

# **Nightlife as counter-space in the neoliberal city**

**Experimentation, co-production and resistance in Geneva's night-time  
economy**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses the impact of the neoliberal rollout on the fabric of urban spaces, a perspective which has recently gained academic attention, particularly amongst social-spatial sciences such as geography. The research explores how actors of the Genevan nightlife have found themselves at the forefront of the resistance against urban transformations enforced by the neoliberal urban regime, having to adapt from a network of spaces which were informal, self-regulated, collective and arts-focused, to a nightscape dominated by hyper-regulation, individual entrepreneurialism and the commodification of space.

Organised around the idea of spaces of nightlife as 'counter-spaces' in neoliberal Geneva, the thesis discusses the role of experimentation as a process of the co-production of spaces which have the potential to stand against the neoliberal urban order. The thesis articulates cultural practices and the structural imperatives of space-making in a dialogic manner, in light of extensive empirical material collected in the city over six years. I draw from this body of 52 interviews (3 focus groups, 6 collective interviews and 43 individual interviews) with 73 participants (nightlife producers, nightlife goers and local representatives), who I have identified as key actors of the production, consumption and regulation of nightlife spaces in Geneva to critically discuss experimentation as a practice which has both the potential to challenge neoliberal urban policies and to support the neoliberalisation of cities. In doing so, I identify why particular actors have resisted the transformation of spaces of nightlife in Geneva under the pressure of neoliberalism and to what extent these spaces act as counter-spaces in the neoliberal city.

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## List of abbreviations

DiY	Do it Yourself
ENTE	Evening and Night-Time Economy
GCN	Grand Conseil de la Nuit
NTE	Night-Time Economy
UECA	Union des Espaces Culturels Autogérés
ULL	Urban Living Lab

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

I initiated my research for this thesis in 2012, in the aftermath of a series of protests held in defence of nightlife venues in my hometown, Geneva, in Switzerland. After decades of operating within what turned out to be a legal grey zone, these nightlife premises had seen their licence withdrawn by the state, which, I still believe to this day, was taken off guard by the scale of the movement of support and protests that ensued. The venues that were shut were very different from each other to say the least, but they had in common that they operated with a “refreshment stall” (*buvette*) licence (État de Genève, 1987), a status inherited from when Geneva’s nightlife was dominated by informal nightlife venues. This thesis is built around the case study of a group of nightlife actors who fought back to reinstate an alternative model of nightlife spaces in the contemporary neoliberal context. Drawing from this case study, I support the argument that experimentation has the potential to arouse and channel expressions of resistance against the neoliberalisation of urban spaces, and offer a pathway to co-produce counter-spaces.



*Image 1: People marching in Geneva on Oct. 30 2010, after L'Usine, an alternative cultural centre, went on strike to protest the temporary closure of two other music clubs by city officials. Photo: Pierre Albouy.*

The 2010 protests brought together a very diverse set of actors, nightlife producers and nightlife enthusiasts, individual club owners and collectives managing nightlife-centred cultural venues, under the common banner of claiming the right to operate nightlife venues within what I identified here as an informal regime of space, a regime that the state was no longer wanting to allow. These expressions of resistance in support of nightlife venues acted as a trigger point for the research presented in this thesis.

Subsequently, I designed a fieldwork strategy that intentionally addressed all actors alike, regardless of the nature of the venue where they worked or went out, with the idea that there was something about resisting for informal spaces of nightlife in Geneva that had to potential to bring a variety of people together around a common narrative. This strategy turned out to be at least partly successful, although the protests did not occupy much of my exchanges with my interviewees in the end, as I will elaborate in chapter 5.

The testimonies that I collected during the empirical phase of the research certainly all have in common the desire to address, directly or indirectly, the shift of urban ideology and the dramatic transformation that Geneva as a city has undergone in the lead-up to the financial crash of 2008. In their interviews, through the lens of how this has affected the spaces of nightlife that they have an affinity with, my participants described how the neoliberalisation of Geneva had transformed spaces of nightlife in the city, into a nightscape that had become more exclusive, that created more segregation and in which spaces were more standardised.

As the empirical part of the research unfolded however, it became apparent that I couldn't ignore the fundamental difference between two sets of nightlife actors present in the city. First, those who, in their interviews, expressed their support for one venue which they particularly cared for, whether because it was the business they own and/or manage, or because it was their preferred nightlife destination. And second, those for who nightlife had become a ground for activism, because their venues were endangered by a new socio-spatial regime in Geneva. This group of participants explicitly talked about the kind of city they wanted to live in and why the spaces of nightlife that they defended did not fit in the neoliberal city that Geneva had become. However, the alliance of these actors during the protests, and later in the form of the Great Council of the Night (an umbrella organisation demanding a diverse nightlife whose creation I was directly involved in), coupled with the intense lobbying work of the Union des Espaces Culturels Autogérés (UECA), resulted in the reconstruction of a geography of counter-spaces in the Genevan night.

The rebirth of counter-spaces in Geneva's nightlife from 2010 was possible thanks to two strands of activism, both of which implied to imagine and experiment with new ways of allying with public services. The first one evolved around the access of State- or Council-owned buildings. The second implied that actors of the local nightlife and State services worked together towards a



“licence to operate without licence”, a regime of exception which was introduced in the latest licencing law, in 2016 (État de Genève, 2015b).

This thesis conceptualises the experience of Genevan nightlife actors who have reclaimed the right to co-produce spaces of experimentation, to discuss the terms in which the neoliberal urban environment reframed “counter-spaceness”.

### **1.1 Nightlife and the Night-Time Economy: fighting for spaces of experimentation**

I could not have written this thesis without engaging with nightlife studies. As the name suggests, this area of urban studies was born out of the interest of researchers in nightlife as an increasingly important dimension of the Western urban economy. While nightlife studies have recently started to incorporate geographies of the night in the global South, the literature used for this thesis is focused on cities of the global North, which allows me to discuss the transformations of the Genevan nightlife in comparable terms.

This body of literature shows that, in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nightlife in Western cities has expanded from a marginal phenomenon to an important part of the urban economy, as the result of various strategies of post-industrial urban boosterism. The spread of the term Night-Time Economy (NTE, or sometimes Evening and Night-time Economy, ENTE) in academic research is a strong illustration of this phenomenon.

The transformation of nightlife into a lucrative industry largely echoes the transformation that occurred in Geneva, with exception of the timing. In cities like Berlin, New York or Manchester, the development of a formal NTE is documented from the mid-nineties onwards, whereas in Geneva, the development of a corporate, licence-regulated nightlife was delayed for a variety of reasons, which I explain in Chapter 4. Until 2010, the dominant

model of nightlife was therefore for venues to be informal, totally unlicensed or licensed on an event-by-event basis, self-regulated, counterculture-focused and, more often than not, collectively run. In Chapter 4 I also trace the history of a culture of self-managed spaces in Geneva and its connection with the local artistic scene. From the early 2000s, the urban ideology induced by the governing institutions – namely the State of Geneva and the Geneva City Council – swiftly and dramatically shifted, which finally resulted in the clampdown on informal venues.

Central to the argument of this thesis indeed is the connection, which I make theoretically (in Chapter 2) and empirically (in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) between these transformations of the production of spaces of nightlife and the neoliberalisation of Geneva. For the development of the NTE to be possible, nightlife as a market was deregulated (more licences were distributed, opening hours were extended) but spaces of nightlife became increasingly regimented and profit-driven, leading to the quasi-extinction of informal nightlife spaces. This thesis draws from the story of Genevan actors of the nightlife who have fought back to maintain spaces of experimentation in the Genevan nightlife, to critically discuss experimentation as a collective practice of co-creation of counter-spaces.

## **1.2 Neoliberal spaces and counter-spaces**

The second body of literature that I mobilise to support the thesis discusses the roll out of neoliberalism in global Western cities during the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the development of the argument in this thesis, I understand neoliberalism as the latest phase of capitalism, which is characterised by a free-market driven ideology, the shrinkage of the state and a strong push towards the privatisation and corporatisation of resources (McGuigan, 2016).

The testimonies that were delivered to me by my participants led me to question what in Geneva had precipitated such a dramatic transformation of

the nightscape, what had been lost and what it was that my participants were standing up for. In this sense, the research strategy, which I adopted was to use spaces of nightlife in Geneva as an object of study to question the extent to which they can inform us about what neoliberalism does to Geneva as a case study, and by extension to cities in general.

Because it is of particular relevance for the case study discussed here, I am differentiating “neoliberalism” as a strand of thoughts and theories, and “neoliberalisation” as its concrete materialisations in policies, laws, narratives, etc., as well as its adaptation to a variety of geographical contexts (Brenner and Theodore, 2010). To achieve some novel theoretical outcomes through a discussion which is fundamentally grounded, I have adopted the concept of “actually existing neoliberalism” as perspective on neoliberalism in Geneva. Framed by Peck et al. (2018), this idea encapsulates the discrepancy between the promise of neoliberalism as an ideology on the one hand (“an utopian idealism of free-market narratives”, p.3), and the various socio-environmental crisis caused by decades of neoliberal policies on the other (Montbiot, 2016). In the case of the Genevan nightlife case study, it helped me distinguish the neoliberal narrative behind the transformation of the local nightlife (a pledge to private property and real estate development, a richer, consumer choice-driven, entrepreneurial nightlife) and the impact of the neoliberalisation of the nightscape (a impoverished, standardised, segregated nightlife). But most importantly, it supported the argument that my participants exploited this discrepancy to work reclaim the co-production of counter-spaces.

The originality of the Geneva case study, I argue, is how it enables me to explore a story of spaces of nightlife, which, at least at first sight, were produced as spaces of cultural experimentation rather than by actors actively seeking to imagine an alternative to the all-encompassing roll-out of neoliberalism. If the reference to counter-spaces directly refers to Henri Lefebvre’s expression in *The Production of Space* (1974), this thesis recontextualises the concept in a different historical moment. For Lefebvre, the idea of counter-space materialises “an initially utopian alternative to

actually existing 'real' space" (p.349), which implies that there is a clear agenda of counteracting a regime of space behind it. As will be extensively discussed in chapter 5 and 6, this is not entirely true to the counter-spaces which I used as case studies for this thesis, although rethinking the movements which led to the resuscitation of counter-spaces in the neoliberal context is part of the innovative strand of ideas presented here.

### **1.3 Why experimentation matters**

Experimentation is the central topic that emerged from the empirical part of the work presented in this thesis. As I started analysing the interviews collected during fieldwork, it became apparent to me that what my participants talked about and valued was the collective practice of experimentation, a dimension of their experience of nightlife which was possible in those spaces of nightlife that were informal, self-regulated and self-managed, but that they described as compromised by the new neoliberal urban environment.

Experimentation, I discovered as I looked for reading on the matter, is a trending topic in urban studies (Evans et al. 2016; Karvonen, 2018). For this thesis, I have grounded the discussion around experimentation in a literature that looks at experimentation as a strategy of space making (Bulkeley and Castan Broto, 2013) and more specifically strategies of urban co-production (Chatterton et al., 2018). This area of academic thinking specifically discusses the ambivalent status of experimentation in the neoliberal context, with the central argument that experimentation can both serve the neoliberal urban agenda, and allow for counter-urban models of spaces to emerge. In this thesis, I build the argument that experimentation is the process by which my participants co-created spaces in nightlife that contest the neoliberal order in Geneva, and that they do so despite the neoliberalisation of the nightscape as a dominant model in the city.

#### **1.4 Objectives, research questions and chapter outline**

As I extensively explore in Chapter 3, Geneva has a rich history of arts-led urban social movements. Given the role that, historically, cultural spaces have played in disrupting the urban order in the city, this thesis explores the hypothesis that informal spaces of nightlife have taken over the role of counter-spaces in the neoliberal context. The aim of this thesis is therefore to understand and conceptualise the co-production of counter-spaces of nightlife in Geneva in which experimentation is seen as key.

In order to do that, I have organised the thesis following three research questions:

1. How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of nightlife?
2. To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?
3. To what extent does experimentation play a role in (a) the co-production of these counter-spaces and (b) resisting neoliberalism?

In chapter 2, I ground the thesis theoretically, exploring but also connecting the three areas of academic literature that this thesis is informed by. First, nightlife studies, looking at how the production of spaces of nightlife has always been and still is intricately bound to the dominant mode of urban space-making and policing; but also presenting nightlife as an environment that fosters spatial, social and artistic experimentations and innovations. Second, Urban Neoliberalism theories as the dominant mode of production of urban space, envisioning how dominant spaces and counter-spaces can be re-conceptualised in the neoliberal urban environment. Thirdly, urban studies about experimentation, looking at experimentation as a strategy of urban co-production. This literature shows that experimentation has received regained attention in recent years because it has the potential support the emergence of alternative models of urban governance in a context of austerity and carbon crisis. This body of literature, however, is also crucial to discuss the ambivalent relationship that experimentation entertains with neoliberal

urbanism, as it shows how urban experiments have the potential to both foster urban transformations and support market-led policies.

Chapter 2 frames the study theoretically but, most importantly, it identifies the gaps which the case study have the potential to fill. This thesis re-conceptualises nightlife actors' political agencies to analyse a process of co-production which emerged without an explicitly anti-neoliberal agenda and yet, I will argue, has provided an alternative to the unique corporate model that was being enforced locally by neoliberal policies. Chapter 2 follows the same topical sequence as the research questions, allowing each one to be theoretically grounded in the research literature before it is discussed from an empirical and analytical perspective. This sequence is further reproduced throughout the analysis chapters, with chapter 4 answering RQ 1, chapter 5 answering RQ 2 and chapter 6 responding to RQ 3.

In Chapter 3, I explain about my methodological choices for the research. First, I write about the methodological implications of using a "social drama" (the protests) as a starting point. Second, I explain about how this grounded process has led to the emergence of an ontological framework comprising spaces of nightlife, experimentation and counter-spaces, and the reformulation of research questions accordingly for the writing phase. Finally, I outline my fieldwork strategies, as designed to suit the case study. I also use this chapter to position myself in relation to a struggle in which I was active until 2014.

Chapter 4 presents the case study in depth, looking at the history of cultural counter-spaces in Geneva, the emergence of informal spaces of nightlife as a model that dominated the nightscape for over 30 years, and the disappearance of this model of counter-spaces inherited from the sixties. I also present recent data regarding the transformation of the conditions of the production of spaces of nightlife in Geneva, such as the introduction of a new licencing system in 2016. Chapter 4 answers the first research question, by giving a historical perspective on the connection between artist-led urban

social movements and today's movements of resistance led by actors of the local nightlife. In this chapter, I look at Geneva as a city undergoing neoliberalisation and I argue that, in the last decade, spaces of nightlife have become at the frontline of urban social contestation. I also connect this narrative with the long-standing involvement of artist-led urban social movements in Geneva, a local history of experimental collective space making that some of my participants reclaimed.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the co-production of the spaces themselves, looking at the crossover between spatial and social structures. Drawing from literature around informality, I show that alternative spaces of nightlife are environments where spatial and social norms are destabilised, played with and contested; whereas mainstream venues convey and reproduce the neoliberal mindset. In Chapter 6, I look at the political role of experimentation with the aim to answer my last research question. The first half of the chapter frames experimentation as a mode of co-producing counter-spaces. The second half discusses the political implications of the reconstruction of a geography of counter-spaces in a neoliberalised urban environment.

The thesis ends with Chapter 7 in which I reflect upon the journey of researching and conceptualising modes of resistance against the neoliberalisation of cities from the perspective of mundane, small-scale experiences such as a night out. In order to do so, I reframe my research findings in light of the concept of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Peck et al., 2002) to show how local actors of the Genevan nightlife have been able to draw from their artistic practices to develop co-production strategies within and beyond their scene. In this chapter, I also take my argument beyond the Geneva case study arguing that experimentation, as a mode of co-production between actors of civil and public bodies, offers promising perspectives to rebuild spaces of "actually contested neoliberalism".

## **Chapter 2**

### **Spaces of nightlife as counter-spaces: the politics of experimentation in the neoliberal city**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Over the last 50 years, the roll-out of neoliberalism has considerably affected the production of urban spaces everywhere around the globe (Harvey, 2005). If the definition of neoliberalism itself varies across authors, its impact on the production of urban space is undisputed and there are many examples illustrating the transformation of urban spaces under the pressure of neoliberal trends, particularly in the global North (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

Using spaces of nightlife as an area of urban life that has been deeply transformed by neoliberalism, this thesis draws from the story of actors of the local nightlife in Geneva, Switzerland, who came together to defend nightscapes of experimentation against the spatial regime imposed by neoliberalisation, with the aim to discuss the role of experimentation as a process of co-production of counter-spaces in the neoliberal urban environment.

The objective of this chapter is threefold. First, I want to bring together the three areas of urban studies, all of which serve as theoretical frameworks for the research presented in my thesis: nightlife studies, neoliberal urban studies and experimentation-led urbanism. My second goal is to demonstrate that, in light of what has been said about nightlife, neoliberalism and experimentation, the research presented here has the potential for innovative outcomes, as it brings together an original set of ideas and a unique and relevant case study. Finally, in this chapter, I want to show how the theoretical base that underpins my analysis connects with and enables me to answer my research questions.



In the first section of this chapter, I focus on nightlife studies, a body of literature which encapsulates the tension that lies in the fact that spaces of nightlife are both the product of a certain regime of space and have the potential to challenge it. In the second section, I bring together ideas about neoliberalism as a dominant urban model and look at how spaces of nightlife can act as countermodels but can also be incorporated into the neoliberal city. In the third section, I look at experimentation and urban politics. In this part, I critically engage with experimentation as both a way of solidifying the neoliberal urban regime and challenging it.

## **2.2 Nightlife studies**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

Nightlife studies is a branch of urban studies which appeared and hasn't stopped expanding since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in relation to the transformations of urban nightlife itself (Nofre and Eldridge, 2018). In this section, I look at how the production of spaces of nightlife in Western cities is interwoven with a dominant regime of space but also how, historically and in the contemporary context, those spaces have been in conflict with some aspects of the dominant urban ideology (control, regulation, social segregation, etc.).

In the three subsections that follow, I use a range of academic writing to look at three aspects of nightlife studies which are relevant to this thesis. In the first subsection, I discuss the production of spaces of nightlife in the context of Western urban spaces and I put forward the idea that spaces of nightlife are intricately connected to the dominant regime of space, and yet have the potential to challenge it. In the second subsection, I look at the recent development of the NTE and how nightlife has become a major area of economic growth. And in the last subsection, I explore the role that spaces of nightlife can play in allowing experimentation, as well as the political resonance of experimental practices in the night.

### **2.2.2 The making of spaces of nightlife and the making of cities**

The aim of this subsection is to explore, with a historical eye, the connection between the production of Western urban spaces and the production of spaces of nightlife. Using academic sources to support my point, I argue that, while spaces of nightlife are the product of an urban lifestyle and an urban regime to which they are inextricably connected, this relationship is inherently conflictual.

In Western cities, nightlife is deeply tied up with urban life. In Europe, nightlife as we know it emerged in industrial cities between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the night was colonised by leisure activities. During industrialisation, waged work became the dominant model of work, casting daytime as the time for work and night-time as the time for non-work (Edgell and Granter, 2020). A strong polarisation between work-time (in the day) and leisure time (at night and at the weekend) emerged from the waged-work regime (Perelman, 2000). The invention of non-work time during the industrial revolution, combined with the availability of extra capital for workers to use in their leisure time, gave rise to the culture of leisure (Palmer, 2000; Somers, 1971). In early modern times, urban life brought together the spatial, technological and social conditions for the night to be “lived through” and filled with leisure. During that period, nightlife therefore became a landmark of the industrial revolution’s urban lifestyle (Blackshaw, 2013; Martineau, 2015).

The development of after-dark life and its materialisation in cities in the form of spaces of nightlife marked an inseparable yet conflicting relationship between spaces of nightlife and the dominant urban spatial regime. On the one hand, nightlife spaces proliferated as a direct consequence of the urban lifestyle, which emerged in Western cities throughout the industrial revolution. On the other hand, spaces of nightlife materialised spatial and social experimentations, which represented a threat for the urban order.

In Geneva for example, cellars and taverns have been present since the Middle Ages, although they were formally banned until the end of the

protestant Reformation. They thus remained residual in the urban space until the beginning of modern times, when the ban was abolished with the establishment of the Republic<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the 1700s, a much broader Genevan population became committed to nightlife – “not only plotters and crooks” but also “a population of honest people appreciating the atmosphere of the city after dark” – with spaces of nightlife diversifying into public houses, bars, pubs and cabarets (Cicchini, 2011, p.59). New forms of premises appeared in the urban landscape, fostering a great deal of spatial innovation and accommodating new forms of social life after dark (Girard-Cherpillod, 1992). Venues such as theatres and social clubs, for example, were amongst the first spaces to challenge the legacy of an urban spatial order inherited from the Middle Ages: they opened after dark and became spaces of social mixing (Markovits, 2008).

Across Europe, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the development of light in public space, which contributed to the normalisation of life into the night (MacMahon, 2018). The introduction of licencing meanwhile marked the end of the full prohibition of nightlife, but also the beginning of its close control by the state (Cicchini, 2011). It also coincided with the invention of modern police forces, which played a prominent role in the policing of the night (Wadds, 2020). With nightlife being depicted as the realm of crime, undisciplined bodies and lack of morality, the urge to tame the night as a space of social disorder became a mirror of political power and control (Koslofsky, 2007; Porret, 2011). In the industrial city, nightlife was also perceived as a threat to the rhythm of industrial production. The policing of night-time socialities mirrored the urge to ensure the reproduction of labour forces (Chatterton, 2002; Dubois, 1995; Reid, 1976; Talbot, 2011). It is in this context that the state started playing an ambivalent role as it both benefits from and represses nightlife. In an attempt to moralise nightlife, tight regulations over spaces of nightlife were introduced, encapsulating nightlife into patterns of consumption,

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<sup>1</sup> The Republic and Canton of Geneva was founded in 1815 when it joined the Swiss Confederation.

constraining limiting mixing and constraining cultural experimentations (Butsch, 1990).

From the early times of nightlife in cities, spaces of darkness were thus the product of a constant negotiation between experimental forms of social and cultural practices and the political agenda to regulate them. Since their origins, spaces of nightlife thus need to be understood as spatial hubs whereby social creativity, artistic innovations and new modes of consumption intersect, but also whereby they are contained within a dominant urban regime. This argument is important to this thesis because it contextualises spaces of nightlife in their urban environment in a dialogic way: spaces of nightlife are the product of a dominant urban regime, which their own *modus operandi* has the potential to interfere with and clash with. This is not to say that spaces of nightlife are inherently operating *against* the dominant urban regime, but more that they can be elusive to it or subvert it. In this sense they have the potential to act as counter-spaces, even though they are also incorporated into the dominant urban ideology.

### **2.2.3 The rise of the Night-Time Economy**

In this subsection, I look at the relation between spaces of nightlife and their urban environment in the contemporary neoliberal context, discussing the idea that, far from the marginality of nightlife spaces in the modern industrial city, the NTE as we know it nowadays is partly the product of the neoliberalisation of cities. My aim in this subsection is therefore to show that, if the tension between the dominant regime of cities and spaces of nightlife hasn't fundamentally changed, these spaces are integrated into the neoliberal agenda has affected the production and consumption of and in spaces in the night.

The deindustrialisation of cities in the global North during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was ground for a major transformation of urban economies of the North. Western nightscapes were deeply affected. In most Western cities, post-industrial urban landscapes were marked with the abundance of

available empty spaces, which, exploited by subcultural actors, became fertile grounds for subcultural spaces to thrive (Hae, 2011a; Grazian, 2013). The availability of disused sites facilitated the creation of spaces whereby social and cultural experiments could happen. Throughout the 1980s and the 90s, subculture-led night venues became iconic landmarks of many Western post-industrial cities (Doron, 2000 and 2008; Edensor, 2005 and 2007; Hudson and Shaw, 2010). For the purposes of nightlife, the original use of urban spaces was subverted and played with: warehouses were turned into rave spaces and ruins became bars (BBC4, 2019; Lugosi et al., 2010). In this context, nightlife continued as an arena of spatial innovation, making it an interesting ground for economic expansion too.

If local urban economies suffered from the post-industrial transition and sought regeneration, zones of urban decay left by de-industrialisation represented opportunities for nightlife to thrive. Subsequently, local authorities tried to imagine ways of attracting investment and nightlife was quickly profiled as a potential area of economic growth (Lovatt, 1995; Chatterton, 2002; Montgomery 2007). At this point in time, spatial, social and artistic experimentations in the night resonated with the promises of new modes of consumption and nightlife transitioned quickly from a relatively contained and marginal activity to a core dimension of urban economies (Crawford and Flint, 2009; Hobbs et al., 2003).

The NTE became a new market broadly supported by local authorities seeking to trigger urban regeneration (Bell and Binnie, 2005; Bell, 2007b). The idea of a 24-hour city (Hadfield et al. 2001; Shaw, 2010) was brought up in the early nineties by the British think-tank Comedia. The document that the group produced in 1991 became hugely influential in the UK and beyond, encouraging policy makers to consider the economy of cities around the clock. In order to boost the NTE, Comedia recommended relaxing the licencing of nightlife venues and particularly extending business hours (Comedia, 1991). This innovative vision strongly contrasted with the modern policing of nightlife and transfigured numerous city centres in the UK, Europe and the West. The ideology behind the 24-hour city clearly was the one of urban boosterism

(Bianchini, 1995). At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the NTE became a marker of urban marketing: in Amsterdam, Berlin and Lisbon, among many other places, city marketers integrated images of temporary creative spaces in their strategies of place branding, intending to attract nightlife consumers of niche culture-orientated nightlife as well as mega-club events (Colomb, 2011). A cross over between urban marketing and cultural policy operated as nightlife became a central part of the cultural economy (Lugosi and Lugosi, 2008; Bell, 2009).

As nightlife transitioned towards the NTE, it took up a new place in public policies, torn between regulation and promotion. As local authorities began to understand the importance of this new phenomenon, nightlife made an appearance in planning documents, urban marketing campaigns and tourism material (Roberts and Eldridge, 2009). If the cultural turn in urban policy-making propelled nightlife into the regeneration toolbox of planners, the reality of the NTE brought way more challenges and difficulties than the naked economic figures might have suggested (Shaw, 2010; Tiesdell and Slater, 2006). Public bodies faced deep contradictions when promoting the NTE with economic benefits often being outweighed by increased strain on local public services such as the police or environmental services such as street cleaning and noise regulation (Roberts, 2009). The development of the NTE pushed local authorities to juggle between capitalistic interests in developing and mainstreaming nightlife (interests that, to a certain extent, also served them financially), issues of public governance and impact on communities. The strain the NTE put on public services subsequently justified the escalation of legal innovations aiming at moralising corporate nightlife (Crawford and Flint, 2009; Hayward and Hobbs, 2007; Hobbs et al., 2003; Hughes et al. 2008). The regulation of nightlife is an aspect which I explore further in part 2.3.4 because, beyond the question of urban management, it is also a strong marker of neoliberal trends in the NTE and was used to impose a hegemonic business model.

As I have explained before, the ambiguous role played by public bodies in both boosting and policing the night was obviously not new. In the post-

industrial urban context however, the intense development of the NTE as part of a state-led strategy to trigger economic recovery transformed spaces of nightlife by escalating nightlife into a lucrative part of Western urban economies. As I will discuss in depth in section 2.3, corporatisation and hyper-regulation are well documented dimensions of the neoliberal urban regime. In this subsection, I wanted to highlight that neoliberalism has transformed the nightscape by making corporate spaces of nightlife a dominant form of space in the neoliberal urban landscape.

#### **2.2.4 Spaces of nightlife, spaces for experimentation**

In the previous two subsections, I looked at the way the production of spaces of nightlife was articulated with a dominant urban regime. In this subsection and the next one, I want to introduce the idea that experimentation remains at the core of the nightlife culture from which spaces of nightlife are created and that experimentation in and with these spaces is the process by which the dominant urban ideology can be subverted and contested, despite the incorporation of spaces of nightlife into the NTE. In this section, I therefore envision that spaces of nightlife can allow forms of experimentation that find no licence in the daytime, becoming spaces for expressions of non-institutional arts, non-normative sexualities and fraternisation amongst groups of people who would usually not cross within daytime social structures.

Nightlife is a dimension of urban life that comes along with a great deal of experimentation: artistic, spatial and social. As nightlife scholar Madison Moore puts it, 'If it's new and exciting, it's probably happening in a nightclub.' (2016, p.51). In lots of ways, experimentation is intrinsic to the nightlife experience. In *The Cultures of Darkness*, Bryan Palmer states that: "The night has always been the time for daylight's dispossessed—the deviant, the dissident, the different—and there is something of a bond among those who have chosen or been forced to adapt to the pleasure and dangers of the dark, as space that exists *through* as well as *in* time and place." (2000, p.16). In modern Western cities, historically and presently, nightlife spaces have the potential to serve as a refuge for social and artistic experiments that subvert dominant social norms and mainstream artistic forms (Starrenberger, 1980).

In 1998, music journalist Simon Reynolds published *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture*. In this iconic book, Reynolds explains how he felt the urge to capture the energy of the British rave scene, although he initially felt musically and socially quite distant from it. Despite his initial reticence, Reynolds quickly becomes a central character as he descends into the experience of raving. Like its author, the book navigates between a thoroughly documented journalistic account of this British countercultural scene and the personal account of a raver. *Energy Flash* is an important book about nightlife because, beyond the snapshot of one specific scene in a specific context, it captures nightlife as a system in which all possible dimensions are designed to produce spaces for experimentation. Rave culture is not an artistic culture, Reynolds says. It is not a social culture either. Nor is it a culture of intoxication. Nightlife in this book is described as a world in which all three of these collide and allow the convergence of a diversity of individual experiences into a collective experimental body. As Reynolds himself progressively immerses himself into rave culture, he describes how the music, the crowd and the location are designed to magnify each other into an all-encompassing experimental socio-space.

Nightlife scholar and artist Madison Moore similarly writes about the cultures of the night as experimental aesthetics. Nightlife, he claims, has become a core part of the urban tradition of artistic experimentation:

*“...nightlife is (..) a creative space, a laboratory for experimental new ideas in self-presentation, art, performance culture, music, fashion, and design. It is my view that nightclubs work simultaneously as spaces of entertainment, where we go to have fun and to distract ourselves from the pressures of contemporary capitalism; spaces of performance, where we go to experiment with identity and put on what Grazian has called a “nocturnal self”, or that special body we become at nighttime; and spaces of creativity, which foster the incubation of brand-new developments across the media and visual arts.”*

(2016, p.50-51)



Here, Moore describes nightlife as a space whereby individual and collective identities as well as artistic forms can be experimented with. Nightlife studies largely document the potential for nightlife to be a space where gender, ethnicity and class can be subverted and experimented with (Banerjea & Barn, 1996; Henderson, 1993; Lewis & Ross, 1995; Measham et al., 2001). Nightclubs, for example, are described by Measham as a “‘new’ social space, facilitating, at least for a short period, new models of social and sexual interaction.” (2004, p.338). One aspect of experimenting in the night clearly revolves around exposing oneself to otherness and engaging with the experimental potential of simultaneity, of being together in shared spaces and experiences. Ethnographic accounts of nightlife in particular map the various strands of experimentation that tend to be stimulated in after-dark pleasure spaces. Looking at the way a crowd of nightclub goers interact in connection to the space and the music that surrounds them, Ben Malbon writes:

*“Some form of extraordinary empathy was at work in that crowd, particularly when at the kind of extended climax of the evening the music and lighting effects combined so powerfully with the moving crowd on the dance floor. (...) This kind of context— this sound and lightscape — must surely significantly change the ways that people interact. I mean, people are just so close to each other; proximately and emotionally. The clubbers were sharing something precious, something personal, something enriching.”*

*(1999, p.xii).*

Nightlife as an embodied experience hence allows for experimentation to happen through the participants’ bodies: sensorial and spatial disorientation can come into play enhanced by intoxication, combined with unfamiliar environmental designs. Nightlife is a site whereby the body can support subversive performances of participants’ identities (Misgav and Johnston, 2014). Allowing for social norms to stretch, nightlife then offers the promise of maximised exposure to otherness in a socially creative context. Last but not least, space is a dimension of the nightlife experience that is also a matter for experimentation. Subcultural spaces, for example, have been shown to play a core role in the development of subcultures and the construction of

subcultural identities (Binnie, 2001). Social spaces have been described as spaces whereby non-normative experiences are fantasised and materialised, cementing around subcultural spaces (Bell, 2001; Califia, 1994). Ethnographies of nightlife illustrate the importance of nightlife spaces in transgressing sexual norms, whilst allowing experimentation with alcohol and drugs (Hesse and Tutenges, 2011; Tutenges, 2012).

In conclusion, it is evident that experimentation is an important component of the cultures that inhabit some spaces of nightlife. This doesn't make nightlife a space whereby experimentation inherently happens. But it is widely accepted that experimentation is a component of the cultures of nightlife at different levels: individual identities and collective narratives of identity, visual and sound art forms, and space, which is the focus of the next subsection. In the analytical part of the thesis, I will also discuss that: 1) the experimental component of nightlife is obviously not universal (the narrative I collected in alternative venues were much more experimentation-centred, although this did not entirely exclude experimentation in mainstream venues; and 2) experimentation is the dimension of some nightlife spaces around which my participants have created collective subjectivities in opposition the urban neoliberal regime.

### **2.2.5 Spaces of nightlife, experimental spaces**

The above subsection has commented on how experimentation can operate *in* spaces of nightlife. In this section, I will discuss the extent to which spaces of nightlife have the potential to be sites whereby spatial norms are reformulated too. That is to say that cultural spaces in the night are somehow "twice as experimental" in the sense that, they can be spaces whereby experimentation happens, but some of them can also be regarded as experimentally constructed spaces in themselves. In order to support the argument that nightlife can produce counter-spaces and that experimentation is the process by which these are created, I will bring forward two ideas, which are relevant to discussing the data that I collected during my fieldwork, as together they address important aspects of the spaces of nightlife that my

participants stood up for. The first one is DiY (Do it Yourself) spaces; the second is alternative cultural spaces, an idea that my interviewees often referred to. Both these ideas are further discussed in relation to the empirical material in chapter 5, when I discuss experimentation as a process of co-creation of counter-spaces.

DiY culture is a broad culture that includes, amongst many other things, experimenting with self-building spaces. The DiY ethos can touch upon pretty much any dimension of life, from learning and knowledge, to clothes making and food growing (Hemphill and Leskowitz, 2012). DiY culture is thus based on the idea that the appropriation of the process of creation is empowering as it allows for people to experiment with new ways of making things and to emancipate them from ready-made commodities. Stephen Wright (2013) defines DiY culture as a hands-on form of engagement into non-specialist art making. Space design and building is no exception to this. Subcultures and countercultures are strongly associated with self-built experimental spaces (Lowndes, 2016). Self-building cultural spaces can be a strategy to make space more accessible and/or more suitable for the cultural forms for which they cater. Countercultural operators, in particular, need to access affordable spaces to live but also share and grow artistic forms outside of mainstream channels (Spencer, 2008). To this extent, DiY cultural spaces can result from a necessity to accommodate forms of culture that have no commercial potential (yet), because they are at an experimental or emerging stage. Often enough, DiY cultural spaces are also the result of a clear stand to avoid institutional and/or commercial channels of cultural production and consumption (Anzilotti, 2016). McKay defined DiY culture as “youth-centred and -directed clusters of interests and practices around green radicalism, direct action politics, new musical sounds and experiences” (1998, p.2). Grounded in the context of nineties British rave events, his paper unravels how dance culture and politics have then connected through the practices of experimenting with DiY music-making, party environments and sound systems. The DiY making of space, in the context of nightlife, thus refers to the action of self-building spaces instead of consuming ready-made spaces, using spaces illegally – temporarily (rave) or permanently (squats) – inducing

a new spatial order that gives agency to its users. In this context, experimentation is the process by which the limits of spatial norms are dealt with, and sometimes challenged (Jordan, 1998; O'Grady, 2015; Wright, 2013).

Alternative is a looser term to describe spaces that contest the dominant socio-spatial order. Nevertheless, it is so often used to describe cultural spaces that stand out of the mainstream. It is a term that my participants widely used to refer to the nightlife venues which they loved. As Shaw puts it, alternative is "self-consciously marginal" (2005, p.150), which means that alternative is not just accidentally or naturally outside the cultural norms but is rather a stand against a dominant model and exists outside on purpose. Unlike 'underground' or 'subcultural', that stand more generically outside the mainstream because spaces and cultural objects don't meet with mainstream standards, alternative emphasises the intention of articulating culture and politics in a way that the mainstream does not (Duncombe, 1997). Alternative defines a different kind of politics through cultural production and consumption, but most importantly it connects cultural production with the kind of spaces alternative culture inhabits. Alternative is thus not only about the arts but also about the space in which artistic creation operates. Sheridan discusses the kind of agency that emerges when cultural operators appropriate and self-design a space:

*"It is apparent that subcultural groups are exploiting the spatial opportunities (...) and the spatial arrangements suiting these groups would often not be possible within the constraints of conventional building use. The occupants and building mutually influence each other to a degree not encountered in usual building occupancy."*

*(2012, p.116).*

Alternative spaces dedicated to cultural production and consumption play a central role in the debate that this chapter is trying to circumscribe: they are spatially experimental, as well as built through the process of experimental practices. To this extent they are important spaces to connect cultural practices to urban politics.

In the first section of this chapter, I have argued the following. First, that the production of spaces of nightlife is theorised in relation to a dominant urban regime throughout history, an imbrication that remains even though the regime changes. Second, that spaces of nightlife are spaces of multiple experimentations. In the next section, I look at neoliberalism as a new regime of space in which experimentation has a different political resonance. In doing so, I argue that the incorporation of nightlife into the capitalist urban economy is undermining the experimental potential in spaces of nightlife and subsequently I question the potential for spaces of experimentation in the nightlife to become spaces of resistance in the neoliberal city.

## **2.3 Neoliberal spaces and counter-spaces**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

If neoliberalism is not a homogeneous form of urban development, the impact of neoliberalism onto the production of urban space is as undeniable as it is widely documented (and debated) by urban studies scholars (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). The discrepancy between neoliberalism as an ideology and the multiple realities of its impact on cities is best encapsulated by Peck et al.'s catchphrase of "actually existing neoliberalism" (2018, p.3), a locution that aims to highlight the difficulty of connecting the neoliberal ideology with the myriad of ways that it concretely translates in the world. This specific aspect of the discussion around neoliberalism has been instrumental in this thesis as it has allowed me to draw from mundane, contextualised nightlife stories to expand theoretically.

This thesis being empirically grounded, in this chapter I am mindful to avoid being sidetracked into theoretical debates around neoliberalism that would not serve the main argument. My intention here, however, is to mobilise theory to: 1) discuss the neoliberal urban context in which I conducted the fieldwork; and 2) become theoretically equipped to answer my first and second research questions "How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of

nightlife?” and “To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?”

In the first subsection I start by looking at the neoliberalisation of space, bringing together a variety of authors who have documented how neoliberalism affects the production of urban space in the global North. In the following two subsections, I look at two dominant features of the neoliberalisation of space and how these have affected spaces of nightlife in particular: the corporatisation of spaces of nightlife first; and the way spaces of nightlife are regulated by neoliberal policies. In doing so, I discuss how spaces of nightlife have the potential to act as counter-spaces by challenging these neoliberal developments.

### **2.3.2 The neoliberalisation of space**

Neoliberalism has been theorised in a variety of ways by social science scholars (Harvey, 2005; MacKinnon and Cumbers, 2011), but not all of them have focused on neoliberal urbanism. If there is a consensus around the fact that neoliberalism is a “fluid movement of ideas” inspired by the free-market ideology and implemented by state policies (Pinson and Morel Journel, 2017, p.138) rather than a coherent and rational political project (Dean, 2014), neoliberalism is best documented in the way it affects certain aspects of our lives. Rather than debating neoliberalism as an ideology, I want to use this first subsection to give a brief overview of how academic literature documents the transformation of Western urban spaces under neoliberalism. This literature is necessary, I argue, to understand the urban environment in which some of the spaces of nightlife where I have conducted my fieldwork have become counter-spaces in the neoliberal urban environment and have concentrated a narrative of resistance within the neoliberal city.

In academic debates, neoliberal urbanism is best seen through 1) a set of homogeneous theories and ideas (as explained above); 2) urban policies and institutions promoting a neoliberal agenda, and 3) the tangible transformations

that cities undergo under the pressure of the latter (Peck and Tickell, 2002), three aspects which are fundamentally interwoven. As I discuss in more detail in the following subsection as well as in chapter 4, such reading is pertinent in this thesis since the profound transformation of the Genevan nightscape is the direct result of a shift in the dominant ideas mobilised by local politicians to rule the political economy of the city (Pattaroni, 2020). As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, the liberalisation of the licencing system from the early 2000s in Geneva, coupled with a highly constraining legal framework promoting individually owned businesses, exposes the success of neoliberal policies in the city.

Without going into too much detail, I will, in what follows, swiftly present three ways in which scholars described the impact of neoliberalism on cities because these will later become relevant in the analysis chapters of this thesis. The first aspect of neoliberal urban theory concerns the effects of neoliberalism in precipitating the commodification of space (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Leitner et al. 2007). It is widely accepted by scholars that neoliberalism promotes but also depends upon a regime of space (and this is particularly true for urban spaces) in which the land is privately owned and rendered profitable (Harvey, 2018; MacGuirk and Dowling, 2009; Sanders-McDonagh et al., 2016).

The second aspect focuses on neoliberalism as a variety of institutions, which translates spatially into apparatuses of regulation and control (Richmond and Garmany, 2016). This aspect of neoliberalism exposes the transformation of the role of the state in governing the city, where the economy of public services is transferred to various degrees into the hands of corporate actors, whilst the state turns into a bureaucratic machine, armed with swelling regulatory and policing apparatuses (Bockman, 2012; Dardot and Laval, 2010; Pattaroni, 2020).

The third and last expression of neoliberalism which I want to mention here is neoliberalism as a socially and spatially segregative force. Best observed

through the lens of micro-urban case studies (Andersen, 2014; Sanders-McDonagh et al., 2016) or the study of specific areas of urban social life (Hae, 2011b; Mendes, 2018; Talbot, 2007), it is widely documented in academic literature that neoliberal cities tend to create more spatial separation between social classes, ethnic groups and pools of consumers. In this sense, neoliberalism is often theorised as a socio-spatial system in which spatial forms and social norms reinforce each other (Collier, 2005).

To conclude this subsection, I want to highlight why I thought that these considerations about neoliberalism needed to be outlined in order to inform the main argument in this thesis. As I have already extensively discussed, the production of spaces of nightlife is interwoven with the dominant mode of production of urban spaces. This section has highlighted the role of the state in inducing the neoliberal trend, particularly in the arena of urban governance. In Chapter 4, I will expose and discuss the disappearance of experimental spaces of nightlife in Geneva in relation to the enforcement of neoliberal policies in the city and explain how these transformations were directly imputable to a change of ideology within the local state. In Chapter 6, I will debate the ambivalent role of the state in both enforcing and counteracting neoliberalism. I will also discuss the new alliances that nightlife actors and public bodies have formed to co-produce a new geography of counter-spaces. The next subsection will look more in depth at how neoliberalisation transforms spaces in and of the night. In the analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), I introduce more material to work towards a definition of counter-spaces in the neoliberal city. But this discussion couldn't take place without understanding the impact of the neoliberal context first.

### **2.3.3 Dominant spaces and counter-spaces in the night**

In this subsection, I want to focus on how neoliberalisation of nightlife champions corporate nightlife spaces at the expense of a broader diversity of business models. In doing so, I also want to present counter-models of spaces in the nightlife and I discuss the role that experimentation has to play in



reading the politics of mainstream space versus counter-spaces. Looking at neoliberalism as a driving force for the normalisation of spaces in the night, the aim of this subsection is to profile counter-spaces of nightlife as spaces that challenge and contest neoliberalism as a spatial hegemony.

The most documented transformation of the nightscape under neoliberalism is the proliferation of corporate spaces of nightlife. Corporatisation, a phenomenon that has been significantly theorised particularly in relation to the neoliberal context can be defined as the concentration of economic powers into the hands of a smaller number of large and often transnational corporations at the expenses of a diversity of smaller local economic actors (Klein, 2000). In the nightlife, the effects of corporatisation translate into spaces of nightlife being privately owned by companies rather than individual actors; being profit driven; being branded to serve a specific group of consumers; being heavily regulated (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003).

In *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power*, Chatterton and Hollands (2003) explore the transformation of spaces of leisure by neoliberalism and discuss the corporatisation of the NTE, particularly in post-industrial British cities. The book extensively documents the multiplication of corporate profit-led spaces in the NTE at the cost of independent, informal, DiY and community- or arts-focused venues. Their exploration of the structural transformation of the production of spaces of nightlife under the pressure of corporate power thus outlines “the emergence of a dominant mode of urban entertainment and night-time production” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003, p.20). Looking at nightscapes from a structural perspective, the book offers a typology of nightlife spaces with the aim of demonstrating how the corporatisation of nightlife has contributed to the standardisation of a dominant model of spaces of nightlife at the expense of alternative models:

*“...older/historic and independent alternative modes of nightlife are being quickly displaced by a post-industrial mode of corporately driven nightlife production in the*

*consumption-led city. In the shadow exists the 'residue' of near-forgotten groups, community spaces and traditional drinking establishments marginalised by new city brandscapes."*

*(Chatterton and Hollands, 2003, p.175)*

The development of the NTE as an industry, Chatterton and Hollands argue, is an unequal process depending on which kind of spaces of nightlife are considered. On the one hand, consumption-orientated, profit-driven, privately owned spaces proliferate, spreading a dominant model of space, which they define as mainstream spaces. On the other hand, this process happens at the cost of marginal or alternative nightlife spaces (see also Shaw, 2010).

A variety of authors have looked at the social impacts of the corporatisation of the NTE. Corporate nightscapes, it has been argued, separate nightlife goers into segregated pockets of profiled consumers (Malbon, 1999; Matsinhe, 2009; Talbot, 2007). Such studies pinpoint branding strategies that nightlife venues develop to distinguish themselves in the NTE, a strategies which tend to operate a selection amongst night-time-goers into groups of consumers, spatially segmenting them according to their modes of consumption (Hobbes and Hall, 2000; Hubbard, 2013). Exploring the social atmosphere of themed leisure parks, for example, Hubbard concludes that "one of the key social roles of the out-of-town leisure parks is offering an affective ambience that offers the illusion of social mixing but where there is little need to interact with unknown others or negotiate the boundaries of self." (2005, p.120). These accounts expose the socially sterile environment that corporate nightlife tends to produce, an environment in which branding and tight regulation tends to stifle the experimental potential of social mixing.

The corporatisation of nightlife takes up so much focus in nightlife studies that searching for discussion of counter-spaces in the NTE is not an easy task. The descriptions of corporate nightlife spaces above, however, give an idea of what counter-spaces might *not* be, an aspect of the transformation of nightlife that I will expand on in chapter 5 on the basis of my empirical data. Based on the literature above, I can say that spaces of nightlife in the

neoliberal city: 1) are tightly regulated and predominantly operate within the corporate regime of ownership (owned by an individual or a corporation), whilst being profit driven; and 2) tend to segregate nightlife goers into groups of consumers and minimise social mixing, whilst excluding cash-poor groups (Öz, 2015). In contrast with this model, I discuss in chapter 4 and 5 how spaces of nightlife have the potential to stand against neoliberalism by 1) being self-managed and collectively coproduced; and 2) maximising social mixing as part of a culture of experimentation.

One way of searching for counter-spaces in the night might be to take a look at subcultural studies. The main difficulty, in this instance, lies in the fact that this literature tends to focus more on subcultural scenes and styles than on the kind of spaces whereby these are consumed, when the innovative character of the argument developed here is to look at subcultural spaces in the night from the perspective of the regime of space which they produce to question their potential to offer an alternative model in the neoliberal city.

In the light of the recent rise of the so-called creative economy, scholars have widely debated the potential for any cultural experimentation to exist outside of the mainstream (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). By extension, a lot of attention has been given to the regenerative and gentrifying potential of culture-led urban policies, with plenty of evidence exposing the impacts of the transformation of the cultural economy and the neoliberalisation of cities (Hae, 2017; Eder and Öz, 2014; Zukin and Braslow, 2011). NTE-led regeneration policies, similarly, have been described as urban economic development strategies engrained in growth-focused vision of the urban economy, in which nightlife spaces are instrumentalised to encourage the development of corporate nightlife, precipitating the disappearance of informal, non-for profit nightlife structures (Rowe and Bavinton, 2011).

The way mainstream and subcultural cultures are distinguished in academic literature, however, also implies that the kind of culture that is produced and consumed in a space influences the cultural practices, and this is particularly true for subcultural spaces in the night (Gelder and Thornton, 1997; Thornton,

1995; Redhead, 1997). Strong cases have been made to show that, if culture-led urban policies feed into and champion mainstream cultural spaces, the spatial ordering imposed by neoliberalism often results in the destruction of cultural spaces which stand outside of the neoliberal interest (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2012). There is also a growing drive amongst urban studies scholars to debunk the vision of counter cultural spaces as inherently gentrifying, particularly around examples of such spaces that have become central to the organisation of anti-neoliberal urban social movements (Hollands, 2020; Marcuse, 2011; Mayer, 2013; Mouffe, 2007; Novy and Colomb, 2012).

Studies of subcultural spaces also provide us with a spatial lexicon to describe regimes of spaces which are different, although this difference is more commonly built around the social dynamic rather than spatial qualities, especially when it comes to nightlife venues. As I have previously discussed, cases have been made, for example, for subcultural spaces to be more economically inclusive and more socially diverse than their mainstream counterparts (Anderson, 2009a, 2009b; Thomas and Bromley, 2000). Equally, scholars have documented that grassroots cultural spaces offer a far more positive social impact than their mainstream counterparts thanks to alternative business models that benefit their immediate community, whilst communicating an inclusive message by offering themselves as open to everyone (Rosenstein, 2011). Finally, countercultural venues have been described as spaces whereby social negotiations are encouraged and even prioritised over social regulation (Anderson, 2009a).

The last important aspect of counter-spaces in the night that I want to bring up here evolves around the question of informality. As I will show in chapter 4 and 5, informality is an essential spatial quality to define counter-spaces in the neoliberal city. In the context of the Genevan nightlife, informality has also played a crucial role in shaping the nightscape for decades. In chapter 4 I evidence that, in fact, informal spaces dominated the Genevan nightscape until the early 2000s and that this spatial realm worked hand in hand with a culture of experimentation in the night.

In the context of this thesis, the idea of informality is important for three reasons. First, informality is interesting because it is seen to be conflictual with the regulatory and profit-making agenda of neoliberalism (Cupers and Miessen, 2002; Edensor et al., 2009). McFarlane and Waibel make the point that the dichotomy between formal and informal spaces itself is rooted in the managerial ideology of neoliberalism (McFarlane and Waibel, 2012). They suggest that, rather than an absence of formalism, informality should be seen as an undeniable reality of the city, which the neoliberal urban regime is unable to accommodate more than temporarily. As such, they situate informality as a deviation and/or contestation of the neoliberal norm instead of limiting it to the fringe of the formal.

Secondly, informality defines a spatial environment in which practices are negotiable, as opposed to regulated (Guha-Khasnobis et al. 2006) . In this sense, informality connects the practice of experimenting with urban forms with social experiments. Informal nightlife districts as described by Campo and Ryan (2008), constitute an example of spaces which are not policed (or more loosely policed), in which acceptable behaviours are left to the appreciation of participants. They describe informal nightlife areas as “beacons of individuality, informality and flexibility in the increasingly rationalized, controlled, subsidized and homogenized landscape of urban entertainment in US cities.” (p.313). Informal spaces, I will further argue, cater for practices that cannot survive in the normative environment of neoliberal spaces (Edensor, 2005 and 2007; Shaw, 2005), and this is where informal spaces have the potential to become a site of resistance against the neoliberalisation of urban spaces.

Finally (and this is an important aspect of this thesis which I will discuss in Chapter 5), informality connects the question of the existence of counter-spaces with the ideology of the state. In this thesis, I look at counter-spaces which have at times been tolerated, encouraged, dismantled and reinstated by or with the assistance of the local authorities. If, in post-industrial cities of the global North, informal spaces can emerge and exist temporarily in urban margins (McFarlane and Waibel, 2012; Shaw and Husdon, 2009) their status

in the neoliberal city depends on the policing of the state. Edensor et al., for example, note that, if subcultural spaces are often incorporated into creative city policies, “discourses of the creative city privilege particular notions of creativity, producing a hierarchal ordering, which champions specific forms of urban development.” (2009, p.1).

In Chapter 4, I explain how Genevan actors of the informal nightlife organised to integrate a cultural exception in the licencing law, a system in which venues whose function is recognised as primarily cultural do not need to meet with the regulation licenced premises. In chapter 6 I discuss how, practically, this means that they forced the state to formalise their informality by creating a legal exception, a system which has supported the re-emergence of a new geography of counter-spaces.

#### **2.3.4 Neoliberalism and the regulation of nightlife**

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, regulation is often described by scholars as one of the ways in which neoliberalism is implemented (Peck, 2002). In this section, I want to look at the impact of regulatory measures on the production of spaces of nightlife, as an important manifestation of neoliberalism. The development of an important legal apparatus has indeed been described as a conveyor of neoliberal trends and the extent to which neoliberal regulations “architect” cities is staggering (Schmidt, 2004).

Mike Davis (1992, 2007) for example has used studies of global cities such as Los Angeles or Dubai to demonstrate that the corporatisation of space is a process that implies a high level of control over space by private entities (and sometimes the transfer of ownership of public space into private hands) or space policing by the state but on behalf of its sponsors. Corporatised spaces, Davis argues, are the product of tight strategies of space design and policing. Davis describes them as designed in a way that recalls branding strategies, labelling specific spaces to best serve segregated groups of space consumers.

Spaces of socialisation in the night are probably amongst the most regulated spaces in cities, with laws and bylaws regimenting spaces, bodies and social interaction in detail (Hobbs et al., 2000). Some authors see the corporatisation of nightlife as a paradox in which the liminal image of nightlife spaces is commodified, whilst laws and bylaws are used to micro-regulate and normalise every aspect of nightlife (Jayne et al., 2006; Hubbard, 2013). Commenting on the regulation of mainstream spaces of nightlife, Fiona Measham says that nightlife “represents not only a site for the pursuit of pleasure in late modern consumer society, but is also an expression and reflection of the structural constraints within that society” (2004, p.337). Regulation encapsulates the neoliberal paradox of an ideology that wants to commodify the liminal nature of nightlife on the one hand but hyper-regulates spaces of nightlife on the other hand (Bell, 1972; Grazian, 2013). Looking at the regulation which suffocated the British free party scene in the mid-nineties at the profit of the NTE, Measham states:

*“within 10 years we have moved from the criminalisation of a cultural space (the unlicensed rave) to the commodification of criminal culture (within licenced leisure space).”*

*(2004, p.344)*

She describes how clubbing has emerged as a regulated version of experimental nightlife spaces, selling an environment that allows a “controlled loss of control”. In *Regulating the Night* (2007), Deborah Talbot sheds a legal perspective on the antagonism inherent to the NTE (see also Talbot, 2004). Concentrating on the regulatory changes that have accompanied the transition from marginal nightlife to corporate nightlife, she builds her argument around the regulatory nature of the dominance of mainstream nightlife. If the development of the NTE requires loosening licencing rules (notably more flexibility for opening hours) she writes, public bodies need other forms of legal disciplinary powers to perform their control over nightlife. Using the example of the Form 696 – paperwork used by London local police

to licence open air events – she outlines the concept of juridification to describe “the contemporary escalation of legal innovation and its impact on the production of alternative culture.” (Talbot, 2011, p.82). Nightlife venues operate like cultural hubs whereby hybridisation operates between people and between cultural products as they are incorporated into the metropolitan social and artistic blend. Talbot’s argument necessitates understanding that the nightlife industry is “fed” by cultural forms which spring up in spaces that cannot fit the legal frame designed to regulate commercial spaces.

Regulation is such an impacting dimension on the way nightlife operates that it affects every single aspect of it: the artistic content, the social behaviour and the way spaces of nightlife are produced. But most importantly, regulation formalises the tension described above between permissiveness and morality, transgression and normalisation. In a way, regulation is the antithesis of experimentation: it sets the boundaries between formal and informal and stands as an institutional response to transgression. In Chapter 5, I will talk more about resisting neoliberal forms of regulation and claiming self-regulation, as these two aspects were major topics of discussion with my participants.

## **2.4 Experimentation and urban politics**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

The aim of this part of the chapter is to give a theoretical framework to answer one of the research questions that guided the thesis: *To what extent does experimentation play a role in the co-production of counter-spaces?*

In order to give a theoretical base to answer this question, the section is organised around two aspects of the same question. First it looks at experimentation as a collective mode of alternative space making; second it questions the political resonance of experimentation against, in or in support of the neoliberal urban agenda.

I begin this section by stating that experimentation is gaining recognition in contemporary urban studies and that, if there is a history and legacy of



experimentation in urbanism, the last decade has seen experimentation-based urban projects attract increasing interest both in urban design and in urban studies.

In *The Experimental City*, Evans et al. (2016) notably argue that, if over the last 30 years, cities globally have undergone major transformations, this trend can only accelerate under the pressure of neoliberalism and the challenges which have arisen due to capitalism's destructive impacts on the climate. It is in this context, they argue, that has prompted urban experiments to be mobilised in order to find solutions to the social and ecological challenges that cities are currently facing. This framing of experimentation as a strategy of space making is strongly focused on urban experiments designed and monitored to resolve one or more aspects of the challenges associated with urban management. Looking at spaces of nightlife from that lens, I will argue, is a valid endeavour although it doesn't come without challenges.

Evans et al.'s definition of experimentation is helpful to frame the argument of this thesis because it contextualises experimentation as a mode of space making in the neoliberal environment. Most importantly, the book problematises the relationship between experimentation and neoliberalism as very equivocal. Drawing from a variety of experimentation-led urban design projects, the authors explore how experimentation can at times counteract neoliberalism, exist within neoliberalism and alleviate its negative impacts, or even serve a neoliberal agenda – a versatile position that, as I have extensively explored in the first part of this chapter, applies to the production of spaces of nightlife too.

The spaces of nightlife which I focus on in this thesis, however, are not experiments intentionally put together to help cities adapt to urban challenges, which mean that, at first sight at least, it might look like my case study isn't exactly fit for adopting this framework. I believe, however, that those spaces of nightlife that I explore can be seen as experimentation-led processes of co-producing counter-spaces in the neoliberal city, an argument that sheds an innovative light onto both the potential for experimentation to let alternatives

emerge within the neoliberal city and the ambivalent relationship between neoliberalism and experimentation.

To conclude this chapter, this section makes three central points. In the first subsection, I consider experimentation as a process of making space and discuss how experimentation as a process connects the practice of co-designing spaces and a form of governance over these spaces. In the second subsection, I look at urban experiments in the context of neoliberalism and discuss the equivocalness of seeing experimentation as a way of creating counter-spaces in the context of neoliberalism. In the third subsection, I focus on examples of creative actors as organising force of resistance against neoliberalism.

#### **2.4.2 Experimentation and the co-production of space**

In the previous section, I described spaces of nightlife as sites of multiple experimentation. Here, I want to think about experimentation specifically as a strategy of space making. In Chapter 4 and 5, I will re-explore the notion of experimentation as a strategy of co-producing counter spaces in my participants' narratives.

In the post-war context, modernist experiments punctually emerged in the head of visionary space designers in the shape of futuristic urban forms (McFarlane, 2011). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, architects and urban designers associated with modernism were particularly fond of developing experimental urban projects, often inspired by science fiction, scientific modelling or political utopias (The Experimental City, 2017; Mortice, 2017). In that sense, experimentation as a strategy of urban space making is not entirely new, or, as Evans states, "the city has always been experimental, in the sense that new knowledges are tested in order to alter the way in which the city is administered." (2011, p.226).

If today's academic literature shows that urban designers have reignited their interest in experimentation-based processes to reinvent cities, the neoliberal context meanwhile surrounds experimentation with a different ideological load. The momentum for urban experimentation as described in recent

academic literature is fed by a mix of austerity politics and ecological crisis. Far from modernist utopias, contemporary urban experiments are often the response to the urge to accelerate the green urban agenda in a context of disinvestment by the state. It is also in the early stages of neoliberalism that the co-production was first coined by Elinor Ostrom (1972, 1996) to explore the delivery of alternative public services by citizen-led organisations.

For Calvet and Castàn Broto (2016), contemporary cities exist in, with and against global capitalism, and it is from this perspective of the transformation of cities within neoliberalism that experimentation comes into play. From an academic point of view, this translates into experimentation being a niche part of the broader body of literature on urban change. In *The Experimental City*, Evans et al. (2016) bring together examples of contemporary urban experiments aimed at transforming cities and allow for a discussion to emerge as to which kinds of politics arise from experimenting with cities in contemporary times. Cities globally, they claim, are forced to reinvent themselves under two conditions. The first is austerity, implemented to public bodies under the so-called New Public Management. This political environment means that urban public institutions need to meet with capitalistic expectations for profit (i.e. managing public services like private companies) to avoid or replace the withdrawal of financial resources. The second is the carbon crisis and the recognition that urban lifestyle has a core role to play in inventing low-carbon impact living (Karvonen and Van Heur, 2014).

In the West, the combination of reduced public action and carbon crisis precipitated the need of new forms of governance, a context in which experimentation formalises the desire to reverse traditional planning processes and re-empower urban actors. Unlike modern experiments that aimed at changing society by planning cities differently from the top, contemporary experiments are geared around practices of experimentation that induce social change by changing cities and the structures of society together (Evans et al. 2016). As I discuss in Chapter 5, this aspect of experimentation connects well with my case study as my participants addressed the question of co-designing spaces both as a practice of experimenting with the design of space and a way of reclaiming urban governance.

Within the field of urban ecology, participation and governance became two key aspects of the discussion around experimentation. For Hoffman (2011), for example, governance experiments are emerging from the lack of structural response by nation states to tackling climate change. These initiatives are brought up by a variety of actors and work through the layers of political structures (local, national, global), challenging the traditional political hierarchy. In this context, experimentation is often used as a strategy to incorporate a broader diversity of actors into the design of the city, and this includes the voices of urban scientists alongside with those of urban citizens (Callon et al., 2009; Evans, 2011). For Karvonen, “experiments are not interpreted as one-off trials to provide evidence and justification for new low carbon policies, regulations, and service provision; instead, they are emerging as a new mode of governance in themselves.” (2018, p.202) This vision of urban experiments as democratic spaces implies that space is given to ‘citizen-non specialists’ to join the practice of planning and designing the city, which comes along with strong political implications. In Karvonen’s words: “Of particular interest to the politics of urban climate change experiments is the potential for experiments to enhance democratic participation in urban governance.” (p.210).

In academic literature, urban experiments which imply the participation of citizens in response to state failure was also captured by the term co-production. Historically, co-production was first theorised in the 1970s, in the early days of the neoliberal roll-out, a context in which state services in the US came under attack. The concept aimed to discuss the organisation of citizens covering for and delivering public services (Ostrom, 1972). If the academic definition of co-production is still deeply tied up with initiatives in which the partial or total delivery of public services such as public health services, waste management and firefighting (Nabatchi et al. 2017) is taken by citizens, the term has recently attracted a growing interest and been reconsidered from a broader perspective. In more recent academic literature, co-production broadly focuses on experimentation as a possible pathway to reconfigure the delivery of public services (Bulkeley et al., 2016), loosely embracing a much

broader range of citizen-state partnerships or, as Brandsen and Honingh coin it, co-production "is regarded as a possible solution to the public sector's decreased legitimacy and dwindling resources by accessing more of society's resources." (2015, p.427). Obviously, in the neoliberal context, scholars have also pointed out that "consumers' choice", which is a central narrative in the neoliberal transformation of public services, can easily be rebranded as co-production, with the agenda to transfer state responsibility onto citizens (Nabatchi et al. 2017).

Chatterton et al. note that: "However, it is also used in more politicized ways such as reconfiguring power relations which can lead to broader and unexpected outcomes." (2018, p.229). This definition, which is the one that I adopt for the analysis in Chapter 6, includes co-production as a range of urban planning practices ranging from collaborative knowledge building (Norström et al., 2020) to citizen engagement (Joshi and Moore, 2004). From that perspective, co-production is reframed around the potential for collaborative space design to enhance political empowerment and allow citizen groups to collectively acquire political capital to "demand action from the state" (Chatterton et al., 2018, p.229).

The focus on innovation in governance and broadening participation is particularly strong in writing discussing the recent phenomenon of Urban Living Labs (ULLs) as a subgenre of urban co-production. I will briefly introduce some of the literature around ULLs because a) they have recently become the dominant model of urban co-production b) they are the focus of scholarly debates around neoliberalism's relationship experimentation. Very popular amongst public bodies keen to initiate post-carbon transition at a structural level, ULLs seem to be by highly heterogeneous, although the term is now widespread in articles exploring case studies of urban experimentation. For Bulkeley et al. (2018), in a context of increasing challenges in the governance of cities, governance by experimentation aims at offering a more flexible, adaptive, bottom-up version of urban planning. In their view, the rise of interest in ULLs as an urban strategy of governance also marks the end of the realm of modernist "total control" of governing bodies, allowing the

incorporation of diverse voices as well as urban contestation groups. In the same register, ULLs are often understood as spaces for co-production of the city in which public, private and civic actors unite, and can be used to reinvent progressive forms of urban governance beyond austerity and the neoliberalisation of cities. The acute deficit of governance, caused primarily by neoliberal austerity, means that cities have more issues to deal with, whilst operating with poorer resources, resulting in a deficit of urban democracy. In this context of urban neoliberalisation and the shrinkage of the state, ULLs have the potential to involve a broader variety of actors and give rise to new progressive practices of urban governance (Voytenko et al. 2016; Chatterton et al. 2018; Menny et al. 2018). The role of ULL is to tackle the fragmentation of actors and decision-making processes in urban planning, whilst “emphasizing the important role of participation and co-creation” (Steen and van Bueren, 2017, p.21).

The challenge in this thesis is to connect this theory to a narrative that has emerged from the empirical part of my work in which experimentation is very present but in a different context. In order to best inform the discussion that follows in the analysis chapters, however, the recent theory that addresses experimentation as a strategy of urban planning and design presents some interesting points. First, experimentation is a strategy of space making, which has the potential to incorporate actors of civil society and the broader urban population into the process of thinking and designing urban spaces. In the case of Genevan nightlife actors, the struggle for spaces in which to perpetuate experimental practices has forced them to become actors or architects of their city beyond the kind of spaces in which they were used to operate. Second, experimentation is seen as a collective process of space making, a dimension which again resonates with the problematics that Genevan nightlife actors brought up from their practice but also from the collective narratives around spaces of nightlife. Often in my interviews, I was struck by the levels of knowledge that my participants demonstrated around the politics of the city and their analysis of the forces at stake in the making of urban space. This political awareness and involvement, I will argue in the analysis chapters, also comes from their own vernacular practice of DIY space

making and how this resonates in the neoliberal context. Finally, and this will take me to the next subsection of this chapter, experimentation has the potential to produce spaces which do not comply with the neoliberal urban regime, but instead serve the uses of those who re-empower themselves through the practice of designing space.

### **2.4.3 The neoliberal city as a context of experimentation**

A second aspect of the discussion around recent urban experiments, which will be particularly relevant to considering experimentation in relation to nightlife, is the ambivalent relation that connects experimentation with the dominant economic model. Evans and Karvonen (2010), for example, describe ULLs as challenging and nurturing capitalism at the same time. In their capacity to reduce and simplify urban realities for the purpose of innovation, they argue, ULLs not only reproduce capitalistic strategies but somehow contribute to the expansion of the capitalistic realm. Considering experimentation as a collaborative and inclusive process rather than a means-ends strategy, allows for its progressive potential to emerge. Experimentation, however, does not inherently counteract a neoliberal agenda. Marvin et al. (2018), for example, question the capacity of ULLs to challenge social inequalities induced by capitalism, arguing that the post-carbon models of cities which they foster might well reproduce the social inequalities that characterise most contemporary urban fabrics. Beyond ULLs, it's the progressive potential of experimentation as a process that most authors question. In 'The city of permanent experiments?' (2018), Karvonen advocates for the socially transformative character of urban experiments, in the sense that they have the capacity to breed innovative forms of governance. But, he cautions, urban experimentation can provide with more inclusive, empowering forms of urban living *and* serve profit-making modes of urban development at the same time, resulting in a sort of alleviated form of capitalism.

Alongside that argument, Sanzana Calvet and Castán Broto (2016) examine urban experiments as coinciding with the implementation and consolidation of neoliberal policies in Santiago de Chile. If experimentation triggers momentum

for "processes of transformation that entail a radical reconfiguration of dominant regimes" (p.108), they argue, urban experiments also bring market-led innovations in the disguise of more sustainable life practices. Questioning whether experimentation-induced progressive change can emerge within the dominant urban regime or whether any change will induce a reformed version of the neoliberal city, Sanzana Calvet and Castán Broto position experimentation as a possible alternative.

In the light of this literature, which roots experimentation in its contemporary context, an important question arises here: to what extent can this vision of experimentation be relevant to forms of experimentation taking place in the nightlife? Or maybe even more importantly: how could nightlife experimentations provide an innovative perspective to progressive urban politics? For the purpose of urban planning, experimentation is rooted in an explicit process of problem solving. The shrinkage of public resources, the lack of urban governance, the ecological crises are challenges for which experimentation represents a resource with the clear agenda to produce change where it is needed. If the experimentations that were examined in the first part of this chapter have the potential to induce change, they are not set with an intention of producing alternative urban planning solutions but rather belong to the realm of artistic creation. There is close to an epistemological difference between, on the one hand, experiments which are designed and reflected upon with the intention of changing urban spaces and, on the other hand, hazardous, adventurous, instantaneous moments of togetherness, which seem to almost elude their own politics (Radley, 1995).

This divergence is formalised in McFarlane's typology of processes of learning in relation to cities. He distinguishes tactical learning, mobilised to solve problems (as is the case in ULLs and state-led co-production processes), from experimental learning, a playful and uncertain process of creating knowledge (McFarlane, 2011). One of McFarlane's takes on experimental learning is that it allows bringing together and connecting a diversity of forms of knowledges by inhabiting the world. These moments of experimentation with the everyday acts of dwelling, he argues, translate everyday life into micro-political



moments. These connections happen without a doubt in some spaces of nightlife in the multiple practices of experimenting with social arrangements, cultural objects and spatial environments, a vision which I develop in light of my empirical data in Chapter 6.

I would like to conclude this section with a quote by Bulkeley and Castán Broto: "Rather than creating protected spaces through which innovation can be fostered and system change developed", they say, "experiments could provide grist in the urban mill, creating conflict, sparking controversy, offering the basis for contested new regimes of practice." (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013, p.367). The practice of what they name "governing by experiment" implies the involvement and commitment of non-professional space designers into the discussion as to how to design "better cities". Recognising experimentation as a site whereby politics have the potential to emerge allows Bulkeley and Castán Broto to connect previously disconnected dimensions of urban life in an experimental way and to unlock new forms of co-production and governance.

#### **2.4.4 Resistance led by creative actors in the neoliberal city**

In the last subsection of this chapter, I engage with a body of literature that has emerged in the last decade around the role played by cultural actors in urban social movements, movements in which nightlife actors have been particularly present. In Chapter 4, I reconnect my case study with the history and culture of artist-led urban social movements in Geneva. The literature cited below thus brings an important contribution to the argument that the culture of artistic experimentation has significantly contributed to the creation of counter-spaces in Geneva.

Mayer discusses the impact of neoliberalism on urban social movements, arguing that the neoliberal rollout "has allowed concessions and offerings to those movement groups that may usefully be absorbed into city marketing and the locational politics that municipalities everywhere are now tailoring to attract investors, creative professionals and tourists" (2013, p.11). In this paper, she shows the ambivalence of the creative sector within urban politics: creatives

can act as a progressive force but are constantly being incorporated into strategies that promote neoliberal space making as the dominant model. Her argument is that creative sector actors are somewhat neutralised by neoliberal policies as long as they act in ways disconnected from other movements (anti-poverty movements, groups in defence of tenants, social housing, public services, etc). But that they are a powerful group in terms of co-producing a narrative of resistance and disseminating it. Artists, she argues, are also efficient at mobilising groups who are politically under represented such as the young people, a phenomenon which resonates very loudly with my case study.

Supporting these arguments, scholars have started documenting in recent years examples of creative spaces which have emerged in reaction to the development of the neoliberal creative city (Montagna, 2006; Hollands, 2020). Led by the idea of creative democracy, a process by which actors of the cultural industries identify neoliberalism as responsible for the precarity within the sector and connect with other social movements contesting neoliberalism, those movements join, amplify and sometimes trigger urban resistance against neoliberalism. Some of these movements have materialised through the co-creation of cultural spaces which contest the neoliberal regime (Novy and Colomb, 2012).

Novy and Colomb look at contestation in the nightscapes of Hamburg and Berlin as case studies to show how experimental forms of arts in the nightscape can become a flagship of resistance against major regeneration plans. In the case of these two cities, spaces of experimental nightlife have played a core role in centralising groups of actors engaged in the movement of resistance against major real estate developments. “What unites an otherwise heterogeneous set of actors”, they write, “is thus a widespread discontent about the loss of cultural diversity, public space and room for experimentation, along with the exploitation of local milieux and subcultures as part of growth- and market-oriented urban policies.” (p.1832). A variety of examples show that the disintegration of the alternative cultural scene under

the pressure of neoliberal urban policies acts as a magnifier for this new urban agenda, with nightlife actors as the organising force of resistance (Gallan, 2015; Hae, 2011b; 2012; Hollands et al., 2017, Shaw, 2005). These examples of mobilisation of nightlife actors mark the opposition of cultural actors themselves to culture-led urban branding, strategies, often inspired by Richard Florida's theory of the creative class, which in turn receive condemnation and resistance by those same groups that they pretend to serve (Peck, 2005).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the key academic discussions around my three ontological nodes 1) Nightlife Studies 2) Neoliberal Urban Studies; and 3) Experimentation, to give a theoretical framework to the research and ensure novel outcomes.

The first section of the chapter had brought together academic literature from nightlife studies. In light of this body of theory, I have discussed the inextricable connection between the making of spaces of nightlife and the making of cities. If nightlife is socially constructed as a space of permissiveness and liminality, I have argued, spaces of nightlife always existed within and were shaped by dominant urban regimes. In the post-industrial urban economy, policies designed to push the free-market, corporate economy have also boosted the development of the NTE.

In the second section, I explored theories of urban neoliberalism. This growing literature shows how neoliberalism enacts itself in urban spaces through privatization, hyper-regulation and segregation, trends which have similarly reshaped the nightscape in Geneva and elsewhere. This literature has also informed us on the duality of neoliberalism, as a set of ideas on the one hand, and a system which enacts itself in heterogeneous, context-specific ways.

The third section, focused on theories about urban experimentation. This literature showed that experimentation has the potential to support the co-

production of alternative models of urban governance and that, as such, it is very in trend in the development of policies trying to tackle austerity and the carbon crisis. Studies of neoliberal urbanism also demonstrated that, in the neoliberal era, experimentation has the potential to both rejuvenate urban governance, or the urban corporate takeover.

In conclusion to this section, I would like to highlight that, unlike most examples theorised above, the Genevan case study is not based on the analysis of practices of experimentation which were developed with a 'problem-solving' solving agenda. This practices (and spaces), however, were threatened by neoliberal policies, which triggered resistance.

In light of my empirical findings and guided by my research questions I will therefore use the next chapters to investigate what it is in the experimentation in the Genevan urban night that needed to be resisted for; and I will discuss how the co-production of spaces of experimentation can be seen as anti-neoliberal in practice.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Making sense of experimentation in the night: a case-study based approach**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

I have used the previous chapter of this thesis to give an overview of the literature covering nightlife studies, neoliberal urbanism and experimentation in order to identify an original intellectual framework for this research. In the chapter that follows, I design a methodological framework for this thesis that mobilises the body of knowledge presented in the previous chapter. My objective here is outline how the empirical stages of the research were designed in correlation with the intellectual framework and the case study. In the first subsection, I present the research framework looking at 1) the implications of initiating a research following a social movement (social drama approach) 2) the design of the initial ontological framework 3) the epistemological choices made for the research. In the second subsection, I discuss the design of the fieldwork, particularly highlighting the impact of the ethical approval process for a research around nightlife. I also explain about the use of reflexivity as an iterative process which I used to redraft my research questions and ontological framework in light of the data collected during fieldwork. In the third subsection, I present the final data set and comment on the analysis methods used to examine the data. I conclude by arguing developing reflexive research strategies allowed me to take advantage of the difficulties associated with researching the urban night.

## **3.2 Research framework**

### **3.2.1 Social drama as a momentum: youth movements and nightlife in Geneva**

The journey towards this PhD started in 2010, when Geneva witnessed a series of protests predominantly led by groups of young people around the topic of nightlife (Berthet and Bjertnes, 2011). The context in which these events started, as well as a more thorough timeline of events will be developed in depth in the following case study chapter. But I'd like to explain here that expressions of unrest and resistance for the right to party acted as a trigger for this research, since this reality influenced the design of the research significantly. In September 2010, the State of Geneva withdrew its licence to two nightclubs, one of which was the MOA club, a mainstream venue of large capacity, famous amongst young partygoers for its accessibility both in terms of price and its relaxed door policies. With the MOA club closed, the Genevan nightscape didn't offer many options other than for a crowd of youngsters with limited cash to redirect towards L'Usine, the long-standing alternative social and cultural centre of the city. After several consecutive weekends of a dangerously overcrowded situation, l'Usine went on "night strike" to attract the authorities' attention and denounce the lack of available spaces dedicated to youth cultures in Geneva. The carnivalesque night events (followed by several daytime protests) gathered up to 2000 protesters, a mobilisation at a scale that the city hadn't witnessed in decades (Hollands et al., 2017, p.295).

These expressions of resistance for the right to party got me thinking about how to connect nightlife as an object of study with urban politics, particularly since the nightscape's transformation strongly resonated with the drastic changes that Geneva as a whole had undergone since the 2008 financial crash. I had some knowledge in nightlife studies and certainly a strong personal interest. I had also benefited from some experience of researching nightlife in Geneva (a position which I will expand upon on the section dedicated to positionality). I saw the nightlife-related protests in Geneva as an opportunity to take an innovative look at nightlife as a topic because the protests were contextualising it within the question of urban politics, which was a rather unusual occurrence. I could picture how Geneva's protests for the

right to spaces of nightlife could act as a good case study particularly because of its connection with neoliberal transformations, a situation which seemed to offer a renewed perspective in nightlife studies. In this sense, the case study fits well in Herbert's definition of "the anomalous case study", a research space that has in common all the characteristics of social and spatial organisation but yet stands out quite differently because "it belies expectations" (2010, p.78). The virtue of anomalous case studies, Herbert argues, is to "use qualitative data to expand existing theory." (p.77), a position which I adopted to contextualise my case study in both nightlife studies and neoliberal urbanism.

Another way of looking at the Geneva case study was to think about it in terms of a one-off, exacerbated moment, a social event or *social drama case study* (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith, 2002). Using a social event to frame case-study based research is a widely accepted approach, although it requires some caution. In *Doing Cultural Geography*, Bennett and Shurmer-Smith for example state that:

*What one means by a 'case study' varies. At the largest scale, one's whole project is a case study, offered as a sample of the wider society; (...) This should necessarily be regarded as a representative sample in the sense that any other sample would have been more or less the same; it is representative only in that, though it is unique, it is a part of a greater whole. Then there are social dramas within the limited field of the study, studies of events which can occur within the selected setting.*

*(2002, p.200).*

Following this vision, my approach took the stand of considering the protests as an acute moment of a broader urban issue rather than the object of my study per se. It didn't mean that the nightlife protests were of no interest for my research, but rather that nightlife and urban social movements didn't connect in the same way that other topics would have. In other words, I didn't want the social drama to be the centre of the work but I rather wanted to use as symptomatic moment of issues that were going to emerge from fieldwork.

The notion of social drama as used by Bennett and Shurmer-Smith was introduced by Victor Turner in 1957 in a study of witchcraft in Zambia. In this research, Turner used the study of unusual moments of crisis and emotional upheaval to reveal both societal norms and the transformation of these norms. The strength of this work is to articulate individual experiences and the potential of collective events to disrupt and transform established social norms. Turner's work greatly influenced the development of theories around social change because it exemplifies the way individual experiences are articulated to create new collective beliefs through cultural practices. In the case study that I base my work around, a set of actors had entered in resistance against the closure of spaces of nightlife. Methodologically, I used the social drama as starting point that is both structuring and open. The strength of a case study-centred method is to place life stories at the core of the research narrative. It allows for individual or exceptional circumstances to dictate the development of the research without eluding the norm or the general. In the context in which I was researching, I did use the 2010 protests to frame the work but I decided to build a methodology that would support reflexivity *around* the protests rather than focusing *on* them. This methodological stand did allow me to engage with participants through the topic of nightlife, whilst letting their experience of urban transformations in Geneva and their criticism emerge. In this sense, I regarded the protests as a symptom that something was changing in the city but was reluctant to think of urban resistance as central to the research. This methodological stand proved to be appropriate for my research because all my participants talked about their practice of nightlife as central and considered their involvement in expressions of resistance for spaces of nightlife as a collateral effect of the neoliberalisation of Geneva. In this sense, as I explain in chapter 4, even if some of my participants regarded their political engagement for nightlife as part of a local history of artist-led urban activism, it was the cultural practice that was central, not the activism.



### **3.2.2 Spaces of nightlife, collective subjectivities and experimentation: the initial ontological framework**

In *Qualitative Researching*, Jennifer Mason (2017) advises that researchers initiate the design of their research project by the conceptualisation of what they understand as a social reality or ontology. Mason describes the construction of an ontology as a researcher's first step into building an "intellectual puzzle" that will act as a research framework. In order to do so, she exemplifies the way research can be defined ontologically by identifying "different versions of the essential or component properties of social reality/ies, and different ideas about where these are located (for example, in people, bodies, practices, discourses, in social, legal or administrative structures)." (p.15). In this section, I will accordingly explain how I have constructed an ontological framework for my research that is a triangulation between spaces of nightlife, the neoliberal city and experimentation; an ontology, which obviously mirrors the literature review featured in the previous chapter.

Through the literature review, I explored the different "component properties" that nightlife geographies can entail. This literature review has showed that geographies of the night are ontologically rich and diverse in the sense that nightlife implies many of the "component properties" that Mason describes: individual but also collective bodies, spaces, cultural objects, subjects and practices. To this extent, nightlife geography shares the ontological challenges that surround poststructuralist fields in cultural geography: if there is a consensus that nightlife is "one social phenomenon", the social reality of nightlife embraces a hugely diverse set of experiences. This reality is complicated by the fact that nightlife is both a fundamentally embodied individual experience and a collective event, that nightlife can be liminal although happening in spaces which are predetermined and tightly regulated, that in some circumstances nightlife is an opportunity for contesting social norms but sometimes it also works along the lines of social norms, and so on. The multiplicity of nightlife experiences makes ontological choices a crucial point.

The first aspect of defining a suitable ontological framework here implies that not all component properties of the social reality that nightlife is made of could be ontologically equally as important for the research. My first challenge was to significantly narrow down the ontological framework. Mason suggests that a solid ontological perspective should start with answering the question: “What is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social ‘reality’, that I wish to investigate?”(p.14). Inspired by Mason’s question, I looked at the story at the centre of my research and simplified it this way: in Geneva, groups of nightlife actors have become politically active in reaction to the disappearance of spaces of nightlife. This story is visible through expressions of collective resistance described above as a ‘social drama’. I therefore established that, at the core of the thesis, there was an ontological connection between spaces of nightlife and urban transformations that led to the disappearance of certain spaces. In the reflexive phase of data analysis, I later identified these transformations as the neoliberalisation of Geneva.

An initial ontological framing emerged in preparation for fieldwork, primarily through both a review of nightlife studies and secondary sources on the Geneva case study. Nonetheless, as Bennett et al. point out: “...good cultural researchers operate (...) by starting with the context and working down to a small and manageable topic which acts as a lens through which to seek a clearer view. Meaningful study is not the study *of* topics, but the study of wider issues *by means* of them” (Bennett et al., 2002, p.82). Methodologically speaking, Bennett et al. support the idea that an ontology should both simplify the social reality of a case study and feature components with potential for theoretical depth. In line with this advice, I reworked my ontology in light of the data which I collected during fieldwork. Initially, to keep the research focused, I decided to search for the collective subjectivities that had emerged in support of spaces of nightlife during the protests (Domingues, 1997, 2000a and 2000b). This concept supported the search for a collective narrative across a heterogeneous set of actors and, most importantly, it helped me frame the transformative potential of collective movements led by actors whose political

actions were due to the circumstances rather than central to their practice. The idea of collective subjectivity, however, did not give me a broad enough perspective to transcend the small topics and address a wider issue by means of them as recommended by Bennett et al.

I therefore completed the ontological framework in the writing phase of the research by recognising that the broader issue that my participants were addressing, even if indirectly, was the neoliberal rollout in Geneva and how this impacted on the spaces in which they operated. I also added experimentation as the third aspect of my ontological framework, as I identified it as a key topic of my participants' description of their nightlife experience, specifically in relation to how they had built political agencies in relation to the threat on spaces of nightlife. As Herbert points out discussing best practice in grounded theory based methods, "A better depiction of common practice is that researchers are constantly tacking back and forth, always mobilizing some theoretical framework yet perpetually troubling that framework with the data at hand." (Herbert, 2010, p.73). Adding experimentation to the ontology of this research has allowed me to both: 1. develop an ontological framework that fits my case study in the sense that I have constructed my ontology organically with the case study; and 2. provide with an innovative framework on the topic of nightlife with a view to expanding existing theory. In this sense, experimentation is my way of troubling and expanding the existing literature about nightlife. At the same time, anchoring the discussion in the context of neoliberal urban transformations gave my research the depth that it needed to contribute to a wider debate in cultural geography from the lens of an innovative case study. These transformations are reflected upon in the next section of this chapter, in which I connect them to the rewording of my research questions.

### **3.2.3 Cultural geography and the politics of research**

Further to highlighting the importance of situating the research epistemologically, Mason (2017) insists on the necessity of situating the research within an epistemology in coherence with the ontology as, she

argues, the way social entities are conceptualised also impacts which kind of philosophy of social sciences they best connect with. In the previous section, I have described my ontology as a triangulation between spaces of nightlife, the neoliberal city and experimentation. In this part, I will thus explicate how I see this ontology grounded within the field of cultural geography and what I am expecting to achieve by situating the research in this field.

Historically cultural geography looked at typologies of landscapes in relation to human activity in the manner of structuralism, assuming that there was a deterministic connection between (predominantly rural) landscapes and human living. The so-called new cultural geography emerged in the poststructural turn throughout the 1980s, challenging the relation that bound culture and space so far but also redefining the politics of culture in relation to space. Shurmer-Smith argues that new cultural geography both contrasts and perpetuates the long-standing tradition of cultural geography, in the sense that it recognises the structural imperatives that dominate space making but shifts the emphasis onto the politics that challenge spatial hegemony rather than the structuring nature of culture (Shurmer-Smith, 2002). In Rose's words too, "geographers took cultural objects to be representations of the world which articulated, sustained and/or resisted social power relations" (2016, p.335). Rose's definition is very much centred on cultural objects and artefacts, because they were initially a central addition to the poststructuralist vision of cultural geography. From this initial focus, the discipline expanded, including cultural practices and processes in today's field. The implications of culture making in processes of producing space are now widely recognised, way beyond the reading of cultural objects. Through cultural practices, actors and consumers of culture literally build spaces and, broadly speaking, have an impact on the making of space. Or, as Anderson et al. put it, cultural geography emancipated itself from the physicality of cultural objects, looking at the making of culture as "new modes of thinking and harrying space which, at one and the same time, create new spaces." (Anderson et al., 2003, p.5). Theoretically, this means that today's cultural geographers are able to mobilise culture as a dimension of space making. But most importantly this relation has become central to discuss space and politics.

In the light of these epistemological debates, how do I see today's cultural geography as a relevant epistemology to this research? I would like to put forward two arguments to justify that choice.

First, as the two references above say, cultural geography is a discipline that articulates space, agency and their politics. Throughout the eighties, it became apparent to geographers that looking at cultural artefacts and beyond would not only allow them to produce geographical knowledge, but also that this would be a productive way of considering space making as an arena of emergence for new forms of political agencies. In an article that is important to the renewed thinking of cultural geography, Cosgrove and Jackson stated that "culture is not a residual category . . . it is the very medium through which social change is experienced, contested and constituted" (1987, p.95). This definition of culture, which profoundly resonates in today's vision of cultural geography, formalises the fact that the major transformation that has occurred in cultural geography is the redefinition of the relationship between culture and space as unstable and dynamic but nonetheless profoundly political. As Shaw et al. write:

*"The ways cultural geographers seek to apprehend the world have shifted, from seeking concrete understandings to embracing performative, processual, and assemblage approaches. Meanwhile, concerns with the political became central – with emphasis on the fragility of meanings and structures, their continual contestation and negotiation, even when hegemonic meaning remains."*

*(2015, pp.212).*

As this quote suggests, looking at culture also as a site of negotiation of power necessitates challenging and expanding the traditional definition of politics. The aim of this research is obviously to look at one particular set of cultural spaces, in a particular geographical context, in order to discuss how they have contributed to the contestation of a socio-spatial regime imposed by neoliberalism. This endeavour is, I believe, coherently grounded in a discipline

that articulates the spatial with the political, whilst allowing renewed definitions of politics (Keith and Pile, 2013).

The second argument that grounds my decision to use cultural geography as an epistemology is that the discipline coherently frames a discussion around political agencies that challenge the mainstream representation of space and politics, but also political agencies that are excluded by the mainstream representation of space and politics. New cultural geography, indeed, was a response to the necessity to include broader sets of political agencies within Geography as an academic discipline, agencies that had until then been eluded by power structures. The birth of post-structural geography in general and new cultural geography in particular coincided with the moment when geography started to be infused by feminism and post-colonialism, which critical stands demonstrated how geography's definition of political agency up until that point had been limited to the model of dominant political agencies. New cultural geography, indeed, was a response to the necessity of including broader sets of political agencies within Geography as an academic discipline, agencies that had until then been excluded by power structures. New cultural geography, to this extent, is important to me and shapes my geographical research practice because it allows me to consider, legitimise and politicise agencies which are not part of the geographical picture otherwise.

Indeed, one of the main challenges I faced with this research was the task of articulating what I thought politics meant in the context of nightlife. This difficulty essentially came from the fact that the countercultural agencies I encountered didn't fit in the traditional definition of 'capital-P' Politics. If nightlife definitely has the potential to be political, I would say that nightlife at no point can be seen as "intentionally political". Nightlife consumers and producers, for example, do not have the same political commitment that urban activists would have, even though, as I will explain further, politics and Politics did cross over in the context of this research.

It is this elusive nature of nightlife politics that made it hard for me to frame the discussion about political agencies in relation to cultural and countercultural practices. In their *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, Anderson et al. discuss how the discipline has contributed in shifting the understanding of power and politics:

*“Over time, understandings of power have shifted, away from models based on the power of one group over another, towards those involving the power to do things. This has suggested that power relations consist not only of domination, but also of seduction, influence, persuasion, capacity, ability, manipulation, consent, compromise, subversion, control and so on.”*

*(Anderson et al., 2003, p.6).*

I see Anderson et al.’s definition of power relations as the right framing for the kind of politics that I am exploring in this thesis. It is obvious that there is politics attached to the demand for spaces of nightlife which are more accessible, inclusive and creative. But the levels of Political implication and expression varied greatly depending on which space I researched, or which participant I talked to. In this sense, Anderson et al.’s quote frames the epistemological space in which to consider all these agencies.

Another aspect of the elusiveness of nightlife politics I want to mention lies in nightlife participants’ own struggle to consider their voice as political. From an epistemological point of view, I had to find an academic area in which to ground my research that would allow for the depth and the seriousness of my topic to emerge. Along these lines, Shaw et al. state that “Cultural geographies have been willing to engage with issues often seen as peripheral or indeed problems to be minimized, bypassed or glossed over in other sub-fields.” (Shaw et al.,2015, pp.211-215). In this sense, I found cultural geography to be an appropriate epistemological framework as it responded coherently to the necessity of legitimising invisible, elusive, decentred political agencies built in relation to spaces of nightlife.

Beyond the intellectual implication, I had to think about cultural geography as a practice and adapt my methods of work accordingly. The main implication of grounding the research in this discipline was to keep the focus of the research onto the dialogic relationship between Geneva's nightlife as an urban landscape and the cultural practices that exist within it. In other words, the spatiality of nightlife became more of a focus than nightlife itself. If nightlife and subcultures have been explored extensively from an ethnographic perspective, adopting the cultural geography standpoint meant for example that I framed the discussion with my participants around the question of spaces of nightlife (rather than talking about their cultural tastes). For the same reason, I also investigated dimensions such as the regulation of space, a question that fed into the discussion about the spatial regimes in which nightlife culture existed rather than the cultures themselves. Last but not least, I looked at spaces and the kind of agencies that had arisen from them but I selectively approached participants whose agencies had the potential to contest and challenge the dominant spatial regime in Geneva's nightlife. In that sense, cultural geography influenced the way I targeted my participants.

### **3.3 Research design**

#### **3.3.1 Designing research questions for a case-study-based approach**

Further to choosing an ontology for the research and grounding it epistemologically, Mason advises that academics formulate research questions to act as "the backbone" of their research design (Mason, 2017, p.14). Well-designed research questions, she argues, must respond thoroughly to the "intellectual puzzle" (ontology), in order to ensure that the empirical research process is appropriately focused onto the ontological elements that the researcher aims to discuss. Mason's suggestion implies that research questions will structure the entire structure of a thesis. Practically, during the empirical part of the study, research questions should be used as guidelines or threads to follow to keep the research process focused.



Specifically using a case-study approach, the methodological challenge for me when designing the research questions lay around the difficulty of anticipating what the case study was going to “be about”. As an example, I knew that I was going to talk about nightlife and I knew that I was going to use expressions of resistance as a starting point. But somehow I was strongly sceptical that the idea of “resistance” was going to be central. In other words, I was concerned that anticipating the topics would encapsulate the research into preconceptions of mine instead of instead of letting the story emerge from fieldwork. I was also concerned that a theory-driven approach would bring a bias into the interviews, leading participants towards topics that they didn’t necessarily want to discuss, instead of letting them deliver their stories. On the other hand, entering fieldwork without any sort of guidelines felt like a hazardous enterprise, with great risk of getting lost between multiple options of topics to research.

In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, Baxter states that:

*“For some, what distinguishes case studies from other approaches, such as grounded theory and ethnography, is that in case studies, theoretical propositions should be stated prior to entering the field. Yet others tend to view qualitative case studies as primarily theory generating endeavours such that ethnography and grounded theory can be easily incorporated within a case study design.”*

*(2010, p.88).*

In other words, the difficulty and strength of the case study approach is that it is neither constrained by a theoretical framework, nor exclusively theory generating. Instead, the research must be developed in a dynamic relationship with theory. To this regards, Mason supports the idea that research questions should ideally be structuring but not limiting: “The question format will help you to design a study which is focused rather than vague but which can nevertheless be exploratory and fluid” (Mason, 2017, p.15). Following that advice, I had at heart to design research questions that would give some direction to my research so as to avoid “fumbling around” my fieldwork

aimlessly. I also used the research questions to maintain some coherence amongst my body of interviews. Nonetheless, if my research questions worked as structuring motives, I intentionally let them be open enough to let participants guide me towards their agencies. As I will present here, the research questions evolved quite significantly as the research work progressed. I therefore conducted fieldwork with a set of research questions, which I redrafted in the aftermath of the analysis phase to best serve the data that I had gathered and guide the writing phase. This process is explained in the next section.

To design my initial research questions, I mobilized a) my experience and knowledge of the field, b) a large collection of secondary data from local media and social media, and c) academic literature about nightlife. Looking at the Geneva case study, I saw spaces of nightlife closing and people expressing their discontent and sometimes resisting these closures. I then articulated a series of very general open questions to work towards more specific research questions:

- What happens between people when they are together in a space of nightlife?
- What has changed in the Genevan nightlife that they are so unhappy about? Has something been lost?
- What is it in the Genevan nightlife that is important to people?
- What has happened in the Genevan nightlife that has led people to legitimise their views over nightlife?
- Has nightlife a potential to be transformative, individually and collectively?
- Do people form political agencies through their nightlife experience?
- Is the outcome of a night out different for people depending on the kind of spaces they attend?

I found a first draft of my intellectual puzzle in these questions. As suggested by the literature above, this initial ontology evolved with the research in lights

of the data that I collected during fieldwork. But I initially focused on four component properties of the Geneva case study:

- Simultaneity: being together in one space, experience in the nightlife, interacting with others, immersion in cultural practices which are collective
- Collective subjectivities: people connect with each other, they build an agency in relation to spaces of nightlife, they get together to defend these spaces
- Spaces of nightlife: structure the nightscape, materialise change, people produce agencies in relation to them, people reclaim them
- Social creativity: people experiment with being together, people experiment with cultural forms, those experimentations can be transformative individually and collectively

The questions below are the ones I designed in preparation for fieldwork, as part of my Transfer Review, a document that formalises the research project before entering the fieldwork phase. Each of them formulates a line of enquiry that I focused upon when selecting and then interviewing participants. As recommended by Mason, each of them aims to explore the component properties of my research puzzle and they are designed to connect those elements together:

- How did the transition towards the Night-Time Economy in Geneva affect simultaneity in Geneva?
- How did this transition contribute to the construction of collective subjectivities and what are they?
- How do these collective subjectivities interrelate with spaces of nightlife?
- How can different nightlife related practices be socially creative and what do they challenge?

As I will explain in the next part of this chapter, I conducted all interviews in a semi-structured way in the sense that I didn't follow specific questions with my

interviewees. Nonetheless, the research questions above gave me directions to keep the interviews as focused as possible and maintain some coherence between them.

### **3.3.2 Reflecting upon research questions: reframing the ontology**

As I have explained above, I initially designed a research framework (ontology and research questions) which aimed at framing a thorough research process. Nonetheless, I kept reflecting upon the initial ontology and subsequent research questions as fieldwork progressed and I was able to revise my research questions in light of the data that I collected. In retrospect, both the ontology and the research questions detailed the various component properties of the research and, from the start, established strong connections between them, which was a positive outcome. The main critique I would address to this initial research framework, however, is that it was too topical, which translated my anxiety of missing the right discussion. But by focusing on the components, I overlooked the main discussion. Reflexivity nonetheless helped me to make the most of this initial intellectual puzzle and contextualise it in a broader academic discussion.

Spaces of nightlife were an unavoidable element of the ontology and remained untouched in the final version. I was even surprised by the extent to which participants were willing to talk about their experience of spaces in the night and how the topic acted as a bridge between experimentation and the overarching question of the neoliberal city.

Collective subjectivities was a useful concept to start the research with. I used it as I found it appropriate to explore political subjectivities that didn't fit in the box of mainstream politics or Politics. It also nicely connected individual experiences and their collective expressions. Collective subjectivities supported the idea of social transformation, which made an important bridge between the idea of experimentation and its potential to be transformative. This concept showed to be very useful from a methodological perspective,

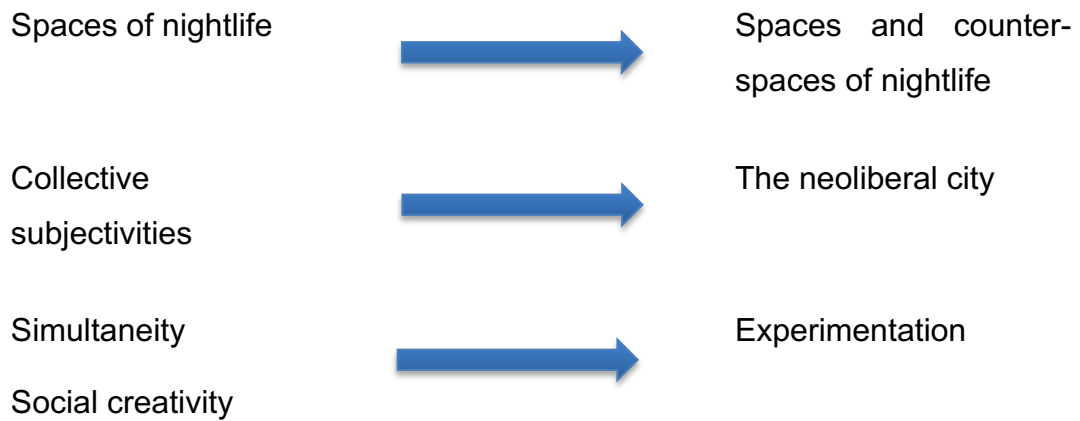
particularly in the analysis phase, when I started looking at my participants' interviews in search of a common narrative. But, if it worked as reflexive tool supporting the analysis, it turned out not to be a central idea for the discussion.

The main changes that affected my ontological approach were therefore:

1. The appearance of **experimentation** as a central topic of the nightlife stories that I collected. In retrospect, I think experimentation was always present (it certainly was in the literature review) but I didn't quite give it the right space in the research questions. In order to write the thesis, I merged simultaneity and social creativity into experimentation as I came to think of them as two dimensions of the process of experimenting. Experimentation as a concept also became the thread to research how some spaces in the nightlife are produced outside of the neoliberal canons.

2. The realisation that, from the perspective of spaces of nightlife, my participants were delivering a **collective critique** of the neoliberal city and the discussion around the **neoliberal city** as the main topic. Collective subjectivities was a useful idea in the analysis phase, when I searched for common narratives throughout a large body of interviews. But it also reveals that my research evolved from investigating an object (narratives around spaces of nightlife) to discussing a subject (the neoliberal city) as the work progressed and I was able to make sense out of these interviews, beyond a descriptive phase.

Reframing of the ontological framework



Subsequently, I reworded the research questions as follows:

1. How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of nightlife?
2. To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?
3. To what extent does experimentation play a role in (a) the co-production of these counter-spaces and (b) resisting neoliberalism?

The chart below also shows the connection between the literature (which mirrors the ontology), the research questions and the structure of the thesis.

Literature review	Research questions	Chapter
Nightlife studies	How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of nightlife?	4
Neoliberal urban studies	To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?	5
Experimentation	To what extent does experimentation play a role in the co-production of these counter-spaces and what role does it play in resisting neoliberalism?	6

In conclusion to this section, I would like to mention the fact that doubting of and reflecting upon research questions was not an easy process to go through. Even if I appreciate that fieldwork might inherently be a moment where any research design is destabilised by its confrontation with the real world, I believe that the case study based approach somehow made it more difficult to be confident about the research questions throughout. It was nonetheless a beneficial choice since I believe that it resulted in a solid connection between the ontology and the data, which greatly facilitated the writing phase.

### **3.4 Fieldwork**

As a part-time student, my fieldwork ran over a period of 18 months, starting in April 2014 and finishing in November 2015. In this section, I will specifically focus on the fieldwork process, discussing the methodological orientations I took through that phase and the practices of doing the fieldwork.

Between 2015 and 2019, I suspended the PhD over two periods of one year each for maternity leave. In June 2020, I conducted four targeted interviews, specifically discussing with relevant actors the enforcement of a new licencing regime in which cultural spaces are exempt from having to hold a licence to operate. This was accompanied by an analysis of secondary documents, primarily the new laws and bylaws, as well as some media coverage. By this, I intended to update my knowledge of the field and verify that the Genevan nightlife context had not changed to such an extent that my argument would be invalidated.

#### **3.4.1 Searching for ethical approval: “daytime interviews” about nightlife!**

Obtaining ethical approval for research on nightlife is a delicate endeavour. The liminal aura surrounding the topic means that investigating in the night deserves close attention from ethics committees. The design of fieldwork for

this thesis, and particularly the methodological framework as it was submitted to the ethics committee, was inevitably imprinted with that topical sensitivity.

I went through the process of seeking ethical approval two years into my PhD, when I was asked to formalise a plan for the empirical part of the study. Reading the ethical review process, I realised that the topic of nightlife was inevitably going to flag up considerations for my own safety, the vulnerability of my research participants, the potential for discovery of illegal behaviours and other sensitive aspects of the research. Practically, the ethical approval process greatly impacted the design of my research project and I learnt that this is something a nightlife researcher has to be prepared for.

I tried to make the most of the ethical constraints attached to nightlife research, trying to see them as opportunities to reflect rather than barriers to the research. The main outcome that worked around extended ethical approvals was by planning interviews in the day instead of conducting them “on the spot”, which in my case would have been in nightlife venues during events. At a practical level, this implied that, even though I had to go through full ethical approval, the research was kept low-risk, which minimised administration to justify of my own safety and the potential vulnerability of my participants. When this initially was mainly a strategic move to avoid requiring extended ethical and health and safety approval, the decision to interview in the daytime also turned out to better respond to the reflexive orientation that I had defined in my research framework. Nightlife studies are largely dominated by ethnographic accounts, which implies that nightlife scholars predominantly journey through nightlife documenting “what people do in the night” (Malbon, 1999). Ethnography obviously does not exclude reflexivity, but using ethnography as a mode of enquiry means that the reflexive part of the work mostly is the realm of the researcher. Yet, my goal for this research was to distance myself from the immediacy of the nightlife experiences of my participants and, instead of getting them to describe their experiences “as they went”, leading them to reflect upon the kind of politics they had developed through their experiences in the night. In this sense, daytime interviewing



became central to a methodological path that sought to encourage people to consider their nightlife experiences and reflect upon the political agencies that they had built in relation to those experiences. Even when it came to talk about their nightlife experiences, this approach produced a very interesting outcome by asking participants to look at their nightlife habits and memories from a distant and neutral point of view rather than from the intensity of the moment.

### **3.4.2 Identifying and contacting participants**

In order to identify and contact participants, I worked in three steps. First, I started by targeting nightlife producers (venue managers and event organisers) who had been at the centre of the battle with the Genevan State in October 2010 (See Appendices A.1, A.2 and A.3 for examples of secondary documents in which I identified participants). I also contacted representatives of public bodies who I thought, due to their position, would be able to deliver an interesting version of the story.

As the interviews progressed, I was recommended to speak to more actors by my initial interviewees. In a second round of interviews, I therefore extended my body of interviews to more alternative operators including members of La Gravière and Motel Campo, free party organisers and nightlife operators who had lost their space during the squat evictions<sup>2</sup>. I also spoke to a collective of bar owners who had more recently receive threats of early administrative closure.

As the interviews of nightlife producers went on, I asked them if they would consent to letting me use their networks to make contact with their customers. All of them consented. I subsequently designed a flyer (see Appendix 4) that I was able to post of their Facebook pages. Motel Campo included it in their

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<sup>2</sup> For information about the role of squats in the emergence of the alternative nightlife scene in Geneva see Chapter 4.

newsletter, too. I also distributed hard copies of the flyer in the venues whose owners I had interviewed.

It took a couple of weeks for things to pick up. But interestingly, as they came across the flyer several times (sometimes in different venues, sometimes online), potential interviewees started becoming familiar with the flyer, a familiarity that aroused their interest and encouraged them to engage. On several occasions, I was distributing the flyer, people started talking to me and it became a way of starting the conversation. I always used those opportunities to recruit more participants but stuck to my daytime rule for interviews. Some nightlife users insisted that I interviewed them on the spot but I always explained why I was not able to do things that way.

During the main part of fieldwork, I conducted 52 interviews, speaking to a total of 73 people. Forty-three of these interviews were individual. Six interviews involved two or three people, either because they expressed their desire to bring a collective voice or because they felt more comfortable being interviewed with friends. Three were organised by me as focus groups. I initially tried to maintain a balance between the number of participants per venue, but quickly realised that consumers were much more fluid in their nightlife choices that I anticipated, which meant that even if they had found my flyer in one place they were also regular customers to other places.

I also tried to keep the balance between consumers and producers, a strategy that produced an interesting outcome: whereas in commercial venues the divide between the two categories turned out to be very clear, the people who I met in alternative venues were much more fluid in their role and a lot of them described themselves as occasional actors of nightlife.

I also spoke to 11 official representatives from a variety of public structures across both council services (including two city councillors, one urban planner, and representatives of the city police and the city council's cultural advisory

boards) and state services (including one state councillor and one former state councillor, the state's police communication office via email, a representative of the licencing office, a representative of the cultural policy bureau, culture funding office and youth services).

As I explained in the introduction to this section, in addition to my initial body of interviews, I also conducted additional interviews in 2020 to verify that my data was still accurate and discuss the impact of introduction of the new licencing system in 2016. These interviews involved three alternative nightlife actors and one official representative, all of which had been involved in campaigning for the licence exemption for cultural spaces in the lead-up to the enforcement of the law. These interviews were accompanied by the analysis of the media coverage of transition, as well as the laws and bylaws.

I can confidently say that this body of interviews gave me a representative picture of the struggles around spaces of nightlife in Geneva from a variety of perspectives. Coherently with the case-study based nature of my research, this body of interviews built up over time as I worked reflexively towards a more specific focus within the field. In this sense, this body of interviews is much broader than it could have been, had I been able to locate experimentation as a central topic before conducting fieldwork. This also means that quite a significant amount of data hasn't been used. A large body of data, on the other hand, meant that I easily located patterns across the interviews, reaching points of repetition and saturation in a very obvious manner on some topics, which was very helpful in the writing phase.

In conclusion, I'd like to point out that the technicalities of writing a PhD part-time, interrupted by two periods of maternity leave, also meant that four years passed between the end of fieldwork and the writing phase. Interestingly enough, though, at no point did my body of interviews give me the impression that the case study had lost its substance. If anything, a stretched process of writing provided me with more distance, which I think this particular case study needed to balance out for the eventful nature of the movements of resistance

that acted as starting point for the research. My general feeling is that time and distance have given more depth and substance to the topic than I would have hoped for.

### **3.4.3 A commentary on my interviews: reflexivity as a strategy**

In *Doing Cultural Geography*, Bennett et al. state that:

*“When required to set up one’s own work, the task, (...) is to generate topics which can bear the weight of wider issues. If work is useful in testing or refining ideas, one should not be deterred by outsiders who think that the specific subject matter is lacking gravity. (...) Topics, in any case, are defined in seriousness according to the values of people in powerful position and, fortunately, these change.”*

*(2002, p.82).*

As I have extensively explained above, the methodological discussion for this research evolved around locating and discussing the politics of cultural practices, which are not regarded as political in the sense that they don’t fit in the box of mainstream politics. The challenges were obviously different depending on the role that my participants played: nightlife consumers were often concerned that they could not speak from an expert position or that their experience would not be meaningful enough to be an object of research. Institutional actors, on the contrary, were quite adamant to water down the political implications of youth movements around nightlife, with a strong underlying vision of nightlife as an arena of hedonism rather than constructive cultural practices and social interactions. In this sense, Bennett’s et al.’s advice resonated strongly with some of the methodological challenges which I faced during the data collection phase of this research. My methodological path was very much imprinted by the necessity to legitimising the voices of actors whose claims are disregarded in Geneva. In order to achieve this, I used reflexivity as a strategy to locate and make sense of decentred political expressions. Following Bennett’s advice to generate a “weight-bearing topic”, I worked throughout my fieldwork to design a research framework that could

facilitate the emergence of self-reflexive views about nightlife, using my participants' narratives to support an argument that was both loyal to my data and feeding into a generalisable societal issue.

My strategy to "generate a meaningful topic" involved using reflexivity as a strategy. I constantly reflected upon the data that I was gathering with the use of my research questions. But also encouraged my participants to be reflexive themselves, by using their nightlife experiences to discuss their vision of the city. Practically, I handled the interviews in a semi-structured manner, with reflexivity as a loose frame. This involved letting participants talk about their nightlife experiences in their own terms, whilst trying to capture what they could identify as most important to them. I would initiate the interview by asking them to talk about their venue of preference. I would then follow a micro to macro pathway, asking them to talk about one specific venue of their choice until finally moving on to questioning their broader vision of nightlife in Geneva.

As fieldwork went by, I moved from semi-structured to more-or-less unstructured interviews as I became more aware of the particular aspects of my interviewees' experiences that were central to the thesis. I also felt more confident to use their thoughts to bounce back and explore those topics. Using my research questions as guidelines, I tried to have more in-depth discussions about some aspects of the stories that my participants disclosed when they responded to my research questions. As the interviews progressed and the bigger picture appeared, I started listing recurring topics across interviews and kept them in mind to see how new participants would respond. This again helped me channel more in-depth chats about specific topics and helped me improve the general quality of interviews, whilst staying participant-centred.

In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, Winchester and Rofe make the point that "Individuals experience the same events and places differently. Giving voice to individuals allows viewpoints to be heard that otherwise might be silenced or excluded" (Winchester and Rofe, 2010, p.7). This statement really helped me to weigh the importance of individual

agencies not only as individual voices but also as elements of the collective subjectivities that I was looking for. Giving consideration to the politics of individual stories meant that I conducted the interviews in a way that encouraged my participants to connect their nightlife experiences with other aspects of their lives. This mindset also resulted in extensive discussions about the context in which their nightlife was taking place.

The interviews took place in public venues such as cafés, tea rooms, bars and outdoors premises (including a public bath, a park and a swimming pool) and I always let my participants choose an environment where they felt comfortable. Our conversations lasted between 20 minutes and two hours. Whilst some seemed intimidated by the interview situation at first, others expressed their gratitude for my interest in their nightlife experiences. I handed out a short presentation of my research project and a consent form to each of my participants (see Appendix 5). I recorded our discussion with their consent. Only one participant refused to be recorded.

### **3.5 Final data set and analysis**

In this section, I would like to reflect upon the sampling techniques which I used to contact my interviewees, the sample of participants who I was able to speak with as a consequence, and finally the method which I use to analyse the data.

#### **3.5.1 Final data set**

As mentioned in the introduction, in my initial set of interviews I held 52 interviews involving 73 participants in total, between April 2014 and November 2015. 44 were held on a one-to-one basis. Five were collective interviews with two or three participants, always as the result of my interviewees' choice, either because they felt more comfortable getting involved collectively, or because they worked and/or went out together. Three were focus groups, which I organised around specific issues: one with free party organisers, one

with an organisation representing high school pupils and one with bar owners operating on one street where the Council was imposing special measures to regulate the flow of nightlife customers.

Although, I was in contact with participants throughout the entire duration of the fieldwork and continued building up my sample of interviews, most of my interviews took place during the summers 2014 and 2015 for the reason that I was able to stay in Geneva for longer periods of time during the summer months and that I identified a peak of nightlife activity throughout this period. I also conducted a few interviews during the winter months, but mostly re-arranged interviews that fell through previously.

Working on a part-time basis turned out to be very beneficial during the fieldwork phase. In total, I spent seven nights out and then maintained my presence in the Genevan nightlife scene, either in person, through the distribution of my flyers in the venues which I had identified or online (the venue's Facebook pages, their websites and in their newsletters). In the early stages of fieldwork, I used purposive sampling technique to identify and contact my participants. As Campbell et al. describe it:

*"Purposive sampling strategies move away from any random form of sampling and are strategies to make sure that specific kinds of cases of those that could possibly be included are part of the final sample in the research study. The reasons for adopting a purposive strategy are based on the assumption that, given the aims and objectives of the study, specific kinds of people may hold different and important views about the ideas and issues at question and therefore need to be included in the sample."*

*(2020, p.654)*

The main reason for using purposive sampling in the context of this research was that I was able to identify participants who had had a role to play in the situation that led to the 2010 protests. Purposive sampling is recommended

when a study has the potential to involve a very large number of participants (which was definitely the case for this research) but the researcher is looking to increase depth of the data rather than width (Palinkas et al., 2015). The reason for this is primarily that purposive sampling allows the researcher to focus on similarities rather than differences in participants' narratives, a mind frame that echoed my initial intention to look for collective subjectivities. I saw purposive sampling as an efficient way of identifying a large pool of participants who had a clear common denominator and to thereby bring together a diversity of voices on a common topic.

Starting with an initial sample of participants that was easily identifiable, I was also aware that this initial group was exclusively focused on nightlife producers and official representatives, two groups who, due to their roles, had been the most visible. I therefore needed to find access to the nightlife consumers, a group who had played an equally as important role in the initial social drama that I was researching but who I could not connect with through secondary sources. As my interviews with producers unfolded, I therefore used the snowball sampling technique, asking venue managers and event organisers to facilitate my networking amongst to their consumers. As I have previously explained, this materialised by my physical presence in the nightlife venues with the consent of nightlife producers, as well as by the distribution – both physical and digital – of my flyers. It also resulted in producers recommending me to contact or putting me directly in touch with additional actors. Once I had attracted interest from a small group of consumers, some participants themselves started acting as snowball effect accelerators, by encouraging fellow nightlife consumers to speak to me or connecting me with further interviewees, who they saw as important voices for their group. Snowball sampling is a powerful way of exploring an organic social network by exploiting the social knowledge of its participants (Noy, 2008). In this sense, snowball sampling played an important role in my strategy of approaching a social event with an open and flexible ontology and letting myself be guided by my participants to deepen my knowledge of the field and progressively become more specific about the topic which I decided to discuss through the lens of my case study.



My final sample of participants can be divided as following:

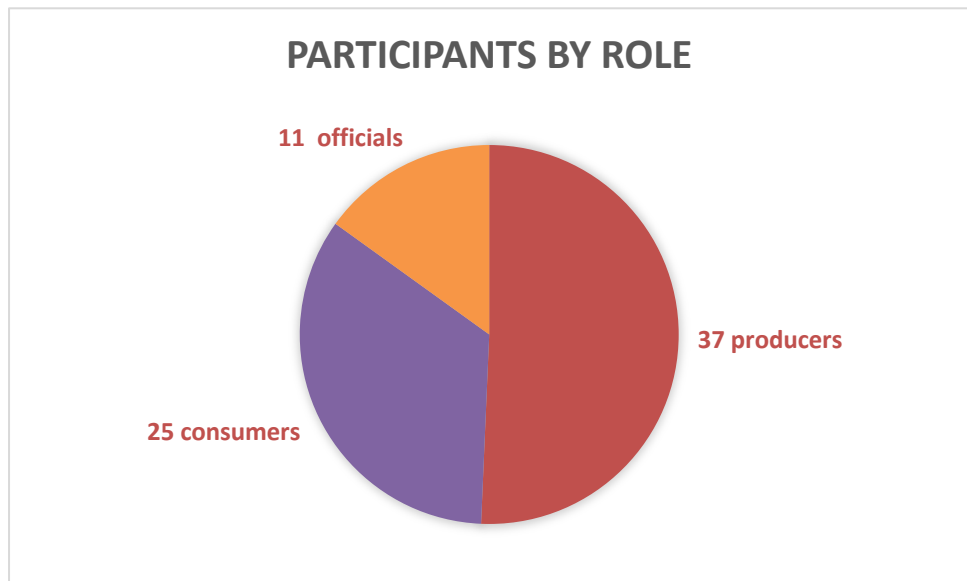


Figure 1 Participants by role

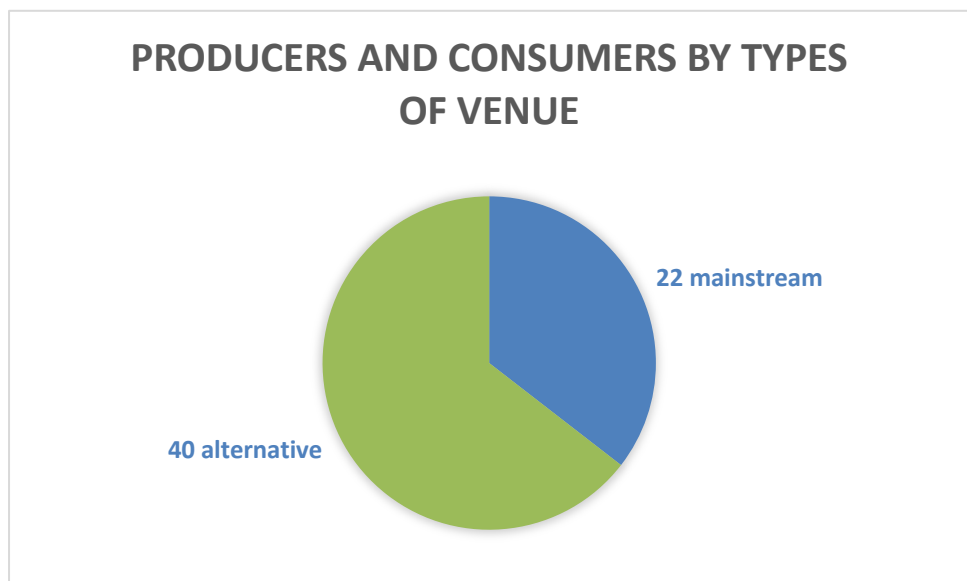


Figure 2 Producers and consumers by types of venue

As the figures above show, I have divided my data set into the roles that my participants played in the local nightlife scene, namely *producers* for participants engaged in organising nightlife events and/or running venues, *consumers* for participants who were attending nightlife without being involved in its organisation and *officials* for participants who were occupying or had

occupied an official function for which they were involved in planning, policing or funding the local nightlife scene.

Figure 1 above shows that producers constituted the largest cohort of my participants (37/73). The first reason for this is that, as I have explained, they were the easiest participants to identify. They were also very responsive and, once I had interviewed nearly 40 of them, I found myself with an already significant data set. Interviewing consumers and officials was definitely necessary to build up a complete picture, but the essence of my data was in the interviews that I conducted the nightlife producers before I started approaching consumers. The second reason was that, despite the differences of perspective between consumers and producers, a vast majority of accounts converged and I quickly reached a point of saturation where interviewees started to deliver similar stories. I was also aware of not accumulating more data than I could handle. Finally, I need to mention that numerous producers identified as consumers as well. If the division between nightlife professionals and consumers was very clear amongst mainstream participants, the habit of attending nightlife venues and being actively involved in the cultural nightlife scene was not unusual within the alternative scene.

In my sample, I also subdivided producers and consumers (Figure 2) depending on the type of venues where I met them. Because the primary topic of this thesis became the regime of space within which nightlife venues operate and due to the history of Geneva's licencing system (see chapter 4 for more details), it made sense to differentiate between nightlife producers who benefitted from informal arrangements with the State and those who were fully licenced. A majority of the producers who I spoke to were still operating thanks to the State's tolerance, either because the local authorities simply turned a blind eye to their activities or under a state of exception, sometimes formalised by a tacit agreement, sometimes legitimised by occasional event licences. In my typology of venues, I also introduced a distinction between alternative venues and mainstream venues. Again, using the regime of space as the main lens of analysis for my data, I considered venues as alternative,

if they were ran: 1. on a non-for-profit basis (venues whereby the profit generated at the door and bar are reinvested in cultural production); and 2. were collectively and/or horizontally managed. Mainstream applied to businesses that were: 1. run as for-profit businesses; and 2. individually owned or managed.

La Gravière was the only alternative venue which was fully licenced. At the forefront of the movement of resistance for alternative spaces, their choice to apply for a full licence was very interesting both because it translated the anxiety created by the state's crack down on non-licenced venues. It also materialised the challenges of fitting an alternative ethos of space management into the constraints of a neoliberal framework.

I conducted interviews with two groups of bar managers situated in two of the most popular drinking destinations in Geneva, namely Rue de l'École de Médecine and Rue Blanc-Valet. Their resistance against policing measures and their strong presence in the media made them unavoidable. Their stories also strongly illustrated the financial and administrative pressures induced by a neoliberal regime applied to the NTE.

*Table 1: Typology of the venues where participants were identified*

	Informal (regime of tolerance, licenced on an event basis)	Formal (fully licenced)
Mainstream: -for-profit -regime of ownership	2	2
Alternative: -non-for-profit (circular economy of culture) -collective management	6	1

In the spring 2020, as I entered the writing phase, I conducted four additional interviews with nightlife actors who had played a role in consulting and organising the sector during the formulation of the licencing system that was introduced in 2016. Two of them were already part of my sample of participants and two were new interviewees. In addition, I analysed the documents related to this process (laws, bylaws, minutes of the Council board's meetings, press releases from the Great Council of the Night and media articles), some of which I found online and others were given to me by these participants.

### **3.5.2 Analysis methods**

The analysis of my empirical data was geared around a large body of interviews (52 interviews involving 73 participants in over 150 hours of recording in total). I initially intended to transcribe and code them but quickly realised that this process was time consuming when only a small quantity of information was retained.

I therefore used the Rapid Qualitative Evaluation method (Vindrola-Padros, 2018, 2021) a process which allows the researcher to a) proceed to the analysis of the data directly from the recordings b) use mind mapping to reflecting on emerging findings c) develop rapid techniques of data coding analysis such as charts to extract recurring themes in the interviews.

Practically, I listened to each interview actively and proceeded to summarise in a few sentences what I saw as the key themes of the conversation. I then proceeded to listen a second time, extracted and transcribed only a few quotes from each interview. These were then coded by themes to facilitate the analysis and the use of captions in the analysis chapters. This method of extraction of qualitative data is described as "aggregative/interpretative" (Noyes and Lewin, 2011) because it allows the researcher to look for clusters of evidences, whilst reflecting upon the emerging topics of the data, an

iterative process which places the voice of participants at the center, whilst allowing for key themes to build in importance (Roen et al., 2006).

### **3.5.3 Thinking about positionality: performing as an “ex-insider”**

There has never been an activist agenda behind this research and I believe that the way this thesis is epistemologically framed makes that clear. I do not exclude that bringing together the voices of those who act in favour of spaces nightlife in Geneva where experimentation is possible might have political consequences. I have nonetheless never grounded this PhD in scholar activism or action research, in the sense that I have never intentionally aimed to produce any political outcome by the means of this PhD. This research would nonetheless be lacking solidity if I did not reflect upon my connections with Geneva’s nightlife in general and my commitment to nightlife activism prior to the PhD in particular.

From 2000, I started collecting records primarily purchased in local record shops across Geneva, Montpellier and Paris where I was a geography student. This resulted in multiple connections with other record collectors and party organisers. Between 2005 and 2007, I then followed a postgraduate programme in critical studies at the University of Art and Design in Geneva where I developed a research project that aimed at discussing the role of party spaces in cities, a practice which I developed further, curating multiple shows and events around nightlife. In 2010, I was commissioned by the culture department of Geneva to co-realise a study on the transformations of nightlife in the city. This resulted in the creation of the Great Council of the Night, a lobbying group that promotes the inclusion of nightlife actors in the design of public policies regarding nightlife. I was involved in every step of the creation of the Great Council of the Night and presided it from its beginnings in 2011 until 2014. Needless to say, I entered the PhD with my own story of the Genevan nightlife.

In *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography*, Kindon describes Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a strategy to “support the group with whom you are working to share the benefits of their involvement with others and to take initiative to address their concerns. (...) PAR is used most frequently by geographers with an activist agenda to work for social change...” (Kindon, 2005, p.207). Considering my implication in the Genevan nightlife scene both as a cultural actor and an activist, action research could have been an option to perpetuate and expand these commitments. I nonetheless decided to position this research differently, for three reasons. First, the practicalities of being based in Leeds for my PhD meant that I was somehow geographically disconnected from day-to-day nightlife and nightlife activism in Geneva. In this context, pretending I was willing to be part of something I was geographically estranged from would have at the very least been ambivalent. After years of organising and working with actors of the nightlife in Geneva, me moving to Leeds to initiate a PhD was perceived in my nightlife network as a step back, not as a different kind of engagement. Realistically, it would have felt unethical of me to take advantage of the network I had built through the years to pretend that my PhD agenda was contributing to their work and not the other way around. The second argument for staying out of the scope of research action was an intellectual stand: the struggles for spaces of nightlife in the context of Geneva, it seemed to me, had more to say about urban social justice than “just” counteracting repressive policies. I do not imply that action research isn’t able to produce theory. But I thought that this research endeavour should be directed towards expanding the theory rather than supporting the struggle. This position was also a form of contribution to the legitimisation of my participants’ demands. Last but not least, my third argument was that I wanted to tell a story that was broader than my own experience (and frustrations) in regards the transformation of nightlife in Geneva. To be coherent with the design of my research, I had to be inclusive of a broader set of subjectivities than the ones of my close “nightlife social circle”. In order to address my participants in an appropriate manner, I had to be transparent about my own involvement in the scene. But in doing so, I also positioned myself clearly in a way that gave more importance to their story than mine. As Hebert words it, it was important: “to suspend theoretical predilections as much as possible, to avoid allowing

an overwrought conceptual apparatus to obscure the ability to see the world through the eyes of those one studies” (Hebert, 2010, p.73). In my case it meant that I was able to make the most my experience and network of the field to access interviewees but also detach myself from me personal experience.

To attend nights out, I was always conscious to dress comfortably and in the least conspicuous way. Throughout my nights out, I also carried a clip board and some stationery for notes. Both the plain clothes and this basic research material were strong enough signifiers that my presence was not motivated by the party. I believe that my experience and ease in the nightlife environment gave me the confidence to engage with consumers in a friendly and engaging manner whilst communicating transparently about the reason for my presence. In this context, I had at heart to build situated objectivity, a position describes does not exclude the researcher from the story of their research but situates them transparently in relation to their participants, allowing the production of “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1988). Making epistemological decisions helped me positioning myself in relation to my object of study. It did also allow me to be clearly situated when I approached my participants.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion to this chapter, I would like to mention that, in the methodological preview which I designed in preparation for fieldwork, I had planned to organise visual-material based focus groups as a research method. The incentive to use this method came from both my desire to discuss the implication of visual artists in alternative spaces of nightlife and an anxiety that despite my best efforts participants would be uncomfortable talking about nightlife “out of context” and would struggle to engage in more abstract discussions about how constitutive to their values their experiences in the night were. These focus groups never happened - not because they were not feasible but because they did not need to. Excluding the more experimental fringe of my methodological toolbox obviously gave a very classical look to my

research methods. But, as fieldwork progressed, organising these groups genuinely did not feel necessary and would have probably created very engineered situations. I was constantly impressed by the reflexive potential of my participants, even in the most traditional interview setting. Some were more quiet and seemed a bit intimidated by the recorder but generally that was because they struggled to see how their voice could feed into an academic discourse. With the vast majority of them, a few questions about their preferences and habits was enough for them to start delivering the substance of anything I have written in this thesis.

Conceptualising reflexivity as a methodological framework and a strategy must have made me “reflexivity aware” and I hope that I have somehow contributed with a coherent design framework. The initial inclusion of visual material-based research methods was an expression of my anxieties that there would not be enough substance in nightlife stories to talk about urban politics. The methodological journey towards this PhD has convinced me otherwise. Using reflexivity as a strategy allowed me to take advantage of the constraints associated with researching nightlife.



## **4. Reclaiming experimentation: the production of spaces of nightlife in Geneva**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will present Geneva as a case study, looking at the circumstances which led to expressions of resistance around spaces of nightlife in this Swiss city. The aim of this chapter is to answer my second research question: “How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of nightlife?” In order to do so, I will use the first part of the chapter to discuss the legacy of countercultural actors in shaping and disseminating practices of co-production of spaces in which to experiment. In the second part, I will explore the rapid dismantlement of the Genevan experimental scene between 2007 and 2008, with the aim of discussing how spaces of experimentation have had to adapt to the neoliberal urban environment in “the second most expensive city in the world” (ats/Newsnet, 2015). In the third and last part, I will look at how nightlife became a focal point of the struggle for spaces of experimentation in Geneva, and consider the collective agencies that emerged specifically around spaces of nightlife in this recent context. Throughout the chapter, I will consider the role of the state as both an agent of neoliberal urban policies and a key actor in the discussion around the preservation of counter-spaces in the neoliberal city.

### **4.2 Alternative cultural spaces in Geneva: a local history of spaces of experimentation**

Throughout the 1960s, cities across Europe were shaken by movements of social contestation and Geneva was no exception. More specific to Geneva was the central role that cultural actors played in shaping and organising urban social movements in the city. Based on an ethos of experimentation as a different lifestyle in a different city, artist-led movements materialised in occupation of both public and private buildings, which were used for experimenting with the arts as much as with experimental forms of communal

living (Gros, 1987; Ruegg, 2004). If the legacy of the local history of counterculture-led urban struggles is still present, its terms have shifted. In recent years, more than traditional art scenes such as theatre or visual arts, it is the night-time cultural spaces that have been triggered resistance. It is the story of both this legacy and the emergence of nightlife as a focal point that I will present in this chapter.

#### **4.2.1 The emergence of counterculture-led struggles in Geneva**

In Geneva, since the 1970s, alternative cultural spaces provided with a rich environment in which artistic, social and spatial experimentations were made possible and nurtured. The history of countercultural spaces in the city is also the one of the struggles for spaces whereby these experimentations could be possible (Pattaroni, 2020).

In the wake of May '68 unrest in Paris, Swiss cities were regularly shaken by youth-led urban social movements. In this context, cultural activism crossed over with feminist, civil rights and anti-army movements, to name a few (Gros, 1987). Contesting the cultural establishment, young cultural actors denounced cultural institutions as spaces of the reproduction of elitist forms of art and demanded cultural spaces where more inclusive and experimental forms of art could exist (Sutermeister, 2000). It is not an exaggeration to say that, in Switzerland in the 1970s, the boom in countercultural spaces largely came as a consequence of the connection between avant-garde cultural scenes and youth-led urban social movements. In Geneva like in other Swiss cities, post-68 movements were largely organised around cultural scenes. Youth-centred cultural practices acted as magnifiers for the lack of provision of space for young people to experiment with artistic forms that didn't fit within the cultural establishment (Kottelat, 2015; Table Ouverte, 1980).

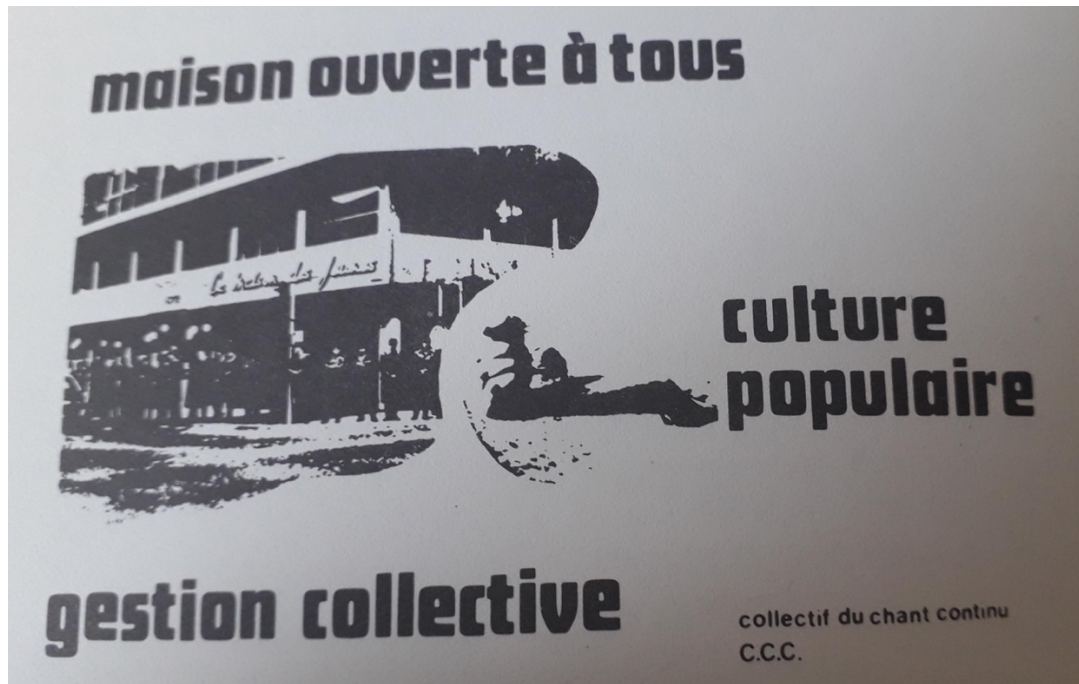
The first artist-led campaign for an alternative cultural space, calling for an autonomous centre, was led in the autumn of 1970 by a coalition of experimental theatre practitioners who named themselves "the Coordination

of Marginal Groups” (Gros, 2000). Here we can see that, even before the term alternative culture is coined, the idea of “marginal culture” becomes a collectively imagined space where artistic practices can feed into the narrative of a different society in general and a different city in particular (Meynet, 2000).

Pattaroni et al. (2020) and Gros (1987) provide with an extensive archive of images of the early counterculture-centred urban struggles that changed the relation between space and the arts in throughout from the 1970s and until the 1990s in Geneva. The pictures below document the occupations of two youth centres, Saint Gervais and Jonction, highlighting the lack of provision of spaces whereby youth cultures could be experimented with.



*Image 2. Police response to the occupation of the Saint Gervais Youth Centre, 1971. The banner says: “free cinema”. Photo: Carlos Rodriguez (Gros, 1987, p.26)*



*Image 3, poster for the occupation of the Saint Gervais Youth Centre by the "Collective for Continual Singing" (CCC), 1975. The poster states: "Centre open to everyone. Popular culture. Collectively ran." Photo: Carlos Rodriguez. (Pattaroni, 2020, p.48)*

The year 1971 marked a pivotal moment for the cross-over between experimental culture and urban social movements in Geneva. The experimental theatre company Les Tréteaux Libres occupied a disused protestant temple to perform three experimental theatre pieces of their repertoire (Sutermeister, 2000, p.96). Through their institutional critique of mainstream theatre, Les Tréteaux Libres brought forward their demand for more spaces of cultural experimentation, critiquing mainstream theatre not only as a form but also as an enclosed, hierarchical space disconnected from everyday life.



*Image 4, protest organised by AMR (Association pour la musique improvisée) for a musical centre in Geneva, 1975. Photo credit : AMR archives, (Pattaroni, 2020, p.50)*

Throughout the seventies, numerous artist-led protests and actions took place in Geneva. Artists were involved in the squat movement too, a movement born in resistance to regeneration plans in the city centre. At this point, building occupations aimed to denounce the loss of social diversity induced by market-led regeneration and to disseminate a critique of how the process was facilitated by the state (Pattaroni, 2007). Occupying private buildings or infiltrating public infrastructures such as students' halls and youth centres, groups of artists managed to force their way into spaces and a myriad of experimental spaces came out of the ground: Ecart, Galerie Aurora, Salle Simon I Patino, AMR, CAC, Association pour la Danse Contemporaine, and Maison des Jeunes de Saint Gervais to name a few (Pattaroni and Piraud, 2020). This period marked the expansion of experimentation to all forms of visual and live arts but also the complete entanglement between the arts as a total lifestyle and an alternative regime of space. The St Gervais Youth Centre (Image 3 on previous page) played an important role in providing cheap and accessible spaces whereby radical forms of art could emerge alongside experimental forms of living. In Saint Gervais, spaces in which to experiment with theatre as an art form coexisted with the demand for more agency over artistic spaces and spaces of living. The first generation of cultural activists

such as the groups involved in the occupation of Saint Gervais contributed to the development of experimental space-building culture, constructing DIY spaces, building sets and props beyond the traditional labour division that ruled the theatre institution, including non-professional actors and connecting theatre with everyday life. The new lifestyle that emerged from the experimental art scene in Geneva highlighted the connection between artistic experimentations and experimentation with new modes of living, which were communal, low-income friendly, and organised around non-ownership, challenging gender roles and contesting industrial work regimes. They also played an important role in building and disseminating a collective narrative around the possibility to reclaim and self-build spaces designed around the practice of experimentation (Centre d'Iconographie Genevoise, 1971).

#### **4.2.2 “Alternative culture” in the most squatted city in Europe: experimental spaces, experimental arts and collective agencies in Geneva**

In this section, I will look at the emergence of the idea of alternative culture in Geneva throughout the 1980s, an idea which brought the struggles for different kind of spaces and different kinds of artistic expressions together, with an ethos of experimentation at their core (Rossiaud, 2004). In order to do so, I will explore examples of spaces that materialise the cross-over between urban activism and cultural activism.

In the mid-80s, the movement around countercultural spaces of experimentation in Switzerland intensified, sometimes quite dramatically, with youth-led social movements leading sometimes violent confrontations with the police in Swiss cities such as Bern, Zurich and Lausanne. The Genevan urban landscape was particularly marked by waves of building occupations. But unlike other Swiss cities' governments, the Geneva State's response was more consensual. Throughout the 1980s, the squat movement grew in Geneva but the narrative around squats shifted. When, in the 1970s, the political motivation for squatting was mainly geared around resistance to state-led urban regeneration, the contestation that animated the 1980s squat scene

focused more on the issue of urban speculation, denouncing the very low occupation rates of buildings in Geneva and the speculation on properties. It is at this moment that the squat movement started shaping an anti-neoliberal discourse (Pattaroni, 2007). In 1983, Claude Haegi, a Conservative MP in charge of public buildings, invented a legal hack, “trust agreements” (*contrats de confiance*) (Petrocchi, 2007), a contract signed between the state of Geneva and squatters that allowed the occupation of unused buildings under the supervision of the state, subject to the “good” use of spaces and the absence of building application on the premises (Pattaroni, 2005). In this context, compared to other Swiss cities, Geneva distinguished itself by its politics of tolerance thanks to an unexpected coalition, which brought together cultural activists and the state of Geneva (Mounir et al, 2013). The state’s motivations were clearly to avoid the brutality that resulted from the local state responses elsewhere in Switzerland. But squatting also gained in popularity and became increasingly visible through art-led campaigns (Deuber Ziegler and Ruegg, 2000; Pattaroni, 2020). It is interesting to note that this period marked a shift in the regime of counter-spaces. On the one hand, squatters and urban activists moved the narrative away from housing so that countercultural spaces became the central point of their campaigns. On the other hand, the state of Geneva adopted a policy which was quite uniquely anti-neoliberal, offering to urban activists the support of the state to use spaces in a way that strongly contradicted the neoliberal order.



*Image 5 Protest demanding spaces for rock music, 30 January 1988. Photo credit: Interphoto, Geneva. (Mounir et al. 2013, p.81)*

As an example, the dialogue between cultural activist and Geneva City Council led to the creation of spaces of experimentation such as L'Usine, a major autonomous cultural centre in the European artistic scene, which opened in 1989 under the pressure of the collective État d'Urgence in cooperation with the local authorities and within the premises of a city-owned former gold refinery. The collaborative process which led to the opening of L'Usine is thoroughly documented by Mounir et al. through interviews of institutional and cultural actors who were active at the time and illustrated by the photos below from their book *Post Tenebras Rock* (Mounir et al. 2013).





*Image 6 État d'Urgence members realising renovation work inside L'Usine (Mounir et al. 2013, p.81)*

It is important to highlight that, from the start, if the existence of spaces of cultural experimentation in Geneva was thus deeply rooted in an activist-led democratic process, their realisation was the result of the combination between cultural activism and political decisions which challenged neoliberalism ideologically, socially, and institutionally (Cahill, 2011). In this sense, the existence of spaces of cultural experimentation in Geneva was always publicly and politically debated. This has proven to make them somehow more vulnerable once the state of Geneva retreated into neoliberal policies three decades later but has, for some of them, consolidated their existence through processes of legitimisation and (at times contested) institutionalisation.

By the mid-eighties and until 2008, Geneva was thought to be the most squatted city of Europe (Rossiaud, 2000; Le Monde Diplomatique, 2007). Weissenbach states that, from the early days, the vibrancy of the Genevan alternative scene was made possible thanks to the cross-over between cultural and urban activism:

“There is (...) an obvious link between movements led by arts-focused associations and squats. The latter were home to people who themselves were engaged in artistic production and will use the premises to perform their art. This is a sort of

core group of people looking for a non-mainstream lifestyle, a sort of well organised margin, with communal life at its centre and liberated, at least in parts, from the rules imposed by the market.”

(2000, p.134).

This alliance was possible as artists and squatters converged towards a critique of the impoverishment of urban experience in the capitalist city and alternative culture became central to the narrative of a different city. In this sense, the role played by cultural actors was central to the formation and dissemination of collective subjectivities around alternative forms of art, alternative social environments and alternative spaces where both were possible.

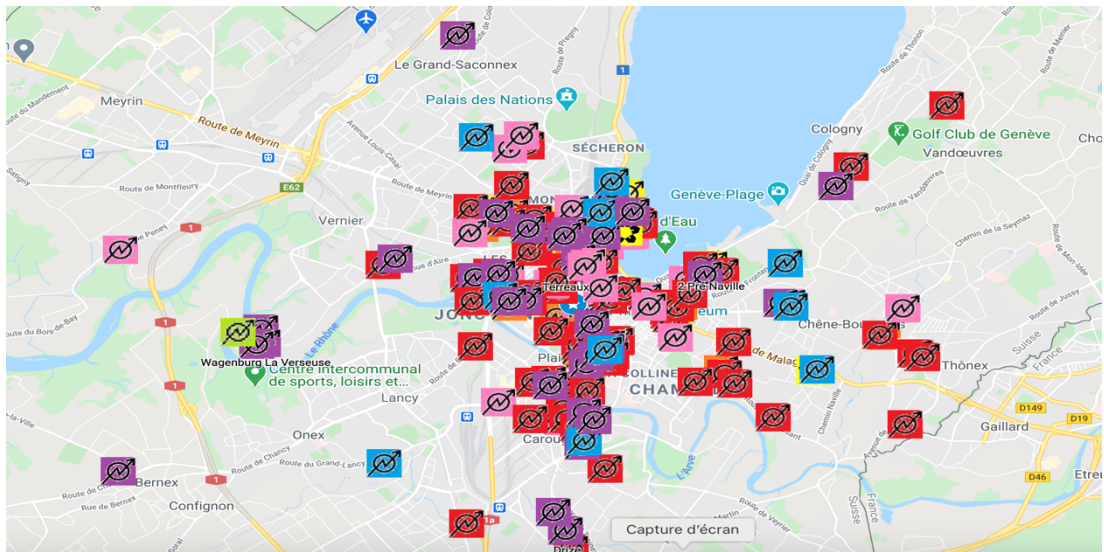


Figure 3 Grinevald, M-H. alias Marylou Genève-Kalvingrad. 2020. Map of squats in Geneva, guide Culture et Tourisme. [Online]. [Accessed 18 October 2021]. Available from: <http://www.google.com/maps/>

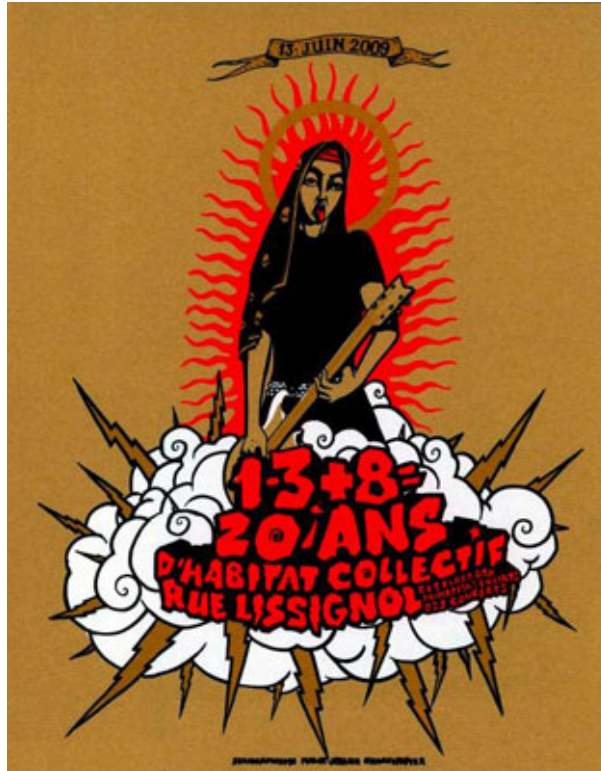


*Images 7 and 8 Concerts organised by Cave12 in the squat Rhino, 2006. On the left, Keiji Haino in concert in the basement of Rhino. On the right concert in one of Rhino squat's bedrooms curated by Christian Graeser as part of the series chambre#. Photo: Marion Innocenzi*

In the words of Pattaroni and Piraud, the invention of alternative culture marks the moment when “the cultural question became an urban issue” (2020b, p.74). Some alternative venues were strictly cultural, in the sense that they catered solely for artistic activities, as was the case of L’Usine and Artamis, the two major cultural sites in Geneva at the time. Most squats, however, brought together a variety of spatial experimentations as is the case for Cave 12 pictured above. The best illustration of this overlap between the cultural struggle and the urban struggle is the existence of a multiplicity of spatial arrangements in occupied premises in Geneva. Venues such as Cave12 operated in the basement of the iconic squat Rhino. The photos above show two performances of experimental music in two no less experimental settings: on the left in the basement (which was Cave12’s regular premises) and on the right in one of the squat’s rooms as part of a series of performances for which the public was invited into private rooms.

Similarly, the Lissignol squat, which sat on the eponymous street, featured collective housing units, several art studios, the art gallery Piano Nobile in the attic (which occasionally became a cinema), the LGBT-friendly venue le Phare on the ground floor and the Madone Bar in the basement (Chantre, 2010). In this context, experimental culture became the public side of an urban lifestyle

that allowed, facilitated and promoted all forms of experimentation. This experimental culture also challenged the limits of privacy within squats and brought a much broader audience than the squatters themselves.



*Image 9 Madone Bar, Flyer distributed by the Madone Bar for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lissignol squat, 2009.*

To conclude this subsection, I would like to insist that, for nearly four decades, informal and unregulated nightlife venues largely dominated the Genevan nightscape due to a strict regulation which limited the number of licences (see further information in subsection 4.3.1) . In a context where cultural and urban activism often overlapped to create the possibilities for spaces of cultural experimentation to exist, a number of experimental spaces were also spatial accidents. When squats were primarily about housing, cultural spaces in squatted housing buildings were run on an irregular basis and with very light-touch infrastructure, making the most out of unused corners of the building. Nonetheless, cultural spaces in squats were also open and accessible to a broader public. Providing with a rich, lively and inclusive cultural life, they became very popular in Geneva (Favre, 2017), which, as I will explain further, made them the focal point of collective agencies in defence of counter-spaces.

### 4.2.3 Spaces of nightlife, spaces of experimentation

In this section, I want to focus specifically on spaces of nightlife in which experimentation was possible. My aim is first, to look at how these spaces have developed in the interstices of Geneva's urban environment to create this unique nightscape around which strong collective subjectivities were built; and second, to discuss how their politics has built around experimentation.

As explained above, the squat movement in Geneva tackled the commodification of space by offering alternative modes of communal living in buildings left empty for speculation purposes. If the right to housing was the primary motivation, it wasn't rare to see squatters turn one room into a communal party space, which, unlike private living spaces, was more or less regularly open to the public. Rhino, as an example, was an apartment block and was primarily centred around experimental forms of communal living. They nonetheless featured a café-restaurant, le Bistrok, on the ground floor, and a music venue, Cave 12, in the basement (Harari, 2017).

Another prime example of an experimental space of nightlife that became extremely popular is Chez Brigitte. Founded in 1994, it was famous for being the first LGBTQI squat in Geneva and hosted parties in both communal and private spaces with a wildly experimental mind set.



*Image 10 Outside of Chez Brigitte during a party held in the squat.*

Although Chez Brigitte did feature a bar/club space that was run on a regular basis over several periods of time, it remained totally informal and unregulated (Herzog, 1997). Chez Brigitte was an experimental space in all possible terms. The squat itself and by extension its public moments militantly promoted non-normative sexual choices and gender identities. In that sense, Chez Brigitte openly branded itself around the total freedom to drop gender and sexual norms and let those who entered it experiment with their identities. If it was also straight-friendly, Chez Brigitte also defined itself as an alternative to the mainstream gay spaces that Geneva had at the time, which Chez Brigitte members described as financially inaccessible for most young queer residents, and which they also criticised for promoting a very normalised and spectacularised vision of gayness (Dimo, 2016). The events held at Chez Brigitte were incredibly eclectic and so was the musical selection, as destabilising cultural norms became a trademark of Chez Brigitte. The venue became famous for its themed parties with dressing up challenges and surprising rules. Managed and catered by the squat's residents, the bar money helped them maintain the building in which they lived. The space was regularly entirely redecorated and transformed by highly creative residents. The venue also kept experimenting with opening hours (these were never fixed, to distinguish the venue from a for-profit mainstream place). Last but not least, several business models were also experimented with, with some nights where the bar was run on a pay-as you-feel basis for example.



*Images, 11, 12 and 13 Chez Brigitte Top: View of the bar space. Bottom left: party in one of a private kitchen in the squat. Bottom right: flyer a for porno star themed party. Not dated.*

Beyond spaces like Chez Brigitte, cultural activism became so central to the urban struggles in Geneva throughout the 1980s and the 1990s that experimental cultural spaces expanded beyond those accidental or ad hoc cultural spaces that flourished in squats. A great many occupations and negotiations with the State of Geneva effectively resulted in the creation of spaces exclusively dedicated to cultural experimentation. This is the case of two major cultural centres, L'Usine and Artamis. L'Usine's premises were never occupied but instead were the resolution of a long negotiation with the state and it still operates in a building owned by the Geneva City Council to

this day. The premises were given for use in 1989 as a form of public funding in kind to the organisation État d'Urgence, a collective of cultural actors that claimed youth-led cultural spaces in Geneva. Artamis was open between 1996 and 2009 and occupied a whole disused industrial estate where dozens of artists' collectives operated within more than 10 former office blocks.

Artamis and l'Usine had in common that they were spaces of cultural experimentation, production, performance and consumption. Because of that versatility, these spaces hosted a variety of activities throughout the day but became public at night, which is why their activities (but also the way they are seen by the public) are strongly associated with night cultures.



*Image 14 Total Acid party at L'Etage, Artamis, 2008.*

Genevan experimental nightlife spaces hosted all sorts of cultural crossovers and hybridisations. Artamis is a prime example: it has hosted a broad variety of musical venues, a cinema, a theatre, a print shop, an art gallery, artist studios and workshops. Born from the occupation of a site left empty by the public power company, Artamis saw collectives of 'artists' self-build and run spaces designed to maximise their potential to experiment (Faxculture, 1997). This culturally vibrant environment allowed art practitioners to experiment with



news forms of art obviously, but also to subvert them and expose them to an audience in the most experimental manner. Nightlife was at the core of this non-for-profit culture-focused environment, as it represented a collective moment where all dimensions of experimentation could converge: the artistic, the social and the spatial.

### **4.3 Spaces of nightlife in the neoliberal city**

As I will explain in this chapter, for nearly two decades – from the late 60s and until the end of the first decade of 2000s – informal nightlife spaces where experimentations were possible largely dominated the Genevan nightscape in number of venues due to a strict regulation of the number of licences. Such spaces had for the most part one or all of the following qualities: they were informal, unregulated, self-managed, culture-centred and socially inclusive. In this section I will explain the conditions under which the nightscape was radically transformed in Geneva in less than a decade. I will also expose the loss of experimental potential that resulted from the transition between predominantly alternative forms of nightlife venues and the emergence of the NTE in the city. Last but not least, I will look at the collective subjectivities that have emerged around experimental nightlife alongside this process.

#### **4.3.1 Nightscape in transformation: a sharp transition towards the Night-Time Economy**

Until 1997, the Canton of Geneva's licencing law was constrained by a "clause du besoin", literally "limitation by need" (République et Canton de Genève, 1987). This bylaw, dating from 1932, strictly limited the number of licences within the Genevan territory, giving the local authorities the power to restrict the number of public venues (Dupont and Fontanet, 1993). The "limitation by need" was abandoned in January 1997 to comply with competition laws (Guinand, 2012).

The late liberalisation of the Genevan hospitality sector was partly responsible for the flourishing of a countermodel of spaces in the night described above. Unlike other cities in Europe whereby the transition towards the NTE with easy access to licences and extended opening hours was being pushed forward (see chapter 2 and specifically part 2.2.3 for references of the development of the NTE), Geneva's night-time regulation maintained licenced premises in a state of historical status quo up until the turn of the millennium. Throughout the eighties and nineties, commercial licences continued to be scarce and existing venues literally looked like spaces of another time with limited opening hours and with their activity confined to selling drinks and food at specific hours (Patrimoine suisse Genève, 2009). Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the reality of licenced spaces therefore sharply contrasted with the vivacity, creativity and exuberance of the unregulated spaces of experimentation that populated the Genevan nightlife. If it is impossible to assert what the exact numbers of unregulated nightlife spaces there will have been in the city, they certainly imposed themselves as a standard for Genevan nightlife goes for nearly three decades.



*Images 15 and 16 The Bar Ephémère, in the Squat the Villereuse was entirely self-built and self-managed by the squatters. It never held a licence. When gigs and parties were hosted, the crowd regularly overflowed the tramway tracks. Between 1992-1998.*



*Image 17 Bistrok, the self-managed bar/café/restaurant in the squat Rhino. Not dated.*

The liberalisation of the licenced hospitality sector resulted in a surge of new venues, with the Genevan Licencing Office (Service du Commerce) estimating that the number of licences nearly tripled in less than a decade, from 1118 licenced premises in 2001 to more than 3000 in 2009 (Ville de Genève, Département de la Culture, 2010). In that sense, like most European cities, Geneva saw the development of a corporate night-time sector. This evolution nonetheless was much sharper and much more dramatically experienced by Genevans. This was obviously due to the quick deregulation of a market which in effect had remained practically protected by the state for nearly a century. In the context of the neoliberal city, as Aalbers (2016) points it, deregulation should be understood not only as the removal of regulations (and particularly laws regulating the economy) that hamper the free market, but also as a reform of the legal system in a way that pushes forward and normalises neoliberalism. If the new regulation on the hospitality sector allowed more private businesses to open, the liberalisation was accompanied by a new legal framework in which spaces of nightlife had to be much more strictly regulated, for example being under the management of a hospitality professional holding

a licence. In that sense, the abandonment of the *clause du besoin* in Geneva illustrates perfectly a “political process of marketisation” (Aalbers, 2016, p.472), a process by which spaces of nightlife were incorporated into a market but under conditions of neoliberalism, a model which excluded any other regime of space (Jessop and Sum, 2006).

In addition to the transition towards a liberalised market happening over a relatively short period of time, the new corporate nightscape emerged at the expense of the experimental model that had flourished in margins and around of Geneva’s experimental spaces. As the transition towards a liberalised NTE facilitated the opening of new venues, the political narrative around nightlife also largely shifted from a tolerant consensus for informal spaces towards a stricter interpretation of the law and less acceptance of a diversity of models of spaces (Ville de Genève, 1997). In 2015 for example, the Liberal State Councillor Pierre Maudet intended to put an end to the state of exception that l’Usine benefited from since opening in 1989: the State had delivered an informal licence which allowed l’Usine to operate under one collective and non-nominative licence, in accordance with its ethos of collective self-management between members and the various structures inside l’Usine (this situation is discussed more in depth in chapter 6 in which some of my exchanges with L’Usine’s coordinator are reproduced). L’Usine successfully resisted his demand to buy individual and nominative licences for each venue operating within its premises instead of one global authorisation (Armanios, 2015). Nonetheless, this situation polarised the political response to the demand for an experimental model of nightlife spaces to be allowed to subsist in Geneva. The pragmatic consensus that had ruled for three decades was forfeited (Mounir, 2015). While left-wing parties saw in alternative nightlife the legacy of a vision of a different city and backed the collective subjectivities rallying behind it, right-wing parties retreated behind a vision of nightlife as a market and increasingly depicted experimental spaces as unfair competitors for regulated for-profit businesses.

### **4.3.2 The (temporary) end of informal spaces of nightlife**

For over three decades until 2008, the Genevan nightscape was dominated by venues which were unlicensed, unregulated, and self-managed often by collective groups rather than individuals (owners, managers, etc). Extensions of spaces of everyday life experiments, informal nightlife venues operated as space laboratories where artistic experimentation was within the reach of professional art practitioners and amateurs alike (Faxculture, 1997). In the absence of regulation, space itself was a matter of experimentation, spatial norms were played with, and premises were regularly reconfigured.

Between 2007 and 2008, this model of informal nightlife was brusquely wiped off the Genevan map. In this section, I would like to point out 1) a shift in political narrative and the rejection of the state of consensus and tolerance with alternative regimes of space, 2) the execution of state-led urban regeneration projects, and 3) the rapid increase of pressure on real estate as the main factors that, alone or combined, have contributed to the quasi-annihilation of the Genevan experimental nightscape exception.

The election of Daniel Zapelli as the General Attorney for the State of Geneva in 2002 put an abrupt end to the politics of tolerance for squats in the city (Le Monde Diplomatique, 2007). Supported by a coalition of right-wing parties, Zapelli was very verbal about prioritising private property and put the rapid evictions of squats at the top of his political agenda. He publicly expressed his plan to evict every single one of the 127 squats that Geneva counts in 2007 (Harari, 2007). In July 2017, the squat Rhino was amongst the first to be booted out.

As mentioned before, Genevan squats opened as a reaction to real estate speculation, with the promise of de-commodifying urban space. Predominantly centred on the question of housing, Genevan squats didn't necessarily feature public spaces or spaces of nightlife. Squats nonetheless hosted some iconic spaces of cultural experimentation. With the eviction of

squats, spaces such as the Cave12, Bistrok, Escobar, Falaises, Bar-bi, just to name a few, disappeared. By the summer 2008, only 15 squats remained in the Genevan landscape, as opposed to 128 in 1997 (Radio Télévision Suisse, 2008). Daniel Zapelli resigned from his position in November 2011 before the end of his mandate, leaving behind him a controversy about the legality of the methods used to evict squats (Mansour, 2011; Maurisse, 2017).

In the local newspaper *Le Courrier*, Roderic Mounir wrote that: “the death of the Rhino is part of an implacable natural law, the sign of the times. Time has come for stronger handed Politics: zero tolerance, cleansing of self-managed spaces, compliance with regulation for everyone, nothing but regulation. This is the new Genevan order” (Mounir, [Online], 2007). The eviction of squats, indeed, was part of a broader shift in political trend in the city which harshly translated in the way spaces of experimentation in the night were policed. With the expansion of a night-time industry, Geneva’s experimental nightlife became increasingly scrutinised, constrained and pressurised by a whole array of public management tools and procedures (Simon, 2014), such as the creation of a register of noise complaints called Sonitus (Pieroni, 2014; Piffaretti, 2014). The escalation of legal innovation and the multiplication of bylaws (Pattaroni and Piraud, 2015) fed into the same political desire to constrain and standardise spaces of nightlife within the frame of a homogeneous industry (Pattaroni, 2020).

The closure of Artamis, a major alternative cultural complex, in 2008 marks another turn in the impoverishment of Geneva’s nightlife (Ulmer, 2008). Like l’Usine, Artamis was never squatted but an informal use of state-owned premises. 2008 marked the emergence of a large-scale state-led redevelopment project on the site prompted by federal regulations on soil quality. The ground of this former power station was found to be contaminated with arsenic, which represented an opportunity for the Genevan authorities to classify the site as unfit for purpose according to the federal law. Occupied between 1996 and 2008, Artamis featured dozens of art-centred experimental nightlife venues, amongst which L’Etage, the Piment Rouge, Shark and the K-

Bar. These spaces were all self-managed and none of them were licenced or formally regulated (Magnol, 2008).



*Image 18 View of Artamis with the Galpon theatre on the right, 2003.*

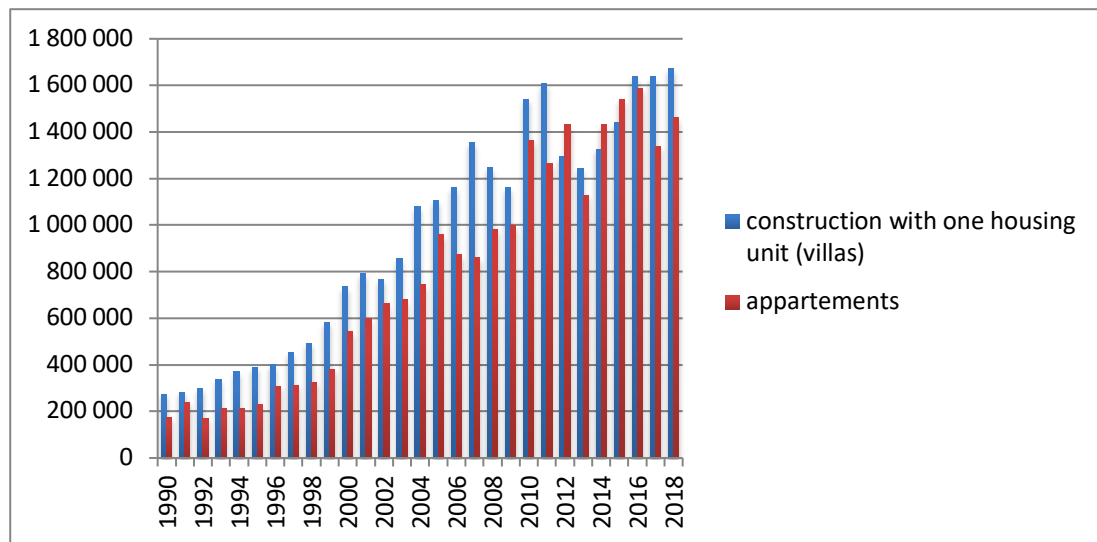


*Images 19 and 20 Left: view inside of the Shark, an art gallery, bar and party space in Artamis. Right: outside the Shark, 2007.*

As Pattaroni puts it, from the early 2000s onwards, “Geneva is characterised in particular by an urban environment subject to heavy real estate pressure combined with strict regulations. To a certain extent, it can be seen as a largely saturated urban space, where none of the fringes have subsisted – industrial wastelands, squats, empty land –...” (2020, p.12). To illustrate the pressure on urban space in Geneva, the graph below shows the sharp increase of the price of individual houses (in blue) and apartments (in orange). If the increase is relatively stable during the 90s, the data shows a sharp increase towards and after 2000. This evolution coincides with the moment when the political discourse started shifting from a consensus around tolerance and

collaboration with squatters and cultural activists who occupied spaces towards the reprioritisation of private property.

**Figure 4 Value of real estate transactions in Geneva in Swiss Francs since 1990**

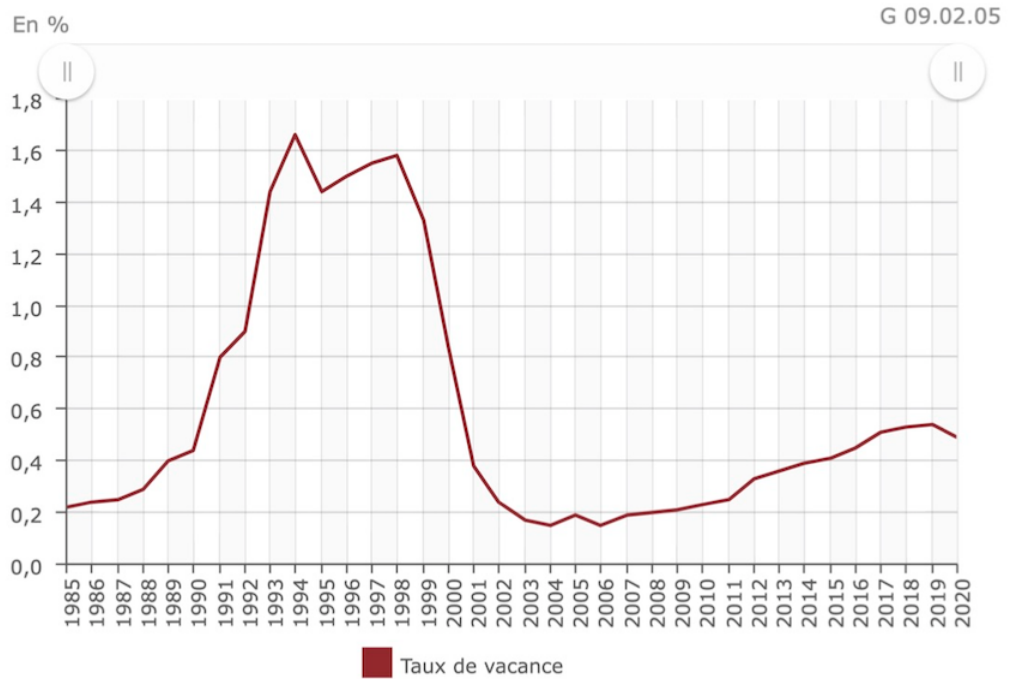


*Graph realised with data available from Office Cantonal de la Statistique Genève (OCSTAT), statistiques annuelles des transactions immobilières, 2020.*

Similarly, the two graphs below show the increasing pressure on real estate in the Canton. The first graph illustrates the occupancy rate of housing units and the second the same data for commercial premises. In both cases, the graphs dramatically visualise the situation that triggered occupations in the 80s, with a large number of unoccupied spaces. Across all three graphs, there is an obvious relationship between the occupancy rate and the rise of real estate value on the Geneva territory.

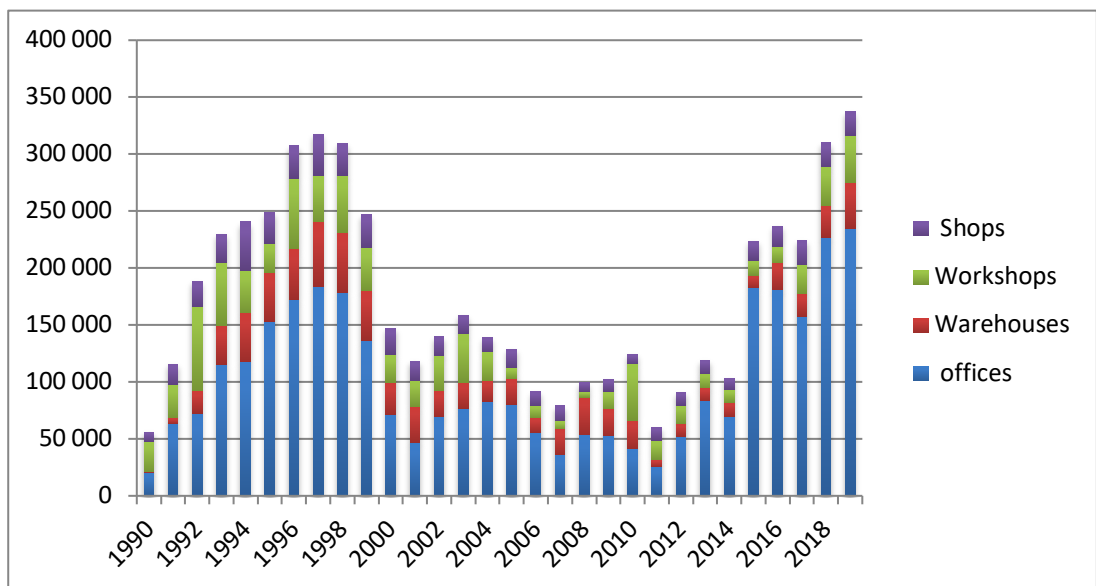


**Figure 5 Rate of vacancy for private housing in the Canton Geneva, 1985-2020**



Graph realised with data available from Office Cantonal de la Statistique Genève (OCSTAT), statistiques annuelles des transactions immobilières, 2020.

**Figure 6 Surface of vacant non-residential premises, by type of use, in the Canton Geneva 1990-2020**



Graph realised with data available from Office Cantonal de la Statistique Genève (OCSTAT), statistique des locaux vacants, 2020.

In 2015, Geneva was ranked “the second most expensive city in the world” (ats/Newsnet, 2015). The sharp increases of the prices of land and rent are symptomatic of the neoliberal transformations affecting Geneva as a city, a mutation that was induced and facilitated by “regulatory arrangements that strive to extend market mechanisms, relations, discipline and ethos” (Pinson and Morel, 2016, p.137). In conclusion to this section, I therefore want to reassert that, if the progressive disappearance of spaces of experimentation in the Genevan night is not imputable to one single reason (eviction of squats, state-led urban regeneration, increased pressure on the real estate market), it is instead the expression of an all-encompassing shift of political narrative and practice around experimentation in Genevan urban space. From the political consensus that emerged around spaces of experimentation in the late 1980s to the encapsulation of nightlife within the frame of the NTE two decades later, all these dynamics can be seen as symptoms of the conscious political decision to push Geneva into the arena of neoliberal governance, or what Pattaroni describes as the “shrinking of the space of possibilities” (2020, p.98).

#### **4.3.3 2010: The return of “the Boring City”**

Ironically, Geneva has a reputation for being a stern city, an image which, it has been illustrated in the first part of this chapter, has fed youth-led urban social movements to claim non-institutional spaces of culture. Historian Erika Deuber Ziegler (2000) amusingly connected Geneva’s Calvinist heritage – and notably the ban of dancing – with the city’s austere image. As a reference to this history of harsh morality, “Calvingrad” became a popular nickname for Geneva in the cultural activism milieu as the network of experimental spaces of nightlife started crumbling apart in the early 2000s. In 2012, one of L’Usine’s organisations was even renamed Kalvingrad with a “k” at the start, to add a level of “sovietisation” to the name in reference to the increase of state control and administrative pressure on L’Usine.



Image 21 “Banks everywhere. Culture nowhere” and “Calvingrad, cold city”, banners in a protest in support of the alternative cultural complex Artamis. 2008.

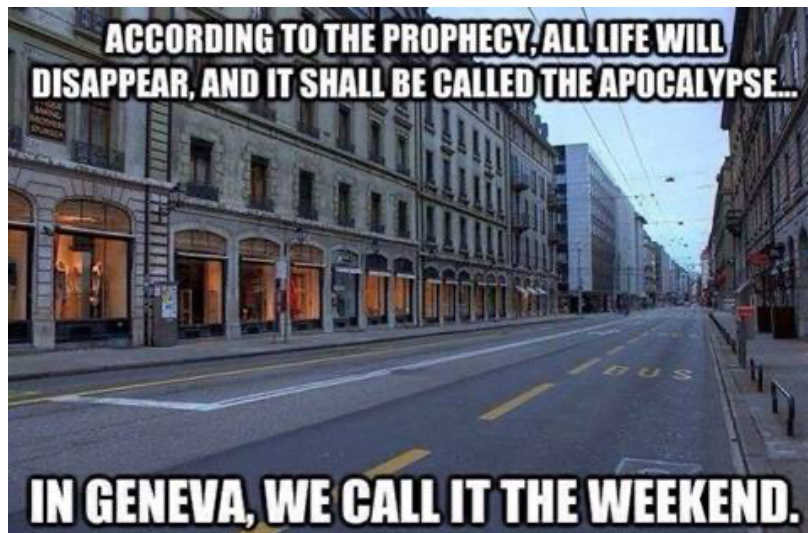


Image 22 Internet meme based on an actual view of the Rue du Rhône in Geneva, 2010

Quoting the (now defunct) Genevan newspaper *Le Temps*, an article in the *New York Times* described Geneva as a city that has “stopped dreaming”, where “counterculture may not be dead, but it is looking distinctly bruised” (Saltmarsh, 2011, [Online]). Even if the eviction of the squat Rhino in 2007 happened relatively frictionlessly, squat closures fed into the impression of a city that was being bled of its vital cultural spaces. Initially, the narrative built up around the loss of spaces was that Geneva had become boring, that the

nightscape had lost in attractiveness, an impression which was reinforced by the critical pressure put on the remaining spaces (Mertenat, 2010) like Walden, L'Ecurie and Le Patchinko, which increasingly suffered administrative pressure and were regularly pushed into more investment to meet with the standards of regulated spaces (Gottraux, 2016). Particularly catering for young nightlife customers and those with low budgets, the closure of experimental spaces of nightlife in Geneva materialised a clear loss of accessibility and inclusiveness in Geneva's nightlife (La Tribune de Genève, 2010), an aspect of the transformation induced by neoliberalism which I expand on in chapter 5.



Image 23 “Geneva was better before”, 2010. Video clip by, DEKOR-TZP-216, Hardcore Solution

In conclusion to this section, I would like to flag the interesting antagonism between the increase in spaces in terms of number on the one hand, that, as it has been described above, is facilitated by the liberalisation of nightlife as a market in Geneva during the first decade of 2000s (see part 4.3.1 for the data in the number of licences); and the feeling that something has been lost in Geneva's nightlife, on the other hand – a narrative that is widely reproduced in the media and accounts for the fact that Geneva's nightlife somehow has

been seen to become more sterile, less creative and more exclusive. I find this antagonism to capture well the image of the boring city as it translates a real sentiment for the transformations that Geneva as a city is undergoing. In the next part to this chapter, I will present the way this narrative of the boring city became a motto that rallied a broad variety of actors.

Most importantly, the figure of boring city encapsulates the sentiment that dominated Geneva's nightlife in regards the roll out of a new regime of space. At a time when new nightlife venues were popping up in the city and, on paper, Geneva had never seen such a high number of nightlife businesses, the experience of spaces of nightlife became more standardised and more exclusive creating this abrupt experience of the neoliberalism on urban spaces. I go more in-depth into this aspect of the transformation of the Genevan nightscape and how this has shaped my participants' narratives in chapter 6.

#### **4.4. Contesting the nightscape: nightlife-centred collective subjectivities and the role of nightlife actors**

In the last part of this chapter, I will focus on the collective subjectivities that emerged around spaces of nightlife in Geneva in the first half of the 2000s and culminated in 2010 with organised movements of resistance. I will also explore the main outcome of the movements: the integration of nightlife actors into the redrafting of Geneva's licencing system, a process which resulted in the exemption for cultural spaces to be fully licenced. In order to do so, I will start by bringing together secondary data evidencing the various expressions of resistance that emerged in reaction to the closure of spaces of nightlife in Geneva. I will then discuss how the resistance structured the collective subjectivities that emerged alongside and vice versa. Finally, I will look at the outcomes of the movement, notably how it was translated into the new licencing regulation and planning policies in the city.

#### **4.4.1 Organising collective subjectivities around Genevan spaces of nightlife**

In July 2007, when General Attorney Zappelli ordered the eviction of two Genevan squats, Rhino and La Tour, resistance and solidarity grew around their iconic status as alternative places of living (Mounir and Lecoultre, 2017). But these evictions provoked collateral damage too: three experimental music venues became homeless, one of which, Cave12, had accumulated 20 years of local and international reputation as a cutting-edge musical institution (Cave12, 2007). The particularity of evictions such as Rhino and La Tour indeed was that their impact resonated way beyond the support for squatters. In Mounir and Lecoultre's words, the eviction of Rhino and La Tour marks "the end of thirty years of social, cultural and political experimentations, which have durably imprinted Calvin's hometown." (Mounir and Lecoultre, 2017, [Online]). Both evictions were certainly resisted, but it took just a couple of hours for the police to evict the squatters and clear the scene (swissinfo.ch, 2007). But what the general attorney had most probably not anticipated was the level of support that Cave12 would receive not only within the cultural scene, but also amongst local politicians and the general public.

Cave12 immediately responded to its eviction by launching a support campaign, which eventually came to a fruitful conclusion in 2013. Thanks to the financial impulse of the City Council, they were able to reopen in new premises after six years of nomadism (fplce, 2013). The eviction of Cave12 positioned the arts at the forefront of renewed urban struggles in Geneva and marked a turning point in the rise of collective subjectivities around spaces of experimentation in the night.

2007 saw the emergence of the Union of Self-managed Cultural Spaces (UECA) "in response to the threat looming over alternative culture in Geneva" (UECA, 2019). UECA played a crucial role in uniting the struggle for spaces of experimentation and put the provision of alternative spaces of culture in general and nightlife in particular on the political agenda.

UECA's campaign for the rehousing of actors evicted from Artamis represented a second pivotal moment in the emergence and organisation of collective subjectivities around experimental spaces of culture. In 2008, UECA launched a campaign for the relocation of cultural actors based on the Artamis site (Genecand, 2008) and, for months, undertook collective actions such as daytime and night-time protests, a petition and political lobbying (UECA, 2008). The outcome of Artamis' relocation is of particular importance when it comes to identifying experimental nightlife-focused collective subjectivities. The main outcome of UECA's intense activism was the relocation of artists and artisans. Thanks to a Geneva State and City Council joint venture topped up with a public-private partnership with the watch manufacturer Rolex's charitable foundation, artists and artisans were relocated within a former industrial site owned by the city (Magnol, 2008; Lalive d'Épinay, 2008). The relocation, however, exclusively benefited individual actors and no solution was considered for cultural public spaces, most of which, in Artamis, were strongly associated with nightlife culture, a situation that left cultural activists with a "strong sentiment of frustration" (Ulmer, 2008, [Online]). Artamis' closure, in a way, set a precedent for the struggle around experimental nightlife to pick up. In political terms, it gave a positive signal for the recognition of the myriad of cultural experiments that alternative spaces had fostered. But it also drew a new line of resistance within the local experimental art scene by intending to satisfy what was perceived as clean, low-nuisance, gallery orientated practices on the one hand, and excluding loud, messy and potentially socially challenging spaces, on the other.



*Image 24 Banners in support of Artamis hanged on L'Usine's front façade: "An alternative to boredom", "L'Usine, still in a state of emergency", "Geneva, cultural desert?" and "What the fuck are you going to do tonight?", 2008.*

2010 marked the moment when the issue of access to spaces of night culture emerged in the public discourse in Geneva. It also marked the year when collective subjectivities around Geneva's nightlife spaces came together in a more organised manner. In October 2010, the Geneva State's licencing office withdrew its licence to the MOA Club, a large-scale mainstream club, triggering the first nightlife protest (RTS, 2010). Under the impulse of the club itself, over 1000 young Genevans gathered to reclaim the reopening of a club known to be economically and socially accessible. Consecutively to this closure, hordes of young night-life enthusiasts streamed to further venues known for their relaxed door policies, amongst which l'Usine, the historical autonomous centre of Geneva, came out top of the list (Mertenat, 2010). During two consecutive weekends, l'Usine suffered intense pressure (with up to 2000 customers crushing at the doors), way beyond the limits of what this self-managed institution, accommodating various culture-centred venues, could handle.



After three weeks of strain, organisations operating in L'Usine made the collective decision to go on "night strike", with the aim of reclaiming recognition for their social and cultural role. Under the flag of UECA and the motto "without nightlife, Geneva is bored", alternative cultural venues across Geneva marched through Geneva in festive nocturnal parades (20minutes, 2015).



*Top left: Image 25 Musical gathering in support of the MOA Club, 2010.*

*Top right: Image 26 "I love MOA", banner in support of the MOA Club, 2010.*

*Bottom left: Image 27 Nightlife strike led by the Union of Self-managed Cultural Spaces (UECA), 2010.*

*Bottom right: Image 28 Banner in a night protest in front of L'Usine: "Culture and noise against concrete and profit", 2010.*

The MOA's closure and consecutive actions by UECA had multiple consequences. First, it demonstrated that there was a relative permeability across the spectrum of nightlife spaces, with mainstream club-goers eventually coming into L'Usine. This realisation triggered a public conversation around the transformation of the Genevan nightscape and particularly its loss of accessibility, which anchored the debate around nightlife within a broader set of arguments about the social groups who were being

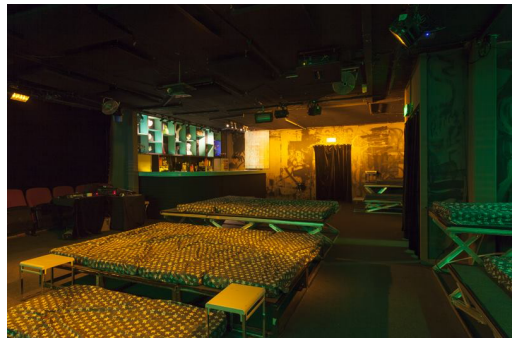
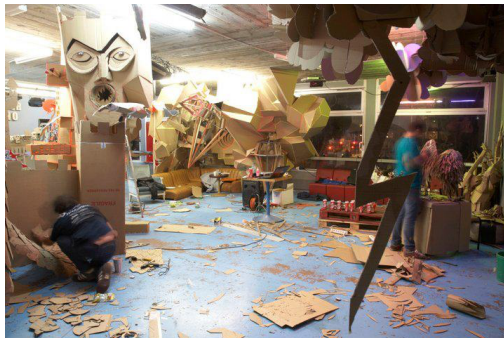
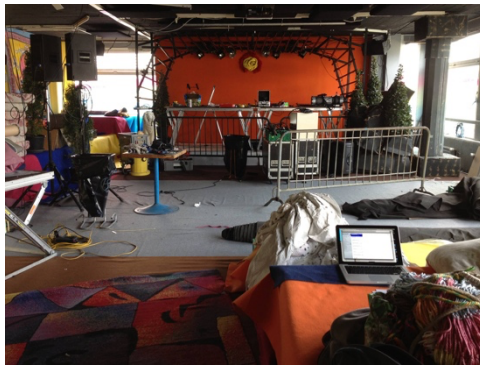
excluded from the post-2008 Genevan nightscape. Second, it brought together for the first time an impromptu coalition of actors around the question of nightlife, private business owners and cultural activists alike. Research on nightlife commissioned by Geneva's City Council Culture Department during the summer 2010, which I co-wrote (Ville de Genève, Département de la Culture. 2010), revived the debate around space provision for alternative culture. It also opened the way for nightlife actors to formalise a collective group of action, the Great Council of the Night (GCN), in reference to the State of Geneva's daytime governing body. The GCN still operates to this day and, as it will be explicated later, played a central role in the consultation that led to the enforcement of new nightlife regulation in 2016.

Last but not least, the Collectif Nocturne, a group funded in 2015 by secondary school pupils, brought together the voices of 60 youth organisations around the question of nightlife (Vaucher, 2017). Campaigning around a manifesto "For a rich, vibrant and diverse nightlife", this collective intensely communicated about the impacts of market-orientated urban policies on the Genevan nightscape, bringing attention onto the exclusion of the youngest and most cash-poor fringe of nightlife-goers.

In conclusion, this section has shown how nightlife has become a frontline topic for youth movements, occupying most if not all the political agenda of groups that claimed the right to cultural spaces in Geneva. It has also shown the potential for nightlife to bring together a variety of actors from across the spectrum of nightlife spaces, from private businesses to cultural activists, a vision which I will nuance in the following two analysis chapters (chapters 5 and 6). Finally, it has exposed the way that collective subjectivities have converged towards actions and into structures, to collect and amplify the interest and the support that they were receiving beyond the circles of nightlife professionals.

#### 4.4.2 The “new experimental nightlife”

From 2008, nightlife actors from the experimental scene started organising to create new spaces. Motel Campo was the first new experimental nightlife space to open, in 2010. Under the lead of a collective of artists and cultural activists formerly involved in evicted experimental nightlife spaces, Motel Campo is the public side of the Laboratoire de Création, a collective of arts practitioners who have their studios in the premises and use Motel Campo as a public experimental space. The photos below show the constant transformations that this space is undergoing, due to the experimental, art-led nature of the space.



*Four variations of Motel Campo's dancefloor.*

*Clockwise from top left:*

*Image 29 Dancefloor in transformation, 2013.*

*Image 30 Public listening at Motel Campo, MOS ESPA festival, 2012.*

*Image 31 Cardboard installation on Motel Campo's dancefloor, 2012.*

*Image 32 Salon d'écoute, collaboration between Frédéric Post and Fabien Clerc, 2014.*

Motel Campo operates within a building owned by the Fondation pour les Terrains Industriels de Genève (FTI), a public foundation that manages the industrial real estate assets of the state of Geneva in order to boost the local economy. Club nights are run at Motel Campo with a strong experimental ethos. The space itself is a matter of experimentation. It is in constant reconfiguration and regularly accommodates a variety of art installations using all media: sculpture, painting, light and video installations, etc. The music and performances too dig into experimentation to transgress the boundaries of artistic practices. Altogether, Motel Campo is a totally experimental space and, as the public takes part in it, the combination of experimental interior design and experimental artistic environment brings people into an experimental social situation. This dimension of the alternative Genevan nightlife is explored in depth in chapter 5.

As a nightlife venue integrated into a broader space of creative production, Motel Campo allows the Laboratoire de Création's members to show their work in an experimental context and to invite other artists to produce nightlife-orientated work. It also supports financially a diversity of art practices, primarily by bringing in money to alleviate the cost of studios and workshops (Garcin, 2016; fplce, [no date]a).

As part of the same renewed experimental scene, La Gravière opened two years after Motel Campo (Gottraux, 2012). Similarly to Motel Campo, La Gravière operates in a building owned by the State of Geneva with the support of public and private foundations and is managed by a collective, the Association Le Bloc on a non-for-profit basis. La Gravière is presented as a space of experimentation and performance for niche music (fplce, [no date]b). With less of a focus on visual arts than Motel Campo, La Gravière has nonetheless profiled itself as an focal point for emerging music and music-related experimental live arts.



*Image 33 Performance at La Gravière, 2019.*

La Gravière is the most direct materialisation of the movement led by UECA to relocate night culture venues from Artamis and one of the focal points of experimental nightlife post-2008 in Geneva.

As the cases of Motel Campo and La Gravière have suggested, experimental nightlife in Geneva was able to regenerate to some degree during the decade that followed the disappearance of most venues. These two examples have illustrated, however, that such renewal of the scene would not have been possible without the cooperation of Geneva's state and council, as well as culture funding bodies, a reality that dramatically changes the conditions under which such spaces are run and exemplifies the difficulty of maintaining spaces of experimentation in the neoliberal context.

To give a full overview of the initiatives led by nightlife actors involved in the experimental nightlife scene since 2008, I need to mention two further initiatives, which have also emerged out of negotiations with the state: Porteous and Soul2Soul.



*Images 34 and 35. Left: Occupation of Porteous, 2018.  
Right: Bar inside Porteous, 2019.*

Porteous is a building occupied since 2018 by the collective of urban activists Prenons la ville. Squatted in reaction to the project to transform the building into a detention centre, Prenons la Ville allied with the local council of the suburban town of Vernier where Porteous is situated and, after seven months of activism, convinced the State of Geneva to turn it into a creative space instead (Amos, 2018; Amos, 2019).

Soul2Soul is a the public space lodged within the Sentier des Saules building, a block of artists' studios and workshops managed by the cooperative Ressources Urbaines (fplce, [no date]c; Ressources Urbaines, 2020).



*Image 36 Ressources Urbaines, 2020.*

These two spaces are interesting in the sense that the process that led to their creation is rather contrasting but the outcomes share a strong resemblance. Porteous is a squatted venue, and its materialisation is the result of an intense campaign of lobbying clearly reviving the old practices of culture-led squatting in Geneva. Soul2Soul fits into a model of spaces that have emerged from negotiations between the state and a more formal artist-led structure. Like the Fonderie Kugler or La Reliure (both occasional public venues in buildings occupied by artists' studios), such structures reproduce the old model of polymorphous public cultural spaces, which, rather than being strictly night-time venues, are spatially, socially and economically integrated into a broader set of artistic practices. As such, they do not hold regular night events but expand practices of experimentation into the night on an irregular basis.

I must conclude by mentioning that, during the low period of experimental nightlife after most spaces had closed and before new spaces started popping up, private initiatives also played their part in the rebirth of more experimental forms of nightlife spaces. Bars such as Le Cabinet, Central Station, la Citadelle, les 4 Coins and La Jonquille all included a small performance spaces whereby they can accommodate live events that are paid for by takings from the bar. Bongo Joe Records, which is a record shop and a bar, follows the same business model. Clubs like Audio and Chez Jean-Luc, whose managers were formerly involved in alternative venues, have made a reputation out of preserving more risky and experimental line-ups. Although their musical ethos leans towards experimentation, these venues operate on a private, for-profit and fully licenced basis. They are therefore very different from experimental spaces, in that that they have to deal with the same financial pressure as other private businesses. As fully licenced night-time venues, they also need to comply with the laws and bylaws that police spaces in the NTE, which greatly restricts their room ofr manoeuvre and experimentation. In the next section, I will discuss how an alliance of spaces of nightlife, experimental and mainstream together, have come to create a situation whereby culture-orientated venues can be exempt from the licencing system.

#### **4.4.3 The new regulation and the “cultural exception”**

Between 2012 and 2016, the State of Geneva conducted a targeted consultation in order to reshape the licencing system (État de Genève, 2015b). The Great Council of the Night acted as one of the consulted organisations. As the chair of the board until 2014, I was closely involved in the early stages of the consultation and continued to pay close attention to the debate around the new licencing system until after it was enforced. Without going into too much detail, I would like to use this section to explain how the new regulation and specifically the “cultural exception” that was introduced in it has supported the rebirth of spaces of experimentation in Geneva. I see this new legislation as a strong legacy from the ethos that developed in spaces of nightlife during Geneva’s “alternative golden era”. I also think of the new licencing system as the most concrete and most positive outcome of years of organising collective subjectivities within the nightlife arena and across the board of spaces, from the most mainstream to the most experimental.

In 2012, the Geneva State initiated a consultation process with the aim of reshaping the licencing system, a set of laws and bylaws that hadn’t changed since the liberalisation in the early 2000s. At the start of the consultation, the Great Council of the Night (GCN) was consulted amongst state services and other organisations (both professional and civil), all of which had been shortlisted for their connection with nightlife. Throughout the consultation, the GCN insisted that the new licencing law should not only take into account the diversity of nightlife venues, but should also facilitate the emergence of inclusive, culture-led and community-focused spaces (Grand Conseil de la Nuit, 2012, 2013, 2014). In the document summarising their position for the last round of consultation (which was communicated after I stepped down), the GCN stated that:

*“The social and cultural impact of a law that regulates the commerce of food and drinks is way broader than it might appear at first sight.*

*Social and cultural enterprises need the financial support provided by food and drinks sales, even if those*



*are not their primary activity, because this gives them more financial independence.”*

*(Grand Conseil de la Nuit, 2014, p.4).*

Because the GCN aimed to represent the diversity of spaces that are constitutive of the Genevan nightscape, making recommendations was always a subtle democratic exercise. This approach did therefore allow the organisation to advocate for the commercial importance of the NTE, whilst demanding that the law allow for non-for-profit structures to cash in and support the existence of spaces of experimentation in the night.

In the first version of the new law that was enforced in January 2016, the authorisation for “buvette” – literally drink stall – had been removed, in what was justified as an exercise of simplification of the licencing system. It became apparent that, with the disappearance of informal spaces, the drink stall licence has offered a grey zone in which alternative actors, but also corporate actors such as the MOA Club, could operate without being fully licenced. This form of event-to-event authorisation had also maintained a form of informal status quo, with nightlife operators (alternative and mainstream alike) running nightlife venues in premises that would otherwise not have qualified for a full licence (i.e. buildings in industrial zones). The withdrawal of the drink stall licence triggered strong reactions within the alternative fringe of the GCN’s members as it appeared that the licence for drink stalls was allowing nightlife actors that were either not professionally trained or were not acting as “business managers” to operate legally but without being licenced. The disappearance of drink stall authorisations was particularly harmful for collective structures such as L’Usine and small artist-led spaces that weren’t registered as businesses.

Following successful rounds of intense lobbying, a “cultural exception” was introduced in article 49 of the law in October 2016, 10 months after the new laws and bylaws were enforced. The article now states: “Spaces dedicated to cultural activities, such as cinemas, theatres, or performance spaces are not considered as venues of public entertainment, in the sense of the law.”

(Conseil d'État de la République et Canton de Genève, 2016, p.16). This cultural exception constitutes an important rupture with the repressive policies that had been threatening spaces of experimentation in Geneva for the decade prior to its introduction. It is interesting to note that this change of tone came by way of a public debate around licencing, a domain that nightlife operators find themselves directly impacted by. This exception, which allows spaces in the night to operate outside of the mainstream “for-profit” business model, is also a direct consequence of the collective organisation of actors involved in experimental nightlife.

Thanks to this cultural exception, cultural spaces are now by law operating outside of the regulatory framework designed for commercial spaces in Geneva. Practically, this means that, whereas commercial spaces are regulated by the Geneva state and need a full licence underpinned by staff training, a registered business structure and full health and safety assessments, cultural spaces demand simple authorisation for cultural events from their local council. They are not regulated by the state’s Licencing Office and no longer have to meet with the criteria for a full licence for as long as the events that they organise are of a “cultural nature”, which is down to them to define. I investigate the Genevan legal exception more in-depth in chapter 6 and discuss the theoretical outcomes of anchoring an informal regime of space in law (what I call formalising the informal) in chapter 7.

In conclusion, I must first say that the cultural exception was the most concrete outcome of years of struggle for an alternative model of space in post-2008 Geneva. It mobilised a diversity of actors from across the night-time industries – alternative and business-orientated – and, in this sense, it was a success in terms of structuring and solidifying collective subjectivities around spaces of nightlife. Nightlife operators had to get organised, communicate to their publics, hold meetings, make their contribution visible to the life of Geneva and position themselves collectively. Secondly, even though the cultural exception sits in the licencing system, an area that is meant to impact space of nightlife particularly, it nonetheless translates in political terms more broadly

than a simple nightlife regulation. The cultural exception basically allows cultural spaces to exist outside of the regulation and financial imperative imposed onto commercial spaces, which contrasts sharply with the ideology governed Geneva since the turn of the millennium. Last but not least, the fact that this change of policies has happened in the area of licencing genuinely highlights how the night became the focal point of the struggle for producing spaces experimentation in Geneva. Because the struggle evolved around licencing, nightlife actors have acted as the organising force for a narrative around different spaces in Geneva to emerge.

#### **4.4.4 Experimentation, nightlife spaces and urban policies in Geneva**

As it has been discussed above, the struggle for spaces of experimentation has been present in the public debate in Geneva for over six decades and, as such, has been impacting – and more often than not enforcing – public policies. Squats existed thanks to an ideology of tolerance within the state of Geneva and major cultural structures such as L'Usine and Artamis operated within publicly owned premises for which both the state and the council acted as landlords. Throughout the history of urban struggles for spaces of experimentation in Geneva, actors demanding those spaces were caught between a state which consistently operated (and still operates) under a Conservative majority, and a City Council which is traditionally left wing. And even then, the political actors who were sympathetic and supportive weren't necessarily to be found in coherence with their political colours.

In post-2008 Geneva, however, things articulate quite differently. As this thesis demonstrates, the politics of experimentation is still vivid – and possibly even revived – by both the new urban and political contexts, but in slightly different terms. As I demonstrated above, nightlife has recently emerged as the focal point of the debate around experimentation in the city. This subsection will therefore look at how nightlife became a topic in itself in the public arena and how this translated into public policies.

From 2008, with the majority of spaces of experimentation being wiped off the map, the narrative made its way up the political circles that local cultural life in Geneva was taking a hit. Nightlife as a topic in itself had nonetheless never been translated into public policies other than in the licencing system – a situation that led to the design of a new law (described above). In reaction, in 2010, Geneva City Council commissioned a group of cultural activists (including myself) to produce a report on the transformations of the local nightscape (Ville de Genève, Département de la Culture. 2010). This report was made public and presented to the media in October 2010. Interestingly, it received little attention until the protests surrounding the closure of MOA and L'Usine started just a few days later, a coincidence that escalated the discussion around the lack of nightlife-related public policies. In 2011, the report expanded to a week of conferences, the États Généraux de la Nuit, events that were held with the clear intention to force nightlife into the political agenda (ATS, 2011). These events eventually led to the creation of the Great Council of the Night.

In September 2013, the newly elected socialist Mayor of Geneva, Sami Kanaan, commissioned a broader policy-orientated research project with the explicit intention of outlining a more consistent nightlife policy for the city (Département de la culture et du sport de la Ville de Genève, 2013). The research culminated in an event called “Genève explore sa nuit” (*Geneva explores the night*), for which civil servants and nightlife actors alike were invited to walk together for the duration of one night. Framed as a “territorial diagnosis”, the project resulted in a document that outlined what were perceived as the main issues around nightlife in Geneva, as well as a series of suggestions to orientate future public policies for the Genevan nightlife. Amongst these perspectives, the diversification of the nightscape as well as the federation of nightlife actors were outlined as priorities (Gwiazdzinski and Chausson, 2015).

In 2017, the state of Geneva commissioned an architecture office to lead another round of workshops and produced a similar research document, “Genève, la nuit. Stratégie territoriale pour la vie nocturne, culturelle et festive” (*Geneva at night. Strategy for nightlife, cultural and party-orientated activities*), (République et Canton de Genève Département de l’aménagement, du logement et de l’énergie, Office de l’urbanisme. 2017). This report points out that “a hostile attitude towards squats and an increasing pressure on the city centre area due to its densification have undermined the dynamism and the diversity of Geneva’s nightlife” (p.21). In its approach, this report strongly anchors the question of nightlife in urban planning. The document nonetheless also stresses the overlap between planning policies and cultural policies when it comes to maintaining the experimental fringe of nightlife, and most importantly the necessity to coordinate both policy strands. Pinpointing the neoliberalisation of Geneva and its impact on the Genevan nightscape, the authors of the report insist on the cultural and social importance of the most experimental fringe of nightlife and stress the impossibility of this fringe’s survival without a strong public engagement. The authors profile the provision of state-owned premises to support alternative cultural actors as a possible solution to alleviate the cost of space and diversify the Genevan nightscape. Demonstrating the broad variety of state services working in relation to nightlife in Geneva and highlighting the lack of coordination within state services involved in the management of nightlife, the document recommends the creation of a nightlife platform, a structure that would bring together this pool of state actors.

The positive aspect of this document is, first, that it is very actors-focused in the sense that it clearly amplifies the narratives which emerged from nightlife-related collective subjectivities in the decade prior to its publication. It positions the state as the facilitator of practices that would otherwise not be possible, a posture that is not far from the political consensus that allowed experimental nightlife to emerge in the 1980s (but with policy options which are more suitable for the current political climate). In that sense, the second benefit of this report is to profile very concrete, policy-realistic options to respond to the alternative nightlife crisis.

The downside of this report, clearly, is that, many years down the line, none of its recommendations have been followed. Nor have the guidelines that emerged from the “Geneva explores the night” initiative. In conclusion to this section, I therefore want to highlight that, if nightlife has somewhat made its way up to the political agenda, it is still hard to see how the collective subjectivities that emerged from the 2010 crisis could enforce public policies, beyond the victory of the cultural exception in the licencing system. The campaigns of organised nightlife actors were fruitful thanks to their intense activism and yet only very concrete demands such as the use of state-owned premises and public assets came to fruition, with a risk that the collective struggle becomes encapsulated into isolated successes. The new legislation is a major realisation however, since it represents a formidable victory for alternative actors. This was made possible by the unity of all nightlife actors through the Great Council of the Night on the one hand, and the collaboration with public services on the other. In this way, collective subjectivities have induced some level of transformation but the question of nightlife is still largely invisible in public policies.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the movements of resistance around and for spaces of experimentation in Genevan nightlife that took place in the city for the last decade, set in the larger historical context going back to the 1960s. I have discussed the legacy of cultural activism in Geneva and showed that, if there is an obvious lineage between the history of cultural activism in Geneva and recent movements centred on nightlife, the issue of experimentation in the night has shifted from a collateral benefit of housing-centred squats to a central topic.

So, to answer my first research question: “How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of nightlife?” I would first say that, beyond the obvious structural transformations of the Genevan nightscape induced by

neoliberalism (which is now predominantly corporate), the neoliberal rollout has placed informal spaces of nightlife at the forefront of the resistance for counter-spaces in the neoliberal city. When other dimensions of urban life, such as housing or public spaces, have been dramatically transformed by neoliberalism in Geneva, these have not brought together the same collective agencies. Actors of the informal nightlife managed to organise despite their differences, reclaim the legacy of urban activism, and reinvent their collaboration with the state of Geneva. I will pick up these threads in chapter 6, in my discussion of experimentation as a mode of co-production of spaces.

In this chapter I have also presented how, in the early days of neoliberalism (from the early 1980s onwards) artists led movements to create spaces of experimentation by occupying buildings used for real estate speculation. I have explained that, through to the *contrats de confiance*, the state then acted as an ally, allowing for spaces to exist within a non-speculative regime, in part to pacify youth-led urban social movements. This unique policy experiment gave birth to an alternative nightlife scene that was dominated by informal, unregulated, collectively managed, and art-focused nightlife venues and put experimental art spaces at the centre of collective agencies defending different spaces in the neoliberal city.

My second thought is therefore connected to the role of the state as an actor of both the neoliberalisation of the urban fabric and, in the case of alternative spaces of nightlife in Geneva, the facilitator and guarantor of a state of exception to neoliberalism. When, in the first decade of the 2000s, state-led neoliberalism personified by General Attorney Daniel Zapelli cracked down on alternative models of spatial governance, the struggles to defend spaces of nightlife managed to transform the way informality is legitimated by the state, and did so despite the dominance of neoliberal views within the state of Geneva. Indeed, the best realisation of the movement to secure counter-spaces is the cultural exception in the most recent licencing law, a document which the state of Geneva and nightlife actors have collaborated on to bring together, in order to “formalise the informal”, a situation which allows the state

to implement a regime of non-neoliberal exception, but within a neoliberal legal framework.

Thirdly, I would like to stress that the enforcement of neoliberal policies by the state of Geneva – the abandonment of the *contrats de confiance* as well as the crackdown on *buvette* licences – has brought together a heterogeneous set of nightlife actors. Even if experimental nightlife remains marginal in the Genevan nightscape since 2008, it is this alliance of actors across the spectrum that have been most successful in their campaigns. In the following chapter (chapter 5), I will discuss more in-depth the fact that, if the common denominators between these actors was that they operated within an informal regime of space, the struggle for spaces of informal nightlife nonetheless resonated very differently depending on the kind of spaces where I conducted interviews (alternative or mainstream), with mainstream operators defending their businesses, and alternative actors reclaiming counter-spaces in the neoliberal city. It is nonetheless the coming together of this diversity of agencies that brought some success to the movement. This wouldn't have happened, in my view, if the neoliberal framework hadn't been enforced so abruptly, precipitating the transformation of the predominantly informal Genevan nightlife into a night-time industry, a process which my participants (producers and consumers alike) have described in-depth as the empirical experience of the neoliberalisation of space. I will expand on this idea in the discussion featured in chapter 7.



## Chapter 5

### From spaces of nightlife in struggle to the redefinition of counter-spaces in the neoliberal city

#### 5.1 Introduction

In chapter 2, I brought together literature documenting the impact of neoliberalism on spaces of nightlife in Western cities. In chapter 4, I looked at how this trend has profoundly transformed the Genevan nightscape by marginalising informal spaces of nightlife, when informality had dominated the Genevan nightscape for over three decades. In this chapter, drawing from my interview material, I focus on the redefinition of counter-spaces in the neoliberal context.

In this chapter, I answer my second research question: “To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?”. To answer this question, I looked into my participants’ descriptions of those spaces of nightlife which they attended and valued, as well as their descriptions of the “other spaces” which they avoided. Interrogating the way neoliberalism articulates spatial forms and social norms (Collier, 2005), I have used nightlife participants’ accounts to build a definition of counter-spaces as environments where spatial norms are intentionally destabilised to facilitate the renegotiation of social norms in a playful manner.

In the initial stages of the research, starting from the social drama, I identified venues in the local media who were in conflict with the State of Geneva over the withdrawal of their licence. I further refer to those venues as “venues in struggle”. In the later phase of the research, I interviewed nightlife operators who had played a role in UECA. In their accounts my participants also referred to venues where I had not recruited. Last but not least, interviewees talked about venues where I had not met them personally, but through which they

had been invited to participate in the research (thanks to my flyers, the venue's social media and newsletters, etc.). In order to conduct the analysis presented in this chapter, I built a categorisation of spaces which mirrored mode of regulation of the venues. This classification is important because it helped evidence the differences and similarities in my participants narratives depending on the types of venues which they attended.

### **Typology of venues and examples:**

**Alternative informal:** for example L'Usine, Motel Campo, Le Patchinko.

- Collective management: non-for-profit structures (associations)
- Self-regulated or loosely regulated (At times regulated on an event-to-event basis)
- Counterculture-focused, promoting experimentation
- Socially and economically inclusive

**Alternative licenced:** The only example in this category is La Gravière which is self-regulated regulated *but* at the benefice of a licence at the request of the State of Geneva, as part of the agreement to operate in State-owned premises.

- Collective management: non-for-profit structures (associations)
- Counterculture-focused, promoting experimentation
- Socially and economically inclusive

**Mainstream informal:** MOA Club, Halle W (Weetamix)

- Individually owned
- Business orientated
- Self-regulated, loosely regulated or tightly regulated management-depending
- Culturally variable management-depending

- Taking advantage of state's acceptance of informal venue
- Socially and economically inclusive

**Mainstream licenced:** for example ByPass, Le Java

- Individually owned
- Business orientated
- Regulated by laws and bylaws (Licencing Law)
- Culturally variable management-depending
- Socially and economically exclusive

The definition of counter-spaces built throughout this chapter transcends these categories, although the way venues operate is instrumental to this definition. The idea of counter-space is explored empirically around two themes that largely emerged from my dataset. The first one is (lack of) inclusiveness in the NTE and counter-spaces as spaces where social exclusion is minimised. The second is informality as a ground for experimentation with spatial and social relations, but also as a legacy of the squats era in Geneva, which has to be reconfigured in the neoliberal context. Following Brenner and Theodore's argument that not only is neoliberalism embedded in spatial forms but that neoliberal spaces are central to the constitution of neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), I have used this chapter to build a definition of counter-spaces around actually-existing spatial forms as projects of producing an alternative to the neoliberal governance of the city.

I have built the first half of this chapter around the theme of inclusiveness, a topic which overwhelmingly dominated the interviews I conducted during fieldwork. This first half is divided into three subsections looking at inclusiveness as a core counter-narrative to the exclusiveness of neoliberalised spaces. Through the lens of my participants' accounts, the first section discusses inclusiveness in the context of the neoliberal city, whilst the

second exposes the exclusiveness of neoliberal spaces. In the last section, I discuss how, depending on the producers, inclusiveness can be seen as business opportunity or as part of nightlife venue's ethos – and how they sometimes overlap.

In the second half, I complete the definition of counter-spaces by looking at how my participants have, in their stories, built a picture of counter-spaces as “unstable spaces”, environments whereby spatial norms are destabilised, subverted and contested and how this culture of space is rooted in practices of experimentation and co-production. The first section looks at the legacy of informality in terms of allowing a provision of alternative spaces of nightlife to emerge. In the second section, I will discuss how, in participants' narratives, the alternative culture of space is interwoven with alternative forms of socialising, a discussion which will also allow me to draw the line between normative spaces and spaces of experimentation. In the final section of the chapter, I round off the definition of counter-spaces by discussing how, connected to a particular history of co-producing spaces for the purpose of social experimentation, spaces of nightlife have the potential to stand as counter-spaces.

## **5.2 This place is for everyone: spatial inclusiveness in the NTE**

Spaces of nightlife were always the starting point of the conversation with my respondents. I would initiate interviews by simple questions such as “I met you in this venue or you responded to the call of this venue to participate. Can you tell me why you go there, what you like about that place?”, a way of approaching the complexity of their experiences whilst putting them at ease. Talking about venues where I had met them (or through which they had heard about the research), which they liked or disliked and letting them express why they thought these spaces were in danger in the Genevan urban context triggered but also guided their narrative. In that sense, the talking about

spaces more often than not was the point of entry of the conversation that I built together with my respondents.

As I started analysing my data, inclusiveness emerged as predominant theme in my interviews, playing an important role in bringing together a collective narrative around different spaces within the Genevan NTE. In this section of the chapter, I look into the practicality, the practice and the ethos of inclusiveness, which, according to my respondents, overwhelmingly characterised the spaces in which I met them.

Beyond the strong presence of this topic in my data, the idea of inclusiveness was crucial for the construction of the main argument developed in this thesis. If modern urban design is thought to be the art of designing spaces of “urban togetherness” (Berger, 2017), the impact of neoliberalism on the production of urban space has been very different, with a wide body of literature documenting neoliberal urban spaces as increasingly segregated, privatised and exclusive to cash-rich urban dwellers (Brenner and Theodore, 2003; MacKinnon and Cumbers, 2011). In this context, spaces of nightlife maintaining the qualities of inclusive spaces had to be somewhat different to the dominant model of spaces that was developing under neoliberalism.

Beyond the inclusive door policies, however, I had to recognise that inclusiveness also resonated with different agendas depending on the kind of places where I conducted interviews. The interviews below were conducted with nightlife producers and consumers from alternative venues both informal and formal, as well as with producers and consumers from informal mainstream venues. Inclusiveness was never mentioned in relation to formal mainstream venues, which in itself is a finding that I discuss in the third subsection.

In the interviews discussed below, I reflect upon inclusiveness part of a broader ethos of space making in alternative venues, a regime which emerged

under the licence of informality and had for a long time been tolerated by the state. But I also expose how, overtime, informality was seen as a business opportunity and, as such, inclusiveness became part of some informal mainstream venues' business model to attract cash-poor consumers.

In the following three sections, I therefore discuss inclusiveness in three ways, which are important to the argument of this thesis. In the first subsection, discussing what inclusiveness means in the context of nightlife, I expose how this theme has brought together a collective narrative of "different spaces". In the second subsection, I look at my participants descriptions of exclusion in the mainstream nightlife. Finally, in the third subsection, I connect inclusiveness with the history of informality in Genevan spaces of nightlife and discuss how differently inclusiveness resonates depending on whether it is considered in relation to mainstream or alternative venues. In conclusion, I make the argument that, inclusiveness in the nightlife spaces has to be understood within a broader ethos of space-making to sit in the definition of counter-spaces in the NTE.

### **5.2.1 What does it mean for spaces of nightlife to be inclusive?**

In this subsection, I bring together some of my interviewees' quotes that best describe inclusiveness in the NTE and discuss how these narrative inform us about the neoliberal transformation of Geneva.

In these accounts, inclusiveness is defined in a variety of ways. Based on the analysis of these quotes, I negotiate the definition inclusiveness in the context of nightlife somewhere between openness, hospitality and a spatial ethos (Stavo-Debaugé, 2017). And I argue that, if all the venues where I met my participants were associated with inclusiveness, not all of them practiced inclusiveness with the same agenda.

As I explained in Chapter 3, the point of entry of the interviews I conducted during fieldwork was predominantly the venue in which I had met my

respondents. I chose not to structure my interviews, which resulted in respondents being asked a variety of questions but touching upon their choice for the venue where I had met them was always a good ice breaker. I initiated the interviews with questions such as:

-I met you in this/that venue. Is it your place of preference in Geneva?

-Why is that that you chose to attend this venue this/that night when I met you?

-I met you in this/that venue. Do you go there regularly?

Responses evoking the inclusiveness of the venues which they attended at the time of our encounter were present in almost every one of my respondents' accounts, irrespective of the venue where I met them.

Opal and Jacob, two 18 year-olds who I met at the MOA club, an informal mainstream nightclub, agreed to speak to me as a group with their friend Hannah, as part of a group who go out together. Talking about the MOA club they say:

*Opal: It's more laid back there, it's easier to get in. You don't necessarily need to dress smart.*

*Jacob: Even with a cap they let you in.*

Opal's statement pinpoints the difficulty of navigating social selection at the door of mainstream nightclubs and particularly the injunction of "dressing smart". Interestingly, in her interview (and other young women who I met at the MOA club), she mentions the care she and her friends invest into their look before going on a night out (which wasn't the case amongst their alternative counterparts). But she expresses her frustration to be forced to dress up, an experience that she associates with social stigma. Jacob's image of the cap also resonates with the social stigma around young men wearing (baseball) caps and, in this instance, the fact that the club let him in *even* with a cap suggest that, not only he did not feel excluded but also that the venue had a hospitable door policy by letting people come in as they are, even in casual clothes.

Abel, a 24-year-old man who I also met at the MOA club, similarly described the venue as very inclusive:

*In Geneva, I've been to all clubs...the MOA for me...I think it really is...a nightclub like no other. It's really...no dress code, nada, and hmm...unlike other clubs the MOA is a sort of big family in fact. That's really what is good about it.*

Similarly to the previous participants, Abel's description of the MOA club is one of a venue that does not select nightlife goers, which makes it inclusive by absence of restriction. In his account, as in a majority of participants' stories, the absence of a dress code was crucial to describe the inclusiveness of nightlife venues. In addition, Abel sees himself as strongly connected to the people present in the venue, which he sees as 'a family'. The idea of a "family-like" venue adds a level of friendliness and hospitableness into Abel's account. Interestingly, in this interview, the MOA's door policy was contrasted with its mainstream counterparts. His idea of the venue, however, adds to the notion of hospitableness previously mentioned, in that Abel described the MOA club as a space where care is invested in making guests at ease by nurturing social relationships instead of selecting them on the basis of social differences.

Nikos, the manager of an informal mainstream nightclub, reflected upon the increasing exclusion of cash-poor consumers in the NTE. Talking about the iconic techno music nightclub Berghain in Berlin he said:

*What I dislike about Berghain it's that...there is a lot of attitude...a whole culture built around the bouncer. (...) I mean fuck it! To love techno music, you don't need to errmm...how can I say...there shouldn't be any discrimination! We never exclude anyone. We will have to ask people to leave if they misbehave. But by principle, the guy who turns up at the door and doesn't behave in a hostile way, of course they are welcome.*



Niko's quote is interesting in terms of how it articulated inclusiveness with a regime of space. He views his nightclub as accessible economically and hospitable to all customers who are willing to respect a basic social etiquette (not being hostile or "misbehaving") and he criticises the practices of exclusion in place in the corporate NTE .

In his quote as well as the ones above, respondents' definitions of inclusiveness read at three levels. First, their description of inclusiveness involves a certain degree of openness, which can only be enacted in the absence of barriers to entry (door policy, bouncers). Second, beyond the absence of restriction, inclusiveness necessitates a degree of economic and social accessibility. Third, they talk about hospitality as an in which nightlife participants feel comfortable to connect and share intimacy (Bell, 2007; Massey, 2005).

Not only are all of the above dimensions of inclusiveness immensely valued by my participants, but inclusiveness really defines those informal spaces where I conducted fieldwork, making them contrast with those venues, mainstream licenced venues that are ruled by an exclusive regime of space. These visions of inclusiveness, nonetheless, are limited to viewing spaces of nightlife as inclusive spaces of consumption and, however important inclusive consumption spaces are for my respondents, in the quotes below, I will show how inclusiveness in counter-spaces transcends economic accessibility.

In the quotes below, I look at how nightlife actors who I met in alternative venues talk about the enactment of inclusiveness as part of a counter-model of space in the NTE.

Luke, a 28-year-old male respondent, described himself as very attached to the alternative scene for its inclusiveness. During his interview, he self-identifies as working class, talked with a prominent regional accent and described himself as a having "a baddie's head" and "being a big lad". According to him, his physical look and accent made it difficult to get granted

access to mainstream licenced venues. Talking about L'Usine's door policy he said:

*If you go to L'Usine, you can get in as you want.*

And further:

*L'Usine, for me, is the one and only place in Geneva where they literally don't fuss. Just to say, it's the only place where you can get in with an open can of beer!*

In this interview, Luke kept referring to L'Usine as the prime example of an inclusive space. In his descriptions, the inclusiveness of alternative venues such as L'Usine reads at two levels. First, he saw these places as "idealistically open" in the sense that, in his descriptions, alternative venues had no guidelines for selecting people at the door, a vision of inclusiveness is based on the absence of exclusion. Secondly, his example of entering the premises with an open can of beer suggested that L'Usine conveys the ethos of a space where nightlife goers are not forced into consumption at the bar since they do not restrict consumption for their own profit. This aspect of their door policy emphasises Luke's ideal of openness because it shows how L'Usine is open to welcome cash-poor consumers and those not willing to drink. But it also introduces the idea that this alternative venue has an ethos of inclusiveness because L'Usine is seen as a space where the desire to socialise in music is enough to justify participants' presence.

Emma, 18 years old woman who I met at La Gravière, said about this alternative nightlife space:

*You can dress however you like. People won't judge you on that basis.*

And further:

*For me alternative means open minded. And so, they will accept everyone, I'd say. Even people who are anti-conformists a bit, they will welcome anyone, and they won't ermmm...judge you and so you can be at ease and dance the way you want, nobody will tell you that*

*you move oddly, or you're dressed in a strange way, you see?*

Emma's description of how she experienced inclusiveness at la Gravière worked alongside her account of being accepted without the need to conform with social norms. For her, inclusiveness means acceptance and co-optation into the venue that she has chosen to visit, by the venue's staff but also by the other attendees in the venue. Her description of inclusiveness indeed entails both the idea of an absence of door policy and a vision of the venue as a safe space where there is no moral judgment on her behaviour. In her account indeed, inclusiveness translates beyond the venue's door into a culture of acceptance of otherness.

Felix, the co-founder of an alternative informal, artist-led venue talked to me about their door policy, an aspect of the management of his nightclub, which highlighted both the similarities and the differences between mainstream and alternative. This quote strongly emphasises the importance of inclusiveness in this alternative place's philosophy of work:

*When I speak to the bouncers, they say that hmm...there are people that they no longer want to let in because they are thieves or dealers...or people who like to fight...and that it's annoying other attendees... They are right, if it is annoying for others that's not ok. At the same time, I am always hopeful that...that if you keep your doors open for them... it will change their heart. And if there's one place where they are not excluded from, it's our venue.*

This quote, in my view, is important for the way it captures the ethos of inclusiveness in alternative nightlife spaces in Geneva. Felix reflects upon his obligation to work with bouncers and security, an obligation that is the result of the neoliberalisation of alternative informal spaces of nightlife, and what he describes is a divergence of nightlife spaces' culture between him and his bouncers. The bouncers he employs bring with them a culture of excluding

participants who do not behave according to social standards and regulations. Unlike them, Felix wants to see his venue as a space where such rules can be negotiated, and he talks about inclusiveness in his venue as the ground for a social experiment that will bring together a diverse set of individuals who will have to negotiate each other's presence for the time of a night.

In this part, I analyse quotes in which my participants talk about venues who have lost their right to operate informally and I analysed how my participants describe the inclusiveness of these nightlife spaces. In all accounts above, inclusiveness is talked about in terms of openness (by opposition to spaces restricted to social groups) and accessibility (social and economic). My interviewees also relate to informal venues, whether mainstream informal or alternative, in terms of hospitableness, which doesn't mean that these spaces of nightlife are idealistically hospitable, but rather that they distinguish themselves from the explicit exclusiveness (and therefore inhospitableness) of formal spaces of nightlife.

So why is inclusiveness important to the definition of counter-spaces? By praising the importance of inclusiveness of spaces of nightlife, the accounts above have exposed how some spaces of nightlife act as pockets in which the spatial regime translates into an experience of social inclusion. I will further discuss inclusiveness in subsection 5.3.3. to argue that it is an instrumental dimension of social experimentation.

### **5.2.2 The “other nightlife”. Exclusion in mainstream licenced nightlife: money, clothes and gender**

In this section, I look at my respondents' narratives of “other spaces of nightlife”, ones that, by choice or by exclusion, they are *not* spending time in. If these accounts resonate in many ways with what is said in the previous subsection, by looking at stories of exclusion in mainstream licenced nightlife here, I am able to further discuss the role of inclusiveness in the construction of counter-spaces.

By talking through their experience of the nightlife they don't like in comparison with those venues where they went out, my respondents delivered their views over the transformation of the Genevan nightscape and its impact on the collective experience of a night out, a thread which I have followed from my research questions. Further to that, considering my respondents' accounts of the 'other nightlife' allowed me to put inclusiveness in the perspective of neoliberal spaces and counter-spaces. In this section, my respondents talked about their experiences of not attending mainstream, licenced spaces. But their narrative did not resonate in the same way depending on whether they experienced rejection and exclusion (directly or indirectly) from spaces of entertainment; or whether they actively rejected themselves the values that are conveyed by those venues.

This distinction is particularly important in terms of whether nightlife actors can be mobilised to produce counter-spaces in the neoliberal city. As I argue in this section, nightlife goers who were excluded from mainstream licenced venues, however difficult these experiences might be, were not actively engaging in the production of counter-spaces. Interviewees who rejected the spatial regime of mainstream licenced venues, however, brought together a narrative of the kind of values they adhered to and how the construction of these values was interwoven with the spatial regime of alternative nightlife spaces.

Hazel was a 24 year-old woman who I met at the MOA club, a venue, which she was very attached to. She said to me about the ByPass and the Java, two high-end mainstream licenced nightclubs:

*...the By Pass I don't go there because, ok I mean, I don't look like I'm 18, they ID my every time because I'm not a regular. They are clubs, like, the Java, I don't go there because unless you're wearing Louboutin shoes and you turn up with your Louis Vuitton bag well...you just can't get in!*

In this quote, Hazel expresses her experience of being unfairly IDed (required to show identification to verify her age) in high-class mainstream nightclubs because she isn't attending the venue regularly enough to be known to door staff. She experiences this selection as unfair and explains how, even though she is willing to attend the venue, being IDed gives her the impression that she "doesn't belong" in this space. In addition, Hazel explains that some of the high-class mainstream nightclubs practice such a selective door policy that she will not even try to attend them. According to her, not only does their dress code force attendees to turn up with clothes that she cannot afford; but her description of their clothes policy is particularly strongly sexualising of women, an injunction which she feels uncomfortable with.

I had a similar conversation with Jacob, Opal and Hannah about "posh" nightclubs in Geneva. Jacob said to me:

*If we go to, say, to the MOA, there's a lot of people I know and it's mostly about partying and having fun. Whereas, if we go to the ByPass for example...it's very strict the door policy, the dress code. But that's because most people there are full of cash and errmmm...tha's for those who are having it easy.*

In this quote, Jacob describes his experience of being turned away from a high-end mainstream nightclub due to an assessment of his social and economic background, a selection/rejection policy that operates through the dress code.

Further along in the interview, Jacob's friends Hannah and Opal said to me:

*Hannah: It's much easier to get in when you're a girl than when you're a lad.*

*Opal: Our problem, I mean girls, in terms of getting in, is for example at the ByPass... it's not to be forced to wear heels. If you wear high heels, the chances are,*

*you'll get in easily. If you don't, then they won't let you in.*

*Hannah: If you go, even dressed smart with jeans and a shirt you won't necessarily be let in. Compared to somebody who's wearing a dress and high heel etc.*

These quotes amplify Jacob's account of social rejection and emphasise the unfairness that my interviewees experience at the door of mainstream formal nightclubs. Hannah and Opal indeed highlight the difficulty of navigating social selection at the nightclub's doors since, in their views, even a strict dress code is still subject to interpretation, which leaves them with the constant anxiety of not being let in. In addition, their accounts introduce the idea that dress codes strongly convey gender normative and heteronormative prejudices, with men being less likely to be let in if they cannot perform consumption power and women being forced into sexualised attire.

Along the same lines, Abel compared the inclusiveness of the MOA Club with the strong social prejudices conveyed by mainstream formal nightclubs' door policies. He said:

*The MOA is a big family, and you never get into trouble. (...) It's no trouble getting in, not like in the other nightclubs where they check you from head-to-toe hmm...if you're a lad and you're not with 3 or 4 girls forget about getting in. At the MOA they don't give a fuck. For as long as you're in age and you want to have fun, go for it!*

And further along:

*In other clubs it's a bit hmm...they are too strict hum...too square with the rules hmm... The MOA...it really is a place where there's just no hassle, if you want to have fun, it's the place. Whereas other places, it's more hum...the look. If you go to the Bypass, or the Java or wherever...it's just how you look that's important.*

Abel's description of this other nightlife, which he dislikes, is interesting in that he compares informal and licenced mainstream nightlife and uses inclusiveness to draw the line between them. For Abel, the informal mainstream place that the MOA club is, is welcoming and open, which strongly contrasts with the selectiveness of formal mainstream premises. His account is all the more important in that, in his interviews, he talked about his job in finance, the fact that he can afford to consume in more expensive venues and how this choice clashes with some of his colleagues' preferences. In addition, his descriptions back up previous quotes about the gender and heteronormative nature of discrimination in licenced venues. Indeed, he exemplifies how mainstream licenced venue instrumentalise women to attract men, whilst men are turned away if they cannot "bring women along" with them, showing how discrimination and prejudice work at the variety of levels in a cash-rich, consumption-driven environment.

In these quotes, my interviewees are explicit about their experiences of strong discrimination in licenced mainstream nightlife spaces. Their experiences not only illustrate how these venues are ruled by door policies that discriminate nightlife consumers on economic grounds, but also demonstrate how these policies of exclusion perpetuate other forms of prejudice.

All these quotes from participants who I met at the MOA club highlight the levels of exclusion and social injustice that nightlife goers are exposed to in mainstream licenced nightlife. These quotes, however, suggest that, if consumers of mainstream informal spaces such as the MOA experience discrimination in formal mainstream spaces of nightlife, this happens by rejection from these venues rather than by an active choice of theirs to not attend these venues.

During her interview, Emma and I discussed the ethos of alternative venues and her experience of being cast in the gender-normative environment of mainstream spaces of nightlife. She said:



*(In mainstream venues) The lads are much more errrrmm...in a...“I’m going to pull a woman” kind of mode, I’d say.*

And further:

*They come and they’ll...I mean they won’t even talk to you first. They’ll grab your waist and dance against you. I genuinely don’t like it. That’s really...places that play mainstream music where men act like that whereas at the Gravière I’ve never been hassled by anyone. People just leave you fucking alone. I mean, they will come and speak to you if they find you attractive but they won’t just come from behind to dance with you.*

In this quote, Emma corroborates the views previously expressed by participants who I met in mainstream informal venues, in that she describes a similar experience of being sexualised and discriminated on the basis of her gender in formal mainstream venues. Unlike participants met in mainstream informal venues however, Emma describes her decision to attend an informal alternative space such as la Gravière as her preference, rather than the result of being excluded. Mainstream consumers’ accounts, indeed, show that they are navigating a nightscape from which they find themselves excluded economically or on the basis of their social status. Unlike them, the accounts I received from nightlife goers who I met in alternative places do suggest that their preference is for alternative venues because these venues convey an ethos of inclusiveness which they make explicit.

In the excerpt that follows, Gabriel, a 30 year-old non-binary raver and occasional organiser of unlicensed raves, talked to me about his first experiences of “posh” nightlife venues as a teenager. He explained how he started going out with a girlfriend who liked high-end mainstream nightclubs and specifically refers to the Java club:

*I wasn’t going to drink anyway because it was totally unaffordable and so I was pre-loading big time. Typically, at the Java, you’ll always find a crowd of*

*people, just sat by the door...drinking...before they get in...those who cannot afford a bottle inside.*

And further:

*There is this kind of... elitist culture. What amused me was the challenge of **getting in** the Java! I had to get into a role and try to trick the bouncer and errmmm... once I was inside it was super boring, now when I think back. (...) It had nothing to do with being part of an elite, because I was totally not part of it! But it was more like a game.*

These quotes are interesting because they demonstrate how participants of the alternative nightlife are aware of the forms of exclusion that rule the mainstream formal nightlife but choose not to expose themselves by choice rather than by exclusion. In this account, Gabriel demonstrates that he is not 'spared' of suffering economic exclusion and that this impacts on his experience of a night out since he needs to 'pre-load' (drinking before entering the venue) . But he also shows how he is aware of the power game that dominates mainstream formal venues such as the Java and how he has the social capital to play them.

Adam was a queer respondent in his mid-40s who occasionally organised parties at Patchinko, an unlicensed bar. Adam had strong views in regards the social violence conveyed in mainstream venues. They said to me:

*There is a question of inclusiveness. Lately I've been volunteering at the Patchinko, it's a venue where it's easy to get in... it's cheap... the beers are cheap (...) So economically... and culturally, because we don't expect people to be dressed in a certain way, so you can come in as you are.*

And further:

*I've been out in all sorts of venues. And these venues that I like have this ethos that I don't find elsewhere... I mean this ethos of kindness and also... I probably share the same values than the people who go out there.*

*Because if I go to other clubs, they are... it's difficult for me to word why I think it's different there, but I certainly experienced more violence erm... more tensions, whereas where I go, I am often surprised I mean people are errmmm... solidly intoxicated but there is still a kind of... of... of... sensitivity that is respectful.*

This quote from Adam challenges the picture previously given by mainstream consumers in terms of how it situates exclusion. Adam explains that he has been participating in both mainstream and alternative nightlife and he sees the same forms of violence and discrimination in mainstream venues. In this sense his preference for alternative venues resonates as a proactive choice to reject any form of exclusion, rather than suffering from exclusion himself. But at the same time, Adam makes it explicit that he sees the spatial regime of mainstream formal venues connected to forms of social violence and segregation in these spaces.

In conclusion to this section, I want to highlight that my participants' quotes support the argument that the corporatisation of the NTE has produced more exclusion and segregation, an idea which has been well documented academically (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hae, 2011a; Hobbs and Hall, 2000; Hobbs et al., 2003; Talbot, 2004 and 2007). These quotes, however, suggest that, beyond the experiences of exclusion in licenced, formal, socially exclusive spaces of nightlife, alternative consumers mobilise a broader set of values to justify why they don't want to attend mainstream licenced venues, which makes it a positive choice rather than exclusively an experience of social injustice and exclusion.

As I have extensively explained before, my research engagement strategy is framed around engaging with spaces of nightlife, which rallied around their struggle to survive in the neoliberal regime of space. The previous two sections suggest that this tacit alliance is sealed by the narrative of spaces which have the potential to include nightlife goers and prevent social and economic exclusion or gender discrimination.

This section, however, suggests that where mainstream consumers are excluded from consuming in licenced mainstream venues, alternative nightlife participants actively reject the values which are promoted by these spaces, a critique which connects the spatial regime of these spaces with their social regime. In the following section, I will therefore discuss how the dichotomy between inclusiveness and exclusiveness that has inhabited the beginning of this chapter ties up with regimes of production of spaces of nightlife. The third section will look at informality and its legacy and investigate how informality has allowed for nightlife mainstream spaces to develop an inclusive business model, whereas alternative nightlife venues have worked towards the resistance for counter-spaces.

### **5.2.3 Inclusiveness: mode of consumption or ethos of space making?**

In this section, I look at how inclusiveness helped me work towards a definition of counter-spaces. In doing so, I discuss evidence that, beyond the “banner of inclusiveness” that alternative informal venues and mainstream informal venues have allied under, inclusiveness resonates differently depending on what kind of spaces my participants are associated with. In the section that follows, I put forward accounts that connect the idea of inclusiveness with the regime of space in which it is enacted, discussing the idea that informal mainstream venues offer accessible spaces of consumption, whereas informal alternative venues (that are also accessible to cash-poor consumers) work along the lines of an ethos of spatial inclusiveness.

First, if I consider the most basic level at which inclusiveness is discussed by my participants – the regime in which nobody is excluded from spaces of nightlife – it becomes very apparent that inclusiveness exists in spaces, which act as pockets of informality in a profit-driven NTE. Second, I challenge that view by exploring the gap between mainstream informal and alternative informal venues, arguing that mainstream informal spaces are embedded in a

vision of inclusive consumption, whereas alternative informal spaces' inclusiveness is the result of their active engagement in reclaiming modes of production of space that clash with neoliberalism.

In the interview from which an excerpt is presented below, I talked with Theo, the co-manager of a mainstream informal nightclub, and we discussed the nightclub's success amongst young, diverse and cash-poor consumers. He recalled the creation of the venue and explained:

*I loved everything that had to do with clubbing, Ibiza kind of stuff etc and in Geneva there was nothing in that register and so that did seem like a cool thing to do...that was missing errrrmmm...we did it here<sup>3</sup> because there was no way that we could have done it anywhere else. I mean, finding premises in Geneva you know too well how hard it is. Even if you told me that it's possible, I wouldn't believe you because I've been looking for over ten years now so...*

In this quote, Theo made it explicit how much the real estate market boom in Geneva has impacted on the production of spaces of nightlife. He explains how he has found himself struggling to find a space which would allow his business model to stay economically accessible. And he pinpoints the fact that industrial premises, which cannot be fully licenced, offer a precarious, yet more inclusive framework. Theo's idea of managing a nightclub, however, is fundamentally entrepreneurial and, even though he expresses concerns and frustrations over the lack of accessible spaces in Geneva, his idea of the inclusiveness of nightlife spaces in this instance is framed by the impact of financial risks (costs attached to the transformation of industrial premises, risk of not being fully licenced) on his business model.

Similarly, Nikos (owner of another mainstream informal nightclub), said to me:

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<sup>3</sup> In an industrial zone

*The dancefloor is not very big. The sound system is made out of huge loudspeakers. To come to my parties, you pay 25CHF<sup>4</sup> once a year and then it's free for a year. My idea is that if you give, you receive. What makes our success after 25 years is that we are... somehow, still conveying the emotion of the beginning of this scene. I mean we're no longer 'vagabundos' in the Ibiza style. But still.*

Interestingly, both these mainstream informal club promoters refer to Ibiza as a model of bohemianism and openness, but also a success story of the Night-Time Economy. Just like Theo, Nikos' club is located in industrial premises, which he shares with a variety of industrial businesses in the daytime. The location of the nightclub implies that, like Theo, he cannot be fully licenced and has to apply for an authorisation for each night, which makes his business model very vulnerable. Both Theo and Nikos demonstrate awareness and a desire to act within an economically accessible framework. They show openness and respect for their cash-limited clientele, although Nikos views his customers as part of a cultural scene, whilst Theo offers a product that otherwise would be outside his consumers' reach.

Jacob, who I met at the MOA, talked to me about negotiating inclusion and exclusion in those terms:

*Here, in Geneva, I was discriminated on the basis of...errmmm... my face. So many times. To be fair the first time I went to the MOA, it happened! But then I called the MOA and I complained and since I never had an issue again. They are actually really nice with me now. They always let me in for free and I can get anyone I want in for free too.*

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<sup>4</sup>Around £20

Further, Jacob talks about a night which he spent at the ByPass, a formal mainstream nightclub, saying:

*I can go through a bottle, it's just that 110CHF<sup>5</sup> a bottle in a nightclub! We can pay that price if there's 15 of us! (laughs). Last time we chipped in... for two bottles it was. They were in a group of 10! And the bottles disappeared like... not everybody managed to get a glass. (...) I'm a hairdresser. If I was a banker, I wouldn't complain.*

To me, the two quotes above powerfully encapsulate the ambiguity of discussing inclusiveness with the nightlife goers who I met in informal mainstream venues. On the one hand, these two excerpts expose high levels of awareness of the mechanisms of exclusion at stake in the nightlife and expose difficult experiences of social and economic exclusion. On the other hand, the quotes show the participants' internalisation of such realities by highlighting how they navigate a thin line between inclusiveness and commercial strategy. In the first quote, Jacob tells me about his experience of being socially profiled but then expresses his contentment with a commercial gesture of the club management, which blatantly aims at pacifying him and preserving the reputation of a nightclub that is open to young, cash-limited consumers. Equally, in the second quote, Jacob explains that his experiences in a formal mainstream nightclub made him class aware. At the same time, he does not criticise the economic exclusion that he is a victim of and perceives high-end nightclubs as just another product for cash-rich consumers.

In the same register, Hazel talked extensively about the venues that she liked in terms of their affordability:

*Hazel: the Monte Christo they do this thing of three drinks... for 20 francs<sup>6</sup>. So you pay 20 francs entry fee*

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<sup>5</sup> Around £90

<sup>6</sup> £13

*and you get three drinks, which is super cool, coz it comes to... nothing for the drinks. And after midnight, that's 30 francs for the girls, 40 francs<sup>7</sup> for men and you get three drinks (...).*

*Me: And ermmm... do you think it's ermm... I mean, for you is that's... that's not so much of an issue that they make the difference between women and men?*

*Hazel: Not at all! (she laughs) Not at all! I am more than happy about it. No, I mean, you know ermmm... that's the people at the Monte who decided to do that, the MOA doesn't make any difference. To be honest, for me in fact... I don't care.*

In these quotes, Hazel also praises the MOA Club and its formal mainstream counterpart, the Monte Christo club, for their inclusive door policy and pricing. In the same quotes, however, she totally disregards the commercial agenda behind those policies, as well as the other forms of discrimination that result from such commercial strategies. In this instance, she is happy to embrace a sexist stand from the nightclub as long as she can benefit from a commercial advantage.

Hazel's account dramatically contrasted with the one of Olivia, an 18 year-old woman who I met at La Gravière. At the beginning of the interview, Olivia strongly insisted that her choice for alternative venues primarily reflected her musical preferences. But as the interview progresses, she starts talking about how her experiences in spaces of nightlife also resonated with her values. She said:

*I was always put off by these venues that ermmm... for example, offer free entry to women ermmm... or stuff like that. Or free champagne for women because erm... because it's just utterly sexist, disgusting and ermmm... that upsets me really.*

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<sup>7</sup> £26



Olivia's quote is important in that it highlights the connection between the business model of spaces of nightlife and the values that such spaces convey. She expresses her anger at commercial strategies that promote a normative and sexualising image of women and explicitly rejects the idea that attracting women with commercial benefits can be viewed as inclusive.

Olivia's quote strongly resonates with Felix's account (co-founder of an alternative informal, artist-led venue) featured below. In the quote, he reflects upon the use of commercial strategies to attract more clientele and says:

*Sometimes we act in a commercial way. We make the fee at the door cheaper before a certain hour to encourage people to come earlier. But that's also to work towards longer nights! So, it's not only about money, it's also to respond to the constraints. What we would never do is leave women in for free, for example. Because we don't want our space to communicate that. That's not right. Women and men pay their fees. One sex isn't there to attract the other. It's not right to attract women with free entry to make men pay. We want people to be equal.*

I find the way Felix negotiates the limit between commercialism and inclusiveness particularly enlightening. On the one hand, he acknowledges his venue as a space of consumption, whereby commercial strategies can be deployed to channel attendees' consumption habits. On the other hand, he acknowledges his responsibility of conveying values and demonstrates awareness of the fact that he does not want to compromise by using gender-based discrimination to attract more custom.

In addition, Felix's quote is important in terms of discussing the status of informal alternative venues. His description suggests that, as an alternative nightlife producer, he has to conform with some aspects of the NTE but also embraces the role of questioning and subverting them. The buvette licence (explained in Chapter 4) under which Felix's venue operates has the potential

to offer more flexibility than a full licence. But Felix suggests in this quote that people have internalised the rhythms imposed by the licencing system and he likes to experiment with a reappropriated version of a widespread mainstream venues' commercial strategy, by experimenting with different time frames in his alternative venue.

Tom, co-founder of an alternative licenced venue, which he co-founded with a collective of people, reflected upon inclusiveness in a similar way. He said to me:

*I like the idea of offering a space... that's open... where very different people have the potential to meet hmm... love each other... eerrmmm I think it's incredibly important because (...) maybe, hmm... hmhhh... I mean... the immigrant who's just arrived in Geneva will meet hmhhh... an extremely rich native Genevan in an almost magical way. Something like that. That there is no more barriers... like, between people from different social backgrounds.*

And further:

*Everyone can come with who they are as an individual, not carrying the load of their social background... cultural... familial. That's really important, isn't it?*

These quotes give a strong image of the ethos of inclusiveness that animate the venue that he operates, way beyond the commercially inclusive vision given by participants I met in mainstream informal venues. According to Tom's words, the nightclub that he co-manages is intentionally designed to be an inclusive space where participants are encouraged to drop social barriers and social norms to connect with each other. In this sense, not only does his quote suggests that an alternative nightlife venue like his has the potential to convey values of inclusiveness in the sense of welcoming a broad diversity of people; but that inclusiveness is a regime of space in which social norms can be subverted and experimented with.

In the first half of this chapter, I have discussed participants' quotes that give a picture of their perception of the Genevan nightscape. First, I looked at participants' accounts which show that informal spaces of nightlife in Geneva, whether mainstream or alternative, are residual pockets where there is no exclusion on the basis of consumption. This vision of an inclusive nightlife, in opposition to the formal mainstream one that emerged in post-2008 Geneva, is important because, in my participants' discourse, it has allowed for informal mainstream and informal alternative producers and consumers to ally under the banner of inclusiveness.

In a second step however, I have discussed how commercial strategies of including young, cash-poor consumers convey other forms of discrimination, notably the sexualisation of women to attract male consumers in exchange of commercial advantages, values that the alternative nightlife goers who I interviewed actively reject. Mainstream informal producers see the inclusion of young, cash-poor consumers as inclusiveness and mainstream informal consumers are happy to take advantage of those trends.

In this last section, I have looked at accounts that make inclusiveness resonate differently depending on whether it is talked about by informal mainstream or informal alternative producers and consumers. In light of these quotes, I have introduced the idea that informal mainstream producers see inclusiveness as part of their venue's business model, whereas informal alternative venue operators described inclusiveness as an ethos of producing spaces whereby a diversity of people have the potential to meet.

In conclusion to this first half of the chapter, I would like to assess that, in light of what participants said to me, it became apparent that informal mainstream venues worked as pockets of inclusive consumption, which did not exclude young, cash poor consumers in particular. According to the producers who I spoke to, this was made possible by the informal nature of their venues and wouldn't have been possible under the regime imposed by the neoliberal NTE.

In the neoliberal context, this was enough to make these informal mainstream venues stand out and was strongly valued by those who were regulars there. Beyond the cheapness and the absence of door policies, my participants conveyed a strong sense of togetherness, sealed around the idea of welcoming those who were not welcome in high-end nightclubs.

In informal mainstream venues, however, inclusiveness worked alongside the neoliberal framework, in the sense that inclusiveness was facilitated by an informal setting to open up the NTE to consumers who would be otherwise excluded.

Unlike their mainstream counterparts, alternative producers were actively engaging in reclaiming modes of production of space in which inclusiveness challenges the commodification of space. Alternative producers in particular expressed awareness of the neoliberal framework that they have to work within and the need to adapt to be able to be truthful to their ethos. In this context, inclusiveness was central to reject the exclusiveness of neoliberalised spaces of nightlife and it became a ground of experimentation to subvert the codes of mainstream nightlife but also allow participants to negotiate the terms in which they interact.

### **5.3 The co-production of counter-spaces**

In the first part of the chapter, I have looked at inclusiveness as an important feature of counter-spaces in the night, but I have also discussed the fine line between inclusiveness as a commercial strategy and inclusiveness as an ethos. In the second half of this chapter, I complete my definition of counter-spaces in the Genevan NTE by digging further into the spatial and social construction of these venues and argue that space making in the Genevan alternative nightlife sheds an innovative light on the concept of co-production.

In order to do so, I first consider the legacy of informality in the making of counter-spaces and discuss how this informal regime is being redefined in neoliberal Geneva. Secondly, I develop the argument that Genevan counter-spaces are defined by a practice of space making which involves playing with and subverting spatial attributes of nightlife venues and destabilising spatial standards. Thirdly, this subchapter discusses, through my participants' accounts, how the spatial unstableness of alternative nightlife venues is feeding into a culture self-management and the negotiation of social relations.

### **5.3.1 The legacy of informality**

As I outlined in Chapter 4, informal spaces were the dominant form of space in the Genevan nightlife for over three decades. As I have already explained, this status quo of informality was considerably shaken by the mass evictions of squats in Geneva. Some pockets of informality were perpetuated, however, notably thanks to the “buvette” (drink stall) licence. The buvette licence put nightlife venues in a precarious position somewhere between the state's legitimisation of informal nightlife through trust agreements and a cash demanding, administratively heavy licencing system. The buvette regime, however, did allow nightlife producers to take advantage of cheaper premises (notably those located in the Geneva's outskirts on industrial estates), buildings which until 2012 couldn't otherwise have been legitimately used for any other purpose than industrial activity<sup>8</sup>. This model of informal nightlife venues gave birth to both mainstream and alternative venues, which, thanks to their informal status were economically more accessible and practiced no door policy. In this section, I want to look at the legacy of this status quo around spatial informality by bringing together some of my participants' quotes that look into how informality can be read in today's spaces of nightlife in Geneva.

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<sup>8</sup> The Genevan planning system was amended in 2012, to allow buildings listed as industrial to accommodate cultural events (État de Genève, 2012)

In section 5.2.3, I have already quoted Theo, the manager of an mainstream informal venue, referring to the industrial premises where his nightclub operated and saying that “*we did it here because there was no way that we could have done it anywhere else.*” In this quote Theo explained how informality has allowed him to operate within industrial premises where an accessible rent allows for his nightlife venue’s business model to include cash-poor consumers. Reflecting upon his journey towards opening his nightclub, Nikos (co-owner of another mainstream informal nightclub), said:

*The real change happened when... eventually... we realised that, in order to throw parties, we needed a space. And that L’Usine, PTR or the Kabaret... who were always... super generous... were not enough. (...) And so, at that point, we decided to accept the financial pressure of what it means to be a promoter, which means paying a rent, have our own sound system, pay for the flights etc etc.*

These two quotes are important in my view because they show a form of “spatial opportunism” in informal mainstream producers. Informality, in their case, meant that they were able to run spaces which were economically accessible and without door selection of customers. For Nikos, who initiated his career as a nightlife promoter in iconic alternative venues such as L’Usine, informality also created a spatial regime in which he was able to serve a subcultural scene in his private nightclub but “in the spirit” of alternative venues. In that sense both of them distinguished themselves from formal mainstream venues, since they take advantage of informality to operate spaces which would otherwise be excluded from the neoliberal NTE model. Their view of informality, however, was very much centred on the way informality served their business interest. In Theo’s quote, informality was the condition to integrate accessibility in his business model. In Niko’s quote, informality was a regime of space in which he was able to cater to a countercultural scene in the form of a private business.

In the next part of this section, I look at the way alternative producers talk about the legacy of informality in their practice and their spaces of nightlife, a vision which radically connected informality and the definition of counter-spaces.

In this quote, for example, Felix remembered the early days of his experience as nightlife operator in the squatted venue called Escobar. He said:

*What we were able to do at Escobar, whether it is to finish at 9am... or 12pm! And sell beers for 2 Swiss Francs<sup>9</sup>... we had no rent to pay. We had no licence. It was... amazing! It was beautiful. That's the background of what we do. And we had to adapt.*

And further:

*In Geneva it was completely dead for about 10 years (...) because with the eviction of squats... and the end of this way of doing things, all the promoters... I mean we were not "promoters", but rather just people organising parties errmmm... we were not equipped to run a bar like a business, or a club. And now are we equipped to do it? I am not sure. We have no capital. We have more experience, but we still don't hold a licence.*

In these two quotes, Felix describes the transformation of a regime of informal spaces of nightlife in Geneva in which a generation of nightlife operators experimented without regulation and financial pressure. These excerpts are important because his words situate his nightlife practice as the legacy of an informal regime of space in squats in which, participants – producers and nightlife goers alike – were able to negotiate and experiment with the very terms of the night, from opening hours to prices. The second quote reemphasised this legacy whilst illustrating the struggles that operators who

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<sup>9</sup> Around £1.60

developed a practice in informal venues faced when this regime of space that disappeared.

Felix reflected upon the new informal alternative venue that he opened and said:

*Initially we threw a party every month. (...) We threw one gig. We organised an exhibition with 30 artists from across Europe who sent us images and we built a wall right in the middle of the space to exhibit them. We really got involved in demanding projects. And step by step we replaced radicality by regularity. Because we quickly realised that we couldn't do... a movie night on Tuesday, build a movie screen, benches and dismantle it all for the Saturday to have it ready for a club night or a gig. I mean we did all that, but we exhausted ourselves and it was hard work.*

Here Felix described the legacy of informality as a culture of using informal spaces of nightlife as total experiments. Administratively, his venue fell into the category of nightlife venues, but the cultural reality of this space was much more diverse. Experimenting with diverse artistic forms and bringing them in contact with nightlife was a practice of experimenting both with and within the space that he operated. He talked about trying to reproduce the conditions under which he had operated in squats and the cultural vibrancy that was possible in them. But he also reflected on the transformation of the informal regime of space post-2008 and describes a loss of radicality precipitated by heavier space management duties and the institutionalisation of his informal venue.

Felix referred to the legacy of informality as a condition in which participants, producers and consumers, had agency over the space within which they operated and could negotiate the terms of their participation. He acknowledged that, in post-2008 Geneva, space management had become alienating even for an informal alternative venue. This quote was particularly



interesting in that it illustrated how the culture of experimentation in alternative nightlife venues was deeply rooted in a struggle for space. Felix explained that his practice of managing a space of nightlife gave him a critical perspective on the spatial regime that produces the NTE in Geneva. He recalled his experience of operating in informal spaces such as squats, which he was nostalgic of. But he also expressed his desire to continue being a part of the Genevan nightscape even if he needed to compromise with the practice that he developed under the licence of informality.

In another interview, I spoke to Tom and Luce who were part of the collective that opened an alternative licenced nightlife venue post-2008. Interestingly, they were the only alternative operators who were at the benefit of a licence, a specificity which they said was a demand from the State of Geneva, as part of the negotiations to get granted the use of a state-owned building. Reflecting upon the way they decided to work towards opening an alternative nightlife venue to perpetuate the culture of experimentation, they said:

*Luce: we always wanted to work around interdisciplinarity, and that meant, ideally, having a space available where we can support the development of a whole variety of artistic practices.*

*Tom: We always wanted... a diversity of musical genres... and a diversity of activities. And we constantly work towards more diversity.*

And later:

*Tom: Yeah, I mean, there's... there's some legacy and there's some novelty too. It works because we experienced hum... how it was before and so we try to reproduce some of the things. But it's also inevitably a bit different.*

*Luce: I mean, it's very different. The legacy continues because we want to perpetuate some ways of doing things...participative...grassroots...but what is imposed on us from the outside clashes completely with that ethos and is fundamentally discouraging these ways of self-organising.*

Interestingly enough, Luce and Tom were the only nightlife producers who I interviewed, who, at the time of the interview, were benefiting from a full nightclub licence. During the interview, they explained that they opted for the nightclub licence, which was the most constraining in terms of norms and security, as it put them in a better position to negotiate with the state to obtain a building, in terms of both quietening down the licencing office and offering more stability to their project. Their descriptions of the venue that they co-managed, however, encompassed all the aspects of what they saw as a counter-space in the neoliberal Genevan nightlife. They described interdisciplinarity as the central aspect of the venue which they worked in, a practice which, in their description, was very much challenged by the institutions that regulated the Genevan nightlife. If the nightclub licence guaranteed them stability to operate, it also involved high standards of regulation that undermined their ability to bring together a variety of artistic practices, particularly when it came to live arts. In addition, the full licence needed to be held by one individual manager, which had forced them to divide the structure between the individual bar management and the collective cultural programming. Like Felix who was quoted above, they referred to a legacy of informality in terms of a nightlife culture based on spatial and cultural experimentations. In their views, the informal regime of space in which this culture was born was a fundamental component needed to keep this culture alive. While they wanted to demonstrate their ability to adapt to the new context, they also acknowledged that the neoliberal spatial regime put an increasing pressure on their nightlife practices.

In conclusion to this section, I want to insist on the fact that the legacy of informality emerged in my interviews as an important dimension of the narrative of resistance among informal nightlife operators, both mainstream and alternative. As I explored this thread, however, two divergent visions emerged. Whilst both types of operators talked about informality as an opportunity to continue existing in the neoliberalised Genevan nightscape, mainstream producers used informality in an opportunistic way, because it

was seen as a business opportunity to give access to young, cash-limited consumers or to cater to a subcultural scene imprinted with an ethos of inclusiveness. Alternative producers, on the contrary, saw the legacy of informality as an inherited practice of contesting a dominant regime of space through practices of experimenting with space, a dimension which I will investigate more in depth the following two sections.

### **5.3.2 Unstable spaces, spaces of entertainment**

As I have explored in Chapter 2 (see specifically section 2.3.3), urban informality has recently attracted academic attention for its potential to foster innovative forms of governance (Shaw and Hudson, 2009). Relevant to this thesis is also the idea that informality can be seen as a deviant or subversive regime in the neoliberal urban environment (Cupers and Miessen, 2002; Edensor et al., 2009; McFarlane and Waibel, 2012).

In this subsection, I look at how the legacy of informality translates into my interviewees descriptions of alternative vs. mainstream spaces of nightlife and how this connects with the politics of informality.

In all venues, my participants talked about spaces of nightlife being decorated and transformed to exacerbate the playfulness and entertainment experience in the venues. In informal mainstream venues, however, their descriptions of the premises fitted into the NTE canons, with, for example, themed decors exoticising the environment for summer parties and displays encouraging the sexualisation of participants (podiums and showers amongst other things). In alternative venues, the descriptions were rather different and participants described arrangement of cultural artefacts (music, videos, light installations and live performances, amongst others) in an unexpected or unconventional way as part of a culture of destabilising cultural and social norms.

In the quote below Luke connected the history of informal spaces of nightlife in Geneva with the spatial diversity which emerged thanks to this regime of space. He described Artamis:

*They were loads of different buildings, I mean, there was a wide range of different things, you see? Like not a city full of... just bars. Or just... just... even that, I mean, maybe l'Ecole de Médecine... the only place where you would maybe get a similar feeling... and I say maybe because you can't even stay on the terrace... everyone is just crammed into the same space... There, it was really a space where you could do whatever you wanted! (...) Now here we miss... we miss... it's way too policed... too policed...*

Luke reflects upon how the neoliberal regime of space has transformed the Genevan nightscape, reducing what he perceives as a diversity of spatial textures. His quote touches upon the transformation of spaces of nightlife from a macro and micro perspective. In his words, spaces such as Artamis created a built environment that was diverse in look and shape, a spatial reality that reflected the cultural diversity which the Artamis venues did host. Interestingly he compares Artamis to the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, a street in the Genevan city centre where bars started mushrooming post-2008, making this place a popular nightlife destination. This street, in his words, recreates that spatial experience of having a number of venues in the same place but with the main difference that, in his view, the bars at Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine are all the same as the result of being in a space that is heavily regulated.



*Images 37 and 38 On the left: nightlife goes drinking and watching a film at a party outside the Shark venue in Artamis, 2008. On the right: People casually drinking outside in the early hours after the party, Artamis 2008.*



*Image 39 View of the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine and bars, 2014. The space is policed through plexiglass dividers meant to contain consumers within the outdoor spaces rented by night-time businesses. Bars also use bouncers in high-visibility jackets to police consumers' behaviours. This image also shows the high concentration of consumers.*

The photos above show nightlife related activities happening in Artamis, an entirely informal and unlicensed cultural district open until 2008 (top photos); and a typical weekend night at the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine (bottom image), the two spaces described by Luke. By drawing this comparison, Luke

shows that, even if he likes the vibrancy of Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, the diversity of spaces that was possible within an informal nightlife environment was lost as a NTE orientated licencing system imposed spatial standards. He described mainstream venues as spatially standardised and "too policed". In this sense, his perspective somehow tackles both the transformation of the nightscape, and the texture of the space. In his view, the neoliberalisation of nightlife in Geneva has standardised venues across the city but also the way venues are designed, undermining the agency that nightlife goers can enjoy over the spaces where they experience nightlife.

Olivia, also a nightlife goer who I met in an alternative venue, expressed a similar views:

*I don't like eerrmmm... I don't like spaces, which are too errmmm... too ready-made? (...) I like it better when it's more informal... more hand made.*

In this quote, Olivia refers to the alternative nightlife culture of "crafting" venues. What she describes is her appreciation of the fact that alternative producers create spaces which are unique because they are "handmade". The combination of DIY-ness and informality converges towards this idea that nightlife producers participate in a culture of using space as a material for experimentation.

Reminiscing about the first nights he threw in l'Escobar, an informal alternative venue sat in the basement of the squat where he lived, Felix said:

*There was one room in L'Escobar, a room in the basement that was hum... full of rubble. There was a car... car parts, motorcycle parts, a shotgun, mattresses. It was full of rubbish, floor to ceiling. We emptied it all (...) We ordered a cement mixer truck. We poured a slab. And it became the Escobar's second room.*

In that quote, Felix exemplifies the culture of DIY space building that emerged in unregulated, informal settings in Genevan squats. He describes how, as a nightlife actor, he was able to appropriate a disused space and restore it to experiment with his practice without any economic constraint or regulatory framework. Later during the same interview he said:

*We threw Prohibition parties. We sold whiskey in jars. You had to bet to buy the jar to buy the whiskey. Sometimes we added electrified barb wire... with a generator, like the ones they use for cows. The Trauma Zone. A whole room was full of barb wire like that and if you touched them, you'd get an electric shock.*

This quote powerfully illustrates the kind of agency over space that nightlife producers found in informality. In this description, Felix talked about creating an environment for a party that completely destabilises the spatial standards that nightlife participants could expect in mainstream formal premises, such as simply going to the bar to buy a drink or enjoying a safely playful environment that is built to encourage oblivious hedonism. To the contrary, this quote shows that informality allowed alternative nightlife producers like him to destabilise and question these standards, whilst inviting nightlife participants to immerse themselves into a creative yet challenging environment.

Ana, a participant who I met at the MOA club, told me that her nightlife history started as a teenager in the hardcore<sup>10</sup> scene. She explained that she was very committed to the alternative scene as a teenager but that she later turned away from alternative venues to seek for a more conventional environment. She said:

*I went yeah... I went to the Squat de la Tour. But I thought it stank in there. I went to Rhino too... but*

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<sup>10</sup> Hardcore: variation of techno music played at a very fast pace

*errmmm... I wasn't a big fan of squats, it wasn't my cup of tea, no. I found them shady.*

During this conversation, Ana explained made it clear that, as she grew out of her love for hardcore music, she found alternative venues too unsettling and preferred the comfort of conventional nightclubs. Ana's experience of navigating both the alternative and the mainstream nightlife environments was an important insight for me to understand the politics of counter-spaces. In her story, she made it clear that, whilst her cultural preferences were more alternative, she was happy to compromise with her musical tastes to prioritise the ease of a night out in mainstream spaces of consumption where she knew what to expect. For her, mainstream nightclubs offered comfortable environments in which to socialise with her friends, and abundant drinking options, two aspects of a night out which she prioritised over unsettling experiences.

When I asked Abel to talk to me about the way the MOA club was decorated, he gave me this very instructive response:

*Honestly, they have good ideas. Like lately for example they've just added a new bar, there's a slush bar, they've put jacuzzis, there's a giant tiki at the door... honestly, it's really cool how they've decorated. (...) It changes from other nightclubs where it's just too conventional you see? At least... it really stands out, you can feel that it's the summer, it's as simple as that! It's the summer so they adapt the décor. In the other nightclubs, they just keep the same space and that's it.*

Abel went on to describe a variety of themed parties for which the MOA club's space was transformed. The flyers below promoted two of the parties that Abel particularly appreciated, the Borderline party involving jacuzzi and one of the Playa (beach) parties on the occasion of which the nightclub's was covered with 5 tons of sand.





Image 40 MOA club's flyer for a "Bordeline party with jacuzzi", 2016



Image 41 MOA club's flyer for a "Playa Party Big MOA Reggaeton" with 5 tons of sand, 2012

Sadly, I wasn't able to access any images of the specific nights that Abel mentions above, neither online nor from the venue's managers. I did, however, spend two nights in the club during the summer 2015 when the venue had been redecorated for the season, which gave me a taste of their practice of theming the space. The showers and jacuzzi were set up at the time of my second visit. The description that Abel gave me coincided with what I could experience: the club's management would pick a theme that was rather consensual and that they could easily communicate to the general public. Then they would accumulate decorative artefacts in the club's space to illustrate that theme and to recreate a concentrated version of a fantasised

space (such as a beach in the summer or an excessively sexualised space where women were invited to undress to warm up the winter). Interestingly, Abel was very vocal about how this practice of theming the space did made the MOA club a place that was different. During our conversation, I understood that, for him, the theming resonated with the absence of social selection in this particular instance.



*Image 42 Inside the MOA club, circa 2015. Plants, a hammock to create a tropical environment.*

Possibly because of the frivolousness of the themes themselves, as well as the way it was materialised (inflatable tikis, fake tropical plants), the environment it created communicated around the MOA Club as a space for fun and obliviousness. This impression very much contrasted with the exclusive and luxurious image of most marble paved and champagne sponsored mainstream clubs in Geneva. Funnily, I found the relative shoddiness of these installations to add to the impression that the venue was not snobbish or pretentious, which was coherent with their branding of a nightclub that didn't want to exclude anyone.

At the same time, I was struck by the conformism and conservatism of environments that were based on uncompromising clichés of exoticism, cultural appropriation and blatant sexism. It seemed obvious to me that the descriptions above translated clear disparities between, on the one hand, a culture of destabilising spatial norms as a way of encouraging participants to question them, and, on the other hand, a culture of transforming space that is reinforcing of spatial norms for the sake of entertainment. In the next subsection, I will also discuss how the transgression / co-optation of spatial norms translates into socially progressive or conservative environments.

I spoke to Liam, a man in his 40s, who I met in his role as unlicensed rave organiser. He talked about what it meant for him to create a space that connects with the legacy of informal space making. He said:

*For me it's a way of showing care for people. It's a demonstration of the fact that you are willing to offer something, not just being in a posture of "I have a club, you guys come, pay a fee at the door, pay your drinks, thank you, goodbye." It's a way of saying, ok, we share a space together and we are willing to share something different each time (...). And you'll come back four months later, and the space will be different again.*

This quote from Liam captured the idea of an ethos of collective space-making in alternative venues. In this citation, Liam describes the culture of creating spaces of nightlife as a commitment to a collective experience. For him, the culture of building unstable spaces resonates with a commitment to a collective experience and opposes the staticness of spaces such as mainstream nightclubs, which are designed for individual consumption. Whereas Abel's quote highlighted a culture of decorating spaces for consumers' enjoyment, Liam exposed a practice of collective space building, in which the space itself supports the experience of togetherness. In his quote, indeed, the physical transformation of the space itself is only the first step into a collective experience of experimenting in an environment which challenges spatial norms.

Jacob, who I met at the MOA Club, said to me that he once had attended Motel Campo, which he described in those terms:

*It's not really like a club. It's more like a warehouse. Like a warehouse turned into a club. That's the only thing for me...that's a bit of a shame. Because the vibe... I loved the vibe there.*

In this quote, Jacob explained how the undefined nature of Motel Campo as a space destabilised him and how this undermined his experience despite liking the crowd and the vibe. The connections between a spatial ethos and a social ethos are developed more in depth in the next section. But I found this quote enlightening in terms of how it captures the difference between, on the one hand, a nightlife consumer who is expecting certain spatial standards and, on the other hand, a space which is intentionally destabilising these expectations. It is interesting to compare Jacob's account with Louis, who was involved in the creation of Motel Campo. In the quote below he described their practice of changing the venue's space:

*It's a space that is constantly evolving. It started as an open space. Everything was on wheels. And to this day, only very few things were really set in space.(...) That is really entrenched in the philosophy of this space and that's a legacy of Artamis... it's a space in progress. In the sense that there is no set plan of how things need to be. (...) It's not as if we had designed a space, borrowed 200'000 Swiss Francs<sup>11</sup>, built it and it's going to be the same space forever. (...) And that's a strong identity for Motel Campo. It's never finished.*

In this quote, Louis described the culture of producing instable spaces of nightlife as something that emerged in informal settings such as squats in Geneva. For him, the constant reconfiguration of the premises that he ran opposed the unchanging nature of spaces of entertainment such as

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<sup>11</sup> Approximately £166'000

mainstream nightclubs. But most importantly, his quote conveyed a critique of the spatial forms that were created in the neoliberal regime of space, forms which he saw as rooted in a model of space stiffly built to promote consumption. His description of Motel Campo was interesting because it rooted the spatial unpredictability of alternative spaces of nightlife into the ethos of making, a process in which participants have increased agency over the space which they collectively inhabit for the time of a night out.

### **5.3.3 The negotiation of social relations in spaces of nightlife: a definition of counter-spaces**

This subsection marks the last step in answering my second research question “To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?”. In this subsection, the last of this chapter, I consider how spatial forms and social norms work alongside each other (Collier, 2005), with normative spaces reinforcing social power structures and experimental spaces potentially conveying more socially progressive socio-spatial experiments (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

To expand from the idea that the regime of space and the regime of social relations are somewhat interwoven and look at it from the perspective of spaces of nightlife, I look into my participants’ account to argue that: 1. Conventional power structures tend to be replicated in mainstream spaces of nightlife that fit into the neoliberal regime; and 2. the practices of experimenting with space described in the previous subsection expand into the practices of creating social spaces whereby social relations are negotiated rather than regulated, a regime of space in which “relational constructedness” (Massey, 2005, p.10) takes over spatial and social norms.

To initiate that argument, I would like to start with one of Grace’s quotes talking about her nightlife preferences. Grace was a non-binary alternative informal venues consumer in their mid-30s. They went to talk about free parties straight

away and explained how this way of experiencing nightlife had given them a different perspective on nightclubs:

*In open-air... in free parties, it's very alternative (...) I like that. Totally laid back. There is no judgment. You can be totally off you face, you can be just happy, you can be supportive with each other, you can sit down, people will offer you a fag (...) In clubs everything is a bit constrained hmm... you have to be careful about everything... you have to get in but you can't take your drink... you have to put your coat in the cloakroom... I mean it's too much. 15 francs a beer (...) at half four it's over! Come on, let's go on! No. It's not allowed...*

Similarly, Emma, who I met at La Gravière, spoke about going out in alternative nightlife venues in those terms:

*I love going out and knowing that... I can be the way I want. I can be on the floor sleeping because I've drunk too much and nobody will ermm... like, bother me. And so that's what I like. The open-mindedness and the kindness.*

These quotes for me illustrated well the relationship between a regime of space and the repercussions on social behaviour in nightspaces. In these accounts indeed, Grace talked about being “off her face”, whilst Emma mentioned “sleeping on the floor”. They used those situations as examples of adopting behaviours which are not socially accepted, but also as experiences in which they potentially put themselves in vulnerable positions. They described what they qualify as an alternative nightlife environment, as a setting in which the constraints on participants' behaviour were minimised and replaced by an ethos of friendliness, mutual respect and consent. In this sense, they both depicted alternative nightlife as a safe space where social norms can be subverted and experimented with without feeling endangered.

Interestingly, for Grace, the premises of a nightclub exemplify the highest levels of constraints both in terms of how the space is regulated and how that

translates into social constraints. These quotes certainly strongly contrasted with accounts such as Hazel's:

*I dance all the time, I am always on a podium or that kind of stuff! But I had to chill out a bit over the years because then, you know... the problem with Geneva is that it's really small and everyone knows about everyone and there's lots of stories going around. But I dance a lot.*

And further:

*Dancing on the bar yes. At the MOA that is an option, at the Monte it's an option (...) BUT, I mean, emmmhhh... yeah, I think there's a moment where... if I feel that alcohol is not making the right chemistry in me, I'd rather go home, same like dancing on the bar I will avoid, emmmhhh, some stuff... no, I mean. For me it's just a question of self-respect, the image that I am going to give...*

In this quote, Hazel described several mainstream nightclubs spatially and socially in a very different way than the participants above describe alternative venues. In her quote, she talked about spatial attributes to the nightclubs, namely the bar and podiums, in relation to her dancing. The presence of podiums suggested that the clubs featured spaces where young women like her were invited to exhibit their dancing. She described dancing on the bar as an even more risqué posture since this part of the club was not meant to be danced on and therefore the action took a subversive meaning in her views. At the same time, throughout our discussion, Hazel's descriptions were constantly influenced by the social expectations that she thought regulated her nightlife experience, a depiction that culminated with the sense of self-restraint that she imposed on herself to protect her image against moral judgement.

Throughout our conversation, Hazel depicted mainstream nightclubs as strongly gendering environments, which she complied with by performing a

sexualised image of herself (dressing up in sexy clothes and dancing on the bar and podiums). At the same time, in her descriptions of mainstream entertainment venues, she constantly walked the line between staged subversion (in which intoxication and hypersexual behaviours were central) and quite conservative views over what was an acceptable behaviour for her and others to adopt (she explicitly disapproved of drug use even though her alcohol consumption was blatantly quite heavy, and insisted on how nights out were moments she would spend “with her girls” to counteract any ambiguity about her trying to meet sexual partners).

Gabriel also described the social-spatial relationship in mainstream spaces of nightlife but from his perspective of alternative nightlife participants. He said:

*One of the reasons why I find venues like the Java unbearable, there it's one step to the side and the bouncers they... they don't approach in a friendly way... "you don't belong here, fuck off" that's what you get. (...) Honestly, as soon as you do anything vaguely outside the box... even dancing on the table you see... it's like the dream they sell to people so they won't stop them from dancing on the table... and even then depending on who it is they might get the person off the table. But if you're a bit tipsy and you break a glass, they'll kick you out.*

Similarly, when I asked Adam to talk about what they thought was specific to alternative nightlife venues, they said:

*It's a way of interacting that is self-regulated and that's why it's working. And when I go to other places often I'm like wow! That's too much aggressiveness for me (...) In profit-driven places, the gender balance is really harsh. It really determines how things happen and quickly creates tensions.*

In these accounts, Gabriel and Adam associated social violence with nightlife venues where social interactions were normed and policed the most, which



were also the most consumption-driven spaces. Gabriel's and Adam's quotes showed that mainstream venues, whether licenced (Java) or informal (MOA club) are spaces where social behaviour is strongly regulated through the use of space, a vision that Grace summarised when she said to me about the mainstream nightclubs' environment:

*It's very constrained, supervised... what's the best way to put it... regulated I'd say.*

In these quotes, my participants illustrate the tight connection in mainstream nightlife venues between a regime of space that is strongly regimented on the one hand, and an environment where social norms are reinforced on the other. That is obviously not to say that space was not playing a role in regulating social relations before neoliberalism transformed the production of urban spaces. But "techniques of exclusion and control through design features and security measures" (Peterson, 2006, p.355) are typical of the transformations occurring in a neoliberal urban environment, which very strongly resonate with the accounts I presented in the first part of this chapter. As discussed in part 5.2, in the case of spaces of nightlife, those techniques operate an economic exclusion of customers and thereby maximise consumption in mainstream formal venues, something that mainstream informal nightclubs owners were able to avoid thanks to the informality with which they operated. The discussions in this chapter, however, have shown neoliberal trends in policing and regulating mainstream spaces to operate way beyond the simple exclusion of cash-poor consumers. Through the way they communicated (flyers, posters and social media), through their architectural features, as well as through all regulatory apparatuses (bouncers, laws and bylaws and their spatial translation, codes of conduct, etc), mainstream venues conveyed values that contributed to channelling and restricting social interactions.

As discussed in part 5.3.2 above, alternative nightlife venues are characterised by the culture of destabilising spatial norms, a dimension of their spatial regime which strongly contrasted with the "stiffness" of mainstream premises. The quotes from alternative nightlife participants have shown how

spatial instability participated in instigating alternative modes of socialisation. The quotes above also contributed to a vision of alternative nightlife in which social relations are negotiated amongst participants in a way that not only allows individuals to behave the way they want (which, as Massey (2005) points out, characterises the neoliberal idea of freedom), but also as spaces whereby pre-defined spatial and social norms are excluded (at least temporarily and/or partially) to allow a regime of co-production to take over.

In that sense, counter-spaces are not only spaces whereby social and spatial norms are destabilised “for fun”, but also spaces where these experimentations have the potential to rearticulate the spatial and the social politically. To conclude this chapter’s analysis, I would like to quote Adam’s description of the Patchinko, an alternative space where he was involved both as consumer and occasional event organiser, and also hear from Gabriel, who was involved in organising free parties. They said:

*If I take the example of the Patchinko, it’s a venue that open errmmm... in the sense that it welcomes a very broad variety of people and erm... as an example there is no security staff, you see? It’s a venue that will occasionally be open until 5am but there is no security. And, in fact, there are surprisingly few situations where security was needed. But if the situation arises... there is a kind of dynamic of, errmmm, solidarity in relation to that. It means that if somebody goes off the rails... it’s not like everybody is completely helpless, running back home! But everyone will come together to try and sort the situation out collectively. (Adam)*

*It’s a desire to be together with others and being in an environment where errmmm... where I can find myself. Not necessarily that I have control over what is happening. It’s more a question of not just buying into what is available but rather creating something that’s yours. Somebody who attends a club night... they are still... they are staying in a system a bit.... that is quite set if you want. You know that you’re going to pay for your drink etc... you’re going to obey the rules and I*

*imagine, that the people who come here [attend the free parties]], they are intending to find a way out of it.*  
**(Gabriel)**

In these quotes, Adam and Gabriel capture the essence of the definition of counter-spaces that I have built throughout this chapter. Through their quotes, my participants have built a picture of informality as a regime of space where social norms are negotiated and regulation is replaced by the emotional connection between participants. They have also demonstrated the instrumental role of physical environment in either conveying the possibility to subvert and negotiate social norms (alternative spaces) or solidifying them (mainstream venues). They have described informal spaces as DiY made, unique and unstable and these dimensions, in their view, supported experimental, fluid social relations. In this subsection, I have shown that, for alternative nightlife participants, the legacy of informality connects with the politics of experimentation and that, in the context of the neoliberalisation of Geneva, informal spaces became bastions of socio-spatial experimentations.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have looked at how my participants talked about the importance of the spaces that they ran or attended and I have looked at their critiques of the kind of spaces that have emerged in neoliberal Geneva with the aim of answering my second research question: To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva? If the answer to this question obviously necessitates more complexity than one clearcut answer, the discussion above has clearly shown that Genevan spaces of nightlife have the potential to open up a counter-model of space in the neoliberal city insofar as they materialise experiments of spatial co-production. In the context of nightlife, co-production takes place in venues whereby spatial and social norms are intentionally destabilised, experimented with and contested.

In the first half of this chapter, I looked at inclusiveness as an overwhelming feature of all the nightlife venues in struggle where I met participants, informal mainstream and alternative alike, and discussed the terms in which inclusiveness was talked about by my participants. These discussions have showed that the inclusiveness of informal spaces strongly contrasted with the selectiveness of licenced venues, and that the neoliberalisation of Geneva had put a heavy strain on the inclusiveness of nightlife. I have further put forward that in informal mainstream venues, inclusiveness was limited to a business model which didn't exclude cash-poor consumers. This obviously did not undermine the important experiences of inclusion described by participants in informal mainstream venues. Furthermore, by producing a contrasting narrative of two different regimes of spaces (licenced and informal) these experiences of informal mainstream venues' hospitableness fed into a collective critique of the NTE as it emerged in neoliberal Geneva.

Beyond the inclusiveness of spaces of consumption such as informal mainstream venues however, I have put forward the idea that, in alternative venues, inclusiveness is articulated around the acceptance of social difference and the possible experimentations that result from the presence of others, which makes them more than just open or accessible but also spaces whereby the negotiation between spatial forms and social norms is articulated politically.

In the second half of this chapter, I looked further into the legacy of informality, beyond the opportunity of retaining inclusive spaces of consumption. I have showed that, for alternative nightlife participants, the heritage of informality is visible in practices of experimenting with space as well as social relations, two aspects of their nightlife culture that enhance one another. Specifically in Geneva, the legacy of informality claims lineage with political practices of creating spaces for cultural and social experimentation which, my participants have argued, allow socio-spatial arrangements that wouldn't be possible in pre-regulated spaces (Shaw and Hudson, 2009). Again, this is not to say that social and/or cultural experimentations never happen in mainstream venues,

even informal ones. But I have illustrated with participants' accounts that mainstream venues are imprinted with a conservative ideology of space and social relations that tends to perpetuate and reinforce the neoliberal mindset. In the next chapter, I look further into practices of co-producing spaces of nightlife by the means of experimentation in order to answer my third and final research question: To what extent does experimentation play a role in the co-creation of these counter-spaces and what role does it play in resisting neoliberalism?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Experimentation, co-production and the neoliberal urban environment**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the last of three analysis chapters, I discuss experimentation, the last topic of my theoretical triangulation after neoliberalism and counter-spaces. In chapter 4, I considered the impact of neoliberalism on urban space, arguing that, as a socio-spatial regime, it has undermined the possibility of running experimentation-led nightlife spaces but has also pushed spaces of nightlife to the forefront of the resistance against the neoliberalisation of Geneva. In chapter 5, I looked at spaces of nightlife as counter-spaces, arguing that they are built around the contestation of spatial norms and the negotiation of social norms.

In this chapter, I take a step away from mainstream nightlife venues which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, took advantage of inherited alternative models of spatial regimes (such as informality) but never engaged in counteracting neoliberal trends other than for their individual interests. This chapter instead focuses on interviews which I conducted with alternative nightlife actors with the aim to answer to the last of my research questions: “To what extent does experimentation play a role in a. the co-production of these counter-spaces, and b. resisting neoliberalism?” To do so, in the first half, I start by considering how these spaces are co-produced through experimentation. And in the second half, I discuss how practices of experimental space-making have brought together a narrative of resistance against neoliberalism.

The response to this last research question is geared around two central arguments which I develop throughout the chapter. The first is that, although

the academic discussion around co-production (which I flesh out with more precision in the first subsection of this chapter) is historically and presently very much focused on the delivery of public services (Brandsen et al., 2018; Nabatchi et al., 2017), the production of alternative spaces of nightlife fits into the definition of co-production because this process allowed for spaces to be recreated that would have otherwise disappeared in neoliberalism. Therefore, the process by which alternative spaces of nightlife were co-produced in Geneva post-2008 resonates with some of the dimensions in co-production theory such as collective knowledge building (Polk, 2015), political engagement (Chatterton et al., 2018; Mitlin, 2008) and, to a certain extent, collaboration with state services (Joshi and Moore, 2004). Additionally, the case study of Genevan alternative spaces of nightlife introduces the idea that creating spaces that would not have existed in neoliberal Geneva otherwise extends the definition of co-production from public service delivery to the provision of spaces.

The second argument is that, as my research shows, in the neoliberal context, there is an unavoidable relationship between co-production and an anti-neoliberal stand, implicitly or explicitly. In line with discussions about how co-production historically appeared in a context of state roll-back (Nöström et al., 2020), and more recently how it has become increasingly popular in response to neoliberal policies around the world (Brandsen and Honingh, 2015), I argue that the definition of co-production must be expanded from and within an anti-neoliberal framework. Even if the collaborations that my participants developed with public agencies were not aimed at delivering public services, they resulted in the implementation of policies designed to alleviate neoliberal pressures. This contribution from my case study has theoretical implications, I will argue, because it means that co-production can no longer be mixed-up with the transfer of responsibility from the state onto individuals, a paradigm which neoliberalism reinforces. But instead, co-production must be understood as a process of building alternatives to neoliberalism.

## **6.2 Experimentation as a regime of co-production**

In chapter 5, I looked at the making of counter-spaces, arguing that their creation is driven by the contestation of spatial and social norms that dominate neoliberal spaces. In this first half of chapter 6 I want to take this consideration further and consider experimentation as a process of co-production of counter-spaces. As I have laid out in Chapter 2 (particularly part 2.4.2), co-production is a concept that has gained academic attention in recent years because it encapsulates conversations around the emergence of alternative models of governance, and this is particularly true in neoliberal cities. In recent academic discussions, co-production is generally seen as a process in which actors of civil society are involved in designing services, a process which is perceived as a restorative solution for the loss of resources and legitimacy of public bodies in times of austerity.

Neoliberal urban studies (Béal, 2017; Berry, 2021; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002) have shown that, given the terms of neoliberalism (dwindling of public resources, deficit of confidence in democratic institutions, increased power of private actors prioritising their interests), relying on public administration alone is not enough to tackle big societal issues. As I explained in chapter 2, it is in this context that co-production has emerged as a possible pathway to reconfigure the way public services are designed and delivered (Brandsen et al., 2018), with the emergence of urban laboratories as dominant model of co-production of urban spaces (Bulkeley et al., 2016). In the first half of this chapter, I will therefore discuss how experimental practices, with a particular focus on experimentation in the arts, were central to the creation of counter-spaces in my case study. I will also show how experimentation has the potential to shed a different light on the concept of co-production and contribute to the growing debate around it.

As I have extensively described in Chapter 4, the production of cultural spaces has played a central role in connecting the cultural milieu in Geneva with



initiatives centred on urban justice. In the subsection that follows, I look at my participants' descriptions of the collaborative work that they have engaged in to co-create spaces of artistic experimentation and I discuss how these processes feed into discussions around co-production. By looking at my research participants' views on this question, I want to consider how the co-production of such spaces perpetuates the connection between cultural activism and urban activism and how the neoliberal context has obviously changed the terms in which this happened.

### **6.2.1 Political empowerment and the co-production of spaces of experimentation**

In this subsection, I argue that experimentation was an aspect of the co-production of my participants' nightlife spaces that was instrumental to their political empowerment. In their descriptions, after the criminalisation of squats in Geneva had made the occupation of privately-owned buildings politically and practically impossible, not only did they have to reinvent a way to find premises, but they had to negotiate the terms in which to occupy them. In the aftermaths of the wave of squat evictions, my interviewees had to find new strategies to access spaces.

In their descriptions, as non-professional space designers, they had to collectively engage and learn with aspects of creating spaces at every scale, from urban planning to property law and building regulation, a process for which they experimented with labour division and collaboration. In order to look for suitable spaces and negotiate access, they had coproduce and mobilise knowledge of Geneva by reflecting upon how their respective artistic practices did fit and/or were excluded from the Genevan urban environment. These experimentations emboldened them to think of themselves collectively as actors of their city, beyond their individual roles as actors of an artistic scene.

When I asked Tom and Luce how they identified the building where they collaboratively developed a nightlife-centred interdisciplinary cultural space they said:

*Tom: Yeah yeah, we were cruising the city!*

*Luce: We were on the Land registry every day!  
Checking who owned the buildings.*

*Tom: It was...I think...after the wave of closures. Because we worked really professionally, I mean we prepared lots of applications, I mean they were people in the team who had a long experience of working in the cultural industries...who had built a discourse that was hum....sharp and all that. (...) We became a sort of hummm....force like hummm...a lobby really, yeah. A lobby.*

In this conversation, Tom and Luce talked about the interconnection between their practice as cultural operators and the process of creating spaces. In their role of alternative cultural producers, they talked about how the neoliberal environment had forced them to reflect upon the kind of city in which they were operating and the kind of resources they could mobilise to find a way of perpetuating experimental arts spaces. In the quote above, these two participants mentioned the knowledge they had accumulated in the process of identifying and negotiating premises, a process which they described as a collective process of knowledge building and empowerment. The exchange I had with them (as well as with other alternative nightlife producers) highlighted that the search for accessible spaces had forced them to reflect upon the changes that Geneva as a city had undergone and how these changes had impacted on their practice. In order to fight back, they had to develop creative strategies such as “cruising the city” and engaging with the land registry and property law to understand building ownership and envision future options. In the quote above, Tom also highlights how the collective process of looking for spaces has emboldened them to justify the importance of their respective practices beyond their individual interests.

The process of recreating spaces of experimentation in Geneva post-2008 was possible through the realisation that alternative nightlife spaces were serving a role in Geneva that no other spaces was fulfilling. Through political empowerment, cultural actors started acting beyond their own personal interests, but also beyond the interests of the alternative cultural scene. By reflecting upon their practices in relation to the neoliberal transformations that Geneva was undergoing, they became key actors who brought together and disseminated an anti-neoliberal narrative.

Collective political empowerment was a crucial aspect of my interviews with alternative nightlife operators. Luis, who I met in his capacity as a coproducer of the alternative night venue Motel Campo, which opened in a state-owned building after him and his coproducers were evicted from Artamis, explained how, at the time, they had to engage with urban politics to maintain cultural forms that weren't possible in the neoliberal environment. He said:

*There was a vacancy in an industrial zone in a place that was considered as a kind of reserve of space, in preparation for possible relocations within the PAV<sup>12</sup>, and because we had become a problem with Artamis we were offered this space. (...) In fact, I think that Motel Campo...is an urban laboratory for me. Because, for me, Motel Campo was born from an opportunity that emerged at the time when Artamis was evicted.*

Further in the interview Luis said:

*All the options that were offered...to rehouse artists after Artamis...that was...they had a lot of qualities in terms of how good these spaces served for studios and all that. But they had very little quality in terms of having us think about which kind of city we were contributing to.*

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<sup>12</sup> Praille-Acacias-Vernets (PAV) is a large masterplan developed by the State of Geneva to transform an industrial zone and relocate industrial activities in the outskirts of the city. Within the PAV area, the land is predominantly state- or council-owned to facilitate planning (FTI, 2020).

In this part of the interview, Luis emphasises that the search for new spaces of experimentation led alternative nightlife producers to reflect on the neoliberal transformations unfolding in Geneva and forced them to think beyond the impact of these on the alternative cultural milieu. In this interview, Luis talked me through how the search for space allowed nightlife producers to instead question the implication of their practice upon the city and the cocreation of the knowledge that spaces of experimentation had a role to play in disrupting the neoliberal spatial order.

The quotes above set out a crucial aspect of co-producing spaces of experimentation: they showed how the process of experimenting with the making of space to accommodate practices that wouldn't have survived in the neoliberal urban environment led my participants to articulate a political discourse around experimentation and its contribution to the remaking of their city.

### **6.2.2 Spaces of experimentation as democratic spaces**

In line with recent academic literature which sees citizen engagement as one of the central aspects of co-production (Brandsen et al., 2018), in the following section, I look at how cultural actors in Geneva have developed a culture of collective and democratic space-making, which, I argue, acts as a laboratory of socio-spatial co-production. The main argument for this section is that cultural actors of the alternative nightlife in Geneva have engaged in co-production by experimenting with alternative modes of management for their spaces and that, in turn, these spaces have created unique experiences which have contributed to the politicisation of those who attended these venues.

Charlie, who at the time when I met them was involved in coordinating a collective of cultural actors within L'Usine, said to me:

*At the moment...it's really intense because there is so much to talk through that we have to hold at least two Usine-wide meetings a week. But that's what makes*

*L'Usine so special as well. We discuss all together every week. (...) We also never vote. We got into the habit of debating until we reach a consensus, which is time consuming, but I think it's worth it. It makes everyone feel very involved and everyone has agency over what's happening.*

I met Charlie in 2015, a moment when the tension between L'Usine and the Licencing office was building up. In this quote, Charlie refers to their tense exchanges with Pierre Maudet, the state Councillor in charge at the time, who had decided to put an end to the state of exception of a single authorisation for L'Usine and demanded that each collective operating within the building applied for a licence.

This quote shows how, in response to state pressure, alternative nightlife actors developed experimental strategies of management. Even if L'Usine operated under collective management from the origin of its creation, in a context where this model was at threat due to the state demanding that it was replaced by conventional licence, they responded collectively by experimenting with consensus building and deepening individual engagement in the co-production of their space.

Questioning licencing as the dominant mode of regulating spaces of nightlife, Tom and Luce also said to me:

*Luce: The nightclub licence implies this...mmmhhh...this organisation...that's much more vertical, with people in charge. You don't sign an authorisation collectively or they aren't signed by an association, it falls onto individual people, who put their names down.*

*Tom: Even if we do everything we can to manage collectively and act collectively...we will inevitably face individual responsibilities...in case of a problem...they want names. I mean one name. (...) It's not that we do anything illegal, it's just that we are creative and hum...sometimes what we want to do doesn't fit in any of the boxes.*

In the last part of the quote, Tom responds to the narrative that alternative venues were demanding the right to act unlawfully, a criticism that primarily served to justify the state of Geneva's demand to enforce a licence in L'Usine (Gottraux, 2015; Mounir, 2015b). This quote shows the connection between experimentation as a mode of artistic production and the conflict that arose around the way cultural spaces of experimentation are regulated in neoliberal Geneva. In this extract indeed, Tom and Luce made explicit that, if their space was designed for the sake of artistic experimentation, this process also implied experimenting with the governance of the space.

Some amongst my interviewees also talked about how experimentation made co-production a more democratic process. When I discussed the protests in support of alternative nightlife venues with Adam, they said:

*Look, when the protests in support of L'Usine...and others errrrmm...happened...all of a sudden, all these people came out of the blue! And I was bumping into people who I never thought would politicise...but somehow that's much stronger than you think. Even if there is no discourse around it...even if that's not explicitly said...it's more connected to people's life experiences and memories. But if you threaten these experiences...it will somehow lead to expressions of resistance.*

In this quote, Adam explained how the movements of resistance against the closure of alternative nightlife venues raised political awareness amongst consumers of these spaces, creating a political narrative around which people could relate to. This political narrative, geared around the survival of "other spaces" or spaces that could not survive in the neoliberal city was, in his view, more accessible and more relatable by consumers of the Genevan nightlife who would otherwise not have built awareness of the consequences of neoliberal policies. In this sense, individual memories and experiences of spaces of experimentation played an important role the co-production of these spaces.

### 6.2.3 Arts-led experimentation as spatial co-production

In this subsection, I look at how my participants talked about the co-production of the spaces where they operated and consumed, in relation to artistic practices. The quotes below exemplify how experimental processes derived from artistic practice supported strategies of spatial co-creation by allowing potentially transformative experiences of spaces of nightlife. Arts-led space making as it is depicted below by my interviewees stood as an arena where people engage collectively and critically with their experience of space. This aspect of arts-led experimentation – from experimental art making to experimental space making – fed into the discussion about co-production as a process that supports space design.

When I spoke to Felix about the design of the alternative space which he ran with a collective of artists, he extensively talked about the dialogic relationship between his experimental practice as an artist and their collective practice of coproducing the space. First, he said:

*In the Motel Campo, sometimes you'll find wall paintings, which are clearly digging into references such as Ugo Rondinone<sup>13</sup> or...Sherrie Levine<sup>14</sup> or...imagery that I like, from the art field that...that...that I recreate, in my own way, on the Motel's walls because I think they are shapes that are...important...beautiful and they deserve not be just shown in a museum, or an art fair. But in a party. Because they will touch people, they will be closer, there will be less distance.*

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<sup>13</sup> Ugo Rondinone is a Swiss artist born in 1964 who lives and works in New York. In his work, he uses the mediums of sculpture, painting and installation.

<sup>14</sup> Sherrie Levine is an American artist born in 1947 who lives and works in New York. Her work is primarily focused on photography and sculpture.

This quote obviously shows strategies of space making which walk the line of experimentation between the arts and space design. By mobilising art objects and exhibiting them in a nightlife venue, Felix subverts the conventions of institutional art to create a unique spatial experience for nightlife participants. Beyond the experimental nature of the experience of the space, however, Felix's intention is to offer participants a reflexive experience of the venue which he operates, connecting participants together and connecting them with an environment that subverts cultural and spatial codes (see section 5.3.2 of the previous chapter for more discussion around the destabilisation of spatial norms).

Further into the interview, Felix talked about his experience of moving on from his artistic background to creating alternative spaces of nightlife. He said:

*First, I was an artist who was interested in parties. (...) There was a balance where I was initially motivated by...making art and dug my inspiration...my references from my nightlife experiences. (...) And then...more and more...I started creating elements inspired by the nightlife...or simulating the nightlife. And step by step, by recreating elements of nightlife errmmm.... records, errrrmm...posters (...) then I realised that the balance in my work had shifted. I became a party organiser more than an artist. And now that's what I do for a living. (...) I take from art...references and aesthetics or...or...or just ideas to spread them in an environment, which is far more popular and much more instantaneous, which is the experience of music and the nightlife.*

This quote illustrates the articulation between individual artistic practices and how nightlife precipitated the alternative scene's awareness of urban politics. During the interview, Felix explained how his artistic practice grew from conventional forms to reflecting upon nightlife as a space where he could be part of collective experimentations but also how this commitment resonated with the space where these were taking place. Felix made the poster below to promote a fictional party, which would have taken place on Artamis' former site. The toxic attack is a reference to the fact that the state used Artamis' soil



contamination as an incentive to evict the site. The poster announces 10'000sqm of tents (which were genuinely used to cover the site during its decontamination) and fictional famous headliners. Several hundred copies were anonymously posted in public spaces across Geneva.



*Image 43 ATAK TOXIC, anonymous artist  
Poster for a fake party on the former site of Artamis, 2010*

Subverting the aesthetics of mainstream nightlife promotional material, the posters featured sexualised images of women and a long list of commercial sponsors. With this poster, Felix illustrated the dominance of the neoliberal night-time economy business model and the eradication of alternative venues. This poster is an example of how artistic experimentation has been used by Genevan alternative nightlife actors to build and disseminate a narrative around spaces which fulfil unique functions in the city and need to be protected from neoliberalism.

My interviewees described how artistic experimentations supported the process of co-production in a variety of ways:

*Our goal, I think (...) is to bring a variety of people who do a variety of things...culturally...everybody brings in their thing and that brings lots of different stuff together.*

**(Gabriel)**

*La Gravière is a hmmm...well a nightclub that was born from the desire of an organisation called Association Le Bloc. And hmmm...even before La Gravière, we always wanted to work around interdisciplinarity, and that meant, ideally, having a space available where we can support the development of a whole variety of artistic practices.* **(Luce)**

*The first thing we discussed extensively, which might seem petty from the outside, is the fact that you need one licence for each and every structure inside L'Usine. And it's just not the way we want to work. Because we are not just sharing a building. It's much more than that. We cannot see how that would work if one cultural practice was allowed and not the other. Because that's what makes L'Usine so special, that we have interdisciplinarity and collaborations.* **(Charlie)**

*We created a space that was truly a multifunctional arts space as we called it because there was a form of constraint. We couldn't just come and say, ok, this is a nightclub. And until today I think Motel Campo is still imprinted with that. It's a space for socialising in music but it's still carrying this history because it wasn't a space that was designed for clubbing so everything else can exist in there. The walls are important. It's an artistic environment first and foremost. We don't run exhibitions or hold screenings as often as we used to but it's still a space of the possible, and a space of artistic intervention. A club ran by artists, that's the best definition.* **(Luis)**

In all the quotes above, my participants allude to their experimental practices as cultural actors. But most importantly they describe the coming together of a spatial environment in which artistic artefacts and people can be arranged

in an experimental way. These quotes show the importance of artistic experimentation in the co-production of spaces of nightlife because they articulate the making of art and the making of the spaces in which this art is created and shared.

### **6.3 Spaces of nightlife contesting the neoliberal urban regime**

In the second half of this chapter, I interrogate the second half of my last research question: “To what extent does experimentation play a role in a. the co-production of these counter-spaces, and b. resisting neoliberalism?” by looking into how the Geneva case study provides an example of cultural actors becoming central to anti-neoliberal resistance. Throughout the interviews that I conducted, the way my interviewees connected their practice of artistic experimentation with an anti-neoliberal stand was twofold.

Firstly, in subsection 6.1.3. I show how my participants reclaimed the legacy of arts-led urban activism, although they also discussed how the focus of such movements had shifted, with the question of access to space becoming central in the neoliberal urban environment (as opposed to a more general idea of alternative lifestyle previously dominating). These conversations echoed the discussions which I developed in Chapter 2 (and particularly part 2.4.3) around the ambivalent relationship between experimentation and neoliberalism, leading me to question the extent to which the nightlife-led struggles could be understood as anti-neoliberal. Through my participants’ answers, I show in subsection 6.1.3 that spaces of experimentation became central to anti-neoliberal agencies as alternative nightlife actors started fighting for spaces which wouldn’t have survived under neoliberalism.

Secondly, my participants’ anti-neoliberal agency largely emerged in the discussion we had around their relationship with public bodies – local city councils and the State of Geneva – and how, in this instance, public

intervention was instrumental to enforcing neoliberal policies as much as it was to mitigating the effects of neoliberalism. In subsection 6.3.2 I therefore explore the terms in which my interviewees have reclaimed (and received) State support, whilst 6.3.3 focuses on State pressure. In these two subsections, again, access to space emerges as a central dimension of the relationship between alternative nightlife actors and public bodies in Geneva and therefore central to the anti-neoliberal narrative which emerged during the struggle for alternative nightlife venues.

### **6.3.1 We want a different city: the legacy of artist-led urban activism**

During our interviews, alternative nightlife actors often talked about the intersection between artist-led movements and urban activism in Geneva, a legacy which they reclaimed. In their narratives, this legacy started with nightlife spaces of experimentation offering an alternative in the neoliberal city. For them, lobbying to create and stand for these spaces beyond their personal interest as cultural actors was a way of demonstrating that a different city was possible.

During my discussion Tom and Luce, they talked about their intentions when getting involved in creating La Gravière:

*Tom: We had a sort of ideal, which was to ensure the continuity of errmm ...self-managed culture. And so errmm...we did do it somehow through this venue. (...) It's a struggle, I mean. I was really sad! It was a sad period! We were watching all these venues disappear and something was really errmm...dying! Like in other cities elsewhere. Money was just engulfing everything. The price of a square metre never stopped rising, every centimetre of the city centre was being gnawed and people are fighting over it and soo... errmm all the places that gave some space for being more human were disappearing. So it was a realisation that we were in this shitstorm and finding our way to fight back.*

*Luce: It's not because we obtained venues...we always said that within UECA (...) we always made it clear that we weren't just fighting for new venues but for a vision of our city, to understand hmm...the right to the city, the diversity of spaces, the diversity of practices and actors.*

Through this quote, Tom and Luce showed that they reclaimed a local history of cultural activism. They see experimentation as crucially shaping a narrative around a diversity of spaces, a narrative which strongly contrasts with the standardisation of spaces induced by neoliberalism (Sanders-McDonagh et al., 2016). In this sense, their idea of arts-led urban activism connects with the insights which I discussed in part Chapter 4 which show that, through their practice of experimentation, Genevan alternative cultural actors produced a critique of the spatial regime in which they operate, in this instance neoliberal Geneva. These accounts echo academic reviews of cultural actors contesting creative city policies particularly and playing a central role in shaping and publicising narratives of alternative spaces to neoliberalism (Hollands, 2020; Marcuse, 2011; Mayer, 2013; Novy and Colomb, 2012).

During the interviews, Luce talked about the transmission of arts-led urban activism. She said:

*I don't see La Gravière as a conclusion. It's not an end in itself, like we've had an ideal and we fought for it. And can't quite see yet what this is part of because...the way to fight, the way to work together is changing so much. (...) But I think that this kind of venues like the Motel, or Kugler (...) these are places through which something can really be passed on. A something that will be different, and that, in 10 years' time, will totally not please the post 68ers who witnessed the emergence of the squat scene in Geneva, but it will be a different something. I really have at heart to perpetuate a form of contestation in different forms.*

Similarly, comparing Geneva to another Swiss city, Winterthur (his city of origin), Adam said:

*The idea of alternative spaces also existed where I grew up in Winterthur. But each city has a different legacy and in Geneva there is this squat culture that has concentrated a lot of what alternative means. (...) In Winterthur, the alternative scene was much more secluded in a way so unless you were actively trying to get involved, that wasn't something alike...now there are a lot of people in Geneva who don't live an alternative lifestyle, politically or in their life standards. But they will regularly say, you know "I spent time in Rhino and in this squat and this squat and I liked it." There was so much openness with that that people could identify with it without necessarily belonging to the hard-lined alternative people.*

The two interviews above show that participants associated alternative spaces with the transmission of arts-led urban activism. Luce above explained the difficulties of a changing context which she says at times necessitated negotiating divergent expectations as to how this legacy could be perpetuated in newly created spaces.

Both quotes above echo with the ideas developed in the previous chapter (see part 5.3) which identify spaces of experimentation as central to the creation and dissemination of anti-neoliberal narratives. In his quote above, Adam also explains that, in his experience, spaces of experimentation created by artists in Geneva have been central to the dissemination of the experience of counter-spaces, an experience which, he argues, has brought a broad range of Genevans together in the fight to support alternative models of space.

The quotes above show that alternative nightlife participants see their practice as nightlife operators and/or the spaces which they attend as the continuation of a history of local arts-led urban activism. My participants explained that this legacy had also created tensions within activist groups as the urban and political context around them changed. Centrally, the question of nightlife venues becoming the centre of the struggle created tensions because it was seen by some as a shrinkage at the expense of a broader vision of a different

city. The two quotes below, however, connect the legacy of experimentation-led urban activism with movements led by alternative nightlife operators in a critique of dominant urban trends. Charlie talked about the Zoo, the organisation within L'Usine in which she worked and said:

*The truth is...we are not "the most alternative" in the city. Or even in Europe. Because L'Usine has always been errmmm...indirectly receiving money in the form of free use of the premises, we don't pay rent. The City supports us in a way and some organisations within L'Usine receive funding. (...) Some people will see us as not hard-lined enough. And it's true that we are not the most radical. But this scene will support us for sure. Because we are the alternative but we receive support from the City Council, L'Usine. And so...if they make the decision to stop supporting us because we are "too alternative" that will open the way for the whole scene to be messed with.*

In this quote, Charlie also talks about the tensions which emerged within the movement that supported spaces of alternative nightlife. She explained that some members of L'Usine and UECA saw alternative nightlife operators as compromising the struggle too much with the City Council, whilst concentrating their actions strictly on spaces of nightlife. However, Charlie depicts L'Usine's relationship with the City Council as more complex. In her view, the fact that L'Usine operated within Council owned premises anchored the venue in the local political debate and forced politicians to recognise publicly the role of public bodies in maintaining alternative nightlife provisions. Furthermore, through her depiction of the ties that bonded L'Usine and the Council, Charlie shows L'Usine's awareness that their actions had an impact on the way other spaces are regulated. She depicts the alternative scene as an arena of and contestation experimentation in and against the dominant spatial regime, but also an arena of potential transformation beyond the alternative scene.

Despite the fact that Motel Campo entertained a different relationship with public bodies, Felix similarly talked about his vision of alternative spaces of nightlife in relation to a broader vision of the city. He said:

*Being publicly funded allows you to do things, which are different. But here...we are experimenting with an autonomous form of management. (...) We don't want to make arrangements with the City Council...with funders, to be able to make it work. We want to demonstrate that it's something that is part of the urban fabric of this city, it's a reality (...) it's not just an ideal. (...) It is possible.*

At the time when I interviewed him, Motel Campo had decided to experiment without arts funding, which meant that, unlike L'Usine, their public support was limited to the use of a State funded building at market price. In this quote, he depicts his business model experiment to drop arts funding as a way of anchoring an alternative space in the reality of the city without the comfort of public funding. In his view indeed, if arts funding was important to develop some experimental forms of art, he saw his alternative nightlife venue as an opportunity to reclaim a way of making space as much as spaces for making art.

In this subsection I have shown that alternative cultural actors who I interviewed positioned themselves within the local history of arts-led urban activism, even though they recognised that the changing political and urban environment was at time challenging this legacy. One important aspect of their narrative around the lineage of arts-led urban social movement was the fact that they saw their actions not primarily geared around the demand for spaces for their own use, but rather more broadly anchored into the negotiation around space governance. As such, they embraced an alternative vision of the city and the responsibility to reclaim more agency over space making for all, not solely for alternative nightlife operators.



During these discussions, the relationship that these actors entertained with public bodies such as the State of Geneva and the City Council occupied an important part of their testimonies. In the following two subsections, I therefore specifically explore how anti-neoliberal policies reclaimed by alternative nightlife operators have at times received the support of and at other times been overturned by public bodies.

### **6.3.2 Accessing space: state support in neoliberal Geneva**

I have extensively discussed the ambivalent role of public policies in both enforcing and alleviating neoliberal trends in Chapter 2 (see part 2.3.2 in particular). But what the case study of the struggle for alternative nightlife venues in Geneva really revealed is the crucial role of the State in facilitating access to space for urban actors wanting to operate in opposition to neoliberalism. In the following subsection, I therefore discuss how actors of the Genevan nightlife have had to rearticulate their relationship with the state in order to maintain a counter-spatial regime that stands as an alternative to neoliberalism.

As it has been extensively discussed previously, a growing body of literature shows the damage that arts-led urban development policies can cause to local artistic scenes as well as urban communities around them (see specifically section 2.4.4 in the theory chapter). Authors such as Rosenstein (2011) have documented the instrumental role of the state in ensuring that cultural venues, local artistic actors and the community around them profit from public investment in the arts, beyond the neoliberal approach of arts-led economic growth. Little has been said, however, on the negative impact of neoliberal urban planning policies onto the arts (Bain and March, 2019; Jakob, 2010).

When I started addressing the role of public bodies in the alternative nightlife crisis in Geneva, I spoke to cultural policy makers who quickly redirected me towards their colleagues working in urban planning. My first contact was Adriano, a senior cultural advisor for the Geneva City Council. He said to me:

*The problem...in Geneva up until now...wasn't really funding. Funding is becoming a problem. But so far it is access to spaces! It is having the courage to say, we're making a political choice, we'll give spaces.*

During this interview, Adriano explained that, in his views, public action to provide spaces for alternative cultural actors and nightlife operators in particular had a much greater impact than arts funding. In his views, however, the difficulty of providing spaces for the alternative cultural scene and alternative nightlife in particular came from the political implications of such actions. Iris, a senior culture department manager for the State of Geneva concurred. She said:

*What we were able to do, was to raise awareness...within the State, the government etc. that there are consequences of closing the squats. As you said, it has impacted the alternative scene and the cultural scene as a whole because it did allow a lot of small-scale projects, a whole emulation that is much more difficult to recreate. And fund.*

In this quote, Iris highlights how squats provided cheap, unregulated spaces, a resource that allowed a rich cultural momentum to occur. But most importantly, she pinpointed how this support was difficult to recreate with arts funding alone.

These interviews showed that cultural funders and policy makers were recognising the impact that real estate speculation and private property-centred policies had had on the experimental art scene. These quotes also highlighted how public bodies supporting the arts in Geneva were left relatively powerless in the face of the change in the urban fabric. These discussions resonated with accounts from alternative nightlife operators (see part 4.2 in particular) for whom access to cheap and self-regulated venues was vital to support an alternative, self-funded economy of culture, a model for which the profit generated by nightlife had become an instrumental resource. In her

quote, Iris pointed out how the loss of spaces not only meant a shrinkage of the scene but also how the State of Geneva was unable to compensate for the loss of revenue.

I also met with Leonard, a former high ranking civil servant who had very conflicting views regarding the situation of alternative nightlife venues. He said:

*However much I am strongly in favour of developing culture hmm...nightlife etc...however much I was...always...extremely uncomfortable with squats. I worked for the Real Estate Board for over ten years...my first job was with a letting agent so I am a bit...a bit "real estate" formatted if you like and...I am very attached to the idea of private property and squats mum....I always fought against that to be honest!*

Leonard also supported the idea that squats didn't close "only for political reasons" but instead argued that:

*"there was also the economic context (...) there was the impact of the market and the economy, it's as simple as that! And even principally, if you look at the mass of squats...most of them closed simply because they were redevelopments starting. And there were some squats...that had a lot of attention, iconic ones, (...) where the General Attorney had to get involved...and politicians had to get involved."*

These quotes importantly illustrate the pervasiveness of the neoliberal ideology within the State of Geneva (Berry, 2021) and the change of political orientation that led to the disappearance of counter-spaces. But what made Leonard's account particularly interesting was how the disappearance of spaces of experimentation made him uncomfortable with his convictions about private property. He said:

*They were political decisions taken hmm...yes. Rhino's eviction is interesting (because) they had the Cave 12*

*in there. And hmm...I must admit that I was...I had at heart to...do something to...to rehouse them. Because...even if I was perfectly at ease with Rhino's eviction, I still felt a bit responsible to see Cave 12 closing. And so (...) I told my services you must find...you must find premises for Cave 12. And that's when they came up with the former cycle storage in the School of Engineering. (...) For me that was the epilogue of the Rhino saga. The reopening of Cave 12.*

This quote echoes the previous from Iris and Adriano above in terms of showing how publicly owned building became the only way for alternative nightlife operators to access premises in post-2008 Geneva. In the quote above, Leonard showed that, beyond his belief that it was just for private property rights to outweigh life in squats, he recognised the uniqueness of alternative cultural spaces in squats as well as the impossibility for alternative cultural operators to recreate such spaces without state support. He further said during the interview:

*It's mostly a question of money, I think. The question of spaces...I mean, in Geneva...space is very scarce! The territory is small to start with and... spaces which are available are scarce and are expensive and so, for people who have projects... of a cultural nature I mean... nocturnal... I mean, I am not talking about... of a space like...how can I say...like La Bohème or the Java<sup>15</sup>... when we talk about venues which are more attractive to people who are not cash rich...it makes it very difficult to make a budget viable. And so, these actors turned to the state... in particular for premises, and... I was always very keen... to contribute, as far as we had the means to...and so if there were premises that weren't used and not necessary for the good functioning of the state, why not make them available.*

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<sup>15</sup> High-end nightclubs in Geneva

In the quote above, Leonard shows that, despite his political orientations, he recognises that experimentation is compromised in the neoliberal urban environment and that the state has a role to play to alleviate neoliberal pressure on cultural actors.

Similarly, Luis, talking about being relocated from a squat (Artamis) to Motel Campo said:

*This experience has allowed the development of a discourse (...) around artists and the arts and how the same policies are developed for them now than they were for artisans in the 1950s. Because what is happening is materialising the need to create a space that is protected by the State to allow certain activities to develop that the market wouldn't allow. (...) And so I believe that this is really interesting path to explore because these protected spaces, if you want, thanks to a public policy, they allow mixity and diversity in the urban fabric.*

In this quote, Luis refers to a series of laws and policies developed by the State of Geneva in 1958 to retain industrial activity on the Canton's territory, a sector that was quickly disappearing at the profit of the tertiary economy (État de Genève, 1958, 2015 and 2018). In the quote above, Luis shows that experimentation became instrumental in the struggle for alternative spaces of nightlife in order to expose and communicate the spatial impoverishment in neoliberal Geneva. And he shows that the struggle for spaces of experimentation forced the state to act as an ally for those seeking an alternative to neoliberalism.

The quotes above show the ambiguity of the role of the State of Geneva, whose policies were both at work in the roll out of neoliberal trends, as much as they were in alleviation and the resistance against neoliberal trends. I have extensively discussed the ambivalence of the role of the state within neoliberalism in Chapter 2 (and particularly part 2.3), and the role of public bodies in Geneva was framed in a similar way by my participants. The case study of alternative nightlife venues in Geneva, however, is striking in terms

of rethinking the alliance between public bodies and actors of civil society, in this instance cultural actors, in search of an alternative to neoliberalism.

### **6.3.3 State pressure and the self-definition of a socio-spatial regime in the neoliberal city**

In the previous subsection, I have shown how the struggle for alternative nightlife venues in Geneva has led local actors to ally with Council and State services in order to survive in the neoliberal environment. Alternative nightlife actors were forced to engage with the relationship between their practices and the making of urban space under neoliberalism, I have argued, and, in this context, access to space was the central aspect of these alliances.

In this last subsection, I want to consider the pressures that have accompanied this collaboration between alternative nightlife actors and public bodies, to demonstrate that, beyond simply securing a provision of space, the self-definition of a new regime of experimentation by alternative nightlife actors was a key dimension of their anti-neoliberal orientations.

In Chapter 5, I showed the all-encompassing nature of experimentation in alternative nightlife venues (artistic, spatial, social). In the first half of this chapter, I have put forward the idea that experimentation is at the core of the co-production of these spaces, as it is part of the process that allowed my participants to both have full agency over the making of the spaces in which they operate and engage critically with the way mainstream nightlife spaces are produced. In the subsection that follows, I look at quotes that illustrate the difficulties of recreating experimental practices in state-owned venues, particularly when it came to nightlife, and how this was resolved by the formalisation in law of a spatial regulation that was demanded and worded by the actors of the alternative scene themselves. Through these quotes, participants show that the practices of experimentation and the regime of co-production were largely challenged by the State's neoliberal idea of governance. A large part of my discussion of alternative nightlife operators

and civil servants therefore evolved around the growing pressure on alternative nightlife venues to meet with the same standards as licenced venues, a reality which was no different in State-owned premises.

One of the first examples was L'Usine, whose various collectives operate in a building owned by the City Council, and which was until 2014 at the benefit of an exception, which implied that they would send their programme monthly to the Council for information without having to seek for a licence. When I met Charlie, we discussed the growing pressure that L'Usine suffered since the Licencing Office had been instructed to align the venue to commercial premises' standards. They said:

*When I started, we were constantly talking about this topic. It became kind of...normal in a way. It was like, ok, this issue with the licence...**again**...taking all the space in our discussions. And we only realised how bad it was when we received a letter saying...that they were going to close the building (...) Before that we were already struggling with the volume controllers. They are muffling the sound, which is not sustainable for us because we have nights...that evolve around sound system culture. (...) We didn't want to accept that, because for us that was the roll out of a sort of sterilisation of the building and errmmmm...one more step inside the premises to control us. It was genuinely scary.*

L'Usine was an outstanding example because it had benefitted from an exceptional regime of space for nearly 30 years but also because its position in a Council-owned building meant that its fate was inextricably tied up to the political decisions of both the Council and the State. In the quote above, Charlie brought together many aspects of the conversation which I developed in this thesis. They talked about the co-production of this space as a form of collective governance, and they exemplified the interconnection between experimental practice in the arts and experimental space governance. Charlie's narrative provides a powerful example of how the penetration of the neoliberal ideology affected alternative spaces of nightlife. But most

importantly, it shows how experimentation became the starting point of Genevan alternative nightlife operators' anti-neoliberal struggle within and against local public agencies.

In counterpoint to Charlie's account, when I spoke to Iris, we discussed L'Usine's claim to benefit from a licence exemption and she said:

*Cultural actors, like anybody else, need to obey the law. I mean the problems that we have come from people who don't act in accordance with the law. I mean, we represent the Canton, the Culture Department. If the Licencing Office and the Environmental Agency say that some venues are not meeting with legal requirements or even operating unlawfully...for us this is no discussion to have!*

And further:

*The problem in this instance was, that wasn't genuinely a claim for alternative forms of cultural expression...that was more about errmmm...maybe entertainment isn't an accurate term but errmm...about the right to accessible spaces of entertainment at night, which is very different. In relation to nightlife, errm...I think it's important not to mix up artistic expressions and socio-cultural entertainment. (...) This, in my opinion, isn't down to cultural policy.*

In the quotes above, Iris shows her view of the responsibility of the State in inducing neoliberal policies, in this instance aligning alternative cultural spaces with the regulation of commercial nightlife venues. Iris' account was clearly grounded in a conservative vision of cultural production in which nightlife-led experimentations did not fit. But further than that, these quotes highlight the difficulty for civil servants working in cultural agencies to comprehend the impact of a neoliberal regime of space onto cultural production.



Leonard's account below reinforced my understanding of the challenge that alternative nightlife presented for public agencies. He said:

*There were some tensions back in the days...between hmm...Mr Beer<sup>16</sup>, who was in charge of the culture department...and myself, because hum...I was the one who was looking after our culture. At least this kind of culture. Alternative culture, nightlife spaces hmhhh...the limit isn't always easy to draw by the way and hum... He had to be more aware of the big picture, comprising the big cultural institutions, the public funding hmm...to organisations hmm...supported by the state etc. (...) As soon as I had an option to make things move forward by the means of...by the means of venues or authorisations and those kind of things...well in fact I succeeded to achieve quite a lot. And he wasn't always very enthusiastic. We clashed sometimes about what we wanted to achieve.*

The quote above shows that within public agencies, a tension arose around alternative nightlife between the understanding that these agencies had a role to play in supporting alternative art spaces by providing accessible premises and the fact that the enforcement of the same regime of space as for commercial premises was undermining this effort. Interestingly, this quote shows that it was more difficult for arts funding bodies to appreciate that the regimentation of space was the front on which alternative culture in general and alternative spaces of nightlife in particular had to be defended, which at times put culture and planning services in competition.

In Chapter 4, I explained that the main positive outcome of the movement in support of alternative nightlife spaces was the introduction in the Genevan licencing system of regime of exception (licence to be licence-free) for cultural arts-led venues. To conclude this last subsection of the chapter, I look at one of Luis' quotes where he talked about the translation in law of the regime that

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Beer was the State Councilor in charge of the Education and Culture Department between 2003 and 2014.

had allowed experimental nightlife venues to exist as the central point in the collaboration between alternative nightlife operators and public agencies. He said:

*“In the initial draft of the law and bylaw, the licence for drink stall had been taken out. So we lobbied really hard and we managed to obtain that...that the law allows for this sort of grey zone, with cultural events being approved by local Councils without having to apply for a licence through the State licencing system. And there is, like, two layers in the licencing regulation in Geneva now. There’s the regulation for nightclubs, which offers more flexibility with extended opening hours. And then there is this in-between status without which, for example, Motel Campo would have disappeared. Not only because they would have had to apply for a full licence, but also because they would have had to officially become a nightclub, which means complying with a whole range of norms that regulate those spaces. (...). And there is now a legal framework that is pretty great. (...) That was the result of the intense lobbying of alternative cultural actors, who managed to obtain that the law isn’t restricting nightlife to one business model.”*

Luis’ statement shows that the fight of Genevan alternative nightlife operators came together around the necessity of obtaining from public agencies recognition and formalisation of a regime of space, which he describes as a grey zone, that allows experimentation to exist in the neoliberal city. This account illustrates the entanglement between practices of experimentation, in the nightlife and beyond, and a self-definition of a spatial regime, which was endangered in neoliberal Geneva. Luis’ quote above is also important in that he insists on the fact that the formalising in the law of a grey zone was the result of the collective reflections and actions initiated by actors of the alternative nightlife scene.

This subsection concludes my exploration of the role of experimentation in counteracting neoliberalism. In conclusion, I want to point out that, according to the interviewees quoted above, practices of experimentation by alternative

nightlife actors were central to the struggle for a socio-spatial regime which acts as an alternative to neoliberal regulatory trends in Genevan nightlife. In previous chapters (see specifically Chapter 5), experimentation in the nightlife has shown to not be inherently anti-neoliberal. But through collective and reflexive processes of their own practice, the alternative nightlife actors who I interviewed came to articulate a critique of neoliberalism and formalise in the Genevan licencing law a self-defined regime of space.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have answered my third research question, arguing that experimentation has the potential to be an arena in which spaces whose regime disrupt the neoliberal order have the potential to emerge. To support this argument, I have looked at the instrumental role that experimentation has played in the co-production of spaces by alternative nightlife participants in Geneva. Analysing how my participants design spaces around artistic practices in the context of nightlife, I have shown that, in this context, experiences of experimentation resonate for nightlife participants with the way the NTE is regulated, allowing them to reflect upon their experience of space and the organisation of social relations in space. For alternative nightlife producers in Geneva, I have argued that co-production was the process by which space-making became a reflexive and political journey, along which they fought to maintain spaces of experimentation and oppose the neoliberal regulation of profit-led nightlife.

As this chapter has supported, in the current context of all-encompassing neoliberalism, it is important to debate co-production not as a strategy that has the potential to transfer state responsibility onto citizens because this is a vision which sits well with the consumer-led neoliberal mind frame. But rather, as I have emphasised, my case study highlights the inherent anti-neoliberal nature of co-production, not just as a cover-up for state failure, but as a process of claiming that the state facilitates a non-neoliberal urban regime. My case study grounds co-production as a process of designing space (and not

only immaterial goods such as services), but more specifically as a process of reclaiming models of urban self-governance. This idea which makes the argument resonate particularly well with literature around informal spaces and the potential for informality to allow alternative models of urban governance to emerge (McFarlane, 2011; McFarlane and Waibel, 2012).

Finally, I would like to conclude with a consideration for the restrictive nature of neoliberal policies that accompanied me throughout the reflections upon my participants' journey. If neoliberalism is broadly seen as an ideology based on the absence of regulation for the economy (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), it is also admitted that neoliberalism is constructed and enforced through institutions (Bockman, 2012). As I have shown in section 2.3 of the theory chapter, stricter nightlife regulation is part of the neoliberal project, at least in the extent to which it serves to exclude any other model. In the case of nightlife, regulations have been used in cities in the global North and beyond to encapsulate nightlife into the NTE, a model which is heavily profit-driven.

I expand further on the possible future outcomes of the research in Chapter 7, but this chapter has shown that nightlife studies would be a good starting point for discussing the discrepancies between neoliberalism as a narrative of economic freedom and *laissez faire* on the one hand; and the heavily constraining nature of (often state-led) neoliberal policing on the other. The Geneva case study exemplifies a process led by actors of the local nightlife who have collaborated with the state to regain agency over the way their spaces are (not) regulated. This co-production took the form of a "licence of no licence" embedded in the licencing law itself and formalising their experimental model of self-management. As it has been expressed in some of the quotes above, such example of co-production contrasts with the traditional outcomes of previous urban social movements, mostly because it sits right in one of the neoliberal institutions. But I see in this case study a great example of how a group of citizen has forced the state to legitimise a regime of space which contests the neoliberal order, whilst embedding it in the terms of a neoliberal policy.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Learning from nightlife to write about neoliberalism**

Initiated in response to expressions of collective resistance and exploring micro-experiences in the Genevan nightlife, this research has looked at the culture of experimentation in the urban night as an arena whereby the actors involved have been able to contest the neoliberal socio-spatial regime and rebuild a geography of counter-spaces.

Beyond the topical object of nightlife, this concluding chapter offers new perspectives on these three core concepts and discusses the relevance of the research beyond Geneva. In the first part of this chapter I therefore reinstate the key findings in relation to the research questions. In the second part, I explore the implications of discussing neoliberalism with a grounded approach and lay out further perspectives of researching through a grounded critique of neoliberalism based on mundane, small-scale experiences, such as a night out. In the third section of this chapter, I return to the question of experimentation, which is precisely the topic that emerged from the grounded part of this research and from which I was able to contextualise nightlife within literature discussing urban politics.

#### **7.1 Experimentation in and against the neoliberalisation of cities**

What I have done in this thesis is looking at experimentation in the urban night to conceptualise its role in the co-production of counter-spaces. Drawing from my participants' nightlife agencies, I organised this document around three central ideas: counter-space, neoliberalism and experimentation. In Chapter 2, I have evidenced nightlife as a space which relevantly connects experimentation and urban politics, arguing that the politics of nightlife can only be conceptualised in and against dominant modes of spatial production.

In this second chapter, I have also flagged up the ambiguous relationship between neoliberalism and experimentation and therefore set an agenda for reconceptualising nightlife-led experimentations in the contemporary neoliberal urban environment.

In order to achieve this, I have organised the research around three research questions:

1. How has the neoliberalisation of Geneva impacted spaces of nightlife?
2. To what extent do spaces of nightlife act as counter-spaces in the context of neoliberal Geneva?
3. To what extent does experimentation play a role in (a) the co-production of these counter-spaces and (b) resisting neoliberalism?

Grounding the case study in the local history of artist-led urban social movements, Chapter 4 and 5 demonstrated that neoliberal policies regulate spatial forms and social norms in a dialogic manner, in the nightlife and beyond. In Chapter 4 I showed how, in Geneva, spaces disrupting the dominant socio-spatial regime have shifted over time, from non-institutional art venues throughout the 1970s, to building occupations in the 1980s and, in the last decade, towards alternative nightlife venues. In this chapter I demonstrated the emergence of a new geography of counter-spaces in Geneva in the aftermath of 2008 and showed that this rebirth would not have been possible without the involvement of nightlife actors in the co-production of the licencing system.

In Chapter 5, I responded to RQ.2 by demonstrating how counter-spaces in the night are co-produced “by experimentation”, through the destabilisation of spatial forms and social norms. This second analysis chapter evidenced the importance of informality as a legacy of the history of counter-spaces in Geneva; but also theorised informality as a socio-spatial regime in which spatial regulation and social policing is replaced by relational constructedness.

When Chapter 4 evidenced the transformations of the Genevan nightscape under the pressure of neoliberal policies, Chapter 6 demonstrated how the abruptness of the clamp-down on informal venues made the impact of neoliberal policies tangible and relatable for a broad group of nightlife actors, even beyond the cultural activism milieu. In Chapter 6, I re-conceptualised co-production in light of my participants' narratives. In this chapter I argued that: 1) Actors of the alternative cultural scene identified experimentation as not only as a cultural practice but also as a socio-spatial regime which has the potential to disrupt the neoliberal policies in the NTE 2) The co-production of new counters-spaces implied that my participants engage experimentally with core dimensions of urban policies and collaborated with public institutions in innovative ways; these strategies of co-production offer a novel and expanded vision of co-production in which DIY urban design and political empowerment are key 3) Co-production has to be understood as an alternative socio-spatial regime to neoliberalism, in and against it.

## **7.2 Actually existing neoliberalism: looking through the mundane**

*Look, when the protests in support of L'Usine... and others ummm... happened... all of a sudden all these people came out of the blue! (...) somehow that's much stronger than you think. Even if there is no discourse around it... even if that's not explicitly said...it's more connected to people's life experiences and memories. But if you threaten these experiences... it will lead to expressions of resistance. (Adam)*

As I explained in Chapter 3, initiating research on a chosen topic (in this case nightlife) was challenging and at times frustrating, as it gave me both a narrow perspective and an unlimited range of perspectives. I was repeatedly asked (by supervisors, research support group members and conference participants) "what is research your about?" and, for a long time, I struggled to answer this question beyond "it's about nightlife". Writing about the

neoliberal city from the perspective of nightlife only came about when I finally separated my object of research (nightlife) from my subjects of research (experimentation and neoliberalism). This articulation necessitated that I bring together and articulate a body of empirical material that is fundamentally sensitive, embodied and emotional on the one hand; and a literature about neoliberalism which is surprisingly disincarnated on the other. This endeavour was not helped by the fact that none of my participants actually used the word “neoliberalism” or worded their struggle as “against neoliberal policies”. This thesis, however, demonstrates that there is anti-neoliberal politics to be found in unremarkable, oblivious and even light-hearted dimensions of urban life and that there is academic potential in writing about neoliberalism from the perspective of mundane topics.

As I introduced in Chapter 2, throughout the thesis I followed Peck et al.’s idea of “actually existing neoliberalism” (2018) as a thread, searching for the gap between the narrative that conveys neoliberalism as an ideology and the reality that materialises it. Actually existing neoliberalism, Peck et al. write, captures the idea that there is an rift in the presence of neoliberalism, which they describe as “oppressive, real and immediate in some respect, but at the same time one that can also be considered to be diffuse, abstract and liminal.” (p.4). This idea is so present in the interviews that I have presented throughout this research. I think in particular of the words of the civil servants who I interviewed, who understood the unique socio-spatial value of counter-spaces, expressed their concerns and yet at the same time used a language that fundamentally normalised the impact of neoliberal urban transformations onto the Genevan alternative scene.

This research is not just describing one of the myriads of ways that neoliberalism manifests itself locally. Actually existing neoliberalism encapsulates the debate around the relationship between neoliberalism as a homogeneous meta-narrative and the local, unique micro-geographies in which it can be identified. Further to that, the concept sheds the light the self-serving nature of this relationship. According to Peck et al., because



neoliberalism exists as a strand of thoughts *but also* transforms policies, laws, commonly used language, etc., it creates a self-reinforcing cycle and normalises itself: the narrative becomes the reality, which in turns feeds into the narrative.

In the interviews which I conducted for this thesis, I was bemused by the inherently conflicting views expressed by civil servants in particular regarding alternative nightlife. As an example, I was struck by the gap between the genuine desire to support self-regulated spaces of experimentation (through funding and access to public infrastructures) but the impossibility of transcending the prerogative that they had to conform with the licencing system to receive the support of public bodies, when it was exactly this aspect of state-induced neoliberalisation that nightlife actors were standing up against. In other words, the same institutions that had induced the complete transformation of the Genevan nightscape were trying to alleviate the consequences of their own policies. This case study helped me to conceptualise a moment of disruption in the virtuous cycle of neoliberalism and neoliberalisation, a moment when, through praxis and mundane experiences of nightlife, actors in Geneva realised the non-inherent nature of the transformations that were occurring in their city.

To conclude this section, I would like to return to the idea of writing about neoliberalism from the basis of mundane, small-scale objects of study, an aspect of the project in which I see great potential for future research. The flesh of this thesis is a collection of ordinary stories of nights out, and the way these stories were delivered to me offers a rich archive of detailed descriptions of spaces and bodies and how they interact with one another. These details are precisely what made the neoliberalisation of Geneva's nightlife tangible and intelligible for my participants and, in turn, for me. At a time when urban social movements in the form that they existed in the post-world war period and until the end of the 1980s have faded, Mayer (2007) urges us to search for anti-neoliberal narratives in the mundane and conceptualise resistance to neoliberalism beyond activism. Similarly, Chatterton (2010) has explored how

anti-capitalist activist groups had to reinvent their connections with local communities and create spaces of grounded politics to make “contentious urban politics more legible and feasible.” (p.1205).

In the last five years, I have witnessed the emergence of nightlife venues more directly framed in connection to activism – MACAO in Milan, Partisan in Manchester, Bassiani in Tbilissi – nightlife venues which intentionally drain the resources of the NTE to finance social justice-led organisations and disseminate progressive a political narrative (Hollands, 2020). This has encouraged me to continue exploring nightlife as an arena in which alternatives to the neoliberalisation of cities can be framed as hedonistic, joyful and pleasurable. But my point is that, even beyond the venue-centred approach which I have adopted in the study presented here (for the reason that I explain in the introduction to this thesis), I see potential in further conceptualising actually existing neoliberalism in micro-aspects of nightlife. A lot of the literature that is critical in regards to neoliberalism is written from the perspective of either anti-neoliberal movements (Mayer, 2009; Pickvance, 2003 ) or acute moments of crisis (Schuller and Maldonado, 2016). In this thesis, even if I recognise that the social drama was a trigger, the protests were rarely (if ever) the topic around which critical views over the neoliberalisation of Geneva were voiced by my interviewees. I have, however, gathered a large amount of interview material through which the neoliberal ordering social relations transpires in the details of my participants’ narratives. These stories, rich in descriptions of dressing up and interacting with staff at the door and fellow consumers inside the nightlife venues, tackle the way gender and embodiment is dealt with in the neoliberal nightlife in Geneva in contrast with alternative venues.

The micro-regulation of spaces of nightlife by neoliberalism as another example, is a topic which I have hardly touched upon, when nightlife participants’ descriptions were so deeply embedded in how movements and behaviours are regulated in the neoliberalised nightlife. This is a perspective which I wish to explore because it should help me pursue the exploration of the idea of a neoliberal ordering of space.

### **7.3 The politics of experimentation: conceptualising co-production**

*I think, a lot of us though: “Shall we just move elsewhere?”. And at the same time, there still is umm... there is potential to do stuff. When I look back and I realise that we talked to politicians, I can make myself understood, I can get the message across. That’s really important! I don’t think you can do that everywhere.*  
**(Tom)**

In this last section of this conclusion, I want to explore the perspectives of pursuing research about experimentation specifically as a process of urban co-production, as I see this idea as a promising terrain in which to look for new kinds of anti-neoliberal practices. One particular thread of thoughts that has followed me throughout the production of this thesis is how, in a very messy way, even perhaps at times incidentally, the collaboration between nightlife actors and Geneva State/City Council services was somewhat facilitated by the experimental nature of it. One central aspect of the resolution of the struggle for the perpetuation of experimental nightlife venues was the formalisation in the law regulating spaces of hospitality of a state of exception.

As I explain in Chapter 2, the multiplication of laws and bylaws is one of the markers of neoliberalism (Talbot, 2011; Crawford and Flint, 2009). The question of regulation is quite heavily present in this thesis for the reason that nightlife is an arena of urban life that is heavily regulated, but also because, in the Genevan nightlife case study, the licencing law crystallised the resistance of local actors. In this instance, the law also acted as a very concrete dimension of the neoliberalisation of Geneva. Discussing the licencing regulation with nightlife operators on the one hand and civil servants on the other highlighted the “actually existing-ness” of neoliberalism in

Geneva. In my participants' words, it was, on the one hand, serving the narrative of the NTE as a free market, the respect of private property and the promise of expanded consumers choice. But, on the other hand, the way it materialised was consensually very different amongst my participants.

It was a political decision that led to the inclusion in the licencing law of an exception for cultural space. This was an experimental solution to allow for some spaces to operate in a form of informality which set in the law. And most importantly, it was a political decision to create a law that was geared around the practice of experimentation rather than excluding venues which would not have survived the neoliberalisation of nightlife. As my participants also expressed, this co-production of the law with public agencies was very different to the stand taken in the 1980s, when the State facilitated squatting. In a way, the regulation that came out of this co-production was certainly more in accordance with the neoliberal framework.

In the last three years, as part of my professional activity as a geographer, I had the chance to contribute to two projects. The first one was the design of the Masterplan for a future park in Geneva, a collaboration between the Geneva City Council and a local neighbourhood association. The second was a Research Postgraduate placement through the Leeds Social Science Institute, which involved that I supported the development of a neighbourhood plan in the Burmantofts area in Leeds, a process initiated and developed by East Street Arts, an artists' collective. Both were contexts in which local residents had taken into their hands the process of working towards urban design. This, in itself, is uncompromisingly experimental, at least in 2022, in cities in the UK and Switzerland.

In Geneva, the former industrial site on which the park is being implemented was considered for a variety of purposes, including large scale real-estate developments. Reclaimed by a group of local residents, the history of this park is deeply connected to a local social movement resisting the privatisation of this plot of land, a history which my work partners (architects and landscape designers) and myself responded by coming forward with a co-design project.

As we initiated the co-design process in the Spring 2021, the site was occupied by a variety of groups all connected to the area, a development which, unlike the City Council, we saw with a positive eye. My work partners and I therefore had to act as facilitating force to accompany the emergence of a new form of partnership between the City Council and the users of the site. In this instance, the challenge is to find a mode of governance for the park which is open enough to incorporate changing actors of civil society. From an urban planning point of view, it also means translating an experimental process with open-ended means onto traditional tools such as maps and an Masterplan.

Both projects are also contextualised in diverse, inner-city areas, which meant that representation and participation of groups largely underrepresented in urban planning (if not unrepresented) were crucial. In order to achieve this, all parties involved (residents, civil servants, planners) had to step far out of their comfort zone and we built this co-production using experimental tools such as role play, samba workshops, nature listening trails and fanzine making. During the summer 2021, I conducted a series of interviews with participants to the Burmantofts neighbourhood plan: residents, Council Representatives and members of East Street Arts. These stories are strongly imprinted with the idea that cities are not designed for the wellbeing of their residents and, in this context, participants committed to the project in hope to regain some agency. Beyond the necessity to critically engage with neighbourhood planning's potential to be truly inclusive of inner-city diverse communities, this material gave me a new angle from which to tackle a critique of neoliberal urban policies from a non-activist stand-point.

These examples of moments of experimentation-focused co-production make me think about the fact that there is still space for public bodies to implement policies that, even though they are not against the tide, perhaps allow for counter-spaces, spaces of "actually contested neoliberalism" to stay afloat. And I see great potential for experimentation to help seal more alliances between citizens and public institutions around other issues, to serve an agenda which is maybe not dogmatically anti-neoliberal but certainly more concerned about social justice.

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## Appendix

### A.1, A.2 and A.3: secondary sources that helped me identify participants

Publié par Tribune de Genève (<http://www.tdg.ch>)

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## «Sauvons le Moa» : plus de 1000 personnes manifestent à Rive

**MANIF** | La fermeture du club Moa fait descendre les gens dans la rue. Weetamix a dû à son tour fermer pour raisons de sécurité.



© MAGALI GIRARDIN | Les habitués du Moa sont nombreux à s'être déplacés. La police genevoise a dépêché du monde.

THIERRY MERTENAT | 09.10.2010 | 18:17

A.1. Screen capture, Tribune de Genève, “We must save the MOA”: over 1000 people protest on the Rive square”, 9 October 2010

Publié par Tribune de Genève (<http://www.tdg.ch>)

[Home](#) > [Content](#)

## L'Usine fait grève: 1000 fêtards dans les rues de Genève

**RAS-LE-BOL** | Samedi vers minuit, près d'un millier de noceurs a défilé jusqu'à la place Neuve. Moins d'une heure plus tard, l'attroupement faisait cap vers le quartier des Grottes



© Pierre Albouy | Le cortège de millier de manifestants, à la place du Cirque.

DEJAN NIKOLIC | 24.10.2010 | 06:02

**A.2.** Screen capture: "L'Usine goes on strike: 1000 party goers in the streets of Geneva". Tribune de Genève, 24 October 2010.

## Secrétariat du Grand Conseil

R 624

*Proposition présentée par les députés :*  
*M<sup>mes</sup> et MM. Eric Stauffer, Pascal Spuhler, Jean-François Girardet, Sandro Pistis, Dominique Rolle, Jean-Marie Voumard, Marie-Thérèse Engelberts*

*Date de dépôt : 7 juin 2010*

### **Proposition de résolution**

#### **Application de la loi en matière d'exploitation d'établissements publics : il faut fermer le MOA**

Le GRAND CONSEIL de la République et canton de Genève considérant :

- que la discothèque-club Le Moa, établie sur la commune de Vernier, fait l'objet d'innombrables rapports de police pour troubles de l'ordre public, bagarres, vente d'alcool à des mineurs, tapage nocturne, problèmes liés à la consommation de stupéfiants ;
- qu'il est établi après enquête que le Moa Club a effectué une demande d'autorisation d'exploitation en octobre 2009 qui n'a jamais été acceptée ; c'est-à-dire que le Moa Club n'est au bénéfice d'aucune autorisation d'exploitation ;
- que cet établissement aurait dû être fermé dès le mois d'octobre 2009 ;
- que le Moa Club a bénéficié de passe-droits et d'appuis politiques en haut lieu ;
- que la commune de Vernier s'est plainte à répétées reprises des nuisances provoquées par cet établissement ;
- que, selon la *Tribune de Genève*, le seul établissement sur le territoire genevois à avoir accepté une « Skins Party » est le Moa Club (voir exposé des motifs),

invite le Conseil d'Etat

- à prononcer la fermeture immédiate et définitive du Moa Club ;
- à ouvrir une enquête administrative afin d'identifier les responsables de la non-fermeture de cet établissement.

**A.3** Bill R 624, "Respecting Licencing Law: we must close the MOA club", State of Geneva archive online. 7 June 2010. Last accessed 30.01.2020 from [ge.ch/grandconseil/memorial/](http://ge.ch/grandconseil/memorial/)


#### A.4 The flyer that I designed to recruit my participants:

“I need your help to talk about nightlife. I am a researcher at the University of Leeds, UK, and I am researching Geneva’s nightlife for my PhD. I am looking for nightlife participants for who nightlife is important and would be happy to give me an hour for an interview. I am not expecting any expert chat! You just need to like going out at night or care for the local nightlife. If you are interested, please get in touch:

Marie-Avril Berthet [gymaab@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:gymaab@leeds.ac.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/marie.avril.94>

Thank you in advance for contributing to a better understanding of nightlife!”

J’AI BESOIN DE VOUS POUR  
PARLER DE LA VIE  
NOCTURNE 

Je suis chercheuse à l’Université de Leeds (UK) et je réalise une thèse sur la vie nocturne à Genève.

Je recherche des noctambules pour qui la vie nocturne occupe une place importante et qui seraient d’accord de m’accorder une heure pour une interview.

Aucune expertise n’est requise, il suffit d’aimer la vie nocturne ou de trouver ça important.

Si vous êtes intéressé.e.s merci de me contacter:

Marie-Avril Berthet

[gymaab@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:gymaab@leeds.ac.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/marie.avril.94>

Merci d’avance de contribuer à la compréhension du rôle de la vie nocturne !



## A.5 Consent form

Marie-Avril Berthet - PhD Student  
School of Geography  
gyaab@leeds.ac.uk  
marieavril@raisonsociale.ch  
079/6810264



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Titre du projet : Recherche Doctorale  
« Réclamer la vie nocturne comme un espace-temps de créativité sociale. Transition de la culture festive dans les squats à l'Industrie Nocturne à Genève, Suisse. »

Nom de la chercheuse : Marie-Avril Berthet Meylan

*Veillez cocher la case si vous êtes d'accord avec la phrase sur la gauche*

- 1 Je confirme que j'ai lu et que je comprends la feuille d'information qui m'a été remise et explique les projets pour lesquels cette interview est menée. Je confirme que j'ai eu l'occasion de poser des questions à propos de cette interview et que j'ai reçu des réponses satisfaisantes.
- 2 Je confirme que ma participation est volontaire et je comprends que j'ai le droit de me retirer à tout moment, sans devoir me justifier et en supporter les conséquences. De plus, si je ne désire pas répondre à l'une ou l'autre des questions, j'ai le droit de ne pas y répondre.
- 3 J'ai conscience que mes réponses seront anonymisées afin de préserver mon identité et que je ne serai pas reconnaissable dans tout matériel de recherche qui pourrait être transmis à d'autres chercheurs ou publié.
- 4 J'accepte que mes réponses soient utilisées dans le cadre de projets de recherche à venir

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nom du/de la participant (e)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nom de la chercheuse

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature



## A.6 List of Participants

Pseudonym	Role	Age group	Type of venue where met/ through which they responded
Abel	Consumer	18-25	Mainstream informal
Adriano	Official representative	45-60	Geneva City Council
Ana	Consumer	18-25	Mainstream informal
Adam	Consumer	25-45	Alternative informal
Charlie	Alternative nightlife operator	25-45	Alternative informal
Emma	Consumer	18-25	Alternative licenced
Felix	Alternative nightlife operator	25-45	Alternative informal
Grace	Consumer	25-45	Alternative informal
Gabriel	Consumer and free party organiser	25-45	Alternative informal
Hannah	Consumer	18-25	Mainstream informal
Hazel	Consumer	18-25	Mainstream informal
Iris	Official representative		State of Geneva
Jacob	Consumer	18-25	Mainstream informal
Liam	Alternative nightlife operator	25-45	Alternative informal
Leonard	Official representative	45-60	State of Geneva
Luis	Alternative nightlife operator	25-45	Alternative informal
Luce	Alternative nightlife operator	25-45	Alternative licenced
Luke	Consumer	25-45	Alternative informal
Nikos	Nightclub owner	45-60	Mainstream informal
Olivia	Consumer	18-25	Alternative informal
Opal	Consumer	18-25	Mainstream informal
Theo	Nightclub owner	25-45	Mainstream informal
Tom	Alternative nightlife operator	25-45	Alternative licenced

## A.7 List of venues

Name of the venue	Description of the venue
Artamis	Alternative informal former industrial site hosting various venues. Evicted in 2008
Bar Ephémère	Alternative informal. Evicted 1998
Bistrok	Alternative informal (evicted with squat Rhino in 2007)
ByPass	Mainstream licenced
Cave12	Alternative informal (evicted with squat Rhino in 2007)  Now alternative licenced (reopened in 2013 in State owned premises)
Chez Brigitte	Alternative informal. Evicted in 2002
Escobar	Alternative informal. Evicted in 2010
Java Club	Mainstream licenced
L'Etage (Artamis)	Alternative informal. Evicted in 2008
L'Usine	Alternative informal
La Bohème	Mainstream licenced
La Gravière	Alternative licenced
Madone Bar	Alternative informal, evicted in 2004
MOA Club	Mainstream informal
Motel Campo	Alternative informal
Patchinko	Alternative informal
Porteous	Alternative informal
Shark (Artamis)	Alternative informal. Evicted in 2008
Soul2Soul (Resources Urbaines)	Alternative informal

