while the music underwent a kind of implosion. Replacing revolution with involution, it plunged deep into its own vast accumulated history, working through the sprawling sonic legacy through a series of internal hybrids and subtle renovations (1998: 613).

Where much of dance music's early development was embedded in conceptions of futurism (Rietveld 2018), its mutation into a tried and tested formula by the turn of the millennium meant that 'dance music no longer seemed exciting and young people turned away from electronic dance music and club culture' (Reynolds

1998: 620). According to this narrative, the popularity of dance music mirrored its musical and cultural innovation.

As dance music culture continued throughout the 2010s and 2020s however, previous genres could be revived and recycled for new audiences. In recent years, UK garage, jungle, and trance have returned to nightclubs, heard afresh by younger generations. Given club culture's association with youth, 'this kind of creative stagnation is perhaps easier to get away with than it would be in other scenes' (Reynaldo 2022). As Tammy L. Anderson notes, generational schisms are key to understanding the decline and alteration of dance music scenes – they cannot solely be understood via a culture industries thesis of commercialisation and resultant loss of authenticity (2009: 317). Dance music's cycles of nostalgia have given rise to intergenerational conflicts, mediated by practices of (sub)cultural distinction. Who was there first? Who did it better? Who has the right to claim ownership over a scene or genre? However, it is important that these questions remain separate from assumptions about social and cultural radicalism. As Mark Fisher (2009) argues, we cannot assume a 'necessary relationship between radicalism and youth', in which 'maturity' is equated with conservatism. Such assumptions are ahistorical – moments in which the young were radical are related to social alienation, which is the product of specific historical contexts.

Many of the most popular and influential writings on the history of dance music culture share a broad focus, exploring its development at national and international scales. Where such an approach is useful for exploring the wider significance of dance music culture, it is less attuned to the specifics of local contexts. Meta-narratives of decline ignore the shifting urban conditions out of which local scenes have emerged, as well as the ways in which different cities have functioned as nodes of musical, cultural, and economic influence at different points in time.

The history of dance music culture in New York is useful for exploring narratives of decline in relation to localised urban contexts. In the 1970s and 80s, a thriving ecology of Manhattan nightclubs, such as the Paradise Garage and Studio 54, functioned as part of the spatial infrastructure that gave rise to disco and its various musical successors. This period of musical creativity was also dependent on cheap real estate prices in Downtown New York, which provided affordable places for artists to live and work, as well as exposure to a 'diversity of thought and experience' (Schulman 2012: 81). Where many popular narratives have explored the decline of this scene in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the latter half of the 1980s, Tim Lawrence argues that it was the 'introduction of a slew of neoliberal politics – including welfare cuts, the liberalisation of the financial sector, and pro-developer politics' that drove up the real estate market and priced out dance music culture from the city (2011: 288). These conditions led not only to population displacements and the transformation of urban space, but also to the 'transmutation of values and norms that define the vibrancy and transformative potential of urban life' (Hae 2012: 3). As Sarah Schulman (2012: 28) notes, physical changes to the city existed in parallel with a 'gentrification of the mind', which homogenised thoughts and ideas, in turn serving to 'naturalise the gentrified city.' In dance music culture specifically, Lawrence describes the assimilation of neoliberal attitudes, 'which encouraged groups that had once sought out common ground to see each other in terms of opposition and even betrayal' (2011: 301).

Where these political, economic, and spatial contexts are key to understanding the perceived decline of New York's nightlife scenes across the 1980s and 90s, it was also mediated via cycles of intergenerational conflict and nostalgia, including the growing popularity of hip hop and techno at the expense of house music (Fikentscher 2000: 111). In this way, narratives of NYC nightlife's decline gloss over the emergence of new genres and spaces in the 1990s – such as the techno, goth, and industrial scenes that formed around Synewave Records and The Limelight club in Manhattan. In recent years, the city's property prices have continued to rise steeply, leading many nightlife events to relocate to warehouse spaces in increasingly peripheral areas of Brooklyn and Queens (Jow 2016; Detrick 2019).

These historical and spatial developments complicate reductionist narratives of decline. As Keith Negus notes, where much writing on musical culture has tended to focus on 'dramatic moments of transformation', there is less research exploring the 'mundane ongoing life of genres', as well as their 'continual possibility for social and aesthetic transformation' (1999: 26-7). In this sense, where the spatial economies of dance music culture are closely bound up with urban transformation, they are not determined by it. Totalising narrations of urban and cultural decline ignore the emergence of DIY 'microscenes' for example (Holt and Wergin 2013: 2), as well as the active role that nightlife spaces may play in processes of gentrification (Hae 2012). Urban, economic, and regulatory contexts afford the conditions for moments of musical and cultural vibrancy, but urban nightlife scenes are diverse and complex, operating through a polyphony of different spaces and times. When considering the perceived decline of nightlife or dance music culture, which genres, scenes, and spaces are we referring to? What value judgements are involved in these definitions, and what communities are included or excluded from histories of culture?

Cities and urban culture are also produced through global flows of people, technologies, markets, and ideas (Appadurai 1990). Much of the historical development of electronic dance music is mediated by transnational interactions and influences between localised urban scenes (Augrand 2020). As dance music culture grew in international influence, local scenes were shaped by the movements of recordings and DJs, as well as the emergence of 'techno-tourism' (Garcia 2016). Similarly, discourses around the night-time economy and nocturnal governance are produced at international scales, in which nightlife and culture are recast as metrics of supremacy in a 'global cities' agenda. Ryan Hartley (2019) identifies a 'global crackdown' on nightclubs during the 2000s and 2010s, in which pro-market policies and the regulation of social dancing sought to reimagine cities through an increasingly homogenised vision of urban culture.

Where such international trends provide additional context, they need be situated in relation to the idiosyncrasies of local scenes. Moreover, wide lens depictions of nightlife and dance music culture need to consider the increasing role of scenes and artists in Global South, in which genres such as kuduro and gqom are remapping electronic music's international spheres of influence (Alisch and Siegert 2011; Murphy 2016; Lee 2020).

In the following section, I explore the emergence of a narrative proclaiming the death of London's nightlife in the mid-2010s. I examine how media discourses oscillated between changing consumer behaviour, gentrification, and austerity politics as possible explanations.

The 'death of nightlife' in London

In August 2015, figures were released by the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR) stating that 44% of the UK's nightclubs had closed between 2005 and 2015 – a drop from 3,144 to 1,733 (Connolly 2015). The high-profile closure of Plastic People in Shoreditch earlier that year had already drawn some attention to the state of London's clubbing scene (DJ Mag 2015), but with the publication of the ALMR's findings, a media narrative rapidly took hold declaring the death of the nightclub. Will Straw has largely dismissed such 'obituaries for nightlife' as forming part of a 'recurring journalistic genre' over the past century, which he notes as having intensified during the last few decades (2018: 230). To an extent, such recurrences can be understood as a component of dance music's cyclically evolving 'taste cultures', in which the subcultural capital, and ultimate success of different scenes and spaces is constantly renegotiated through media discourse (Thornton 1995).

In the initial media response to the ALMR statistics however, there was a generalised consensus that this was less about the waning popularity of musical styles or their associated spaces, and more about the wholesale decline of club culture itself. Two of the first articles to appear attributed this decline primarily to young people's changing habits of consumption (Burrell 2015; Mangan 2015). The nightclub, they argued, was at best incompatible, or at worst, rendered obsolete, by the digital technologies that have become such a core component of young people's lives. Spotify and other streaming platforms circumvent the DJ as a mediator of new music, and offer an apparently infinite and customisable service, which is impossible to replicate in a club. Moreover, the function of the nightclub as a space of romantic or sexual encounter had been supplanted by dating apps such as Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble, which replace the dangers and unpredictability of going out with an efficient, digital interface. Lastly, it was argued that the hazy darkness of the dancefloor holds little appeal to a generation for whom experiences are valued according to their visual reproducibility on Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok. According to this analysis, the nightclub was fundamentally outdated, and the future survival of nightlife was dependent on the willingness of stakeholders to adapt for a new model of nocturnal consumer.

Where some accepted the decline of the nightclub as part of a shift in consumer behaviour and demand, others were quick to point out the unique value of nightclubs as spatial anchors for music scenes and their associated communities, emphasising the need to understand venue closures in social, political, and urban contexts (Wolfson 2015). The main body of journalistic writing that emerged over the next year or so following ALMR's announcement acknowledged the role played by social media and changing consumer habits, but primarily viewed the decline of the UK's nightlife as the result of spatial, economic, and regulatory pressures. An early Guardian article listed twenty significant club closures in London since 1998, grouping them into six categories of reasons for closure: crime, development, Crossrail, expiry of lease, decision by owners, and finances (Coldwell 2015). A similar feature in Vice cited a combination of 'the authorities', gentrification, drugs policy, festivals, and 'moral panic' as responsible for the death of British nightclubs (Harrison 2016).

By highlighting the range of different factors involved, these early articles were cautious to construct a complex, nuanced account. Yet the narrative that quickly took hold within much of the electronic dance music community tended toward variations on a theme of what Angus Finlayson (2016) described as 'a scene decimated by greedy property developers or the inexorable march of gentrification.' The extent to which this narrative took hold in the popular imagination was exemplified by a NESTA report into London's nightlife from 2017, in which one of the key goals was to determine whether club closures were related to property price increases. The report concluded that there was in fact no clear relationship – citing methodological complexities in that 'the link between rental rates and property price growth is not straightforward', as well as suggesting that 'venue closures can be related to other factors such as licensing' (Lima & Davies 2017). This report, along with Finlayson's (2016) article highlighting the effects of austerity on London's nightlife, argued that the narrative linking club closures solely to gentrification and rising property prices was either unfounded or out of date. Both publications were a useful counterpart to the reductionism of the prevailing public discourse, but served to construct unhelpful binaries, pitting property prices against licensing, or austerity against gentrification for example, rather than drawing attention to the ways in which the various factors may be interrelated. These simplifications point towards the lack of critical research at the time, in which discourse was produced largely by journalists with specialisms in music and 'lifestyle' writing, lacking expertise in urban politics and geography.

As Anna Minton (2017) has argued, austerity is a key driver behind what is known as 'state-led gentrification', whereby local authorities cite funding cuts to justify the sale of public housing to property developers. In this process, the myth of the 'sink estate' is constructed around social housing projects to legitimise their sale, demolition, and redevelopment (also Campkin 2013). Related practices can be observed in the closure of many nightlife establishments, whereby drugs policing is 'applied selectively' to venues which may be causing friction with local residents and business interests. Where complaints around noise or anti-social behaviour may not in themselves be grounds for closure, drugs policing can be deployed as a 'convenient proxy for non-illegal nuisances and "undesirable" groups' (Garcia 2017: 9). In one example, Ed Gillet (2015) has discussed how the closure of longstanding Soho cabaret club Madame Jojo's in 2014 (in)directly smoothed the way for the redevelopment of the site by Soho Estates, who had been attempting to evict the owners for several years. When the venue's license was revoked after an incident of violence by security staff against a member of the public, Gillett argues that Madame Jojo's clean prior record and proposals for drastic new security measures were unfairly rejected by the licensing review, with the local authorities facing a 'confluence of interconnected pressures' from the police, wealthy local interests, and their own financial constraints. In East London, an alleged sexual assault was used to shut down Hackney Wick nightclub, Shapes, which had long been in the planning sights of the London Legacy Development Corporation (Codrea-Rado 2016). My intention is not to discredit such allegations, but rather to draw attention to the wider urban and economic contexts that mediate many responses from the police and local authorities.

In this sense, much early media coverage of London's nightclub closures made too much attempt to account for a diversity of different factors, without examining the ways in which economic and regulatory strategies may have an interrelated function in determining acceptable and unacceptable forms of nightlife (Talbot 2004). As Ryan Hartley argues, the regulation and displacement of nightlife can be conceptualised within a wider-reaching paradigm in which urban space is remodelled to fit the homogenised vision of a 'global cities' agenda. (2019: 16) Such an agenda need not be the shadowy 'conspiracy by real estate developers' dismissed by Finlayson (2016), but rather, demonstrates the ways in which cities are produced socially, culturally, and economically, as well as through forms of securitised control (Hae 2012).

In the following two sections, I develop this narrative of decline, exploring the ways its quantitative approach fails to account for the uneven impacts on different nightlife venues. In the first section, I draw attention to venues that continued to flourish during this period, as well as the emergence of new nightlife practices. In the second, I explore how spatial pressures had disproportionate effects on nightlife spaces catering to London's marginalised communities – a more nuanced account that was largely missing from public narratives of decline.

Developing the narrative of decline

The media discourse which developed following the release of the ALMR figures centred predominantly around a narrative of the UK losing 'almost half' of its nightclubs in a decade. Articles focussing on this theme proliferated between 2015-2017 but continued to appear several years later (e.g. Plumb 2019). Such accounts galvanised wide-reaching public debates around the value of urban nightlife, but the construction of a reductionist narrative of loss failed to account for some of the more nuanced dynamics involved. Wide reaching narratives ignore the ways in which certain venues and communities were disproportionately affected by spatial pressures, while others emerged to flourish and shape the transforming urban context. Writing in 2018, Will Straw was critical of the 'alleged death of nightlife' discussed in the British press, arguing that it wrongly conflated the decline of nightclubs with the collapse of nightlife itself:

> If a certain kind of nightlife might indeed be in decline, this has not slowed the worldwide spread of nuit blanche events, extended museum nights, bookstore nights, nocturnal bicycle rides and the general rush of so many social and cultural actors to occupy the night (2018: 231).

Straw is correct to highlight how a narrative of loss fails to account for the numerous other ways in which night-time culture may have diversified and transformed. However, rather than using this broader reaching definition of nightlife as a way of destabilising notions of night-time culture in decline, I argue that it can be deployed more critically, to develop understandings as to what kinds of night-time spaces and cultures align with contemporary urban imaginaries. Dave Haslam has highlighted how 'one type of club has

remained impervious to recessions of all kinds…the members-only, VIP-heavy, expensive London clubs frequented by bankers, starlets, rich Russians and members of the royal family' (2015: 382). Due to their separation from electronic music and (sub)culture, such venues are rarely recognised in writings on London's club scene. Yet their ongoing success tells us much about London's image as a haven for the super-rich 'transnational elite', for whom the city is seen to be physically and financially safe, with 'high-end restaurants and the right types of social life' (Minton 2017: 12). Thus, where Straw argues for a definition of nightlife which encompasses more than just club culture, we should also be wary of how we choose the define the parameters of club culture itself.

A few journalistic articles in 2015 explored new shifts within club culture, discussing not only the displacement of existing night-time spaces by gentrification, but also the gentrification with and through nightlife itself. Writing in Vice, Clive Martin summarised a new style of going out as

> A club culture that's affluent but not gaudy, urbanized but certainly not intimidating, often utilizing reclaimed, picturesque city locations such as rooftops and riverside spots. These events often have sideshows involving corporate sponsors, street food stalls, marquees, competitions, generic wedding-playlist DJs and all sorts of additional activities…This is the rise of middlebrow clubbing (2015).

In some respects, this description matches similar trends that Chatterton and Hollands identified some fifteen years earlier, in which mainstream night-time spaces reinvented themselves as 'more expensive café and style- bar concepts…based upon seating, eating and drinking in a highly design-oriented environment.' Such spaces used architecture as a practice of social exclusion and control, creating a safe but exciting atmosphere to target the 'needs and desires of cash-rich groups of young people.' On the surface, these venues diversified city centres, while in practice, they sustained or even amplified social inequalities, strengthening the dominance of corporate operators in the nightlife sector (2002: 98-102).

Despite these similarities, Martin's observations also highlight some new nightlife trends, in particular the use of repurposed space combined with what Ed Gillett (2015) terms 'a loosely-themed "experiential" approach to music events'. For the organisers of some of these pop-up 'experiences', such practices are justified as a necessary reinvention of outdated and unadventurous models of night-time culture (Café 2016; Curran 2016). Yet with this shift away from more permanent spaces, such events are often dislocated from the needs of specific communities, reliant instead on quirky activities and gimmicks to draw an audience. In this sense, where many commentators have debated whether the decline of the UK's nightclubs was the result of gentrification or of changing consumer behaviours, it is important to reflect on the ways in which new forms of nocturnal culture emerge as the direct result of spatial pressures. In London's intensive competition for space, the derelict buildings or disused land that might once have been repurposed for raves and free parties are now of such high value, that even short term, 'meanwhile use' rents can be prohibitively high for small or more socially-oriented businesses (Bosetti and Colthorpe 2018; Ferreri 2021) As Dan Hancox (2014) has argued – and as I will return to discuss in chapter 2 – pop-

up events emerge from the 'temporal logic of neoliberalism', prioritising novelty and short-term reward rather than the slower but perhaps more sustainable task of community-building. In this sense, where such events tend to elevate varieties of experiential consumption over the social (but no less commodifiable) potential of a dancefloor-focussed space, we can also situate nightclub and venue closures within a broader loss of shared space, including pubs, youth clubs, and community centres (Harris 2018). Situating nightlife venues in this broader context draws attention to their importance for diverse communities, forming infrastructures for alternate public spheres (Warner 2002).

Nightlife spaces, scenes, and marginalised communities

The focus on an overarching narrative of decline neglected to examine which kinds of spaces and communities were most affected by spatial pressures. Quantitative analysis of venue closures fails to account for the significance of different spaces to specific music scenes and communities. The closure of certain venues will have disproportionate effect due to their role in different musical and social ecologies – a form of cultural value that doesn't necessarily correspond to the size or longevity of a space (Lima and Davies 2017). Plastic People, for example, was a 200-capacity basement on Curtain Road in Shoreditch, which shut down on New Year's Day 2015. Despite its small size, Plastic People played a significant incubatory role for London's burgeoning broken-beat and dubstep scenes during the early to mid 2000s, hosting seminal parties such as CoOp and FWD. These genres may be understood as an extension of the multicultural ecologies of rare groove, jungle, and UK garage, which as Caspar Melville (2020) argues, have done much to remap London along social and racial lines. Moreover, while Plastic People closed as the result of a decision taken by the owners rather than any specific licensing issue or conflict, its closure was indicative of wider shifts to the Shoreditch area, which despite emerging as a vibrant hub for nightlife, had very few clubs or venues primarily organised around music by the mid to late 2010s.

Among the few journalists who discussed which specific types of clubs were closing, most tended to focus on the disproportionate closure of small-scale, independent venues versus higher-capacity corporate spaces (e.g. Gillett 2015). This is an important distinction, but many of the dynamics shaping London's nightlife cannot be theorised using what are often vague constructions of alternative and mainstream. In recent years, London has seen numerous examples of larger club closures including Cable, SE1, and Matter, while many small-capacity, independent venues simultaneously contribute toward the displacement and exclusion of different nightlife communities.

In the Brixton area of South London, a new 300-capacity nightclub, Ton of Brix, opened in December 2022. On paper, this represented a welcome addition to the area's nightlife, managed in collaboration with local operators including Brixton Jamm. However, the opening of this new space involved the displacement of Club 414 – a venue which had occupied the same site since 1985. Club 414 originally opened as a reggae venue, but soon emerged to become a home for London's hard house, trance,

and acid techno scenes (Sadoux 2021). Club 414 shut down in June 2019, despite being designated an 'asset of community value' by Lambeth Council the previous year (Slingsby 2018). The site was purchased by the owners of the nearby Brixton Market, Hondo Enterprises, who describe themselves as 'a property investment, development and asset management company specialising in transactions in Central London.'[4] Hondo Enterprises are widely perceived as an 'unwelcome gentrifying force by much of the local community', such that Ton of Brix was met with much controversy from residents and London's dance music communities (Lawson 2022). In this way, the opening of a small, independently run venue remains bound up with complex urban dynamics, shaping London's ongoing transformation.

Researchers have also begun to investigate the ways in which club closures have affected spaces serving marginalised communities, drawing attention to the ways in which such closures are often omitted from mainstream discourse around the decline or transformation of nightlife. In 2017, a UCL Urban Lab (2017) study found that the number of LGBTQ+ night venues in London had fallen from 121 to 51 between 2006 and 2017. This represented a net loss of 58% – a disproportionately high figure among the city's club closures more generally. Moreover, this figure is compounded by their findings that 'the heritage of LGBTQ+ people is embedded in the fabric and specific cultures of designated LGBTQ+ venues and events.' For LGBTQ+ communities, the research highlighted that the most valued venues are spaces in which 'diverse gender identities and sexualities are affirmed, accepted and respected.' Given the lack of permanent or LGBTQ+ owned spaces, LGBTQ+ events are forced to migrate between different venues on a temporary basis, creating complications in the relationship between nightlife ecologies and their diverse communities of users.

Like other spaces, LGBTQ+ venues exist across a broad spectrum of economic and cultural categories, although the UCL report found that those campaigning for venues to stay open generally had 'severely limited negotiating power compared with [the] large organisations leading development' (Campkin and Marshall 2018). In this sense, it is important not only to consider venues in terms of their size and direct economic leverage, but also, to take into account the factors impacting different venues' abilities to communicate and negotiate with relevant business or governmental interests. As Deborah Talbot found during her research into the regulation of night-time venues in a rapidly regenerating part of South London, stakeholders perceived that licenses were granted depending on whether the authorities viewed applicants as "someone they could work with", rather than on any actual level of illegal activity in a venue (2004: 898).

Another key factor is the level of press coverage that different venues receive when under licensing pressures or facing closure. With a few exceptions (Godfrey 2015; Raj 2015; Webber 2015), the closure of LGBTQ+ spaces was generally absent from most mainstream media coverage of club closures in 2015-2016, despite an evident proliferation of interest in queer nightlife around this time (Garcia 2014). In the dance music press, there were a lot of features during this period focussing on the politics and production of 'safe spaces', but only a few which contextualised this in direct relation to the spatial pressures faced by LGBTQ+ specific venues (SIREN 2016). Campkin and Marshall also highlighted how the lack of provision

[4] https://hondo-enterprises.com

for London's QTIPOC communities has been 'notably underrepresented in media reports about the closure of LGBTQ+ venues' (2017).

There has also been a distinct lack of discourse regarding the racialised dynamics mediating London's nightclub closures. This was explored in a widely read, self-published article by Roshan Chauhan, written under his DJ pseudonym R.O.S.H. (2020). Circulated against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, he argued that the U.K. dance music press has focused its coverage on a limited stylistic canon, excluding many working class and Black genres, communities, and spaces. In one section of the piece, he compiled a list of London venue closures, focussing on spaces which hosted 'dance music nights related to UK funky, deep tech and afro house' – genres which cater predominantly to Black and working-class audiences. Where the temporary closure of Fabric commanded extensive column inches on Resident Advisor and in the mainstream press, R.O.S.H. highlights how the closure of the Black music clubs in his list were almost entirely ignored by the media, and thus excluded from the broader narrative of nightclub closures. Part of his analysis centred on a critique of an article in Resident Advisor by Angus Finlayson (2016), which sought to shift the conversation around the UK's club closures away from gentrification, towards a narrative focusing on the effects of austerity on club culture. R.O.S.H. argues that Finlayson's argument rests on the exclusion of a wide range of dance music scene and venues. While clubs like Fabric in Farringdon inhabit space which has already progressed into the 'ultra-rich, late-stage gentrification process', many clubs serving Black and working class audiences in peripheral areas of London have closed following ongoing processes of gentrification and displacement.

Alessio Kolioulis (2020) has highlighted the ways in which institutional racism mediates the treatment of nightlife venues in regeneration processes. Discussing the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle area of South London, Kolioulis draws attention to two nightclubs occupying neighbouring railway arches on Elephant Road. The first venue, Distriandina, is a restaurant and salsa club, which has catered predominantly to the area's Colombian and Peruvian communities since it opened in 2002. Next door, Corsica Studios is a popular nightclub programming house, techno, and other electronic music genres, for a predominantly young and white student crowd. When it was announced that Distriandina would be forced to move, they were provided with a much smaller temporary venue nearby, as well as vague and uncertain information regarding longer-term strategies and funding for their relocation. Around the same time, the development company, Delancey, announced that Corsica Studios would receive £125,000 for soundproofing, pre-empting possible noise complaints from the apartment blocks to be built next door (Gillet 2018). As Kolioulis (2020) notes, anti-gentrification activists argued that this was an example of racial prejudice, in which the developers and Southwark Council intervened to save Corsica Studios from closure, while a venue catering to a working-class, migrant audience received little in the way of support.

Caspar Melville argues that many of London's racialised spatial conflicts have been manifested through 'sonic struggles over the right to play music' (2020: 5). Crucially, for Black musical communities, this struggle relates not only to the closure and availability of venues, but also to the policing and exclusion of Black musics and their audiences. As Deborah Talbot has argued, urban regeneration and the regulation

of culture – through licensing and policing – need to be understood as 'interrelated variables' (2004: 898). When urban space already exists at a premium, practices of social and cultural exclusion function as a compounding layer of spatial pressure.

Between 2005 and 2017, the controversial Form 696 was used by the Metropolitan Police to determine whether live music events posed a risk of disorder. While ostensibly a bureaucratic risk assessment tool, the form was widely accused of racial profiling. Early iterations of the document asked organisers to specify whether there was a 'particular ethnic group attending', as well as for information about the 'music style to be played/performed' – positioned as a leading question with 'bashment, R&B, garage' listed as examples (Hancox 2009). After concerns raised by a high-profile campaign led by UK Music, these stipulations were eventually dropped. However, a subsequent version of the form was directed away from 'live music' and toward late-night events predominantly featuring 'DJs and MCs performing to a recorded backing track' – a characterisation that still (in)directly targeted Black musical forms. As was suggested by a 2017 report on the state of the grime scene, participants generally supported the idea of risk assessment to ensure the safety of musical events, but felt that form 696 was fundamentally discriminatory and racist in its targeting of particular genres and audiences (Ticketmaster 2017: 59). In late 2017, the form was scrapped following interventions from the Mayor of London's office, although it was claimed by the superintendent of the Metropolitan Police at the time, Roy Smith, that this decision related in part to a 'reduction in serious incidents at promoted music events' (Nerssessian 2017). Where the racist policing of Black music events in London and the UK has a long and well-documented history (Talbot 2004; Hancox 2019; Melville 2020; Blagrove Jr. 2022), Talbot argues that the significance of Form 696 lay in the way that it rendered explicitly visible 'the connection in the MET's perception between disorder and "black cultural events"' (2011: 89). Given the ways in which form 696 coincided with a period of spatialised decline among nightclubs and venues more generally, London's Black music scenes experienced disproportionate pressure, leading Dan Hancox to suggest that institutional racism served to break apart grime's social and sonic structures as club music. Forced out of nightclubs, grime mutated into two polarised forms: one which occupied large venues and festival stages via the commercialised dance pop of Dizzee Rascal and Wiley, and the other, which condensed into a decisively underground scene of what Hancox describes as 'iPod-headphones-in-your-flat-listening-on-your-own music, not a music for collective enjoyment and celebration' (Barry 2018). In this way, the combination of spatial and regulatory pressures affected the stylistic development of grime, as well as its socio-economic organisation.

The abolition of form 696 in 2017 was touted by the Night Czar's office as one of Amy Lamé's primary achievements during her first year in office (Mayor of London 2017). However, the Metropolitan Police offered no acknowledgement of the form's discriminatory nature, instead focussing on the impact it had on the wider night-time economy rather than on Black artists and audiences more specifically (Fatsis 2019: 450). This lack of apology demonstrated the persistence of an ingrained institutional racism within the Met.

More recently, commentators have argued that institutional racism mediates the production of London's Black nightlife communities beyond the direct involvements of the police. Since the early 2010s, shuffling – a dance style popular among Black and working-class clubbers – acquired an association with aggression and anti-social behaviour, leading high-profile promoters such as Creche and ABODE to ban it from their events. In many cases it was believed that shuffling was targeted as a way of excluding young and Black audiences from events (Patterson 2020). Other examples of racialised exclusion result from the stylistic dominance of subgenres of house and techno, which can draw reliably large, predominantly white crowds, meaning that many underground Black events are perceived by venues as more financially risky. Furthermore, many Black nightlife cultures are less centred on a culture of heavy drinking, placing them in conflict with the alcohol-centred economy of most nightclubs (Bernard 2018).

In the following section, I explore how the narrative of decline transformed into one of urban relocation. Where this drew attention to the emergence of new scenes and spaces, I argue that accounts of relocation need to consider factors of displacement, as well as the ways in which the production of 'new' nightlife scenes may erase the histories and ongoing cultural lives of local communities.

Loss, relocation, and displacement

Around 2017, media discourse slowly began to shift away from a narrative of loss, highlighting instead how less formalised, DIY nightlife scenes were emerging to fill the gaps created by the closure of many traditional venues (Amin 2017; Assiter 2017). Much of this shift aimed to counter the pessimism that had proliferated over the previous few years, restoring a sense of agency to nightlife and dance music communities. Parts of this newly optimistic thread rested on logics of cyclical decline and renewal, perhaps another iteration of the resurgence of small venues that Dave Haslam notes as following the implosive crisis of the UK's superclubs at the turn of the millennium (2015: 364). In this subsequent media narrative, the focus on new underground scenes was mirrored by a perceived shift in urban space, what Will Coldwell (2018) described at the time as a 'scene moving to the city's periphery – legally, spiritually and geographically.' New nightlife venues opened in post-industrial areas including Tottenham, Bermondsey, and Canning Town, shifting away from more residential locations in Hackney, Shoreditch, and Peckham. This marked in many ways a familiar cultural and geographical cycle, in which underground music scenes seek out cheaper space, with 'less restrictions around operation' on noise and opening hours (Darchen et. al 2021: 6). In this narrative, a story of loss was transformed into one of relocation, but the movements of nightlife spaces need to be understood within broader urban dynamics of displacement.

In an interview from 2018, Paul McGann of Grow Tottenham discussed his optimism regarding the wave of new clubs that were opening in the ex-industrial estates around Tottenham Hale:

> I'm not convinced at all that nightlife in London is declining, I think it's just changing…Nightlife is constantly reinventing itself, and location is part of that. The night tube and 24-hour Overground at weekends is reconfiguring the map, and it's opening up new territories for people to explore…Tottenham will never be like Dalston – Dalston is a traditional London high street, with everything crammed together along one stretch of road, with clubs in basements, shops at ground floor level and people in flats living on top…The new venues in Tottenham aren't opening up in basements on a high street, they're mostly opening up in old industrial spaces that aren't surrounded by housing. In many ways it's a better area for people to enjoy themselves at night without causing problems (McGann in Usher 2018).

McGann is correct to point out the ways in which the ex-industrial location of the new Tottenham clubs occupied a less disruptive and anti-social position in urban space. However, describing peripheral areas of London as 'new territories to explore' disregards the cultures and communities which already inhabit them. While Tottenham was described in Time Out magazine as a 'fertile new ground for nightlife' after the opening of Grow and The Cause in quick succession in 2018 (Ekanayake 2018), the closure of nearby Caribbean Edge – a key venue for London's dub reggae scene – the very same year, received very little media attention.

When thinking about proclamations of nightlife as 'on the move', it is important to ask, which kinds of nightlife, and for whom? Assuming that new nightclubs and the night tube put an area like Tottenham 'on the map', ignores the ways in which existing venues and cultural spaces may serve localised communities, particularly as you move further from the city centre. NESTA's 2017 research into London's nightlife identified a generalised tendency of nightclubs leaving central London and gravitating toward the north-east of the city. NESTA highlighted the ways in which such shifts may result in 'poorer access to culture', as well as the more loaded statement that 'cultural displacement can also affect a city's wider reputation.' In this way, the location or accessibility of culture is tied up with outward facing images of the city. This can leave peripheral, 'inaccessible' spaces undervalued and unappreciated, existing outside of tourism economies and their proximity to galleries, museums, and central shopping districts (Lima and Davies 2017).

Replacing a narrative of loss with one of relocation also fails to engage critically with the causal relation between many nightlife spaces and processes of gentrification (Hae 2012; Kolioulis 2018). The Tottenham area of north London is undergoing intensive regeneration, centred primarily around the construction of the new Tottenham Hotspur football stadium which opened in 2019. Proponents of the regeneration schemes point to the 2011 riots – which started in Tottenham – as evidence of the area's deprivation, but it remains unclear how residents will benefit, as evidenced by the long-term battle to save the Latin Village market in Seven Sisters (Rosa 2021). The opening of four new nightclubs – Styx, Five Miles, Grow and The Cause, in the ex-industrial estates of Tottenham Hale between 2015-2018, needs to be understood within this wider urban context. To be sure, the regeneration of the Tottenham area is primarily the product of large-scale renewal projects led by Haringey Council and property developers,

rather than the more 'organic' process often associated with the term gentrification (Dillon and Fanning 2019; Ince et al. 2021). Nevertheless, the granting of 4am licenses to these new clubs, as well as the opening of a climbing wall and numerous cafés-bars brought a new kind of cultural capital and infrastructure to the area, leading the Evening Standard to proclaim in 2017 that 'Tottenham is the new Hackney' (Kale 2017). Where Tottenham was an attractive location for nightlife venues given the availability of warehouse space and less restrictive licensing regulations than neighbouring Hackney, the emergence of this new hub for nightlife marks just another brief settlement for relatively non-commercial cultural spaces on a longer-term shift from the urban centre to the periphery. Thus while the Tottenham club scene felt at least to some like a cause for celebration at a time when London's nightlife was felt to be in decline, crucially, both Grow and The Cause opened on a meanwhile use basis, such that their existence was always already temporary – a theme I will examine in greater detail in chapter 2. In this way, Tottenham's brief emergence as a centre for nightlife is far removed from the planning experiments in Amsterdam led by *nachtburgemeester* Mirik Milan, who granted 24-hour licenses to venues in the suburbs as part of a municipal plan to take pressure off the inner-city night-time economy (Henley 2016).

Following the closure of Tottenham Hale's last remaining nightclubs in 2022, there are plans for new venues in the (ex-)industrial zones of Edmonton and Enfield.[5] In 2019, Field Day festival relocated from Victoria Park in Hackney to the Drumsheds in Meridian Water, a set of former gasworks operated by Broadwick Live – a 'creative agency' and venue management company with a portfolio that included Printworks in Canada Water. Located far from residential areas, the Drumsheds were touted as having 'the potential to run longer, later and louder than anywhere else in London'.[6] Despite the relative flexibility of the Green Belt, the continuous outward shift of night-time spaces is ultimately finite and unsustainable. It is interesting to note the intensive polarisation of night-time events in the Meridian Water area between 2020-22, with no cultural middle ground between a thriving illegal rave scene and the huge Drumsheds project. Thus a 'peripheral' location such as this has already been subject to commercial and institutional forces before any regeneration had even taken place, likely excluding venues with less economic and social capital from any future use of the area.

Considering the changes to working habits wrought by COVID-19, as well as its spatial and economic fallout, commentators speculated a cultural repopulation of urban centres, with empty offices emerging as a new form of disused space for cultural and social uses.[7] As of 2023, this transformation has yet to take place, with the service and financial industries returning to many of their pre-pandemic working practices and outputs.

Applying a more critical lens to notions of nightlife as 'on the move' draws attention to the relation between urban transformations and displacements, as well as the role of media discourses in processes of placemaking. In the following section, I turn attention to Berlin and its emergence as a global centre of dance music culture, exploring the musical and social impacts this had on London's nightlife scenes. I

[5] Ed Holloway interview, 2022.
[6] https://thedrumshedslondon.co.uk
[7] 100 Day Studio Panel discussion (2020) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uM8K_lwLVtY

consider how a specific set of urban, cultural, and political contexts afforded the gravitation of dance music culture to Berlin. At the same time, I question the production of this urban and cultural imaginary, as well as the ways it contributed toward the social and cultural homogenisation of electronic dance music more broadly. Where this adds an additional context through which to consider the perceived decline of London's nightlife scenes, it also draws attention to the localised conflicts that have arisen considering Berlin's self-branding as a centre of dance music culture and 'techno tourism'.

Global displacements and nightlife in city-branding: Berlin

As well as considering the geographical reorientations of London nightlife within the boundaries of the city, it is also important to explore the shifting global status of London's electronic dance music scenes. More specifically, the perceived decline of London's nightlife during the 2000s and 2010s may be understood in relation to dance music culture's physical, cultural, and musical reorientation toward Berlin. This reorientation raises several questions: what are the relations between different urban centres of dance music culture? How do musical transformations, urban conditions, and city branding strategies combine to produce the perceived cultural influence of local dance music scenes? How do metrics of cultural influence impact local scenes and communities?

In this section, I consider the production of Berlin as the 'European, maybe even world-wide capital for clubbing' around the turn of the millennium (Lessour 2012: 365). This draws attention to the relation between vibrant night-time cultures and specific urban conditions, but also to the increasing deployment of 'nightlife supremacy' discourses, in which the night-time economy is conceived as a contested territory of so-called 'global city' status (Massey 2007; Kolioulis 2018).

As New York's vibrant disco and nightlife scenes were decimated by AIDS and the neoliberal financialisaton of the city during the 1980s (Lawrence 2011; Hae 2012), the next wave of global dance music culture was less centralised, emanating from and between several international urban centres. During the peak of electronic dance music's popularity in the mid-1990s, the international ecology of dance music culture could be understood as a series of flows and interconnections between cities including Chicago, London, Manchester, Paris, Frankfurt, and Berlin; as well as more peripheral but disproportionately influential locations such as Ibiza and Goa. Geographical focal points materialised around the cyclical popularity of genres, but there was no real sense of a consistently dominant centre.

Shortly after the turn of the millennium however, there was a distinct shift in the balance of power and influence in which Germany – and Berlin in particular – emerged to become what Simon Reynolds has described as the 'spiritual homeland for electronic culture' (2013: 626). At the end of the 1990s, electronic music had already played a large role in re-establishing Berlin as a *Weltstadt* for the first time since the Weimar Era (Lessour 2012: 321), but during the early 2000s, Berlin materialised as a central node in the international ecologies of electronic dance music – both as culture and as industry. As Tobias Rapp has

suggested, 'clubbing is for Berlin what the financial industry is for New York or London, what Hollywood is for Los Angeles and what fashion is for Paris or Milan' (2009: 10). Berlin's newly (re)discovered international reputation is a relatively unique case, given that its cultural influence was divorced from any significant financial or economic influence. In this way, Berlin became a 'global city' for electronic dance music culture, despite – or indeed because of – its inability to develop into a global city in the traditional sense, more typically defined as a financial or political node of power (Kratke 2001; Massey 2007).

Berlin's emergence as a perceived techno capital can be attributed to the interplay between a set of specific local and global conditions. Among music historians, there is a generalised consensus that dance music culture reached its zenith of hegemonic influence by the mid to late 1990s, followed by an explosive moment of crisis around the turn of millennium in which the 'boom in superclubs and superstar DJs turned to bust' (Haslam 2015: 364). Berlin's dance music scene experienced its own crisis of institutionalisation, perhaps best exemplified by the Love Parade's loss of legal status as a political demonstration in 2001, marking a clear symbolic rupture from the radical hedonism with which Berlin's early techno scene had been associated (Collin 2015: 75). At the same time however, there was a sense in which Berlin's scene was able to emerge uniquely placed from this crisis, combining a newly found professionalism with what Tobias Rapp (2009: 12) suggests were the 'positive elements of an independent culture – economic autonomy, artistic integrity, the refusal to compromise.' This seeming contradiction was encapsulated by Berghain – the flagship venue of Berlin's techno scene – which has been described simultaneously as both 'a trendy artistic club and a massive money-making machine' (Lessour 2012: 361). Through a strategy in which a large part of Berlin's city branding has been based on projections of specifically *sub*cultural capital, it has been in the city's institutional interest to support and sustain alternative culture, in which the club scene forms a vital component (Picaud 2019). This cultural image has direct economic benefits for the city, forming the core of what has been described as a thriving 'neo-Bohemian industry of techno-tourism', built around perceptions of 'authenticity, eccentricity, creativity and the dramatization of independent and idiosyncratic lifestyles' (Garcia 2016: 289). Municipal recognition of the cultural and economic significance of the city's club scene was borne out between 2005 and 2009, in a decision to reclassify techno events as "culture" rather than "entertainment", reducing their tax rate from 19% to 7% (Garcia 2017: 10). Thus while much of dance music culture experienced a crisis of identity during the early 2000s, Berlin's techno scene was able to emerge with a largely unique form of institutionally-sanctioned and supported subcultural legitimacy. This placed the city at the geographical centre of an international network of electronic dance music producers and consumers, who gravitated toward the city both as new residents and more transient inhabitants (Rapp 2010; Garcia 2016).

As Berlin became a key geographical centre of international club scenes post-2000, it also came to have a defining influence on the stylistic development of electronic dance music over the following decades. With its critical mass of producers, DJs, labels, and nightclubs, tied together by a mythologised cultural image, the specific musical genres associated with Berlin, and Berghain in particular, have formed a stylistic hegemony which has shaped many dance music scenes up until the present. This effect was amplified via

the increasing impact of the software companies Native Instruments and Ableton Live, which were both founded and headquartered in Berlin. Alongside the streaming service Soundcloud, these companies constitute not only a core part of the international dance music economy, but also a means through which Berlin's stylistic influence has been technologically mediated. Designed by Monolake member Gerhard Behles, Ableton Live has been described as 'almost like a magic box for making Berlin-style minimal techno' (Lessour 2012: 341).

In the early 2000s, Berlin's stylistic influence stemmed primarily from the minimal and microhouse scenes which had relocated to the city from the German industrial centres of Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, and Cologne. By the following decade however, this had morphed into the darker, more austere form of a distinctly local sound, generally referred to as either Berlin or Berghain techno. As these genres increased their international influence, the close relationship between the sounds and spaces of electronic dance music – as signified in this case by the genre descriptor 'Berghain techno' – concentrated Berlin's geographical dominance in an intensifying feedback loop. While larger-scale superclubs were closing down across much of the UK and the USA at the turn of the millennium, the sparse textures of the newly dominant strains of minimal house and techno were generally incompatible with the bars and pubs into which much of dance music culture had migrated. Such spaces were limited by their small sound systems, unable to 'achieve the right degree of scale and sensory overload' necessary for the realisation of the prevailing musical styles (Reynolds 2013: 626). In contrast, the combination of Berlin's vibrant cultural scene and the availability of urban space allowed the city to maintain numerous clubs in cavernous post-industrial spaces in the east of the city, with large sound systems and reverberant acoustics. In this way, even as the Berlin sound became increasingly globalised, it remained closely intertwined with distinctly local sonic and spatial infrastructures, sustaining a geographically centralised hegemony. In other words, as the sounds and aesthetics of Berlin were imitated around the world, Berlin's continued musical dominance was sustained not only through transnational social, cultural, and economic networks – it was materially grounded and hyperlocalised in the post-industrial architecture of the city. Where such spaces had already been subject to longstanding processes of gentrification and development in other major urban centres such as New York (Zukin 1982), east Berlin can also be situated in relation to the emergence of flourishing techno scenes in other post-Soviet cities such as Kiev (Electronic Beats 2016) and Tbilisi (Ravens 2019) during the 2010s.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the availability of post-industrial space in Berlin gave it a unique edge over many more 'developed' cities. Once Berlin's new cultural reputation had been (re)established however, the resulting stylistic hegemony has arguably homogenised much of the field of dance music culture, to the exclusion of aesthetically and socially divergent scenes. Despite the close association between Berlin techno and contemporary invocations of queerness in global dance music culture, the local scene's radical sexual openness has been tarnished by more recent accusations of racism, manifested through discriminatory door policies (Hubbard 2019), as well as more wider reaching musical mediations of whiteness. In 2020, the DJ and producer False Witness published a widely read polemic critiquing the ways in which Berghain has been constructed as a form of 'idealized listening space'. Situating this within broader narratives about the

whitewashing of techno, they suggested that this aesthetic elevation of Berghain privileges minimalist modes of musical production to the exclusion of other, often Afro-Diasporic musical forms (Gomez 2020). False Witness' analysis is perhaps too quick to draw a necessarily racialised dichotomy between minimal and maximal sounds[8], but it is useful for pointing out the ways in which musical and social hierarchies are produced through the intersections of sound, architecture, and wider urban space (e.g. Born 2013). What began as an inventive appropriation of disused post-industrial buildings later transformed to become the soundtrack to gentrified, commercialised club culture: the big rooms of 'big room techno' are also inherently the most profitable.

In this way, it is vital that the power structures producing the dominance of Berlin techno are understood through frameworks of race, geography, and economics, as well as their close interrelation. Where London (Melville 2020) and New York's (Fikentscher 2000) dance music scenes are for the most part recognised to be deeply rooted in Black musical forms and postcolonial, multicultural exchange, the historiography of Berlin techno's own encounters with Black music have generally centred on intimate but necessarily distant exchanges with Detroit (Denk and Von Thülen 2014). Such a narrative allows Berlin techno to be bound up with a white German imaginary, one which simultaneously extricates itself from place, such that it is 'universal in theory…but definitely not multicultural' (Lessour 2012: 327). As more recent scholars have highlighted, this process of identity construction also erases the history and influence of Black Germans and their associated cultural spaces, including the GI discos and other nightclubs that programmed Black music in West Berlin before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Weheliye 2015).

Considering London's dance music scenes in this international context, it is useful to note the ways in which many dubstep DJs from the UK started shifting toward a more techno-oriented sound in the 2010s – the very same period in which they began to get more regular bookings across Continental Europe. Not only were European audiences generally more comfortable with the rhythms and timbres of house and techno, many European clubs – including those in Berlin – were acoustically organised in ways that were less compatible with bass-heavy or syncopated musical forms (Electronic Beats 2016a). Berghain was relatively supportive of the nascent dubstep scene through its occasional Friday night parties Sub:stance and REEF, but these always remained distinct from the club's core Saturday night techno programming, which was organised under the neutral, universalising heading of *Klubnacht*. Thus, where the rise of dubstep in the late 2000s and early 2010s felt like a newly ascendant moment for London's dance music culture, the scene's eventual migration through the rest of Europe led to its gradual absorption within the transnational sounds and structures of the prevailing musical moment, eventually reinventing itself as 'UK-techno'. As London DJ T. Williams has argued, this co-option process also had a distinctly racialised aspect. Where white (post-)dubstep DJs such as Ben UFO and Jackmaster were given free rein to play music drawing from a broad stylistic canon, Black DJs such as himself were more likely to be pigeonholed by genre, restricting them to racially demarcated parameters of perceived and expected musical authenticity (Muggs 2019: 394).

[8] Robert Hood, a Black artist from Detroit, was one of minimal techno's key innovators in the 1990s.

The ascendance of Berlin's dance music culture adds further context to understand the transformations of London nightlife. DJs and producers gravitated towards Berlin because of its cheap cost of living, while clubbers took advantage of low-cost air travel. As Berlin grew in musical and cultural influence, it contributed to the homogenisation of localised dance music genres in London and elsewhere. Although house and techno originated among African American communities in Chicago and Detroit, the ascendance of Berlin techno was entangled with a white German imaginary, less compatible with the multicultural sounds of London. In this section, I have focussed on Berlin, but there is room for research exploring the musical, cultural, and economic influence of other cities, such as Amsterdam, during this period (Van Bergen 2018).

The gentrification of Berlin through nightlife

Berlin's rapid cultural ascent was always unsustainable. When former Mayor Klaus Wowereit famously proclaimed that "Berlin is poor but sexy" in 2003, his slogan formed the basis of the Bohemian image through which Berlin was marketed on the global stage, but it also reflected the city's material reality, which had some of the lowest rents and costs of living in Europe. This economic context – a residue from the fall of the wall in 1989 – was vital for Berlin's thriving musical and creative culture, serving as an important reminder that the vibrancy of urban cultural scenes is dependent not only on the availability venues and clubs, but also on wider living conditions and 'backstage' infrastructures (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 125-9; Bingham-Hall and Kaasa 2017). In this sense, as Marie Thompson (2016) argues, it is vital that campaigns for the survival of music spaces are situated within and alongside broader urban activisms, in recognition of the interrelations between cultural spaces, community, and basic access to housing.

In Berlin in recent years, these relationships have come to the fore, as gentrification – in part driven by the international appeal of the city's nightlife – has meant that while rental accommodation in Berlin remains affordable in comparison to many other European capitals, it has also experienced the fastest rate of increase in Europe, with the average rent per square metre almost doubling between 2009 and 2018 (Gennburg and Coulomb 2020). Berlin's emergence as an international centre for dance music culture contributed toward the exposure of its housing market to international economies, in which locals were forced to compete with more affluent new residents from Australia, North America, and elsewhere in Europe. These social and economic changes were closely related to subsequent municipal strategies in which the city opened itself up to the more 'lucrative digital sector', seeking to capitalise further on existing cultural successes in line with Richard Florida's creative cities model (Picaud 2019).

By 2008, city marketing strategies shifted away from prior glorifications of poverty with a new campaign built around the catchphrase, 'be Berlin' – targeting tech companies and start-ups (Kirschbaum 2008). Such strategies contributed to Berlin's rapid gentrification through the following decade, leading to rising living costs and the eventual imposition of a rent cap in 2020 following successful campaigns by local activists (Gennburg and Coulomb 2020). As Luis-Manuel Garcia (2017) notes, Berlin's intensive urban

transformation – in which derelict building stock was refurbished and sold to upwardly-mobile residents – created an unfavourable environment for nightlife, which was increasingly caught up in new conflicts around noise and anti-sociability. Even as early as 2001, Berlin had already begun to develop its own narrative of nightlife's death: *Clubsterben*.

In this way, where the ascendance of Berlin's techno scene provides additional context for understanding the perceived decline of nightlife in London and the UK more broadly, it is important to view such shifts critically, thinking about the ways in which the displacement of urban nightlife scenes from London and other cultural centres has in turn contributed toward the gentrification of Berlin. As Loretta Lees argues, 'gentrification has not simply gone global', it has become a 'global process'. Given the increasing role of city marketing strategies targeting both tourism as well as more permanent forms of foreign investment, gentrification can no longer be conceptualised as a localised form of urban transformation, 'it is now predominantly state-led or state-induced' (Lees 2019: 6).

This context is important for understanding of the emergence of new modes of night-time governance in London and elsewhere during the 2010s, which in theory at least, were set up to protect and preserve nightlife under conditions of urban transformation. Rather than treating nightlife, gentrification, and municipal politics as discrete categories or forces, it is important to recognise their complex and ambivalent interrelation. Moreover, given the increasing significance of nightlife and culture in the global production of cities, it is important to explore how emergent models of nocturnal governance relate to concerns with city branding and metrics of influence.

In the final sections of this chapter, I return to London, exploring the temporary closure of Fabric and its relation to the emergence of the Night Czar as a new mode of nocturnal governance for the city. Where The Night Czar marks a new form of political representation for London's nightlife, I argue that its limited powers of jurisdiction restrict it to largely symbolic capacity, concerned primarily with the shaping of London nightlife's local and global reputation.

#savefabric and the inauguration of the Night Czar

On the 6th of September 2016, two high-profile verdicts were reached in both Berlin and London. In Berlin, a court ruling reclassified Berghain's tax status, grouping it together with more traditional cultural institutions such opera houses and concert halls. On the same day in London however, Islington council ruled permanently to revoke Fabric's license, following the drug-related deaths of two eighteen-year-olds in the summer of 2016. The divergence between these two rulings served further to amplify the growing public discourse around the 'death of nightlife' in London, imparting a renewed sense of urgency to the appointment of Amy Lamé as the city's first Night Czar only two months later. Where the eventual reopening of Fabric was celebrated as one of the Night Czar's primary achievements during her first year, I argue, following Comunian and Mould's (2014) critique of 'flagship cultural projects', that the municipal

attention afforded to Fabric related as much to concerns with city-branding as it did the day-to-day flourishing of London's nightlife ecology. By charting Fabric's closure and the subsequent #savefabric campaign alongside the inauguration of the Night Czar role, I offer an alternate account of this emergent mode of nocturnal governance, suggesting that it reframes nightlife as a newly contested terrain of urban competition.

When Fabric first had its license suspended in August 2016, it galvanised a wave of public support from musicians, journalists, and industry professionals, grouping together under the #savefabric hashtag (Garcia 2017). Fabric's closure was seen by many to be a watershed moment, marking an unacceptable escalation in the recent history of London's declining nightlife scenes (Brewster 2016). When the decision was made permanently to revoke the club's license on September 6th, support consolidated into a more formalised appeal campaign, raising £360,000 toward legal costs as well as the expenses necessary to maintain the venue and staff payroll during the period of closure. Fundraising efforts included the release of a compilation comprising 111 tracks by a range of international electronic music artists,[9] as well as a series of events featuring high-profile headline DJs including Ben Klock, Seth Troxler, and Ricardo Villalobos. These events were organised under the heading #saveourculture, a shift which not only situated Fabric in relation to broader narratives of club closures in London and elsewhere, but further, appeared to position Fabric as gatekeepers of a wider-reaching evocation of dance music culture itself. #saveourculture functioned in part as a polemic proclamation that dance music culture is *culture,* but it also suggested that Fabric claimed some sense of ownership over this definition, granting them the authority to delineate its parameters.

Where Fabric has been rightfully celebrated for its 'adventurous music policy…incorporating some of the more marginal, niche club scenes into its programming' (Haslam 2015: 376-7), it is also one of London's larger and higher-grossing nightclubs, with assets that had amounted to almost £4 million by the end of 2015.[10] Moreover, in 2007 and 2008, Fabric was voted the World's Number One Club in DJ Magazine's 'Top 100 Clubs' poll, coming in second place in 2009, 2010 and 2017. In this way, it is important to conceptualise the role played by Fabric not only within localised notions of dance music culture, but also electronic dance music as an international industry. While Fabric has always made a point of supporting local London scenes – in particular through its Friday night Fabric Live events which programme drum and bass, dubstep, and grime – it is simultaneously a key node in the touring schedules of high-profile international DJs. This relationship between local and global musical ecologies was highlighted by the London-based DJ, Debonair, in the 'Bigger than Fabric' (Holloway 2016) documentary, in which she described Fabric as 'one of the places that really makes London a player on the global circuit'. In her view, the closure of Fabric placed London's reputation as a 'world class club city' at risk. In this way, the shift from #savefabric to #saveourculture evoked not only localised concerns with London club's culture, but also the perceived reputation of that culture on the international stage.

[9] https://www.discogs.com/Various-savefabric-Compilation/release/9279323
[10] https://www.companiesintheuk.co.uk/accounts/fabric-life/annualaccounts/2016-12-31

Similar sentiments were echoed by Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, in a high-profile letter he sent to Islington Council shortly before Fabric's appeal hearing on November 28th 2016. In the letter, he begins by stating that 'London's iconic clubs are an essential part of our cultural landscape', before going on to argue that the city's high number of club closures must be reversed for London to 'retain its status as a 24-hour city with a world-class nightlife' (Khan 2016). Through these statements, the Mayor's interest in the health of the night-time economy appears to be concerned primarily with the production and maintenance of a particular urban image, foregrounding London's global standing. In his 'Vision for a 24-hour City' report published the following year, Khan went further: 'I want London to be a global leader in the ways nightlife is planned. But we face tough competition, with Paris, New York, Berlin, Tokyo and San Francisco all looking to grow their night-time offers' (GLA 2017). In this way, Khan evokes the night-time economy within discourses of global city status, founded on a conception of cities as 'coherent entities that compete against each other' (Massey 2007: 21). Where global cities have typically been defined via financial metrics, notions of 'world-class nightlife' recast night-time culture as a terrain of urban competition, what Alessio Kolioulis (2018: 211) has described as a framework of 'nightlife supremacy'. Such rhetoric breeds homogenisation, reinforcing common measures of success – typically market logics – rather than valuing diversity between cities (Massey 2007: 28). Moreover, such logics make assumptions about a correspondence between 'nightlife supremacy' and more localised notions of high-quality nightlife. As Massey points out, there is little correlation between global city metrics and rankings based on liveability (Ibid. 19).

Given Fabric's international reputation, it is telling that the Mayor's office intervened during the club's threat of closure, which represented a high-profile culmination of London venue closures. In this way, following Comunian and Mould (2014), I argue that it is useful to consider Fabric as an example of a 'cultural flagship' – a large scale, iconic cultural venue intended to enhance a city's image, encourage investment, and attract tourists. Where Comunian and Mould's framework deals primarily with publicly funded cultural development projects – of which the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is the most widely cited example – their work is useful for the ways it critiques received consensus that flagship projects or 'anchor institutions' necessarily contribute to the wellbeing of a city's local cultural ecosystem. Instead, they suggest that cultural flagships are often linked to short-term logics of high-visibility boosterism, bearing little connection to the sustained, everyday production of local cultural infrastructure (2014: 66). In Fabric's case, the club had been open since 1999, but it was only at the high-profile moment of its threatened closure in 2016 that it received any degree of cultural recognition from City Hall. Without the level of international public and media support that Fabric was able to channel into its campaign, it is unlikely that the Mayor would have intervened so directly. This moment served not only a way for the Mayor's office to recognise Fabric's genuine cultural contributions, but also as a highly-visible opportunity to change public perceptions about the relationship between City Hall and London's nightlife, (re)establishing an image of London as a world-leading 24-hour city.

Crucial to the impact of this shift was the way in which the successful appeal of Fabric's closure coincided with the inauguration of Amy Lamé as London's first Night Czar. The idea of a 'night-time economy champion' was floated by Boris Johnson in March 2016 as part of his six month 'Night Time Commission' – an investigation set up to respond to the perceived decline of London's nightlife (London Night Time Commission 2016). When Sadiq Khan was elected in May 2016, he stated that the establishment of a Night Czar for the city was one of his key priorities (BBC 2016). Thus, while the concept of the Night Czar had been in gestation through much of 2016, its eventual coincidence with Fabric's appeal hearing – whether deliberate or not – served to intensify the impact of a new political role, which as Will Straw has suggested, was already characterised by a particularly 'high journalistic appeal' (2018: 226). After a year in office, City Hall cited 'Keeping Fabric Open' as one of Amy Lamé's primary achievements, highlighting her intermediary role in the discussions between Fabric's owners, the Metropolitan Police, and Islington Council (Mayor of London 2017). This sentiment was also echoed in one of the first academic studies on night-time mayors, which suggested that Amy Lamé had led the talks allowing Fabric to stay open (Seijas and Gelders 2020). Despite attempts by City Hall to draw a causal relationship between the inception of the Night Czar and Fabric's swift reopening, several subsequent news reports argued that Amy Lamé's involvements were minimal if not non-existent, citing evidence from sources closely involved in the negotiations (Wilding 2017; O'Sullivan 2018). These reports point to the ways in which the Night Czar's influence may have been overstated, accentuating the role of municipal government over the well-organised and financed campaign organised by Fabric and the wider nightlife community. Moreover, the emphasis placed on 'keeping Fabric open' served to disregard many of the strict regulatory conditions the club was forced to accept, as Resident Advisor highlighted in an opinion piece shorty following the verdict:

> When fabric reopens, it will need to abide by a raft of new licensing conditions, agreed upon by the club, the council and police. These conditions will be implemented alongside a 155-page handbook that will see it achieve a "gold standard" of operations. The new conditions include a batch of infringements that fall somewhere between disheartening and dystopian – ID scans on entry, increased CCTV, tougher searches on entry, covert surveillance inside the club, physical changes including the grim-sounding provision of "improved lighting" – in addition to punitive measures like lifetime bans for anyone found in possession of drugs or attempting to buy drugs in the club. The minimum age for entry on club nights has risen to 18 from 19 (Coultate 2016d).

In this way, what was celebrated in public discourse as the saving of a cultural flagship venue – by a municipal administration newly awakened to the needs of London's nightlife communities – simultaneously involved the imposition of newly draconian practices of regulation. As was noted by journalists (e.g. Byers 2016) following the initial decision to revoke Fabric's license, evidence submitted during the hearing drew on written testimonies from an undercover police operation, 'Operation Lenor', which had taken place prior to the drug-related deaths which had supposedly triggered the license hearing in the first place. While testimonies contained no hard evidence of drug use, they incorporated conjectural statements including,

'When in room 2 it was clear when looking around that some people were intoxicated by drugs or otherwise, they were sweating and had glazed red eyes and appeared to be staring into space.' Both Byers (2016) and Garcia (2017) argue that the existence of Operation Lenor suggested a more sustained campaign against Fabric, in which a cash-strapped Islington Council deployed drug legislation selectively as a 'convenient proxy for non-illegal nuisances'.

Whatever the motivations behind the heightened interest in Fabric's attitude toward drugs, the new regulatory measures stipulated in the verdict point toward the reproduction of night-time economy discourses focussing on anti-social behaviour and control. Thus where Luc Gwiazdzinski (2018) suggests that the emergent phenomenon of night mayors 'offer mediation rather than regulations', the example of Fabric demonstrates the degree of ambivalence inherent to this apparent governmental shift. Such contradictions expose the tensions between nocturnal governance as a new form of political representation and notions of night-time culture as expedient, subservient to the wider image of the city.

In order to explore the nature of the newly formalised relationship between City Hall and London's night-time economy, it is useful to situate the stated responsibilities and goals of the Night Czar role in relation to the limited nature of its jurisdiction. The initial advertisement for the position stated:

> The Mayor of London is looking to appoint the UK's first Night Czar to shape London's future as a 24-hour city. The Night Czar will champion the value of London's night-time culture whilst developing and diversifying London's night-time economy…Working with the Mayor, the Night Time Commission, local authorities, businesses, the Metropolitan Police Service, Transport For London and other agencies, the Night Czar will create a vision for London as 24-hour city and a roadmap showing how the vision will be realised. The Night Czar will have proven leadership ability, public profile and convening power, plus a thorough understanding of the night-time economy and the ability to work in a political environment (Mayor of London 2016).

This description evokes multiple overlapping identities for the Night Czar: a visionary to develop London's nocturnal cultural offerings; an intermediary to mediate between different urban stakeholders; and lastly, a more symbolic representative to 'champion' the urban night-time at local and global scales. The advert also highlights the diverse web of actors that already comprise wider practices of nocturnal governance. In this way, while Seijas and Gelders (2020: 6) conceptualise night mayors primarily as 'mediators or translators between two worlds – nightlife and city government', this focus on the process of mediation attributes a false sense of unity and cohesion to each respective 'world'. Not only is nightlife a broad spectrum of spaces, communities, and practices, but notions of 'city government' also cover local borough authorities, City Hall, as well as a range of other public and private organisations, each with their own spheres of authority and regulatory powers. Despite the connotations of the term 'czar', the position has very limited jurisdiction over the night-time, with no genuine executive power. Planning and licensing – perhaps the key paradigms of nocturnal urban governance, are controlled by local councils in each London Borough. In 2018, when Hackney Council implemented controversial new licensing restrictions

forcing new venues to close at midnight on weekends, the Night Czar's powerlessness was made clear, with Amy Lamé seemingly unwilling and unable to intervene in what was widely perceived as a direct attack on East London's nightlife scene (Kolioulis 2018: 213).

The Night Czar is constrained not only by the powers of local authorities, but also by the structure of their relationship with City Hall. Philip Kolvin – generally recognised as one the UK's leading licensing QCs – notes that the nature of this relationship is one of the roles' inherent contradictions. A figure wholly autonomous from local government would struggle to gain the necessary recognition and funding to be effective, while someone in direct employment would be forced to 'align with political interests and voting cycles' (Seijas and Gelders 2020: 7). In this way, even a mediatory conception of the Night Czar role over-emphasises its capabilities to act within the political constraints of the position – advocating the needs of night-time communities, yet simultaneously ill-placed to criticise what may be ineffective or even antagonistic municipal approaches toward the night-time.

With no executive power nor any direct democratic accountability to London's nightlife communities, it is difficult to conceive of the Night Czar as much more than a symbolic gesture toward a new paradigm of nocturnal governance. The lack of genuine jurisdiction afforded to the Night Czar may be further contextualised within the limitations of City Hall itself. When Tony Blair introduced the elected Mayor of London role in 2000, it was only granted responsibility for three main areas of policy: the production of a 'London Plan'; the management of London's transport system; and the regulation of the Metropolitan Police and Fire Brigade. Crucially, the Mayor would have no control over taxes, schools, nor the construction and management of housing. For Owen Hatherley (2021), New Labour's introduction of city mayors served in part to replace properly elected local authorities with largely powerless, symbolic political figures – a nod toward local democracy and devolution enacted at the very same time that education and public transport were subject to further processes of privatisation.

In the final short section of this chapter, I discuss the Night Time Industries Association, and the emergent framework of the 'nocturnal commons'. Where these frameworks present contrasting modes of nocturnal organising, I argue that London's nightlife would benefit from a third form of collectivisation, fostering democratic solidarity within and across the full diversity of nightlife spaces.

Organising London's night-time

As of 2023, the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) is the closest London's nightlife has to its own organisational body, seeking to 'give a voice to underrepresented licensed businesses.'[11] The NTIA has done much to campaign for the interests of nightlife and has a close relationship with Amy Lamé and City Hall. They have commissioned several reports on the state of the UK's nightlife, drawing attention to the plight of nightclubs and venues before and during COVID-19.[12] However, in representing the business interests of the night-time, the NTIA lacks any relation with London's more DIY and community-oriented night-time spaces. Its founding members include individuals involved with Fabric, The Hydra, London Warehouse Events, and Street Feast. While these operators are all independent, they represent some of the more commercially influential stakeholders in London's nightlife sector. Moreover, in their focus as a business interest group, the NTIA reproduces many institutional logics of nightlife valued primarily as a driver of economic and urban growth. In their own words, the NTIA aims to 'ensure that the night-time economy continues to flourish, supporting regeneration, creating jobs and enhancing the UK's international reputation.'[13] In this sense, they support market-oriented conceptions of nocturnal culture, as well as wider discourses of 'nightlife supremacy', which emphasise competition between cities rather than 'cooperative dialogue and exchange' (Kolioulis 2018: 211).

More recently, researchers at the organisation Autonomy, have proposed the idea of a 'nocturnal commons', which emphasises 'community stewardship and worker control'. A nocturnal commons would involve participation from the full spectrum of night-time workers, seeking to 'democratise the night-time economy by sharing resources and leveraging collaborative practices.' Autonomy's research builds on 'public commons partnerships' (or PCPs), as opposed to public-private-partnerships, as a tool to 'enable democratic urban politics that regulate the interactions between citizens, workers and local administrations' (Kolioulis et al. 2021: 43-7). The framework also draws attention to less visible forms of nocturnal labour, such as sex work, which operate outside formal economic structures. Where the nocturnal commons is useful for encouraging solidarity across the diverse ecology of night-time workers, its broad focus is less attuned to the specific needs of nightlife spaces and communities. In this way, London could benefit from a democratically structured 'nightlife commons', in which venues could pool resources and share expertise, providing smaller, less commercial venues with collectivised power. Where such an organisation would likely interact with City Hall and the Night Czar, its political independence could afford more wide-reaching critique of existent nocturnal governance structures and the broader market logics of the night-time economy.

The absence of such a body in London goes some way toward explaining the lack of coordinated activism in relation to London's nightclub closures, which was limited to the actions of the NTIA and campaigns to save individual venues. When venues were threatened with closure, they had to organise their

[11] https://www.ntia.co.uk
[12] https://ntia.co.uk/ntia-night-time-economy-report-shows-businesses-and-culture-at-risk/
[13] https://www.ntia.co.uk/

own campaigns in relative isolation, rather than as part of a broader movement. In this way, it is important to restore London's nightlife with a sense of political agency, recognising their own failures to organise collectively in the face of spatial and economic pressures.

Conclusion

By the end of the 2010s, the narrative of decline around London's nightlife was no longer big news. Though the city still had far fewer clubs and venues than two decades prior, there appeared to be glimmers of optimism. Along with the new spaces that had opened in Tottenham and Bermondsey, London gained a new 24-hour licensed venue in the form of FOLD – a 600-capacity nightclub that opened in Canning Town in the latter half of 2018. With its extended opening hours and industrial location, FOLD sought to cultivate a more 'continental approach' to approach to clubbing, 'tucked away from the pressures of the city' (Turner 2018). In the summer of 2021, Mick's Garage in Hackney Wick reopened as Colour Factory, becoming East London's largest Black-owned music venue. In the words of director Nathaneal Williams, Colour Factory is 'committed to representing and reflecting the diverse community of London', ensuring that every event line-up is mixed gender and includes at least one person of colour (Hawthorn 2021).

In the period between these two openings however, COVID-19 emphasised the latent precarity of London's nightlife scenes. Despite the new political and regulatory climate promised by the inauguration of the Night Czar, nightclubs and electronic music artists struggled to meet eligibility requirements for Arts Council funding during the period of lockdown enforced closure (Mazierska and Rigg 2021). By the end of 2021, London had lost almost a quarter of its nightclubs since the start of the pandemic (Prynn 2021). A report commissioned by the NTIA in 2023 suggests that the fallout from COVID-19 has continued to impact the night-time economy, which remains one of the 'worst affected' sectors (NTIA 2023).

While unique, the circumstances of COVID-19 intensified many of the political, economic, and spatial pressures faced by London's nightlife scenes prior to the pandemic (Assiter 2020). Was this just another reinscribed episode in the ongoing death of the city's nightlife? London's dance music scenes have undoubtedly been impacted by the closure of nightclubs and venues over the past few decades. However, as this chapter has argued, a broad-sweeping narrative of decline fails to account for the more complex spatial and temporal transformations that took place during this period. I have demonstrated how marginalised dance music communities experienced disproportionate forms of spatial and regulatory pressure, while new nightlife spaces and practices emerged in line with broader transformations to the city. Moreover, I have argued how the modes of nocturnal governance that developed in response to venue closures have functioned largely to manage the symbolic reputation of London's night-time culture. As evidenced in Berlin, aggressive city-branding strategies contribute to intensified processes of gentrification and displacement, which when left unregulated, have drastic impacts on the fragile ecology of local cultural scenes, as well as the broader working and living conditions of urban life.

In the chapters that follow, I use this context of spatial precarity as a starting point from which to explore the new spaces and times that have emerged in London's nightlife between 2015 and 2023. On the one hand, these spatial transformations add nuance to understandings of the commercialisation, gentrification, and institutionalisation of nightlife and urban culture, while on the other, they point toward the development of innovative spatial and cultural practices, adapting to new social, urban, and technological contexts. Narratives of decline in dance music culture have predominantly focussed on the loss of nightclubs and venues. These are important stories to narrate – as musical spaces come and go, their ephemeral histories have much to tell us about the changing social and cultural lives of cities. In my research however, I draw attention to the new spaces and times inhabited by London's electronic music cultures, many of which fall outside the traditional night-time venues of dance music culture. The first of these chapters does in fact focus on London nightclubs in a more traditional sense, though I consider those which represent examples of 'temporary urbanism'. The chapter highlights issues of temporality in dance music culture and nightlife, exploring how temporary events and spaces complicate prevailing narratives of urban decline and renewal.

Chapter 2. 'A testbed for culture': nightlife spaces and temporary urbanism

The opening and closing of venues raise questions of space, but also of time. How does the duration of a musical space affect its cultural influence and value? What role can shorter-lasting spaces play in the construction of musical communities and wider cultural ecologies? As a culture of events, electronic dance music is closely intertwined with transience. In dance music culture, sonic (Fink 2005) and chemical (Esteve 2018) technologies are used to expand and disrupt perceptions of time and space, but the dancefloor always remains bounded and ephemeral. This transient quality calls into question the utopian politics of rave – 'what happens once the party is over?' – yet it is also a source of affective power. The dancefloor acquires meaning in part through its separation from the routines of the everyday, what Rossi and Eisenbrand describe as its 'temporal discreteness' (2018: 19). Dance music events may be intrinsically temporary, but they take place across a wide spectrum of spatial environments, each with their own rhythms and temporalities. These range from the longer-term infrastructures of purpose-built venues and nightclubs to a wide variety of ephemeral spaces, which reimagine urban and rural locations on a temporary basis.

Where we can speak of an architectural typology distinguished by states of permanence and temporariness, such distinctions are called into question by the economic and cultural cycles of capitalism. Spaces are built, bought, transformed, sold, and destroyed according to the demands of the market, following 'the temporal cycles of boom and bust, and the spatial patterns of investment and disinvestment' (Madanipour 2017: 1095). These market forces are mediated by a range of other factors including planning regulations, state/municipal policy, and the interventions of local interest/community groups, all of which impact the life cycles of buildings and cultural spaces. Distinctions between temporary and permanent spaces are thus more fluid than binary – they relate as much to intention as they do material qualities of duration. It is possible for a temporary space to outlast a permanent one, with its temporal distinctiveness remaining intact. Relative qualities of temporariness and permanence are socially and culturally defined, producing different meanings, values, and identities. Of course, nothing is truly permanent, as the impending climate crisis reminds us. However, most spaces in the built environment tend to be constructed with a degree of at least potential longevity in mind, such that intentionally temporary spaces carry their own set of social, cultural, and economic characteristics. In this way, I use distinctions between temporariness and permanence to highlight issues of temporality and duration in the city more broadly – permanence is only a relative quality of space.

Henri Lefebvre (2004) draws attention to the ways in which urban life and culture is produced at the intersection of the social, spatial, *and* temporal, manifest in what he terms rhythms: 'all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space, a localised time, or if one prefers, a temporalized space' (2004: 89). In this mutually generative relationship, it is 'not bodies moving through space-time but making it' (Crang 2001: 194). Given this social production of both space *and* time, Will Straw argues that we should 'consider social

relationships not simply in terms of their distribution across space, but also according to their organisation in time, in the ways in which they produce "temporal communities"' (2015: 54).

In this way, relative qualities of temporariness and permanence acquire a range of different meanings, which change according to social and historic context. Within the broad category of the temporary, Robert Temel draws a distinction between the ephemeral and the provisional. The latter represents a short-term stand-in for the 'real' thing, whereas the former connotes an 'existential temporality', in which temporariness is valued in and of itself (2006: 55). In the latter half of the 20th century, such conceptions of the temporary were associated with strands of radicalism in art, architecture, and politics. Guy Debord (2012: 41) famously claimed that 'our situations will be ephemeral, without a future … The permanence of art or anything else does not enter into our considerations.' In the 1960s and 70s, the squatting movement took hold in many Western European cities, using the temporary occupation of empty buildings both as a practical living solution and as part of broader political struggles for housing, autonomy, and the 'right to the city' (Martinez 2020). Where certain squats ended up lasting for years or even decades, the ideologies of temporariness underlying squatting function as a critique of permanence in the capitalist city and its associations with exchange value and investment (McArdle 2022). In 1960s Italy, architects experimented with news forms of temporary design at the Piper Club in Rome, using a series of modular structures to create a dynamic, reconfigurable space that encouraged participation and new 'collaborations between spectators and actors' (Capolei 2015). In electronic dance music culture, temporariness was explored by the rave and free party movements that emerged during the late 1980s and early 90s, creating transient spaces of dancing as manifestations of Hakim Bey's (1991) 'Temporary Autonomous Zone'.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, much of urban life was characterised by an intensified spatial and economic precarity, with effects on the meaning of transience. In 2011, the Occupy movement spread from New York to almost a thousand cities around the world, using temporary occupations of public space as part of a direct-action strategy disillusioned with institutional political structures and modes of organisation (Glasius and Pleyers 2013). During this same period, temporariness was absorbed into the logics of urban capitalism via the emergence of the pop-up economy. In this newly formalised economic and spatial logic, precarity is reimagined as flexibility, using temporary occupations to generate profit from disused urban space. Temporary urbanism is marketed as a way for small businesses, creative producers, and community projects to gain cheap access to space. At the same time, it is used by many local authorities and property developers as part of large-scale placemaking strategies and culture-led regeneration projects (Ferreri 2015; 2021). In this context, temporariness emerges as socially and politically ambivalent: providing valuable opportunity under conditions of precarity, whilst simultaneously contributing to market-led urban transformations and displacements.

In this chapter, these contexts provide the backdrop for an exploration of the changing relationship between temporary events, temporary urbanism, and the spaces of electronic dance music culture. By charting a brief history of this relation, I demonstrate how the temporary strategies of rave have been

reimagined as part of increasingly formalised – but equally transient – infrastructures in nightlife. Where this might appear to be a simple story of commercialisation and institutionalisation however, the reality is more complex. I draw attention to the ways in which the temporary spaces of rave have borne an ambivalent relation to commercialism from the outset, as well as the ways that formalised temporary urbanism has provided necessary infrastructure for the emergence of grassroots nightlife spaces in London. In this way, I use the broad category of the temporary as a lens through which to examine the historical development of electronic dance music cultures, as well as their changing relations to urban space.

I begin with a discussion of early warehouse parties and UK rave culture, arguing how temporary spatial occupations functioned variously as an alternate public sphere for London's Black communities; as an infrastructure for the development of informal nightlife economies; as well as a manifestation of the spatialised politics of the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone'. In the following section, I turn attention to the 'Temporary Events Notices' developed as part of the 2003 Licensing Act, which provided legislation for a newly legalised ecology of temporary dance music events. Following a discussion of the theoretical tensions inherent to temporary urbanism outlined by Maria Ferreri (2015; 2021), the remainder of the chapter is structured around two contrasting case studies. The first of these focusses on Grow Tottenham, which was a 'meanwhile use' nightclub and community garden in North London. This case study explores how temporary urbanism can provide valuable infrastructure for grassroots cultural spaces, while simultaneously highlighting the limitations of temporariness as produced by existing municipal and corporate governance structures. The second case study focusses on Printworks, and its management company, Broadwick Live, who use temporary nightlife spaces as a way of attracting (sub)cultural capital to areas earmarked for regeneration, in close collaboration with local authorities and property developers. Building on Alessio Kolioulis' (2018: 214) notion of the 'financialisation of clubbing', I explore the development of a newly formalised industry, which is blurring the boundaries between cultural production, venue management, and speculative urban development.

Temporary events

Rare groove, rave, and free parties

Temporary occupations of space have always formed a core component of electronic dance music events and cultures. Such occupations have emerged as strategic responses to a range of different social, cultural, and spatial contexts, broadly seeking to produce alternatives to formalised nightlife events and infrastructures. At different historic and geographic moments, such strategies have sought to provide social space for marginalised groups; circumnavigate official nightlife economies – whether with ideological or entrepreneurial intentions; take advantage of disused urban and rural space; and return to a more 'authentic' cultural ideal, perceived as lost through the mainstreaming of commercialised club culture. These practices

are historically significant, though the development of dance music culture has been shaped by formal and informal nightlife infrastructures in equal measure. During the 1970s, for example, New York's disco scene was built on a thriving ecology of purpose-built Manhattan nightclubs (Lawrence 2003; 2011), while the emergence of techno in both Detroit and Berlin was closely related to processes of industrial decline, and the abundance of disused warehouses and factories it produced (Rietveld and Kolioulis 2018). Crucially, where temporary and longer-term spaces can broadly be mapped on to informal and formal nightlife economies, this binary was always blurred, and has become increasingly indistinct over time.

In the UK, illegal temporary events played a crucial role in the early development of electronic dance music culture. According to the dominant historical imaginary, the acid house raves of the late 1980s, as well as the free party scene that emerged in the wake of the 1994 Criminal Justice Act were definitive moments in the emergence of British dance music culture, contributing toward the subsequent growth of a more institutionalised club culture in the latter half of the 1990s (Collin 1997; Talbot 2009). As Caspar Melville reminds us however, an alternate public sphere existed among London's Black communities since the 1960s, with events that took place in 'unlicensed venues, shubeens, blues parties, municipal halls, squats' (2020: 88). Building on this tradition through the first half of the 1980s, London's emergent rare groove scene 'exploited the possibilities of industrial decline, turning the carcasses of dying imperial industry, manufacturing and trade … into new spaces of multiculture.' Crucially, these parties ruptured the racial segregation of London's nightclub scene at the time, exploiting the ways in which abandoned buildings offered a form of blank social slate, existing outside the racialised spatial order of the rest of the city (Ibid. 88-9). Where blues parties and reggae sound system events had always been subject to repressive, racist policing, the multicultural demographics of rare groove promoters and audiences meant that their illegal events received more lenient treatment from the authorities – in part the result of deliberate strategies by Black DJs and party organisers. Moreover, collaborations with white, middle-class promoters gave access to social networks including people who worked in commercial real estate, who could provide tip-offs and occasional access to empty spaces (Ibid. 111). By drawing attention to the rare groove warehouse scene that preceded the emergence of acid house and rave, Melville highlights the racialised dynamics that mediated these early shifts away from nightclubs toward the temporary occupation of unlicensed spaces. This revisionist history (re)centres the role of Black creativity in the development of British rave and warehouse party culture, as well as demonstrating the importance of informal, temporary venues for marginalised groups, who have been denied access to the public sphere of mainstream nightlife spaces (Fikentscher 2000; Talbot 2004; Talbot and Böse 2007).

With the development of acid house and rave culture toward the end of the 1980s, unlicensed parties in temporary urban and rural locations grew to become a national cultural phenomenon. As has been widely documented, London's warehouse party scene spilled over into open spaces around the perimeter of the M25, before rapidly spreading into fields up and down the country as part of the so-called 'Second Summer of Love' in 1989 (Collin 1997; Reynolds 2013). Bringing crowds of young people, noise, and widespread drug use, rave was perceived as a threat to the pastoral sanctity of the British countryside,

spawning a nationwide moral panic. Beneath rave's ecstasy[14]-fuelled discourses of togetherness however, the unregulated nature of these events fuelled the growth of a lucrative informal industry. Entrepreneurs such as Tony Colston-Hayter generated large untaxed profits from the ticket sales of events including Sunrise and Back To The Future, many of which resembled small-scale music festivals with up to 20,000 partygoers in attendance. Alongside this, raves supported the development of an interrelated narcoeconomy, based predominantly around the distribution of ecstasy. As numerous commentators have argued, the anarcho-capitalist tendencies of rave may be theorised as a realisation of the free-market individualism espoused by Margaret Thatcher at the time (John 2015) – extending the entrepreneurialism that was latent within many earlier countercultural practices (Hancock 2019). The profits generated from these events were directly related to their transient, unregulated nature. Not only did they provide a platform for untaxed ticket and alcohol sales, but their location in fields, barns, and disused aircraft hangars allowed promoters to host events on a massive scale, free from the limitations of urban density and licensing regulations.

While the temporary spaces of rave existed outside the formalised infrastructures of nightlife, they shared similar economic imperatives. Once a more commercialised club culture emerged in the wake of the 1994 Criminal Justice Act, unlicensed parties were driven further underground, and split into two camps. On one side were the 'unscrupulous money spinners who operated in a grey economy of (semi-)criminal involvement', while on the other, were those who used 'the relatively simple logistics of a mobile sound system' to host free parties in the 'open air or in squatted/borrowed premises' (Rietveld 1998b: 255). In this second strand, the temporary spatial tactics of rave acquired a newly politicised edge, merging with the DiY and direct-action movements of the early 1990s. For proponents of free-party culture such as DiY Sound System and Spiral Tribe, rave was reimagined as a distinctly anti-commercial project: 'whereas Tony Colston-Hayter had seen the English countryside as a green-field development site for his new leisure concept, the Spirals understood it as a politically charged environment, a historic arena for a clash between rebels and oppressors' (Collin 1997: 202). In this formulation, rave was oriented around the 'construction or reclamation of space', in which short- or long-term occupations functioned as a 'prerequisite for community' (Mckay 1998: 28). Like the direct-action politics of Reclaim the Streets, this was a 'culture of immediacy', in which longer-term trajectories of the past and future were rejected for the primacy of the present moment (Ibid. 13).

As was noted by theorists and practitioners at the time, free party culture can be conceptualised via Hakim Bey's notion of the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone' (T.A.Z.). For Bey, future-focused political orientations can leave us unable to enjoy true freedom in the present. The T.A.Z. functions as one way of experiencing such utopian ideals 'in action.' Given the ultimate failure of most revolutions to deliver

[14] 'Ecstasy' refers to the tablet form of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA, a psychoactive drug with both stimulant and psychedelic properties. It functions primarily by stimulating the release of neurotransmitters including serotonin and dopamine. It is classed as an empathogen–entactogen, inducing feelings of empathy, communion, and euphoria among users. Ecstasy played a key role in the development of acid house and rave culture in the late 1980s (Collin 1997; Reynolds 2013), and its use remains prevalent among attendees of electronic dance music events.

liberation, Bey argues that we should instead harness the ephemeral moment of the uprising itself, which can still provide a more lasting 'quality of enhancement'. The T.A.Z. is not necessarily intended to replace longer-term political strategy, but it functions as a way of 'experiencing some of its benefits here and now' (1985: 96-9. Given its rejection of teleology, the T.A.Z. focusses its energies on a politics of space. As Bey notes, since the 19th century, land has come under either State or private control – what he terms 'the closure of the map'. The T.A.Z. seeks to occupy the neglected or overlooked cracks between these spaces of closure (Ibid. 100-1). Although Bey theorised the T.A.Z. before the emergence of the free party movement, he recognised the affective power of festivals and parties as possible manifestations of the T.A.Z.:

> Let us admit that we have attended parties where for one brief night a republic of gratified desires was attained. Shall we not confess that the politics of that night have more reality and force for us than those of, say, the entire U.S. government? (Ibid. 132).

Bey's writings encapsulate many of the tensions at the heart of the politics behind free party culture, if not those of electronic dance music's broader transience. As Gilbert and Pearson have argued, 'liberation is not the same thing as transformation … Escape – especially if only temporary – is not the same thing as political change' (1999: 162). Free party culture and its connections with direct action politics, they suggest, was

> always in danger of collapsing into a radical *spatialization* of politics; a search for immediacy and an abandonment of any real orientation to the future … this was a politics which occurred in space – the space of raves, of squats, of roads – but did not have time to occupy itself with time (Ibid. 167).

In its most cynical interpretation, rave as T.A.Z. can be critiqued via the same logics of the medieval carnival as social safety-valve – 'a turning away from the possibility of real political engagement' (Ibid. 163). The temporary nature of the carnival – or the rave as T.A.Z – means that it is always open to such critique. However, as Stallybrass and White suggest, it makes little sense to debate whether carnival – or rave – is '*intrinsically* radical or conservative'. Rather, any meaningful analysis requires 'close historical examination of particular conjectures' (1986: 14-6). In this way, it is important to compare the wide variety of temporary spatial strategies in dance music culture, exploring how the social and cultural meaning of temporariness has changed across different places and times.

Thus far, I have discussed examples of temporary events which have functioned as an alternative to the racialised exclusions of club culture; as unregulated business opportunities; and as cultural manifestations of a newly spatialised politics. Across this range of overlapping functions, what each events-based culture shared was an identity that stood as somehow against – or at least outside – the formalised infrastructures of urban nightlife. As the following sections will demonstrate, this began to change in the 2000s and 2010s, when the strategies and aesthetics of rave were reimagined as part of the emergent pop-

up economy and shifts toward temporary urbanism in corporate and municipal culture. This draws attention to the more complex entanglements of DIY practices, commercial imperatives, and institutional structures, as manifest in temporary events and spaces. These complexities have intensified as dance music has permeated further into mainstream cultural and economic discourse, but as this first section has shown, they have mediated the development of electronic dance music cultures throughout their historical development.

Temporary Events Notices (TENS)

By the end of the 1990s, the majority of electronic dance music culture in the UK was located within the spaces of an increasingly formalised nightlife infrastructure, what came to be conceptualised as the night-time economy (Chatterton and Hollands 2002; Shaw 2010). In 2003, the passing of the Licensing Act sought to produce more flexible conditions for entertainment venues and the sale of alcohol, creating the possibility of 24-hour licenses, 7 days a week. Part 5 of the act outlined a new piece of legislation, the Temporary Events Notice, or TEN, which allows for 'licensable activity' to take place in unlicensed premises on a temporary basis. TENs are administered via local councils and can only be refused if objections are raised by the police or environmental health agencies. Grounds for objection arise if it is perceived that an event can 'lead to crime and disorder; cause a public nuisance; be a threat to public safety; or put children at risk of harm.'[15] TENs replaced a more complex process of authorisation with a 'less bureaucratic system' for one-off events, which as Sarah Clover (2006) has noted, became 'surprisingly liberal and unregulated.'

Where TENs were designed to cover a wide range of temporary events including weddings, circuses, and funfairs, they had an unexpected impact on electronic dance music culture, effectively creating a legal structure through which party organisers can host raves and warehouse-style events. In London, the combined result of nightclub closures, TENs, and an infrastructure of disused buildings created the conditions for a thriving 'warehouse scene' (Hutchins 2014). During this period, it became commonplace for event flyers to list their location as 'East London Warehouse TBA',[16] evoking the secrecy of rave and free party culture within a newly legalised framework. A number of large-scale warehouse venues operated via TENs during this period, including Hackney Downs Studios, Hearn Street Car Park, Great Suffolk Street Warehouse, and Studio Spaces, operating within relatively central areas such as Hackney, Tower Hamlets, and Southwark. Outside London., TENs supported an ecology of 'temporary clubs' in Sheffield, allowing promoters to host events amid the city's post-industrial architecture, freed from the high expenditure necessary to set up permanently licensed venues. One of the city's key warehouse venues, Hope Works, has successfully hosted events since 2012, operating solely via TENs (Hollins 2021: 43–4; Thomas 2022).

[15] https://www.gov.uk/temporary-events-notice
[16] Warehouse events took place all over London, but mostly within the post-industrial infrastructure of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, and Newham.

The structure of the TENs system means that operators are limited to a certain number of events per year, and due to their lack of a permanent premises license, can only set up facilities for the sale of alcohol within the boundaries of temporary events. During the 2010s, many of London's warehouse venues functioned as multi-purpose spaces, set up as film and photography studios in the periods between parties. Given the precarity of the temporary events economy, as well as the increasing value of warehouse-style spaces as commercial real estate, such flexibility was financially necessary, meaning that much of London's temporary events scene was dominated by professionalised operators. These operators had the experience and industry contacts to organise large-scale events, which could generate enough income to sustain a business through the temporal limitations of the TENs system. As Sarah Clover has argued, where TENs were intended to create a more open and flexible licensing environment for 'small-scale, small-time entertainment providers', it is largely operators with sufficient resources and financial backing who have benefited. Such operators have found ways to exploit the TENs system to host

> lucrative events that are not answerable to either local government or the local community … The reality is that they [TENs] have become standard additions to large-scale operators who have rolled out "conveyor belt" style applications for premises licenses across vast licensed estates (Clover 2006).

This 'conveyor belt' approach in part explains the relative decline of the TENs warehouse party scene by the end of the 2010s. As DJ Geddes – a key player in this scene – has suggested, a formula for the 'secret location thing' was established and copied during this period, reimagining the spatio-temporal aesthetics of rave as part of an increasingly professionalised practice (Hutchins 2014). This slowed innovation over time and led some promoters to withdraw from the scene. For party organisers who were used to organising illegal events, the normalisation of the TENs system brought additional layers of administrative labour that were incompatible with many of their established working patterns (Warwick 2017). Moreover, the constraints of an events culture based on temporary venues left organisers with little opportunity to experiment with space. Most events during this period featured large industrial rooms with festival-style pop-up bars and makeshift toilet facilities. Sound systems would have to be hired rather than purchased, and engineers would have little time to devise appropriate acoustic treatments. Where rave culture's historic associations with warehouse spaces ascribed these events with a vague sense of architectural authenticity, their ad hoc arrangements were combined with expensive ticket prices and corporatised promotional strategies. In this way, where the TENs system set out to create a more diverse and flexible events infrastructure, it simultaneously served to reinscribe power imbalances and homogeneity within electronic dance music's spatial economy.

As Dan Beaumont has argued, TENs function as a 'kind of legal loophole', which when granted, remove many of the regulatory frameworks typically involved in licensing decisions (Coultate 2016a). In 2015, when Hackney Council sought to instigate Special Policy Areas in Shoreditch and Dalston that would make it almost impossible for new venues to obtain late licenses, Beaumont points out that the council had

handed out the second highest number of TENs of any local authority in the country. This points not only to an obvious disconnect between licensing policy and the demand for late-night events, but further, it created a context in which a vast number of relatively unregulated, temporary events were able to take place, despite an otherwise unfavourable regulatory climate. Where this provided brief glimpses of flexibility for event organisers, it had the potential to raise tensions between nightlife stakeholders and residents, while offering little in the way of longer-term solutions toward more sustainable night-time cultures and economies. Furthermore, the relative vagueness of the TENs system – oriented around four broad licensing objectives – means that the awarding of TENs varies widely according to local authorities and the individuals working within them. As Nikhaela Wicks argues, this has created the possibility for the reproduction of racial prejudices within the licensing process, reflected in certain jurisdictions' reluctance to grant TENs to so-called 'urban' events. Moreover, the supposed neutrality of the four licensing objectives makes it difficult to acknowledge or change any biases mediating their application (2019: 4–5).

Despite their inherently temporary nature, TENs have had some impacts on longer-term nightlife infrastructures. Aside from the emergence of 'temporary clubs', many venues use TENs to host one-off events outside their usual licensing conditions, such as those with extended opening hours. In a limited number of cases, TENs have also paved the way for the opening of a more permanent, fully licensed nightclub. E1 in the Wapping area of London started life as Studio Spaces, a warehouse venue which hosted parties in collaboration with electronic music institutions including Ostgut Ton, Boiler Room, and Ninja Tune – despite operating solely via TENs. In 2016, Studio Spaces was granted a full license, using their track record hosting temporary events to demonstrate their 'credentials as a reliable and safe operator to the local authorities.'[17] Ormside Projects – a 200-capacity nightclub, arts, and music space in Bermondsey – shared a similar trajectory. Ormside hosted events via TENs from 2015, until they were given a full premises license in July 2022, allowing them to open until 6:30am on weekends. This was the result of a hard-fought legal and public campaign, in which the police and environmental protection raised concerns about noise and possible criminal activity, despite the venue having hosted over ninety TENs events over a period of seven years, with only two complaints (Heren 2022). These two examples demonstrate the ways in which TENs have contributed toward the development of longer-lasting nightlife spaces, although they remain the exception rather than the rule.

More broadly, TENs raise questions about the relationship between temporariness and urban nightlife infrastructures. Once the temporary strategies of rave are not just commodified, but institutionalised in law, what remains of their possible temporal radicalism? What is the relationship between (in)formalised temporary infrastructures and the production of temporal communities? How is temporariness to be understood during a historical moment defined increasingly both by flexibility and precarity? Before moving on to the two main case studies of this chapter, I present a brief theoretical discussion of temporary urbanism, drawing on the work of Maria Ferreri (2015; 2021) to explore the tensions inherent to urban and economic precarity reimagined as flexibility.

[17] https://e1ldn.co/our-story

Temporary spaces

The precarious logics of temporary urbanism

The flourishing of London's TENs warehouse scene around the turn of the 2010s may in part be understood as a response to the spate of nightclub closures that had escalated around this time (Hutchins 2014). On the one hand, this can be considered a classic shift toward DIY practices in the face of economic and spatial decline. Given the legal frameworks provided by TENs legislation however, such responses need also be contextualised as part of wider governmental logics of individualised responsibility, which position entrepreneurialism and precarity in inextricable interrelation (Lorusso 2019). Via such logics, uncertainty is to be celebrated – reframed instead through the aspirational language of resourcefulness and innovation. Crucially, when preoccupied by the insecurity of the present moment, such discourses can only ever produce reactive and short-term solutions, divorced from any possible engagement with more permanent trajectories.

In the context of the city, these logics acquired a spatial form via the rise of so-called 'temporary urbanism'. Initially taking cues from squatting and other radical traditions, temporary urbanism emerged during the early 2000s to encompass a constellation of related short-term urban development strategies, described variously as 'interim', 'pop-up' or 'meanwhile use'. In perhaps its most archetypal formulation, the pop-up shop was often used as a PR stunt by brands to launch new or limited-edition products, drawing on a romanticised imaginary in which derelict space is reimagined and mythologised as a seductive urban frontier. Under the austerity measures that followed the 2008 financial crisis, the appeal of temporary urbanism gained a new urgency emerging to form a core component of many cities' regeneration strategies, as a 'quick fix' that was used to 'transform a failed or stalled development' into a destination in the increasingly events-based, experience economy (Ferreri 2015: 182-3). In this way, what has often been presented as a transformative instrument – reflective of wider structural shifts toward flexibility and fluidity – may in fact function as little more than an 'interim fashion aimed at filling short-term economic gaps' (Madanipour 2017: 1). Crucially, while temporary urbanism is inherently transient, it simultaneously serves to reinforce and reproduce a corresponding, longer-term logic, in which space can only be transformed in 'one temporal direction…a trajectory of never ending urban economic and real estate development.' By providing space for non-commercial, artistic and community projects on a short-term basis, temporary urbanism consigns such spaces to a permanent state of precarity, granting them brief glimpses of security in an existence that is 'alternative…but not antagonistic' to the prevailing urban rhythm of assumed, relentless growth (Ferreri 2015: 186-7).

Where Ferreri draws vital attention to the relation between temporariness and precarity, she is cautious of drawing a binary between radical traditions of temporary occupation and 'austerity urbanism'.

Such a binary, she argues, fails to account for examples of 'more mundane and localised collectives coming together and organising around potentially conflictive vacant spaces' (2021: 17). In this sense, it is unhelpful to explore the politics of temporariness in a general sense. Rather, it needs to be situated within the parameters of specific examples, approached with an openness to their tensions and contradictions when situated in practice.

In the remainder of the chapter, I turn attention to two case studies broadly focussing on Grow Tottenham and Printworks. These two London venues – both closed as of summer 2023 – present contrasting iterations of 'meanwhile use' as a cultural and urban strategy. Understood together, they raise questions about the cultural value of urban night-time spaces, as well as the ambivalent value of temporariness when situated in contexts of economic and spatialised precarity. The first case study draws extensively on an interview I conducted with Ed Holloway, an architect involved in the design of Grow Tottenham, and situates the venue in relation to wider temporary urban practices in London.

Grassroots meanwhile use: Grow Tottenham and The Cause

Grow Tottenham was set up in 2017 by Grow London C.I.C., a social enterprise that 'works with local communities and landowners to make spaces for gardening, working, learning, and social life.'[18] At its core was a volunteer-run community garden, featuring 'micro allotments' for local residents, as well as an outdoor classroom that hosted workshops for local schools. Alongside this, its indoor component comprised music and artist studios, a café, record shop, and a 300-capacity nightclub. Despite the breadth of this social and spatial vision, Grow Tottenham came to be recognised as a key part of London's nightlife infrastructure between 2017 and 2022. Alongside its neighbouring nightclub, The Cause, as well as nearby venues Styx and Five Miles, Grow Tottenham contributed toward the emergence of Tottenham Hale as a temporary epicentre for London's nightlife scenes during this period (Blake 2018; Ekanayake 2018; Funster 2018).

Grow was located on Ashley Road in an ex-industrial estate close to Tottenham Hale train station. Entry was through a large metal gate, designed for heavy goods vehicles to drive into what was originally a mechanics depot. From here, you walked across the asphalt floor of the old carpark, winding between wooden planters, a meadow, and a geodesic dome. During the week, you would find schoolchildren and volunteers tending to the beds, sharing the space with slugs and bees. At weekends, this garden was a resting place and playground for night and daytime revellers. Along one side of the garden was a greenhouse, constructed from glass and frames of Unistrut – Meccano-like metal fixings which were salvaged and repurposed from their previous use storing motor components. This space bridged Grow's identity as both garden and nightclub, functioning as a greenhouse, café, and chill out zone. At certain times, it was tranquil,

[18] http://www.growlondon.org.uk

hosting community meetings or ceramics workshops. At others, it would be thick with cigarette smoke and filled with sweaty, reclining bodies.

Fig 2.1 Grow Tottenham. Courtesy of Beep Studio.

Passing this threshold, the plants and flowers gave way to a starker interior, where original concrete and metal fixtures were reimagined with a series of DIY wooden structures. The club space was tucked below an existing mezzanine and separated from the bar area by two heavy doors. This dark box had no windows and was cut off from the rhythms of the outside world. Custom built speaker stacks stood in each corner and the DJ booth was on ground level, occupying a small opening in one wall. The space was raw and simple. There was little in the way of lighting, with much of the sensory atmosphere generated through smoke and fog. As an architect involved in the project described to me, 'it was a very quick and dirty bit of work – just to design a space that could operate with loud music without pissing everyone off.'[19]

Grow was a fully licensed nightclub, but it operated largely as an infrastructure for the more DIY fringes of London's party scene. Its makeshift architecture and community focus afforded an atmosphere of freedom rarely found in the heavily regulated space of many London nightclubs. In contrast with nightlife economies oriented around headline DJs, much of Grow's programming centred local collectives including HTBX, Childsplay, and Co-Select. On occasion, Grow would join forces with The Cause next door, hosting 5 or 6 room events, such as those by queer party, Adonis.

Where Grow's founder, Paul McGann, was always curious about expanding and redefining the parameters of what constitutes a club space, this was never the primary driving force behind the Grow

[19] Ed Holloway interview. January 2022.

project. As Arman Nouri (2019) points out, Grow was founded as an explicit response to 'rising land scarcity, declining availability of outdoor space, as a well as a perceived sense of alienation between inner-city communities and the natural and social environments they inhabit.' Where such intentions are difficult to mediate via the amorphous structures of club culture, they are key to any understanding of Grow Tottenham and its relation to broader debates around nightlife, grassroots culture, and temporary urbanism.

Grow London first emerged as part of campaigns to save the Heygate Estate in the Elephant and Castle area of South London. Along with its sister estate, the Aylesbury, the managed decline of the Heygate came to be viewed by commentators and activists as a 'microcosm through which we can trace the diminishing value UK governments have attached to the state provision of housing' (Campkin 2013: 78). Alongside drastic spending cuts and mismanagement, the Heygate and Aylesbury estates were reimagined as part of what Ben Campkin terms 'sink estate spectacle' – an ideological strategy to associate large-scale housing projects with crime and urban decay, thus justifying their sale and redevelopment over any possibilities of improvement (Ibid. 100-104). Once campaigners realised the battle to save the estate had been lost, they shifted their efforts toward securing a better deal for the area's remaining residents and improving the design of the proposed redevelopment. Part of this involved obtaining a site for a community garden – what would become Grow Elephant. The garden opened in the summer of 2016, including the adjoining Tropics Café built out of shipping containers, which hosted talks, film screenings, and music events. Tropics Café aimed to provide additional layers of social infrastructure, as well as generating revenue to fund the day-to-day workings of the garden. Despite a social impact survey which found Grow Elephant to be a 'unique community asset' attracting a 'wide cross-section of people together from the local community' (Social Life 2017: 1), the new owners and developers of the site, Lendlease, served Grow Elephant an eviction notice within just a year of their opening.

By this stage, Grow Elephant had put down roots as a community garden and become increasingly entangled with South London's DIY party scene. Much of this was the result of overlapping social networks with the ecologies that had formed around World Unknown, but crucially, Tropics Café allowed organisers of free entry events to use their space without paying a hire fee. This provided cheap cultural infrastructure for young promoters unable to afford venue hire in London and encouraged a more diverse range of programming than would be financially feasible in many commercial spaces (Ibid. 10). To be sure, many of these events appealed to demographics beyond the working-class vicinity of the area's immediate locale – highlighting the tensions inherent to many (sub)cultural reclamations of urban space. With Grow however, there was a more considered strategy, in that all profits generated from events were fed back into the running of the garden, which was explicitly targeted at local communities. Moreover, the tandem operation of the café and garden meant that they functioned as a kind of semi-public, non-commercial space, without the pressures of buying food or drink (Ibid. 11).

After their eviction from Elephant and Castle, Grow was invited to a new site in Tottenham Hale by Mill Co., a non-profit organisation who collaborate with 'partners such as borough councils, housing

associations and landlords to repurpose disused buildings and place make.'[20] Grow Elephant was reopened as Grow Tottenham in 2017, taking over an ex-mechanics depot on Ashley Road on a 'meanwhile use' basis. As Bosetti and Colthorpe (2018: 8) define it, 'Meanwhile use is a loose designation for activities that occupy empty space, while waiting for another activity on site.' In the case of the Ashley Road site, this comprised the disused warehouse space of Ashley House and a large outdoor carpark, which were awaiting development by Notting Hill Genesis. This site was part of a much larger redevelopment project in the Tottenham area, in which Haringey Council deployed 'regeneration, in the form of private residential developments', as a response to the 2011 riots (Ince et al. 2021: 8).

Intermediaries and bureaucracy in meanwhile use

Where squat party organisers or those using TENs might have occupied the building illegally or come to an informal agreement with the property owners, Mill Co. acted as an intermediary between Grow Tottenham and Notting Hill Genesis, providing the kinds of 'guarantees and assurances' that a grassroots arts or community organisation may be unable to provide themselves.[21] Beyond this however, an architect involved in the design of Grow questioned the role of such intermediaries. Once a meanwhile use site has been assigned, intermediaries often do little more than add 'another layer of cost and bureaucracy.'[22]

Although Mill Co. operate on a not-for-profit basis, the mediation and management of meanwhile use spaces has emerged as a lucrative industry in London (Ferreri 2021). The tensions inherent to this industry are exemplified by the practice of property guardianship, in which vacant buildings are reimagined as temporary residential dwellings, with tenants recast as live-in security to prevent theft, vandalism, and squatting (Ferreri et al. 2017). As recent journalistic investigations have pointed out, many property guardians are subject to precarious and poor living conditions. While this was originally viewed as a trade-off for cheap rent, property guardianship has seen significant price rises in recent years, in which rent hikes – of more than 100% in certain cases – have brought prices in line with standard market rates (Brown 2022; Shadijanova 2022).

In discourses around temporary urbanism, impermanence is generally associated with flexibility. Temporary use allows for experimentation, circumventing much of the bureaucracy involved in typical planning procedures. Freed from such processes, temporary urbanism is associated with immediacy and speed (Mankus 2015). Grow Tottenham opened at the new Ashley Road site within just 6 months of their eviction from Elephant and Castle. Shortly into their meanwhile occupation however, Grow was contacted by Haringey Council asking whether they had planning permission for the greenhouse they were building between the garden and indoor space. Next door, The Cause – another club space operating in Ashley

[20] https://millco.co.uk/about/
[21] Ed Holloway interview. January 2022.
[22] Ibid.

House on a meanwhile use basis via Mill Co. – were also subject to intense and unexpected building regulation demands from the council. Despite the proliferation of meanwhile use in London, with most occupations taking place in property owned by local councils, these examples draw attention to the discrepancies between meanwhile use and existent planning rules. As Bosetti and Calthorpe (2018: 44) argue, the rigidity of planning structures is often ill-suited to the rapid pace of temporary urban projects, in which a delay of just a few months or even weeks can have drastic impacts on the 'window of opportunity' for a meanwhile use project. Moreover, resource constraints and the prioritisation of housing delivery mean that local planning departments are rarely able to fast-track meanwhile use permissions.

Ultimately, both Grow and The Cause were able to work through these interventions, and operate relatively unimpeded for the duration of their meanwhile tenancies. Part of this was the result of close collaborations with Beep Studio, an architecture practice involved in the design and planning process. During a visit to their studio, they showed me the extent of planning documentation required for an upcoming meanwhile use venue they were working on:

> This is the letter we got from the council asking for everything they need. They've written underneath each of the core policies of the London Plan, the council's development plan, national policies, principal development, how housing classes can be mixed up, the rationale for it. And then a list of all the submittals, plans, proposed plans, existing plans, a design and access statement, which is an 80-to-100-page document, a transportation statement, which costs about £5k, a flood risk assessment – that requires a hydrological engineer working out exactly what the flood level could be in a 100-year flood, with a quotient for global warming added into it. And then you have to design flood mitigation strategies for something that's a meanwhile occupancy … Energy statement, are you carbon neutral, will you have any renewable sources on the site to generate power, these are all policy decisions. Air quality statement … And the event management plan, which is another 100-page document about how you're going to deal with all the licensing criteria and the broader context of how you're going to operate in relation to other businesses around.[23]

This extensive list demonstrates that while meanwhile use may typically be associated with flexibility and reduced costs, the level of bureaucracy involved still requires a degree of expertise and resources unavailable to many small-scale projects. Such administrative requirements perhaps point toward the necessity of intermediaries in the organisation of meanwhile use occupations. In Grow Tottenham's case however, Mill Co. presented the Ashley Road site as a blank slate. This gave Grow and The Cause a high degree of flexibility in the design and operation of their spaces, but it also meant that they were left to manage the planning and regulation bureaucracy themselves, within a relatively short space of time.

Elsewhere in London, it is common for many temporary urban developments to group several small businesses together as part of a single, larger infrastructure. This can be seen in the growing trend for

[23] Ed Holloway interview. January 2022.

pop up and street food markets, first established in 2011 by Boxpark in Shoreditch. Despite the appearance of vibrant and diverse abundance projected by such multi-purpose, pop-up spaces, their aesthetics masquerade highly centralised, corporatised structures. Four of London's major street food markets: Dinerama, Model Market, Giant Robot, and Hawker House are all run by a single company, Street Feast;[24] while the 'third space concepts' of Flat Iron Square and Goods Way are owned and managed by the 'multi-national entertainment & hospitality operator', Venue Group.[25] Where such spaces present themselves as incubator platforms for up-and-coming traders and food start-ups, their appeal is generally based on the assumption that they will act as a temporary stepping stone for businesses to relocate to more permanent brick and mortar premises further down the line.[26] Bar a few well publicised success stories (e.g. Roolant 2017), such opportunities are inherently few and far between in London's intensive competition for space, reproducing an ongoing state of precarity via what may often be a false discourse of aspiration.

The pop-up and meanwhile use economy thus raises questions not only about issues of temporality and duration, but also about the power dynamics between occupants, intermediaries, and landowners. In certain cases, management companies can use successful meanwhile use occupations to speculate on larger-scale opportunities in the future. Of course, the success of such projects is largely down to the work of the tenants themselves, and even if this leads to the acquisition of new temporary spaces, there is rarely any guarantee that such spaces will be available or suitable for previous meanwhile use tenants to occupy.

Transitions, relocations, and continuity

Initially, Grow Tottenham expected their meanwhile tenancy to last for just a year. After several false alarms and delays to the local redevelopment project during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were able to remain at the Ashley Road site until the summer of 2022. As of early 2023, Grow London C.I.C. operate a single space, OK Grow, a 'communal food growing project' not far from the original Grow Elephant site in South London[27] – but they are no longer involved in any multi-use or nightlife spaces. After the initial move from Elephant and Castle to Tottenham, Grow was relatively successful in sustaining the community they had built around the project. Prior to their relocation however, users had voiced concerns about what would happen should Grow be forced to relocate far away from the initial site – an even greater issue for those with limited mobility (Social Life 2017: 18). By necessity, nightlife communities are well-adapted to navigating the shifting spatial cycles of urban club culture, following the more sporadic rhythms of events-centred 'weekend societies' (St John 2017). For a community garden however, the roots quite literally run

[24] https://www.streetfeast.com
[25] https://www.venuegroup.com/about
[26] Street food platform Kerb Food offer a three-stage business development programme in which traders progress from 'Inkerbators' to become fully fledged 'Kerbanists', before eventually graduating as 'Alumni'. See https://www.kerbfood.com/traders/
[27] http://www.growlondon.org.uk

deep, and the precarity of meanwhile use is less compatible with necessary routines of care, not to mention seasonal growing cycles.

Without the complex infrastructure of a garden, Grow Tottenham's neighbours and Ashley House cotenants – The Cause – were able to relocate to a new temporary site on Dock Road in Silvertown in 2022. Like Grow, The Cause was set up with a social emphasis, raising funds for partner charities including Mind and Help Musicians UK. Aside from this however, their core identity is more firmly embedded within the spatial and economic ecologies of London nightlife. Part of their success in relocating relates not only to the establishment of a dedicated musical community, but also to their adaptability and entrepreneurialism – values which fit much more comfortably with prevailing conceptions of temporary urbanism. Like many other London venues, The Cause were forced to reimagine and diversify their typical operations during the lockdown restrictions of COVID-19 (VibeLab 2020). Food and beverage economies were expanded, featuring a series of rotating pop-up vendors. They also introduced a range of different activities and entertainments, rebranding the nightclub as a multi-purpose destination. Given the limits on indoor socialising in 2020 and 2021, they opened Costa Del Tottenham in the courtyard of Ashley House, described as 'a sun-soaked, socially distanced, food, drink & entertainment complex.'[28] Where this temporarily repositioned the nightclub within some of the 'gimmicks of a universalised experience economy' (Assiter 2022: 2), it simultaneously allowed The Cause to tap into a range of different demographics and economies, and left them with a drastically expanded spatial infrastructure, which they continued to use once pandemic restrictions had been lifted. At the end of their meanwhile tenancy, The Cause launched Off Radar, a series of 'Satellite raves in undisclosed locations around the city and possibly beyond, only revealed to ticket buyers on the week of the event'.[29] With Off Radar, The Cause untethered themselves from a fixed location in space entirely, evoking the transience of early rave culture. In the summer of 2022, they also hosted a small festival, Seaside Beano, at a Pontins resort on the Sussex coast.

Across these examples, The Cause used temporary events as a way of sustaining musical communities, income, and their brand more broadly, in the gap between more stable spaces – which were themselves always already temporary. In this way, their strategies pointed toward the reproduction of a spatial and cultural imaginary divorced from any necessary location in physical space. More broadly, The Cause integrated the inherent temporariness of their existence as a core part of their marketing and overall identity. This included an extensive series of closing parties, 'The Beginning of the End' – organised over 2 months with a degree of planned choreography that would be largely impossible for the less predictable trajectories of most venue closures. As of February 2023, their marketing featured the tagline 'possibly maybe: is this the start of something?'[30] In this discourse, the precarity of their meanwhile existence is repositioned as a source of mystery and wonder, its latent potential commodified. As Silvio Lorusso argues, 'both entrepreneurialism and precarity are, however, ways of dealing with change: the first tackles it with enthusiasm, the second with fear or dissatisfaction' (2019: 68). This cognitive repositioning has the potential

[28] https://www.costadeltottenham.co.uk/
[29] https://supportthecause.co.uk/off-radar
[30] https://supportthecause.co.uk/possiblymaybe

to normalise or even glamorise a state of insecurity (Ferreri 2021: 21), but equally, it is a defensible, and in many cases necessary, mode of survival within the competitive economic and spatial terrain of the city. Like Hakim Bey's T.A.Z., such practices are more a tactic than a strategy, leaving underlying structures unchallenged.

For Grow Tottenham, their overlapping status as both garden and nightclub made such practices of identity construction and reinvention more complex. Branding takes time and resources, which are arguably less compatible with an explicit community focus. Where The Cause has thus far been successful in sustaining an identity across multiple locations, the success of this business model does not necessarily equate to the reproduction of sustained musical communities. Historically, the relative consistency of physical venues and spaces has always been core to the formation of electronic dance music scenes (Haslam 2015; Rossi and Eisenbrand 2018). At the same time, club culture's origins within rave and free party culture mean that nightlife communities have always shared a close relation with transience. Even within the comparatively more lasting infrastructures of urban club culture, cycles of taste and spatialised decline and renewal can contribute toward perceptions of vibrancy. In this way, where fixed locations in space may in certain contexts be perceived as barriers to cultural innovation and reinvention, it is also important to note how stable spatial anchors may offer a 'radical antidote to an economy of ongoing obsolescence and short-term fads' (Straw 2001: 254). Post-subcultural formations of social groupings such as the scene, lifestyle, and neo-tribe tend to valorise fluidity (Bennett 1999), but their focus on hyper-individualisation leaves less room for the articulation of competing social identities (Carrington and Wilson 2004). Where informal, temporary venues can function as safe spaces for marginalised groups, they need to be complemented via more permanent infrastructures, which provide the time and space for the more complex, longer-term processes of building communities around music, culture, and physical space.

Debates around meanwhile use can be grouped into two broad discourses. One views it as a last resort response to rising property prices, aligned with neo-liberal tendencies to individualise risk (Mankus 2015). The other argues that meanwhile use provides 'a way to offer opportunity to those unable to afford the city otherwise, to try out new activities, and to make things happen in parts of the city needing greater economic vitality' (Bosetti and Colthorpe 2018: 8–9). In the case of grassroots cultural spaces such as Grow and The Cause, they have had clear social and cultural impact on nightlife communities, even within the constraints of a limited timeframe. Moreover, their meanwhile tenancies afforded a kind of flexible architecture that could adapt to the changing needs of users, as well as changing contexts. As Arman Nouri (2019) has argued, this allowed Grow Tottenham to function as a 'loose space' or 'micro-utopia', in which 'small-scale experimentation' could 'ignite new modes of thinking and being.' For a micro-utopia, even if its physical existence is temporary, longer-term trajectories are produced at the scale of ideas, blurring boundaries between the thinkable and unthinkable, expanding horizons of possibility (Wood 2007).

Temporary urbanism in the long-term

Where meanwhile use affords a flexibility that is well-suited to many social and artistic spaces, it is important that discourses of temporary urbanism do not consign such spaces to inhabit a permanent 'space of temporariness' (Ferreri 2015: 187). At its core, this relates to a much broader and more complex issue, in which the financialisation of London's property market values the built environment as a commodity rather than a public good (Moreno 2014; Minton 2017). Given the scale at which such contexts are ideologically and materially entrenched, it is also necessary to work toward solutions in the shorter term, as demonstrated by recent shifts to produce frameworks for more sustainable practices in meanwhile use. In a report commissioned for the GLA in 2020, the two key recommendations were 'to maximise social value and benefits to local communities', as well as 'to ensure these benefits … also construct a long term legacy' (Arup 2020: 6). As part of long-term strategies for social projects, they advocate that meanwhile users should be rotated to a different local plot at the end of their tenancy, or ideally, that the meanwhile use should be embedded within the development that takes its place (Ibid. 99). At The Cause's current site in the Silver Building, there are provisions to guarantee that no meanwhile tenants will be displaced by the site's eventual development. The proprietors are 'wholly committed to re-provision with no net loss of employment space.'[31] Such developments have the potential to create a new middle ground for meanwhile use, combining elements of both flexibility and stability.

At the same time, Arup's meanwhile use report remains guided by a core principle of so-called 'Good Growth' – a key part of the GLA's (2022) city design strategy. This positions social and environmental sustainability as subsidiary to underlying priorities of economic growth. Proposed shifts from 'meanwhile use to transitional urbanism' demonstrate a renewed concern for the relationship between meanwhile use and longer-term aims. However, the exact nature of these aims remains contested, seeking to address the needs of local communities whilst also aligning with vague mandates including 'broader city goals and the Mayor's priorities' (Arup 2020: 88). The increasing institutionalisation of meanwhile use has the potential to make it more equitable, while simultaneously drawing it closer to the kinds of 'rigid master planning' it is supposedly intended to oppose (Madanipour 2017: 3) In this context – as the following case study will demonstrate – many examples of meanwhile remain driven by 'dominant logics of urban development' (Ferreri 2021: 11), in which cultural spaces are valued primarily for their place-making capabilities and contributions to creative economies.

In the final section of the chapter, I draw on a case study of the superclub Printworks and its management company, Broadwick Live. This will explore how the symbolic capital of nightlife and meanwhile use spaces are deployed as a core component of large-scale urban regeneration projects. Such

[31] http://thesilverbuilding.com

tendencies draw attention to the emergence of an increasingly corporatised industry, operating at the intersections of venue management, nightlife promotion, and the market-led transformation of urban space.

Fig 2.2 Printworks, from 'A Vision for a 24-hour City'. Courtesy of Carolina Faruolo

Printworks: placemaking and the corporatisation of temporary urbanism with nightlife

Page seven of the Mayor of London's (2017) 'A Vision for a 24-hour city' features a full-page photograph of the super club and events space, Printworks (see Fig. 2.2.). The picture is taken from behind the DJ, who appears God-like in front of a crowd of thousands. The throng stretches deep into the hazy distance of a long narrow room that once housed the printing presses of the Daily Mail, Metro, and Evening Standard. Constructed in 1989 as Western Europe's largest print facility, the room was later reimagined as the 'Press Halls', the venue's main events room featuring 16-metre-high ceilings above more than 3000 square meters of 'original industrial space'.[32] Cutting across the photograph are a series of choreographed blue light beams, accentuating the scale and architecture of the space, as well as its impressive audio-visual capabilities. With a capacity of up to 6,000 people across a 12-acre site, Printworks opened to great fanfare in February 2017. Given the club and venue closures that had dominated headlines in recent years, Printworks was viewed by many in the nightlife community as a cause for celebration (Eede 2016; Ravens 2016; Coultate 2016c). In political circles, Printworks was positioned as an early success story for Sadiq Khan's 24-hour city, legitimising the appointment of Amy Lamé as the city's first Night Czar just 3 months prior. Within less than a year of opening, Printworks was victorious in two separate categories at the London Venue Awards.[33]

Amid this discourse of optimism and excitement however, two key points were largely overlooked. Firstly, Printworks was lauded as a victory for nocturnal culture – though it had little to do with the night-time. Events at the venue generally took place between the hours of midday and 11pm, and despite having a 2am license, the owners viewed the tense regulatory climate as reason 'to ease into doing big, late events' (Keens 2016). Aside from a few exceptions, such as the AVA Festival club nights in February 2022 and 2023, these late events rarely transpired, and Printworks predominantly remained a daytime events space throughout its tenure. Secondly, was the fact that Printworks was opened on a meanwhile use basis. This apparent shift in the fortunes of London's urban nightlife was only ever provisional, with a tenancy that would last a maximum of seven years. The temporary nature of Printworks' occupation was uncovered by urbanist researcher Alessio Kolioulis (2018), but it remained largely unknown among electronic dance music publics until 2021/2022, when the meanwhile tenancy was approaching its end.

The Printworks building forms just one component of a 53-acre regeneration site managed by British Land – one of the leading property development companies in the UK. The 'Canada Water Masterplan' sets out to build 3,000 homes alongside two million square feet of workspace and one million square feet of 'retail, leisure, entertainment and community space', that combine to produce one of London's largest mixed use development projects. Where British Land claim to have a 'vision for inclusive regeneration', their marketing openly targets demographics working in Canary Wharf, the City and 'the tech hubs around Shoreditch.'[34]

[32] https://printworkslondon.co.uk/
[33] https://londonvenueawards.co.uk/2017-winners/
[34] https://www.britishland.com/our-places/canada-water-masterplan

As Kolioulis (2018: 213) argues, Printworks was intended to play a key strategic role in this development, attracting 'new buyers to the area by creating social value through clubbing.' As a meanwhile use venue, Printworks generated income during the interim phase of the development, but it also functioned as a placemaking device, attaching new forms of symbolic and cultural capital to the area. Since the development of 'night-time economy' discourses in the 1990s, nightlife has long been recognised as a driver of urban growth. The 'nightlife fix' developed as a way for cities to manage the fallout of post-industrial decline (Hae 2012), creating infrastructure for the emergent cultural and creative economies (Florida 2004). In the case of Printworks and related projects however, the relation between nightlife and urban regeneration appears to have become more closely intertwined, in that 'the contribution of a nightlife industry company to the redevelopment project is explicitly mentioned' (Kabuiki 2022). In their annual report from 2017, British Land stated, 'we have created an exciting new events space at the Printworks to raise the public profile of the area and to generate income' (British Land 2017). This direct investment in a nightclub by a property development points toward what Kolioulis terms the 'financialisation of clubbing' – a phrase which indicates 'not only an economic process, but also a transformation of clubbing into a tradable urban product' (2018: 214). Where British Land were open about this instrumentalisation of club culture, it was left out from the marketing discourses around the venue itself, along with the temporary nature of its tenancy. As Samuel Lamontagne argues regarding related nightlife projects in Paris, 'some collaborate openly with public authorities, [while] others organise themselves in a more or less clandestine manner … thus claiming a form of authenticity' (2021: 135). This simulation of authenticity is vital – not only for a venue to be perceived as legitimate among nightlife communities, but also for the broader success of a placemaking project, in which authenticity functions as a marketable urban commodity (Zukin 2010).

Broadwick Live – the events company behind Printworks – soon became involved in several similar meanwhile use ventures, perhaps most notably the Drumsheds, which opened in 2019. This comprised four interlinked warehouses in a former gasworks, which forms part of Enfield Council's £6bn Meridian Water regeneration project. In this case, Broadwick Live were open about the intentions behind the project from the start. In an early conversation with the press, their managing director, Bradley Thompson stated, 'we see an opportunity to create something special in the interim of the regeneration phase … We want to launch venues for London that are forward-thinking in terms of music programming that also work from a corporate, community and financial perspective.' In the same article, Alan Sitkin, an ex-governance board member for Meridian Water and former Enfield borough cabinet member shared similar sentiments: 'On one level we all share the ambition of a night-time economy in the borough – it doesn't bother me at all to have cultural events at Meridian Water … I want hipsters to come to Meridian Water, they bring money and that's a good thing' (Henderson 2019).

Across the examples of Printworks and the Drumsheds, the placemaking strategy of the nightlife fix is openly recognised by the range of public and private stakeholders involved. Broadwick Live's own decision to be more publicly transparent about this coincided with broader transformations to the company. In 2019, they sold off much of their festival portfolio to focus more on venues and spaces. This included

the founding of a new division 'Broadwick Live Development', set up with the intention to create 'massive impact' through 'design, architecture, and experiences', which have the power to 'transform neighbourhoods and cities as well as individual lives.' They designate these spaces 'Centres of Cultural Gravity'. This division represents their formalised entry into the public-private industry of culture-led placemaking and regeneration: 'Landowners, civic partners and third-party developers are partnering with BWL Development to create place and narrative-driven developments that make big statements of change and impact, through the Pillars of Music, Culture and Space.'[35] In more typical interactions between nightlife and urban planning, it is rare that event organisers play an intentional role in these processes, which involve adjustments and compromises in light of the 'precarity of their occupation agreements and the impossibility of their perpetuation' (Lamontagne 2021: 139). In contrast, Broadwick Live Development represents not only an explicit and intentional urban intervention, but also a more wholesale blurring of the boundaries between culture and urban capitalism, such that cultural value becomes inseparable from its utility as resource (Yudice 2003). Definitions of culture are expanded, filtered through a language of fluidity and hybridity:

> No more labels. Venues of the future will no longer adopt traditional titles, like theatre, nightclub or conference centre. The next generation of spaces will be fluid centres, hosting multi-arts, music, culture, brand experiences, film, F&B and workspace.[36]

In this state, the simulation of authenticity is no longer deemed unnecessary. The merging of art, work, and brand experiences is not just seen as expedient, but as an inevitability, with their prior separation rejected as nostalgia. These are spaces designed for the continuous, homogenised temporalities of 24/7 capitalism (Crary 2013).

Prior to the formation of Broadwick Live's development division, Printworks functioned as a test bed for this kind of hybrid space. Where large scale dance music events formed the most highly publicised aspect of Printworks cultural programming, these took place on a sporadic basis, organised into intensive seasons that alternated with breaks of up to 4 months at a time. This organisation positioned events closer to the fleeting spectacles of festivals than the more consistent programming of a nightclub. During the interim periods, Printworks functioned as a 'blank canvas for conferences, exhibitions, experiential events, concerts, product launches and filming.'[37] These ranged from high concept events such as a 'drive through immersive theatre experience' used to launch a new Toyota model, as well as disco-inspired corporate Christmas parties. In this way, Printworks' identity as a nightlife space was transient and unstable, despite its positioning in marketing and public discourse. Electronic dance music events were just one temporary use of a space inherently defined by temporariness.

[35] https://broadwicklive.com/divisions/development/
[36] Ibid.
[37] https://printworkslondon.co.uk/hire/

In one respect, this multi-use infrastructure functioned as way to create a more sustainable financial model for nightlife spaces. Most nightclubs lay empty during the week and in daytime hours more generally, relying on income generated at weekends to sustain running costs. At Printworks, the venue's survival during the extended periods of pandemic-related closure was largely possible due their reinvention as a filming location and studio (Embley 2022). Such logics function as a response to contexts of economic and spatial precarity, but they simultaneously flatten the unique qualities of electronic dance music culture into a generic economy of experience. Given the importance of alternate revenue streams to Printworks' financial model, it is interesting to note how the venues multiple spatial identities were reproduced and sustained in different contexts. In most journalistic discourse – not just the specialist music press – Printworks is depicted as one of London' largest and most iconic venues for electronic dance music. The public imaginary of the venue is thus associated with the (sub)cultural capital of clubbing, which fuels its power as an urban placemaking tool. At the same time, any mention of Printworks in British Land corporate material neglects to disclose its nightlife aspect. In their 2018 Annual Report for example, we are told that Printworks 'has welcomed more than 250,000 visitors since launch, and has hosted bands including So Solid Crew and Django Django as well as the Beavertown Brewery Extravaganza, bringing over 70 of the world's best breweries together' (British Land 2018). Club culture is hidden discreetly behind live music and craft beer, which are presumably far more palatable to shareholders. Such contradictions are typical in the governance structures around nightlife, in which 'clubbing is at the same time celebrated and condemned' (Kolioulis 2018: 208).

Printworks represents many of the tensions inherent to the corporatised, institutionalised production of the urban 'nightlife fix'. Nightlife spaces are deregulated to the extent that they enter the placemaking toolbox of local authorities and property developers, but they are simultaneously subject to intensive regulation and surveillance, such that the 'wilder version of nightlife often only remains as an image, as a simulacrum of the neighbourhood's subcultural history' (Hae 2012: 32). In this process, the (sub)cultural imaginary of nightlife is sustained for its value in the urban economy, but less attention is paid to the actual needs and cultural experience of nightlife communities.

At Printworks, this disconnect was borne out in the intensive regulation of the space. As Kolioulis (2018: 214) highlights, the club featured an extensive infrastructure of private security patrols and CCTV, as well as separate VIP areas. Given Printworks' unique relation to British Land and the surrounding area however, this regulation of bodies extended well beyond the confines of the club space. Journeys to and from raves have formed a core component of dance music's historical imaginary (Peter 2020) and play a key role in mediating the experience of attending events. In the following section, I narrate my own journey to Printworks, examining how the regulation of flow and mobility intersects with the nightlife experience, as well as the wider regeneration of the Canada Water area.

Daytime journeys

I first attended Printworks in April 2018. At the time, day parties were still a relative novelty in London, and our journey felt distinctly out of sync with the families and friends heading into town for a sunny day out. As our train approached Canada Water station, there was a palpable sense of alliance among attendees. Smiles and knowing nods were exchanged across the carriage. We were united by our destination, but also the shared secrecy of our inverted urban rhythm, exploring nightlife in the bright light of day. Once we arrived at the station and emerged at the top of the escalator, any vague sense of diurnal transgression or clandestine temporal community swiftly evaporated. In the quasi-public space of the train station, we were greeted by a small army of fluorescent-vested stewards, chaperoning us with an assertive but well-rehearsed cordiality in the direction of the club. Our collective secret was out, and it was clear that we now had little option but to follow the heavily prescribed flows of a well-oiled and highly-corporatised choreography.

The walk from Canada Water station to Printworks is approximately half a kilometre, encircling the murky liquids of the only freshwater lake in the Docklands area. Stewards lined the route at intervals of ten or twenty metres, ensuring that the movement of people was contained within a consistent tempo and direction. In contrast to the heavy police presence common at large outdoor events such as Notting Hill Carnival, this was crowd control with a friendly face. It seemed to be effective, and I noticed no significant moments of conflict between security and those on their way to the event. Yet this operation also appeared less to be about the regulation of behaviours, and more about the containment of flows. I was surprised that groups were generally permitted to stop and gather along the route, as long as nobody deviated from the predetermined trajectory. This made sense, given that we were carefully guided around the lake in an anti-clockwise direction, passing little but the frictionless borders of a car park and shopping mall. We were shepherded through the 'non-space' of anonymised and contractual transit (Augé 1995). Leaving the edge of the lake, we were ushered across Surrey Quays Road by two more stewards, who operated a portable pelican crossing that was temporarily erected for the event. After waiting cautiously to cross a road that appeared largely free from traffic, we passed through a large squadron of security personnel and entered the Printworks site. It was still some distance to the actual venue itself, but our passage through the spacious surroundings of the post-industrial site was prescribed by an infrastructure of railings and signs. These texts served to define the traffic conditions of another transitory non-space, assigning us with the temporary identities of 'Ticketholder', 'Guest List' or 'VIP' (Ibid. 96-101).

Compared to most other London venues, Printworks had little concern with noise complaints. The space was soundproofed and designed with a non-residential buffer zone during its industrial past. The main possibility of disruption to the surrounding area thus related to the passage of event attendees to and from the venue. As was obvious from my visit, this was managed by ensuring that all attendees arriving from Canada Water Station or on foot follow a route on which little exists to be disturbed or disrupted. In the hire brochure for the venue, this 'visitor walking route'[38] is detailed on a map of the surrounding area

[38] https://printworkslondon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PRW_006_Brochure_21.pdf

and local transport links. Geographically speaking, Canada Water station is connected most directly to the venue by Surrey Quays Road. This road is densely populated with residential properties and comprises numerous key elements of the 'Canada Water Area Action Plan' (2015) – a broader regeneration site of which the British Land project is just one component. These included the Piers Gough designed Canada Water library and adjacent plaza at Deal Porter Square; as well as two new luxury property developments – Maple Quays and Decathlon. It is unsurprising that the meandering throng of several thousand ravers would be directed away from this area, which serves as a significant source of income and prestige for Southwark Council.

At the time of my first visit, I was unaware that the designated 'visitor walking route' traversed British Land's masterplan. What I thought was a heavily prescribed choreography of bodies through public space, in fact involved ensuring that people remained inside the privately managed borders of land that included the Printworks site. Where the 'visitor walking route' represents the spatiotemporal regulation of visitors' journeys to and from the venue, it simultaneously serves to mitigate the perception of regulation. We are led through a relatively barren urban landscape, approaching Printworks from the southwest, such that the blocks of glass-fronted flats just a few hundred metres to the north remain completely hidden. We are made to feel like urban explorers, a feeling that is accentuated by the industrial aesthetic which has been retained in the venue. Like those who scoured the outer reaches of the M25 for outdoor raves in the late 80s and early 90s, there is some sense of a quest with an unknown outcome. Where those journeys took place late at night in the countryside, driving from phone booth to phone booth to get location updates from a party line, this is entirely scripted. With QR code tickets at the ready on our smartphones, we are directed in full daylight through seemingly liminal urban space to Printworks*,* the cultural flagship of British Land's 'Canada Water Masterplan'.

Space, music, and culture

Printworks announced their final season of dance music events in November 2022, which would take place between February and May 2023. In the period leading up to this announcement, Broadwick Live began to be more transparent about the meanwhile use aspect of their venue, in which the inevitability of closure was inherent to their agreements with British Land. At the same time, the public announcement of their impending closure was met with surprise and disappointment by many in the dance music community. A petition was signed by over 11,000 people opposing the conversion of Printworks into offices. The petition argued that this displacement was taking place 'in the name of further corporatisation of the City' and would 'rip [out] the soul of the area'.[39] Printworks was positioned as part of an emotive discourse lamenting the loss of London's nightlife spaces to gentrification, when in fact, the venue and its management were directly involved in the urban masterplan that would drastically transform the Canada Water area. Despite this

[39] https://www.change.org/p/lb-southwark-save-printworks-nightclub-from-being-converted-into-offices

evident contradiction, Broadwick Live capitalised on this public mobilisation as part of their attempts to secure a new nightlife space within the Canada Water development. In a press statement, their Director of Strategy, Simeon Aldred, stated:

> In this decisive moment for the future of one of London's most loved venues, we are humbled and grateful for the support of our community and partners … We will need your continued support as we enter the planning process with Southwark Council in the coming months …The cultural resonance and debate around the future of Printworks only comes to demonstrate the importance of preserving authenticity and culture at the heart of our neighbourhoods and urban redevelopments (Murray 2022).

In this statement, Printworks and Broadwick Live are presented as saviours of urban and cultural authenticity. Such evocations sit awkwardly with their involvement in culture-led urban placemaking, but also with their corporatised relation to nightlife programming. During the seven years of their meanwhile tenancy, most events featured big-name, international DJs, with ticket prices ranging between £20 and £50. This approach continued to characterise most of the events in their 2023 closing season, aside from a few notable exceptions. In February, Printworks hosted the inaugural winter edition of Body Movements – the UK's first ever queer and trans music festival – featuring several key local LGBTQ+ music collectives including Adonis, Chapter 10, Inferno, Riposte, and Big Dyke Energy.[40] This provided a relatively rare moment of mainstream recognition for grassroots queer nightlife. In April 2023, Printworks also hosted events in collaboration with FWD>> and Plastic People, a club night and venue which have played key roles in the production of distinctly localised, multicultural music scenes in London.

With these curatorial decisions, Printworks associated themselves with several of London's grassroots nightlife communities – at just the moment when they required public support both for their possible reopening as part of the Canada Water development, but also for the planning application of The Beams – a new meanwhile use venue that Broadwick Live were opening in the Silvertown area of London. When The Beams ran into opposition from residents due to complaints about noise and anti-social behaviour,[41] it was announced that the venue would be rebranded as a 'Centre for New Culture', directing their focus toward contemporary art programming. Their first event, Thin Air, opened in March 2023, and sought to 'explore the boundaries between art and technology, working with light, atmospherics, sound, and experimental digital media.'[42] By pivoting away from electronic music programming, Broadwick Live were able to distance the venue from some of the anti-social connotations

[40] https://printworkslondon.co.uk/event/body-movements-winter-edition/
[41] https://pa.newham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=neighbourComments&keyVal=RLRGT5JYHVX00
[42] https://thebeamslondon.com

of nightlife, while simultaneously adding the lucrative cultural capital of contemporary art to their growing portfolio.

In this way, Broadwick Live demonstrated an ability to exploit the flexibility of temporary urbanism not just as a way of adapting to changing contexts, but as part of wider attempts to build influence across the broad categories of space, music, and culture. Temporary urbanism is often presented as an opportunity for bottom-up, community-led development, as well as an alternative to the rigid structures of urban master planning. Printworks, and many of the other projects managed by Broadwick Live, suggest quite the contrary. In these examples, meanwhile use plays a role in orchestrated deployments of nightlife and culture in placemaking strategies, producing a highly regulated, corporatised vision of club culture. This is familiar terrain for critics of temporary urbanism, although the explicit and intentional involvement of nightlife operators represents a newly intensified relation between cultural producers and market-led urban planning (Kolioulis 2018; Kabuiki 2022).

More crucially, Printworks and Broadwick Live demonstrate the ways in which cultural formations of temporary urbanism have emerged as an industry, with increasingly centralised power structures. In this way, critical approaches to temporary urbanism need to direct their focus beyond the transient qualities of individual spaces, and toward the longer-term questions posed by these consolidations of urban, economic, and cultural power. As Peter Arlt (2006: 39) has suggested, interim use is an inherent component of market economies – cycles of use only ever last as long as they remain profitable. In this way, where Broadwick Live have positioned their meanwhile use strategies as a 'testbed for culture in all its forms', this emergent hybrid industry, requires further examination, in its amalgamation of a wide range of overlapping economies including venue management; nightlife promotion; events; cultural programming; placemaking; and culture-led regeneration. Given the spatial pressures faced by many urban nightlife and cultural scenes, as well as the continued importance of events and festivals in the broader musical economy (Bennett and Taylor 2014; Anderton 2018; Anderton and Pisfil 2022), such industries will likely continue to grow, and thus represent an important site for explorations of power in interactions between the contemporary cultural industries and the public and private production of cities.

Conclusion

Back in 2018, during the early stages of my research, I was drawn to the example of Printworks because of its discordant identity as a daytime nightclub. As Alessio Kolioulis (2018) argues, this was a stark example of broader trends toward 'more day in the night'. Given the unique qualities of the urban night as a terrain for the production and consumption of culture (Palmer 2000; Shaw 2014, 2018), as well as the close historic relation between popular music and the night-time (Stahl and Botta 2019), I wanted to examine what this temporal dislocation might represent for electronic dance music culture, as well as the cultural life of cities more broadly. Where researchers of the night-time have long discussed its colonisation by the day, electronic dance music has tended to remain a nocturnal culture. Printworks' daytime identity, in combination with its meanwhile duration, appeared to undermine its municipal and cultural status as one of London's flagship dance music venues. In the process of unpacking Printworks' more complex relation to highly structured placemaking and regeneration practices, I realised that the temporary duration of this space in fact represented a much longer-lasting ideological transformation, in which nightlife venues are used to add and extract value from the idle spaces of cities. The 'urban hacking' (Friesinger et al. 2010) strategies of rare groove, rave, and free party culture had been repositioned as part of a much wider reaching spatial and economic logic, which accelerates the development of urban territories in which alternate social and cultural forms might otherwise emerge.

More broadly, this led me to consider electronic dance music culture within the parameters of both space *and* time (Lefebvre 2004). There are countless bodies of research which explore the relation of popular music to space and place, but fewer that consider issues of temporal location and duration. To be sure, space and time are interdependent, such that 'changes in the nature and experience of one impact upon changes in the nature and experience of the other' (May and Thrift 2001: 6). This chapter has explored dance music culture in relation to temporariness, which tells us as much about the spaces of dance music culture as it does their times. The shifting status of temporary events and spaces in dance music culture mediates changing cultural practices, as well as their entanglements with transformations to urban space. As longer lasting (sub)cultural and nightlife venues become an increasing luxury in the precarity of the contemporary city, their temporal identities emerge as key sites of power in the spatial production of urban culture. Paying attention to the spaces and times of culture draws attention to emergent structures of urban governance and corporate control, as well as new timespaces of possibility, in which cultures and communities may be constructed in counterpoint to prevailing rhythms of speculative urban growth.

Where companies like Broadwick Live are seeking to capitalise on the spatial and temporal cracks between trajectories of urban development, dance music culture can draw on its histories of radicalism, in combination with the formal infrastructures of temporary urbanism, to reclaim disused spaces as sites of culture, community, and social transformation. These ideas have been explored by John Leo Gillen, who founded rave architecture collective, Temporary Pleasure, in 2017. In their own words:

> Temporary Pleasure is an ephemeral club with no fixed location or time. A club that only exists in a certain place at a certain moment. For a few weeks or just a night, before it changes shape and location again.[43]

Temporary Pleasure host projects in different cities, which bring together groups of local people to design and build their own temporary club. Over the course of a week, the groups conduct research and sketch out ideas for a transient space 'with the optimal experience in mind'. At the end of the week, they host a 12-hour party, before taking the structure down, 'leaving the space in the past as a mere but communal memory' (Krabbe 2023). The project employs temporary architecture to foster community involvement in the design, construction, and operation of a club space, as well as a way of intensifying the momentary, affective qualities of the dance music experience. Projects such as this one seek to divorce temporary urbanism from conceptions of disused urban space as economically idle, instead imagining it as a site of community, collaboration, and grassroots culture.

During the pandemic, temporary urbanism was key to the survival of many urban cultures and economies. As Will Straw (2022) notes, many businesses were forced to hybridise and transform their typical use, such that cinemas became boutiques, and bars became restaurants. In London's nightlife scenes, clubs made use of outdoor space and expanded their hospitality offerings to include food as well as drink (Assiter 2022). In these spatial and temporal reorderings, DJs were repositioned to soundtrack seated environments, rupturing dance music from its associations with movement and conviviality. In the next chapter, I turn attention to London's audiophile bars, exploring their static cultures of listening in relation to hierarchies of attention, distinction, and sociability, which I argue, mediate their status in urban space.

[43] https://www.temporary-pleasure.com

Chapter 3. From Bagley's to Spiritland: audiophile bars and the gentrification of listening

Discussing temporal cycles and divisions of culture, Will Straw suggests that 'increased movement and exuberance replace stasis as night replaces day' (2014: 197). This model functions as a spectrum rather than a discrete set of categories, but daytime cultures tend to foreground individualised modes of contemplation, such as the gallery or museum, while the night-time encourages sociability and interaction. In this framework, the 'audiophile bar' (also known as the 'hi-fi', 'listening' or 'record bar') presents a new kind of space for UK music and DJ culture, incorporating the performance of pre-recorded music, but encouraging socialities based around static forms of listening rather dance.[44]

Despite their long history in Japan, audiophile bars have only begun to open across Europe and America over the last decade or so. In London the culture remains relatively small, but there is a burgeoning scene that combines several permanent spaces: Brilliant Corners*,* Spiritland, Behind the Wall, System, and Jumbi; transient event series such as Classic Album Sundays and Birdland Kissa*;* as well as a few related parties including Lucky Cloud Sound System, Beauty and the Beat, and All Our Friends. Outside of London, listening bars have become popular in New York and Los Angeles, with venues also opening in Miami, Berlin, Hong Kong, and Tel Aviv. Taken together, these spaces and events contribute to a wider cultural ecology that is reimagining audiophile sound outside of its more typical associations with domestic space (Keightley 1996; Perchard 2017).

In the press, audiophile bars have largely been imagined as a 'slow listening' response to the musical ubiquity and sensorial saturation of contemporary consumption practices (Spice 2016; Roberts 2018; Iqbal 2019). Streaming platforms have contributed toward modes of 'inattentive listening', in which individual tracks and playlists are functionalised as a 'background to our everyday routines, amplifier for experiences and enabler of moods' (Prey 2019). As Hesmondhalgh and Meier (2018: 1568) argue, 'the ubiquity of music … heard in a rather distracted way, seems to be connected to a loss of its cultural and emotional force.' In this cultural and technological context, audiophile bars are understood to (re)centre the activity of musical listening, prioritising intentional modes of attention.

I build on this framework, but in addition, situate the rise of London's audiophile bars against the backdrop of the spatial pressures faced by the city's nightlife scenes and spaces. Considering this urban context, I explore how the emergence of musical spaces organised around static modes of listening took place under conditions that were hostile to many other types of music venues and nightclubs. This analysis shifts attention away from broader questions of decline and renewal, instead focussing attention on the specific qualities of different musical and cultural spaces, as well as their diverse relations to wider processes of urban transformation. Following Fabian Holt, 'it might prove helpful to temporarily bracket conventional

[44] Many electronic dance music DJs regularly perform at listening bars, and it is for this reason that I include them within the wider spatial and cultural ecology of London's electronic dance music cultures.

narratives of the intrinsic values of clubs and instead focus on clubs as units of analysis for understanding musical and cultural change in neighborhood context' (2013: 153) Where research such as that by Chatterton and Hollands (2002) and Laam Hae (2012) focuses on the relation between urban change and music venues broadly categorised as 'mainstream' or 'alternative', I argue that a focus on sound and listening practices affords new ways of conceptualising musical spaces, which may not fit into clear social and economic distinctions. In this sense, this chapter also contributes to debates regarding the broader relations between sound, listening, and the production of urban space, building on work by Karin Bijsterveld (2008) and Marie Thompson (2016; 2017).

I begin by discussing three historic listening contexts: the development of silent concert hall etiquette at the turn of the 19th century; domestic hi-fi culture in the mid 20th century; as well as the more direct origins of the contemporary audiophile bar in Japanese *jazu-kissa.* Across the three examples, I demonstrate how spatially and technologically-mediated listening practices are contingent on wider discourses of listening, in which modes of social distinction are manifested as hierarchies of (in)attention. I then move to discuss the relationship between idealised and enacted listening practices in London's audiophile bars, incorporating an account from my own ethnographic observations at Spiritland. After exploring the ways in which aesthetic hierarchies of sound, listening, and culture mediate the ways in which audiophile bars may be more widely understood, I finish by discussing Spiritland in the context of the recent redevelopment of the King's Cross area, situating idealised audiophile discourses in relation to issues of gentrification, (anti-)sociability, and culture-led regeneration.

Concert hall etiquette: silent listening and bourgeois propriety

In relation to more typical nightclubs or bars which play pre-recorded music, audiophile bars place a much greater emphasis on static modes of attention. Silent, attentive listening has permeated numerous contemporary cultures and contexts of Euro-American musical performance – including jazz, popular, and experimental musics – but the classical music concert hall remains the benchmark of static, silent audience behaviour. Clearly, the concert hall constitutes a very different musical space to the audiophile bar, with no direct historical relation. However, I argue that the development of concert halls' specific practices of attention, and the close relation of such practices to class formation, provides an important context for evaluating how audiophile bars may be understood within hierarchies of social, cultural, and urban space.

Concert hall etiquette is ubiquitous across auditoriums the world over and is largely self-regulating, sustained by interrelated spatial, social, and cultural codes that developed over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries (Nicholls et al. 2018). Part of this regulation occurs via the architecture of the concert hall space, which encodes musical performance with a particular social and cultural status, distinct from everyday life. Unlike rock venues or nightclubs, the concert hall maintains a ritualistic separation of socialising and listening, whereby eating, drinking, and possibilities for more fluid interaction occur outside

the sanctity of the dedicated performance space. Inside, the directional layout of seats produces an audience of spectators rather than participants, 'aimed not at a community of interacting people but at a collection of individuals' (Small 1998: 20-27). Where the architecture of the auditorium cannot specifically regulate attention, it encourages an atmosphere of silence in which audible communication occurs primarily through the medium of musical sound, flowing in a single direction from performer to audience.

At the turn of the 19th century, the architecture of the contemporary concert hall coproduced a more attentive culture of listening, reflecting the new social role that music played for Western Europe's emerging middle class. As James H. Johnson (1995: 55-60) argues, such wider transformations are evident in the socio-spatial changes which took place at the Paris Opéra at the end of the 19th century. Initially, the space functioned primarily as an arena for the performance and perpetuation of aristocratic power, whereby the most desirable and exclusive seats – reserved for royals – were the best placed from which to be seen by the rest of the audience. Ironically, these seats simultaneously offered the most restricted aural and visual experience in the theatre, such that subsequent seating practices and architectural changes only developed in response to shifting audience behaviours, 'attentive now to the drama on the stage more than to the spectacle of the hall.' With the appearance of a new middle class in post-revolution France, aesthetic attentiveness emerged as a marker of social distinction, in which politeness was 'central to the self-conception of the bourgeoisie.' In a climate newly characterised by the fragile and volatile nature of social standing, the performance and policing of manners played a vital function in affirmations of social identity. Familiarity with the novel code of silence at the Opéra became a means through which the bourgeoisie could self-identify through recognition and 'confirmation by other members of the bourgeoisie' (Ibid. 233).

In 19th century Britain, similar social guidelines were formalised in a vast literature of etiquette books, which taught the middle classes the behaviours necessary to attain a 'degree of prestige and successful living within Victorian society' (Deaville 2019: 57). Focussing primarily on politeness and propriety, such books placed great emphasis on familiarity with musical codes, which were constructed as one of the most significant markers of social standing. As Deaville (2019: 62) argues, where these texts offered little in the way of specific guidance for musical or aesthetic understanding, they aimed to establish a 'zone of audition' which respected other listeners and avoided disturbing them. Silence was to be maintained regardless of enjoyment, on the assumption that there would always be those present who were more fully engaged. Such practices have persisted in contemporary contexts, and despite critical recognition of a wider spectrum of possible listening experiences, it remains largely agreed that 'experiencing a concert is about paying attention par excellence' (Tewinkel 2019: 487).

While the contemporary concert hall cannot be said to hold the cultural influence it once did, the history of its etiquette demonstrates the ways in which individualised constructions of musical (in)attention need to be understood in social and historic context. Moreover, where the architecture of musical spaces may be designed to facilitate particular kinds of musical experience, these spatial affordances must also be understood in relation to the social and historic contexts which gave rise to particular practices and pedagogies of musical listening (Nicholls et al. 2018). As I will return to later in this chapter, such contexts

make it difficult to disentangle notions of attentiveness from wider social, cultural, and aesthetic hierarchies, which mediate our understandings of musical spaces and their associated codes of behaviour.

Domestic hi-fi culture: fidelity and refined listening

Where audiophile bars have reimagined high-fidelity sound in a collective listening space, hi-fi technologies have a more longstanding history in home listening contexts. This history has an intimate relationship with gendered conflicts over domestic space (see Keightley 1996; Perchard 2017), but for the purposes of this chapter, I will be focussing on the relationship between hi-fi sound reproduction technologies and class-based cultural and aesthetic hierarchies, which contextualises the new musical and social space of the audiophile bar and its idealised practices of listening.

As the phonograph and domestic hi-fi systems were popularised over the course of the 20th century, musical listening was reinvented as a solitary, private experience. While sound reproduction technologies facilitated new ways of interacting with music, transformations to the sphere of musical listening resulted as much from shifting social and cultural discourses as they did technological developments (Björnberg 2009). As with concert hall culture, such discourses were mediated by longstanding hierarchies about the nature of music and the ways it should be experienced. At the turn of the 20th century, bourgeois conceptions of music as something to be experienced either in public concerts or domestic performance left sound recordings denigrated as 'an entertainment for the lower classes.' For early critics of the phonograph, the space that it created for private listening was great cause for concern, providing audiences with a newly individualised agency to bypass the 'guiding influence and surveillance of the standard-bearers of public music culture' (Volmar 2019: 399-402). Similarly, early noise abatement legislation in the Netherlands refracted music through explicit social hierarchies, differentiating between complaints originating from instrumental performance and sound reproduction devices. Where technology certainly provided greater opportunities for amplification, it was argued that gramophone listening was an unskilled activity and therefore more likely to afford public nuisance and distraction (Bijsterveld 2008: 165-171). Such biases also mediated the early reception of novel recording and production techniques, which were treated as uncultured gimmicks that threatened the 'hegemony of music over sound and art over technology' (Barry 2010: 119).

Attitudes toward recorded sound changed only once technical developments became more widespread, attaining a normalised, naturalised place in everyday practices of consumption (Björnberg 2009: 108). As Björnberg has argued, technical advancements are not automatically internalised as improvements, such that listeners must learn to perceive, let alone appreciate, new distinctions in sound quality (Ibid. 113). In this sense, pedagogical and discursive interventions were necessary for high fidelity technologies to be more widely accepted, and given the critical response to the early phonograph, hi-fi manufacturers sought

to find ways to appeal to middle-class consumers.[45] In doing so, they reimagined existing classical music discourses that associated critical listening with refined taste, but cultivated an idealised listening practice based on the affective, sensory experience of sound, rather than the intellectual apprehension of musical structure. Once such a narrative took hold, 1950s hi-fi culture became a means for 'articulating the social status and aspirations of a new tech-savvy male elite' that emerged in post-war Western society. In this way, Volmar argues that 'technologically mediated listening should not be read as a decline of bourgeois ideals of music listening, but rather as an index of broader value shifts *within* the hegemonic discourse of the educated middle classes' (2019: 403-11).

While audiophile bars relocate hi-fi technologies to a collective listening space, the classed (and gendered) background of domestic hi-fi culture is an important historic context, particularly when thinking about the contemporary evolution of audiophile bars in Europe and America. If anything, the historic association between hi-fi technologies and domestic environments draws attention to the audiophile bar as a wholly different category of social, cultural, and musical space, distinct from more typical bars and nightclubs.

Japanese contexts: *jazu-kissa* and the *fueihō* laws

Audiophile bars are a relatively recent phenomenon in Europe and North America, but their roots can be traced directly to the rise of *jazu-kissa* ('jazz cafes') in mid-twentieth century Japan. In this section, I outline a short history of the *jazu-kissa,* arguing how its unique culture of listening is socially rather than technologically produced. I then discuss Japan's *fueihō* 'no-dancing laws', to consider how audiophile bars may be perceived within moralised hierarchies of urban nightlife spaces.

Jazu-kissa developed out of specific historic conditions in post-WWII Japan. During this period of gradual economic recovery, buying import records was a complex and prohibitively expensive process for most Japanese jazz fans. In a socio-cultural climate defined by material scarcity alongside a growing cosmopolitan curiosity, the *jazu-kissa* emerged as a vital means for Japanese consumers to keep up to date with developments in Euro-American culture, and this quasi-public social setting was normalised as the space to hear new musical releases. In this way, *jazu-kissa* elevated the consumption of musical recordings to an unusually high cultural status, whereby 'post-war Japanese were simultaneously underdeveloped as cultural producers, but were massively overdeveloped as consumers – as listeners.' What began in part as a reaction to the scarcity of live performance by foreign musicians in Japan, later transformed into a listening discourse which privileged the unimpeded fidelity of musical recordings as a way of upholding the 'authentic boundaries of a foreign performance genre' (Novak 2008: 22).

[45] Such interventions were particularly necessary given the ways in which the often excessive, expensive nature of hi-fi technology was antithetical to middle classes' typical refusal of vulgarity (Keightley 1996: 171).

Early *jazu-kissa* could be categorised somewhere in between a cafe and a bar. Often hidden away in the darker recesses of Japan's dense urban fabric, they combined the cultural civility of a daytime space with the greater subcultural allure of the night (e.g. Straw 2014). This spatial merging contributed toward the development of a discerning and dedicated audience, who under the authority of the 'master' of the *kissa,* helped sustain a pervasive culture of listening characterised above-all by silence, attentiveness, absorption, and respect (Novak 2008: 18-20). Thus, while *jazu-kissa* were a quasi-social space with attendant forms of affective community, they encouraged a static and individualised listening practice that bears more resemblance to concert hall etiquette than the more sociable atmospheres in which live jazz performance originally developed. In this way, it is important that we understand *jazu-kissa* as comprising both a musical space *and* an interrelated musical practice. As Jonathan Sterne (2003: 225) reminds us, 'any medium of sound reproduction is an apparatus, a network – a whole set of relations, practices, people, and technologies.'

While the *jazu-kissa* and its culture of listening were formed by specific historical and cultural contexts, contemporary Japan retains a strong listening bar culture. Venues such as JBS in Tokyo's Shibuya[46] district continue the tradition of a single barman (it is usually a man) selecting records for a small number of mostly individual listeners, but the scene has also diversified to encompass a wider range of musical styles, spaces and audiences.[47] The soundtrack at Bridge*,* also in Shibuya, includes house, techno, and disco, but there is still an overriding focus on sound quality, with a sense that the venue occupies a different spatial category to nightclubs. Venue owner Masaaki Ariizumi evokes Ray Oldenburg's (2000) notion of the 'third place', describing Bridge as a loosely-defined environment that is 'not quite home, and it's not work, but a community where everyone can be welcomed and relax, with a nice atmosphere' (Coultate 2016b). Other venues, such as Bar Martha in the more upscale Ebisu district of Tokyo, highlight some of the tensions between *kissa* traditions and contemporary nightlife practices. Bar Martha occupies a relatively large footprint by Tokyo standards, with room for 50 seated customers (standing is prohibited). Aside from the imposing Tannoy speakers and 6,000 or more records which adorn the wall behind the bar, the space could be mistaken for an exclusive cocktail bar in Manhattan, decorated with many of the now familiar aesthetic tropes of post-industrial design. Yet despite any visual similarities with more familiar bar spaces, the venue maintains an infamously strict culture of listening, such that a recent Guardian article on the venue leads with a cautionary subheading: 'Listen, don't talk. And remember, the man behind the decks does not take requests' (Boyd and Sinclair 2019). In tripadvisor[48] reviews of Bar Martha, almost half of which give the venue the lowest available rating of 'terrible', it is clear how unfamiliar and hostile such an enforced listening code can appear, especially to foreign visitors unacquainted with *kissa* culture:

[46] Shibuya is a major commercial hub in central Tokyo with a high concentration of clothes stores and nightlife venues. As well as being a hub for Tokyo's youth culture, the area houses two of the world's busiest train stations.
[47] The number of traditional *jazu-kissa* in Tokyo have dwindled drastically, falling from a peak of more than 250 in the 1970s to 130 in 2015 (See http://www.tokyojazzjoints.com/)
[48] https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g1066456-d9963865-Reviews-Bar_Martha-Shibuya_Tokyo_Tokyo_Prefecture_Kanto.html

> I understand in some bars there are rules (no dancing, no talking outside in a residential area, etc.) but this place is another level…RUDEST staff ever don't want you there obviously. The music is nice, and if they just said "please keep it down a bit and enjoy the music" it would be fine…But they are aggressively rude (February 26, 2019).

> We are all quiet, well mannered and conscious of our surroundings…Within 30 minutes we were warned twice to keep our voices down and that our laughter was too loud. Now I'm all for following "house rules" but if you want a relaxing spot, this isn't it. The service was rude and too aggressive… my suggestion would be to skip this one and visit their other location, Tracks, where you can have a conversation at a normal level and not worry about laughing occasionally (November 24, 2019).

> no "loud" noises are allowed in this bar. Do not come here with friends if you're looking to unwind and have an enjoyable time. The folks here are super strict with these policies. If you shine your phone's light into your bag (it's dark inside the bar), you will be warned. If you make your friends laugh with a joke you will be warned…the service was not friendly at all by any standard. If you're looking to enjoy a drink in a library type atmosphere, this place is for you (August 21, 2018).

Across the reviews, there is a clear lack of familiarity with the culture of Japanese listening bars, assuming wrongly that they are a space for unimpeded conversation and socialisation. The idea of silent listening is constructed in opposition to the conviviality typically associated with bars, and the sincerity with which Bar Martha's staff sustain this atmosphere is interpreted as rude and elitist. These reviews demonstrate the uniqueness of Japanese listening bar culture, along with the confusions and conflicts that may arise when such particularities are imposed on an audience unfamiliar with the long-established histories and practices of the listening bar space.

Having outlined some of the specifically Japanese contexts which informed the development of listening bars and their unique cultures of presenting and consuming musical recordings, it is also useful to situate them in relation to the legislative context of Japan's *fueihō* laws. Loosely translated as 'Entertainment Establishments Control Law', the *fueihō* laws were established in 1948 to regulate Japanese nightlife. Clubs had to apply for a special license for dancing to be allowed on their premises, and even when granted such a license, dancing was prohibited after midnight. Alongside such temporal boundaries, licenses were only granted to venues with a floor space of more than 66m², which is large by the standards of Japan's densely built cities (Hartley 2019: 3). While the *fueihō* laws have been enforced sporadically and inconsistently over their long history, they give further context to the listening bar space and its culture of static listening. Crucially, the *fueihō* legislation grouped nightclubs and music venues together with brothels and other spaces associated with sex-work, forming part of what Terre Thaemlitz (2015) has called 'Japan's morality code.' Viewing the *fueihō laws* as one arm of 'the state's physical and social policing of our bodies and their movements', we can begin to situate the listening bar not only within hierarchies of listening, reception and

attention, but also within a *moralised* hierarchy that privileges intellectual over embodied modes of cognition – an ideological distinction which has mapped on to hierarchies of race, gender, and class (e.g. Henriques 2011). Although specific to Japanese contexts, the *fueihō* laws demonstrate how listening bars may be understood as a different category of night-time space, distanced in some ways from the 'morally suspect pleasures typically associated with night' (Straw 2014: 198).

Adjustments made to the *fueihō* laws in 2016 make even more explicit perceptions of the night-time and darkness as sites of moral regulation. For businesses to be granted a non-*fueihō,* 'Specific Entertainment Restaurant Business' license, they are required to have a lighting level measured at 10 lux, roughly equivalent to 'pre-performance cinema', or the brightness required to read a newspaper from around 30cm away. (Hartley 2019: 4) Given the complex and often irregular lighting of nightclubs, such a stipulation is of course notoriously difficult to measure and enforce, but it demonstrates the continued prevalence of moralised discourses surrounding dancing, hedonism, and the night-time, from which listening bars will be largely exempt.

Audiophile technology and mythologised discourses of listening

Lacking the long-established culture of *kissa* found in Japan, London's audiophile bars have constructed their own discourses of musical mediation, mythologising narratives of sound fidelity as affording assumed practices of listening. Such discourses have been established via their own modes of self-promotion, as well as through media representations and interviews with key figures in the scene. Many of these features have placed great emphasis on sound quality and the technological production of listening bars, with articles led by headlines such as 'Sonic boom: why clubs are cranking up the quality instead of the volume'; 'Perfect sound forever: The UK venues in pursuit of audio excellence'; and 'Listening Clubs Tantalize Audiophiles in London' (Bernas 2016; Muggs 2016; Baines 2018). In certain cases, sound technologies are treated as fetishised objects, such that we hear of Spiritland's sound system as 'an imposing array that dominates the room like a shrine in a temple', featuring an 'eye-wateringly expensive Kuzma turntable'. On their website, Spiritland describe their bar as 'host to a world-class Living Voice sound system – a *unique* creation'[49] – tapping into a classic trope of audiophile culture which values bespoke modification over less personalised forms of audio consumption (Husokawa and Matsuoka 2008: 49-50). Speaker manufacturer Living Voice make explicit their aims to transcend technicality into more subjective, esoteric realms:

> At the high-end of audio design, art and science merge. The most revered audio designers are no longer strictly concerned with the objective world of measurements and specifications. Instead they explore the world of human expression and human sentiment as captured in the recorded musical

[49] https://spiritland.com/about/

> performance. This is an exploration guided not by machines and technology, but by tacit knowledge, intuition and musical sensibility.[50]

Spiritland align themselves further with the technological pursuits of 'traditional' audiophile culture since opening a 'headphone bar' in the West End, which claims to sell 'the best headphones in the world' along with 'amplifiers and digital players designed to present music in unparalleled quality, side by side.' Spiritland's Paul Noble suggests a relationship between high fidelity audio technologies and particular listening practices, describing a 'revelatory trip' to listening bars in Japan in which he'd encounter a 'wall of original jazz issues on vinyl, EMT turntables, valve amps and JBL speakers – and no mixer or limiter. Just a record collector carefully playing the music they loved, and a few people sitting there digging it' (Muggs 2016). In this discourse, sound technologies afford intense aesthetic experiences: '[Spiritland was] born of a desire to engage with music in the deepest possible way – to hear it as the artist intended, to connect with the emotions within'.[51]

At Brilliant Corners in the Dalston area of East London, there is a similar focus on sound quality, but as part of a discourse in which audiophile technologies function to facilitate a more collective musical and sonic experience. According to co-owner Amit Patel, Brilliant Corners was founded with the audiophile's desire to 'share [music] where it would sound its very best', but combined with a democratic purpose in which 'everyone should be able to have good things, it's not elitist' (quoted in Muggs 2016). Much of this discourse takes direct inspiration from the mythologised practices of pioneering disco DJ David Mancuso, who argued that 'good sound is a human right' (quoted in Faber 2018). Mancuso's famous 'Loft' parties in New York were built around what Peter Shapiro (2005: 22) describes as an 'almost Buddhist approach to sound', incorporating an audiophile's commitment to clarity with a spiritual belief in the healing powers of music. Brilliant Corners grew in part out of the musical community based around London's Lucky Cloud Soundsystem, a party which was set up as a direct descendant of the Loft, with the involvements of Mancuso himself. Brilliant Corners also installed the same model of vintage Klipschorn hi-fi speakers used by Mancuso, aligning themselves with his sonic, musical, and technological heritage, which strives for an immersive but forgiving collective sonic experience (Spice 2016).

Mancuso's musical philosophy was based on an idealised sonic transparency. After abandoning early experiments which used additional equalisers, subwoofers, and tweeters to enhance specific frequencies, he stripped his system back to the bare minimum, arguing that

> the more components you have the more you hurt the original sound, so the system should contain the least amount of electronics possible. You want the music in your brain and in your heart. The purer the sound, the more you will remember it.

[50] https://livingvoice.eu/en/page/about-living-voice
[51] Ibid.

For Mancuso, music and sound contributed toward a spiritual and psychedelic social practice in which 'there was neither the DJ nor the dancer…Everybody was there and we were like a family. There didn't seem to be any conflicts' (quoted in Lawrence 2003: 10-13, 240). Where Brilliant Corners is set up primarily for seated listening, brothers Amit and Aneesh Patel have also set up a 'travelling sound system', Giant Steps, which takes the audiophile experience to dance-focussed contexts at music festivals such as Houghton, as a well as a pop-up space which ran during the summers of 2018 and 2019 in Hackney Wick. Echoing further the sonic spiritualism of Mancuso, Amit and Aneesh state that their aim with Giant Steps is 'to create an atmosphere of freedom, comfort and togetherness, so that sounds travel straight into the hearts and souls of the dancers' (quoted in Spice 2017).

Despite the variances between the discourses constructed within and around Spiritland and Brilliant Corners, both are based largely on suppositions that audiophile sound technologies afford their own sonic socialities, containing specific individual and social listening behaviours. High-fidelity sound certainly carries with it the *potential* for particular kinds of musical and sonic experience, but to revisit Jonathan Sterne (2003: 225) once again, the technological aspects of sound reproduction form only one part of a network that crucially also includes people, social relations and practices. As Georgina Born (2013: 24-6) reminds us, our analyses of how spaces may be sonically and technologically produced need to be 'culturally and historically enriched', in order to take into account the broader contexts through which individual and social auditory experiences are mediated. In this sense, where Japanese listening bars use sound reproduction technologies to help facilitate a particular listening experience, such experiences are also enabled via the specific localised history of the *jazu-kissa* and its associated traditions, whether as a culturally inherited or more explicitly enforced practice of listening.

Tom Panton, who works for the speaker company Sonos, argues that the UK's new audiophile spaces have emerged out of a growing appetite for new kinds of musical experience, one part of a wider 'renegotiation going on about where and how we listen' (quoted in Muggs 2016). Another commentator suggests that spaces dedicated to what he terms 'slow listening' have arisen in reaction to the increasing power of club sound systems, as well as the more widespread ubiquity of music in everyday life (Spice 2016). However, given the relative novelty of the listening bar concept in the UK, I would argue that audiophile bars function as a different category of space in London than they do in Japan. As Ben Ratliff (2019) has suggested in relation to comparable US contexts, 'At this early stage, the American listening bar remains a social experiment, because a bar is still generally understood as a place to talk, not listen.' To come to a more critical understanding of this new category musical space, it is useful to interrogate the relationship between mythologised and enacted listening practices. The following section is organised primarily around my own ethnographic observations from visits to Spiritland.

‘Come home to music’?: Listening at Spiritland

> Music as background...It costs the listener nothing; it is included in the price of the coffee, the hot chocolate, the vermouth; he barely notices it. If he does notice it, he feels himself buoyed up as a visitor to an expensive establishment…it keeps the customers company – the tired ones with their stimulating drink, the busy ones with their negotiations, even the newspaper readers; even the flirts, if there are still any (Adorno 2002: 506-7).

Most journalistic responses to listening bars tend to focus on *potential* rather than actualised forms of musical and sonic experience. I could only locate a single article, referenced below, which gives any significant consideration to the ambivalence of the audiophile utopia that tends to be evoked elsewhere:

> At best, the listening bar raises good questions about whether there might be an unrealised public listening ideal in a ritual as familiar as going out for a drink. At worst, it’s pretty much like a regular bar, but with a trowelling of extra noise provided by an obscure record you’re not hip enough to know, played on equipment you’re not rich enough to own, in a room that does not accommodate dancing. It can be hard to talk, much less to listen (Ratliff 2019).

My first visit to Spiritland was brief, but gave me much food for thought. I arrived at around 7pm on a Thursday night, a peak midweek moment for the after-work crowd. Next to the entrance, a wooden sign announces the multi-purpose nature of the space, with ‘seasonal food served all day; cocktails, craft beers and wines by night’; as well as ‘records, books and audio equipment for sale’. Most importantly perhaps, we are told of the ‘deep music policy on a unique sound system’, conjuring forth mystique and expectation in prospective customers. Spiritland’s tagline, ‘Come home to music’, sets out their primary objective, but part of me couldn’t help but recall Grace Dent’s (2019) discussion of the ‘everything space’ – that hyper-contemporary trend to combine ‘dining, eating, drinking, thinking, art-house, cocktail, coffee’ into an ambiguous totality, perhaps most defined by multiple planes of consumption. As I entered the bar, I was welcomed by a friendly waiter who regretfully informed me that it was full, but was happy to let me have a quick look around. As our conversation ended, I was able to tune into the soundscape of the space. Having had few revelatory audiophile experiences in my life, I was genuinely curious to encounter the custom Living Voice sound-system – a company whose speakers are famed for their six or even seven-figure price-tags. Despite the visual prominence assigned to the speakers and valve amp at one end of the room, my ears were immediately struck by the dissonance of the sonic environment. The sound system was operating at a relatively high volume, but fighting for space in a saturated frequency spectrum. The mid-range was occupied with the enthusiastic conversation of some seventy or so people, while the high frequencies were muddied with the incessant clatter of steel, ceramic, and glass, as well as interjections from the espresso machine and cocktail shaker. I didn’t want to judge Spiritland too harshly during this fleeting visit, but for a space designed with supposedly transformative auditory experiences in mind, this felt like an all-too-

familiar friction between ambient and musical sound, convenient neither for talking nor listening. In Schafer's (1977: 43) terms, this was a 'hi-fi system' positioned inappropriately in a 'lo-fi soundscape'.

Regarding his own similar listening bar experience, Ben Ratliff (2019) highlights the significance of temporal contexts, suggesting that 'night is dynamic and complicated: so complicated that it turns great record collections and stupendous sound systems into background.' Aware of this myself, I returned to Spiritland during the day, this time arriving just before midday on a Tuesday. The space contrasted noticeably with my previous visit, this time transforming into a familiar café scene. Most people sat alone tapping away at laptops, while a few small groups had business or social meetings over coffee. During the first half of the day, Spiritland is envisioned primarily as a 'café and workspace', with an abundance of electrical sockets integrated into the architecture of the room. At this stage, the sound system sits firmly in the background, a tinkle of sibilant hihats just audible alongside low-level conversation. Until evening, the music is disembodied and automated, generated via a set of pre-recorded 'uncompressed audio files'. As the day progresses through lunchtime into the early afternoon, I notice that the volume level is carefully managed, increasing in gradual synchrony with the greater sociability of the atmosphere. By 3pm, the sound system discreetly emerges to take centre stage - the volume remains restrained, but reaches a noticeable prominence in comparison to most daytime spaces.

Here I finally realise that the reputation of the sound system is well-founded: an expansive auditory space unfolds in three dimensions from one end of the room – a crisp high-end sparkles at once both sharp and soft, while resonant lows are warm and full, with no trace of flabbiness. Instruments and voices dart through the air in a hyperreal reproduction of live performance. Looking around the room, it appears that this significant sonic shift is unmatched by any discernible transformation of behaviour. It is of course difficult to measure something as elusive as attention to sound, especially via simple observation. But given that everyone in the room was absorbed either in their laptop or in animated conversation, I found it hard to imagine how the staggering array of audiophile equipment could be translating into any form of subtle, let alone quasi-mystical auditory experience. Attention was most evident in the visual realm, as people entering or exiting the space would occasionally pause to gaze at the tantalising DJ setup just by the door, often taking photos. At one point, one half of a pair sat adjacent to the speakers got up to go to the toilet, and I was excited to see the other enthusiastically nodding their head in time to the music. He briefly looked up from his phone in what I assumed to be a moment of particular concentration or affect, before I noticed his gaze return to the screen, where he was selecting an appropriate Instagram filter for the picture he'd just taken of the striking valve amplifier which sits centre-stage.

The lights were dimmed as evening approached, conducive perhaps toward a greater focus on the auditory, but also signalling a more familiar ambiance for less inhibited nocturnal socialisation. As the bar fills with an evening crowd, I'm now the only individual customer – tables fill with pairings and groups, drinking alcohol rather than coffee. The volume of the music increases, but so does the level of conversation, returning to the saturated 'lo-fi soundscape' I had encountered on my previous visit. I now feel conspicuous as the single solitary customer and my attempts to listen feel misguided and out-of-place.

At 6pm begins the daily custom in which an LP is played uninterrupted from start to finish. This marks a potentially dramatic moment in which there is a shift from a pre-recorded selection of music to the ritualised 'performance' of single vinyl LP, but this shift in media appeared unmatched by any apparent shift in attention. At 7pm the sound reproduction process is humanised a step further as a DJ takes the decks, but once again, there is no discernible transformation of listening or social behaviours in the room. Certainly, the figure of the DJ has always been idealised as engaging in what Fikentscher (2000: 58-90) termed 'interactive' or 'collective' forms of performance, so it would be misguided to expect the appearance of a DJ to reorientate the room via a unidirectional audience-performer dynamic. However, given that the audiophile bar space has reimagined the role of the DJ as facilitating a listening rather than dance-focused musical experience, I found it difficult to avoid interpreting their role as much more than an intensification of what Adorno (2002: 305) would have termed the 'condition of distraction' that was evident in the room.

In thinking about the relationship between idealised and enacted listening practices at Spiritland, my intention is less about forming any specific judgement of success or failure of implementation on their part. Rather, I intend to use this as the starting point for thinking about what audiophile bars might represent as a new category of musical and cultural space for London, particularly given their emergence during a period in which electronic dance music and wider night-time cultures have faced numerous social, spatial, and regulatory pressures.

Hierarchies of listening

Most of the discourse around audiophile bars has combined existing tropes from hi-fi culture and Japanese *jazu-kissa* to construct a narrative based on quasi-social, transformative listening experiences. Within this narrative, audiophile bars are set in distinct opposition to the auditory space of 'traditional' nightclubs, which are associated more with volume and sonic power than sound fidelity. While audiophile bars are positioned as an alternative rather than direct replacement for clubs, their associated listening discourse evokes numerous social, cultural, and aesthetic hierarches, which I argue will inevitably play some role in framing how they are perceived within wider urban ecologies of music scenes, spaces, and cultures. Before moving to discuss how Spiritland may be situated in relation to the musical histories and ongoing regeneration of the King's Cross area, I will outline some of the ideological and sonic hierarchies which contribute toward the production of audiophile bars as cultural and urban spaces.

Contrasting idealised audiophile fidelity against the 'brute force' of nightclub sound systems rests on assumptions about the respective values placed on volume and clarity, or in the most reduced terms, about the relationship between music, noise, and silence. In her study of noise, Marie Thompson (2017: 4) critiques two dominant 'discursive lineages' defining such relations: the 'conservative politics of silence' and the 'transgressive poetics of noise', both of which rest on an assumed correlation between 'noise, unwantedness and badness.' Thompson takes Schafer's acoustic ecology as a prime example of such a discourse, arguing that its underlying auditory politics are constituted via a dualistic 'aesthetic moralism', in

which noise is seen as an inherently negative disruption to idealised silence. In Thompson's reading of Schafer, definitions of noise and silence are mapped on to a binary of nature and modernity, whereby 'the natural is characterised as belonging to a "better" time, uninfected and unbroken by the noise of technology' (Ibid. 88). Intrusions of noise are seen to have detrimental effects at individual and societal levels, such that a society's soundscape is taken to be an 'indicator of the social conditions that produce it' (Ibid. 91).

In her study of sound and public problems of noise, Karin Bijsterveld (2008) identifies similar 'deeply rooted cultural hierarchies', locating the origins of noise abatement policy in notions of noise as a disturbance to civility. Such bodily, visceral effects were seen as disruptive to processes of intellect and the states of quietude and rest upon which they depend, often leading to a variety of spatialised solutions, including the influential 'islands of silence' tradition (Ibid. 255). Relating the seclusion of the contemporary 'science park' to the authority and mysticism that the desert, monastery, and mediaeval university exerted historically, Doreen Massey (2005: 144) describes such spaces as 'places which crystallise through spatialisation a separation of Mind from Body, a notion of science as removal from the world.' Separation in spatial terms thus contributes toward the segregation and legitimisation of knowledge and cultural production from other forms of labour. In this sense, these spatial divisions function not only as a manifestation of pre-existing social, cultural, and aesthetic hierarchies, they are one of the means through which such hierarchies have been enacted, upheld, and reinforced through history.

Given this mutually constitutive relation between cultural and spatialised hierarchies, auditory politics inform material realities of urban space, in which, as Thompson contends, 'hierarchies of dwelling' are determined by unequal distributions of noise pollution and access to silence. Such hierarchies are manifested in terms of housing types, whereby a detached house offers greater auditory privacy than a flat in a housing estate. In the wider geographies of the city, suburban quietude is valued over the incessant soundscape of the inner-city high street. As Thompson goes on to argue, such hierarchies have been 'complicated by the emergent preference for post-industrial city living among the wealthy'. Yet, even where urban clamour is increasingly reframed in terms such as 'vibrant' or 'edgy', reinscribed versions of old conflicts arise out of the tensions between living in a culturally 'happening' area and the 'continued desire for sonic control' over private and domestic space (Thompson 2017: 104-9).

Given that listening practices demands atmospheres of quietude, dominant hierarchies of noise and silence exist relate closely with hierarchies of listening and attention. In Schafer's (1977: 43) notion of the 'lo-fi soundscape', he laments the ways in which 'individual acoustic signals are obscured in an overdense population of sounds…[in which] perspective is lost.' For Schafer, noise abatement strategies are only a reactionary solution to a problem more fundamentally based on an increasing inattention to sound, whereby individuals are unaware of their acoustic environments and the dangers it poses. In this way, one of the primary goals of his acoustic ecology project was a 'resensitization of listeners to the sounds of their surroundings' (Thompson 2017: 90). There are numerous examples of this moralistic idealisation of attentive listening. Focussing on 1930s America, David Goodman has discussed how radio and other new sound reproduction technologies were met with widespread concerns about the effect that the new

overabundance of sonic material could have on the wider public. As a variety of sonic media became the ubiquitous soundtrack to everyday life, it was feared that this would encourage promiscuous, uncritical, and distracted modes of listening, which were denounced as a 'threat to social, civic, and psychological wellbeing.' Such hierarchies of listening were refracted through prisms of class, 'polarised between an *elite* of attentive and selective listeners, and a *mass* of distracted and indiscriminate ones' (Goodman 2010: 16-7). Like Schafer's acoustic ecology thesis, much of this was rooted in fears of technology and aspects of modernity, as well as a nostalgia for the 'sacralised status' of listening etiquettes which at this historical stage, were only recently established.

Alongside idealised auditory perceptions within everyday forms of listening, related hierarchies of attention have been constructed within specifically musical contexts, perhaps most notably in the work of Adorno. As with Schafer's contention regarding the mutually constitutive relationship between cluttered soundscapes and desensitised listening practices, Adorno argued that a 'regression of listening' developed in parallel with the aesthetics of popular music, which he viewed as undeserved and undemanding of any more concentrated attention (2002: 305). Adorno famously developed an extensive and hierarchical typology of listener types, working downwards from what he termed the 'expert listener'. Verging on a utopian category limited to a very small circle of professional musicians, this 'fully conscious listener' grasps 'simultaneous complexities', hearing 'past, present, and future moments together so that they crystallise into a meaningful context' (1989: 4-5). Further down the typology is the 'culture consumer', said to be a 'voracious listener', but generally more concerned with the hoarding of 'musical information' and 'biographical data' than the 'unfoldment of a composition' (Ibid. 6-7). Close to the bottom of the pyramid, just above the final category of the un- or antimusical lies the 'entertainment listener' – the most common listener type. For this listener, music functions as a 'comfortable distraction' from daily life, such that their mode of listening is defined primarily by 'distraction and deconcentration, albeit interrupted by sudden bursts of attention and recognition' (Ibid. 15-6). Like Schafer, this sense of auditory inattention existed in relation to broader social conditions, in this case capitalist alienation and its symbiotic relationship with the 'culture industry':

> Distraction is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalised and mechanised process of labour to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject. This mode of production, which engenders fears and anxiety about unemployment, loss of income, war, has its "non-productive" correlate in entertainment; that is, relaxation which does not involve the effort of concentration at all. People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do no put such a strain on them, that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously (Adorno 2002: 458).

Where much of Adorno's social critique remains strikingly relevant when thinking about popular music and contemporary cultural production, he has been rightfully criticised for his ideological biases toward particular musical forms and their associated modes of listening and consumption. Despite these critiques,

related forms of elitism pervade in contemporary contexts, informing hierarchies of 'high' and 'low' culture; arts council funding allocations; and social-political categorisations such as night-time economy rather than night-time culture.

The cultural and aesthetic hierarchies I have discussed thus far generally extend beyond musical culture, but will mediate the ways in which different musical forms, scenes and spaces are received in wider social contexts. Before moving to the final section in which I reflect how these hierarchies may be useful for understanding Spiritland in the context of the regeneration of the King's Cross area, I would like to explore one final aesthetic hierarchy, this time dealing more specifically with internal concerns to DJ and dance music culture.

DJs, selectors, and cultural omnivores

As I have discussed, the main thrust of discourses surrounding the development of UK audiophile bar culture has been focussed on idealised practices of listening. Where much of this discourse situates particular modes of auditory reception in relation to particular modes of sound reproduction, there is also a parallel, secondary narrative, which explores how audiophile bars enable new musical canons and repertoires, and thus new practices of DJ 'performance'. In this discourse, we hear from the respective owners of Brilliant Corners and Spiritland that people can 'appreciate even stuff they wouldn't normally listen to, whether that's jazz or African records or whatever', or similarly, that visitors can't believe that they're 'hearing music you'd never normally hear "out"' (Muggs 2016). William Smith of DJ duo Leisureware suggests that listening bars allow DJs to 'indulge in the more impulsive and exploratory side of DJing' (Reeve 2018).

Often referred to as the 'selector', this type of DJ prioritises the process of musical selection over and above that of mixing. This school of DJing has its roots in the practices of David Mancuso, the rare groove scene, and the 'Balearic' style that developed in 1980s Ibiza, which were built around diverse musical repertoires, focussing on rare or overlooked records. Just as audiophile sound is contrasted against the primitive force of nightclub sonics, this style of DJing is set in contrast to that found in many electronic dance music scenes, which tend to focus on repetition, functionality, and stylistic continuity. In some contexts, such DJ types are positioned in hierarchical relation, with the 'selector' revered for their distinct curatorial practice:

> From Mancuso to Marco there is a thread underpinning them that sets them apart from their contemporaries. They are the selectors, the DJs that stretch that little bit further in their pursuit for the obscure and the idiosyncratic. They number amongst some of the best DJs today and even at a time when everything is available to everybody they still manage to find their niche…While we still barely brush the upper layers of music and its culture, the selectors are somewhere at the

> back digging deeper and longer, in search of that one record…which constantly alludes [sic] their record bag (Jaeger Oslo 2019)

Typically, the figure of the selector is discussed as challenging dominant musical canons, bringing outliers to the fore that reimagine the 'grand narrative of culture' (Vaher 2008: 352). For others, a shift in focus away from the more performative aspects of mixing allows the music to shine through in its purest form, unadulterated by the ego of the DJ (Jaeger Oslo 2019).

While there is undoubtedly some value and truth in these more utopian visions of the selector, I would like to suggest an additional, alternative interpretation. Where the figure of the selector can be seen to disrupt dance music culture's often strict genre-based canons, it can also be reframed through the concept of the cultural 'omnivore'. This notion reimagines Bourdieu's distinction thesis, suggesting that 'highbrow' cultural consumers may have replaced their taste for 'high culture' with eclecticism, in which cultural capital is demonstrated through an ability to engage on multiple cultural planes (Kern and Peterson 1996). In the context of DJ and dance music culture, it is difficult to map notions of the cultural omnivore on to overtly class-based assumptions, given the diverse and working-class origins of the northern soul, rare groove, and Balearic scenes which have contributed toward contemporary notions of the DJ as 'selector'. However, I would argue that such practices serve further to distinguish audiophile bars from the typical environments of DJ performance. This performance style functions largely as an internal mode of distinction within dance music scenes and spaces, but can simultaneously inform debates around the cultural status of venues in the wider context of the city.

When discussing the eclectic repertoire of the 'selector' and the audiophile bar, one overriding theme is an avoidance of the 'functional' electronic dance music found in clubs. These musics are more generally associated with an affective visceral experience, contributing toward the intensive auditory policing of nightclubs in London, as well as the ways in which certain genres have been subject to state oppression. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 infamously clamped down on 'sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats'; while the more recent 'Form 696' was a covertly racialised piece of risk assessment bureaucracy through which promoters were forced to supply the police with information about performers and genres at their events. Where both pieces of legislation were met with widespread public opposition for targeting particular social groups via crude associations with musical style, they demonstrate deep-rooted associations between particular musical genres, nightlife, and definitions of anti-sociability; exemplified by reductionist approaches to the night-time economy which remain dominated by a 'discourse of control and restraint' (Rowe and Bavinton 2011: 815).

I have outlined these overlapping and often interlinked cultural and aesthetic hierarchies to explore different frameworks for thinking about the audiophile bar, in particular their growth in relation to contemporary urban contexts and nightlife scenes. Generally, journalistic writing on audiophile bars has focussed on their promotion of 'slow listening' as a response to the increasing ubiquity of music in everyday life. Whilst I do not deny such factors, I think it is also important to examine what kind of space the

audiophile bar represents, and how it may fit into urban and cultural contexts. In the final section, I will return to discuss Spiritland more specifically, exploring how these cultural and aesthetic hierarchies can help situate the audiophile bar space within the specific urban and musical histories of the surrounding King's Cross area.

From Bagley's to Spiritland: transformations to nightlife in King's Cross

Spiritland is located in the Coal Drops Yard redevelopment in King's Cross, a set of ex-warehouses which were originally constructed in the 1850s to process, distribute and store coal from the North East and Yorkshire to the London market. Over the course of the twentieth century, as railway became a less significant part of transport infrastructure and industry declined more generally, the warehouses fell into disuse and lay dormant for several decades. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, these disused warehouses became intimately intertwined with London's burgeoning acid house scene. Soon after, as rave culture was rapidly regulated and commercialised, what started out as a location for illegal raves and squat parties soon became an epicentre for club culture, with Bagley's (renamed Canvas in 2003), The Cross, and The Key, running from the mid 1990s until the end of 2007.[52]

The history of electronic dance music culture in King's Cross is mediated through what Ben Campkin has described as a 'prominent and multi-faceted discourse of blight' (2013: 105). In the popular imagination, King's Cross was associated with street-prostitution and drug dealing, an unproductive, liminal space characterised by a 'symbiotic relationship between marginalised, abject characters and the semi-ruined urban landscape' (Ibid. 112). Out of this narrative of urban decline, King's Cross was primed for redevelopment – combining the spatial and cultural capital of a post-industrial geography with an unusually central urban location.

Today, King's Cross has emerged to become 'London's biggest, buzziest tech hub'[53], housing the London offices of multinationals including Google, YouTube, and Samsung. Alongside swathes of new apartment blocks and shopping facilities, King's Cross also hosts the headquarters of the Guardian, Central Saint Martins art college, as well as a multi-arts venue, King's Place. As Campkin concludes:

> The distant industrial past has real estate value as heritage. Yet the more recent and ephemeral history of King's Cross – a contested place, where creativity, charity, clubbing and queer culture appeared in the cracks of the ex-industrial cityscape – has disappeared under pristine developer-owned streets (2013: 125).

In response to the planning documents submitted on behalf of the Coal Drops Yard development, Historic England offered architectural guidance to uphold the 'Victorian industrial heritage' of the site, with no

[52] https://www.kentishtowner.co.uk/2013/03/01/top-5-lost-london-nightclubs-of-the-90s/
[53] https://www.wired.co.uk/article/st-kings-cross-tech-hub

mention of more recent cultural histories.[54] In this setting, Spiritland stands about as close as King's Cross gets to having any sustained or reimagined musical and auditory legacy. Given the wider urban context, which has seen half of the UK's nightclubs close since 2005; 35% of live music venues since 2008; as well a drastic decrease in other 'shared spaces' such as pubs, youth clubs, and libraries (Harris 2018), it is important to think critically about this shift from Bagley's to Spiritland. This structural context is key, and my intention is less about directing any individual criticism toward Spiritland. However, it is useful, as Fabian Holt has argued, to move beyond notions of the intrinsic value of musical spaces, instead paying attention to the variations between them, as 'units of analysis for understanding musical and cultural change in neighbourhood contexts' (2013: 153). As such, analysis needs to be qualitative not quantitative, recognising the ambivalence of musical spaces through the ways in which they may simultaneously be 'integral to the gentrification processes that threaten their continued existence' (Thompson 2016: 7).

Fig 3.1 Coal Drops Yard in 2022. Courtesy of Alena Veasey/Shutterstock.

In the summer of 2020, I visited Coal Drops Yard with Byron Biroli, who had attended Bagley's on a weekly basis between 1997 and 2000. We conducted an informal interview on foot, seeking out features that might evoke memories. As we walked around, it was striking how the area had transformed beyond recognition. He had been to Coal Drops Yard on several previous occasions, but it was not until I pointed out the building that had once housed Bagley's that he was able to make the connection. He described to me how his journeys to the club had involved what felt like an exploratory trek through near empty space – 'you

[54] http://camdocs.camden.gov.uk/HPRMWebDrawer/Record/5407636/file/document?inline

were just going past dead buildings, it just felt like nothing.' In 2020, the sheer scale of the redevelopment had erased any architectural links with this history. In his words, 'it was just wasteland, now its flats flats flats.'[55] The closest we could find to any physical reminder was an elevated walkway along the old railway viaduct, which had been named 'Bagley Walk'. Elsewhere in Coal Drops Yard, we located a small display of photos, documenting the area's legacy for club culture. While informative, it was hidden away in the recesses of a stairwell – symbolic of the value this legacy was ascribed within the broader context of the redevelopment.

The marketing discourse around the Coal Drops Yard development offers further material with which to situate this legacy in the context of local urban regeneration. On their website, Coal Drops Yard are keen to emphasise how they are embedded in the local area's musical and cultural heritage, describing how the buildings were once 'the beating heart of London's ecstasy-fuelled club scene', hosting 'some of the most iconic nights in clubbing history'. The close relationship between the decline of this scene and one of Europe's largest urban regeneration projects is reduced to a simple fatalistic statement, which states that 'as with all good things, the scene came to an end.' In this reductionist narrative, 'The Coal Drops Yard shopping district is just the latest chapter in the colourful history of these buildings.' We are told that this reimagined post-industrial architecture 'provides the backdrop for something that's very London, and very much now'.[56] The musical and cultural legacy of the area is evoked to validate the new development, adding edge and (sub)cultural capital. As Richard Florida (2002: 228) argued as part of his creative cities thesis, 'music is a key part of what makes a place authentic.' However, where an active nightlife scene would entail dealing with the tensions inherent in imagined and lived realities of local 'vibrancy' (see Kusiak 2014), evoking a historic legacy is a safer mode of authentication.

In this context, Spiritland, as the sole musical space in the development, can be understood as a material manifestation of local legacies of DJ and music culture, refracted through the cleaner, more ordered aesthetics of post-regeneration King's Cross. As much as audiophile sound contains the potential for transformative auditory experiences, its elevation of detail and fidelity over volume and visceral affect makes it far less disruptive in urban contexts. In Schafer's terms, the internal hi-fi soundscape of audiophile bars is far more conducive to sustaining a hi-fi soundscape in the external context of the street.

As well as thinking about how Spiritland fits into the historic and contemporary soundscapes of King's Cross, it is useful to explore how it fits into broader notions of 'culture', as evoked within the rebranding of the local area. Adorning the home page of the Coal Drops Yard website as well as physical awnings around the site is the capitalised maxim, 'Stores Dining Culture'. According to their website:

> Coal Drops Yard is a place to stumble upon something new, to meet with the unexpected. A place where art, commerce and culture come together… There are stores here that you know (but perhaps not as you know them), and stores that you don't. What unites is that they offer an

[55] Interview 7th July 2020.
[56] https://www.coaldropsyard.com/history-of-coal-drops-yard/

> experience that's out of the ordinary, that goes beyond being a place to buy… Coal Drops Yard is challenging the trend of faceless, endless, mass supply and demand by redefining what 'consumption' means. Because to consume something fully, you must be fully engaged in the experience. And the experience is everything.[57]

In this branding discourse, art and 'culture' are evoked to mediate commercial imperatives. Culture is deployed to provide 'a respectable veneer because…to be cultured is to be civilized' (Miles 2013: 124). This discourse looks knowingly down upon 'mere consumption', idealising an all-encompassing, engaged consumer experience, such that a process as banal as shopping begins to overlap with more transcendent notions of 'Culture'. In this blurring of categories, culture is not just commodified, but transformed into a resource – any notion of a transcendent, valuable experience is folded into an expanded notion of expediency (Yúdice 2003). Within this framework, Spiritland shoulders a great responsibility, providing culture in what is otherwise essentially a shopping district. Although my own experience at Spiritland was of a space seemingly not that dissimilar from other bars, I would argue that the listening discourse around audiophile bars affords them a particular cultural status, tapping into auditory hierarchies as well as hierarchies of attention. This status is most evident given the recent opening of Spiritland's second outlet, this time inside the hallowed walls of the Royal Festival Hall. Despite the increasing relationship between nightlife and cultural institutions in recent years, it is perhaps telling that an audiophile bar is the first more permanent manifestation of a nightlife venue inside one of London's major institutional spaces.

[57] https://www.coaldropsyard.com/about/

Conclusion

As Marie Thompson argues, we cannot characterise noise as inherently good or bad - any sense of its (un)desirability is necessarily 'secondary, relational and contextual' (2017: 120). The same can be said of 'audiophile' sound. Despite lingering hierarchies of music/noise, mind/body, and high/low culture, hi-fidelity sound can be employed to facilitate transformative individual and collective experiences, or can simultaneously be evoked as a more civilised, 'sociable' form of urban musical culture. By situating Spiritland in the context of gentrification, culture-led regeneration, and the pressures faced by London's nightlife scenes, I have demonstrated how thinking in greater depth about listening, music, and sound can inform understandings of culture in urban space. Where audiophile bars are for the most part independently run, grassroots venues, their relation to orderings of urban sociability lies outside typical categorisations of underground and mainstream. In this way, the urban and cultural status of different musical spaces is constructed through sonic practices, listening, and performance, as well as their spatial and temporal location in the rhythms of the city.

The critiques in this chapter are not intended to discredit audiophile bars directly. They afford new cultures of listening and DJ performance practices, which have (re)integrated a diversity of genres and musical repertoires into London's nightlife scenes. DJs such as Donna Leake – a former resident at Brilliant Corners – have developed international careers afforded by London's ecology of audiophile bars. Moreover, in their continuation of musical practices in part established by London's rare groove scenes in the 1970s and 80s, audiophile bars function as a reinscribed extension of localised musical legacies. Where this might signal the familiar co-option of a multicultural musical practice within what predominantly tend to be white, middle class spaces of consumption, it is important to highlight the opening of JUMBI in Peckham in 2022, followed a year later by its Tottenham sister venue, MOKO, which reimagine the listening bar concept as a celebration of the 'sounds & flavours of the African-Caribbean diaspora.'[58] In this way, where audiophile bars form a distinct cultural and urban category in contrast with nightclubs and other spaces of social dancing, different listening bars carry a diverse range of meanings, values, and identities, which mediate their relation to the spaces and times of the city.

In spatial and temporal orderings of urban culture, audiophile bars represent the conjoining of day and night, repositioning DJ culture within a static listening environment. As I have argued, this affords audiophile bars a unique position within hierarchies of culture, sociability, and urban space. In the next chapter, I take these issues further, exploring the relocation of dance music culture into London's major museums and galleries. This raises questions about the relationship between institutions, popular culture, and the creative and night-time economies, while pointing toward the possibility of new economic infrastructures and hybrid cultural forms.

[58] https://www.jumbipeckham.com

Chapter 4. Nights at the museum: electronic dance music and cultural institutions

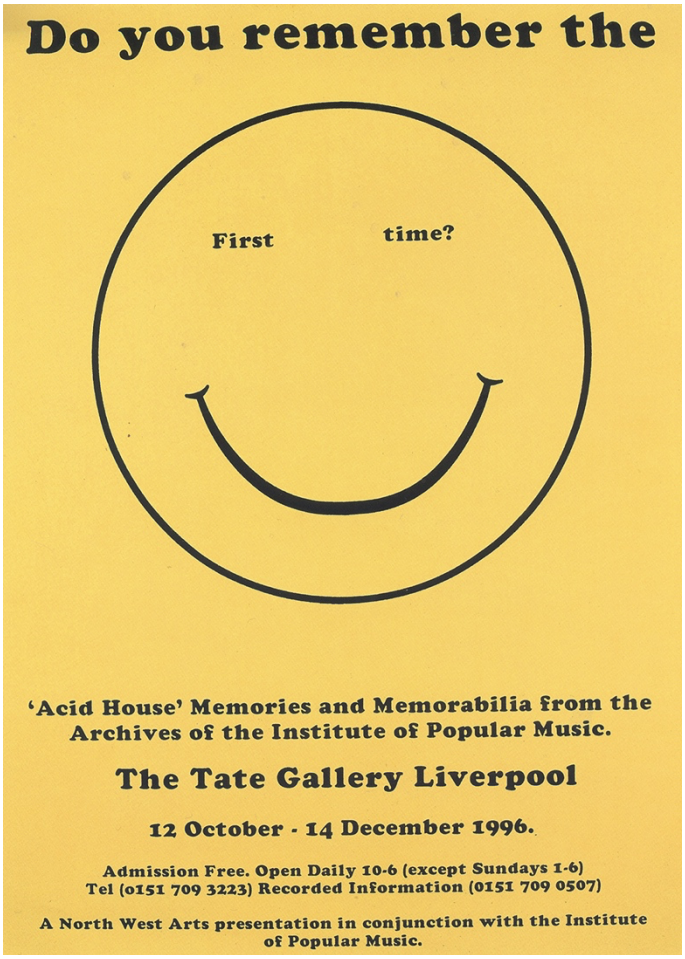

Fig 4.1 Jeremy Deller. 1995. *Do You Remember the First Time?* Glasgow: Toby Webster Ltd.

In the mid 1990s, the British artist Jeremy Deller produced a poster entitled 'Do You Remember the First Time?', which depicted an imaginary exhibition on acid house at the Tate Liverpool. At this moment, electronic dance music culture had achieved a high level of popularity and cultural influence in the U.K., but it was not until more than two decades later that an exhibition resembling the sort that Deller had imagined would take place. Despite this delay in electronic dance music culture's recognition by the U.K.'s major museums and galleries, it would be simplistic to suggest that rave was the victim of unfair treatment, or that it was somehow resistant to institutionalisation. In parallel with the populism of early rave culture and the commercial success of the club culture that would follow, electronic dance music's historical development has been accompanied by a wealth of writing in newspapers, magazines, books, and blogs, as

well as a growing ecology of academic literature, research, and pedagogy. Where electronic music's lack of lyrics was understood to be radical in its foregrounding of timbre, rhythm, and bodily affect (Gilbert and Pearson 1999), its non-discursive nature has simultaneously given rise to a tradition of intellectual and often speculative writing, as can be seen in the work of influential writers including Simon Reynolds, Mark Fisher, and Steve Goodman,[59] which straddles the worlds of academic and popular publication. This body of written work points toward the complexities involved in any reproduction of the affective qualities of dance music culture, as well as the broader cultural politics of the relation between popular culture, academia, and institutions. While these writers are keen to draw attention to Black and working-class dance music culture through their theorisations of the 'Hardcore Continuum' (Reynolds 2010), their predominantly white middle-class identities, as well as their tendency to draw casually on critical theory – whether writing for academia, blog posts, or popular books – demonstrates the longer-term and often paradoxical relation between dance music culture and its institutional production. As Andrea Fraser (2005) has argued in relation to art, institutional critique was always already institutionalised, and thus any attempts to escape the institutions of art have primarily served to drive its expansion. Indeed, it is difficult to assess the role of such discourse in mediating the everyday practices of electronic dance music culture, but it has undeniably contributed toward the influence of certain demographics, musical canons, and approaches to writing in dance music journalism and criticism, the broader social and political effects of which have only recently come under scrutiny (R.O.S.H. 2020).

Rather than exploring broader historical and theoretical questions about electronic dance music's institutional mediation, this chapter focuses on the period beginning around 2015, when electronic music began to be regularly featured in the programming of London's major museums and galleries. Where this can be understood as an extension of dance music's longer-term relationship with the worlds of academia and art, it raises new issues regarding the more direct role that institutions are playing in the spatio-temporal economies and cultures of nightlife. Despite the obvious growth of this relationship, it has received almost no critical attention among scholars or electronic music communities, aside from a handful of journalistic articles outside of the specialist dance music press (see Amoako 2020; Oltermann 2020; Dicker 2021; Rietveld 2022; Prashar-Savoie 2023).

Where much writing on dance music culture has framed its history as one of commercialisation, this chapter draws attention to the dynamics raised by new forms of institutional involvement. Given dance music's firmly established entanglements with the cultural and economic life of cities, debates around authenticity tend to be bound up with an increasingly distant nostalgia, as well as ongoing practices of subcultural distinction (Thornton 1995). As Robin James (2020a) notes, such distinctions may be mediated via race, gender, and class, in which idealisations of cultural autonomy are detached from the unequal access to resources among musicians and cultural producers. Moreover, where the participation of museums and

[59] Goodman has a PhD in philosophy and has held various academic teaching positions in the field of sonic culture, alongside his influential production work as Kode 9, and founding of the seminal record label, Hyperdub. Several other DJs straddle the worlds of performance and research, including King Britt, madison moore, Gigsta, and Lynee Denise.

galleries might point toward the emergent role of state and municipal infrastructures in the production of dance music culture, it is important to note that popular music was never a 'purely free market form' (Cloonan 2007: 141). Rather, this chapter takes the relation between dance music and cultural institutions as a starting point, constructing the beginnings of a history of this relationship. I foreground the tensions in many institutional engagements with dance music culture, while drawing attention to the vital – and mutually beneficial – role that institutions can play in the production of sustainable and innovative cultural forms.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the contemporary museum more broadly, exploring its role as a site of both knowledge production and entertainment, as well as its entanglements with urban and creative economies. I consider the representation of popular music in museums, arguing that many scholars' focus on the (im)possibility of reproducing sound, obscures the more intricate relations between space and sociality that are key to dance music culture. Following this theoretical outline, the main body of the chapter charts a three-part history of the relationship between electronic dance music and London's cultural institutions from 2015 to the present. I frame this history as one of growth and transformation, in which earlier interactions have laid the groundwork for a more nuanced and reciprocal relationship to develop over time. The first part focusses on museum and gallery 'Lates', exploring the role of institutions in the events culture of the night-time economy. Where these events provide vital income for performers, I argue that it is largely institutions who benefit, drawing on the (sub)cultural capital of nightlife to attract new audiences and reinvigorate the museum sector. The second part examines two large-scale retrospectives on dance music culture, exploring their role in forming public histories, as well as the complex relationship between heritage and the ongoing production of popular music culture. This section also draws attention to the nuances of reproducing dance music's affective qualities, exploring the contested identity of museums as sites of knowledge production, entertainment, and experience. The third and final part focusses on the programming of electronic music at the ICA, demonstrating how a more collaborative relationship is producing not only mutually beneficial funding structures, but is also contributing toward the development of a new cultural ecology, in which artistic and spatial distinctions become increasingly blurred. To conclude, I discuss the emergent frameworks of 'conceptronica' and 'interdependency', drawing on writing by Robin James (2020a) to explore the urgent role institutions can play in the precarity of contemporary urban and cultural contexts.

The 'critical museum'?

During the 1980s, scholars sought to denaturalise the idea and function of the museum, exposing its intimate intertwinements with legacies of imperialism, racism, and cultural elitism. In its most tangible aspects, this included discussions around the appropriation, ownership and repatriation of artefacts 'acquired' by colonial powers. More broadly, researchers explored the role of the museum as a crucial site in the production of power, knowledge, and ideology, as part of the seemingly hidden structures of what Tony Bennett (1988) termed the 'exhibitionary complex'. Where the prisons and asylums of Foucault's "carceral archipelago" exert power through individualised, psychological means, Bennett argued that museums and galleries function through more public processes of education and entertainment (2015: 4). At the birth of the modern museum in the nineteenth-century, cultural institutions were used by many Western nation states to construct norms of civil identity and behaviour, which would later become naturalised in the practices of class-based social distinction that Bourdieu famously identified in the latter half of the twentieth century (1984; 1997). In this sense, we need to conceive of institutions as 'not only buildings and organisations, but also systematic and specific social values and practices' (Willis 1990: 2).

Following critiques put forward by the so-called 'New Museology', contemporary practitioners have sought to reimagine the museum's potential, working to diversify collections, staff, and audiences. Recognising the symbolic influence retained by many major cultural institutions, scholars have looked toward the possibility of a 'critical museum', which seeks ways to redeploy its 'collections, its cultural authority, its *auratic* space and resources to give voice to the underrepresented' (Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2015: 8). In this contemporary formulation, the museum is transformed from a temple to a forum, in which the one-way transmission of knowledge from expert curator to passive audience is exchanged for more open and inclusive opportunities for dialogue and participation, with the museum reimagined as an interactive and democratic 'contact zone' (Clifford 1997). Rather than seeking a wholesale rejection of institutional authority, contemporary conceptions of the museum aim to reapply and reimagine its social, cultural, and political influence, in ways that can encourage reconsiderations of 'that which was previously known, imperfectly understood or marginalized' (Curtis 2015: 129).

While the museum and gallery sector has done much to adapt, they remain spaces fraught with contradiction. Where postmodernism suggested that the elite autonomy of high art had dissolved into the more diffuse realm of visual culture, contemporary galleries remain bound up with hierarchies of social distinction, even if these are less clear cut than those outlined by Bourdieu earlier in the twentieth century (Prior 2011). Alongside the widening of museum audiences, their expansion has also been accompanied by the continuous rise of entrance fees, as well as the 'creation of new forms of elite participation', including memberships that provide patrons with access to exclusive spaces and events (Fraser 2005). More recently, critics have also drawn attention to the tokenistic nature of many large galleries' engagements with diversity in their programming and hiring of staff, which tend to individualise systemic problems, and thus sustain and reinforce existing structures of exclusion (The White Pube 2021). As Tony Bennett has argued, liberal

notions of 'tolerance' can serve as new frameworks of governmentality, 'by managing the demands for recognition and difference of marginal groups in ways that leave intact the forces that marginalize them.' In this way, reimagined conceptions of the museum as a site of cosmopolitanism may simultaneously function as part of 'contemporary reorderings of the relations between museums and liberal forms of governmentality' (2015: 10-11).

Museums in urban and creative economies

Urban museums need also be understood as part of cultural and creative economies. Many contemporary museums have a close relationship with market-oriented conceptions of culture, complicating the boundaries between public and private cultural institutions (McGuigan 2005). This can be seen in rise of corporate sponsorship since the late 1980s (McGuigan 2015), but also as a by-product of many institutions' attempts to attract wider audiences. As part of efforts to distance themselves from lingering associations with elite connoisseurship, many museums have reinvented themselves as multi-purpose destinations, which appeal in equal parts to entertainment and education (Prior 2011: 509). Such reinventions may be interpreted as the creative repurposing of space, or as part of a simultaneous process of 'selling-out' (Gray 2015: 6). In an institutional environment oriented increasingly around profit, the business models of most large museums and galleries have become dependent on the programming of high-profile "blockbuster" shows, which tend to be accompanied by a growing range of merchandise and hospitality offerings (Fraser 2005). As Nick Prior has argued, contemporary museums are perhaps best understood as complex and contradictory, marked at once by their 'residual appeal to connoisseurship as well as their homage to consumer culture, their role in reproducing social inequalities as well as their increasing democratization' (2011: 522)

Museums have also become more closely entangled with the 'generalised arena of the cultural and creative industries' (Gray 2015: 6). Part of this shift relates to the repurposing of museums and galleries as sites of performance and entertainment. Yet alongside these changes in the day-to-day – and night-to-night – use of institutional spaces, the museum's broader function has also transformed, with implications for its relationship to the city. Inspired primarily by the success of the Guggenheim Bilbao, museums have emerged as a core component of urban renewal and city branding strategies (Zukin 2010). For cities produced increasingly at the level of images, the cultural clout and architectural spectacle of museums assigns them an important role in practices of place making and urban development. In many cases, there is a disconnect between the symbolism represented by the opening of high-profile institutions and the forms of local regeneration they are intended to stimulate (Communian and Mould 2014). Rather, many museums and galleries can be understood as a means through which cities exert forms of 'soft power', through 'ideas, knowledge, values and culture' (Lord and Blankenberg 2015: 9) Where Bennett's 'exhibitionary complex' highlighted the historic role of institutions in the construction of national identity,

many contemporary museums are bound up with the production of cities, at local and global scales. In Richard Florida's 'creative city', museums are positioned within a wider ecology of cultural spaces, which attract and attach people to places through the appeal of entertainment offerings, a sense of openness, and physical aesthetics (Ibid. 2). Within this framework, values of tolerance – which can be produced through the activities of institutions including museums – are reduced to a simple metric alongside talent and technology, supporting the development of urban creative economies (Ibid. 14-5).

Popular music museums, sound, and social space

The programming of popular music in museums raises its own set of questions for curators, drawing attention to issues of sound, temporality, and representation. Writing in the 1960s, Adorno drew attention to the phonetic association between 'museum' and 'mausoleum', arguing that the conservationism at the core of museums owes 'more to historical respect than to the needs of the present'. This focus on preservation serves effectively to neutralise culture: 'art is lost when it has relinquished its place in the immediacy of life, in its functional context' (Adorno 1967: 175-180). The potential for such neutralisation is exacerbated when dealing with popular music culture, given the ephemeral qualities of musical performance, as well as its ongoing existence as a lived, contemporary culture. For Simon Reynolds, the

> museum – a becalmed resting place for works of art considered to have passed the test of time – is opposed to the vital energies of pop and rock . . . Pop is about the momentary thrill; it can't be a permanent exhibit (2011: 3).

Given the static, material focus of museums, music exhibitions have tended to focus on the display of physical objects. Many early exhibitions dealing with popular music in the UK, such as the British Music Experience in Liverpool, or Sheffield's short-lived National Centre for Popular Music, were largely orientated around ancillary memorabilia including posters, stage outfits, and instruments, which for Reynolds, suppressed the 'crucial element of sound'. The primacy of vision is enshrined in the architecture of many museums and galleries, which have tended to privilege discrete notions of artworks or artefacts as 'individual and independent aesthetic objects' (Pallasmaa 2014: 239). Considering this architectural and sensory prejudice, much scholarly discussion of the relation between museums and sound has shared a practical focus, exploring ways of organising musical exhibits that avoid sound bleed (Edge 2000). Such strategies might involve listening stations with headphones, directional speakers, or acoustically treated sound booths. Others argue that complex sound environments are a reality of contemporary urban and musical life, such that the popular music museum need not concern itself with containing and isolating sound (Baker, Istvandity, and Nowak 2016: 76). Salomé Voegelin goes further, suggesting that sound

affords new ways of interacting with museums, dissolving the 'separation of galleries, works, inside and outside' to produce more relational modes of engagement (2014: 126).

Whether or not sound is taken to be compatible with the museum space, Reynolds argument rests on two core assumptions about museums and popular music. Firstly, that the sonic experience is fundamental to popular music culture, and secondly, that the museum should seek to reproduce this experience. In response, scholars have argued that the curation of objects and displays can be used as a vehicle to conjure up audiences' own experiences and memories:

> The invocation of immaterial heritage and intangible memories related to that heritage requires the tangibility of objects . . . In fact, objects become animated by way of patrons' memories and the affect generated . . . The focus of the popular music exhibition could therefore be seen as the story of artists and the creation of popular music discourse *in situ* rather than the music itself (Baker, Istvandity, and Nowak 2016: 77).

This formulation rests on a more dialogic relation between the exhibition and its audiences, in which value is generated at the intersection of objects and patrons' own experiences. While dependent on memory, this draws attention to objects functioning as catalysts, rather than as ends in themselves.

In shifting attention away from the primacy of music, this kind of curatorial approach is also more inclusive. It recognises the diversity of ways in which people interact and engage with popular music culture, whether through fashion, drugs, spaces (both public and private), dancing, and social interaction. Historically, the production and consumption of dance music has been mediated along lines of gender, limiting performance opportunities, as well as the accessibility of spaces such as record shops, studios, and nightclubs (Farrugia 2012; Stirling 2016). In this way, it is important to recognise how Reynolds' (2011: 3) emphasis on music as 'the main thing itself', valorises a particular mode of engagement with musical culture, while excluding other forms of participation.

In the case of dance music and club culture more specifically, music cannot be considered in separation from the 'total space' of the nightclub, in which sound has an interrelated function alongside drugs, lighting, and other 'spatial technologies' (Esteve 2018: 147). This draws attention not only to the non-musical aspects of club culture, but also to the ways in which sound and other spatial technologies are 'initiatory of socio-spatial relations' (Born 2013: 23). In this way, the aesthetic qualities of dance music culture – produced at the intersection of sound and 'total space' – are intimately entangled with its politics. This space represents dance music's ambivalent social potential, as a site of both encounter and exclusion (Saldanha 2007).

Engaging with the sonic, social, and spatial construction of the club means engaging with dance music culture's relation to issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Where dance music communities have rightfully called into question assumptions regarding the desexualised utopia of the dancefloor in recent years (Roberts 2017; Kakaire 2019), it is also important to recognise the ways in which rave culture provided opportunities to challenge 'normative heterosexual femininity' – a shift which took place on the dancefloor

itself, despite men's continued dominance in the more obviously visible (and audible) realms of production and performance (Pini 2001: 17). This means elevating the role of dancers, audiences, and listeners in depictions of dance music's histories, alongside that of DJs and producers. Dance music culture provides a useful lens through which institutions can attempt to move beyond grand interpretive narratives of musical culture, which have often tended to elevate the role of individuals over the more complex realities of the collective. Brian Eno (1996: 354) has described this as a conceptual shift from genius to 'scenius' – a focus on communal creativity which is relevant to the blurred performer–audience dynamics that characterise much of electronic dance music culture (Fikentscher 2000).

As madison moore argues, such pluralistic approaches to music history gain a new urgency when dealing with the concealed worlds of queer nightlife. These tend not only to be overlooked by definitions of institutional respectability, but further, have actively resisted documentation as a key survival strategy. In this way, moore proposes an expansion of the museum archive to encompass the full typology of nightclubs' messy and ephemeral residues:

> One unlikely archival site for exploring the possibilities and potentialities of queer nightlife is the dance floor. Not 'the dance floor' as a metaphor for worldmaking – the actual *floor* itself. Anyone who has been to or performed at a club, a rave, a drag show, a sex club or who has thrown a party or run a venue knows that when the party is over, the floor is disgusting. The floors in queer nightlife spaces are a wet, hot, sweaty netherworld, where the bathroom floor might be caked in sweat and soggy toilet paper, and where as you move through the venue you might be wading through an elixir of haze, spilled booze, glitter, crushed drink cups and cans, straws, cum, poppers metro cards, debit cards, bills, coins, tiny drug bags, lighters, dirt, cigarettes, loose tobacco, and rolling paper (moore 2021: 195).

By drawing attention to the dregs of the queer dancefloor, moore demonstrates how a broadened definition of archival objects can contribute to the documentation of queer nightlife's past, as well as its ongoing present. Such a shift needs to be embraced by institutional representations of nightlife if the vital role played by queer communities in the ongoing history of dance music and club culture is to be more fully recognised (Buckland 2002; Garcia 2022). More broadly, if the practice of archiving might typically stifle the life out of objects, moore argues that the process itself should remain as fun and dynamic as its materials: 'queer sleaze offers not just a trace or an indication of the pleasure. It *is* the pleasure' (2021: 196). In this way, finding strategies to evoke the ephemeral qualities of the club space is about more than just constructing an immersive experience – it affords a deeper engagement with the diverse and often marginalised communities that make up club culture. Where the critical museum may exist in direct tension with the pressures of the 'experience economy', this kind of archival practices suggests a possible resolution, in which the reinvention of the museum as a site of entertainment and fun can simultaneously contribute to the production of newly critical histories.

Electronic dance music and 'a culture of lates'

In the mid-2010s, the first phase of the emergent relationship between electronic dance music and London's major cultural institutions began with the increasing programming of electronic music performances as part of museum and gallery 'Lates'. These events occupy a different temporal and conceptual space to the more conventional institutional engagements that would emerge toward the end of the 2010s and early 2020s. Rather than treating musical culture as an object to be exhibited, Lates involve processes of spatial and temporal reprogramming, in which museums host performances that would more typically take place in clubs or music venues. Like gallery openings and private views, Lates are set at the convergence of both day and night, with the 'intention to bind the durability of the exhibit to the momentary sociability of the party' (Straw 2014: 197). In this way, Late events may be conceptualised as part of a generalised shift toward the 'museum-as-entertainment', in which institutions have sought to distance themselves from prior associations with tradition and elitism (Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2015: 6). Such shifts point toward the possibility of a more open museum, while raising questions about the function of institutions when repositioned as part of the creative and night-time economies. Moreover, given the importance of branding for contemporary museums, as well as the role played by museums and nightlife in wider strategies of place-making (Prior 2011), Late events are a useful site for an exploration of the increasing entanglements between cultural institutions, municipal visions of urban culture, and the (sub)cultural capital held by electronic dance music scenes.

Over the last two decades, Lates have served as a meeting point for London's cultural institutions and the previously distinct ecology of the night-time economy. According to a 2018 Arts Council UK funded report, Lates are defined as 'events which start after 5pm that take place in Museums, Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Heritage Sites and Sacred Sites and Historic Houses' (Culture24 2018: 5). In London, the culture of Lates began in 1999, when the Royal Academy of Arts opened its Monet exhibition for 24 consecutive hours. The V&A launched their first regular Late event shortly after in 2001. Such events are now so popular that almost six thousand Lates took place in London between 2009-2018, carving out a distinct place in the city's nocturnal urban culture. At a time when museum attendance has generally been dwindling, Lates create a broader window for generating income and attract new audiences. Where many museums tend to struggle with drawing younger demographics, Lates aim to reconfigure the museum as a social space, based around food, drink, music, and performance (Ibid. 8). They are intended to favour interaction, such that museum visits are envisioned as 'a leisure activity not a learning opportunity', in which the night-time adds a specific 'atmospheric element' (34). In this way, Lates may be conceived as one part of the contemporary museum's turn toward the economy of experience (Noordegraaf 2004).

Electronic dance music corresponds appropriately with such strategies: bringing new forms of (sub)cultural capital; close associations with sociability and the night-time; and an often-elusive younger demographic. Over the course of the 2010s, it became common for Lates to be curated around electronic dance music as their core component. After a few early events at the V&A, this tendency was solidified

with the founding of 'Uniqlo Tate Lates' at the Tate Modern in 2016, and 'Concrete Lates' at the Queen Elizabeth Hall two years later. At these events, institutional spaces would be temporarily transformed using sound systems, DJ equipment, and pop-up bars. This created novel juxtapositions in which the imposing architecture of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall or the V&A's grand entrance foyer was reimagined as a space centred around electronic music, dance, and conviviality. The events felt risky: intoxicated revellers stumbled around chaotically, spilling drinks on historic marble floors. Pounding bass disrupted notions of the museum as a space for silent contemplation, with vibrations threatening the fragile sanctity of rare and priceless objects.

Where this collision of culture was provocative, it often struggled to evoke much more than an approximation of rave: museum spaces tend to be cavernous, and their acoustics are ill-suited to amplified music. As one DJ described his experience performing at a Tate Late event, the sound system was 'definitely an afterthought.' Given the lack of a more thorough engagement with the aesthetic and spatial reproduction of rave, he went on to suggest that 'it seemed to mainly exist as an event so the Tate / Uniqlo could say they were doing it rather than to actually put on something engaging or worthwhile.'[61] According to his interpretation, Late events function as a means for institutions to capitalise on the subcultural value of club culture, while failing to engage with the more complex processes of building communities around music and space.

For the Tate, the benefits of their Uniqlo Late series are clear. The events have brought approximately 150,000 new visitors to the gallery and have doubled the number of BAME and young audiences on the nights of events.[62] With Lates functioning as a new 'contact zone', these audiences are then more likely to feel welcome in museums and galleries more broadly. While difficult to measure, it is less obvious that Late events have fed new audiences back into electronic music scenes. To be sure, Late events exist as just one part of a wider nightlife ecology, alongside bars, venues, and clubs. Despite their name, Lates tend to take place in the early evening rather than the night-time, with little risk of them existing in direct competition with nightclubs.

However, context is important is here, in that the emergence of electronic music at museum Late events occurred in direct parallel with London's epidemic of nightclub closures in the 2010s. This context carved out a more urgent function for institutions, who were able to provide artists with gigs, curatorial opportunities, and income. Museums and galleries tended to offer generous fees, which for less established artists, were often higher than what they would receive in many small nightclubs. As well as providing space, institutions acted as intermediaries, connecting public and private funding sources with electronic dance music's own internal institutions. The Late events at the Tate Modern worked in partnership with the clothing brand Uniqlo, as well as the online radio station NTS, who used their expertise and vast network of broadcasters to liaise with London's electronic music communities. Musicians were afforded access to otherwise unavailable spaces and resources, administered via the familiar and trusted intermediary of NTS

[61] Email communication 22nd March 2022.
[62] https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/corporate-support/partnership/uniqlo-tate-lates

radio. Where this structure could be seen as an encroachment of corporate involvement in electronic dance music culture, it simultaneously provided funds for artists in a way that ensured club culture remained independent from the demands associated with more direct forms of public or private sponsorship.

The director of the Tate Modern, Frances Morris, framed the Uniqlo Lates as events of 'cultural significance', which have had 'a great impact on London's nightlife.'[63] While many Late events were constrained via the acoustic limitations of museum and gallery spaces, they played a useful economic role, mediating access to resources during a moment of heightened precarity for London's electronic dance music cultures. When evaluating the impact of Lates on nightlife however, it is important to differentiate between dance music scenes and wider categorisations of urban nocturnal culture.

Since the establishment of the Night Czar role in 2016 and London's renewed municipal championing of the night, Lates have come to be considered a means through which museums and galleries can more directly contribute toward the UK's night-time economy. More specifically, Lates are considered an opportunity for such spaces to contribute toward a more *diverse* night-time economy, 'as they can offer a product that has the features of both a venue and a bar (and in some cases a nightclub)' (Culture24 2018: 23). Museum Lates have been understood as a 'more open and fluid' type of event, considered better placed to reflect 'city culture, cityscape and social life' (Evans 2012: 47). This focus on diversifying the night-time economy draws attention to the various modes of social exclusion that produce the 'internal coherence of alco-centric nightscapes' (Hadfield 2015: 612). Access to the spaces and times of the nocturnal city has long been marked by inequalities along lines including age, race, gender, sexuality, and class (Shaw 2018: 4).

At the same time, this discourse of diversification is centred on limited conceptions of the night-time economy, which define it primarily in relation to issues of excessive drinking and anti-social behaviour (Evans 2012: 47). Such definitions fail to recognise the diversity of electronic music scenes for example, as well as their significance for a range of different social groups. Seen in this light, it is suggested that reimagining museums as new kinds of night-time social space could play one part in 'turning the night-time economy debate *away from anti-social to social behaviour* [italics mine]' (Culture24 2018*:* 34). This shift in discourse is long-overdue in public and academic discussions of nightlife. However, enacting it via the relocation of club culture into museums and galleries has the potential to reinforce perceptions of traditional nightlife venues as inherently anti-social. Although museum Lates provided vital income for DJs and performers at this time, the vast pool of musicians from which Lates can build their programming is dependent on the longer-term sustainability of nightclubs, venues, and events. In other words, Lates contributed little to the spatial economies and infrastructures of London's nightlife.

However, the responsibility for this allocation of resources cannot be placed on institutions alone. As I have described, the organisation of many Late events occurred in close collaboration with platforms including NTS radio and Boiler Room, who are closely embedded in London's electronic dance music communities. In one of the earliest iterations of this, the V&A partnered with Boiler Room in January 2014 to produce a Friday Late event, 'Sound It Out', themed around an 'exploration of music's relationship to

[63] https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/uniqlo-tate-lates

technology.' After the event, Boiler Room published a blogpost reflecting on their involvement in the experience. The piece concludes by positioning the Late event as part of a broader attempt to elevate the relevance and status of London's cultural institutions on an international stage:

> Boiler Room's ethos – at heart, to showcase the best of modern music from intimate live performances and beam it across the world – was proven to be scalable and adaptable: from grimy warehouses right up to posh museums, surrounded by priceless art. There were wider implications, too: in New York you have music featured frequently at the MoMA and Guggenheim; there are plenty of cross-cultural events in Paris; Vienna has the Museumsquartier and Sydney has its Opera House as the nexus of the cities. In London, people have to be almost reminded that we have these amazing gallery settings, and their capacity to remain relevant is as strong as ever (Warsop 2014).

What may initially appear as the promotion of electronic dance music via new platforms, spaces, and audiences, is subsequently mediated through a global cities framework, in which urban culture is recast as a terrain of competition (Massey 2007). Where London's club culture would emerge to become more directly involved in city branding exercises only a couple of years a later – as part of what Alessio Kolioulis has termed a discourse of 'nightlife supremacy' (2018: 211) – at this stage, in 2014, electronic dance music was used to promote traditional cultural institutions as public-facing symbols of urban culture. Rather than suggesting how clubs or other nightlife spaces could themselves take on these kinds of 'cultural flagship' roles (Comunian and Mould 2014), the focus on institutional spaces' 'capacity to remain relevant' foregrounds their adaptability, while failing to elevate club culture's own struggles to adapt to new social and urban contexts.

Between 2015 and 2020, Lates were a core component of London's night-time culture. After the pandemic, many museums and galleries continued to host Late events, but their close relation with club culture diminished. The novelty of their spatial and temporal relocation could only last so long within dance music's evolving cycles of taste. In the longer-term however, Lates played an important role in demonstrating the potential for collaborations between the previously distinct worlds of nightlife and cultural institutions – both as economic infrastructures, as well as social and artistic ecologies. What had seemed like a distant possibility to Jeremy Deller in 1995, was now a material reality, and the relationship continued to evolve over the next few years.

Rave Retrospectives

Around 2019, the relationship between electronic dance music and London's cultural institutions shifted into a new phase, in which the museum assumed a more typical function. Several high-profile exhibitions charted broad retrospective histories of rave and club culture, at the Saatchi Gallery, Design Museum, and Barbican. These were set alongside numerous other examples of public cultural programming, including the BBC's screening of Jeremy Deller's documentary on acid house, 'Everybody in the Place: An Incomplete History of Britain 1984-1992'; as well as the Tate Britain's display of Mark Leckey's 1999 film, 'Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore', which chronicles British club scenes between the 1970s and 1990s. Many of these projects were programmed to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the second so called 'Summer of Love' in 1989, marking a moment in which it appeared that the legacies of UK rave culture were beginning to receive more formalised institutional recognition. These exhibitions revealed an expansion of existing trends toward the 'institutional archiving, collecting and exhibiting of popular music' (Leonard 2018: 261), while diversifying the remit of popular music as cultural heritage beyond the previously recognised canons of rock and pop.

Where these exhibitions represented a key historic moment in the institutional acceptance of rave as culture, they also highlighted many of the complexities involved in attempts to document and exhibit electronic dance music culture. To be sure, the display of any artefact in a museum is necessarily dependent on processes of representation, in which 'the fixity of an object's physical presence cannot deliver guarantees at the level of meaning' (Lidchi 2013: 129). As I have argued, the ephemeral qualities of social and sonic experience are crucial to any representation of the meanings of electronic dance music. Moreover, dance music's status as a culture that is at once historical *and* ongoing, demands modes of engagement in which evocations of the past are placed in close dialogic relation with the present. As Sarah Cohen has suggested, the 'transformation of music scenes into memory cultures' involves processes of both inclusion and exclusion. The forms of collective identity fostered by official celebrations of popular culture can simultaneously serve to obscure the (re)production of 'official and dominant music histories and heritages' (2013: 37-8).

In the following sections, I discuss two of the main exhibitions from this period, situating my own reflections alongside journalistic responses. I compare the curatorial framing of the exhibits with their critical reception, focussing on their attempts to evoke the experiential qualities of club culture, as well as their role in constructing public histories of dance music culture. These examples draw attention to dance music's ongoing institutional recognition, as well as the contested function of contemporary urban museums, combining functions of knowledge production and entertainment.

Sweet Harmony: Rave Today

The first of these major shows, 'Sweet Harmony: Rave Today', was held at the Saatchi Gallery in the summer of 2019. The exhibition included different media and displays, with a variety of artistic, experiential, and archival motivations. Much of the gallery space was devoted to photographic documentation of early rave and free party culture, including work by Dave Swindells, Tom Hunter, Vinca Petersen, and Mattko. Other parts of the exhibition were dedicated to more symbolic evocations, including a neon petrol station entitled 'Getting to the Rave', accompanied by a soundtrack of passing traffic and the distant throb of filtered beats. This installation was designed by Colin Nightingale and Stephen Dobbie, members of the interactive theatre company, Punchdrunk – a key organisation in the emergent 'immersive entertainment industry.'[64] Other rooms contained a pop-up record shop hosted by Vinyl Hunter, as well as Spotify-curated listening stations, built around subgenre playlists including happy hardcore, Balearic house, and Detroit techno. The exhibition concluded with a closing party that featured a b2b DJ set from Carl Cox and Fat Boy Slim, which was streamed live on YouTube. On the Saatchi Gallery website, 'Sweet Harmony' was framed as 'an immersive retrospective exhibition devoted to presenting a revolutionary survey of rave culture through the voices and lenses of those who experienced it.'[65]

Given that this was the first exhibition of its kind in the UK, it had the potential to play a significant role in the shaping of public discourse around the history and broader perception of dance music culture. At the same time, the exhibition embodied the multiple aims, functions, and tensions of contemporary museums and galleries. These are borne out in the close and often contradictory relationship between attempts to diversify cultural canons and audiences, alongside shifts toward the 'museum-as-entertainment' – guided by profit, mass appeal, and branding strategies (Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2015: 6). These tensions were evident in the involvements of the communications company, Premier, who described their PR work for the exhibition as shaping cultural awareness and public debate, alongside terminology that framed the exhibition as 'one of the smash hits of the summer' and 'part of the zeitgeist.'[66] Indeed, such dual functionality need not be mutually exclusive – throughout their history, museums have always worked via twin 'mechanisms of pedagogy and entertainment' (Bennett 2015: 4). In the case of the Saatchi Gallery, such tensions are of critical importance, given its outward appearance as a public sector gallery, despite Charles Saatchi's key role in the corporatisation of art and culture since the 1980s (Hatton and Walker 2000; McGuigan 2015). As the artist Mark Leckey has argued, galleries can function as a new way of commodifying dance music culture, repackaging it as something to be sold in the art market (Thorp 2019). The involvement of a commercial gallery introduces additional cultural and economic dynamics, in

[64] https://www.punchdrunk.com/about-us/
[65] https://www.saatchigallery.com/exhibition/sweet_harmony__youth_of_today
[66] https://www.premiercomms.com/work/2019/sweet-harmony-rave-today

which the function of objects as pedagogy and entertainment are mediated via longer-term trajectories of commoditisation.

If museums can both educate *and* entertain, space is created for a variety of different activities, fulfilling 'multiple purposes for multiple sets of actors' (Gray 2015: 8). This creates the possibility of a more open and democratic institution, in which different modes of audience engagement are valued equally – whether contemplating historic photographs, browsing records, or dancing: 'the museum experience is a multi-layered journey that is proprioceptive, sensory, intellectual, aesthetic, and social' (Levent and Pascual-Leone 2014: xiii). At the same time, this 'extreme hybrid form' (Moore 2000: 22) can lead to confusion and disagreements, given the potential for misalignments between the production of exhibits and the wide range of possible audience expectations. It is important to note that 'Sweet Harmony' took place in a gallery rather than a museum, in which artistic representations of rave culture functioned largely as a way of constructing a broad social and cultural history.

Many critical responses to 'Sweet Harmony' focussed on its limitations as an 'immersive experience'. Time Out argued that when 'curtained off against white gallery walls, rave culture is drained of its radical spirit' (Williams 2019), while Crack Magazine suggested that 'the exhibition feels oddly removed from the experience of partying, and desperately lacking in the spirit of the movement it claims to document' (Haque 2019). The Guardian contended that 'raves, often itinerant and messy affairs, sit in opposition to the very concept of a bricks-and-mortar institution' (Dicker 2021). In these reviews, it is unclear whether criticisms were perceived as the result of specific curatorial failings, or a wider reaching incompatibility in the relation between rave culture and institutions. However, critics appeared to agree that the affective, experiential qualities of electronic dance music should be core to any exhibit on dance music culture. After my own visit to the Saatchi, I was struck by its multiple aims, which sought to construct a history of dance music culture through original photographs and newly commissioned artworks, as well as a broader sense of experiential immersion. Taken together, they formed a rich and diverse programme, but at moments I felt unsure how to engage with it – whether as art, archive, or experience. The exhibit required audiences to switch between different modes of engagement. Artworks used imaginative techniques to evoke the affective legacies of rave, while original photographs could be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, alongside their archival function.

Given the uniqueness of the exhibition as one of the first large-scale retrospectives of rave culture, there is something inherently vital and radical in the process of archiving as an act of institutional recognition. The Saatchi Gallery appears committed to this kind of cultural practice, opening the UK's 'most comprehensive graffiti and street art exhibition' in early 2023.[67] At the same time, the retrospective quality of 'Sweet Harmony' sat more awkwardly with the longer-term durations of dance music, as an ongoing, contemporary culture. Curators were careful to involve young local DJs as part of the Lates programme, but they were largely eclipsed by performances from big-name historic artists including Fatboy Slim, Carl Cox, and Chris Liberator. In its construction of a history, the exhibition necessarily formed temporal

[67] https://www.saatchigallery.com/exhibition/beyond_the_streets_london

boundaries around a culture which has continued to evolve since the 1980s and 90s. As Stuart Hall argued, any attempt to impose a historical beginning or end on culture is a necessarily selective process, which 'foreshortens, silences, disavows, forgets and elides' the possibility of alternate narratives (1999: 5). Further caution need be exercised in the institutional reproduction of canons in popular music, given its 'relatively late recognition . . . by archives and museum sectors' – such that any invocation of its 'past is instead already "pre-formed"' (Baker, Doyle and Homan 2016: 9).

In this way, where 'Sweet Harmony' returned acid house and rave culture to the forefront of public cultural discourse, it did little to challenge to the dominant historical narratives surrounding UK rave and club culture, that were firmly established two decades prior in popular texts including those by Matthew Collin (1997) and Simon Reynolds (2013). These histories have since been disputed in work such as that by Caspar Melville (2020) for example, which foregrounds the overlooked role of Black artists in the development of British dance music culture. Given that 'Sweet Harmony' was the UK's first major retrospective on rave culture, it is unsurprising that it reproduced existing historical canons, functioning as just the first stage in a newly public, institutional discourse. However, with such a wide body of popular and academic research to draw on, curators could have positioned the exhibition as a more radical act of intervention. 'Sweet Harmony' may have been progressive within the context of the museum and gallery sector, but it existed as part of a much longer legacy of dance music discourse, produced through academic and popular texts, cinema (Morrison 2012), and fiction (Morrison 2021).

In its bounded retrospective focus, the exhibition left audiences to evaluate the legacies of early rave culture in relation to contemporary contexts. Many reviewers pointed out the irony of the exhibition being held in the Saatchi gallery: the Saatchi brothers were closely involved in Conservative Party election campaigns shortly before the passing of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act in 1994, which criminalised rave and free party culture. However, reviewers neglected to mention the irony of an exhibition on rave taking place at a moment when dance music culture was perceived to be in decline. Time Out's only mention of the more contemporary aspects of the show was to draw attention to Anna-Lena Krause's post club portraits from 2016, and the ways in which their subjects projected an aching self-awareness in contrast to the 'carefree chaos' of early rave (Williams 2019). This reproduced a simplistic narrative of dance music culture's history framed as a generalised loss of authenticity, with little attempt to scrutinise the social, spatial, and political nuances of contemporary club culture. There is value in constructing newly public histories of rave and dance music culture, but these histories need to be placed into dialogue with the contemporary moment. How, for example, have the legacies of the Criminal Justice Act shaped contemporary relations between cultural policy and the night-time economy? What is the relationship between pop music as heritage and the ongoing work of cultural producers and nightlife organisers? As was pointed out in a Guardian article published a few years later, any public perspective gained through the museumification of rave need to be 'brought to bear on sustainably funding, diversifying and enriching club culture' (Dicker 2021).

'Sweet Harmony' and its critical responses serve as a useful case study for exploring the contemporary museum, in which the construction of critical histories; the curation of experiences; and the

ongoing production of contemporary culture, function in close and often contradictory relation. The contested purpose of the exhibit was exemplified by much of the media response, in which perceived experiential failings drew attention not only to the complexity of representing popular music culture, but also to the diversity of expectations around museums and galleries. Where reviewers were keen to point out the exhibition's failings as an 'immersive experience', they did little to explore how this might relate to the production of critical histories around dance music culture, or the 'critical museum' more broadly – instead reproducing conceptions of galleries and museums as sites of experience and entertainment. This relation is key, because any attempt to capture the affective qualities of dance music culture need be more than a simple act of imitation. If visitors seek 'the experience of partying' above all, they can certainly find it elsewhere. Equally, if museums strive to 'compete directly with other forms of leisure activities…they risk being caught in a race they cannot win' (Moore 2000: 19). As madison moore argues (2021), archival representations of nightlife can instead be more speculative, avoiding factual depictions as a way of encouraging more active and imaginative modes of audience interpretation. In this way, 'Sweet Harmony' pointed toward the complementary roles that museums and galleries can play, situating archival documentations of dance music culture alongside creative, artistic responses.

'Electronic: From Kraftwerk to the Chemical Brothers'

The other major retrospective on rave and club culture during this period was 'Electronic: From Kraftwerk to the Chemical Brothers', which opened in July 2020 at the Design Museum. The programme set out to transport audiences 'through the people, art, design, technology and photography that have been shaping the electronic music landscape', covering a broad geography including Chicago, Detroit, Berlin, and London. Like 'Sweet Harmony', this wide-ranging historical journey was promised to take place while 'evoking the experience of being in a club'.[68] The majority of the exhibit was built around objects including synthesisers, record artworks, and stage outfits, with a focus on the interaction between electronic music and design. Alongside individual listening stations with headphones, the exhibition was accompanied by a soundtrack curated by the French DJ Laurent Garnier, which was audible throughout the exhibit. A set of speakers was also placed in the museum foyer, setting the scene for queuing audience members. Movement through the exhibition was choregraphed by a complex set of structures, producing a sense of narrative within the dimly lit space. 'Electronic' concluded with an installation by Adam Smith and Marcus Lyall, who reconfigured their design for the Chemical Brothers' expansive live show into a smaller-scale audio-visual experience, which immersed visitors in sound, light, and smoke. Sound played a key role in the exhibition, but it was situated within a wider discourse in which 'music is only part of the story',[69]

[68] https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/electronic-from-kraftwerk-to-the-chemical-brothers
[69] https://ra.co/events/1354546

making space for the diversity of different communities and media that have contributed to the development of electronic music culture.

In contrast with the critical reception of the Saatchi Gallery and Barbican exhibitions, 'Electronic' received favourable reviews in the mainstream press, with the Evening Standard praising its 'sensory feast' (Embley 2020) and the Guardian highlighting its 'spirit of communal celebration' (Lynskey 2020). The immersive finale was also well received among the specialist dance music press (Normski 2020). Reviewers noted that the exhibition was successful not only for its evocative sensory aspect, but also for its in-depth contextualisation, which highlighted the diverse and 'resilient communities who created EDM' and made efforts to 'unpack the political and ideological role of the nightclub' across a variety of different historical and geographical contexts (Bucknell 2020). A film entitled 'The New Rave' highlighted the Black artists shaping London's dance music scene, while other sections explored the significance of the nightclub for anti-fascist youth groups in both Eastern Europe and the Midlands. 'Electronic' highlighted the multiple functions of the contemporary museum, drawing together the display of auratic, original objects; detailed social and historical commentaries; as well as sensory and experiential spectacle. In this way, the exhibition pointed toward the possibility of a museum combining critical and entertainment functions. Despite the space that was provided for a range of different musical communities and contexts, it is also important to note the limitations of its populist, 'blockbuster' format, which relied on high-profile commissions from big-name artists including Kraftwerk, Aphex Twin, and the Chemical Brothers. However, these were largely balanced with stories taken from outside canonic artists, repertories, and geographies.

Through its pedagogical and sensory hybrid form, 'Electronic' encapsulated, in another reviewer's words, how 'music exhibitions have evolved since Reynolds's disappointing encounter with the British Music Experience' (Amoako 2020). With its focus on dance music and design, the exhibition had a specific thematic remit, building on research such as that by Haq (2016) and Kries et al (2018), which explores the relation between electronic dance music, art, and architecture. These texts emerged out of related exhibitions in Belgium and Germany, demonstrating the potential for a dialogic relationship between written research and institutional spaces in producing public discourses around dance music culture.

However, given that the exhibition took place in the latter half of 2020, it is difficult to separate any comparative evaluation of the exhibition from its context. At this moment, COVID-19 lockdowns meant clubs and venues in the UK had been closed since March 2020, with no predicted trajectory of reopening. The exhibition's Chemical Brothers installation was perhaps the closest (legal) proximation of a nightclub available in London at this moment – an irony which did not go unnoticed among reviewers. Not only did this context heighten the sensory experience of the exhibition, but it also repositioned it as an unintentional act of archival intervention during a moment when electronic music culture was at its most vulnerable. This context reemphasised the importance of the museum in its most basic definition, as an institution which 'acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment'.[70]

[70] https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/

If 'Electronic' demonstrated some of the ways in which a museum might represent both the tangible and intangible heritage of rave culture, it was striking that this took place at the very moment when nightclubs themselves were silent, concerned more with short term strategies of survival than the production of rave aesthetics and socialities (Assiter 2022). While the exhibition certainly drew further public attention to the institutional recognition of club culture, it occurred against the backdrop of nightclubs' own struggles to receive state support during the precarious context of the pandemic (Mazierska and Rigg 2021). Where museums can function as important 'sites of persuasion' (Dubin 2011: 478), how might their symbolic value serve to mask the reproduction of inequalities in the broader distribution of cultural funding? (Moore 2000: 22). This inverse relationship can be traced back to the years preceding the pandemic – as the journalist Lauren O'Neill (2019) asked, 'is bringing electronic music into public arts spaces a product of London's continuing refusal to invest in nightlife?'

In a reversal of similar logics, Berlin techno club Berghain reinvented itself as an art gallery in September 2020, hosting works by 115 Berlin-based artists in collaboration with Studio Berlin. The exhibit was intended to symbolise the continued vitality of Berlin's cultural life during COVID-19, while providing continued employment for Berghain's staff. Where this led one critic to conclude that 'art is the luxury asset that moves in when the party's over' (Farago 2020), it prompted Philip Oltermann to ask: 'can the art world and the music scene help each other navigate the choppy waters of the pandemic? Can an art exhibition become a life raft for struggling cultural enterprises?' (2020). Beyond the unique circumstances of the pandemic, this temporary transformation pointed towards the emergence of a newly multidirectional relationship between art, institutions, and club culture – as a mutual economic infrastructure, as well as a collaborative creative practice.

New collaborations

As the period defined by 'blockbuster' exhibitions on rave and club culture reached its climax at the Design Museum in the latter half of 2020, a third phase began to emerge, suggesting new possibilities in the developing relationship between institutional spaces and electronic dance music culture. This third phase sought to augment, complicate, and challenge dominant historical narratives, while exploring the potential in blurring the boundaries between the museum, gallery, and nightclub. As curators moved away from wide-lens depictions of Chicago–Detroit, acid house, and rave culture, there was a new focus on localised histories,[71] such as South London Gallery's 'Shut the Club Down', which presented archival material documenting the histories of two venues in Peckham and Camberwell that were key spaces for the early hardcore and jungle scene. Elsewhere, 'Sweet Harmony: Radio, Rave & Waltham Forest, 1989-1994' held

[71] Numerous exhibitions with a localised focus also took place outside of London, including: 'Sanctuary: The Unlikely Home of British Rave' at Milton Keynes Gallery; 'House is a Feeling' at the Former Ikea Building, Coventry; and the UK edition of 'Night Fever: Designing Club Culture' at the V&A Dundee, which featured an additional section on Scotland's own club scene.

at the Vestry House Museum in Walthamstow, explored the development of the local borough's early dance music scene, detailing an ecology of cultural infrastructure including venues, pirate radio stations, and record shops. These two exhibitions made little effort to evoke the experiential aspects of rave beyond their inclusion of video footage and listening stations, but their collections of objects and oral histories drew attention to a hyper-localised network of spaces, places, and communities, which have otherwise been marginalised from attempts to construct grander national and transnational narratives. This kind of approach stands in contrast to many popular music exhibitions that focus on place-based heritage at the level of the city or nation, which have often aimed to provide a pilgrimage site for fans and stimulate tourism as part of wider regeneration strategies (Leonard 2018: 265).

Alongside these exhibitions focussing on more specific histories and localities, an additional space has also begun to emerge, exploring the possibilities of an ongoing, contemporary dialogue between electronic dance music culture, art, and institutions. To be sure, such developments are not without historical precedent. As Christabel Stirling (2021) has argued, alternate trajectories can be traced in which 'popular' U.K. genres such as dub, punk, and hip hop opened up the political and aesthetic space for sound art, as part of a history involving 'multiple protagonists and genealogies'. New York's 1980s downtown scene is perhaps the classic example of this, in which avant-garde and dance musics, nightlife scenes, art, film, and performance emerged out of closely related social and cultural milieu (See Lawrence 2009; 2016). However, where these scenes were largely borne out via subcultural crossovers, I would argue that institutions are contributing to the emergence of a new electronic music ecology, with its own producers, audiences, and reconfigurations of space. As the economic and geographic conditions which afforded the development of many popular cultural forms have been disrupted by austerity politics, gentrification, and the increasing precarity of the gig economy (Graham 2016: 81-2), this kind of institutional support gains a new urgency.

In the following section, I explore the potential of this hybrid space, with reference to a case study focussing on the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and its programming of work foregrounding contemporary club culture and electronic music. Much of this section draws on interview material with one of the ICA's curators, Sara Sassanelli, who combines expertise in curation and performance with a background in queer (and) club cultures.

Institute of Contemporary Arts

As a former employee of the Tate Modern, Sassanelli described the limitations they faced in trying to programme events based around the relational socialities of music and performance. The business model of the Tate and most other large museums is dependent on blockbuster shows and permanent collections. As such, their curatorial style tends to be mediated by aesthetic concerns and practical experience derived primarily from the management of physical objects. Divorced from such a focus, galleries such as the ICA have more space – in both a conceptual and literal sense – for alternate programming, encompassing cinema, music, and performance (Brazil 2016). The ICA has a longstanding history of live and electronic music programming, including the ICA Rock Weeks that took place during the 1980s, as well as the Blacktronica series of club nights in the early 2000s.

Expanding on this legacy of curatorial openness, the ICA hosted an all-night takeover by queer techno collective Inferno in January 2020. It took place between the hours of 10pm and 6am, in the gallery's event and performance-oriented Theatre space. For Sassanelli, this kind of all-night event allows for a more thorough kind of 'temporal reprogramming', with diverse aesthetic and social affects. In broadening this temporal horizon, the gallery can be better placed to reproduce the socialities of club culture, which may otherwise be extracted and dissolved during the limited timeframes of more traditional gallery Late events. By evoking the spatial and temporal parameters of the club, galleries can tap into practices that are already inherently relational – building on the shift toward 'relational aesthetics' which Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) famously identified as a new artistic tendency during the 1990s. However, hosting Inferno at the ICA was about more than just reimagining an institutional space. The gallery also provided organisers with a greater flexibility than would be found in a traditional club environment, thus allowing for the simultaneous reconfiguration of dance music's spatialities. During the event, pornography was screened in the ICA cinemas, which were recast as potential 'dark room' sites. The event was also able to subvert some of the musical and chemical trajectories more typically associated with electronic dance music. At 2am – what would tend to be considered 'peak' time in a nightclub – the musical programming was interrupted by silence and a slow choreographic performance, out of which the DJ then gradually re-emerged.

This event did not pass without controversy. RT – a state-funded Russian news source – published an article by Alexander Adams in response to the event, in which it was stated that 'the ICA – once the premier venue for great Modernist painting and sculpture – is now a circus of transgression a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace'. The article argues that the ICA has lost its way, becoming a redundant institution since other established museums and commercial galleries have emerged to provide space for contemporary art. Considering this redundancy, the ICA has been forced to turn to 'performance, cinema, music, club culture and *"artivism"*', as part of its struggle to remain relevant. Through the course of these endeavours, the ICA has supposedly lost any focus on art of any aesthetic quality, instead foregrounding work which is 'anti-West, anti-white, anti-tradition, pro-gay, pro-minority, pro-mass-migration or *"gender non-conforming"*' (Adams 2019). Notwithstanding the author's evident racism, homophobia, and transphobia, as well as the

media platform's possible political agenda in discrediting the state of UK culture more broadly, the article demonstrates the ways in which cultural institutions continue to be contested sites, in which perceived transformations can result in 'conflict and negotiation' (Dubin 2011: 478).

Fig 4.1 Outside Buckingham Palace after the Inferno event at the ICA. Photograph by Sara Sassanelli.

In trying to construct a fixed identity for the ICA, the author fails to engage critically with shifting historical contexts. After highlighting that the ICA was founded at a time when there was no other public home for contemporary art, he then goes on to argue that 'in a London that has a wide range of private and co-operative spaces which can host fringe events and views, there is no need for such views to be hosted by publicly funded venues.' Where such an argument may have had more application during the 1980s or 1990s, it fails to recognise the precarity of London's alternative cultural infrastructures in contemporary contexts (Ferreri 2021), of which the closure of nightclubs is just one example. Under such conditions, an institution like the ICA gains a renewed political urgency, in which its 'desperate' turn toward performance, music, and club culture fits well within the intentions set throughout the institution's history. As far back as its original founding in 1947, the ICA stated that it was to be concerned with the 'unknown art of the future', which as Kevin Brazil has argued, was always about reconstructing modernist and contemporary art as 'interdisciplinary phenomenon' (2016: 195). In 1968, the ICA's director Michael Kustow made clear his intentions in exploring new institutional functions, avoiding becoming 'merely another cultural amenity, in a city well stacked with galleries, theatres and concert halls'.[72]

[72] https://www.ica.art/about

In hosting the Inferno takeover, the ICA demonstrated not only a commitment to an interdisciplinary conception of contemporary art that includes club culture, cinema, and performance, but also to a political programme centring the voices and direct involvement of marginalised groups. For Sassanelli, this kind of political work necessitates striking a fine balance between taking a more active role as curator and giving invited collectives greater agency in the process of production. In this kind of relationship, institutions support and facilitate the exhibiting of work which may often already exist, rather than seeing themselves in a more operational sense as somehow 'creating the conditions for something to happen'.

Sassanelli aimed to embody this form of curatorial practice with the programming of 'Channel B' between October 2021 and January 2022, which invited the Black-owned art and music collective Nine Nights to produce an 'audiovisual exploration of Black futurism . . . drawing on a lineage of pirate radio, subterranean dance floors, and the art happenings of the 1960s'.[73] Crucially, 'Channel B' sought to transform the ICA across multiple spatial and temporal planes, such that the varied rooms of the exhibition were simultaneously sites for an events series, 'New Syntax', oriented around music/sound, performance, and dance. As Nine Nights themselves described their plans prior to the opening of the exhibition, 'each area will become a stage partnering with Black talent across the UK to bring the ICA alive, interacting with the exhibition' (Something Curated 2021). Reviewers generally argued that the exhibition felt empty in the moments where it was not animated by performance (Frankel 2021), but simultaneously praised the fluidity of its concept, which in one critic's words, translated a sense of 'being on the brink of something, of experiencing a new economy and the possibility of imagining a collective future' (Van der Watt 2021). Where 'Channel B' may have failed in the full realisation of its spatial ideals, it pointed towards possibilities of a new relationship between institutions and electronic dance music culture, which perhaps most crucially, was framed by a distinct political project – 'exploring new modes of artistic empowerment . . . to support Black culture'.[74]

In this way, where certain earlier attempts to relocate club culture in museums could be construed as an attempt to attract new, younger audiences, the framing of 'Channel B' was directed explicitly toward addressing the systemic racism at the heart of both cultural institutions and the music industry more widely. Moreover, the freedoms that the Nine Nights collective were afforded by the ICA, as well as the exhibition's attempts to explore the political and artistic possibilities of longer-term collaborations between club culture, art, and cultural institutions, suggest the potential of a shift beyond the symbolic gestures toward diversity and inclusion which have characterised many institutional engagements with race and racism (Muhammad 2021).

Key to the potential for institutions and club culture to form a novel hybrid space is the development of a broader cultural ecology, which straddles the worlds of art, academia, and club culture – while simultaneously carving out its own distinctive territory and identity. Again, Sassanelli decentres the

[73] https://www.ica.art/exhibitions/nine-nights-channel-b
[74] https://www.ica.art/exhibitions/nine-nights-channel-b

role of institutions in producing this space, suggesting instead that a whole scene of musician/artists, such as Nkisi, Klein, and Mica Levi, have inhabited this kind of cultural terrain for some time already – despite their lack of direct funding and infrastructure. In Nine Nights, several of the artists involved share similarly fluid artistic identities, moving comfortably between the gallery and the nightclub. GAIKA has released music on the key electronic music label, Warp Records, while simultaneously curating SYSTEM at Somerset House in 2018, an installation which explored sound system culture and the legacies of Notting Hill Carnival. Similarly, Shannen SP is a DJ and vocalist who also co-curates 'Ø' with Kode 9 at Corsica Studios, an event which Christabel Stirling (2021) characterises as exhibiting a 'double movement of stretching both the art institution and nightclub beyond their often intensely genrefied milieux'. In forging newly collaborative intersections between the gallery and the club, there is potential to uncover not only novel aesthetic and critical territories, but also a more mutually beneficial relationship. Such a relationship requires change on both sides: on the one hand a process of 'institutional innovation', while on the other, artists must be willing to compromise in accepting their 'possible instrumentalisation' when receiving forms of state funding (Graham 2016: 60-73).

This kind of relationship intensified when the ICA appointed Wolfgang Tillmans as chair of their board in 2022, who then hired Bengi Ünsal as director – the former head of contemporary music at the South Bank Centre. These appointments sought to emphasise the performance aspect of the gallery, as well as its identity as a multidisciplinary space. Where this shift is partly about drawing new audiences and income to the ICA – they receive just 21% of their funding from the Arts Council – their 6am license, as well as the combined experience of these new appointments, affords the possibility of a more considered nocturnal programme (Needham 2022).

In the final section, I discuss Simon Reynold's notion of 'conceptronica' and its critical reception, drawing on the concept of 'interdependency' to explore broader theoretical questions surrounding the future relationship between institutions, marginalised communities, and the production of culture.

Conceptronica and interdependence

Towards the end of 2019, Simon Reynolds published an article in Pitchfork outlining 'conceptronica' – his framework for exploring and explaining 'why so much electronic music this decade felt like it belonged in a museum instead of a club' (2019a). In this widely read and polarising polemic, Reynolds positioned the increasing use of institutional infrastructures and intellectual practices in dance music culture as a generalised loss of authenticity. Drawing on examples including the work of transnational collective NON Worldwide and Berlin label PAN, Reynolds suggests that conceptronica may be conceived as music for thinking rather than dancing, repurposing the 'rhythmic tools of body music' to elicit contemplative rather than physical responses. Conceptronica thus functions as less of a genre, and more as a 'mode of artistic

production – and audience reception', in which artists use academic discourses a way of distinguishing themselves within the already saturated attention economy. This produces a wider cultural ecology that includes an 'ever-growing circuit of experimental music festivals, along with subsidized concerts at museums and universities.' Reynolds is keen to highlight the ways in which the leading artists in conceptronica have generally been through postgraduate education and thus share a necessary fluency in the 'critical lingua franca used in art institutions.' This discourse-heavy approach stands in stark contrast to the 'relatively down-to-earth vernacular' of 90s IDM artists such as Aphex Twin or Luke Vibert. Reynolds concludes by suggesting that conceptronica is limited by the tensions at its core, namely the

> disquieting discrepancy between the anti-elitist left politics and the realities of conceptronica as both a cultural economy and a demographic – the fact that it is so entwined with and dependent on higher education and arts institutions.

In a follow up blog post, Reynolds argues that this institutional entwinement leaves conceptronica as neither a popular nor underground culture, instead emerging as a form of 'subsidized vanguard' (2019b). Through this comment, Reynolds draws attention towards the role played by institutions in constructing and funding the ecology of conceptronica, whereas his initial piece focused its critique largely on the practices of artists themselves. As the blogger Xenogoth (2019) argued in response to Reynolds' original piece, institutional involvements may be understood as a form of co-option, given the renewed politicisation of many conceptronica artists, who foreground issues of race, gender, and sexuality in their work. In this way, anxieties surrounding conceptronica may be understood in terms of the ways in which the 'subsidized vanguard' constitutes a form of less visible, soft state suppression enacted via the arts university, instead of the heavier-handed tactics used against rave culture during the 1980s and 1990s.

For Reynolds, the growing relationship between conceptronica and institutions has placed distinct limitations on the aesthetic possibilities of electronic music. Free from the demands of verbal framing, earlier incarnations of electronic music '*sonified* more than it *signified*'. This created opportunities for meaning to flow in multiple directions, 'to be reimagined by the individual listener, or collectively repurposed by social energies' (2019a). Where many 90s electronic music producers cloaked themselves through various strategies of technological anonymity (Kopf 1996), conceptronica (re)asserts the identity of the artist, with their ideas moving in a one-way transmission to listeners. For another blogger, Mitts (2019), this can be related to a broader critical failure – namely the tendency to equate art's 'proclamations of concept' with its content and form. If we are to seek 'as yet unheard futures' in musical work, Mitts argues that they will most likely be perceived in the ambiguous terrain of sound and performance, rather than in the processes and conceptual underpinnings of a musical project.

Where the conceptronica framework is useful for opening up critical conversations around the growing ecology of electronic music and cultural institutions, the critique put forward by Reynolds fails to engage in any great depth with the historical context out of which conceptronica emerged, as well as the identities and politics of the artists involved. For Robin James (2020a), Reynold's critique of conceptronica

rests on the production of cultural hierarchies, which idealise autonomous conceptions of art. The 'non-profit industrial complex' of conceptronica is thus closely related to commercialised culture, in that both cultural forms are criticised for their reliance on 'external support, be it from corporations or academic institutions.' This ideal of autonomy maps on to interrelated social and political hierarchies, in which 'fine art, like the white cishetero man, is autonomous…whereas craft, entertainment, and other low-status forms of cultural production are, like white women and people of color, subordinate – in this case, to function.' While autonomy tends to be positioned as an aesthetic ideal, it in fact rests on systems of privilege, in which artists are ascribed 'elite status so long as they privatize the costs associated with such success'. Thus, artists' individual capacity to realise this ideal must be understood in relation to their own socio-economic status, as well as broader historical contexts.

During the 1970s, DIY ethics emerged among primarily white underground musicians as a rebellion against the corporatised music industry. In contemporary contexts however, James argues that

> Neoliberalization…has since shifted the stakes of DIY: It demands that everyone "do it themselves" as independent entrepreneurs, such as gig economy contract workers. By 2013, it was clear that DIY had been fully co-opted not just by the culture industry…but by capitalism generally…the independent musician is now an aspirational and inspirational figure for hegemonic institutions rather than a thorn in their side – no longer a countercultural rebel but the gig economy's ideal worker (James 2020a).

Under such conditions, idealised notions of autonomy value unrealistic, individualised conceptions of cultural producers, dividing and disempowering them further within what is an already precarious context.

Instead, Mat Dryhurst (2019) proposes an alternative ideal of 'interdependence', which draws attention to the collective power borne out in intimate relationships between networks of producers, scenes, spaces, and publications. In collaboration, such communities can achieve far greater bargaining power than atomised, individual artists. When popular culture is liberated from concerns with the symbolic authenticity of autonomy, institutions can play a role in interdependent, ecological conceptions of culture, providing access to space and funding through a less hierarchical distribution of resources. In this formulation, the critical museum functions less through grand gestures of intervention, but rather through a parallel 'plurality of smaller ones' (Curtis 2015: 136). As part of an interdependent network, museums and other institutions play a role in the construction of historical narratives, while simultaneously contributing to the ongoing production and flourishing of contemporary culture. Roberts and Cohen draw a useful distinction between 'Big-H/Heritage' – representing culture as a fixed, observable object, and 'little h/heritage' as praxis, which is 'embedded in the flux and flow of everyday life, culture and creativity' (2015: 235). Moving away from 'official authorised' canons of popular music and culture, little h/heritage allows greater room for 'unauthorised' forms of heritage, which may be more closely embedded in musical communities (See also Baker and Huber 2013; Withers 2015). In constructions of little h/heritage, museums need to present

popular culture 'on its own terms' (Moore 2000: 83), a complex process which lays bare the tensions at the heart of the contemporary museum.

Aside from some of the more collaborative events and exhibitions at the ICA, and a few new festivals such as RE-TEXTURED – which took place in early 2022 between the Southbank Centre, Printworks, and FOLD – there are few examples in London which could be said to embody an interdependent conception of institutions and electronic music culture. As this chapter has demonstrated, the relationship remains a young and developing one. Aside from a relatively small network of artist–musicians, the majority of London's electronic dance music culture has existed and evolved in relative separation from direct institutional involvement. Outside the UK however, there is a large network of international festivals that programme electronic dance music alongside performance, panel discussions, and visual arts, which take place across a range of institutional and nightclub spaces. Berlin's CTM Festival and Krakow's Unsound both have histories going back to the late 1990s and early 2000s, while Berlin Atonal initially took place between 1982 – 1990, before starting up again in 2013. Atonal was founded by Dimitri Hegemann, who would later go on to open the influential Berlin techno club Tresor – demonstrating the forms of interdependency that were present in the early history of Germany's electronic dance music culture.

In a study of MUTEK festival in Montreal, Francois Mouillot highlights some of the tensions that remain present in these more developed examples of collaborations between cultural institutions and electronic dance music. Mouillot presents a comparative study of the electronic music scenes orbiting both MUTEK festival and a local underground label, Arbitus Records, arguing that while they have developed distinct models of governance, they are 'both embedded in the city's official and informal cultural policy frameworks' (2021: 96). Each scene is based around divergent social, spatial, and municipal infrastructures, but they frequently comingle and overlap as part of a broader musical and cultural ecology. At the same time, Mouillot (Ibid. 102-7) draws attention to the connections between MUTEK festival and the culture-led regeneration project which transformed the city's historic Red Light district into the 'Quartier des Spectacles'. Where this process has located MUTEK at the heart of Montreal's cultural and tourism sectors, it has simultaneously displaced many older entertainment venues with a series of institutions and performance venues. Furthermore, a large part of MUTEK's success in securing public funding has been dependent on framing electronic music as art rather than dance music, allowing for organisers to 'more tightly integrate the event with some of Montreal's infrastructure-related and cultural policies', as well as broader conceptions of 'Montreal's creative city agenda' (Ibid. 109). The example of MUTEK festival demonstrates how even more established, interdependent examples of institutional involvement in electronic dance music remain fraught with tensions, in which wider power dynamics mediate the distribution of cultural and economic resources in urban space.

Conclusion

During the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of arts spaces and venues brought discussions of cultural value to the forefront of public debate. 2020-2021 was a difficult period for the UK's electronic dance music culture, as venues and artists struggled to meet eligibility criteria for funding (Mazierska and Rigg 2021). Predictions suggest that the UK could soon be left with less than 5,000 nightclubs, a decrease from 10,040 in 2010 (Guttridge-Hewitt 2022). Where the prospects for the museum sector seemed equally bad at the start of the pandemic, 2021 saw significantly fewer museum closures than in the years prior to COVID-19 (Candlin 2021). In either case, the pandemic emphasised the latent precarity of the cultural sector and the fragility of its public and private economies.

In this chapter, I have outlined the early history of an emerging relationship between dance music culture and London's cultural institutions. I have explored the entanglements of museums and galleries in the creative and night-time economies; their role in constructing public histories of popular culture; as well as emergent collaborations, which point toward the possibility of a more interdependent relation between electronic music and cultural institutions. New modes of nocturnal governance have highlighted municipal interest in the cultures and economies of the night-time, but public funds remain largely inaccessible to dance music artists, communities, and spaces.

Outside the UK, there are examples of public funding structures adjusting to the needs of nightlife. As I highlighted in chapter 1, Berlin techno club, Berghain, was reclassified as a 'cultural centre' rather than an 'entertainment' venue in 2016, conceding it a reduced tax rate in line with museums, theatres, and concert halls. In the press, this was widely lauded as an example of Germany's progressive cultural politics, granting techno the status of 'high culture'. This was contrasted with the climate in the UK, in which Islington Council ruled the closure of Fabric on the very same day. However, as Luis-Manuel Garcia (2017: 12) notes, Berghain's reclassification was dependent on diversifications of its cultural offering, which included programming experimental music and workshops, live music on weeknights, and collaborations with arts festivals such as CTM. In this way, Berghain's new identity as a *Kulturzentrum* was less about the simple acceptance of dance music as institutional culture, instead relating to the formation of a hybridised cultural space.

Interdependent collaborations between dance music culture, the art world, and institutions foster structures of mutual support and sharing of resources, as well as creating opportunities for the formation of new cultural and artistic practices. In one recent example, 'Synchronous Errors' took place at the nightclub FOLD in March 2022, programming DJs alongside site-specific artworks. On their event page, the organisers asked: 'Is this an exhibition, is this a party? Who knows and really…who cares?'[75]

Considering my own multiple identities as a musician, partygoer, and researcher of dance music culture, it is important to retain a degree of reflexivity regarding my own contributions to the institutionalisation of club and rave culture. In this way, I hope that my research will have some relevance

[75] https://ra.co/events/1493013

for those within dance music communities, as well as academic environments. This relates as much to linguistic choices and modes of expression, as it does media and contexts of publication. There are numerous examples of scholar-practitioners exploring interdependent work at the intersection of nightlife practice and research. DJ-researchers such as madison moore and Terre Thaemlitz use hybrid performance–workshops as a way of contextualising dance music culture within critical histories and praxis.

This chapter has explored spatio-temporal reorderings and transformations across multiple planes, including architectural types, cultural categories, and economic structures. Such interactions call into question distinctions between popular and institutional culture. In the next chapter, I explore dance music culture in relation to distinctions of work and leisure, as manifest in interactions between dance music culture and the wellness industries. I situate these contemporary interactions within a longer-term ideological history, which destabilises utopian assumptions of dance music culture as a discrete social, cultural, and economic space.

Chapter 5. 'Rave your way into the day': work, wellness, and conscious clubbing

When considering electronic dance music culture and the time-space of the night, the relationship between work and leisure is of primary concern. Many nocturnal cultures seek to extend the temporal horizons of leisure, although they are of course dependent on the often-invisible labour of those for whom the night-time economy is a place of work (Macquarie 2019; 2020). Night-time cultures may conflict with naturalised rhythms of sleep and productivity, yet the meanings of this relation are ambivalent, existing across a spectrum that ranges from the wholesale rejection of work to more ephemeral forms of escapism. Writing in the early 1990s, Hillegonda Rietveld suggested that 'rave offered a release from day to day realities, a temporary escapist disappearance like the weekend or holiday.' Where this was dependent on a momentary undoing of established orders, it amounted more to processes of refusal than critique (1998a: 58). A year later, Gilbert and Pearson argued that acid house and rave culture represented a challenge to the Protestant work ethic and its underlying ideology of Puritanism, questioning the 'notion of the human subject as defined radically in terms of *self-control*' (1999: 150). In either case, electronic dance music culture is seen to inhabit a conceptual space that stands largely outside of or in opposition to categories of work. When Rietveld (1998a: 64) suggested that at raves 'the long night suspends a feeling of an everlasting present,' it is a version of the present defined by (perceived) liberty instead of work; sensory pleasure instead of rational labour; and night instead of day. Whether this constitutes a fleeting disengagement, or a more radical rejection can only be interpreted according to context. But in one way or another, most electronic dance music cultures seek to establish spaces which involve a suspension of norms, existing in a place that Foucault (1984: 4) has described as 'outside of all places.' This spatial, temporal, and ideological positioning affords dance music culture with much of its social and affective capacity, but it can simultaneously obscure underlying tensions in its received meanings, values, and internal dynamics of power.

Within these contested distinctions of work, leisure, and culture, the self-professed 'pioneers of sober morning raving',[76] Morning Gloryville, occupy a relatively unique place within electronic dance music culture. Founded in London in 2013 by Nico Thoemmes and Samantha Moyo, Morning Gloryville host drug and alcohol-free parties on midweek mornings, between the hours of 7 and 11am. The events are designed not only to fit around peoples' working schedules, but are explicitly intended to complement the working day, providing an opportunity to invigorate mind and body before going to work. As Samantha Moyo has stated, 'After coming to Morning Gloryville, people said they felt more inspired, more creative and more open … [and] they were able to inject that vibe in their workspace' (quoted in Driscoll 2013).

Morning Gloryville evoke dance music as part of wider practices contributing toward physical health and mental wellbeing. Their events are organised around music and dance, but these are situated

[76] http://morninggloryville.com/about-us/

within a continuum of other activities including yoga, reiki, and massage; with juices and smoothies taking the place of alcohol and drugs. This marks a distinct shift for rave and club cultures, whose histories have been narrativized around the effects of different drugs as much as shifts in musical style (Collin 1997; Reynolds 2013). In recent years, dance music communities have questioned this chemical hegemony, exploring possible models for the coexistence of club culture with harm reduction practices and sobriety. Debates have drawn attention to the ways in which alcohol and drug-related risk is experienced differently across diverse nightlife communities and identities. As Caspar Melville points out, assumptions regarding the historic relation between nightlife and drug taking are racialised, and many of London's historic Black club scenes were anti-drugs (Melville 2020: 148). More recently, London-based collective, misery, organise sober club events as a way of constructing 'alternative systems of care and community' for QTBIPOC, who tend to experience disproportionate issues with mental health and addiction (SODAA 2022). Sober events can also provide more accessible infrastructures for 'ageing ravers', for whom drug taking – and the public perceptions around it – may be incompatible with work and family-related commitments (Peter and Williams 2022). Discussions around ageing, drug taking, and nightlife practices are themselves intersectionally produced, in which 'queer temporalities' may present versions of adulthood organised around subcultural practices and affiliations rather than traditional family structures (Halberstam 2005; Florêncio 2021; Wark 2023).

In recent years, leisure practices and nightlife have also been shaped by broader changes in public attitudes toward health and wellbeing (Gibsone 2017). These may be understood as a product of education and heightened awareness (Berridge 2013) but need also be contextualised in relation to the growth of the 'global wellness market', which was valued at $1.5 trillion in 2021.[77] Dance music culture remains a recent and small component of this economy, but there are increasing examples of crossovers between club culture, fitness, and wellness. Since its founding in 2013, Morning Gloryville has grown into an international brand, hosting events across Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia. New York-based Daybreaker follow a similar model, organising pre-work events for some half a million participants across the USA, as well as Tokyo, Sydney and London.[78] In early 2017, London nightclub Ministry of Sound opened a purpose-built fitness studio to accompany their successful series of workout compilations (Egere-Cooper 2017), while in the summer of 2021, Fabric teamed up with pop-up wellness brand, The Rogue Room, for a monthly event, 'Redemption', that offers 'deep meditative, flow-state yoga to offset the sins of the weekend'.[79]

The growth of this economy exists in close relation to ideologies of work. Moral imperatives of wellbeing – and its economic output as increased productivity – shape a society in which the 'line between work and life is increasingly difficult to draw' (Cederstrom and Spicer 2015: 132). Digital technologies and flexible working patterns have dissolved distinctions between 'private and professional time' into

[77] https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/feeling-good-the-future-of-the-1-5-trillion-wellness-market
[78] https://www.daybreaker.com/about/
[79] https://www.theroguеroom.com/redemption

continuous, 24/7 temporalities (Crary 2013). These contexts provide a framework through which to understand contemporary alignments of club culture with wellness and productivity, but they also call into question broader idealisations of dance music culture as an assumed 'outside' space. The history of dance music culture destabilises many clear distinctions between work and leisure, particularly since rave was reimagined as the night-time economy, in which nightlife is instrumentalised as a key infrastructure for the creative industries (Florida 2004). More broadly, the historical and ideological crossovers of rave's vague politics with entrepreneurialism and contemporary working practices destabilise the assumed utopianism at the heart of dance music culture.

In this chapter, I use Morning Gloryville as a lens through which to examine dance music's relation to distinctions of work and leisure. Morning Gloryville represents a striking example of the ways in which these distinctions have become blurred in contemporary contexts, but I argue that these tendencies have been latent throughout much of dance music's longer history.

I begin with an ethnographic account of a visit to Morning Gloryville, exploring how its daytime context and sobriety produce an uncanny reordering of rave. In the following section, I discuss the broader relation of work and leisure under capitalism, as well as the ways that music has been used in workplaces as a technology of productivity. The next two sections discuss histories of UK and US rave culture, demonstrating their alignments with emergent ideologies of work, including entrepreneurialism and the newly flexible working practices of the tech and creative sectors. Building on the work of Barbrook and Cameron, and David Hancock, I highlight the ways in which the spiritual discourses of rave may be understood as a manifestation of the libertarian 'Californian Ideology', as well as the broader countercultural logics that fed into what would come to be labelled as neoliberalism. In the final section, I explore the ideological underpinnings of the wellness industry, outlining the ways they have shaped contemporary relations between work, culture, and urban space, through moral imperatives of self-optimisation. Where these histories and literatures help frame my understanding of Morning Gloryville, I intend for them to function as part of a much broader critique, questioning the utopianism of electronic dance music and its relation to distinctions of work, leisure, and culture.

Morning Gloryville

I arrived at Bar 90 in Hackney Wick shortly after 8am. School uniforms rush past me, dissonant against the muffled but unmistakable throb of kick-drums that emanate from nearby. As I entered the space, I was swiftly greeted by a woman who hugged me as she yelled, 'welcome and congratulations! Happy re-birthday!' This was one of Morning Gloryville's 'hugging angels' – a core part of the operation, but in appearance, indistinguishable from the crowd. I edged slowly towards the dancefloor, wishing I'd had a stronger morning coffee. The whole room was pulsing with movement and energy. I stood awkwardly and self-consciously at the periphery, very much a passive observer at this stage. The sheer intensity of positivity

and vitality was overwhelming. Apart from myself and a few other timid first-timers, everyone in the room was dancing. Each with a huge smile on their face. Brightly coloured clothes and glitter sparkled in the morning sunlight. There seemed to be few examples of 'getting lost in the music' or hypnotic, trance-like states – movements were almost exclusively outward-looking and extravert. People's eyes were open, and dancing appeared to be about connection and visibility, with an aura of extravagance. The room was a sea of jumping, bouncing bodies. After 20 minutes or so, I felt conspicuous in my role as disengaged observer. I put my bag in the cloakroom, ordered a 'Phoenix Matcha' at the bar, and had a dance. I couldn't help but be drawn in by the atmosphere, which was undeniably warm and welcoming. It felt uncanny somehow, but perhaps no stranger than the MDMA-induced socialities of rave.

The music was generally an uplifting variety of funky, bumpy house. There were lots of big bass drops, build-ups, and climaxes. It didn't seem like the kind of scenario that could be maintained by more rolling, repetitive grooves. The moments of choreographed collectivity enforced by the 'drop' were necessary at regular intervals to sustain the atmosphere. Structures were simple, regular, and predictable. Cyclical dynamics ensured that music remained firmly in the foreground. One of the DJs described to me how the sober, early morning context meant that he avoided playing 'deeper' or more psychedelic tracks. Another resident DJ, Kemi Oshi, told me that her sets at Morning Gloryville always strive to be uplifting and immediate:

> you just go in, and you give them big tune after big tune, impact track after impact, you don't need to build them up…it's not such a journey set, it's a more keep you up there the whole time kind of set.[80]

Musical repertoire was thus limited by a specific function, but it is of course standard practice for DJs to respond to the demands of different contexts, as part of improvised feedback loops between performers and dancers (Fikentscher 2000; Butler 2014). Historically, dance music has been understood as existing outside typical logics of purpose and rationality. Theorists have described how rave 'possesses little telos' (St John 2004: 38) and refuses to 'sublimate pleasure to any other function' (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 16). Yet as a dance culture, electronic music is closely intertwined with functionality. Electronic music producers often design tracks with the intention of eliciting specific effects on the dancefloor (Smith 2021). Despite this close causal relation between music and dance, functionality is often stigmatised among dance music communities, for whom overtly utilitarian structures are seen as 'creatively inert' (Cowton in Wilson 2016). In this way, perceptions around the underlying functions of dance music are mediated via a range of social and sonic markers, ascribing genres and scenes with varying degrees of what Sarah Thornton (1995) terms 'subcultural capital'. Different spaces and events carry their own expectations of energy, tempo, and style, and these expectations transform according to shifting cycles of taste and culture. Thus, where function

[80] Kemi Oshi interview. September 2020.

may be perceived as antithetical to the freedom and creativity of rave, every dancefloor remains subject to its own systems of governance and 'intricate codes' of behaviour (St John 2008: 151).

On the stage next to the DJ, a woman stood holding a microphone. Her role fell somewhere between that of an MC and a motivational speaker. Bolstering the structures of the music, her regular vocal interjections compounded the atmosphere of positivity. She distinguished Morning Gloryville from 'intoxicated raves' and tied it into a grander narrative of social change: 'Well done for the sober rave revolution. You're part of that rave-olution, we're about to change the world!!' Like the Jamaican dancehall MC, she guided and instructed the audience, while 'championing' Morning Gloryville over other events (Henriques 2011). Where the practices of the dancehall MC are embedded in histories of racial oppression and diasporic culture however, these invocations felt somehow divorced from any wider context.

Through this intense combination of voice and sound, behaviours at the event were geared toward the collective performance of positivity. The sobriety of the crowd contributes toward a sense of cohesion in which 'nine times out of ten everyone gels together and the collective energy is like something you've never seen before.'[81] The affective power of this cohesion evokes the close relation between utopia and dystopia in rave's theologies of togetherness: 'does this prefigure a new form of collective consciousness or does it mean the end of oppositionality and individualism?' (Tagg 1994: 219). Despite rave's pervasive discourses of ecstasy-influenced unity, the reality of poly-drug use at regular, non-sober events means that participants' experiences are mediated by a diverse range of chemicals, each with contradictory effects and temporal trajectories. In a surreal inversion of logics, was this sober event closer to the mythologised ideals of rave than many contemporary manifestations of club culture?

Given the event's temporal location, participants ranged widely in age, and children ran freely between bodies on the dancefloor. A resident DJ told me how she had once performed with her young daughter strapped to her back. The safety of the sober, daytime environment gave this child access to her mother's place of work, which would otherwise remain a site of mystique.[82] The dancefloor also included a much older demographic than that of many London nightclubs. For those who grew up with 1990s club culture, Morning Gloryville provides a reimagined party environment, divorced from the disruptive trajectories of late nights and drugs (Deacon 2014). The space also felt markedly desexualised, despite the lack of any safe(r) space policy as has become the norm at many dance music events. Where rave culture created the possibility for new forms of 'female subjectivity' (Pini 2001), sexual violence remains pervasive in many nightlife spaces (Quigg at al. 2020).

This was no multicultural utopia however – the crowd was overwhelmingly straight and white. Morning Gloryville attracted criticism in 2017 when they hosted an event dedicated to 'The Motherland – Africa'. Videos of the event circulated online, depicting a crowd wearing headwraps and animal print, in a space decorated with fruit, jungle foliage, and West African fabrics. Commentators criticised the event for

[81] Kemi Oshi interview. September 2020.
[82] Ibid.

its evident cultural appropriation and essentialising, colonial tropes (McIntosh 2017). Soon after, Morning Gloryville CEO, Samantha Moyo – a Black lesbian who grew up in Zimbabwe – published an apology:

> I created Morning Gloryville to bring people together regardless of their cultural origins or beliefs, united in spirit … Our dream is a world without borders … We work tirelessly and are devoted to celebration. We work towards unity and liberation through music and dance. We explore different themes and ways of finding meaning, community, belonging … We're trying to create more togetherness in the world through our events and are dedicated to exploring this further (quoted in Lloyd 2017).

In these vague evocations of liberal cosmopolitanism, Moyo captures the limitations at the heart of rave's fragile utopian politics. Music's intense but nebulous capacity to forge connection can conceal underlying exclusions, asymmetries, and violence. As Arun Saldanha argues, 'it is precisely the potential for escape that can turn music not only imperialistic, but also into a narcissistic enclave changing nothing in the overall systems of domination' (2014: 113). Within the atmospheres of affective charge produced by dance music, the 'state of liquidarity risks obfuscating the ongoing reproduction of power' (Garcia 2011: 3). In this way, the criticisms directed at Morning Gloryville's event speak to the wider (anti-)politics of rave, in which invocations of collectivity are rarely situated as part of more considered structural critique.

Much of the US rave scene is guided by an underlying philosophy of PLUR: peace love, unity, and respect (Takahashi 2004: 144-149). Morning Gloryville is organised around a similar manifesto, which outlines nine core values, including 'joy', 'harmony', 'creativity' and 'growth.'[83] This establishes an intentional code prior to events, mediating the attitudes and behaviours of attendees. At Morning Gloryville however, these values are positioned within a broader ideology that draws together dancing, wellness, and work. As company CEO Sam Moyo describes, their events create 'productivity, team building, mainly that happiness factor because companies are starting to realize actually above everything else happiness is the number one thing your team needs in order to be productive' (Pepper 2014). Morning Gloryville also offer a roaming 'microrave' service, woven into the structure of the working day to 'reward and stimulate your team.'[84]

Morning Gloryville draw on scientific discourses to highlight these links between dancing, happiness, and output: 'serotonin has also been proven to increase creativity and productivity and we always have positive feedback from patrons about how it puts them in a great mood so who knows what creativity we've stimulated!' (quoted in Phillips 2016). US event Daybreaker take this kind of justification a step further, claiming that 'dancing is downright scientific', building their brand around what they term the 'Daybreak D.O.S.E.', representing the dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins that will be released through dancing, ready to keep you 'happy and 'energised' throughout your day.[85] In this way, rave is

[83] http://morninggloryville.com/manifesto/
[84] http://morninggloryville.com/catalyse/
[85] https://www.daybreaker.com/about/

situated within a loosely empirical discourse, in which social dancing is valued for its contributions to overlapping conceptions of wellbeing, creativity, and productivity.

As my energy began to wane towards the end of the event, a woman approached me exclaiming, "you look so serious!" When I reassured her that I wasn't as serious as I looked, she seemed satisfied and instantly relaxed: "Oh, you're smiling inside." For the most part, it seemed as though the frameworks of happiness and wellness that surround the event served to mediate the ways in which participants experience and understand it. I asked several people whether they were regulars, explaining that it was my first time. One man told me that he had attended at least ten times, describing it as "food for the soul." Towards the end of my time at Morning Gloryville, I was surprised to see a young woman crouched down at the edge of the room, fiddling surreptitiously with a small vial. I felt a little shocked that someone would be taking drugs on a Wednesday morning, but also somewhat reassured that even Morning Gloryville has its rebels. I looked away for a moment, keen to avoid interrupting her transgression. As I turned back, I realised that it was bright red glitter coming out of the vial, and she was applying it carefully to her cheeks. She looked up with a big smile on her face and asked me if I'd like some.

Work and leisure; music and productivity

To consider how music fits into notions of work and leisure, it is first necessary to interrogate the binary of work and leisure itself. As conceptual categories, work and leisure are primarily defined by their interrelation and opposition to one another. Etymologically, recreation is a time to 're-create' oneself after tiresome, often labour-related, activities. In this way, it is only ever a subordinate category, leading Adorno to describe leisure as inherently 'shackled to its opposite'. Under Adorno's reading of capitalism, free time is an illusory concept, serving no other purpose than allowing people to 'summon up the strength for work.' Free time is not only defined in opposition to work, but becomes 'nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour.' In this formulation, boredom itself is the product of a life 'lived under the compulsion to work', in which truly autonomous forms of self-directed spare time rarely have any opportunity to figure (Adorno 1991: 162-168).

In this way, leisure and work are mutually defining and co-dependent. Simon Frith has discussed how the work ethic necessary to sustain the Industrial Revolution was developed in conjunction with an 'equally rational leisure discipline…subordinated to the timed needs of the industrial labour process.' Thus, leisure's temporal norms are defined in relation to the working day. As non-work time, evenings and weekends are designated the primary outlet for leisure activities (Frith 1983: 249-253). Coupled with alienating forms of labour, such temporal structures govern the formation of contemporary character archetypes such as the 'weekender', whose leisure activities are a habitual escape, and thus necessary counterpart to the working week (Moody 1998: 1009). While free time is determined in the sense that it cannot disrupt workflows, Frith stresses its 'ideological importance', as the moment in which 'people

experience themselves as free' (1983: 253). In this way, the control of leisure under capitalism always needs to be 'indirect', allowing at least for an illusory autonomy, which in Adorno's words 'continues to hold people under its spell' (1991: 162). Under this definition, leisure is fundamentally a form of 'mass deception', sustaining wider power structures through the construction of pseudo–free choice (Rojek 1985: 114).

Leisure activities are situated within their own hierarchies of distinction. Looking at the growth of British leisure practices during the Industrial Revolution, Frith draws attention to what he terms the 'moral entrepreneur', who in addition to their financial interests, was concerned with promoting 'rational recreation' as part of a discourse in which leisure is a 'means to the end of self-improvement.' Thus the development of middle-class leisure practice is based on an 'ideological distinction', derived from the Protestant work ethic, distinguishing between categories of leisure said to have a function of 'improvement', and those defined by a mindless hedonism (Frith 1983: 254-255). Much of electronic dance music and club culture's early (and indeed ongoing) struggle for institutional recognition has been mediated through versions of this distinction, in which sensory, physical forms of leisure and pleasure are viewed with suspicion if not outright hostility (Gilbert and Pearson 1999).

Whether deemed rational or hedonistic, the consumption of music is typically situated within the category of leisure. However, music is also used in workplaces as a technology of productivity. Perhaps the most infamous example of this is the American media company, Muzak*,* which since its founding in the early twentieth century has come to enter everyday language as a generic and often derogatory signifier for a variety of 'background', 'elevator' or 'easy-listening' musics. The moral implications of such terms bear similarities with the subcultural capital ascribed to 'functional' dance music, which is perceived in opposition to notions of creativity and music for its own sake.

Although Muzak came to be known for providing environmental musics in a broad sense, their concept was originally developed for the workplace. Their interest in the physiological and psychological effects of music emerged in the context of Taylorism and the early twentieth century 'scientific management' of the industrial workplace, which sought to rationalise every stage of the labour process in the name of efficiency (Jones and Schumacher 1992). During the 1940s, Muzak devised their 'Stimulus Progression' programme, which was specifically designed to relieve monotony, reduce stress, and increase overall productivity (Lanza 1994: 42-49). The programme was structured to complement the fluctuating routine of the working day, deploying contoured musical dynamics and shifting rhythmic intensities that were specifically intended to counter moments of lethargy. 'Stimulus Progression' was devised around 15-minute cycles that alternated between music and silence, engineered to ensure that the music wouldn't disappear into the background as a monotonous constant (LaBelle 2010: 176).

Although dealing with a different kind of 'work' environment, Serena Facci's (2016) study of Italian gym soundtracks sheds further light on how music may be deployed toward motivation and productivity. At the gym, music is utilised not only for its impact on bodily movement, but also for its more nuanced emotional and social effects. As research on entrainment has demonstrated, there are neurobiological connections between sound and movement (Nozaradan et al. 2018). At the same time, any interaction with

music also involves engagement with a complex affective and communicative network, regulated by 'culturally shared codes' (Facci 2016: 141). In line with this, fitness trainers use music to generate cohesion in classes, bringing a sense of collectivity to an activity that may otherwise be governed by largely individualised ambitions. Similarly, at Morning Gloryville – and at many other dance music events – DJs use high impact tracks to sustain energy and create shared moments of affect. This also resonates with what was a core part of Muzak's marketing ideology, in which music was used to create a sense of community among employees, thus improving morale (Jones and Schumacher 1992: 162).

In the case of both gym soundtracks and Muzak, music is used to aestheticize forms of physical and mental labour, concealing an unpleasant activity within one that is more typically associated with leisure. Historically, this has been used as a gendered technology of access. As Frith and McRobbie (1978: 11) note, the ways in which music can 'soften the workplace' was used by many employers in the British service industries to lessen job dissatisfaction and create a more inviting environment for female workers. Similarly, music was used in Jazzercize classes in the mid 20th century United States, as a way of opening up the male-dominated world of exercise via what has now become a common model of 'community through choreographed fitness' (Petrzela 2019).

Where Muzak's early business model was based on soundtracking standardised, centralised modes of accumulation, the development of the post-Fordist economy throughout the latter half of the 20th century rendered many of their techniques obsolete. Muzak shifted away from the commissioning of original 'background music' to focus on the licensing and programming of existing repertoire, now recast as 'foreground music'. Their revamped practices were directed toward the regulation and aestheticisation of sites of consumption, reflecting both the transition from manufacturing to a service economy, as well as the intensifying connections between popular music, identity, and the new consumer culture (Jones and Schumacher 1992). As working practices have become ever more flexible and decentralised, the functional use of music to create conditions of productivity now tends toward the provision of what are on the surface at least, more personalised services, targeted primarily at the level of the individual. Where companies such as Spotify offer specially curated playlists for work and productivity, the ways in which they seek to emphasise real-time flexibility and possibilities of customisation disguise what remains a highly prescriptive and centralised corporate service (Eriksson and Johansson 2017). Moreover, as playlists curated for 'productivity' exist alongside a wealth of different options including 'wellness', 'chill' and 'focus', subjectivity itself is rendered a site of 24/7 optimisation, regulated by a ubiquitous functional soundtrack. The musical mediation of this blurring of work and leisure is encapsulated by the non-stop YouTube livestream, 'lo fi hip hop radio – beats to relax/study to', evoking a flattened temporality in which productivity and relaxation demand interchangeable psychological states (Winston and Saywood 2019).

This contradictory and often illusory sense of agency permeates Marek Korczynski's (2014) study into the ways in which factory workers use music to mediate their own experiences at work. Focussing on workers' everyday 'microcultural practices', such as listening to the radio on the shop floor, Korczynski explores the ways in they can serve as a self-directed aesthetic counterpart to the monotony of work. Rather

than casting such musical practices as inherent acts of resistance, Korczynski develops the concept of 'multitonous musicking' to denote moments in which everyday musical practices may function in ways that are simultaneously with and against wider social structures. Multitonous musicking reminds us that music 'is a medium that has the potential to be used simultaneously to enact a social order and to express a spirit of resistance toward that social order' (2014: 194). This foregrounds the importance of context, demonstrating that broader attempts to understand music as resistant or otherwise, fail to consider the ways in which the meanings of music change across different spaces, places, and times. In the specific context of the factory however, Korczynski admits that much of multitonous musicking is governed by a 'logic of the immediate present' (Ibid: 208). This logic means that acts of resistance tend to occur in reaction to immediate issues, thus undermining workers' engagements with the structural conditions of their employment.

In this sense, while Korczynski emphasises a vital sense of agency within microcultural working practices, the outcome of such practices is largely to that produced by Muzak*,* Spotify's featured playlists, or the YouTube LoFi Hip Hop livestream – serving to aestheticize and improve the experience of an expanded conception of work, and ultimately, reinforcing the ideology of work itself.

Acid house, entrepreneurialism, and creative work

Where most evocations of electronic dance music culture tend to position it as existing outside of structures and ideologies of productivity, it has always had its own ambiguous relationship with work, particularly when manifested through an ethic of entrepreneurialism. Numerous responses to the early years of British acid house and rave culture identified what Andrew Hill (2002: 91) termed 'instances of a double relationship between the subculture and Thatcherism'. Hill evokes the noisy crowds of rave as disruptive to Margaret Thatcher's bureaucratic authoritarianism, while noting the ways in which rave culture simultaneously embodied core Thatcherite values, including 'the work ethic, entrepreneurialism, discipline, and respectability' (Ibid). As early as 1989 – when the dust of the so-called 'Second Summer of Love' had barely had time to settle – Stuart Cosgrove argued that the warehouse party scene was already controlled by a 'conspiracy of profit and rogue economics' (1989: 39). While many histories of U.K. dance music culture idealise these early moments in opposition to the supposedly more commercialised club culture that emerged in the latter half of the 1990s, Cosgrove suggests that there had always been a close relation between rave promoters and explicitly commercial enterprise:

> Their actions…are a perverse but poignant reading of market forces in the late eighties. Law and order are now inconvenient obstacles in the way of profit and the new breed of acid-house entrepreneurs – whether black or white – are often little more than accountants with Rottweilers… Put at its most bleak, the warehouse legacy has all but abandoned its contact with

> subcultural creativity and is simply its own peculiar drama: the tragedy of Thatcherism unmasked (Cosgrove 1989: 39).

The tensions inherent in the early UK rave scene were perhaps best encapsulated by the infamous figure of Tony Colston-Hayter, a self-professed entrepreneur and promoter of foundational U.K. rave event, Sunrise. By expanding the original acid house formula into an open-air operation taking place on a massive scale, Colston-Hayter created a lucrative business model, oriented around vague notions of social and racial inclusion (Lynskey 2014). Colston-Hayter's entrepreneurial streak was consolidated by his subsequent collaboration with Paul Staines,[86] a political aide who worked closely with one of Thatcher's advisers. Staines described his own politics as 'anarcho-capitalist' (Collin 1997: 99) – an appropriate ideological framework for the lawless enterprise of rave promotion at this time. At the turn of the 1990s when raves were clamped down on by the authorities, Colston-Hayter's 'Freedom to Party' campaign attempted to position rave promoters as 'true free-market entrepreneurs', deserving of applause from the government. As Colston-Hayter said himself, 'Maggie should be proud of us, we're a product of enterprise culture' (quoted in Collin 1997: 110). Within this formulation, the promotion and organisation of raves was valorised not for its social, cultural, or even economic contributions, but for the work of enterprise and entrepreneurialism as virtuous ends in themselves. Where early rave culture embodied core tenets of Thatcherism, it exposed the ideological contradictions of free-market orthodoxy mediated through moral and family values (John 2015: 173).

Related forms of 'invisible' entrepreneurialism have also mediated the development of many underground Black British musical cultures from jungle to grime, in which the informal economies of urban music scenes have remained largely unrecognised by institutional definitions of employment and socio-economic value (White 2017). In this way, understandings of the relation between popular music and entrepreneurialism need also consider the ways in which race and class mediate access to traditional structures and trajectories of employment. Where the relation between culture and commercialism may often function as little more than a marker of subcultural distinction (Thornton 1995), idealisations of autonomy are dependent on the ability of cultural producers to privatise the costs of their own labour (James 2020a).

As rave's influence permeated more widely through British popular culture and society over the course of the 1990s, it came to be understood as playing an active role in shaping the contours of the emergent cultural and creative industries. More than just a reflection of Thatcherite entrepreneurialism, the self-generated organisation of raves served as a model for the more fluid, individualised working practices that came to define the new creative sector. What Angela McRobbie (2002: 520) describes as the ecstasy-influenced intimacies of 'club sociality' transformed into the equally informal, yet increasingly ruthless practices of networking, which were an essential component of self-promotion and career advancement in the new economy. The temporalities of nightlife mapped comfortably on to the 'long hours culture of new media and creative work' – an apparent flexibility perhaps better understood as flattening circadian rhythms

[86] Paul Staines later attained notoriety as the founder and editor-in-chief of the right-wing political blog Guido Fawkes.

into an expanded working day (Ibid. 526). Richard Florida (2004) recognised this as part of his 'creative cities' thesis, in which the night-time economy was promoted as a way for cities to attract creative and cultural workers. In this widely adopted framework, the cultures and communities of the urban night-time were valued not only as an expanded site of consumption, but as a key social infrastructure for the emergent creative industries (Shaw 2018).

With nightlife reimagined as the night-time economy, distinctions are blurred between spaces of work and leisure. Where the success of nightlife rests on its perceived distinction as a site of leisure, this was complicated in 2019, when London club Ministry of Sound opened The Ministry – a coworking space specifically targeting the creative industries.[87] This may appear incongruous, but many idealised narratives of club and rave culture fail to recognise its relation to the emergence of flexible working practices.

In the following section, I trace an additional historical lineage, focusing on the West Coast rave scene in the US and its entanglements with Silicon Valley. I use this history as a springboard for a broader exploration of the 'Californian Ideology' and the ways its countercultural logics fed into the development of contemporary working practices.

West Coast rave culture and the 'Californian Ideology'

As has been variously documented, a second countercultural moment occurred in late 1980s/early 1990s California, in which a revived psychedelic spiritualism, a thriving rave scene, and early iterations of what would later become the World Wide Web developed in closely related social and ideological milieu (Rushkoff 1994; Davis 1998). From the beginnings of this moment, there were numerous intersections between rave and the working practices of the nascent tech scene. On the one hand, this functioned as an intensified version of the traditional work-leisure relation. As Michelangelo Matos (2018) has pointed out, 'it was not uncommon for startup workers to spend fourteen hours a day for two weeks straight, coding in preparation for a launch, and then blow it out for two or three days at a party.' At the same time, the rave and tech scenes functioned as mutually constitutive social and cultural infrastructures. Parties served as a space for tech workers to congregate and network, while the very same workers developed digital mailing lists which quickly became key to the promotion of events. Brian Behlendorf, the primary developer of the Apache web server and founder of the influential SFRaves mailing list, has described how this context 'led to a very porous boundary between work and play', in which the interrelated aspects of an emergent lifestyle and socio-technological paradigm were perceived by participants as contributing to the invention and manifestation of a new future (Matos 2015).

Within a developed and exaggerated version of this same social and conceptual framework, Burning Man festival functions as a core cultural infrastructure for Silicon Valley (Turner 2009). Where

[87] https://theministry.com

Richard Florida's creative cities thesis assumes a close relationship between culture and the creative industries, it retains some sense of a perceived distinction between them. According to Turner's argument however, Burning Man manifests new forms of ideological and structural entanglement, which use culture to legitimate and actively drive new forms of wealth production:

> Burning Man transforms the ideals and social structures of bohemian art worlds, their very particular ways of being 'creative', into psychological, social and material resources for the workers of a new, supremely fluid world of post-industrial information work (2009: 75-6).

In this merging of 'techno-pagan' ritual (Kozinets and Sherry 2004) with new working paradigms, Burning Man goes further than providing a counterpart to workplace alienation – it 'transforms the work of engineering into a spiritual task…the pursuit of a kind of vocational ecstasy' (Turner 2009: 86). As an extended form of practices already set in motion at work, Burning Man validates and authenticates tech and new media production via the manifestation of values including self-fulfilment, collaboration, and communal identity. These values share many crossovers with Morning Gloryville's manifesto, who's organisers have long-standing relationships with Burning Man (Moyo 2015; Greenwood 2020).

As is now well known, Burning Man has gained a reputation as a playground for the Silicon Valley elite, with CEOs including Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, Larry Page of Alphabet and Elon Musk of Tesla all counting themselves as enthusiastic fans and attendees. The event's drastic transformation from a small gathering of San Francisco hippies to a key networking event for the super-rich may appear absurd, but this potential was inherent within the ideological underpinnings of the event, in which vaguely defined invocations of 'radical self-expression' in fact afford the flourishing of the status quo, with control sustained and strengthened by those who already enjoy 'influence, power, and wealth' (Spencer 2015).

The ambiguous politics at the core of Burning Man, as well as the wider West Coast culture out of which it developed, can be conceptualised through what Barbrook and Cameron (1996) termed 'The Californian ideology'. This newly pervasive socio-cultural shift was defined above all by a vague libertarianism, in which radical visions of individual and collective liberty merged with free market orthodoxy, via 'a bizarre mishmash of hippie anarchism and economic liberalism' (Ibid: 56). The emphasis placed on technological utopianism – intended to enhance personal freedoms at the expense of the nation state – served to create space for the growth of an increasingly corporate monopoly, as embodied by the rapid centralisation of power in Silicon Valley. The co-option of what began as a community-oriented idealism in part resulted from the lack of any nuanced critique of the relation between state and private power, as well as the social and racial stratification that is fundamental to California and the US more broadly. Where the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s had combined self-development and cultural rebellion with more structured political struggle, the tech engineers of 1990s California were more likely to seek 'individual self-fulfilment through therapy, spiritualism, exercise, or other narcissistic pursuits' (Barbrook and Cameron 1996: 61). Rather than seeking to dismantle social systems, they sought freedom from within the constraints

of the free market, such that meaning and satisfaction would be derived primarily in the workplace: 'not a freedom from work, but freedom *through* work' (Fisher 2018: 756).

Others have suggested that the relationship between countercultural politics and contemporary iterations of capitalism may be traced back to the emergence of what was later termed neoliberalism during the 1980s. As Mark Fisher and others have asserted, neoliberalism may in part be understood as a project aimed at destroying and rendering unthinkable the social and political experiments of the 1960s and 70s, replacing collectivist imaginings with a 'mandatory individualism' (2018: 757). David Hancock develops this thesis, suggesting that the ambivalent politics of bohemianism and 1960s counterculture were themselves integral to the shaping of what would become neoliberal ideology. For Hancock, both the counterculture and neoliberalism were forms of revolt against bourgeois morality, as well as interrelated structures of traditional corporate organisation. Emerging out of the relative affluence and stability of suburbanised, post-war America, counterculture was primarily the result of spiritual rather than material discontent, in particular the ways in which the bureaucratic post-war order was seen to contradict the heroic imaginaries of the American frontier (2019: 15). What Hancock describes as neoliberalism's 'countercultural logic' was necessitated by a similar moral and spiritual vacuum – in this case, one which was exacerbated by the material failings of the new economic order. Where inequality intensified under neoliberalism, counterculture functioned as a way of presenting risk-taking not only as seductive, but as a moral enterprise – such that 'the ethic of the entrepreneur, celebrated as a mode of self-expression and heightened experience, born of risk, enables capitalism to become a spiritual endeavour' (Ibid: 70). If forms of insecurity and instability were a personal choice for the bohemian, uncertainty becomes not only an accepted reality of the neoliberal economy – but a fundamental component of its valorisations of experimentation, risk, and chance: precarity masquerading as the excitement of flexible employment (Lorusso 2019). The ambivalent rebelliousness of counterculture is thus far removed from any societal threat, and instead integrated as a core moral tenet of the dominant social, political, and economic order.

The seeming contradictions of this 'countercultural logic' are no longer just an underlying, operational rationale – they have risen to the surface as highly marketable soundbites. In this way, it is with such sincerity that Daybreaker CEO Radha Agrawal expressed the following in an interview:

> Don't label me…I am Radha Agrawal. I am an entrepreneur, I am a capitalist. I am also a hippie. I love men, I love women. I love to eat vegetables. I also love to occasionally eat a cheeseburger…you know, every six months. You cannot label me, you cannot label Daybreaker, you cannot label each other (quoted in Caiger-Smith 2017).

In this statement, representative of a particularly pervasive kind of contemporary marketing discourse, a self-proclaimed hippie can simultaneously and proudly identify as a capitalist. The apparent paradox of the juxtaposition is worn as a badge of honour – more than just an attempt at authentication via subcultural aesthetics, the very logic of rebellion is largely inextricable from the corporate jargon of disruptive innovation.

Life, work, and the wellness industries

Contemporary notion of 'wellness' are a core legacy of countercultural logics. What began as a collection of ideas concerned with the 'transformation of the unitary individual' fuelled the development of ideologies directed toward the maximisation of individual potential in the capitalist economy (Ingram 2020: 3-4). This shift has occurred across several different areas, including the recent popularity of micro-dosing psychedelics as productivity and creativity enhancers among tech workers in Silicon Valley (Kuchler 2017); as well as the use of meditation and 'mindfulness' techniques as a form of self-pacification and control in corporate settings (Purser 2019). The resurfacing of these ideas can be understood as the latest iteration of workplace optimisation strategies under capitalism, but also as a response to a related but much wider-reaching contemporary crisis of meaning, as demonstrated by the recent embrace of far-right conspiracy theories by certain New Age, wellness, and psychedelic communities – what has begun to be termed the 'cosmic right' (Milburn 2020; O'Donovan 2021).

In his 2015 book, *The Happiness Industry,* William Davies chronicles the development of what he terms the 'science of happiness' and the associated industry that has formed around it. For Davies, the present-day 'happiness industry' can be traced back to the scientific utopianism of the Enlightenment, which contends that questions of politics and morality may be answered via empirical means. Much of this science is directed toward practices of social control and private profit, such that we witness the 'entangling of hope and joy within infrastructures of measurement, surveillance and government.' Davies links such tendencies to contemporary crises of capitalism, whereby the increasing demands placed on employees in the 24/7 digital workplace leads a host of stress-related disorders, which manifest as diminished productivity and ultimately, diminished profit margins (2015: 7). Happiness is thus channelled from being an end in itself to become its own 'form of capital.' Where this started as a way of maximising productivity, 'the importance of employee happiness and psychological engagement becomes all the greater once corporations are in the business of selling ideas, experiences and services' (2015: 126).

Notions of health, happiness, and productivity were initially deployed to augment one another, but they have since become increasingly difficult to distinguish, merging into a singular category of continual self-betterment (2015: 135). Writing on the contemporary obsession with 'wellness', Cederstöm and Spicer suggest that the 'wellness command' may be understood in relation to a contemporary work ethic, but argue that the 'line between work and life is increasingly difficult to draw' (2015: 132). Physical and mental wellbeing have become both an ideology and a moral imperative, such that life itself has emerged as an 'exercise in wellness optimization' (2015: 3). While the search for wellness promises greater happiness and self-fulfilment, it ultimately breeds an 'infectious narcissism', a 'creeping sense of anxiety', and rampant individualisation, borne out of the relentless societal demands for disciplined improvement (2015: 133-5).

Wellness in urban space

The growth of the wellness industries also has a distinctive spatial footprint, existing in close relation to broader processes of urban transformation. In Lower Manhattan for example, what was once a globally influential centre of urban nightlife has since been remade by an increasing concentration of boutique fitness spaces, growing in parallel to the mental and physical demands of the knowledge economy (Florida and Boone 2018). Much of the intensity of this shift can be attributed to the so-called 'yoga effect', through which exercise could be validated and authenticated via a newly authoritative spiritual discourse (Petrzela 2018). Where such language was derived from yoga's origins as a holistically conceived mental, physical, and spiritual practice, yoga has in many urban contexts been reconfigured as an immediate, fitness-oriented activity, with studios and classes positioned to fit around the busy working schedules of a middle class, metropolitan demographic (Biswas 2012: 106). With much of yoga's perceived authenticity built on Orientalist tropes, the yoga studio functions not only as a space of self-optimisation, but also as one of escape and recuperation – an exotic escape located conveniently within the fabric of the neighbourhood (Parish 2019). In many cases, yoga and fitness studios are integrated as part of new office and residential developments, blurring the physical architectures of life, work, and leisure.

Crucial to the relationship of the fitness and wellness industries to the city are the ways in which they idealise bodies along lines of race, gender, and class (Petrzela 2020). The centring of these industries on the body functions as an additional layer of spatial exclusion, serving to '*naturalize* processes of displacement and social upgrading' (Kern 2012: 32). In this way, as Parish argues, the combined forces of the wellness industries are not only a symptomatic reflection of tendencies in contemporary capitalism, they are 'integral to the social reproduction of urban neoliberalism at both bodily and neighbourhood scales' (2019: 105).

The growth of the wellness industries provides further context through which to unpack the crises faced by London's nightlife scenes in recent years. When the widespread closure of the city's nightclubs and music venues was identified around 2016, much of the ensuing media debate centred on whether this was the result of spatialised pressures, or the changing behaviours of more health-conscious young consumers. The framework of the 'wellness command' offers some way out of this debate, drawing attention to the ways in which changing consumer habits may be understood as part of a broader ideological shift, coproduced through the changing spaces of the city. Given the increasing influence of wellness as an ideological and economic imperative, it is unsurprising that urban nightlife scenes have adjusted their cultural offerings in response. While understandable, these transformations limit nightlife spaces to the shorter-term management of financial precarity, limiting their potential as sites of social and cultural transformation.

The politics of wellness

When thinking through the ideologies of happiness and wellness proposed by Davies, and Cederström and Spicer, there is perhaps some exaggeration of the extent to which such values have shaped society. Discourses of wellbeing are undeniably entangled with contemporary social, cultural, and economic life, but they remain relevant concerns for a privileged global minority. Social media has projected an idealised wellness culture to a far wider audience, but few have the kinds of living and working situations which permit such a foregrounded concern with health, happiness, and wellness. Moreover, despite the generalised shift toward flexible employment in the creative, media, and tech industries, such work remains dependent on a vast infrastructure of hidden and invisible labour, which is largely detached from notions of work conceived as fulfilling or contributing to a broader sense of wellness (Crain et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, the framework of the wellness industries is useful for its exploration of the ways in which discourses around health and happiness have become entangled with the reconfigured demands of capital. Just as poverty is positioned as the result of personal failings, notions of happiness are bound up with an individualised responsibility. Stress and other mental health disorders are depoliticised, and subsequently divorced from any possible social causation (Fisher 2009: 37; Becker 2013). In these contexts, the societal distribution of this conception of wellness is inherently uneven, limited to those with access to specific practices of work, leisure, and living.

In their final chapter, Cederström and Spicer conclude their critique of wellness by differentiating it from joy. They turn to dance music culture to demonstrate this difference, comparing an account of an ecstatic night out written by novelist Zadie Smith, with sober club night, Morning Glory – the forerunner to what would later become Morning Gloryville*:*

> Unlike the easily replaceable everyday pleasure, joy is something that comes unexpectedly, and leaves in the same way. It cannot easily be repeated, replicated and brought back to life. Joy dies. And attempts to resuscitate it only leave us with a hollow shell… Morning Glory is not a place of joy. It's a place ruled by measured pleasure. All forms of excess are carefully avoided…What makes Morning Glory so contemporary is its ability to marry the pleasure principle with the broader obligation to be a productive wellness maximizer (2015: 131).

Conclusion

This chapter has considered electronic dance music culture in relation to categories of work, leisure, and wellness. Morning Gloryville's early morning, pre-work events reorder the temporal logics of dance music culture as a counterpart to contemporary working practices, entangled with broader conceptions of wellness and self-optimisation. Where this might seem incongruous, I argue that Morning Gloryville may be situated as part of much longer-term historical trends, which question received assumptions about dance music culture as a utopian, outside space. I was drawn to the example of Morning Gloryville because of the ways it appears to invert many of the unique social and cultural qualities of dance music culture. After attending some of their events, I realised that while it didn't align with my own musical and cultural taste, it creates an important social space for attendees, that in certain respects is more accessible than many nightlife environments. Like Carl Wilson's (2007) study of the popular but polarising figure of Celine Dion, I had to be cautious to separate questions of politics from my own aesthetic judgements. The more I sought to critique Morning Gloryville however, the more I found that my criticisms could be directed as much toward the fragile utopianism that underpins much of dance music culture.

Such criticisms do not deny the possibility of dance music culture as a site of social transformation. However, when thinking about dance music culture in the context of cities and contemporary capitalism more broadly, it is important that such structures are not understood in a wholly deterministic sense. If Morning Gloryville might point toward the absorption of social dancing within ideologies of work and wellness for example, we need also consider how culture has contributed to such ideologies. Similarly, where urban cultural spaces are often positioned as victims of external forces including commercialisation, institutionalisation, and gentrification, it is vital to interrogate how cultural practices can sustain and reinforce such processes, reproducing the very same structures that mediate perceptions of spatial and cultural decline. Where this might signal a relentless, cyclical pessimism, I would argue that ongoing, reflexive critiques of dance music culture are vital – to uphold its potential as a space in which alternate modes of community may be enacted, experienced, and imagined.

During the unique conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, Morning Gloryville's remote events accelerated a broader process of blurring in which domestic space was invaded by labour and incessant work of self-improvement. This flattened space and temporality produces an 'apparent equivalence between what is immediately available, accessible, or utilizable and what exists', such that we are left paralysed, unable to see beyond 'the homogeneity of the present' (Crary 2013: 19). Where such paralysis was difficult to avoid during the early days of lockdown, the intense technologisation of work, culture, and social life during the pandemic also afforded new cultural forms and modes of social transformation.

In the following, final chapter, I turn attention to the livestreaming of dance music culture during COVID-19, situating it as part of a broader technological and cultural history, including pirate radio, grime YouTube videos, and Boiler Room. Where the last five chapters have explored dance music culture's spatial

and temporal transformations in a material sense, this chapter considers the social, cultural, and economic transformations afforded by a shift from physical to digital space.

Chapter 6. 'No screenshots on the dancefloor': livestreaming and the audiovisual mediation of electronic dance music

Days merge together in static monotony. Without movement, time itself slows down: 'all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space' (Lefebvre 2004: 89). For those of us with the privilege to social-distance, distinctions between work and social life fold into the blurred temporalities of digitally augmented domestic space. It's Friday night. I quit Microsoft Word, close my laptop and go to the kitchen to get a beer. Maybe I can chemically induce some kind of shift. I return to my desk and dim the lights, hoping to repurpose the space. I open up my laptop, where my social media feeds are saturated with footage from DJs' bedrooms. They have been all week. I scroll voyeuristically through countless options of mediated intimacy. Parties reimagined as content. Hunting for an immersive experience, I try my best to ignore the clutter of memes and news reports vying for my attention. Normally I savour this journey — the expectant walks through nocturnal streets — some routes well-trodden, others unfamiliar. That unmistakable low-end throb that signifies proximity. Tonight, my only movement is through digital space. Eventually one option catches my eye and I click to enter full screen. In the stream, the lone figure of a DJ is only just visible, their silhouette contorted through digital manipulations. I spot a friend in the chat feed and we exchange a few messages, performing an ironic dance floor interaction. An ephemeral moment of connection. After spending most of my day hunched over a keyboard, my mind and body crave social contact, an altered state. I stand up and increase the volume on my speakers. The twisted euphoria of lysergic resonance fills the room. A sibilant hi-hat enters, and I sense a brief flash of energy course through me. There's much to hear, but I miss the feeling of vibration. That sensory overload when I surrender my body as membrane. I dance for a moment, grateful but alone. Alone, but together.

In March 2022, COVID-19 lockdown measures forced the indefinite closure of nightclubs and venues around the world. Fundamental questions were raised as to how the aesthetics, communities and economies of dance music culture could survive a physically despatialised context. The sounds and structures of electronic dance music are closely intertwined with the architecture of the nightclub space, combining to produce the setting for dance music's uniquely intimate sensory and social formations. Physical space also plays a vital but often overlooked role in club culture's delicate economy, in which the increasing monopoly of exploitative platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music has rendered live events the only feasible source of income. Where many nightclubs already inhabited a precarious position in gentrified, financialised urban space, the pandemic served to emphasise club culture's existent fragility.

As in many other spheres of life, dance music scenes responded to lockdown with a swift and comprehensive process of digital migration, using audio-visual streaming services as part of attempts to fill the social and economic gap left by closed venues and cancelled events. In certain cases, new media organisations emerged in direct response to the crisis. United We Stream started out by broadcasting live

from venues across Berlin, but soon expanded to numerous cities around the world, using the streams to generate income for a 'rescue fund to support clubs in difficulty'.[88] Existing platforms like Boiler Room adapted their previous service, moving to host broadcasts 'direct from artists' homes and private spaces'.[89] Outside of these more formalised services, countless DJs and collectives set up their own livestreams on Facebook, YouTube and Twitch, repositioning the 'bedroom DJ' in a newly public light. Some were set up among small groups of friends, while others functioned to sustain wider musical scenes and communities. These ranged from those oriented around genre or artist-based fandom, as well as those grouped around identity markers of race, gender, and sexuality – for whom nightlife venues might typically function as vital spaces for self-expression and community building.

The speed of this transition from physical to digital space was borne out of necessity, and in many cases, revealed an inspiring sense of solidarity within and across localised dance music scenes and communities. At the same time, this shift can also be understood as a sudden and unexpected acceleration of processes that were already well underway in much of dance music culture. Over the last decade, the unstoppable rise of Boiler Room had already established the livestream as a ubiquitous component of contemporary club culture's ecologies of production and consumption. Prior to this, the history of local and global dance music scenes has long been shaped by a variety of audiovisual media, including radio stations – both legal and pirate; specialist television programmes, such the New Dance Show in Detroit; cinematic depictions of rave culture (Morrison 2011); a variety of different YouTube channels and videos; as well as a number of experiments with virtual clubbing on platforms such as Second Life (e.g. Simao 2015). Where each of these examples bears intermedial relations with contemporary livestreaming practices, the range of affects produced by each medium must be understood in relation to their specific cultural context. Radio, television, and the internet afford different social and cultural potentials, but these are always dependent on use. Different technologies *afford* different uses, but they do not determine them (Winner 1980).

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between electronic dance music culture and its audiovisual mediation, historicising the livestreaming practices that emerged during COVID-19 via a trajectory that includes jungle pirate radio, grime YouTube videos, and Boiler Room. While Boiler Room normalised the aesthetics and practices of livestreaming within a spatially fragmented and increasingly corporatised infrastructure, jungle pirate radio and grime YouTube videos highlight the important role that audiovisual media have played in reproducing distinctly localised musical communities – a vital social function which was intensified during the pandemic. In the final section, I draw on three case studies taken from 2020 and 2021 which explore how livestreaming was used variously to sustain marginalised communities, support the spatial infrastructures of urban nightlife, and inspire new models of organisation for nightlife venues. Through this wide range of case studies taken from the early 1990s to the present day, I aim to demonstrate the diversity of possibilities in interactions between music and its technological

[88] https://en.unitedwestream.berlin/info/
[89] https://boilerroom.tv/article/streaming-from-isolation

mediation, which are shaped by the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are situated. Before moving to the case studies, I present a brief discussion of some existing literature on remediation, technology, and community, which have guided my approach to the case studies that follow.

Music, media, and community

Much has been written about the relationship between music and digital media, with a large portion of the literature focussing on the effects of P2P file sharing and streaming platforms on the traditional economies of the music industry (Burnett and Wikstrom 2009; Mulligan 2015; Negus 2019). While there are important and ongoing debates regarding the monetisation of audiovisual livestreaming, my primary focus in this chapter will be exploring the relationship between club culture, audiovisual media, and community, as well as thinking about how these musical, technological, and social interactions reshape our relations with urban space. The specific qualities of digital media afford their own set of social, cultural, and aesthetic affects; however, they are best understood within longer-term trajectories of technological change. As Paul Theberge notes:

> The digitalization of music is not a "revolution" … digitalization has been, in fact, a relatively long, transformative process of economic, technological, social and cultural change that has taken place over a half-century or more … the digitalization of music should be regarded not as the result of a singular technological innovation …nor the apparent rise of new forms of consumer power … but, rather, as a series of more or less distinct transformations that have occurred at different times and across a number of different areas of musical practice (2015: 329).

In this way, the shift from the analogue technologies of radio and television toward digital livestreaming may be productively understood via Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation. Rather than focussing on the unique properties of new media forms, remediation draws attention to the ways in which a 'new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways' (2000: 47). As much as digital technology may appear to replace old media, prior media forms remain important reference points through which the value of new technologies may be measured. Far from constituting a radical break with the past, digital media will always 'function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was first introduced' (50). Here it also crucial to note that 'remediation operates in both directions', such that digital media refashions 'old' media, as much as old media reinvent themselves via the incorporation of new technological possibilities (48).

Remediation is useful not only for drawing attention to the continuities between apparently paradigmatic moments of technological change, but also for highlighting the ways in which new varieties of media are best conceptualised in relation to their technological predecessors. If the audiovisual

livestreaming of music might (re)assert the role of the visual in musical listening for example, we must remember that it was not until the invention of phonograph recordings that the consumption of music could exist in a 'purely' aural realm (Auslander 1999: 74). Furthermore, where livestreaming may challenge ontological conceptions of live performance based on spatial and temporal co-presence, Sarah Thornton (1995) reminds us of the ways in which idealisations of liveness in musical performance only developed in the mid 20th century, as a response to the perceived threat posed by DJing and its associated disc cultures. If the audiovisual livestreaming of electronic music appears to undermine the shared auratic experience of the dancefloor, Thornton's history draws attention to the relatively recent acceptance of DJing as a legitimate form of musical practice and performance. More broadly, Thornton highlights the ways in which technological shifts and remediations are dependent on related processes of enculturation and authentication – processes which are fundamentally social in character.

With each new development in media, debates often tend to focus on their capacity to extend or fragment forms of social connection. When DJs first began to perform using recordings of pre-existing music, early critics regarded them as incapable of 'delivering an authentic experience of musical community' (Thornton 1995: 25). Related debates developed in response to the emergence of digital communications and the internet in the early 1990s, which tended to focus on their utopian or dystopian social potential. For Howard Rheingold, the internet afforded new kinds of 'virtual community', defined by 'many to many' capabilities and new possibilities for 'citizen-based democracy' (1994: xxvii-xxviii). For others, the internet offered users a delusory 'experience of decentralization', within an infrastructure that was in fact 'impressively centralised' and corporatised (Calhoun 1998: 382). Calhoun argues that early web utopians failed to understand the differences between face-to-face and mediated interactions. According to Calhoun, digital technology is effective at building interest groups or enclaves built around particular identities, but it is less capable of 'binding people to each other in dense, multiplex networks', or in constructing a 'public realm in which members of different such communities … engage with each other across the boundaries of their differences' (1998: 392).

With the benefit of hindsight of course, we know that both conceptions of the internet are true. As Nicholas Cook (2019: 26) argues, 'if digital technology has created the conditions for surveillance and social oppression, it has also created means for resisting them.' Key here is to understand that technological change can only be understood within and alongside culture. It is not what technology does, but how it used. Therefore, different media and technologies do not carry their own politics – our understanding of technology can be neither utopian nor dystopian in an inherent sense. This means, in Georgina Born's words (2022: 4), that 'debates over technological determinism are in principle *undecidable.'* Rather, the relations between technology, society and culture need to be understood within the specific parameters of each situation – 'the debate cannot be resolved philosophically'. In this way, Born continues, 'we should understand change as resulting from multiple trajectories that as well as being musical and technological may be cultural, social, political, economic and legal' (Ibid.)

Digital media have created the conditions for music scenes that are virtual, as well as local and translocal (Bennett 2004). Yet where digital technology only affords the possibility of mediated communities rather than necessarily producing them, it is also useful to think about these different kinds of music scene in relation, rather than as discrete categories. Andy Bennett (2002: 91) discusses the 'Canterbury Sound' in progressive rock as an example of a virtual scene, in which the city of Canterbury functions as 'the necessary stimulus' to forge a geographically disparate musical community via print and electronic media. The significance of Canterbury is rooted in the localised geographies of a historic music scene, but this grounded reality is extended via retrospective practices of mythologisation. Canterbury comes to represent broader musical and cultural dispositions, forming what Bennett terms an 'urban mythscape'. Where urban mythscapes may initially be constructed via informal networks of fans, they will often be later adopted by musicians and the tourism industry, as part of new or revived economies. In turn, such adoption serves to authenticate the mythscape, sustaining and reproducing its cultural life (95). This example highlights the formation of a virtual music scene, produced at the intersection of media, localised musical practice, and urban institutions. Moreover, in its technological production both via the internet and print-based media, it decouples the virtual from the digital, highlighting the importance of remediation and the need to understand digital affordances as part of broader social, cultural, and technological histories.

In the following section, I draw on two London-based case studies: jungle pirate radio and grime YouTube videos. These examples explore the ways in which audiovisual media have shaped local music scenes, serving to sustain and amplify urban communities beyond the co-presence of the dance floor, while simultaneously drawing attention to the limitations of musical communities mediated via the centralised infrastructure of online platforms.

Mediating electronic dance music in London

Jungle pirate radio

Along with warehouse parties and club nights, pirate radio stations such as Rush, Eruption and Kool FM played a key role in the formation of the multicultural networks and communities that made up London's jungle scene during the early 1990s (Melville 2020: 205-8). Hundreds of local radio stations were set up in the council estates of London's suburbs, using the roofs of tower blocks to widen the reach of their transmissions, as well as to conceal antennae and other equipment from the regulatory staff of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Pirate radio stations broadcast the intimacy of the dancefloor across the city into bedrooms and cars, providing access to those who were too young or poor to attend parties. Yet pirate radio was about more than just transmitting the sounds of jungle beyond the confines of the rave – it actively sought to imagine and amplify widened musical communities. The patter of radio MCs combined intensely rhythmic phrasing with patois and London slang, establishing what Simon Reynolds

has described as an 'atmosphere of sociability…with a strong emphasis on audience participation' (2013: 288). MCs would make continual reference to individuals and crews 'locked in', who would make their presence known via mobile phone rings and text messages. As Matthew Fuller (2005: 37) has argued, this was

> not an attempt simply to ego-amplify the MC and DJ but to develop a "multiple ear" in the listeners. At the same time as you listen on Walworth Road, there's someone in Beckton texting or calling in to set up a rewind or shout for their mates. The radio provides a way of triangulating this relationship based on disjuncture.

This process ensured that an otherwise passive act of individual listening was experienced as a participatory, collective ritual. Mobile phones and radio combined to form 'autonomous media ecologies' (James 2020: 57), functioning outside their intended social and economic affordances. Not only did pirate stations illegally occupy the airwaves of FM radio, their use of 'rings' – dialling phone numbers with no intention of the receiver answering – exploited the communicative capabilities of mobile phones, while circumventing the payment structures of telecommunications companies (Fuller 2005: 50). Such participatory reimagining of technology speaks not only to the social affordances of radio and phones used in unintended conjunction, but further, to the inherent collectivism of dance music culture. Outside the co-present feedback loop of the dancefloor, DJs and listeners found new ways of expressing the shared, communal nature of their experience.

By operating at the margins of formal media infrastructures, pirate radio had unique sonic and aesthetic qualities, which produced unintended social affects. For Malcolm James, the intimacies of pirate radio's permeations into the privacy of domestic space were intensified by its lo-fi, sonic imperfections, in which stuttered shout-outs could only be deciphered through active forms of listening – a mode of communication which stood in stark contrast to the authoritative, 'disembodied voice of BBC unity' that characterises national radio institutions (2020: 66-7). The efforts required by the listener were amplified by the unpredictable, transient nature of pirate radio transmissions:

> For those "locked in", this was all compounded by the precarity of the listening experience. This concerned the fast-moving nature of the scene. Some tunes were played once and never heard again. But it also concerned the transmission and reception technologies, the properties of the FM signal and the problem of brick walls. Listening experiences were always immediate – in the sense that you might never hear the tune again – and impermanent, because you listened in the knowledge that reception could suddenly be lost … This unpredictability was central to the listener's relationship with the station. The impermanence of the jungle pirate radio listening experience was an intimate material connection to the radio itself. Odd as it might seem, the frustrating experience of moving around a room, antenna in hand, trying to clear the fuzz, was an affirmation of pirate radio's poesis and your place within that (Ibid. 77).

In this way, jungle pirate radio served to mediate and extend the intimacies of rave via an interrelated set of functions, some deliberate and others unintentional. At its most basic, jungle pirate radio contributed toward the formation of musical communities that cut across lines of race and class, as well as geographical boundaries of London's inner city and suburbs. Crucially, via their illegal, informal nature, these mediated communities were formed in opposition to the dominant musical tastes produced via BBC Radio 1, which was itself founded in 1967 to regulate and institutionalise the threat posed by the first wave of pirate radio stations, such as Radio Caroline and Radio London (Melville 2020: 70). Secondly, pirate radio used early mobile phone technology as part of a media ecology that reproduced an approximation of the co-present feedback loops on the dancefloor, in which domestic listening was reimagined as a participatory, collective experience. Lastly, these social affects were inadvertently amplified via the unpredictable nature of the hijacked, analogue media that was used, serving both to heighten the active role of the listener, as well as the ephemeral liveness of the DJ and MC's performance – itself a core component of the immediacy of the rave experience. The active role of listeners was intensified further due to the lack of any formalised systems of archiving, such that listeners' amateur cassette recordings provided the only form of documentation (De Lacey 2020: 199).

Where pirate radio contributed toward the technological mediation of jungle's musical communities, it existed as just one component of an interdependent ecology that included the physical spaces of warehouse venues, nightclubs, studios, dubplate cutting houses, and record shops. Pirate radio was a vital medium for the advertisement of events, and the fees used to pay for this airtime would then be fed back into the running costs of the station. Moreover, while pirate radio produced its own modes of listener participation and imagined collectivity, its social affects were always firmly 'grounded in the materiality of the rave' (James 2020: 78). Pirate radio broadcasts were valued as a distinct cultural form in their own right, but their invocations of the 'junglist massive' would make little sense without reference to the communality of the dance floor.

In the 2000s and 2010s however, the relationship between London's pirate radio stations and live events was disrupted. During this period, pirate radio was dominated by the emergent sound of grime, which as Dhanveer Singh Brar has argued, 'was always intended to be pirate *and* club music' (2021: 118). As has been widely documented, the racialised bureaucratic tool of Form 696 made the organisation of grime events almost impossible, largely excluding live grime performance from the public sphere. In this way, where the dedication of pirate radio stations had always cast them as 'viable oppositional sites' in the face of monitoring by the DTI, they acquired a degree of heightened urgency under the repressive conditions of Form 696 (De Lacey 2020: 204). No longer a mediated extension of the rave, grime pirate radio represented, for the early scene at least, almost the entire cultural territory in which grime took place. However, pirate radio did more than just fill the gap left by the cancellation of live events. As Brar goes on to argue, the repressive power of Form 696 may also be understood as a response to the social and cultural

influence of pirate radio itself, which jeopardised the 'terms and conditions of race as a spatial epistemology in London … [and] represented a spectacular break in a previously sedimented order' (2021: 126).

In this sense, both live and mediated musical performances contribute toward the production of urban music cultures, which (re)shape the social and geographic space of the city. As the example of pirate radio demonstrates, musical media can function both as an extension or replacement of co-present musical performance, but in either case, it remains closely bound up with contested articulations of space and community. This is borne out by the example of grime YouTube videos in the section that follows, in which the internet contributed toward grime's national and global popularity, while simultaneously reproducing the hyperlocal imaginaries at its core.

Grime YouTube Videos

As an MC-oriented musical culture, the immediacy of live performance is key to grime. Pirate radio did much to capture the spontaneous group dynamics of grime performance (De Lacey 2020), but it could only go so far in sustaining grime through the despatialised conditions brought about by Form 696. As Brar (2021: 118) reminds us, grime requires the 'oxygen of gatherings … the movements of a crowd', but at the very least, it needs to be seen as much as it needs to be heard. Yet, despite noting this visual aspect, Brar neglects to mention the significant role played by audiovisual media in the early dissemination of grime music. Where the intangible, autonomous aspects of pirate radio have acquired a near mythical quality among researchers of London's underground music cultures,[90] grime YouTube videos raise additional questions about the visual and digital mediation of music, as well as the contradictory relationship between DIY musical practices and the centralised power of online media corporations. Given the localised reach of pirate radio and its close associations with the architecture of council estate tower blocks, it has an obvious relationship with urban spaces and communities. However, as Malcolm James (2020) and other scholars have argued, the digital and audiovisual media of grime share a similarly close relation with the urban, allowing artists to reshape images of their inner-city locales and broadcast them on national and global scales.

The development of jungle was closely intertwined with the analogue technologies of vinyl and FM radio. The production and consumption of grime, on the other hand, was also dependent a range of digital media including DVDs, YouTube videos, social media, and mp3s shared via mobile phone. Pirate radio stations such as Rinse, Déjà vu and Choice FM were key to the initial consolidation of the grime sound, but these worked in tandem with audiovisual platforms, which helped to construct grime's visual aesthetic, as well as broadening its reach. On satellite television, the influential Channel U was founded in 2003, laying the groundwork for several others including SBTV, Link Up TV, and GRM Daily. In contrast

[90] Alongside academic and popular texts, record label Death is not the End has released several volumes compiling pirate radio adverts from the late 1980s and early 1990s.

with the slick production values of MTV, Channel U often featured homemade footage filmed on handheld video cameras and mobile phones. Anticipating the user generated content of Web 2.0, Channel U provided a platform for grime artists to broadcast DIY music videos via the extended reach of satellite and cable television. For early grime artists who struggled to gain recognition from the mainstream media and music industry, platforms like Channel U gave them alternative routes to success. Audiovisual platforms functioned as part of an informal entrepreneurial infrastructure that subverted many young Black Londoner's assumed social trajectory, destabilising the often-limiting classification of 'NEET' – Not in Education, Employment, or Training (White 2017).

As the function of these TV channels was replaced by online platforms and social media, grime artists took further advantage of their democratising potential, reaching ever wider audiences while circumnavigating the power structures of major record labels and the mainstream music industry (Woods 2020). Using a combination of digital technologies including DAWs (digital audio workstations), phone cameras, and social media, grime artists were able to retain control over the production, distribution, and marketing of their music. To be sure, while digital media presented independent artists with the potential for exponential growth and reach, its democratic promise was certainly more complex than the self-contained autonomy of pirate radio and dubplate culture:

> As the alternative media ecologies of grime were displaced by YouTube, these forms of economy found affinity with the systems of prosumption that characterise labour exploitation and profit generation in Web 2.0 … the gift economies of grime then become inseparable from the forms of dominant capitalism for which YouTube is designed (James 2020: 90).

In this way, as much as digital media provided grime artists with the means to bypass the structures of the traditional music industry, their activities must simultaneously be understood in relation to emergent economic and technological paradigms, in which user generated content and its associated interactions function as vital commodities within systems of algorithmic monetisation (Zuboff 2019). Where Orlando Woods (2020) is keen to highlight how grime artists took advantage of the emancipatory qualities of digital media, it is important to recognise the inherent ambivalence of such technologies, which always hold the simultaneous potential to disrupt *and* reproduce existing structures of power. Aside from its wider structural significance however, the shift toward digital media had tangible effects on the socialities of grime. As James goes on to argue,

> In terms of presence, while earlier relations of kinship and community remained, the intimacies of the sound system and pirate radio were increasingly absent. Being on the dance floor or in radio call-ins with people like you was now secondary to deterritorialised dialogue. Verifications of yourself and others came not through shared sonic knowledges of the past and everyday life, but through impressions left in view numbers, comment boxes and Google Analytics' data (2020: 102-3).

The very same qualities of digital media that provide structures for interaction and participation simultaneously form a terrain of competition in the economy of attention. Of course, these effects were far from unique to grime, and have come to mediate much of contemporary culture and daily life. However, the disembodied, deterritorialised nature of digital media bears particular relation to grime, mirroring the urban conditions out of which the music emerged. These included the closure of former shared spaces such as pirate radio stations, record shops, and youth clubs, as well as the increased policing of public space – which limited the urban mobility of many young Black Londoners. In the face of this spatial alienation, grime artists took advantage of audiovisual media to forge articulations of 'hyperlocality', broadcasting images of local London neighbourhoods and crews through digital space (James 2020: 87). These can be read both as expressions of lived urban claustrophobia, but also as an active reclaiming of the city through images. In other words, grime and its audiovisual media are products of urban inequality, as well as a means through which such inequalities may be resisted (Woods 2020).

The audiovisual mediation of grime was significant for providing new modes of distribution, but also for the visual language it produced. With the MC now seen as well as heard, the racial and gendered codes implied through lyrics and sound were intensified by the visual presence of bodies. These bodies were often situated against the stark backdrop of London's council estates, reinforcing grime's relation to race, as well as a specific urban imaginary. Where the multiculturalism of jungle was coproduced via the disembodied sonics of vinyl and pirate radio, grime's audiovisual mediation ensured that even when it enjoyed a greater degree of commercial success, it remained inextricably bound up with racialised constructions of local identity. Such associations were amplified further through the lo-fi immediacy of DIY aesthetics, which foregrounded a gritty realism, in stark contrast to what Korsgaard (2017: 180) has termed the 'hypermediated spectacularity' of MTV and many earlier music video practices. In part, this can be understood within the wider shift toward DIY aesthetics that was brought about by YouTube and Web 2.0 more broadly (Vernallis 2013). However, it is also important to emphasise the unique relationship between grime's DIY visual aesthetics and the social and urban conditions out of which the genre emerged. While this aesthetic was afforded by the democratising possibilities of digital technology, it was bound up with a particular urgency for many early grime artists, who worked without access to professional recording studios and the networks of production provided by major record labels (White 2017). Furthermore, by broadcasting grime performance direct from the streets of inner-city London, the sounds and images of grime were rooted firmly within expressions of local urban identity.

Following Bolter and Grusin (2000), this can be understood via simultaneous logics of 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy'. On the one hand, the simplicity of many early grime videos produces a sense of intimacy, in which the viewer is immersed in the very same environment where the music is lived, produced, and performed. Instead of choregraphed dance routines or flashy computer graphics, we are presented with groups of young Black men huddled on street corners or in the cramped studios of pirate radio stations, passing around a microphone between verses. On the other hand, the shaky, pixelated footage filmed on

handheld cameras and mobile phones simultaneously accentuates the act of mediation, drawing attention to the low budget technologies with which it was produced. In grime video, aspects of immediacy and hypermediacy combine to produce meaning, in which technological mediation functions to reinforce expressions of identity, space, and place.

Where these visual aesthetics would later become stylised as part of more strategic constructions of authenticity, grime points toward the relational possibilities afforded by this conjunction of audiovisual media, musical communities, and urban space. Placing grime video into a narrative that includes Boiler Room, as well as subsequent practices of livestreaming, (re)centres the role of Black creativity in what would later become normalised as part of global media phenomena. More broadly, as the following section will demonstrate, any attempt to understand the uses of musical media need be 'determined not by their ostensibly intrinsic characteristics but by their positions within cultural economy' (Auslander 1999: 51).

Boiler Room and the cultural economies of livestreaming

Boiler Room was founded in 2010, and over the course of the next decade, emerged to become one of the most influential institutions in contemporary electronic music culture. In their own words, Boiler Room 'started with a webcam taped to a wall',[91] livestreaming DJ sets from a railway arch in East London. What began as a localised operation soon developed into an international media organisation, building an archive of over 8000 performances from 200 cities around the world. With this extensive global reach, Boiler Room normalised audiovisual livestreaming as a core component of contemporary musical landscapes, creating noticeable effects across the aesthetics, communities, and economies of electronic dance music culture. The history of Boiler Room encompasses a story of new media and technology, but more crucially, highlights the tensions between underground music scenes and their audiovisual mediation, when located within the organisational structures and economic models of an increasingly corporatised media platform.

The example of jungle pirate radio demonstrated the ways in which the mediation of electronic music could be used to construct widened musical communities – extending the dancefloor 'massive' across real and imagined geographies of London. The example of grime videos showed how digital media could be used to forge audiovisual articulations of (hyper)local identity. Where digital technologies provided artists with newly democratised possibilities of production and distribution, they were simultaneously dependent on the infrastructure of corporate platforms such as YouTube, marking a shift away from the more self-contained, autonomous ecologies of pirate radio and dubplate culture. With the rise of Boiler Room, many of the logics and discourses of these prior examples were remediated into a new audiovisual form – the livestream – which widened access to the urban confines of the dancefloor to a transnational demographic, operating at an unprecedented scale. As Boiler Room grew to become a dominant force within the

[91] https://boilerroom.tv/about

international dance music industry, it raised important questions around media ownership and power, exposing the contradictions inherent within the participatory capacities of digital media and technology more broadly.

Boiler Room have always been careful to emphasise their humble origins, which according to their website, aimed to open a 'keyhole into London's underground … Today, we remain true to that history. We support emerging artists. We tell stories from the fringes. We connect local dance floors to the world.'[92] Less evident from their branding discourses are the ways in which Boiler Room was founded with lofty business ambitions from the outset. Their concept rested on invoking the atmospheres of pirate radio and early Ustream broadcasts as part of a platform with far greater reach. In 2011, founder Blaise Belleville had already made clear his plans to 'build an empire of online destinations of different stripes in a bid to build a brand he can then parlay into lucrative consulting jobs.' In an interview from that year, his entrepreneurial intentions and expertise were self-evident:

> It's agency work, essential. We just aren't calling ourselves an agency. You cannot really survive on just advertising and the traditional model. So having a portfolio of really interesting projects that each have their own specific audience has great value in terms of the services you can offer to a massive international brand, whether it's through a front end project or advising them how they can launch their product in a new territory or how they can appeal to young people or whatever … For now it's an exploration of Boiler Room, building our other brands and building a really exciting media group in London that fosters equally independent brands. There's so many people doing things online, not really knowing how to give them a future or how to advertise what they're doing (Shia 2011).

As made clear by the example of grime, electronic music is no stranger to entrepreneurialism. Moreover, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the mythologised history of early acid house and rave culture is also one in which utopian invocations of community were always mediated via a strong business mindset and ambitions of economic growth (Collin 1997). For many grime and jungle artists however, informal practices of entrepreneurialism functioned as alternate means to social mobility within social, and often racialised, contexts of marginalisation. In the case of Boiler Room, the platform's references to Black urban musical culture sit awkwardly with the socioeconomic milieu out of which it emerged. As Stephen Pritchard (2017) has demonstrated, Boiler Room's founders were white, public school educated, and in Blaise Belleville's case, had a family background firmly rooted in the UK's land-owning upper class. In later years, shareholders would include the New York-based venture capital firm, Conegliano Ventures, as well as the international media company, Vice. Of course, this co-option of Black underground music by white, privileged stakeholders is far from unique in the history of popular music culture, yet it was able to pass remarkably unnoticed during Boiler Room's early history.

[92] Ibid.

Aside from a handful of scholarly articles (Heuget 2016; Mathias 2016), Boiler Room has received little academic attention given its significant influence on contemporary popular music culture. In early journalistic responses to Boiler Room, critical focus was largely directed toward concerns around the (im)possibility of reproducing the tangible intimacies of the dance floor via an audiovisual medium. As Angus Finlayson (2011) asked, 'Who wants to express their appreciation of a particularly incendiary bassline through the medium of chatroom emoticons, rather than the more fleshy resources of their own body? Isn't dance music *all about* physicality?' In this article, Finlayson situates Boiler Room within a broader history of popular music television, including shows such as Top of the Pops, Soul Train, and The New Dance Show from Detroit. Where such programmes contained an undeniable 'glaze of unreality', they sought to capture the broader 'ritual of pop music performance', foregrounding the fashions and dance moves of audience members alongside footage of the performers themselves. In Boiler Room's initial aesthetic form, dynamic cameras shots were replaced by 'a static webcam, fixed unremittingly on the performer in a way that bears no comparison to the experience of a club-goer.' Where Boiler Room's audiences are (in)famous for their lack of dancing, the platform seemed to mark a shift away from the collective experience of dance music culture, 'in many ways returning to a performer-centric dynamic of which the underground claims to disapprove.' Finlayson argues that Boiler Room's lack of high-production artifice is 'oddly, paradoxically, alienating', serving to dilute localised musical identities and communities into the disconnected realm of a media aesthetic. This stands in stark contrast to the DIY visuals of grime videos, in which lo-fi realism was both the result of material inequalities, as well as an active reclamation of lived urban experience. Finlayson situates the processes of deterritorialisation brought about by Boiler Room within broader urban and cultural contexts:

> Given the ever more dispersed audiences for specialist music – not to mention the gradual gentrification, the driving-out of the poor and bohemian, in cities such as London, coupled with ever more draconian noise and licensing regulations – how long until clubbing IRL becomes the sole preserve of trendy wine bars and soulless mega brands?

During this early stage of Boiler Room's development, concerns about the effects of livestreaming on physical dance music events were largely speculative. At this point, livestreaming was still relatively novel, and had yet to permeate more fully into the culture and industry of electronic dance music. As another journalistic article suggested, in 2012, there was perhaps no need for pessimism about the digitalisation of live electronic music performance: 'at this moment, real club culture and virtual club culture are running in tandem, influencing and inspiring each other, and offering a wealth of cultural discourse for anyone with access to a broadband connection' (The Quietus 2012). This statement feels somewhat eerie in a post-pandemic context, but was largely representative of Boiler Room's early reception among electronic dance music communities, in which the vast majority of DJs were keen to be featured on the platform, and any vague misgivings about the concept were rarely shaped into any form of public critical discourse.

The small number of academic articles dealing with Boiler Room focus largely on its visual aesthetics, making little attempt to explore the platform's relation to the wider social and economic structures of electronic dance music culture. In this way, they build on work such as that by Simon Morrison (2011), which explores the difficulties involved in attempts to represent rave culture through cinema. As a livestreaming platform, Boiler Room combines cinematography with the additional qualities afforded by the context of real-time performance. Discussing Boiler Room's simple early aesthetic, Guillaume Heuget describes how their camerawork combined livestreaming with static shots, to emphasise a naturalised sense of 'shared time' between the viewer and the bodies on screen. Such choices, he argues, serve to compensate for 'the artifice of the sceneography', in which the DJ faces the camera, with the crowd behind them. These arrangements constitute a reversal of the spatial arrangements of the nightclub, but one which places the viewer 'in a position of eyewitness to a cultural scene of community.' (2016: 81-2). For Heuget, these aesthetic choices worked in tandem with editorial discourses as a part of a strategy to be perceived as authentic within electronic music's own systems of value. This strategy was necessary, Heuget argues, to negotiate the contradictory relationship between Boiler Room's mass mediated audience and the subcultural exclusivity that is core to much of dance music culture – ordinarily maintained via gatekeeping strategies ranging from Berghain's infamously cryptic door policy to the geographical mysteries surrounding illegal raves. Where's Heuget's argument is useful for helping to explain the success of Boiler Room and its acceptance within electronic music communities, he offers little critique as to how Boiler Room's mediatised aesthetics may impact the real world socialities and economies of electronic dance music culture.

In contrast, Nikita Mathias argues that the contemporary club space has been transformed by the 'recording, digitization and publication' of dance music events on social media and video sharing platforms (2016: 86). Like Heuget, Mathias offers a detailed analysis of Boiler Room's cinematography, exploring how the higher production values of their later streams used a broader technological and formal repertoire, in which the livestream functions both as a 'mediatised approximation' of the club space, as well as a piece of cinema, with its own languages and modes of expression (Ibid. 88). Where Heuget positions these choices as part of Boiler Room's own authentication strategies, Mathias concludes by highlighting the ambivalence of Boiler Room's influence on electronic music culture more broadly:

> We can observe tendencies towards a global social code of discotheque practices, according to which local features become unified, standardised and dissolved. Accordingly, Boiler Room's broader appeal to its users seems to celebrate an underlying concept of cosmopolitanism, emphasising and promoting intercultural encounters, an international mindset of community and global party culture (2016: 91).

In this way, Mathias shifts critique of Boiler Room away from one solely concerned with their deployment of video aesthetics, raising additional questions about the relationship between an international media platform and the localised scenes and communities that are core to electronic dance music culture.

When Boiler Room first started out, their influence on real world club culture was largely limited to any potential effects brought about by the increasing normalisation of audiovisual streaming. During the platform's first few years of existence, livestreams were filmed at specially curated events. There was a small, invite-only audience in attendance, but the events were primarily oriented around the streaming process, existing in a separate category to more typical club nights and parties. At this stage, any possible impact on physical dancefloors lay in the symbolic effect of their aesthetic. One key factor was the foregrounding of visuals that focus on the figure of the DJ. This accentuated the DJ's role as a performer, shifting away from previous ideologies, such as that espoused by David Mancuso at his Loft parties in 1970s New York, in which the DJ had a more transparent function, facilitating a non-hierarchical space oriented around the sounds and socialities of the dancefloor (See Lawrence 2006). Where much of 90s rave culture sought to anonymise and dissolve the identities of musicians via an 'aesthetic of disappearance' (Kopf 1996), Boiler Room placed the visual identity of performers front and centre. On the one hand, this can be conceptualised as part of the ego-driven screen culture brought about by social media, in which individualised self-branding practices take precedence over attempts to build forms of social solidarity.

At the same time, the rise of Boiler Room also took place alongside electronic music culture's reappraisals of its relationship to race, gender, and sexuality. The visual media of livestreaming simultaneously provided a space for DJs to perform expressions of identity, whether through dress, or the simple presence of racialised and gendered bodies on screen – what Derek Conrad Murray (2015) terms 'representational agency'. As Railton and Watson have argued in relation to music videos, the audiovisual terrain of livestreams may also be understood as a 'key site through which cultural identities are produced, inscribed and negotiated' (2011: 10). Crucially, this audiovisual terrain should not be evaluated as a reflection or distortion of pre-existing conceptions of identity, but rather as a space in which identities may be explored and articulated. The formation of this new visual space was of great social and political significance for electronic dance music at this moment of reappraisal, given that much of rave's discourses of togetherness and anonymity had historically concealed a culture which reproduced many existent structures of race, gender, and class (Saldanha 2007; Garcia 2011, 2023).

Sound, space, and livestreaming at Notting Hill Carnival

During the early days of livestreaming in dance music, audiovisual media existed largely in parallel to co-present club culture. Dommune – a Japanese streaming platform founded in 2010 – deliberately hosted their broadcasts between Monday and Thursday, so that they wouldn't clash with the weekend programming of nightclubs. As Boiler Room expanded their operations however, they began broadcasting from a range of different sites including nightclubs, music venues, and festivals. This marked a significant shift, in which livestreams were no longer confined to specifically organised events, but instead took place within the social, spatial, and economic infrastructure of 'IRL' musical culture.

These developments raised new issues around the power, role, and responsibilities of a media platform, such as the ethics of consent for filming in public space, but also broader questions as to how the act of filming may transform a musical event, both for performers and for attendees. Boiler Room's gradual permeation into the world of in-person dance music events seemed to pass largely unnoticed until 2016, when it was announced that they would broadcast live from London's Notting Hill Carnival. In this section, I present a case study of Boiler Room's involvements with Carnival between 2016 and 2017, as a way of exploring audiovisual livestreaming in relation to issues of sound, space, and the economies of popular music culture.[93]

In 2016, Boiler Room announced that they would be broadcasting direct from Notting Hill Carnival, with a total of 42 hours of media coverage from 8 different sound systems, including Rampage, Deviation, and Aba Shanti-I. In a press release, CEO Blaise Belleville suggested that Boiler Room's coverage aimed to 'cast a light on the unifying cultural hub that Carnival really is' and provide a 'counterbalance to the negative media portrayal.' Although Notting Hill Carnival is widely recognised as a vital celebration of British-Caribbean culture and London's unique multiculturalism, coverage has often paid disproportionate attention to issues of crime and disorder (e.g. Batty et al 2003), in turn perpetuating the event's long-standing issues with funding. In this context, Boiler Room's intentions were laudable, but as one commentator argued, it was unlikely that their coverage would reach the necessary audience: 'the complaining cohort of Evening Standard/Daily Mail/Tory MPs are not going to tune into the live coverage or watch whatever documentary film Boiler Room manufacture afterwards' (Boil the Room 2017). Crucially, despite years of unfair treatment from local authorities and certain sections of the media, Notting Hill Carnival attracts some two million attendees every year and remains Europe's largest street festival. In this context, it is important to consider whether Boiler Room's own media brand stood to gain more from the collaboration than Notting Hill Carnival itself.

Whether or not Boiler Room would be able shift public perceptions around Carnival, their involvements also raised questions about the limitations of representing the event via audiovisual media. As Henriques and Ferrara (2014) have argued, Carnival's symbolic and experiential meaning is produced through its multisensory intersection of steel bands, parade floats, and static sound systems. Where the Trinidadian *mas* element contains a strong visual aspect in the form of costumes and choreography, much of sound system culture is constituted in aural and corporeal spheres. A core aspect of the sound system lies in its physical deployment of bass frequencies, leading to a specific form of sensory overload that Henriques (2011) terms 'sonic dominance'. With roots in Jamaica's reggae and dub traditions, the bodily affects of sub bass were subsequently taken up by producers of a British – and largely London-based – musical lineage, including jungle, garage, and dubstep (Goodman 2009). The unique power and meaning of these genres is dependent on specialist sound systems, which construct what Goodman (2005) terms

[93] While most of Notting Hill Carnival exists outside definitions of electronic dance music culture, Boiler Room's involvement – as a key institution within dance music culture – places this case study within the boundaries of my research. There are also important crossovers between the corporeal aspects of sound system culture and numerous electronic dance music genres.

an 'affective sonic sociality', emphasising collectivity through the shared bodily experience of bass. In this way, where livestreaming can only ever produce an approximation of in-person live performance, Boiler Room's broadcasts from the sound systems of Notting Hill Carnival were unable to translate one of the most essential aesthetic and social components of sound system culture.

Within the spatial context of London and the Notting Hill area in particular, the embodied experience of sound and space gains an additional layer of urgency, which is also difficult to mediate via audiovisual streaming. After funding cuts enacted by Boris Johnson during his tenure as mayor of London, the city lost several of its free music festivals, such as the anti-racism event, Rise, which was scrapped in 2009 (Mulholland 2009). In this context, Notting Hill Carnival is a rare example of a festival that remains freely available to the public. London is now home to a variety of commercial festivals including Field Day, Wireless, and British Summer Time, which fence off public parks as private spaces and charge high entrance fees which exclude much of the city's population. The embodied experience of attending Notting Hill Carnival thus represents a celebration of music and culture as a public good – a significance which is hard to translate via despatialised processes of audiovisual mediation.

Regarding the Notting Hill area more specifically, the chaotic presence of sound and bodies on the street represents an act of symbolic and lived resistance within wider contexts of gentrification and urban displacement. Between the 1950s and 1970s, Notting Hill was home to many of the first Caribbean communities to migrate to the UK, as part of the so-called 'Windrush Generation'. The area remains important for these communities, but with an average house price now reaching £1.5 million, local demographics have shifted drastically along socioeconomic, and often racialised, lines. In this way, the 'disorder' brought about the sound and crowds of Carnival has emerged as a key site of contestation between old and new residents in the local area, for whom the event represents a vital celebration of Black diasporic culture, or an annual annoyance. The co-present experience of Carnival in Notting Hill thus functions as a moment in which the area is reclaimed as a space of historic and ongoing significance for British Caribbean communities, as well as broader conceptions of London's multiculturalism. Where Boiler Room were careful to foreground these contexts in the discourses surrounding their livestreams from Carnival, audiovisual media is unable to translate the affective power of sound and bass asserting temporary acoustic control over the area, bleeding between the boundaries of the street and domestic space.

In 2017, Boiler Room's involvements with Carnival intensified when it was announced that they were to be awarded an Arts Council grant of £297,298. Following on from statements released the previous year, Boiler Room's press release suggested that the money would contribute toward four main objectives: working to 'change the media perception of Carnival' to something fairer and more positive; creating a 'high quality, accurate visual record of Carnival' in line with coverage of other events on a similar scale; shining a light on 'under-celebrated sound system culture'; and helping to 'secure a sustainable future

for the festival by working to generate stable revenue streams'.[94] The awarding of this money to Boiler Room must be understood within the context of Carnival's long and chronic history of underfunding, as well as its heavy reliance on a core group of unpaid volunteers, headed by the London Notting Hill Carnival Enterprises Trust (LNHCET). The LNHCET are funded by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, who in 2017 halved their annual carnival grant to just £52,000 – despite estimates suggesting that Carnival generates more than £90 million for London's economy every year.

During the first year of Boiler Room's involvement with Carnival, they were met with a small degree of hostility. Makeshift 'Fuck Boiler Room' placards were visible in the crowd at Aba Shanti-I, where Boiler Room's crew were attempting to film. After the announcement of the Arts Council grant the following year, public opposition grew, with graffiti, stickers and leaflets detailing Boiler Room's involvement distributed throughout Carnival (Harrison 2017). The protests combined both anti-racist and anti-corporate sentiments, questioning why a media company run for profit was given such a significant sum of public money, when Carnival itself suffers from such a lack of funding. Out of the total grant, only 11% (£32,000) was to be directed toward the sound systems themselves, and Boiler Room's plans made little attempt to build a more sustainable, self-determined future for Carnival. As one commentator suggested, the Arts Council could have funded local communities to make their own films about Carnival (Pritchard 2017). Where Boiler Room said they would work to 'generate stable revenue streams for Carnival', another commentator argued that this would largely amount to the creation of 'lucrative marketing opportunities for brands to infiltrate Carnival on a much larger scale than seen previously' (Boil the Room 2017). This potential shift toward corporate sponsorship was significant in that 2017 was also the first year that the Emslie Horniman Park area of Carnival was cordoned-off as a separate and heavily branded Red Bull stage.

The awarding of this grant to Boiler Room raises broader questions about the politics of cultural funding and the involvement of private companies in public cultural events. More specifically, it highlights the inequity of access to funding, which is often dependent on having prior application experience or access to the necessary support networks, advice, and expertise. For the purposes of this chapter however, this case study demonstrates the need to understand music's interactions with new media and technologies within dynamics of social and economic power. When considered in relation to the qualities afforded by audiovisual media more broadly, Boiler Room's streams from Notting Hill presented an opportunity to widen audience access and broadcast the event on a global scale. When situated within the specific sonic and spatial qualities of Carnival however, as well as the power dynamics mediating Boiler Room's involvement, the picture becomes far more complex. As this case study shows, understanding music's relation to audiovisual media requires both an exploration of the interactions between digital technology and the specific music and culture in question, alongside analysis which situates this interaction in broader

[94] See Boiler Room's carnival press release, published August 10th 2017.
https://boilerroom.tv/microsite/carnivalacegrant/

social and cultural contexts. In this way, where different media may be said to hold affordances, such affordances must always be examined within the specific conditions of their application.

HÖR Radio, livestreaming, and the international dance music industry

By the end of the 2010s, the Boiler Room brand had grown to include a diverse media and creative portfolio. The original streaming platform began to feature higher production values and covered a range of different repertoire, that included jazz, hip hop, and dance performances, alongside their original focus on DJ sets. In 2018, they launched 4:3, a 'multifaceted genre-spanning' video platform, which at the time was dubbed the 'Netflix of the underground' (Yoo 2018). A year later, Boiler Room launched Brand Labs, 'a creative and strategic consultancy that will deliver campaigns built around custom partnerships, experiences, live-broadcasts, original content and other media' (Stewart 2019). By this stage, Boiler Room was a core institution in the international economies of electronic music, contributing toward the normalisation of audiovisual livestreaming both as an essential promotional tool for artists, as well as a valued cultural form.

Given club culture's rapid cycles of taste and obsessions with 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1995), it is unsurprising that alternatives to Boiler Room began to emerge around this time. It became commonplace for online radio stations, such as LOT Radio in New York, to include a live visual feed from their studio, blurring intermedial boundaries between radio and audiovisual livestreaming. In August 2019, HÖR was founded in Berlin. It was set up to provide a platform for lesser-known artists in the local music community, filling a space left by the recent closure of Berlin Community Radio (Shortlidge 2020). HÖR's visual aesthetic marked a return to the stripped-down simplicity of Boiler Room's early broadcasts, but in this case, with no audience present – a precursor to the livestreams that would emerge during the pandemic.[95] DJs perform in a small studio, facing a ground floor window which looks out on to the street in Neukölln. The unmistakable, white-tiled interior has earned an informal reputation as Berlin's 'techno bathroom', suggesting a playful or provocative repurposing of space. The small room conjures a sense of voyeuristic intimacy for the viewer – an intimacy intensified by the significance of bathrooms for Berlin's electronic music scenes, as hidden sites for drug taking and sex.

Despite retaining strong place-based associations, HÖR has since emerged to become a key destination for DJs as part of international touring circuits. Where artists have long combined gigs with shows on local radio stations such as London's NTS or Red Light Radio in Amsterdam, HÖR has grown in reach and influence to the extent that many touring artists will visit Berlin with the primary purpose of performing on HÖR. When listing their gigs online, many DJs now include an upcoming appearance on HÖR, ascribing it the same status as a live performance. In this way, where HÖR contributes toward the deterritorialization of electronic music scenes, it simultaneously demonstrates the close interrelation

[95] HÖR was founded 6 months before lockdown restrictions were imposed in Berlin, but the platform's wider influence was accelerated during the contexts of COVID-19.

between physical and digital space. Not only do DJs cross borders to benefit from HÖR's international reach, but this reach is closely related to Berlin's reputation as an international centre of dance music culture. As part of a digital–geographical feedback loop, HÖR in turn contributes toward the reproduction of Berlin's cultural image at local and global scales. Audiovisual media extend the reach of culture and musical communities, with economic and geographic implications that operate at local and global scales. In this way, HÖR may be situated as part of broader trends through which the images and lived realities of cities are increasingly produced through digital technologies and media (Halegoua 2020; Rose 2022).

Having discussed Boiler Room and HÖR's normalisation of livestreaming in electronic dance music culture, I now turn attention to examples of livestreaming that emerged during the despatialised contexts of COVID-19. Where these examples remediate aesthetics and practices established prior to the pandemic, they grew out of a context in which livestreaming no longer functioned in parallel to in-person events, but for the period of global lockdown measures, functioned as the entire cultural territory in which electronic music performance took place.

Livestreaming during COVID-19

Queer House Party

Queer House Party was set up by three housemates and DJs, Harry Gay, Wacha and Passer, on the first Friday of the UK's COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Broadcasting DJ sets from their kitchen at home in London, the livestreams were initially organised as an online meeting space for their group of friends, but the events soon drew the attention of wider queer communities, attracting thousands of attendees on a weekly basis. Queer House Party adopted the musical and technological practices established by Boiler Room and other dance music livestreaming platforms, but repositioned them within specific legacies of 'queer radicalism' (Crack Magazine 2022). At its core, Queer House Party functioned as a virtual gathering space for LGBTQ+ communities, when the social infrastructures of queer nightlife were unavailable. Beyond this, Queer House Party sought to foreground 'an ethos of collaboration, solidarity and accessibility, with the politics of the collective at the fore' (Marshall 2022: 166). Queer House Party's livestreams were primarily oriented around DJ sets and performances, but they would often interrupt the music to make announcements during events, raising awareness about campaigns and charities in need of donations, as well as wider issues facing the queer community and other marginalised groups. In this way, Queer House Party positioned a mediated vision of dancefloor collectivity not only within contexts of queerness, but as part of an explicitly political programme that forged links with organisations including Black Lives Matter and Sisters Uncut. As Lo Marshall (2022: 166) suggests, such activities can also be contextualised within a broader history of 'house parties and praxis – where queer community organising and activism manifest as throwing parties in our domestic abodes.' By explicitly linking dance music events

with wider political struggles, Queer House Party sought to 'recognise the nightlife space as one with a potential for building solidarity and energy, rather than something separate or enclosed from our day-to-day lives' (Crack Magazine 2022).

Queer House Party emerged as a direct response to the closure of queer nightlife spaces during lockdown. As highlighted in a report by Mark McCormack and Fiona Measham (2022), Covid-19 had disproportionate effects on queer nightlife scenes, for whom clubs and venues function as a vital infrastructure of community and individual wellbeing. The loss of space was felt by partygoers, as well as DJs, performers, and other self-employed nightlife workers, who lost their primary source of income. The social and spatial loss experienced by London's queer communities during 2020 was far from unique however, and need be understood as part of a longer history of precarity. Between 2006-2017, London lost 58% of its LGBTQ+ venues – a higher proportion than the significant closures already faced by the city's nightclubs, grassroots music venues and pubs. During this period, London's queer nightlife was increasingly characterised by transient LGBTQ+ events taking place at non-LGBTQ+ specific venues, divorcing them from the security, expertise and empowerment associated with self-owned or managed spaces (UCL Urban Lab 2017). This left queer nightlife economies particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. Arts Council support primarily targeted venues and cultural organisations, rather than individuals, many of whom lacked the experience or basic confidence to apply for government grants (McCormack and Measham 2022: 18-20). Where Queer House Party and other online streaming events sought to provide systems for performers to be paid, audiences' willingness to use online tipping services quickly dwindled after the beginning of the pandemic (Ibid.).

In the despatialised context of COVID-19, Queer House Party produced what Ben Walters (2022: 9) has termed 'novel spatially distributed, digitally enabled forms of relationality.' Such relationality functioned as a temporary replacement of the social infrastructure provided by clubs and venues, but further, it deployed digital technology as a way of exploring and augmenting forms of accessibility that are rarely possible within the architectural limitations of in-person events (Marshall 2022: 166). Performances on Queer House Party's livestreams were accompanied by British sign language interpretations, closed captions, and audio descriptions. Guests in attendance were encouraged to drink alcoholic drinks out of discreet containers in 'solidarity with sober friends', while attendees were free to choose whether they kept their cameras on or off, allowing for a range of different forms of participation. Where many performers and attendees may ordinarily be cautious about wearing drag in public space, online events allowed for creative expression through dress without needing to travel to a venue (Bloodworth 2020). Moreover, the expanded geography of the digital livestream format allowed individuals to attend from countries such as Russia, where it is unsafe, or illegal, to be openly gay (May 2021). Since lockdown restrictions were lifted, Queer House Party have begun to host and perform at IRL events, but have retained their focus on accessibility by continuing to provide livestreams wherever possible. An event they hosted at London's

Colour Factory in May 2021 was called 'Queer House Party: Vol. 25 URL/IRL', at which they described the online space 'as an integrated aspect of the party, rather than an afterthought.'[96]

The example of Queer House Party demonstrates the ways in which the media practices normalised by Boiler Room could be reimagined to play a vital social role for marginalised communities during the pandemic. Their use of music and technology was far from radical, but by positioning it within a specific social and political discourse, they were able to present a vastly different model of livestreaming, with community at its core. The following example presents another model of livestreaming, which again remediates existing musical-technological practices, this time situating them as an institutional intervention within the struggling spatial economy of club culture during COVID-19.

United We Stream

United We Stream was founded as a direct response to the closure of Berlin's nightlife spaces in March 2020. Where Queer House Party's livestreams began as a DIY operation among a small group of friends, United We Stream employed audiovisual media as a way of imagining wider nightlife communities at institutional, urban, and (trans)national scales. The platform was initially set up by Clubcommission and Reclaim Club Culture, two Berlin-based organisations representing the political interests of the city's nightlife scenes. What began as a fundraising project focussed on sustaining Berlin's nightclubs through the pandemic, had by the end of 2020 broadcast from 98 cities around the world, raising €1.5 million in donations (Airen 2021). Each of their livestreams was hosted by a specific venue, typically featuring DJs who were residents or otherwise associated with the space. United We Stream primarily used livestreaming as part of a broader fundraising infrastructure, but they simultaneously used digital technology to construct a sense of unity among nightlife communities in the face of crisis – exploring imaginaries of a 'collective global experience' (Vorreyer 2020). United We Stream hosted their performances via the online platform of ARTE, a French–German TV channel that was set up in 1992 as a joint project exploring visions of an intercultural European identity (Rothenberger 2012). Despite the rapid international growth of United We Stream, it took half a year before they broadcast from London, resulting in a short series of only four livestreams that took place during October and November 2020.[97]

Journalist Thomas Vorreyer (2020) has argued that United We Stream's rapid and effective mobilisation in Berlin was the result of the city's longer-term successes in gaining institutional and municipal recognition of nightlife as culture. Where Berlin's Clubcommission has campaigned for the interests of the city's nightlife stakeholders since 2000, London's comparable trade body, the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA), was founded much more recently, in 2015. The differences in this history go some way toward explaining the ease with which German club culture was able to collaborate with

[96] https://www.outsavvy.com/event/6121/queer-house-party-vol-25-urlirl
[97] https://london.unitedwestream.org/info/

ARTE, while any comparable involvement from the BBC was unlikely, despite the increasing interest of British cultural institutions in UK club culture in recent years. Despite the clear differences between British and German institutional approaches to the livestreaming of electronic dance music during lockdown, it is important to note that the existence of United We Stream – as a municipal, national, and later, international organisation – was itself a response to the lack of sufficient government support for nightlife spaces during the pandemic, forcing them to rely on entrepreneurialism and strategies of temporary reinvention (Assiter 2022).

In this way, it is important to highlight the ambivalence of United We Stream's institutional collaborations, given the role of local and federal government in reproducing Berlin nightlife's ongoing state of precarity. As Jean-Hugues Kabuiku (2021) has argued, while the Berlin Clubcommission were keen to present themselves as guardians of nightlife during the pandemic, they have in fact contributed toward many of the market-oriented logics that have left Berlin's nightclubs so vulnerable to the effects of gentrification and property speculation. In their longer-term campaigns to protect club culture, the Clubcommission marketed nightlife as a business opportunity to German politicians, a strategy which has exacerbated the increasingly polarised viability of commercial and community-oriented spaces. More specifically, Kabuiki draws attention to the fact that German federal law stated businesses and landlords should share the financial impacts of lockdown restrictions – effectively providing legal frameworks for rent reduction during the unique circumstances of the pandemic. However, where United We Stream and the Clubcommission raised funds for venues to continue paying their full rent and building costs during the period of closure – rather than helping them negotiate reduced rental payments – Kabuiku suggests that they were complicit in 'landlordism'. This diverted funds away from many of nightlife's more vulnerable communities, perpetuating urban dynamics in which powerful landlords, such as the Swedish national electricity company, Vattenfall, as well as the state-owned Deutsche Bahn, continue to hold spatial influence over Berlin's nightlife spaces.

Despite the complex relationship between the organisations involved in United We Stream and the longer-term sustainability of club culture, their fundraising efforts generated an impressive €570,000 for 67 of Berlin's nightlife spaces, focussing on venues and clubs with a capacity of less than 1,500 people.[98] This success in part resulted from the established reach and reputation of ARTE, but it should also be understood in relation to United We Stream's unique visual aesthetic. Their streams built on the cinematography normalised by Boiler Room, but with one key difference – the lack of any audience. As I have described elsewhere:

> United We Stream's broadcasts from nightclubs depict eerie, empty rooms where lights flash and smoke machines billow around the lone figure of the DJ. Such an aesthetic captures a dystopian moment when spaces of shared social liberation were suddenly and radically redefined as spaces of

[98] https://en.unitedwestream.berlin

> potential infection. Safe(r) space is no longer about the regulation of behaviour, it is now determined by the wholesale absence of bodies (Assiter 2020).

This jarring, uncanny aesthetic was very much a deliberate choice on the part of organisers. On the one hand, it sought to highlight the 'responsible side of club culture', particularly in the face of media responses to lockdown parties and what later came to be known as 'plague raves' (Vorreyer 2020). On the other, it functioned as an affective statement, drawing attention to the critical situation faced by nightclubs, and ultimately, encouraging viewers to donate (Woolsey 2020).

The example of United We Stream demonstrates another remediation of the livestreaming format established by Boiler Room, this time reimagined as part of a fundraising infrastructure closely intertwined with the spatial economies of club culture. Where livestreaming had previously been understood as 'running in tandem' with 'real club culture' (The Quietus 2012), United We Stream and the unique circumstances of COVID-19 presented a moment when virtual clubbing served not only as a replacement of in-person events, but simultaneously functioned to sustain the communities and economies of physical nightlife spaces. During the pandemic, commentators speculated the extent to which the accelerated digital migration enforced by lockdown might continue to shape club culture once restrictions were lifted. While Boiler Room and HÖR continued to exert influence over electronic dance music culture in post-lockdown contexts, livestreaming largely reverted to its prior role. However, as the final case study will demonstrate, the forms of digital communication and mediation compelled by the pandemic have influenced club culture beyond practices of audiovisual livestreaming, informing the development of emergent models of nightlife, which explore modes of organisation operating at the intersection of online and offline space.

SODAA

During 2020 and 2021, the digital and audiovisual transformations of club culture largely played temporary roles of replacement and preservation, paying little attention to the post-pandemic future. In response to initiatives such as United We Stream and Resident Advisor's 'Save Our Scene', several early commentators suggested that the reframing of electronic dance music events as a donation-based economy emphasised 'just how fragile the electronic music industry had already become' (Reynaldo 2020). However, like much of the social and political discourse that occurred during the pandemic's state of exception, these modes of self-reflection and critique quickly dissipated in the rush to return to normality once lockdown restrictions were lifted.

One notable exception to this was the founding of SODAA, a nightlife collective seeking to combine 'online and IRL participation … in building a decentralised governance model for a venue in London.'[99] From the days of jungle pirate radio through to more recent experiments with virtual clubbing

[99] https://sodaa.club

such as algo:ritmi in Turin (VibeLab 2020: 26-9), conceptions of technologically mediated participation have largely focussed on reproducing, or at least approximating, the kinds of audience-performer feedback loop and related social intimacies that occur on the dancefloor. For SODAA however, these 'boundaries of togetherness' fail to include questions regarding the ownership and governance of the spaces in which dancefloors are contained:

> We go to the club to feel like we belong. We are part of an ecosystem that thrives on the mutualism between artists, workers and sweating bodies. And yet who benefits from the spaces we create? … It's time to have a share in your favourite venue; time to organise a group chat, open a bank account and start a coop: the coop will buy the club and redistribute wealth, ownership and decision-making between its members, and run the club as a public good (SODAA 2022).

SODAA seek to develop the kinds of digital participation that were intensified during the pandemic to produce decentralised, democratic decision-making processes with a view to organising events, and eventually, owning and managing a venue in London. SODAA combine monthly in-person meetings with a channel on the communications app, Discord, both of which are open for anyone to attend and contribute. After each meeting, minutes are collated into a Google Doc, which is then posted on the Discord channel, allowing those unable to attend in person to stay updated on any new developments. In their first year of existence, SODAA have hosted a variety of events, including workshops, panel discussions, and parties, as well as a series of radio takeovers. In early 2023, SODAA released a compilation, 'Decentralised Vol. 1', as a 'co-release' with several other like-minded labels. They also curated a club night at London's Corsica Studios in September 2022, where the line-up was decided by a vote. Like Queer House Party, SODAA aim to provide a livestream from their in-person events, widening access to those who live outside of London, or those with mobility issues. Through this combination of online and offline participation, SODAA acknowledge geographic inequalities, while simultaneously recognising the forms of localised community building that are core to electronic dance music culture.

As of 2023, SODAA is still very much an emergent experiment in club culture democracy, and like many collective endeavours, has struggled with the divergence between theoretical ideals of open participation and the practicalities of generating sustained commitment from members. However, if SODAA can succeed in working toward their goal of owning and running a venue in London as a 'public good', their efforts would constitute not only a new cultural application of technologically mediated decision making, but also, a significant intervention in London's cultural and spatial economy. Where the NTIA and the Night Czar's office have done much to campaign against the closure of existing venues, their close intertwinements with market-led urban dynamics and municipal institutions renders them less effective in imagining radical new models for the ownership and governance of music venues and clubs. Within

electronic dance music culture, SODAA may also contribute toward a shift in political discourse, which has tended to focus on concerns with identity and representation in recent years, paying less attention to the structural and material issues (which are themselves mediated by dynamics of race, gender, and class) that define the spatial and temporal economies of club culture.

Conclusion

While attempting to think and write during the depths of lockdown in 2020 and 2021, I struggled to retain much semblance of reflexivity or objectivity regarding the transformations of electronic dance music culture through livestreaming. As a working musician and active participant in London's nightlife scenes, my close personal relationship to the spatial economies and socialities of club culture clouded my perceptions of the sudden shift to digital space. The heavy weight of the historical moment made it difficult to situate livestreaming within longer-term trajectories, let alone as part of exciting and radical futures. Writing this chapter in 2022, when in-person club culture had returned with a newfound – and in some ways, amnesiac – vigour, I was better placed to cast a wide lens over the events of the pandemic, seeing them less as a unique state of exception, and instead as a product of ongoing technological, cultural, and social processes.

By exploring livestreaming as a series of specific case studies, rather than as a monolithic technological entity, I have demonstrated its diverse and ambivalent potential for musical culture. Livestreaming, along with its analogue and digital predecessors, have the capacity to fragment the localised, co-present music scenes that are core to the production of club culture, but simultaneously, can mediate the formation of extended and imagined communities. These mediated communities feed back into the shaping of grounded musical realities, operating at multiple geographic scales. Despite the increasing importance of digital space in nearly all aspects of our musical, social, and cultural lives, the co-presence of shared musical and social experiences remain core to dance music culture, as well as the development of emergent technological and media forms.

In the post-pandemic context, any fears regarding the lingering effects of dance music's intense mediatisation rapidly deteriorated, as audiences gravitated back toward shared physical spaces of social dancing. Where eighteen months of online education, work, and social life may have contributed toward the development of social anxieties on a societal scale, it also meant that a whole generation of young people had missed out on a long period when many might have had their first experiences with nightlife and club culture. In the first few months of lockdown, many DJs and producers experimented with more ambient, listening focussed sounds, geared toward domestic spaces of consumption. As lockdown fatigue set in over the unpredictable course of 2020 and 2021, Berlin's HÖR radio, as well as an illegal – and socially controversial – rave scene emerged as key anchors for much of electronic dance music culture. Harder and faster strains of techno, trance, and jungle came to dominate many livestreams, DJ mixes, and production

practices. When clubs eventually reopened, the visceral immediacy of these styles soundtracked many young clubbers first experiences of parties, who were hungry for a quick and intense fix. As commentators have argued, this marked in many ways a return to the affective energies of early rave and hardcore culture (Muk 2023). In this sense, the disembodied structures of livestreaming during COVID-19 contributed toward the ongoing transformation of musical practices and socialities, as well as their subsequent reintegration into physical contexts. Livestreaming had established itself as a vital technology, but the resilient spaces and times of the dancefloor returned, with much still to offer to social, cultural, and urban life.

Conclusion: night moves

This project began with two related sets of research questions. The first sought to understand the ongoing cultural life of London's electronic dance music scenes, alongside pervasive narratives of decline. How best to characterise a period defined by nightclub and venue closures without erasing the agency and resilience, or in numerous cases, complicity, of DJs, promoters, and other nightlife practitioners? Can contexts of precarity be reconciled with a vision of the present defined by more than pessimism and nostalgia? The second set of questions sought to investigate recent renegotiations of the identity of electronic dance music and nightlife spaces. What does it mean that electronic dance music can now be found in museums and galleries; in listening bars; and in daytime events and spaces; as well as in virtual and online space? How do these venues and events mediate electronic dance music's unique social, cultural, and aesthetic affordances? Do these new spaces and temporalities support narratives of nightlife's ongoing decline? Or do they point toward a more complex process of transformation?

My thesis uses the framework of a transition from night to day to conceptualise these changes to the spaces and times of electronic dance music culture. My core argument proposes that this spatio-temporal framing develops and updates existing literatures on the commercialisation of electronic dance music and night-time cultures, but further, that it captures the emergence of new practices, which present alternatives to dominant social, cultural, and economic models in nightlife. This transition from night to day characterises the contradictory impulses of dance music's recent history, in which the spatial and temporal impacts of processes including gentrification, institutionalisation, and platformisation, simultaneously contain the means for nightlife communities to imagine and construct new futures.

On the one hand, my thesis is the result of an interest in urban and geographic questions about the place of nightlife in a changing city, but as a researcher in music studies and musician, it has also been my aim to explore the relationship between urban change and the specific social, cultural, and aesthetic concerns of electronic dance music communities and their associated research fields. Bar a few notable exceptions (Mateo and Eldridge 2018; Stahl and Bottà 2019; Darchen et al. 2021), these are issues and approaches that have remained largely separate in existing literature. Much geographic work on nightlife and the city collapses nightlife spaces into the broadly defined 'night-time economy', with less consideration for the wide range of different venues, events, and scenes that constitute electronic dance music's spatial ecology (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Talbot 2004; Grazian 2009; Shaw 2018). Conversely, in electronic dance music studies, much work has explored cities and the place-based emergence of specific genres (Peter 2014; Anniss 2019; Melville 2020; Brar 2021), but there is room for further work which examines the relationship between urban contexts and the spatio-temporal infrastructures that are core to the production of electronic dance music cultures. In this sense, my thesis focuses on London specifically, but it explores questions around space, culture, and politics which have relevance across numerous urban nightlife scenes.

To bridge the gaps between urban geographies and electronic dance music, I draw on the interdisciplinary field of 'night studies'. The breadth of this field has proven vital for my research,

encompassing the tangible infrastructures of the urban night, as well as the more poetic and elusive relationship between the night-time and the production of culture. As I outlined in my introduction, night studies draws attention to the unique time-space of the night, highlighting its associations with otherness and transgression, its affordances of heightened intimacy and encounter, as well as its role in providing spaces of safety for marginalised groups. These are also qualities closely associated with much of electronic dance music culture, and in this sense, my thesis demonstrates how the spatial and temporal contexts of the urban night-time are vital for understanding electronic dance music culture, as well as popular music cultures more generally. Here, I build on work by Stahl and Bottà (2019), which argues that popular music cultures and the atmospheres of the urban night-time need to be understood in close reciprocal relation, whereby each animates and amplifies the other. More specifically, my thesis draws on the framework of night's colonisation by day. I concur that this framework is useful for conceptualising profit-driven colonisations of the night; however, I argue that it is unable to account for the range of new spaces and temporalities that have emerged in London's electronic dance music cultures in recent years. Instead, I propose a broader framework of the night's transformation, which accounts for ongoing expansions of capital, as well as the agency of electronic dance music communities in imagining spatio-temporal alternatives to the dominant cultures and economies of urban nightlife.

Chapter summaries

In chapter 1, I explored the 'death of nightlife', arguing that this broad narrative of decline failed to account for the more complex transformations of London's nightlife. The following five chapters considered different examples of dance music culture relocating from the time-space of the urban night. Chapter 2 focussed on issues of temporality in dance culture, narrating a history from the temporary events of rave and warehouse party culture, through to meanwhile use nightlife spaces. The example of Grow Tottenham demonstrated how temporary urbanism can create infrastructure for grassroots, community venues, while Printworks and Broadwick Live highlight the involvement of nightlife spaces in financialised placemaking and regeneration strategies. Chapter 3 considered sound and listening practices as a way of categorising different musical spaces. Where audiophile bars afford new practices of DJ performance and consumption, their static socialities reimagine dance music within gentrified visions of urban space. Chapter 4 explored electronic dance music in galleries and museums. These relocations contribute to the ongoing institutionalisation of urban and nocturnal culture, while creating hybridised artistic and spatial forms, as well as interdependent funding models for public and private culture. Chapter 5 examined Morning Gloryville in relation to work, leisure, and the wellness industries. While their events may represent the absorption of dance culture within logics of self-optimisation and 24/7 capitalism, I argue that such ideologies are latent within the vague utopianism that has guided much of dance culture throughout its

historical development. Chapter 6 situates livestreaming during COVID-19 as part of a longer history of electronic music's audiovisual mediation. Where Boiler Room has contributed toward the corporatisation and fragmentation of nightlife scenes through digital technology, I demonstrate how pirate radio, grime YouTube videos, and livestreaming during the pandemic have played vital roles in sustaining local, and often marginalised, musical and social communities.

From night to day: colonisations and transformations

Each chapter of my thesis has focussed on examples of electronic dance music culture relocating from the typical spaces and times of the urban night. Though my five case studies exhibit a variety of different transformations, I group them together as expressions of a spatial and temporal transition from night to day. In each instance of electronic dance music reimagined as a daytime culture, I assess the extent to which this relocation has transformed the social, cultural, and aesthetic qualities associated with electronic dance music. From my research, it is clear that the transition from night to day has had a significant, and in many cases, disruptive impact. In certain examples, dance music is reimagined as a static culture, in which movement and interaction are replaced by individualised practices of listening and observation (Chapters 3 and 4). Similarly, the museumification and platformisation of electronic dance music has created the conditions for a renewed focus on the visual, interrupting the auditory, corporeal, and multisensory aspects of rave (Chapter 4 and 6). Elsewhere, I have shown how the non-teleological pleasures of dance music are instrumentalised as part of urban regeneration or self-optimisation ideologies, suggesting an intensification and consolidation of the commercial tendencies that have been nascent in UK dance culture since the emergence of rave and acid house (Chapters 2 and 5).

Within night studies, the closest to an existing framework with which to address these transformations is the notion of night's colonisation by day. This has been theorised in various ways by scholars including Koslofsky (2011), Crary (2013), and Gwiazdzinski (2014), and taken up more recently among electronic dance music and nightlife researchers including Rietveld (2013; 2022) and Kolioulis (2018). According to this framework, the colonisation of night by day primarily represents the temporal expansion of capital, whereby the night – as a time-space of rest and recreation – is annexed by logics of production and consumption. When foundational night studies scholar Murray Melbin likened the night to a 'frontier', his ideas were guided by an underlying colonial logic, in which the natural and exploitable resources of the night are considered 'time itself' (1987: 14). Jonathan Crary (2013) extends this analysis, suggesting that the structures and technologies of late capitalism dissolve distinctions between day and night altogether, forming 24/7 temporalities of production and consumption.

Throughout my thesis, the framework of night's colonisation has proven useful, leading me to uncover and draw together emergent interactions between dance music culture and markets expanding

through space and time. Examples including Printworks and Broadwick Live (Chapter 2), Morning Gloryville (Chapter 5), and Boiler Room (Chapter 6) all represent market-led colonisations of the night. However, they reveal new social, cultural, and economic changes that cannot be explained solely via the narratives of decline and commercialisation that have dominated much of academic and popular discourses on nightlife. Where earlier histories of electronic dance music have focused largely on the interplay between rave and the formalised economies of club culture, my thesis highlights the need for research frameworks that respond to the spatial and economic challenges of contemporary contexts. These include nightlife's ongoing entanglements with urban real estate and development; the emergence of institutional and public funding models alongside regulatory paradigms; as well as the inescapable importance of audiovisual and social media, within emergent structures of platform capitalism. These are all largely underdeveloped areas of research, with room in particular for further work that examines electronic dance music's growing relationships with cultural institutions, as well as its online mediations.

At the same time, my research has led me to conceive the night to day transition in ways that complicate frameworks of colonisation. It is for this reason that my research is structured around the less prescriptive notion of transformations, encompassing varied and contradictory processes of change. This bears some resonances with the work of Tammy L. Anderson (2009), who sought to move beyond a culture industries approach by exploring the decline and 'alteration' of the Philadelphia rave scene. Similarly, Will Straw (2018) has countered recent narrations of the 'death of nightlife' by drawing attention to the emergence of new nocturnal events alongside the decline of the nightclub sector. My own approach positions the last decade or so as a moment of significant change in London's dance music and nightlife cultures, but rather than seeking to define it as a moment of decline or otherwise, I argue that material and ideological crises have simultaneously created the conditions for reflections, renegotiations, and remakings.

Indeed, this complexity is baked into the night and day relation itself. One of the most important contributions from night studies is its foregrounding of the ambivalence of the night. Much like electronic dance music culture, the night can function as a haven for otherness and marginality. However, it is not a time-space of assured safety and its utopian promises cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, and again, like electronic dance music culture, the night is animated by an array of intoxicating discourses and affects. This power can flow in multiple directions, obscuring how exclusions, inequalities, and the logics of capital structure the night just as much as day. In this sense, while we must remain attuned to the ways in which 24/7 capitalism flattens distinctions between day and night (Crary 2013), we must also be cautious not to conflate these distinctions with an assumed cultural, political, or moralised hierarchy. Night and day must be treated as culturally and historically contingent. Though my research has drawn attention to the diurnalisation of nightlife, modern nightlife practices are themselves rooted in prior colonisations of the urban night, made possible by artificial lighting technologies and the work-leisure rhythms of industrial capitalism (Koslofsky 2011; Baldwin 2012). Awareness of such contingencies makes room for the emergence of new spatial and temporal forms, in which the nightlife practices can be decoupled from simplistic notions of convention or authenticity.

As my case studies have demonstrated, many core aspects of the inclusive, collectivist discourses that mediate much of electronic dance music culture have survived their relocation into daytime spaces and temporalities. At Morning Gloryville in Chapter 5, I found a community of sober morning ravers, who embodied ideals of carefree, desexualised abandon that are missing from many nocturnal events and spaces. In Chapter 3, I found that listening bars allow DJs to experiment with genre, and as Christabel Stirling (2016) and Timo Koren (2022; 2023) argue, genre can function as one of the key means through which race and gender-based exclusions are mediated in nightlife. In Chapter 6, I found that livestreaming during COVID-19, as well as its technological precursors in pirate radio, widened access to dance music along lines of socio-economic status, geography, and physical ability. Across all three examples, transformed spaces and times demonstrated their capacity to realise the ideals of inclusion and collectivity that frame much of electronic dance music culture. In other words, parts of my thesis show how nocturnal behaviours and values can stick during these instances of displacement, allowing them to reach a much broader range of spaces, times, and audiences than that facilitated by the infrastructures of club and rave culture. Where the utopian politics of electronic dance music culture are often criticised for their ephemeral nature, further research into these moments of displacement, translation, and mediation may help us to understand the impacts of the dancefloor beyond its immediate spatial and temporal reach.

To summarise, my argument is that notions of the night's colonisation need to be supplemented via a broader framework of transformation. This recognises the ways in which urban, economic, and technological changes are shaping contemporary nightlife cultures, while granting agency to dance music communities in imagining new spaces and times. This contributes both to night studies and the study of electronic dance music culture, demonstrating how the night to day transition situates electronic dance music within the dynamics of a changing city, as well as the ways in which this transition shapes, and is shaped by, the social and aesthetic concerns of electronic dance music and nightlife communities.

Night moves in London

Alongside broader contributions to electronic dance music studies and night studies, my thesis also contributes to histories of nightlife and electronic dance music in London and the U.K. (Gilbert and Pearson 1999; Malbon 1999; Melville 2020; Brar 2021; Gillett 2024). I argue that the night to day framework helps us to characterise a period of historical change in London's nightlife and electronic dance music scenes, from the mid 2010s to the present. The ambivalence of the framework allows for a more nuanced and complex understanding of this moment – one which cannot be conceptualised solely via the binary interplay of 'commercial' and 'non-commercial' spaces, nor via broad historical notions of prosperity and decline.

Firstly, and most significantly, the case studies in my thesis must be understood in relation to the contexts of spatialised precarity that have mediated London nightlife since the mid-2000s. Between 2005 and June 2023, the number of nightclubs in the UK fell from 3,144 to just 851 (NTIA 2024), and during this same period, London's dance music scenes explored a range of alternatives to more typical club and rave spaces. This included relocating into museums and galleries (Chapter 4); an increase in formalised temporary infrastructures (Chapter 2); as well as the development of new events and spaces, which depart from the social and physical architectures of club culture (Chapters 3, 4, and 6). As I argue in Chapter 1, the narrative of spatialised decline that has dominated much of popular and journalistic discourses fails to account for these processes of transformation. My argument is not to downplay the significance of venue closures, but rather, to highlight the complex range of affects brought about by the displacement of dance music events, as well as the ways in which these spatial and temporal transformations may feed back into conditions of spatial and economic precarity. Focussing on transformations rather than loss makes room for analysis which recognises both the agency and resilience of nightlife stakeholders, as well as their own complicity in processes of gentrification and financialisation. This builds on work which explores gentrification 'with and against' nightlife, moving beyond assumptions that nightlife spaces are the passive victims of urban transformation (Hae 2012; Thompson 2017; Kolioulis 2018; Sadoux 2021; Gillett 2024).

Secondly, my case studies explore the transformation of nightlife in parallel with the emergence of new modes of night-time governance and renewed municipal and institutional interest in electronic dance music and nightlife. Despite the high-profile inauguration of London's first Night Czar in 2016, nightclub and venue closures have continued apace into the 2020s, and as my thesis demonstrates, many recent developments in nightlife and dance music culture have been characterised by their departure from the traditional spaces and times of urban nightlife. As I argue in Chapters 1–4, this disjuncture points toward the increasing importance of nightlife not only in localised urban regeneration, but as a core metric in city branding (Picaud 2019). Crucially, such strategies are dependent on projecting the appearance of vibrant nightlife scenes – just enough to acquire valuable (sub)cultural capital – rather than sustaining genuine functionality and value for nightlife communities (Prashar-Savoie 2023). This goes some way to explaining why Printworks and Drumsheds are positioned as flagship components in London's night-time offering, despite their primary identity as daytime spaces, as well as why electronic dance music events have found a home in flagship cultural institutions, such as the Tate Modern, Design Museum, and Barbican. Such examples are easily positioned as evidence of London's 24-hour cultural offering, but one more compatible with spatial and temporal markers of respectability. Where night studies scholars have been keen to present the global increase of night mayors as evidence of a renewed political interest in the night (Straw 2018; Seijas and Gelders 2020), aspects of my thesis point instead towards the reinscription of older night-time economy discourses, in which the municipal promotion of nightlife is inseparable from its regulation (Chatterton and Hollands 2002; Hae 2012). Where such earlier critiques drew attention to processes of homogenisation, their frameworks were based on a clear distinction between commercial and non-commercial spaces, in which the illegal rave is juxtaposed against the superclub. Such distinctions remain

commonplace in colloquial and academic discourses around electronic dance music culture (Hollands 2023), but as my thesis demonstrates, they are ill-suited to conceptualise some of the more complex entanglements between cultural institutions, local governance structures, and property development that characterise London's contemporary nightlife scenes and urban geographies more broadly. As I argue in Chapter 3, smaller independent venues can still be instrumentalised as part of wider regeneration projects, adding vital but manageable cultural capital to otherwise sterile shopping and residential districts. Moreover, as I argue in Chapter 2, the category of commercial spaces is inadequate to describe the venue portfolio of Broadwick Live, given their explicit role in reimagining nightlife as part of an industry that conjoins events programming, temporary urbanism, and culture-led placemaking – what Kolioulis' (2018: 214) terms the 'financialisation of clubbing'. As Ed Gillett (2023: 299) argues, the naked commercialism of the 90s superclub has been replaced by less visible nightlife conglomerates, in which corporatised operations and funding structures are largely hidden from dance music fans.

Thirdly, my research took place at a moment in which London's electronic dance music communities were renegotiating their relationships with the social and ideological space of the dancefloor. Since the mid-2010s, debates around safe(r) spaces and diversity have destabilised many of the utopian discourses that have framed electronic dance music since the 1980s. Alongside questions around dancefloor behaviours and DJ line-ups, dance music communities have explored the ways in which exclusions and inequalities are mediated via factors including drug and alcohol consumption, accessibility, and music policy. In academia, work such as that by Luis-Manuel Garcia (2023) has brought new historical and ethnographic perspectives to the questions that animated much of the first wave of electronic dance music studies – examining the extent to which dance music culture can fulfil its collectivist promises. In this context, I argue that transformations to the spaces and times of dance music culture function not only as a response to spatial pressures and closure of nightclubs, but as a way of reimagining what have become firmly established social, spatial, and aesthetic norms. As my thesis highlights, these reimaginings have taken a variety of forms, including listening spaces that encourage DJs to explore different musical repertoires; daytime events oriented around sobriety; hybridised exhibition, performance, and club spaces; as well as online events that widen access according to physical ability and geographic proximity. These transformations highlight the need for expanded theorisations of electronic dance music and nightlife cultures, in which nightclubs and informal rave spaces function as part of a much broader spatial and temporal ecology. Such an ecology demands that many received spatial distinctions be renegotiated, recognising the role played by markers of authenticity in upholding many structures of social and economic power (James 2020a; 2020b). Many pervasive cultural and spatial typologies fail to account for the ways in which institutional spaces have been effective at foregrounding the work of marginalised dance music communities, for example, and conversely, why anti-vax and anti-lockdown ideologies found a home in the illegal rave scene during COVID-19. Crucially, attempts to understand this transformed ecology of dance music spaces require an awareness not only of wider urban contexts, but also of the shifting cultures and politics within nightlife and electronic dance music communities. In this sense, I support the approach taken by Chatterton and Hollands' analyses

of nightlife spaces, summed up as 'an outlook which combines the study of political-economic forces … with critical ethnographies sensitive to the nuances of locality, agency and political resistance' (2002: xi). Such an approach ensures that electronic dance music communities retain agency and accountability in shaping the future of nightlife scenes in London and elsewhere.

Night moves?

My thesis has focussed on London specifically, but it explores transformations to electronic dance music and nightlife cultures that have relevance across numerous urban contexts. London's epidemic of nightclub closures has close parallels in Berlin's *Clubsterben*, along with the generalised contraction of nightlife scenes that Ryan Hartley (2019) identifies in cities including Sydney, Glasgow, and Tokyo. Night mayors have been appointed in a growing number of cities worldwide, including locations as diverse as Manchester, Pittsburgh, and Cali (Seijas and Gelders 2020). Electronic dance music has featured in museums and galleries in Aberdeen, Frankfurt, and Paris, while Morning Gloryville, and a similar wellness-oriented daytime event, Daybreaker, have hosted events in cities such as Zurich, Bangalore, and Ibiza, including events at Washington D.C.'s Smithsonian and the Natural History Museum in New York. Audiophile bars can now be found in Bangkok, Sao Paulo, and Cape Town, while Boiler Room and Hör broadcast events from Mexico City, Shanghai, and Rio de Janeiro. There is room for work which situates these examples in local contexts, as well as for work which zooms out to explore them as part of broader transformations to electronic dance music, nightlife, and urban culture.

Where I have focussed on instances of electronic dance music's spatial and temporal transformation, it is important to note that my case studies represent nascent trends. Despite the closure of venues and the emergence of new spaces and events, nightclubs and raves remain the archetypal spatial and temporal forms in electronic dance music culture. When club culture migrated online during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, many overestimated the role livestreaming would play in the post-pandemic cultural landscape. Even as platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok play an ever-greater role in mediating electronic dance music's social and cultural ecologies, the co-presence of in-person events has proven resilient. But what is meant by the resilience of nightlife? The cyclical interplay between 'mainstream' and 'underground' spaces has been one way of explaining this, but it feels insufficient to understand contemporary transformations. It is a resilient nightlife that has produced marginally more diverse DJ line-ups, while underlying power structures and conditions for nocturnal workers remain unchanged (Rennela 2021; Prashar-Savoie 2023). It is also a resilient nightlife that employs 'logics of deviance', whereby grassroots venues can push the limits of legislative grey areas, while remaining spatially compliant (Adu forthcoming). As I have argued, transformations to the spaces and times of electronic dance music culture present a range of possible outcomes. It is up to dance music communities, researchers, and activists to ensure that such transformations lead to a more inclusive, equitable, and joyful nightlife.

Epilogue: transformed spaces and times

When I was formulating the initial idea for this project in 2016, I felt a sense of dissonance between my own experiences of London's dance music culture and the media discourses that surrounded it. While news articles narrated the death of the city's nightlife, I was immersed in lively and active dance music scenes. Squatting had been criminalised since 2012, but dedicated communities continued to organise parties in warehouses, industrial estates, and the diminishing brownfield sites around Hackney Marshes and the River Lea. Many of these events occupied legal grey zones, somewhere in between the radical autonomy of free party culture and the formalised infrastructures of nightlife. In the nightclubs that were still open, many were highly regulated and securitised, but they continued to draw large crowds and remained key destinations in DJs' international touring schedules.

Along with the material reality of venue closures, it felt important to engage with this complexity. In many cases, dance music culture continued to provide spaces of social transformation, despite an increasingly gentrified, financialised, and precarious urban context. Amin and Thrift note that urban transformations do not necessarily determine conditions of alienation and dysfunction. As such, we should be attuned to the spaces and times of contemporary cities, which produce reimagined opportunities for interaction, 'unexpected juxtapositions', and 'novelty' (2002: 37). Spaces of dancing – whether familiar or transformed – provide one possible site of urban encounter. As Laam Hae argues, access to social dancing can be understood as part of a wider, democratic right to public space, which affords the 'diverse cultural life and socialisation unique to cities' (2012: 39).

As I described in chapter 1, cycles of decline and renewal are familiar tropes in histories of music and urban culture. The excesses of commercial success build to a moment of implosion, making space for the emergence of new cultural forms. Most historians of dance music culture argue that it had reached a peak of popularity and influence by the end of the 1990s, though there has yet to be an agreed metanarrative as to what came next. After several early texts on dance music culture sought to narrate wide-ranging histories of its development through the 1980s and 1990s (Collin 1997; Pearson and Gilbert 1999; Reynolds 2013), much subsequent work has focussed on specific genres (Anis 2019; Warren 2019; James 2020), geographies (Denk and von Thülen 2014; Lawrence 2016; Melville 2020; Brar 2021), and identity-based communities (Buckland 2002; Farrugia 2012; Wark 2023). Such approaches are useful for drawing out the specificities of dance music's diverse and ongoing histories, and there remains much work to do in this regard. Most book-length studies continue to focus on Western Europe and North America – London, New York, and Berlin in particular – and there is room for a much wider geographic focus, as well as the ongoing significance of dance music culture for many queer communities and people of colour. At the same time, such approaches lead to an increasing fragmentation and atomisation of research on dance music culture. With ever more specific social, geographic, and musical histories, it can become difficult to draw out broader, macro reflections about electronic dance music and its relationship to contemporary society and culture.

Given my focus on London, this thesis is in some ways another iteration of this same tendency. However, my contribution is to situate the study of dance music culture in relation to the changing spaces and times of the contemporary city, in which processes of urban, cultural, and social transformation have relevance across multiple geographic contexts. When I realised the need to paint a nuanced picture of London's contemporary nightlife, it soon became clear that this was more complex than integrating stories of 'underground' and 'mainstream' culture. The distinction and interplay between formal and informal nightlife practices remains useful – as evidenced by the resurgence of illegal raves during COVID-19 (Avis-Ward 2022) – but these are stories that have been told in countless iterations since the late 1980s.

By considering electronic dance music in relation to the contested time-space of the urban night, I have been able to examine its spatial and temporal transformations in ways that moves beyond distinctions of underground and mainstream. As electronic dance music enters its fourth decade of history, it has become mediated via a much wider range of forces than the commercialisation and state regulation that characterise many early histories of dance music culture. I have drawn attention to a range of additional factors, including night-time governance, urban planning, cultural institutions, and digital technology, which are shaping – and being shaped by – contemporary dance music culture. In certain cases, these transformations represent reinscribed versions of familiar processes of corporatisation, institutionalisation, and gentrification. However, each chapter also tells us something more than this – narrating the emergence of reimagined and radical nightlife practices, as well as new ways of conceptualising dance music culture's own complicity in reproducing the neoliberal logics of the night-time economy.

Utopia / dystopia

Each chapter of this thesis considers how spatial and temporal transformations in contemporary dance music culture afford multiple social, cultural, and political outcomes. These transformed spaces and times represent sites of creativity and social transformation, as well as reconfigured articulations of commercialisation, institutionalisation, and gentrification. Given contemporary nightlife's mediation via emergent modes of nocturnal governance, corporatised urban regeneration, and digital platformisation, transformed spaces and times of dancing require new critical frameworks and practices to disentangle dance music culture's utopian impulses from the reproduction of the neoliberal city. Spaces of dancing continue to function as sites of encounter and community, but these vague affordances can simultaneously serve to conceal an underlying dystopia, in which nightlife reinforces structures of power and capital (Saldanha 2007).

In recent years, dance music communities have worked hard to foreground issues of diversity and representation. This work remains far from complete, but DJ line-ups have certainly become more inclusive, and it is now commonplace for nightclubs to have safe(r) space policies and infrastructures for dealing with harassment. Considering the key role played by queer, trans, and communities of colour in the historical development of dance music culture, such reappraisals are long overdue.

At the same time, this focus on identity and inclusion has meant that the spatiotemporal economies and politics of nightlife infrastructure have received less in the way of critique. This is not a question of either/or – the spatial and temporal politics of urban nightlife are mediated by exclusions of race, gender, sexuality, age, and class. What does it mean, for example, that the UK's first queer and trans music festival, Body Movements, was hosted at Printworks, which as I highlighted in chapter 2, has played a key role in integrating nightlife within corporate and municipal urban development strategies? What does it mean that FOLD – a key venue for London's queer techno community – was forced to surrender £214,000 worth of audio equipment in 2022, following allegations that it was linked to cyber fraud and money laundering in connection with the QQAAZZ organised crime group? (Brookes 2022). In a more worrying example, over 10,000 people from London's dance music communities took to the streets as part of a 'Save Our Scene' demonstration in June 2021. Protesters highlighted the government's unfair treatment of nightlife during the pandemic, but their calls to reopen nightclubs went against public health advice, evoking a libertarianism that in many cases overlapped with anti-mask and anti-vaccine ideology (Gillett 2021).

It would be easy to dismiss these examples as non-representative, and many DJs certainly voiced public critique of the 'Save Our Scene' march. However, it is also worth considering how such seemingly contradictory politics may be afforded by the vague utopianism that continues to frame much of rave and dance music culture. As I discussed in chapter 5, such contradictions may be located in dance music culture's early histories, in which discourses of togetherness were refracted through entrepreneurial ideologies and the neoliberal tendencies latent within Californian counterculture. Dance music culture's more recent foregrounding of identity goes some way toward repositioning these utopian impulses within a more considered politics, but dance communities can go further in their analysis and praxis, exploring how the micro-social politics of the dance floor are mediated by the spatial and temporal politics of the city, as well as the broader systems of capitalism. As Marie Thompson (2016) argues, campaigns for the survival of nightclubs and music venues need to be situated within broader urban activisms, exploring the close relation between cultural spaces, the availability of housing, and broader rights to the city. Similarly, Mathys Rennela (2021) argues that dance music's focus on diversity in DJ line-ups obscures the struggles of less visible nightlife workers, including bartenders, cleaners, and bouncers. As I highlighted in chapter 1, London's nightlife lacks any structures of organising aside from the business interest group of the NTIA, meaning that campaigns for venues and employment rights are divorced from any collective solidarity and power. Until the politics of dance music culture includes these expanded and more specific orientations, the utopia of the dance floor does much to conceal the dystopia that bubbles just beneath it.

Spatial and temporal creativity

As I noted in my introduction, many commentators have argued that dance music culture has reached a point of creative stasis, recycling old genres and musical practices (Reynolds 2010; Fisher 2014; Reynaldo

2022). Shifting attention toward the transformed spaces and times of contemporary dance music culture may provide a way out of this. The physical, sonic, and social architecture of nightclubs has remained relatively unchanged since the advent of discotheques in the mid-20th century. Despite developments in audio and digital performance technologies, DJs continue to perform with pre-recorded music in a space designed for social dancing. In this sense, musical innovations need to be understood within spatial and temporal contexts. Disco cannot be understood without the discotheques of New York and Philadelphia, just as the sounds of UK rave and hardcore cannot be understood without the urban and rural events through which they emerged. These musical innovations took place in tandem with the development of new musical spaces and times. As the design of nightclubs has become standardised since the mid 1990s, along with the spatial technologies of lighting and drugs, it is perhaps unsurprising that DJs and producers have struggled to innovate. The new spaces and times that I have documented remain relatively recent, but how might they afford the development of new musical and stylistic trajectories? Emma Warren's (2023) new book goes some way to exploring the diverse musical and social possibilities of different dance floors, but this history can be expanded to include meanwhile use venues; listening bars; museums and galleries; as well as shifts into digital space. Given that electronic dance music is a fundamentally spatial and temporal culture, how might designers, architects, and urban planners impact its ongoing development? What new spaces and times of dancing can we imagine, in both physical and digital space?

At the same time, I would also argue that the social affordances of dance music take precedence over musical and stylistic innovation. The dance floor can retain an important social and cultural role in the public life of cities, even when produced through old and familiar sounds. My research has drawn attention to the transformed spaces and times of dance music culture, but nightclubs, raves, and free parties continue to produce interaction, encounter, and the possibility of community. The spatial and temporal reorderings I have discussed might point toward more day in the night. But this can also be flipped on its head. Might there also be more night in the day?

COVID-19 accelerated the spatial and temporal contraction of nightlife. The economic impacts of the pandemic on dance music continue to be felt, and many venues were unable reopen after the period of lockdown enforced closure (NTIA 2023). At the same time, where commentators speculated longer-lasting effects of the rapid shift into digital space, dance floors have returned not only to the time-space of the night, but also to the day. At the end of 2021, Fabric unveiled a new series of events, Continuum, which run for 24+ hours, with some lasting for entire weekends. In Canning Town, FOLD has attracted a growing cult following with their event Unfold, which runs from midday to midnight every other Sunday. Unfold is a queer-centred techno party, with unannounced, secret line-ups, and a community focus that is unusual for such a large London nightclub. For these events, FOLD reorient their space by positioning the DJ booth in the middle of the dancefloor. This creates a non-directional space, not dissimilar from my first experiences of World Unknown in that Camberwell basement back in 2015. In contrast with the daytime clubbing of Printworks, these examples represent an extended rather than relocated night.

At the same time, these temporalities are fragile and ambivalent. London's nightlife scenes have become increasingly dominated by day festivals and day parties. Like Morning Gloryville, these are positioned to be compatible with the rhythms of 9 to 5 working life. Where the night-time economy sought to 'double' horizons of production and consumption, many of these events seek to double the economies of the night. In other contexts, daytime parties can afford unique possibilities of aesthetic and social transformation. During the 1980s and 1990s, afternoon events opened up dance music culture to communities of young British South Asians, many of whom felt restricted by familial expectations, and excluded from the white-dominated spaces of nightlife (Bugel 2021). Elsewhere, Sunday daytime parties at South London pubs, including The Elephant and Castle, and The Park, incubated the emergent sounds of UK garage, affording DJs a greater freedom to experiment than in nightclubs on Friday and Saturday nights (Titmus 2014).

In 1999, Gilbert and Pearson argued that 'it isn't dance culture which has been incorporated; it's the dominant culture which has been infiltrated and transformed' (1999: 180). Via this same logic, can we say that the day has been infiltrated and transformed by the night? The emergence of night mayors in cities around the world might support this, as well as the ongoing development of the disciplinary field of 'night studies'.

New directions for research

Beyond distinctions of day and night, my research points toward the importance of time, as well as space, in understanding music, culture, and urban life. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis has had much influence on urban studies, but there is much room for explorations of temporality in the study of music, space, and culture. How, for example, do the opening hours in different venues and urban contexts shape local performance practices and genres? Romanian minimal techno has a slowly unfolding, long form style, afforded by the country's relaxed licensing laws, where many clubs can run from Friday through till Monday. Dublin and Sydney both have vibrant dance music scenes, despite most nightclubs having very limited opening hours. How do these temporal affordances impact the development of local dance music cultures and musical practices? Temporality could also be explored in relation to the structures of the week. Midweek and Sunday night parties such as Metalheadz and FWD>> have played a key role in the formation of new genres, while Unfold uses Sundays as part of the temporal production of a queer safe space. Lastly, as I began to explore in chapter 2, temporality can be considered in relation to the durations of different venues and musical spaces. Along with explicitly temporary venues, how do the life cycles of different spaces mediate the formation of musical communities? What can the relative durations of musical spaces tell us about the cultures and politics of different urban environments?

The spatial and temporal transformations I have discussed took place in London, but similar tendencies can be found across numerous urban contexts. In chapter 1, I presented a brief discussion of Berlin, but there is room for extensive comparative study. This could involve discussions of urban nightlife

elsewhere in the UK or Europe, as well as more distant nightlife scenes in Shanghai, Johannesburg, or Tehran, which raise new questions about the spatiotemporal politics of urban nightlife. Studies of dance music culture have tended to focus on canonic urban centres including London, Berlin, and New York, and these geographic tendencies are mirrored by many studies of the urban night more broadly, as well as research into emergent modes of nocturnal governance. Given the reproduction of homogenising 'global cities' and 'nightlife supremacy' discourses, how might cities in the Global South contribute toward the production of more diverse critical and practical approaches to urban nightlife?

Within London itself, there is such a wide range of nightlife and dance music cultures that my own research is far from representative of the entire city. The spaces and communities that I have included are mediated by my own time, knowledge, and connections. There are countless clubs and venues in more geographically peripheral boroughs such as Enfield, Barking & Dagenham, and Croydon, which were beyond the scope of my research. Many of these spaces serve working-class and migrant communities and remain outside most journalistic and scholarly conceptions of London nightlife. As I noted in chapter 1, media discourses play an important role in shaping the parameters of perceived decline and renewal in nightlife scenes. Moving beyond distinctions of 'underground' and 'mainstream', as well as received canons of musical and cultural influence, how might a more diverse approach to (hyper)local nightlife spaces afford more nuanced understandings of the relation between race, gender, class, and the production of urban nightlife?

Fig 7.1 Support Nightlife protest, Hackney Town Hall, July 27th 2018. Photograph my own.

Where my close relationship with dance music culture – as a DJ, producer, and partygoer – afforded ease of access to certain scenes, spaces, and communities, my own networks, preconceptions, and taste simultaneously placed limitations on the parameters of my research. In this sense, there is also value in research from 'outsiders', who may be better placed to avoid judgements clouded by their personal affinities and involvements (Stock and Chiener 2008). In many strands of popular music research and cultural studies, there is a tendency among researchers to focus on niche and 'underground' scenes. These may represent sites of social and aesthetic radicalism, but their place in grand narrations of culture can often tell us as much as about the proclivities of researchers as they do the wider significance of such cultures in urban, social, and political life. In this sense, there is a need for research into electronic music and nightlife that encompasses the full spectrum of the popular, commercial, and 'mainstream'. This may require many researchers – including myself – to step outside their comfort zones, and engage with the full spectrum of urban nightlife, in all its utopian and dystopian complexities.

As I have touched on at various moments in this thesis, the perceived decline of London's nightlife needs to be understood in relation to dance music communities' own failures to organise and forge structures of solidarity across scenes, spaces, and broader political movements. In the summer of 2018, Hackney council announced a series of measures that would place a midnight weekend curfew on any new venues that opened in the borough. In response, activists organised a 'Support Nightlife!' protest on July 27th (see fig. 7.1). The associated Facebook event attracted some 7,000 responses, but at the demonstration, only a few hundred people showed up. Despite the breadth of London's dance music communities, this attendance speaks to their lack of political mobilisation and direction. In her research on social dancing and gentrification in New York, Laam Hae (2012) draws attention to the efforts, and limitations, of pro-nightlife activism in struggles against the city's restrictive 'cabaret laws'. Researchers and nightlife communities in London would do well to study movements elsewhere, learning from the successes and failures of other pro-nightlife movements. As Hae argues, part of this requires situating struggles for nightlife venues within a broader 'right to the city', in which spaces of dancing can be valued and supported by those outside of dance music and nightlife communities. Researchers, artists, and activists would also benefit from further study of historic campaigns around Black and LGBTQ+ musical spaces, in which the survival of spaces of dancing overlaps with more urgent questions of social and political recognition. This could also be supported with further research into geographically diverse nightlife protest movements, such as those in Tbilisi, Georgia, where campaigns for social dancing intersect with broader struggles against homophobia and right-wing nationalism (Collin 2018).

Without the infrastructures of spaces and times of dancing, the micro-social politics of the dancefloor are meaningless. Can social transformations endure once the music has stopped, and the sun has risen? Or perhaps brief glimmers of hope and imagined community are all that the dancefloor has to offer. These are questions that have remained unanswered since the early days of rave, and they continue to shape the ongoing transformations of electronic dance music culture. Like the night-time, the dancefloor

has no inherent politics. It can be a space of collective joy, or one of danger, alienation, and exclusion. Visions of utopia can be escapist or distracting, but they can allow us to imagine the possibility of different futures. The possibility of such imaginings is surely worth struggling for, both on and off the dancefloor.

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Appendix: list of interviews

Hour long interviews:

Byron Biroli (Attendee at Bagley's) July 2020. In person.

Soumyak Kanti DeBiswas (Former director of the Yard Theatre nightclub) August 2020. Zoom.

Kemi Oshi (Resident DJ at Morning Gloryville). September 2020. Phone call.

Sara Sassanelli (Curator at the ICA). January 2022. In person.

Ed Holloway (Architect at Bleep Studio). January 2023. In person.

Email interviews:

Martin Sage (Former music programmer at The White Hart) June 2017.

Dan Hampson (Former music programmer at the Yard Theatre nightclub) June 2017.

Tom Steidl (Founder and director at Rye Wax) June 2017.

Dan Beaumont (Founder of Dalston Superstore and Dance Tunnel) June 2017.

Jack Carter (DJ 'Scientific Dreamz of U). March 2022