Underground Club Spaces and Interactive Performance:

How might underground club spaces be read and developed as new environments for democratic/participatory/interactive performance and how are these performative spaces of play created, navigated and utilised by those who inhabit them?

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents who have always believed in me and to my daughter, Maisie, who is my source of inspiration and joy.

Abstract

This thesis examines how the underground club space might be read and developed as a new environment for performances that are democratic, participatory and interactive. It positions the club space as a playful arena and asks how these performative spaces of play are created, navigated and utilised by those who inhabit them. The study looks at the club space and the activities housed therein using performance theory as a lens and as a theoretical tool for understanding the nature of the club context and the possibilities it affords for performative exchange. The thesis identifies and explores the continuum of performance practice that occurs within club spaces and analyses a number of bespoke performances that have been developed specifically for this study in order to illuminate particular theoretical models of interaction. The central premise of this research is that underground clubbing practices themselves can be understood as participatory performance. The ethos of participation prevalent within this culture results in notions of community, engagement and reciprocity being widely circulated and cited as a significant element of the underground experience by clubbers immersed in the scene. This research takes into account the belief in the provisionality of the clubbing space as a potential site of performance where people may try out alternatives, imagine (im)possibilities and play. Furthermore it explores how performance practice carried out in the underground may help develop interactive structures that can be applied to other contexts. Building on existing scholarship in club culture, this study contributes to new knowledge in the field in that it draws parallels between the club space and spaces of play as a way of modelling potential platforms for performative exchange. In addition the study develops a set of models for analysing performance that occurs in unpredictable, fluid, social spaces.

Note:

The author's name was previously Alice Bayliss.

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Foreword

'You need a laugh to live: you need a life to laugh'
(Carey cited in McKay 1998: 78)

I remember the first time it all made sense.

It was 1998 and I was in the Q Club, a legend of a nightclub in the heart of

Birmingham. I had been there many times before but never quite like this. I was

standing in the main techno room along with a couple of thousand other people. It

was hot, really hot. And crowded. Hundreds of sweating bodies were moving

together to the thump, thump, thump of a heavy bass line. The music was incessant,

all consuming, a physical assault on the senses to the extent you could feel the blood

pulsing in your ears and your heartbeat keeping time with the bpm. Standing towards

the back of the room on one of the raised platforms that circled the edge of the dance

floor, I could feel the vibrations of the music coming up through the floor and

through the soles of my trusty dancing shoes, travelling up to my gut and rattling my

chest, my teeth and the ends of each hair on my head. Electric. Hundreds of arms

were lifted high in the air breaking the green laser horizon with their fingers. Faces

were tilted upwards to the light, illuminated by the flashing rig. Each and every one

of the crowd seemed to be drinking in the energy that was coming from the DJ

somewhere far off at the front of the room. They bounced it back so it filled the

space above their heads created by the high vaulted ceiling of the building that used

to be a church. Collective worship of a different kind. And everyone was smiling. I

was completely alone – not a recognisable face around me in the sea of bodies below

- and yet for the first time in my twenty-eight years I felt like I belonged. All that mattered was the here and now, this moment, being with these people in this space when the rest of the city was fast asleep in bed. Filled up with light, with colour, with emotion, with rhythm, with sensation, with warmth, I realised I was smiling too.

That's when it all made sense.

What were the special characteristics and dimensions of that club world that provided such a powerful, emotional experience? How have they impacted on the way I have chosen to perceive and act in the world ever since?

This study is not simply about clubbing, although that is its context. It is about trying to understand that moment of revelation I had back in 1998. It is about trying to understand how the temporary world of a club operates as a site of interactivity, as a space that can provide people with a creative outlet, which then resonates with their everyday lives and changes the way they feel, think and respond in the world at large. This is a study about human beings at play and what we can learn from being playful. It is an attempt to discover more about the performative self and about the self in performance. It is a journey into an underground world of noise, dance and night-time pleasures where participation, play and performance converge and collide to create new meanings and new ways of being for the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Clubbing as a social activity has grown, mutated and taken root as a significant part of people's lives over the late twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Each weekend young people (and not so young people) are choosing to spend their time dancing to the hypnotic sound of bass in darkened spaces until the early hours of the following morning and beyond. Club spaces provide people with the opportunity to come together, to be together and to celebrate what it is to be human. As a public milieu that responds to contemporary trends, tastes and values, what occurs in these buildings, fields, tents and community centres can be seen as a barometer of social and cultural change and, as such, has found itself the subject of increased academic attention. How people shape their leisure time, construct their existence and take a break from the rigours and routines of daily life has always provided an insight into the ideals, priorities and behaviours of a particular group or community. Looking at how we play helps us to understand how we learn, how we develop as individuals and how we relate to other people.

My interest in this field is twofold. First, I am, and always have been, an avid clubber. From a very early age I took every opportunity to hit the dance floor and, to this day, a weekend doesn't feel like a weekend unless I am crawling into bed sometime around dawn clutching a couple of crumpled flyers, with my ears ringing and my feet aching. I was an adolescent during the Thatcher years and watched from the sidelines as the media reported the country's journey from the Yuppie ideal of the "Me Generation" to the explosion of Acid House and the arrival of what has been coined the "We Generation". I witnessed the media storm surrounding illegal parties, the M25 orbital raves, the flood of Ecstasy into the UK, the first publicised Ecstasy

death. In parallel with this emergent club scene, I saw on television images of violence between police and protestors during the Poll Tax demonstrations, the dissolution of the Peace Convoy, the Battle of the Beanfield and the direct action of eco warriors defending ancient woodlands against the onslaught of ring roads, motorways and bypasses. I saw the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act and its impact on the moral and political landscape of the country. Responses to the efforts of a hard-line Conservative government to rein in sections of a society who were attempting to walk a different path became intimately connected with the underground dance scene. In a complex and often messy relationship, club culture and political action became enmeshed – sometimes explicitly, at other times tangentially.

Second, while these major cultural and political shifts were taking place, I was studying for a degree in Theatre Studies and went on to become a secondary school teacher of Drama. I encountered numerous young people in an education system that prepared them relentlessly for tests, examinations and careers but allowed them little opportunity to be creative, experimental or innovative. At weekends I saw the same young people dancing the night away – dressing up and getting down, revelling in music, engaging with people of all ages and from all walks of life, expressing themselves through dance, participating in a sense of community that was as tangible as it was temporary. There seemed to be such a mismatch between their daytime existence and their nightly pursuits and it troubled me. The late-night world of the club seemed to be offering a route for self and collective expression that was not being accessed in the same way during their more visible daily lives.

As I began to study part-time for an MA in Drama Education and Cultural Studies I became particularly interested in play theory, notions of ludic behaviour and how play infiltrates our lives psychologically, socially and linguistically. What we as humans gain from being playful came rushing to the fore and sharpened in focus each time I stepped into a club at the weekend. I began to notice how club spaces were organised, structured and arranged both physically and psychically and began to draw parallels between the club world and, from my background in theatre, the play world of the stage. In my research I began to look closely at the varying degrees of participation deployed within the drama classroom to encourage young people to engage with social issues, formulate aesthetic ideas and develop creative concepts in order to shape their understanding of the world. Gradually, I started to make connections between my daily work in schools and my experience of club events at the weekend. I began to understand the draw of the club and the potential it offered for interaction, participation and creative play in the form of performative behaviour. Here were groups demonstrating dynamic, expressive and collective behaviour but choosing to do so under cover of darkness, away from the watchful eyes of parents and teachers, in spaces they were carving out in collaboration with others.

At around the same time there was a desire by club owners and promoters to create the notion of the club event, a specially created atmosphere akin to the larger warehouse raves and Balearic parties of previous years, rather than the dreary, predictable, weekly night out that had been the staple choice of many a provincial town centre in the early 1980s. This rethinking of the club space resulted in some key changes both to the ways in which the buildings, venues and events were organised and to how those who chose to attend participated in the success of the party and

thus, to a large extent, held ownership of it. One of the major shifts in thinking was to re-envision the club as a celebratory space, a night-time festival of light, music, colour and pageant. Suddenly clubs became places where you could listen to innovative music created by artistic DJs using state of the art remix technology; where you could watch light shows, video projections and installations; look up and see inflatable sculptures hanging from the ceilings; dance under and around intricate UV painted hangings and have a cup of herbal tea or a back massage while you took a break from the dance floor. The importance of participatory performance in communal celebration was not lost on these party organisers and so, building on the festival and warehouse aesthetic, they began to book trapeze artists, jugglers, dancers, stilt-walkers, fire breathers, walkabout characters and other diverse acts to create an exciting, dynamic space of rich interdisciplinarity and interaction.

This thesis is stimulated by two personal points of interest – my clubbing life and my academic specialism in education and applied theatre. These two strands motivate and frame the study but do not define its parameters. As a researcher I am motivated by ethical concerns and social engagement and hold certain beliefs and convictions about the positive benefits of clubbing. The efficacy of clubbing as a social practice and the potential functionality of placing performance work into this context is raised within this thesis but it is not my intention to prove or demonstrate this as an explicit outcome. Rather this enquiry is about play and playful behaviour in convivial spaces and how the underground club can be positioned as a playful arena and formulated as a site of participatory performance practice. This is the central spine of the thesis.

A Consideration of Key Terms: Performativity, Rehearsal of Alternatives and the Underground

This thesis sets out to examine the underground club space by utilising the lens of performance and to consider certain practices that occur therein as performative acts. My usage of the term performativity is drawn from both Schechner and Butler's interpretations of Turner's observations on ritual events and liminality in traditional cultures (Turner 1982), even though these two theorists apply these observations in very different ways. Schechner explores the uses of liminality to stress transformative and resistant practices (1988) and suggests how they might be put to use for generative effect in the creation of new meaning. In contrast Butler asserts that gender identity is a performative accomplishment based on reiteration (1988) and that individuals are socialised according to compulsory systems of difference that result in gender appearing as 'natural'. However, Butler suggests that conceived as performative, the gender system is not unassailable. Citations are never entirely the same. Playful utterances can shift the contextual frame and provide opportunities for resistance on a local or a micro scale (Butler 1993: 221). These shifts of subjectivity may not be 'totalising transformations' (Shepherd and Wallis 2004: 153). Rather they may be understood as 'local instances of autonomous subjectivity summoned forth by the performance situation' (Kershaw 1999: 61-62). It is my premise that the club space as playful arena provides opportunities for moments of autonomous subjectivities to become realised and that these moments, whilst potentially transitory, temporary and incomplete, are enacted through the performative mode and framed by varying paradigms of play addressed later in this thesis.

I start this research with the basic premise that performativity concerns itself with 'getting something done' (Shepherd and Wallis 2004: 223). Stemming from Austin's observation that in uttering certain sentences people perform acts to make something happen (1962), we see how 'performatives' can become an active part of ordinary life. From a postmodern perspective we now understand these 'utterances' to include physical acts as well as spoken words and it is these physical acts carried out in the club space that are of concern here. Performative turns shape the construction of social reality through repetition, reiteration and rehearsal. It is the element of rehearsal that is pertinent to this enquiry.

An underlying motivation for this thesis is that the club space offers opportunities for the rehearsal of alternatives through play that chimes with the dialogic exchange offered by Augusto Boal's notion of the participatory stage where 'rehearsal for reality' (Jackson in Boal 1992: xxi) informs both the structure and the content of dramatic encounters. What that rehearsal might achieve in real terms beyond the world of the club is more uncertain and I do not attempt to resolve the issue of potential efficacy within the remit of this piece of writing. However I do raise it as a possible implication for further study within the additional frameworks of Berlant and Warner's work on world-making (1998) which is, in turn, a theory pursued in detail by Fiona Buckland on her research into social dancing and queer clubs in New York (2002). Buckland herself acknowledges the difficulties of writing about the experience and effects of clubbing and yet she maintains 'the effort is worthwhile because social improvised dancing […] is so vital to the cultural life of individuals, groups, and lifeworlds and to how they make meaning and value' (2002: 2-3). Throughout this thesis there is commentary from clubbers as they attempt to

articulate the positive benefits their clubbing experiences have had on their lives. Again, it is not within the remit of this thesis to prove that these articulations are accurate assessments but a belief in the potential impact of underground clubbing practices is a significant aspect of the context under investigation.

In an exploration of theatrical performance, Kershaw too addresses how any attempt to prove efficacy is fraught with difficulty. He asks how efficacy can be measured. How do effects in the theatre relate to action carried out in the world? He suggests rather that the question be reframed and that we 'pay more attention to the *conditions* of performance that are *most likely* to produce an efficacious result' (1992: 3). If we accept the premise that within the club space meaning might be made and values might be generated, then it may be less problematic to identify the special features of that space and the various apparatuses available to clubbers that enable those meanings to be exchanged rather than attempt to determine how far-reaching or efficacious those meanings might be for participants. It is these performance conditions and strategies for participation, engagement and meaning-making that is of concern to this thesis.

Returning to the notion of rehearsal - Schechner states, '[performance consciousness] activates alternatives: "this" and "that" both operate simultaneously. In ordinary life people live out destinies. […] But performance consciousness is subjunctive, full of alternatives and potentiality. During rehearsals especially, alternatives are kept alive, the work is intentionally unsettled' (1985: 6). There is an implied functionality here. Schechner's implication is that the rehearsal mode might provide a space for questioning and lead to a re-imagining or, ultimately, a challenging of the status quo,

of fixed realities and social constructions. However, rehearsal is not solely the domain of the actor; 'Performance consciousness' no longer resides only on the stage and within the realm of the theatre building. With the postmodern shift towards the performative as a way of understanding being in the world, people can be regarded as performers in their own social script. Rather than being ensnared in the acceptance of a repressive status quo, the explosion of performance beyond the theatre has its roots in the counter culture of the 1960s and points towards an understanding of the performative as 'an excessive dynamic interaction between text and context, performance and society' (Kershaw 1999: 63).

Kershaw views performances 'in the light of concepts drawn from theories of democracy' (ibid.) and it is with this body of work in mind that the title of this thesis invokes a sense of the democratic. Rather than denying the rather generalised argument that all performance is in some way political, Kershaw encourages discrimination between the different ways in which and the extent to which particular kinds of practice may promote democracy (ibid.). For him 'performative excess untrammelled by theatre is freer to create new domains for traditionally democratic practice' (ibid. p.85). The explosion of performance beyond the realms of traditional theatre is celebrated as operating in '*self-created* circumstances, in *fresh* types of venue, *beyond* existing theatres (ibid. p.62). The confluence here of autonomy, novelty and alterity is a key concept that is pursued throughout my own research. Positioning the underground club space as a new site of performance practice allows us to see how (semi)autonomous spaces of play contribute to and shape the pursuit of new creative practice, the development of open performance structures that

encourage participation and the advancement of democratising performance strategies.

It is important to note that, for the purposes of this research, the clubbing space of the underground is denoted more by the socio-cultural frames applied to it by participants rather than by the walls, doors, physical structures and musical policies of particular venues. The research, therefore, takes into consideration contemporary music festivals, illegal raves and various kinds of free party, all of which align themselves in one form or another to the 'underground'. These celebratory events can often be found outdoors, beyond the fixed notion of the commercial nightclub that is usually situated in an urban setting and operates as part of the regulated leisure industry.

The term 'underground' when used in the context of clubbing is subject to much debate and is resistant to definitive description. Any underground music or club scene mutates and develops according to the context in which it is operating. Many underground scenes are highly localised and take on different manifestations depending on the mainstream scene to which they place themselves in opposition. The fluctuating relationship between underground and mainstream (where hitherto 'alternative' scenes rise to the surface through increased popularity and become incorporated into widely-distributed forms) results in a slippery territory that can change rapidly. Despite these difficulties, there are certain characteristics that, for the purposes of this thesis, help us to locate the underground and what it might mean to its participants. Firstly, the term can be used as an identifier of a (sub)culture shaped by the interlocking relationship of music, dance and marginality. As Michel de

Certeau says, 'Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive…Marginality is becoming universal. A marginal group has now become a silent majority' (de Certeau, 1988: xvii). An underground scene sets itself apart from what it views as conventional or commercial. Historically associated with resistance movements where levels of secrecy were necessary in the face of harsh regimes, the underground has its roots in the radical. This may emerge in artistic terms with its music (regardless of genre) being described as experimental, pioneering, creative, cutting-edge. It may relate to its patterns of organisation, which tend towards being self-regulating, progressive and independent. It may relate to its social, cultural and political positioning and thus be regarded as a refuge, a place that celebrates and allows for difference and revels in its own invisibility, anonymity and obscurity. As such, an underground will always exist, regardless of its musical specificities, and people will align themselves to it as an expression of ethics. As Frank Zappa reputedly put it, 'the mainstream comes to you, but you have to go underground'.[1] It is the sense of being underneath, moving to the margins as an *intentional* ploy, lurking below the surface with a group of like-minded people and effecting change at the borders, which is appealing and gives the underground a quasi-political dimension.

An overview of intentions

The central spine of this thesis situates the underground club as a space of play and explores how these performative spaces of play are created, navigated and utilised by those who inhabit them. The study looks at the club space and the activities housed therein using performance as a lens and as a theoretical tool for understanding the

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[1] Exact source unknown.

nature of the club experience. Within this framework the thesis identifies the continuum of performance practice that occurs within club spaces and analyses a number of bespoke performances that have been developed as part of the research to illuminate particular theoretical models of interaction. The overarching purpose of this work is to determine how clubs might be read as new environments for interactive performance and to offer new models of theorisation of performance practices carried out within this context.

This work builds on previous research into club culture which has emanated from a range of academic disciplines – including cultural studies, theology, philosophy, social geography, sociology, musicology, media studies and queer theory. Scholarly interest in club culture has stemmed predominantly from a desire to document changes in youth culture, societal shifts in behaviour and patterns of consumption. Certain aspects of this existing work have drawn upon the field of performance studies (Jackson 2004, Cunningham 1998, Gore 1997) or situated themselves firmly within it (Buckland 2002) and I am indebted to the work that has already been conducted. However, up to this point no specific research has been conducted that draws parallels between the club space and spaces of play as a way of modelling potential platforms for performative exchange. This study aims to address this imbalance by examining not only the performative culture of the clubbing environment but also the opportunities it can offer for new configurations and theorisations of interaction between artist and audience.

In order to address the central research question, it is first necessary to investigate the particular characteristics of clubbing space not only as it exists in the physical world but also in the consciousness of those who inhabit that space on a regular basis and the significance they ascribe to it. The aim here is not to provide an historical overview of a particular youth culture or musical scene, but rather to focus attention on the clubbing space as a playful arena. This arena operates both as a physical site and a figurative space where the three core activities of performance, participation and play collide; providing us, in turn, with a live context in which to learn more about humans' interaction with others, intimate technologies and local environments.

The first chapter will begin by providing a contextual overview of the nature of underground club culture (namely that associated with techno music and which has its roots in rave) and how it is positioned as a social activity at the start of the twenty-first century in the UK. The investigation will draw on work related to counter-cultures started in the 1970s by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Clarke and Jefferson 1973), but will move beyond it to examine how the underground dance movement has become embroiled in notions of political resistance, mythologies of fantasy, escape and liberation from the strictures of self, with playfulness as its guiding principle.

The second chapter will move on to investigate how the club space is framed as a space of play or playful arena. From there Chapter Three will begin to assess how the club space might be read as a site of performance. This section will take into account the club as a performative environment and the performative actions, modes of behaviour and degrees of participation contained therein. By analysing the activities

of both licensed artist/performers and of clubbers themselves, the fourth chapter will examine the nature of performative interactions taking place within the club space.

Chapter Five examines a number of interactive performance pieces that I designed and carried out in order to test some of the hypotheses developed in the earlier stages of the research. It is hoped this practice-led research will not only clarify our understanding of how the club space operates as an environment where the participants themselves create meaning through interactive play, but also provide a framework through which to look more closely at a poetics of interaction that can, in turn, be applied to other contexts. The models developed in this chapter represent an original contribution to the way in which we consider those contemporary performance practices that seek to engage participants in semi-structured works, particularly those that respond intimately to the dynamic offered by the site in which they manifest.

The concluding chapter will summarise the main findings of the thesis and suggest how the theoretical tools developed throughout this study may provide a useful apparatus for practitioners working with participatory and interactive structures beyond the field of club culture.

Methodology

As is usual in performance research, the methodology for this thesis will draw upon theoretical frameworks from a number of different disciplines. Work from areas such as social theory, politics, cultural and urban studies, musicology, developmental psychology and anthropology will be called upon to elucidate the investigation. However, the intention is to examine the club space as a site of performance, so established performance theory will be the central theoretical underpinning with a particular focus on play, phenomenology and spatiality. The methodology will deploy phenomenology as an observational stance or as 'a particularizing mode of attention' (Garner 1994: 5) and as a way of encountering the club world 'as it appears or discloses itself to the perceiving subject' (ibid. p.2).

The research data has been gathered through four distinct, yet interrelated, processes. These are participant-observation, interviews, performance practice (all of which are grouped under the broader heading of 'fieldwork' and discussed in more detail below) and theoretical modelling. The fieldwork was conducted in three core strands – firstly attending events and writing up my observations; secondly by conducting interviews with a variety of participants in the club scene ranging from promoters and DJs to performers and clubbers; and thirdly by creating a number of interactive performance pieces which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. Because of the inherent difficulties associated with interviewing participants in the club space (due to noise, potential intoxication, intrusion of recording equipment and so on), the decision was taken to observe and analyse interactive behaviour promoted through this performance practice, rather than attempt any written or verbal account of the experience from the participant-audience.

Fieldwork One: Participant-Observation

First, I conducted primary research as participant-observer out in club land, with the emphasis here placed on the participatory mode, or what Marshall and Rossman call 'in-person' observation (1995). As a methodology, participant-observation has its roots in ethnography and offers us a deeper understanding of a particular context or experience than can be gleaned from someone else's retelling of certain actions, beliefs or feelings. It is an opportunity to collect qualitative data where it is essential to capture human behaviour in a broad natural context at different times and from different perspectives (Glaser, 1996). It is a method which emphasises the participatory element and embraces the personal, subjective accounts of the experience (Tedlock 2000). How the participant-observation is then interpreted and used by the researcher becomes significant and is not without its challenges.

In line with other ethnographies my own research methods acknowledge that there are varying degrees of contact with a social setting that operate along a continuum of involvement and detachment as articulated by Gold (1958) and Gans (1968) and that adopting one mode for the duration of the research is not always possible or desirable. The roles of total participant, researcher-participant and total researcher (Gans 1968) may co-exist within one project and provide different methods of recording data and offer different perspectives or insights depending on circumstance. For this thesis shifts between these separate roles occurred not only within the project but, at times, within the course of one club night or event as I responded to who was there and how much further research I had to pursue in an overt manner. It is interesting to note my research stance could not always be planned for nor predicted with any accuracy. If I attended a club purely for pleasure it often provided me with unexpected data that became useful. On other occasions

attending an event for the purposes of research placed me in a position of detachment that prevented me from being fully engaged with the crowd or the events as they unfolded. Managing the anxieties associated with this unpredictable terrain has become part of the methodology itself insomuch as it has required me to be aware of my modes of participation and to be able to adjust them and move between them *in situ*.

The very experience of being a participant is central to this thesis and is, therefore, used in its design. Whilst a party or event may be constructed, organised and facilitated by a professional or semi-professional team, the experience of it is shaped by the participant and thus creates varying feelings of ownership, engagement and fulfilment for the individual depending on how that person places themself in relation to the event. Choosing where to stand, where to dance, when to sit back and observe, when to take centre stage, when to interact with strangers, when to dissemble, when to lose oneself in the music, when to merge with the crowd – these choices create a sense of personal narrative embedded within the collective experience. They are choices made by clubbers every time they step into a club. They are choices made by researchers involved in negotiating ethnography that deliberately obfuscates clear delineations between participant and observer roles. The choices I have made in terms of what to observe, what to record and what to analyse are all framed by the 'acute sense of uncertainty' (Bryman 2004: 500) that attends most reflexive research. Reflexive research entails sensitivity to the researcher's cultural, political and social context (ibid.) and, to a certain extent, writes the researcher into the research process and outcome. As Lincoln and Denzin put it:

> On the one hand there is the concern for validity, or certainty in the text as a form of isomorphism and authenticity. On the other hand there is the sure and certain

> knowledge that all texts are socially, historically, politically and culturally located. We, like the texts we write, can never be transcendent! (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 582)

Having a personal connection with the setting in which the research is undertaken problematises this still further. It is with this in mind that the 'knowledge' resulting from this thesis is presented as a reflection of my own location in time, social space but also as a reflection of the stance I adopt in relation to the (sub)cultural space of the underground club.

In line with Rosenau's view that postmodernists 'offer "readings" not "observations", "interpretations" not "findings"' (1992: 8), perhaps a better description of the method I undertook would be 'participant-interpretation'. After each club night attended, I wrote up my 'interpretations' ensuring a time lapse of no longer than twenty-four hours between event and documentation. The time lapse between experience and notation helped achieve a degree of distance enabling me to be reflexive about what had been experienced. Returning to the more conventional term, as a participant-observer I moved between covert and overt ethnography during the course of the research. In the main my presence in the club was anonymous. I usually visited the event with groups of friends as a regular attendee and, unless specifically asked, no one there knew of my position as a researcher. On occasion club promoters did organise a place on the guest list for me but again, as most of this was conducted by prior arrangement over the phone or by e-mail, my presence was anonymous unless I decided to declare it for the purposes of making contacts and organising further interviews.

Covert observation gave me not only unlimited access to the setting under consideration but also meant that people did not adjust their behaviour in front of me. There are obvious ethical considerations to take into account here, particularly as the context in question did involve some levels of illegality associated not only with recreational drug use but also licensing laws and, in the case of appropriated spaces, trespass. However, observations made to support the line of enquiry in this thesis concerned themselves with modes of performance and how individuals and groups responded within a playful space. The extent to which playful behaviour was shaped and influenced by individuals consciously engaging in illegal activity has been dealt with in general terms within the thesis and is not linked to specific individuals. At those times when it was necessary to move from the covert to the overt position in order to make contact with performers or promoters for future interviews, rather than being met with any suspicion, my presence as researcher in the club was welcomed. A willingness to talk was accompanied by varying levels of surprise that research in this area was being conducted at doctoral level. This enthusiasm and openness could be read as a desire on the part of individuals to share their ideas about the club space as a place of play and performance and to show loyalty to a particular club or scene. However, it could also be interpreted as a reflection of what they deemed to be my own position, namely one that is immersed in the scene and generally supportive of its aims, ethos and attitude. Through casual conversation or prior personal knowledge of me, informants knew or could make informed assumptions about my own views. The extent to which this swayed any future discussion through interview is impossible to determine but needs to be taken into account when analysing responses to questions.

Selection of material for observation

In such a vibrant, noisy, fluid and seemingly chaotic environment as a club, everything has the potential of being a possible point of research and as such demands to be noted, remembered and filed for later consideration. (An early decision was taken not to bring recording equipment of any kind into a club as this would mark me out further from the crowd and separate me from the action as it unfolded.) Attempting to read and de-code such a multitude of signs can lead to one losing the sense of being immersed and experiencing the event from within. On the other hand, a night out with friends can often be just that. The researcher's eye has temporarily closed and moments that would prove useful later have not been paid adequate attention. To prevent information overload in terms of observational data, it was important to keep the research questions in clear view and to identify strands of interest within each. The research questions I was pursuing were:

1. How do modes of professional and semi-professional performance operate within the fluidity of the club space?
2. Are performances signalled as such and how does this impact on audience response?
3. What is the nature of the interaction between formal performance and creative clubbers?

To develop a more effective frame for viewing, a set of criteria were written which acted as signposts for the event which, in turn, helped me select key moments, anchor my experience and apply it to the research questions under scrutiny.

The first set of criteria can be applied to any club environment, whether professional performance is present or not:

- **What is the physical arrangement of the club space?** (entrances and exits, dance and non-dance spaces, stage spaces, decoration and visual effects, lights and projections, flow of movement between rooms, position of the DJ, position of other licensed performers, presence of technology etc)

- **Do different parts of the club promote different modes of behaviour?** (dancing, talking, shopping, drinking, observing etc)

- **What interactions are taking place?** (between friends, between strangers, between the music and individuals/groups, between the DJ and the crowd, between performers and clubbers)

- **What are the signs of creative input to the event from clubbers?** (social dancing, costuming, improvised role play, performance and visual display e.g. juggling and poi, interaction with installations/performance)

The second set of criteria relate specifically to those clubs that seek to incorporate formal performance of a theatrical nature into their event:

- **How do the professional performers signal themselves as such?**

- **Where are they situated in relation to the crowd?**

- **How do they interact with the clubbers?**

- **To what extent is their work interactive?**

- **To what extent does their work rely on improvisation and participation with clubbers?**

- **How does their work interact with other activities within the club?** (DJ, music, lights, crowd flow etc)

These questions provided a framework for conducting a snapshot ethnography during a period of three years. The ethnography was not designed to be comprehensive or inclusive of all types of underground clubs in all parts of the country. It represents a particular moment in time (2003-2006) and charts my own personal contact with the club world driven primarily by convenience, opportunity and location. It can, nonetheless, be taken as a representative sample of club performance occurring throughout the UK during this period.

Fieldwork Two: Interviews

The second core strand to the fieldwork research methodology was the conducting of interviews that were recorded and transcribed in full. The content of these interviews (or more informal conversations) was largely determined by the relationship the interviewee had with the club itself and where the interview took place (during the event itself or in a neutral space away from the club). The three categories of interviewees could be described thus:

- **Club staff** (promoters, venue managers, show directors, technical crew etc)
- **Club performers** (DJs, VJs, dancers, aerialists, jugglers, stilt walkers, actors etc)
- **Clubbers** (those who attend as 'punters')

Of course these distinctions are inherently unstable. Roles constantly shift and slide, often throughout the course of a night. The very fact that roles are slippery is crucial to this study as a whole and part of the fundamental datum and yet it must be acknowledged that this sense of flux created its own problems in terms of conducting interviews of parity. Being able to question in a semi-structured manner whilst allowing for contingency in situations that were prone to change was essential. It was important that the interview structure was sufficiently flexible to take this into account and to acknowledge that during the course of the interview the interviewee might be responding to questions from a variety of perspectives that co-exist in terms of their identification with the club world. For example, many club staff are running events because of their own personal interest in clubbing. Many staff and performers will attend other nights as 'punters'. Some performers are not personally interested in the club scene and only perform in clubs as there is no other work available. Many clubbers themselves attend such events because of the performative release it offers. In spite of, and perhaps because of, this complex pattern of shifting identities and relationships between self and the club, it was essential to adhere to established criteria during the interviews in order to focus the conversation, anchor it to the research questions and prevent the discussion from becoming merely anecdotal. Questions were crafted for each interview so as to relate specifically to and take into account the perceived role of the interviewee. Whilst there was some flexibility in how the questions were asked as the interview proceeded, they were constructed according to and followed strands of thought relating closely to the field of research as outlined in the sub questions. Whilst each set of interview questions were all slightly different and, by necessity, responded to the interviewee's experience, ease and desire to talk, the questions followed these notional categories:

- **Notions of performance within clubbing**

- **Degrees of participation**

- **Elements of playfulness**

- **The physical club space**

- **The psychical dimension of the club space**

- **Clubbing and the creative self**

- **Professional performance within the club**

- **Interactions between professional performer and punter**

- **Clubbing and daily life**

It is also important to note that a numerous informal conversations took place during my attendance at club nights. Whilst these encounters were not transcribed as verbatim interviews, they were recorded as field notes where appropriate and proved extremely useful as immediate responses to particular moments, without the self-censorship that can occur within a formal interview setting.[2]

Fieldwork Three: Practice-Led Research

Conducted in parallel to participant-observation and ongoing interviews, a number of practice-led research projects were conducted to deepen and interrogate the theoretical premises developed in this study. This body of work centres on the practice of **…floorSpace…,**[3] a performance company I established in June 2006 with the aim of working intensively on the development of strategies for interaction

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[2] Whilst evidence from many interviews has been included in the thesis, full transcriptions have not. These are available on request.
[3] Information on the company can be found at www.embracefloorspace.co.uk

within the club context. The company is made up of student performers and graduates from the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds. Performances developed specifically for the thesis are discussed at length in Chapter Five. Initially the company was set up in order to develop three discrete pieces of work to be performed at the *Shamania* festival in Lancashire, UK, in 2006. However, since this time, the company has gone on to develop additional performances and is regularly commissioned for work around the Yorkshire region. The development of the company's work has been a crucial element of the methodology for this thesis. Experimenting with form, content and context over an extended period of time has provided rich and varied data by which to investigate the central hypothesis of this study. In addition members of …floorSpace… have become key informants in terms of reflecting on their own clubbing practices as well as helping develop the hypotheses around participatory performance structures in the club context.

Reflections on the 'Researching Clubber'

For the purposes of this research, shifting my own position from what I might call 'thoughtful clubber' to 'researching clubber' has provided me with an interesting challenge. My personal investment in this scene has allowed me access to the insider's view or 'emic perspective' (Kruger 2008: 50) and this has been crucial to developing an understanding of how play operates in this setting. The precarious position of the ethnographer who is already immersed in their chosen culture is a methodological difficulty widely acknowledged (Buckland 2002, Lovatt and Purkis 1996, Cunningham 1998). The charge is that the subjective self takes over, resulting in a lack of distance between the researcher and the object of study. Whilst this is a

concern, the opposite is also at issue. In attempting to gain critical distance from what are inherently subjective experiences and being aware of the ethnographer's imperative to observe, interpret and analyse has, at times, prevented me from being fully immersed in the events I have attended. Furthermore, developing a performance company and carrying out practice in this context for the purposes of research has changed the club space for me personally from a space of play to a place of work. My own playful behaviour is no longer the motivation for attending a club. Examining how others play and how performance augments that experience has altered fundamentally my relationship with the club space. Thinking about how we play whilst we are engaged in play interrupts its flow and this is also true of the experience of clubbing. Managing the mediation between participation and observation, immersion and critique has been a particular challenge in conducting this research and has required frequent reappraisal of my own positioning as researcher in relation to the material under investigation.

Chapter One: Contexts

'Make the vinyl spin and the system pound,
providing a vibe with the underground sound.
Of illegal music they just can't stop,
gonna crush their laws making party's rock.
So dance with us, come stomp your feet,
cuz your future lies with repetitive beats…!!! '
(cited by Alan Lodge, 2003)

Introduction

In order to understand club spaces as sites of play and to determine how they might

be read and developed as new contexts for participatory performance it is necessary

to bring into focus the historical, social and political contexts which frame the study.

The various popular and academic discourses that surround the underground party

scene as a communal human activity offer useful way markers for the debate. Whilst

the focus of this study is to view clubbing (which consciously sets itself apart from

the mainstream) through the lens of performance and to examine this club context as

a potential platform for interactive performance, it is necessary to acknowledge the

multifarious perspectives that have been brought to bear on this cultural phenomenon

over the past twenty years. This prismatic approach to contextualisation affords a

complex reading of the club space that helps illuminate both its place within the

contemporary cultural landscape and the dimensions that enable it to become a space

of play and a potential site for emergent performance practices.

The chapter begins by outlining the challenges associated with defining a particular

strand of 'club culture' and addresses some of the issues relating to clubbing as an

expression of cultural practice. Thereafter a number of contextual frames are

explored in order to map the factors influencing this particular scene and to indicate

how notions of performance may resonate with it. I begin by looking at the historical development of the underground club and its transition from the United States to the United Kingdom via Ibiza. The prevalence of Ecstasy is discussed, leading on to a consideration of the attitudes and ideologies associated with that shift in recreational drug use. The next context to be addressed is the socio-political dimension, the changes in legislation that occurred in the early 1990s and the broader, philosophical debate surrounding music, noise and power. The chapter ends by investigating the intersection between clubbing and identity politics. These contextual considerations are explored in order to characterise the socio-political terrain of club culture and to understand the implications of situating performance practice within a terrain that has been characterised by and associated with narratives of personal discovery and social shifts.

Throughout this chapter the term 'rave' is used in a number of different ways. In the first instance rave is used to denote a particular movement in club history that began in the 1980s after importation from Ibiza. It gained much media attention and was associated with the increased use of the drug Ecstasy and illegal gatherings of young people attempting to evade police attention in order to party freely. Whilst these situations no longer occur in precisely the same manner as they once did, the word 'rave' is still in common parlance and is used to denote not only the type of music that might be played at a party or club night but also the attitude one might expect of its participants. Rave can be used both as a noun to describe the event itself and as a verb to suggest the action or activity of raving. The term can also be used to denote a culture that has its roots in a particular moment in time but which extends into contemporary underground practices and its attendant philosophies. As a note to the

reader, the whole range of meanings are utilised within this chapter and are key considerations in how we understand the development of the term and its cultural position within our language.

Clubbing and Culture - slippery definitions: unstable distinctions

Much has been documented about clubs, clubbing and club culture over the past twenty years by academics and clubbers alike, with a focus on musical developments, shifts in technologies and cultures of style. The writing ranges from personal testimonials to histories of particular scenes, genres of music and mythologies of particular night clubs, with much of the early academic discourse reflecting upon the experience of raving as a significant social practice within the context of the theories offered by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). This section identifies some of the attempts to locate clubbing as a cultural practice and the inherent difficulties associated with that enterprise. To acknowledge the complexities of contextualising clubbing is, paradoxically, the first context of this study.

The CCCS concluded that youth subcultures of the 1960s and 70s such as Teds, Punks and Mods were stylistic expressions of resistance to, and articulations of alienation from, mainstream society that would eventually lead to reincorporation and acceptance of societal positions with the young person's arrival at adulthood. For CCCS these subcultures were 'concrete, identifiable social formations constructed as collective response to the material and situated experience of their class…they were also attempts at a solution to that problematic experience: a resolution that because pitched largely at a symbolic level was fated to fail' (Hall and Jefferson 1976: 47).

Whilst the legacy of CCCS in critiquing youth culture is clear, much has now been written which contests its findings in relation to rave culture (Redhead 1993, Thornton 1995, Martin 1999). Academic discourse has since turned to the writings of Baudrillard, Foucault and neo-Marxist frameworks such as those of Adorno, Gramsci and Williams to cast light on notions of power, subjectivity and politics that move beyond class-based groupings and are, instead, tied up with the rave as social engine and the raving body as a particular expression of self. Where the CCCS suggested sub-cultures operate at a largely symbolic level and thus have no material influence on countering the hegemony of the 'parent culture', performance practitioners applying drama methodologies in order to effect social change would argue that by working through the symbolic register one can learn how to shape, manipulate and alter the 'maps of meaning' (Hall and Jefferson 1976: 10) we carry around with us in daily life. As Boal says:

> The act of transforming is in itself transformatory. In the act of changing our image, we are changing ourselves, and by changing ourselves in turn we change the world. (Boal 2006: 62)

The club space offers a range of opportunities in which people are able to 'change their image' and thus, perhaps temporarily, 'change themselves'. It is the symbolic register of the performative mode as it exists within the club context and its potential to facilitate transformation of both individuals and groups that is of interest here. The thesis does not set out to prove the extent to which lasting transformation is achieved in this setting. Rather it examines how the performative mode might be adopted as a strategy by participants and how that might affect the manner in which they respond to or interact with rehearsed performance structures framed within the club event.

Undoubtedly inherent dualities exist within the world of dance music and underground club culture as characterised by rave culture of 1980s Britain which problematise the nature of the discourse from the outset. There is a desire by those involved in the culture to attempt to tell the story of this cross-cultural movement, to bear witness to it, yet at the same time, an anxiety presides over attributing meaning to a scene that has often revelled in its own ability to resist value, meaning and familiar modes of communication. As Simon Reynolds asks, how do you write the history of a culture which is fundamentally amnesiac and nonverbal (1999: 9)? This difficulty is also true of any research project situated within this context and is acknowledged within the methodology section of the thesis. The validity of conducting surveys, questionnaires or interviews for an activity which values immersion, embodiment and trance is problematic, hence the emphasis in this study on participant-observation, immersive fieldwork, performer experience and the phenomenological stance where the world is studied 'as it is lived rather than…as it is objectified, abstracted and conceptualised' (Garner 1994: 26). As States asserts, 'phenomenological criticism is a form of impressionism' (1992: 369) and it is these 'impressions' and how they are formed, experienced and expressed within the clubbing space that is of primary concern in this research.

Attempting to characterise or document a particular culture is especially difficult when that culture is made up of a layered network of events that can range from outdoor festivals to illegal warehouse parties, one-off events and licensed club nights. Underground dance culture, by its very nature, is fragmented, elusive, illusory, ephemeral and resistant to analysis and definition; for once it has been

defined it mutates, moves on, changes location and shifts its parameters. In fact, as Georgiana Gore says:

> rave culture may be conceived as a microcosm of the contemporary metropolis, which has itself been proposed as a metaphor for postmodernity, that 'condition' which celebrates fragmentation, deconstruction, dispersal, discontinuity, rupture, asubjectivity, ephemerality, superficiality, depthlessness, flatness, meaninglessness, hyperreality (1997: 51).

The work of Sarah Thornton (1995) serves as a key text in the analysis of club cultures although she has been criticised for her somewhat externalised, or distanced, approach to the work (see Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 18). For Thornton, club cultures are 'taste cultures'. In other words, people subscribe to the culture through a shared taste in music and a shared consumption of media. As she says, 'taking part in club cultures builds, in turn, further affinities, socialising participants into a knowledge of (and frequently a belief in) the likes and dislikes, meanings and values of a culture' (ibid. p.3). Whilst she accepts clubs and raves house *ad hoc* communities she does not accept the egalitarian, democratic facet of rave culture that is a significant element to this study insofar as it contributes to the mythology and self-constructed narrative of the underground scene. She asserts that club cultures are riddled with cultural hierarchies and set up binary oppositions such as 'the alternative and the straight, the diverse and the homogenous, the radical and the conformist, the distinguished and the common' in order to perpetuate divisions and distinctions between participants (ibid. p.5). Whilst such classifications are certainly rife within club cultures both historically and now, it is my view that they exist more to identify what joins people together rather than to exclude particular groups or sections of society. As she offers her view within the framework of a comprehensive cultural critique, her investigations do not prioritise the lived experience of clubbers in the same way as my own. Using embedded ethnography where participation cannot be

divorced from observation, my own research deploys a different tool for viewing and attempts to make sense of the feeling of community at such events (whether real or imagined) rather than dismiss it as naïve idealism.

Thornton has been accused of viewing 'ravers' (as a particular category of club-goers) as a homogenous crowd and of failing to acknowledge the diversity of musical tastes, ages, ethnicities and professions in attendance. She does, however, paint a rather more complex picture. She suggests that, while ravers see themselves as a mixed and diverse crowd, they are all too ready to view the mainstream as an agglomerated mass. As Bourdieu says 'nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies' (1990:132) and, as such, these multiple processes of classification that are subject to constant revision in the music press, on websites and dance music forums tell us as much about dance cultures as the labels themselves. With my own research located specifically in an 'underground' context, Thornton's writing is useful here inasmuch as it helps us acknowledge the often loaded cultural distinctions that are undoubtedly inherent in this field. It is useful to recognise when writing about the dance scene the problems involved in labelling, identifying and naming the shifting sands of the territory which itself is open to local differences, local narratives, local registers and local distinctions and internal hierarchies.

A particular challenge related to writing about any form of social dance is that its very nature seems to resist formal analysis. In the underground club scene, dance of this kind occurs in dark, crowded spaces and eschews any formal separation between dancers and audience. It is improvisational, responding to the particular social context, musical backdrop and atmosphere of the moment. There are rarely texts or

scores present after the event. Those attending and fully immersed in the scene may try to reflect on the experience but are forced to acknowledge that that experience is open to subjectivities and can differ wildly from person to person, place to place, month to month. Anthropological accounts of social dance practice often attempt to read the semiotics of dance as if it were a systematic and coherent language in order to make it signify as opposed to an embodied subjectivity that is rooted in the perspectival rather than the universal (Garner 1994: 5). The notion of dance as an end in itself is strongly resisted in the literature. Most accounts agree there must be a function or 'telos'. The functionalist interpretation of dance culture is in the thrall of a rationalist imperative, in other words dancing must fulfil a function beyond the zone of immediate bodily pleasure (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 16). Journalists reporting on the growing rave scene in the 1980s found it impossible to believe that people would travel miles to be in a field or warehouse just to dance, implying that the lure of readily available drugs and a criminal underworld were the greater attractions. This study will argue that immediate bodily pleasure accessed through play, performance and participation on the dance floor is of value in itself and offers a particular experience of being in (and of) space which is enough to draw thousands of people on a regular basis well into the twenty-first century.

The explosion of rave in the 1980s signalled a significant shift in clubbing activity that gained the attention of young people, journalists and cultural theorists alike. The rapid growth of dance music in the UK altered patterns of behaviour associated with public dancing provoked changes in legislation and altered the ways in which music was produced and received. Matthew Collin in his book *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House* suggests that the combination of dance music and

recreational use of the drug Ecstasy triggered the most vibrant and diverse youth movement Britain has ever seen which continues to reverberate both culturally and politically over twenty years later. In his words, the scene offered 'experiences that have changed the way we think, the way we feel, the way we act, the way we live' (Collin 1997:4). The narrative of club culture's ability to change patterns of behaviour is a strand that runs through many testimonies associated with the scene and is a central belief for participants that needs taking into account when dealing with playful performance within this context. The stories people tell about the personal significance of Acid House and E culture is as noteworthy as any actual impact it may have had. Gilbert and Pearson state clearly at the beginning of *Discographies* their belief in dance music as one of those forms of culture which contains within itself 'the potential not just to tell us who we are, but to challenge us with a sense of who we might be'(1999: ix). Clubbers immersed in alternative or underground scenes that position themselves in opposition to the mainstream cite the transformative and recuperative nature of the dance floor repeatedly.

There is a recurring narrative from club-goers that their weekend activities provide a space where 'PLUR'[4] is possible and it is this belief in a particular cultural phenomenon that provides the starting point for the thesis. The utopian notion of genuine, democratic, collective transformation occurring on the dance floor may be a naïve and impossible ideal. However, testimonies from participants would confirm belief in that potential, even if not necessarily an abiding actuality.[5] The dance floor promotes access to a mind set, a way of thinking, a way of being in space with others

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[4] PLUR is an acronym that stands for Peace Love Unity Respect. It is associated with the rave movement of the mid to late 1980s and encapsulates the philosophy adopted by sections of the underground clubbing community.

[5] Testimonies from clubbers will be explored later in the thesis to demonstrate this view.

that has a particular set of parameters and it is this frame, together with the trope of

rehearsal, which can be utilised in terms of understanding people's approach to

collective playfulness and performative interaction.

As Collin suggests:

> E culture was no freak storm that burst miraculously from the ether; instead, it was
> part of an evolving narrative of the development and refinement of the technologies
> of pleasure that crossed continents and cultures before ultimately converging to
> establish a series of private utopias, altered states of Great Britain – not just rites of
> passage bridging the 80s and the 90s, but phenomena that continue to shape our
> world-view (Collin 1997:9).

Rave culture as it manifested in the UK in the mid to late 1980s offered a generation

described as 'cultural orphans' (Price 2004) a means of shaping their world-view.

Many of these young people were disinherited from a stake in the cultural life of a

country where art had become a vehicle for economic growth rather than creative

exploration and chose instead to enter a world of dance and music that held the

promise of collectivity and belonging.

The impact of the developing underground scene at this time was documented

initially by music journalists such as those working for *The Face* magazine. They

began to articulate two central principles, namely that 'clubs are places in which the

young and creative try on new ways of expressing and enjoying themselves that feel

right for the times' (Benson 1997:12) and that 'clubs can be the best places in which

to hunt out the new music and ideas that may eventually infiltrate everyone's

everyday lives' (ibid.). The opinion that what was happening underground was not

only a response to the wider world but perhaps offered an alternative means of

navigating through it is echoed by Buckland:

> …instead of exhaustion, it promises energy; it replaces dreariness and monotony with an intensity, excitement, and affectivity of living; substitutes the manipulations of advertising, bourgeois democracy, and sex roles with transparency: that is, open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships; and replaces the experience of fragmentation…with the experience of community (2002: 88).

Buckland here outlines the dynamism of the club space that offered an alluring alternative to what was perceived as the dreary monotony of the mainstream or 'straight' society. For a group of individuals drawn to a particular club on the basis of sexuality and shared experience, the club world offered an antidote to the sense of a fragmented daily life and provided a sense of cohesion, expressed here as 'community'. Regardless of whether a disparate group of people drawn to a nightclub can legitimately be called a 'community', the *experience* of community is what is pertinent here and relevant to other clubbing narratives. In this instance it is possible to see the alternatives the dance floor might have offered to its participants. In direct contrast to the world of the every day the club provided access to a different type of social reality that better fitted with the participants' own lifeworlds (Berlant and Warner 1998: 558) and sense of shared culture.

To summarise, many academic disciplines have begun to regard clubbing as a significant social practice that allows us insight into participants' responses to an ever-changing social, political and cultural landscape. How club cultures begin, grow and mutate reveals clues about how people choose to spend their time, how they produce and consume leisure and how they carve out cultural space for themselves. Stemming from the rave movement, the alternative or underground club scene is characterised as being experimental, creative-oriented, interactive and resistant (Chatterton and Hollands 2003: 202). It promotes itself as a culture of participation that is imbued with notions of cultural activism, creative defiance and performative

protest. It is these notions of collective action that underpin the research and drive the philosophy of creating work that brings people together through interactive, playful performance.

In order to contextualise the underground club scene further, this chapter will now provide a brief historical overview of the rise of clubs with particular reference to Acid House and the ideological roots of the underground scene.

Underground Clubbing - A Genealogy

Clubs have always been places that exist within, stem from and respond to a particular cultural time laced with certain moral codes and social mores. They give us a glimpse not only of the world of the club, but also of the world outside the club doors. Read in relation to significant historical events and major shifts in public consciousness, it is easy to see how changes on the dance floor are indicative of social changes. How much time people have to devote to leisure, how much they prioritise it as an activity, how much they spend on it, the significance they attach to it, all these factors give us insight into the wider experience of a particular generation (including working conditions, ethical/moral values, political conflict, social struggle and so on). Clubs, therefore, are not only useful 'laboratories of our leisure time' (Benson 1997:13) they are also barometers of cultural shift.

Just as youth culture can be read as a series of traditions that grow along a compound continuum of action and reaction (Elms 1982: 26), so too can club cultures be understood as developing along a spiral where patterns are repeated but never replicated:

> Imagine a spiral that begins with a birth out of affluence and post-war liberation, and moves through time propelled by its own mythology and its own contrariness and is affected by technology and whimsy and economics. It is cyclical, but the circle is never completed because it is also revolutionary; therefore patterns repeat but they are never quite the same (ibid.).

Whilst the contemporary underground dance scene is not exclusively populated by the young, Elms' analogy is useful when tracking its origins. The development of the underground dance scene as it exists today within the UK and its attendant mythologies of politics, acts of resistance and performance must be considered within an historical context. The development of musical scenes and the 'technology and whimsy and economics' of the time are intimately related. Below I offer one possible genealogy of the underground scene by tracing some key developments in clubbing practice. This particular journey begins in New York, travels to Ibiza and then to the UK.[6] Here the emergence of the warehouse rave is discussed with particular reference to the (mis)appropriation of space and how this contributed to a growing sense of ideology (albeit imprecise and unwritten) associated with the scene itself.

The Acid House scene owes its existence in many respects to the black gay clubs of 1970's New York. DJ Larry Levan, who played at the *Paradise Garage* in the West Village from 1976 to 1987, has been described as 'the finest conjurer of the psycho-active power of dance music to create a fleeting vision of spiritual utopia'(Collin 1997:15). The powerful sense of allegiance and community demonstrated in the black gay clubs in New York at this time created the ideological template which has infused dance culture ever since. These clubs provided black, gay men with 'the only

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[6] I fully acknowledge there are many other routes that could have been taken in tracing this development including scenes emerging in India, Thailand, Germany and Holland.

place where they could truly be themselves and play out their desires without fear or inhibition…The rhetoric of unity and togetherness which echoed down through club cultures to come was forged in these clubs, under pressure from an oppressive world…the club became church, bedroom and family' (ibid. p.17). Coupled with this powerful ideology came new technologies that revolutionised the way music was produced, recorded and distributed. Sounds came out of New York, Chicago and Detroit that would affect lasting changes in the world of pop music and see house, garage and techno dominate many UK clubs in years to come.

As well as musical development, experiments with club architecture and space (mis)appropriation have shaped the way crowds experience a club night with geographically local scenes borrowing from each other as club tourism advances on a global scale. *The Loft* in 1970's New York created the blueprint for the modern-day club. Created by David Mancuso, *The Loft* was situated in Mancuso's own home at 647 Broadway and was characterised by rambling rooms used both for work and play rather than the plush interiors of the previous disco era. *Studio 54*, on the other hand, was a 'superclub' before the term came into common parlance. Its association with drugs, sex and celebrity saw it rise to mythic status until its owners were imprisoned for tax evasion in the 1980s. New York became a highly regarded location for British clubbers from the early to mid 1980s with clubs like *The Paradise Garage* and *Limelight* and DJs like Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles providing a scene yet to be witnessed in the UK. Eric Goode's club, *Area*, pioneered the idea of the nightclub as art installation. *The Roxy* had its crowd on roller skates. Kamin's one-nighter, the *Harem*, ensured belly dancers kept the crowd entertained and provided a sense of the exotic (Garratt 1998: 27).

This sense of the fabulous was mirrored on the White Island of Ibiza where more and more young people were spending time and making the most of cheap flights, readily available drugs and the remnants of the hippie culture that had taken root there since the 1960s. As Antonio Melechi (1993) is quick to point out, the formation of Acid House is in debt to the rise of the package holiday. 'It is here in the definitively postmodern experience of self, that the British phenomenon of Acid House belongs, attempting to relive the jouissance of the Mediterranean holiday in the pleasures of dance, music and drugs' (Melechi 1993:30). By the 1980s, Ibizan clubs had developed into ornate Moorish fantasy palaces adorned with palm trees, fountains, balconies and cushioned areas. They resembled glamorous film sets rather than the sticky carpet cliché of the British disco. The foam parties at *Amnesia,* the fountains that drenched clubbers at *Es Paradis*, the swimming pool sunk into the floor at *Ku*, and the live sex shows and outrageous performances at *Manumission*, meant that Britain's youth were being given a glimpse of excitement and wonder that they would export to the UK.

As Lisa Loud reminisces about Ibiza in 1986:

> It was more exciting, more colourful, more worldly. It might have been because I was young, but the things we saw! Guys walking around on stilts with wedding cakes on their heads. A guy wearing a swimming hat with Barbie and Cindy dolls attached so their legs all stuck out. This French couple who were always in luminous lycra with high-rise platform shoes (cited in Garratt 1998:96).

Ibiza offered a fantasy world, an extravagant wonderland of excess that was bound to be at odds with the strict licensing laws and moral codes of Thatcher's Britain. As

Sheryl Garratt says, the resulting energy put into circumventing the restrictions on all-night partying has led to the world's most inventive club scenes (ibid. p.67).

Whilst the current commercial scene in Ibiza is anathema to the underground party movement in the UK, it undoubtedly owes it origins, in part, to a period of time in the mid 1980s when young people like Danny and Jenni Rampling (who later founded *Shoom* in 1988) discovered the potent combination of dance, drugs and 'the holiday vibe' for the first time and determined to recreate the Balearic blueprint in the UK. In holiday time normal rules cease to apply, reality is suspended and the shackles of working life can be thrown off, albeit temporarily. Recreating this vibe in the UK by setting up extravagant one-off nights and illegal parties that operated outside the law became the raison d'être of club culture towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. This sense of otherworldliness, fantasy, possibility and waking dreaming is of course pertinent to a study which attempts to draw parallels between the club world and the world of performance.

The idea for once-a-week clubs where you use someone else's space to create your own environment originally arose from the black soul boy tradition of warehouse parties where you literally 'did it yourself'. The 1980s saw a gradual move back to warehouse spaces and a re-appropriation of industrial units, factories and aircraft hangers that offered the scope and scale to house these huge events attended by thousands. Sivan Lewin (1986), writing in *The Face,* talks about warehouse parties being held in disused London buildings where a rich mixture of people from DJs to dancers, rappers and artists created a hotbed of talent that positioned the UK to lead the way in the developing dance scene. Using borrowed spaces and transforming

them became an integral part of the culture. As Richard and Kruger say of the parallel trend in Germany, raves took 'place largely in post-industrial landscapes, transforming rundown warehouse sites into timeless, de-localised and de-realised spaces, where obsolete industrial infrastructure is juxtaposed to state of the art technology to create a surreal, almost virtual world – a fun factory' (1998:163). Competition between crews to throw the best parties led to increased sophistication and innovation. Warehouses were painstakingly decorated with artwork, wall hangings and video projections. Eccentric industrial sculpture and other installations started to appear within the architecture of the club and, following on from the successful festival vibe established at events such as *Glastonbury* in the 1970s, market stalls selling anything from hot cups of chai to Indian head massage began to appear.

By 1989, as well as the much-documented orbital raves[7] came parties on the London underground system organised by *World Crime, Mutoid Waste Company* and *The Bash St Kids*. They were free, claimed to be non-elitist, were advertised by word of mouth and furthered the notion of the (mis)appropriation of public spaces for the uses of pleasure. According to Collin many of these loose organisations thrived on the post-punk continuum that had been transformed through contact with anarchist bands like Crass, attendance at free festivals and an involvement with squatting, demonstrations and direct action. Between 1989 and 1991 Blackburn (Lancashire, UK) and the underground party collective, *Hardcore Uproar*, was at the centre of the DiY party movement, from which emerged *Cream* and *Back to Basics*. Suffering the

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[7] The term 'orbital rave' refers to the large-scale, semi-spontaneous parties that happened outside London's main orbital motorway, the M25, in the late 1980s. These events could involve up to 25,000 attendees and became the focus for large-scale police operations which led to arrest and prosecution for many of the promoters.

effects of the economic policies and welfare reforms of the Conservative

government's third term (such as the cutting of social security, the introduction of

compulsory training schemes for the young and the weakening of the Trade Unions

by abolishing the secret ballot and increasing the risk of prosecution for those taking

strike action), the industrial heartlands of the North of England were particularly ripe

for the re-appropriation of abandoned warehouses and empty factories in the name of

resistance and release. 'The dour and ugly urban features were mirrored in the

hopelessness of the residents' lives. People had little to lose and everything to gain,

which explains the immense amount of creative and psychic energy released by the

parties' (McKay 1998: 210). Many claim the thriving party scene helped build a

sense of regional identity and cultural pride that was to be mirrored in other parts of

the country.

> It wasn't about visiting some purpose-built place, it was about creating somewhere
> new; it was about building a city for a night – a dream city of friendly strangers. A
> club had a venue, a place in space and time, but a rave was all about possibilities. A
> rave existed in the minds of the people who danced together (Brewster and
> Broughton 1998: 92).

Many of the early dance events grew from the ground up. They were organised by

the participants themselves and dissolved the hitherto strict separation between

organisers and crowd, promoter and punter, producer and consumer. The rave scene

was adopted by travellers, hippies, eco-activists, punks and squatters who employed

direct action tactics in protest at the government's road building programme in the

early 1990s. Some parties, like the hippie-inspired collectives *Pendragon* and *Return

to the Source*, were concerned that their dance nights should have a strongly positive

vibe and would even start the night with rituals led by technoshamans[8] to ban bad

spirits and honour the natural cycles of life. The free party circuit continued to grow

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[8] Techno*Shamania*m is discussed in more detail on p.125

and DiY groups such as *Spiral Tribe, Rinky Dink, Tonka, Sugar Lump, All Systems* and *Spoof* (Sheffield People On One Forever) continued to blur the lines between pleasure, party, protest and politics (McKay 1998: 248-250).

The ideology of democracy was not only to be found in the way parties were organised and arranged, but on the dance floor itself. As one informant tells Matthew Collin when talking about the outdoor illegal rave *Sunrise/Back to the Future* in 1989, 'the very dynamic of the rave itself felt so liberating – democratic rather than hierarchical. The dancers' focus was not on the stage, but on each other. The hegemony of the performer was usurped; the energy was coming from the participants themselves' (Collin 1997: 104). Tony Wilson echoes this when he talks about the *Haçienda*. 'I remember looking down from the DJ box and thinking what a democratic art form it was. Rather than four people in the spotlight on stage, everybody was the show' (cited in Garratt 1998: 206-7). As Garratt continues:

> At their best, clubs are places where the marginalised can feel at home, where we can experiment with new identities, new ways of being. They are places where cultures collide, where people dance alongside each other and then, when they meet again in the real world outside, understand each other a little better (ibid. p.321).

Here Garratt suggests that the experiences of the dance floor, where people come together through communal dance and positive social interaction does have some lasting effect that extends into the 'real world outside'. Not only is there a flow of influence from the dance floor to the outside world, but there is also a flow of influence from the outside to the interior of the club. The interior and exterior worlds respond to and are in dialogue with each other. Even as early as the 1970s, academics were beginning to view changes on the dance floor as a response to the increasing passivity people felt in their own lives.

> Sociologists see the current dance mania as part of modern man's revolt against being a perpetual spectator. Over the years, they say, the majority of us have done less and less participating and more and more watching…Unlike the customers of nightclubs or cabarets who pay their money and then sit back to be entertained, the customers at discotheques are paying their money to entertain themselves. It's the people who are the real show at discos – and they haven't come to find fault. They've come to play (Hanson 1978: 8-9).

It is perhaps important to remember at this point the inadequacies of attempting a historiography of this particular movement. As Gilbert and Pearson (1999) point out, rave eludes attempts at homology and thus cannot be pinned down to one narrative but is rather a composite of narratives and continues to be so as it mutates and reassembles in the twenty-first century. Club culture offers a complexity of experience which differs from person to person and from night to night. Each local scene has its own set of narratives and practices that are accessed by individuals on an *ad hoc* basis, resulting in a picture which is never fully drawn and never comprehensively documented. Many of the published stories about the early days of rave came from journalists based in the South East who were simply in the right place and available to cover the orbital parties of the M25, and yet the rave scene was by no means monopolized by London. There was, in fact, an aesthetic shift in the traditional environment of youth cultures, namely away from urban centres and out into the countryside. Many raves took place well beyond the suburbs and, what began as American urban dance music became entangled with notions of a pastoral idyll that identified strongly with counter-cultures derived from rock festivals such as *Glastonbury*. Many free parties today take place under cover of darkness in secluded woods, forests and national parks well away from the glare and intrusion of the popular press and the authorities. The site is cleared before dog walkers and ramblers appear the following morning and efforts are made to eradicate the physical traces of what went before.

An additional consideration in attempting to formulate any kind of mapping of the free party scene and underground clubbing as a cultural movement is the form of the event itself. An underground club event is fugitive. It is not a text that contains constituent parts or traces by which it may be repeated or reassembled. The elusiveness and illusion created by the party that holds interlocking narratives and registers of experience for participants again has parallels with the framed and temporary world of the fictive stage, in particular the improvised or participatory stage where written text, stage directions and cues may be only partly conceived. Its transient reality vanishes with the clearance of the site in the same way that the temporary fictional world of the stage vanishes with the striking of the set.

To summarise, what happens in the night-time world of clubs relates intimately to the changes and shifts presented by the daytime world at large. As the ideology of unity and togetherness was transferred from the gay clubs of the United States, club spaces were reconfigured and new technologies brought to bear on the way music was recorded, produced and consumed. With the growth of club tourism, the Ibizan model of hedonistic excess was imported to the United Kingdom during a time of hard-line Conservative government. This confluence of socio-political factors led to a commitment to democracy finding expression within the party scene and it is within this context that the underground club began to position itself.

An additional factor in considering the contexts of club culture is the incidence of drug use, particularly that of Ecstasy, which began flooding into the United Kingdom in the late 1980s. The next section will raise some of the debates surrounding this

issue with particular reference to the part pharmacology plays in shifting attitudes within the clubbing community.

Ecstasy

It is impossible to conduct any research into the dance scene without mentioning Ecstasy (MDMA).[9] Whilst not all clubbers take drugs, it is true to say the increased availability and use of Ecstasy has played a major part in the rise of the dance scene over the past twenty years and provides a significant contextual layer to the consideration of participant behaviour, production and response within club culture. Anti-drugs discourse fuelled much of the moral panic surrounding the scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with high profile cases such as the death of Leah Betts[10] being used to support the view of the rave as a dangerous and destructive force. Much has been written about the effects of Alexander Shulgin's experiments with the 'empathogen' MDMA on the psyche of the nation's youth (Parrott and Leasky 1998, Rodgers 2000, Parrott, Milani, Parmar and Turner 2001) with the effect on mental state being characterised as 'positive, inducing feelings of empathy, alertness, energy and love' (Merchant and MacDonald 1994: 22).

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[9] MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine) is most commonly known by the street name Ecstasy (often abbreviated to E, X or XTC) although most Ecstasy pills contain relatively little MDMA often being cut with cheaper substances. It is a semi-synthetic member of the phenethylamine class of psychoactive drugs. It falls under many broad categories of substances, including amphetamines, stimulants, psychedelics and empathogens-enactogens. MDMA is illegal in most countries, and its possession, manufacture or sale may result in criminal prosecution. (See also footnote 41)

[10] Leah Betts was a UK school girl who died after taking one Ecstasy tablet at her 18th birthday party in 1995. Her case drew a huge amount of media attention not only because she came from a respectable family (her father was an ex-police officer and her step-mother a nurse) but also because the incident took place at home with friends rather than within a club environment. Subsequently it was discovered she had consumed 7 litres of water in 90 minutes and it was water intoxication and hyponatremia, not Ecstasy, that was the cause of her death.

If it is possible to leave the moral arguments that surround recreational drug use to one side, the belief in its benefits did much to influence the way people engaged with the new musical and social developments of the time. As Rick Doblin, a pro-Ecstasy campaigner, said in the *Tampa Tribune* in 1985, 'the religious experience, the sense that people get that they are part of the same community which is very diverse but includes everybody, that insight about humanity has incredible political consequences because it will lead you to try and understand people rather than consider them the enemy' (cited in Collin 1997: 33). Whilst some see Ecstasy as being 'responsible' for rave culture, E had in fact been around for a long time prior to it. Whilst Ecstasy was starting to be used at private parties in the early 1980s, it did not become regularly available or have widespread popularity until people starting returning from Ibiza with stories of their own drug and dance epiphanies. It was not until there was a confluence of certain socio-historic circumstances in British culture in the mid to late 1980s that people found a specific set of uses for the drug and its usage became widespread.

Gilbert and Pearson (1999) view drug use as just one of an arsenal of experience-heightening technologies and assert that, if drugs are read as such, their use can be examined without being weighed down by morality. This would seem to be a beneficial framework through which to approach the subject in terms of embodied experience and human interaction. They maintain that the social and cultural effects of technology are dependent on the uses to which it is put. The effect is not dependent on the technology itself but on the socio-cultural context which produces it. The often simplistic, media view of drug use is a type of technological determinism. This particular discourse suggests that these technologies have a life of

their own, the capacity to effect change, and that contact with these substances will necessarily have a deleterious effect (ibid. p.139). Anti-drugs discourse has been, and remains, largely couched in Puritan terms. Drugs sap the user's will to achieve and saps their will to work. The idea of engaging in any activity purely for pleasure is seen as highly suspect. To engage in an activity which decreases one's capacity for reason is reprehensible. In *Generation Ecstasy*, Simon Reynolds discusses with clarity how drug experiences challenge the basic premise of phallogocentrism. Now some eleven years old, this viewpoint is well-rehearsed. However his argument is reiterated here as it gives particular insight to the processes of interaction and social formation that will become important to the thesis later.

Drugs such as Ecstasy have caused a significant shift in the perceived (a)sexualisation of the dance floor where the 'subliminal hormonal "hum" of masculinity [is] suddenly silenced' (Reynolds 1999: 247):

> E doesn't negate the body, it intensifies the pleasure of physical experience while completely emptying out the sexual content of dance (ibid.).

As Simon Reynolds suggests, the most novel and subversive aspect of rave culture may be that it was the first youth subculture that was not based on the notion that sex is transgressive (ibid.). Indeed, Reynolds goes on to suggest there existed a 'homosocial aura' to many raves and an 'autoerotic/autistic' quality to much of the dance styles that have developed within the scene (ibid. p.248). Still used in varying forms today MDMA decreases sexual aggression but intensifies physical sensation. In a highly contradictory way, MDMA allows the individual to retreat into a private dream world where sounds, lights, colours and the touch sensation are heightened, yet at the same time an awareness of being part of a collective is also increased. The

feeling of the 'real you' belonging in a welcoming crowd of like-minded people freed from the restraints of their everyday lives is a potent side effect of the drug and, for many, is what encourages them to repeat the experience time and again in order to recapture that initial revelation of being a valued part of a greater whole. Whatever the reality and extent of drug usage, the landscape of rave and contemporary clubbing infused by E culture offers a utopian politics of community which is committed to the pursuit of pleasure and is predominantly social in its formation. Seen in this light, the influence of Ecstasy has to be read with more subtlety than suggested by the British tabloid press of the 1980s and certainly has to be taken into consideration when investigating social and performative interactions within the dance scene.

Despite the dichotomous nature of E culture, there can be no doubt that MDMA acts as 'an antidote to the English disease: reserve, inhibition, emotional constipation, class consciousness' (ibid. p.238). However, here too there is a further paradox and, as Reynolds goes on to say, it is crucial to understand the dual nature of the drug when considering its impact on culture. The drug acts as both a psychedelic and as an amphetamine. Its dual nature is linked to two rather different effects and accompanying ideologies. The psychedelic component lends itself to utopianism and an implicit critique of the way things are. Conversely the amphetamine component is ego-boosting and runs counter to the hippie creed of selfless surrender and Zen passivity. When the amphetamine component of Ecstasy comes to the fore (which is common as amphetamines are cheaper and more readily available and necessary in the face of over or repeated use) rave culture loses much of its progressive and bohemian edge (ibid. pp. 238-241). There is an ongoing tension between

'consciousness raising and consciousness razing' (ibid. p.241). Reynolds goes on to

say that the committed raver lifestyle is akin to falling in love every weekend and

then having your heart broken by Tuesday. The rave is utopia in its original

etymological sense: a nowhere/nowhen wonderland' and he calls MDMA 'a

utopiate' (ibid. p.248):

> MDMA actually makes the world seem *realer*; the drug also feels like it's bringing
> out the "real you", freed from all the neurosis instilled by a sick society. But
> "utopiate" contains the word "opiate", as in 'religion is the opium of the people'. A
> sacrament in that secular religion called "rave", E can just as easily be a
> counterrevolutionary force as it can fuel a hunger for change. For it's too tempting to
> take the easy option: simply repeating the experience, installing yourself
> permanently in rave's virtual reality pleasure dome (ibid.).

Understanding the effects of MDMA and Ecstasy is crucial when examining the

authorities' attempts to control their distribution and usage. D'Angelo (1994)

suggests governments have pursued a policy of prohibition because indulgence in

hedonistic pleasures of the body threatens the moral basis of capitalism, that is,

according to Weber's thesis (1976), hard work and deferred gratification. In

agreement with Martin, the central point here is that anti-drugs discourse has been

implemented not to protect the health of the nation but rather to curb its excesses and

police its consciousness:

> Rave poses a threat not just to capital…but rather a threat to the social order, and to
> the ways in which power is exercised in western society. Rave culture undermines
> the disciplinary control and knowing gaze of modern western governmentality, and
> the legal reaction to rave is an attempt to re-establish this kind of power over an
> unwilling object (Martin 1999: 83).

The paradox of E culture is that, whilst certain aspects of it can be read as an

embodied threat to capitalism and authoritarian control, the majority of clubbers

would neither subscribe to nor even be interested in this concept as a motivation for

taking drugs, particularly now that dancing beyond two o'clock in the morning is

legal and that exposure to Ecstasy does not fuel the same kinds of moral panic that it once did. Many clubbers remain unaware or unconcerned about any ethical remit a party may have and do not participate as an expression of resistance or opposition. In fact, as a culture which relies heavily on its own type of market economy, some are drawn to it for the profits that can be made from it. Whilst historically rave may have been egalitarian in its outlook and in its articulation, E culture breeds its own entrepreneurs (both legitimate club owners and promoters and the black market economy of the drug trade) and could not survive without them. The unsettling duality of the underground scene and the myriad reasons one may choose to participate in it, problematises any critique of it as a coherent culture with consistent values and concerns.

As dance music mutates, reshapes and reconfigures over the years, so too does drug use. Recent years have seen an increased use of Ketamine and phenethylamines of the 2C family. These substances are psychedelic, hallucinatory and, in the case of Ketamine, result in dissociative anaesthesia. While tracing the dance scene according to a pharmacological narrative is interesting, it is not the focus of this research. Nonetheless drug use continues to pervade the dance scene and cannot be ignored when dealing with notions of ideology and the physical embodiment of experience.

To summarise, the use of Ecstasy is often couched in terms of moral debates that are, in turn, reinforced by media panics and prohibition. Combined with musical and social developments, there can be no doubt that Ecstasy did much to change attitudes and influence the way people behaved and interacted with each other on the dance floor and beyond. Its prevalence as a tool for pleasure helped to position club culture

in strict opposition to the Puritan discourses of work and the capitalist project of production. In this way, it offered a physical route into a critique of dominant ideology for those people who subscribed to its utopian philosophy and reasserted the body as a central way of understanding ourselves. The use of Ecstasy is intimately related to discourses of the body and embodied practices that frame this study. Pharmacology undoubtedly affects the way people behave, the way they interact and the way they process experience and, as such, is a significant (if not primary) thread in the contextualisation of this thesis.

The next two sections attempt to unpick some of those changing attitudes that occurred in tandem with the increased use of Ecstasy in more depth. The first charts the fundamental shifts in the ideals expressed by this particular youth culture and the patterns of behaviour that emanated from the club scene. The second section looks more closely at how these shifts converged with and responded to the political landscape of the time.

E Culture and the We Generation

Garratt and Baker (1989), writing in *The Face*, suggested a new attitude had begun to sweep through Britain during the late 1980s, entitling their article 'The We Generation'. They viewed this new era of clubbing as an antidote to the 'Me Generation' and the inherent capitalism of the period. Fraser Clark who ran the magazine *Encyclopaedia Psychedelia* saw the Acid House scene as a renaissance of the hippie movement of the 1960s, coining the phrase 'zippies' to describe its devotees. Echoing the words of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg, he was not the

only individual to view the flourishing house music scene as a contemporary version of shamanic rituals and the DJ as digital shaman. 'The rave scene is the first step to awakening; you dance for hours to shamanic tribal drumming. That clears your head of all your conditioning and your mind is opened. Then you've got to reprogramme it with a different philosophy' (cited in Collin 1997: 189-190).

Flyers for events at this time provide a clue to the attitudes behind them. They display 'cosmic, quasi-hippy mystical images to advertise raves like *Infinity*, *The Meaning of Life, Humanity, Phantasy* and *Live the Dream*' (Garratt and Baker 1989: 106). The philosophy of ethno-botanist Terence McKenna, who advocated the use of psychedelics to save humanity and the world, began seeping into the ethos of techno travellers and crews such as *Spiral Tribe*. As described by Reynolds (1999) one of its members, Mark Harrison, drew on the emergent techno-hippie continuum and its premise of using technologies such as chemicals and computers to create alternative realities and traverse the borders of human potential. The spiritual yearning and the idealism of house music to heal a nation is expressed in the words of a leaflet circulated by Malachy O'Brien, involved in the weekly club *Come-Unity*:

> …when used with positive intention, Group energy has the potential to help restore the plan of Love on Earth...When you open your heart, and trust the whole group you dance with; when you feel love with everyone, and they return it, a higher vibration can be reached. This happens when a crowd is deep into the vibe of House…In the true sense of rhythmic movement, the effect is to align the physical, mental and emotional bodies with the Oneness of All That Is…Don't put out negative energy and feelings. Leave the old ways behind. Throw yourself into the winds of transformation and sow the seeds for a new world – one where the human family is together again. When people respect and care for each other as a community organism. Spread the Peace! (cited in Reynolds 1999: 154)

As early as 1983 *The Face* writer, David Johnson, saw the words 'Boogie leads to integration' scrawled across the wall of *The Lift*, an itinerant gay club that was

'heterosexual friendly' (1983: 38). The words presaged a sea-change in the way music was being considered, an ethos that was to be made manifest in the rave scene which asserted the notion of clubbing as community. In her period of research Fiona Buckland heard clubbers articulate time and time again the desire to connect with others, not only in the same space but by imagining a wider connection of global, national, regional and local networks of spaces (Buckland 2002: 44). The words community and clubbing are often used together and yet it manifests itself as what Benedict Anderson calls an 'imagined community… (where) members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each they carry the image of communion' (1983: 15). Dealing largely with gay clubs, where a desire to connect with others who identify themselves as 'gay' is significant in establishing a sense of community, Buckland goes on to say:

> while participants may not have physically seen all of their peer clubbers in the club, the city, or across the nation and beyond, they imaginatively experienced and shared a vision of being a part of a larger lifeworld. Although the realities of community within a club were occasionally dystopic, this articulated vision expressed a desire for community and the celebration of belonging (2002: 47)

and:

> Some participants wanted to see the club as a space of escape from the outside world; others wanted to see these spaces as prepolitical configurations of community that could blossom into political agency outside. Some saw their activity as an individual self-fashioning; other expressed that their decision to go to a club was born out of desire to be with others like themselves (ibid. p.86).

As Attali (1985) points out, music is a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community. It indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it. With concrete links being made between the dance scene, culture and community, it is hardly surprising that the rave movement in the UK proved to be alluring and highly rewarding for a generation brought up in a world where its

elected leader believed there was 'no such thing as society' (Thatcher 1987). As one

informant, known as K, tells Melissa Harrison in *High Society: The Real Voice of*

Club Culture:

> We grew up in a society that was, and is, fundamentally unstable. We grew up with the reality of widespread unemployment and job insecurity, with a soaring divorce rate and growing poverty. We have no community of our own, so we made one: a community of clubbers. It's still there in the clubs today, for you can't stamp it out; it's needed too much. It's about family, about trusting the people you're with, about security and identity. We didn't step into a world where those things were there for us, so we made them…It's about finding a common identity and a culture to call our own (Harrison 1998: 129).

The sentiment is repeated in Collin's *Altered State – The Story of Ecstasy Culture*

and Acid House:

> The empowerment of the people was an important part of it, people doing things in groups. It felt strange, it was the first sense of community there'd been in years. We could define culture, we could push the boundaries of the culture. We were very much feeding off what was going on around us because there was so much energy around, we could never run out of ideas and never run out of purpose (1997: 150).

It could be claimed that these positive attitudes and utopian ideals were merely due

to the drug of choice at the time, Ecstasy, and that the idealism diminishes as the

chemicals leave the blood stream. However, it is also possible to argue that Ecstasy

acted as a gateway for many and provided a means of accessing a heightened

consciousness that was to do with community cohesion. In 1994 it was estimated

hundreds of thousands of youths were attending raves, generating door sales of

around four billion pounds (Thornton 1995: 15). Large recorded numbers of

attendees were being exposed to an underground movement that promoted a belief in

positivity and transcendence. In parallel music, art and fashion developed a new

sense of fun. Clothes worn were brighter and baggier. Posters and flyers were

decorated with UV colours and fractal inspired shapes (see Pilcher 2008: 158-167 for

detailed discussion and pictorial record). With a return to more hippy-inspired ideals

the recurring principle in clubland was collectivisim, and a collectivism which

allowed for what Garratt and Baker call 'subcultural creativity' (1989: 108). Whether

its impact can ever be proven empirically is open to debate. Nonetheless *conviction*

in rave's potential to transform society is a reality that is cited time and again.

> Acid house was a revolution. For two years there was a tribal kind of unity, a party
> every night, a genuine sense of community. Even football violence almost
> disappeared. I think that really put the fear of God into the authorities, because a
> form of dance music succeeded where they'd failed so often. And Ecstasy did play a
> part. It changed a generation's outlook on things (Brewster and Broughton 1998:
> 87).

Simon Reynolds echoes the view that a convergence of socio-political circumstances,

events and attitudes did much to further the appeal of the rave for the largely white,

working class youth who championed its benefits:

> In the 1980s, with mass unemployment and Thatcher's defeat of the unions, the
> soccer match and the warehouse party offered rare opportunities for the working
> class to experience a sense of collective identity, to belong to a "we" rather than an
> atomized impotent "I" (Reynolds 1999: 64).

Conversely, it could be argued that the rave phenomenon is a product of Thatcherism

rather than an oppositional response to it. Without doubt some individuals made a

huge amount of money by jumping on the bandwagon of hosting immense parties in

abandoned industrial sites, demanding hefty ticket charges, providing little in the

way of facilities, and walking away with huge, tax-free profits. However as Garratt

and Baker point out, 'if they are a product of greed, the parties are at the same time a

strangely egalitarian, collective reaction against the them-and-us, divided nation,

"me" mentality. Huge, peaceful gatherings of young people is hardly a situation

conducive to divide and rule' (1989: 110). What you *are* had become more

important than what you own and that enabled a host of young people to find their place in a society which had previously shut its doors to them.

> E culture's prevailing ethos is inclusive. It has an open-access formula rather than a defined ideology, it offers a series of possibilities that people can use to define their own identity, possibilities that can be adapted to each individual's background, social status and belief system. It is endlessly malleable, pragmatic to new meaning (Collin 1997: 4).

Wayne Anthony, a boy from East London who took his first Ecstasy pill in 1987 and went on to turn his entrepreneurial skills to organising and promoting the huge Genesis raves during the so-called 'Summer of Love'[11] is one example of an individual who has since become well known for narrativising his own experience of those times. In his testimonial *Class of '88*, he talks about the 'dramatic transformation' his friends went through from 'blaggers and boozers' to 'loved-up' dancers:

> This was something we deeply believed in, it wasn't just about having parties. We were all bearing witness to a happily unified nation and projecting good karma to one another, which was well worth the graft. Under that roof we forgot our troubles and those of the mad world around us. We were fully interacting with people whom under normal circumstances we'd have passed by in the street without a glance. We knew it was something special (Anthony 1998: 22).

Anthony is one of many who have a firm belief that, through rave, the so-called 'lost generation' of the 1980s found its direction and secured its place in cultural history. The sense of being part of 'something special' and the feeling of esteem attached to that is clear in his statement. What is also apparent is that the experience of acting communally or in a 'unified' manner is in opposition to his everyday behaviour where he might pass someone in the street without acknowledgement. The rave space allowed him to behave differently, interact more and gave him license to discard the

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[11] Summer of Love is the term given to the period in the UK encompassing the summers of 1988 and 1989 before police cracked down on illegal raves.

patterns of behaviour that hitherto separated him from others. Whether this had a

lasting effect on his behaviour or changed how he operated beyond the space of the

rave is unclear but the belief that E culture drew people together and broke down

barriers of culture and race (albeit for a limited period of time) is a sentiment echoed

by others:

> Dance music and the Ecstasy culture have brought together different types of people who otherwise might not have met, and it has produced a very positive, caring, responsible culture, contrary to how the mainstream media portray it…We have built something very strong and very important and very positive for ourselves (Paul Belford talking to Melissa Harrison in Harrison 1998: 172).

Here Belford articulates a sense of pride in building a culture that he describes as

'positive', 'caring' and 'responsible'. This view of E culture stands in stark

opposition to how it was being portrayed in the media at the time. Rather than a

space of hedonistic individualism, the picture Belford paints here is one of strong

communality and collective ownership that supports positive ideals. Again, the

utopian viewpoint comes across strongly here but is situated as a contrasting view to

that of the 'mainstream'. Whilst it may be impossible to prove the claims made for E

culture, the prevalence of a faith in revolution through dance music cannot be

disputed and is again reiterated by Wayne Anthony:

> The hysteria whipped up by people going to dance parties caused a massive surge of positive energy. The E generation became the We generation. We were making history, boldly going where no man had gone before (Anthony 1998: 42).

Using the self-aggrandising analogy of exploration and history-making to describe

his involvement in the scene, Anthony here is talking from the perspective of

hindsight. E culture and the rave movement do now have a place in cultural and

musical history. The extent to which this was felt by party organisers at the time is

harder to pinpoint. However the movement did offer a suitable terrain for activists to

occupy as large numbers of people were being experiencing non-compliance and

radicalisation for perhaps the first time. Whilst promoters like Anthony articulated a

belief in how 'programmed minds could be reconditioned and channelled towards a

brighter future' (ibid. p.68), activists and demonstrators took the vision further. 'The

dance experience can break down barriers and open people's minds, not to the

spurious aspirations and conservative politics often found in the New Age

movement, but to radical alternatives that take the energy and inspiration of dance

culture beyond the comedown and into new zones of autonomous life' (McKay

1998: 227). The alignment of the underground dance scene with the politics of direct

action and protest is traced in the next section.

Whilst many viewed the movement as a path to enlightenment and as a way of

healing social rifts that existed between the sexes, between classes and between

races, it is also true that the era was prone to much hyperbole, overblown statements

and unproven claims. Whatever the reality, it is pertinent to remember that this was

at least a time where ideals flourished, where they were encouraged and cherished in

contrast to the realities of life experienced by many during the Thatcher years. It

motivated some to question and challenge how their society was shaped and whether

alternatives were in fact possible:

> In a bizarre attempt at drugged up self-analysis, I took out a pen and preposterously
> started to look for meanings and concepts to explain what's happening to us all on
> planet party. It was tempting to write that we live in a world so remote, so fucked up,
> that pure hedonism is our only escape route. Or perhaps attempt to justify it all not as
> submission, but as a strong force for empowerment, a push for a liberal agenda of
> equality, tolerance and freedom. Trouble is, I'm not so sure of anything, certainty
> being what it is these days (Hills 1994: 156).

Whilst the politics of E culture may have been hard to pin down at the time, some of

the social effects are easier to see with the benefit of hindsight. Much research has

been conducted into how the movement transformed the landscape of youth leisure and patterns of drug and alcohol use (Miller 1997, Sutherland and Willner 1998, Winstock, Griffiths and Stewart 2001). With changes in the pharmacological narrative of Britain came changes in behaviour patterns both within and beyond the club. The lowest levels of football hooliganism were recorded for 1991 and 1992 and this was attributed, in part, to many people taking Ecstasy on the terraces themselves or experiencing the match though the haze of a 'come down' from the previous night.[12] One of the social side-effects of Ecstasy is that it promotes tolerance and empathy (McElrath and McEvoy 2001). Described as 'luvdup and de-elited' (Reynolds 1999: 238) the dance floors of the 1980s and 90s explicitly promoted greater acceptance of class, race and sexual preference than had previously been witnessed in UK discos.

To summarise, the development of the 'We Generation' was seen, at the time, as an antidote to the 'Me Generation' and the unbridled capitalism of the late 1980s. With a new-found sense of fun and freedom of expression, clubbers began to revel in a sense of collectivity and self-regulation. The principle of clubbing as community was heartfelt and filled a gap for people who had hitherto felt marginalised by a society where how much you owned seemed to have become more important than what you believed.

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[12] Mark Gilman conducted a two year research project for Lifeline, Manchester studying a sample of young men in the North West including football hooligans. See 'Football and Drugs: Two Cultures Clash', *The International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol 5, No. 1, 1994 for more detail. His report suggests that in their transition from hooligan to raver these young men spurned excessive use of alcohol in favour of Ecstasy which had a palpable effect on football terraces. This view is supported by many personal testimonies although, undoubtedly, impossible to prove unequivocally.

With notions of egalitarianism and unity embedded in an activity that was both engaging and fun, it is not difficult to see how E Culture and politics became bedfellows. The following section charts that relationship in order to bring into focus another significant context for the rise of sub-cultural creativity that flowed from the underground.

E Culture and the Question of Politics

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of Ecstasy culture and the Acid House scene is that it can be described as 'a culture with options in place of rules' (Collin 1997: 5) and much has been argued about the threat E Culture has posed to the dominant social order and its potential for the political[13] – 'political', in fact, being a term most ravers would reject in favour of the word 'spirituality' or 'interconnectedness'. Testimonies from clubbers would suggest it provided a set of alternatives for a generation and a way of being that many found liberating, empowering and hugely exciting. Whilst some describe E culture as 'hedonism in hard times' (Redhead 1993), an action and a response to difficult social situations, others see it as an empty vessel representing nothing more than trivial and meaningless self-indulgence with no political framework. As Martin points out, 'what is at stake here is the definition of political' (1999: 91):

> If we accept that fun can be political, then raving can be a political practice which challenges our very notions about ourselves. It subverts dominant images of subjectivity and discipline, it states that politics does not have to be negative, nor does it have to be cooped up in committee rooms, and that protests don't have to be angry. Raving shows that a positive assertion of values and practices, which change the way a large proportion of the population live their lives, can be more constructive and affirmative than any political party (ibid. p.92).

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[13] See Daniel Martin 'Power Play and Party Politics: The Significance of Raving' *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol 32, No 4, Spring 1999, p.77 for a full discussion.

Collin suggests that although it may not have a clear manifesto or set of defined policies and slogans, 'E culture offers a forum to which people can bring narratives about class, race, sex, economics or morality' (Collin 1997: 5). For Stanley these narratives work as 'significant texts of the everyday attaching to alternative configurations of meaning and reality (and) become a significant realisation in the formulation of nonrepressive, antirhetorical, antihegemonic formulations of power and identity' (Stanley 1995: 99). Whilst its organisation, form and structure may be at odds with what society has traditionally called 'political', rave forces us to broaden our understanding of the term and to 'assert that politics and fun can go hand in hand, and that the scope of meaningful action can be far more inclusive than simply challenging capital' (Martin 1999: 96). At the same time it is important to remember Garratt's point that 'as a nation, Britain tends to be suspicious of fun, and as a nation with a strict class system and a deep distrust of its own young, it disapproves of the leisure activities of working class youth most of all' (1998: 67). With this in mind the dismissal of any latent ideology within rave culture as trivial, naïve idealism is as revealing as the ideologies themselves.

As pointed out in an earlier section, in her book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1995), Sarah Thornton demolishes the conventional accounts of youth subcultures as being inherently oppositional. Instead of viewing youth cultures as areas of resistance to dominant bourgeois culture and the encroaching 'mainstream', she believes youth cultures themselves do much to establish hierarchies and distinctions between young people and goes on to demonstrate what she believes is the elitism that defines youth culture. However, approaching the research as a self-confessed 'outsider' and by concentrating on the 'inner circles' of

the club world such as DJs, promoters and club owners, Thornton's argument is rather skewed. Gilbert and Pearson prefer to adopt the model informed by the post-Marxist political theories of Laclau and Mouffe:

> We need far more precise accounts of the power relationships existing within and between cultural formations, dominant and non-dominant accounts which recognise there is no single locus of power in society, but a multiplicity of points at which power is condensed and dispersed (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 160).

If there is no single overarching dominant formation to which cultural forms may be 'oppositional' then there is no mainstream but a range of relationships, cultural formations and interactions between them. 'The question would, therefore, not be how likely dance culture is to bring down capitalism or patriarchy, but at which points it succeeds or fails in negotiating new spaces' (ibid.). Rather than attempting to 'negotiate the spaces and gaps' in dominant culture in a cyclical process of resistance and incorporation as suggested by CCCS (Jefferson and Hall 1976: 12), contemporary dance culture creates opportunities for rehearsal in which new formations of space, and how to behave within it, may be observed and tested out in a similar manner to Boal's spect-actor who is able to adopt the dual role of audience and performer. For him, this invasion of the stage where an audience member can adopt the position of 'actor', the one who takes action and makes changes, is a 'symbolic transgression' (Boal 2006: 74) where we try out in relative safety the transgressions we may need to make in order to liberate ourselves in our daily lives. This study proposes that both the literal and metaphorical spaces afforded by rave culture go some way towards providing opportunities to try out new ways of understanding the performative body and its relation to the world of the everyday. By offering varying degrees of participation within a rehearsed performance structure that might range from distanced observer to immersed performer, the clubber is able

to play, co-author and create which, in turn, may offer a route to personal and collective agency that operates beyond the dance floor.

Of course, there are many problems with seeing rave as offering a radical challenge to dominant culture (if indeed one agrees that dominant cultural formations do, in fact, exist). Ecstatic dancing can indeed be liberating but it is not always necessarily transformative. Escape is not the same as political change. Rave may offer a temporary escape route from the constraints of bourgeois Puritanism and phallogocentric subjectivity but once the music stops, are we ushered back into normative patterns of behaviour and the acceptance of the social structures that we sought to leave behind? Is it possible for playful irreverence to move into the realms of political agitation and begin to challenge authority and hegemonic ideas? Gilbert and Pearson would argue that 'a radical openness to the possibilities – social, political, emotional, technological – of the future becomes a demand for all waiting and striving to cease in the attainment of a perfect, if temporary, now' (ibid. p.168). Young people stopped waiting for things to improve via mainstream popular culture and tried to make life bearable through drugs, dancing and physical resistance. Indeed the launch slogan of the trance club *Megatripolis* was 'by changing ourselves we can change the world'. It is impossible to ascertain the exact impact such a culture may have had, or continue to have, in challenging societal norms and discourses of power without conducting a focussed longitudinal study with this as its precise aim. Nevertheless, by applying the frame of performance to the movement, it is perhaps possible to examine the structural possibilities for empowerment, engagement and direct action that might be on offer to those who choose to participate.

It is obvious to say that E culture did not happen in a vacuum. It was born out of and shaped by the particular economic, social conditions at the tail-end of Thatcher's government. As Collin explains, libertarian capitalism had elevated consumer materialism to a creed and, at the same time, Thatcherite assaults on collectivism were creating a fragmented and individualised society. Economic libertarianism was tempered with a grim authoritarian edge that simultaneously advocated and curtailed freedom (Collin 1997). Whilst claiming to empower the individual, the reality of the Thatcher years for many was economic insecurity though low pay, casual work, mass unemployment and a widening divide between the haves and the have-nots. The young were increasingly treated as society's scapegoat, frequently characterised in the press as lazy, immoral and violent. Lager louts and football hooligans became the new folk devils. With apprenticeships and training being replaced with often meaningless job creation schemes and with benefits being cut to make leaving the parental home more and more difficult to achieve, it is perhaps no wonder that the 'apathetic youth' of the late 80s found running through fields evading police *Dogs* and road blocks in pursuit of a party particularly exhilarating.

> When times get tougher, people tend to escape down the rabbit hole, through the K hole, past the doorman, down the corridor and into wonderland. And survival, taking pleasure at a time when misery is all that's on offer, can surely be a political act in itself (Garratt 1998: 321).

As previously discussed, the links between rave and politics have long been contested. Whilst some maintain the very act of raving can be seen as oppositional practice, others such as Rietveld point out the hedonism of rave and drug tourism was more akin to escapism rather than aligned to any specific ideology.

> When one escapes instead of opposes, no alternative moral values are proposed at all. This lack of dialectic is what Baudrillard would call 'amoral', rather than

immoral. Like an amorphous monster, the 'amoral' raver went 'mental', creating at
times a sense of profound panic in the people who desired to make sense of it all
(Rietveld 1993: 66).

But rather than constructing a strict separation between the 'conscious raver' and the 'unconscious raver', it is more useful to view rave as a vehicle which can house both perspectives simultaneously (not only within the same physical space but occasionally within the same individual). Using a theatrical analogy, the *appearance* of being amoral can be just as effective, persuasive or convincing as amorality (and immorality) itself. The appearance of a 'reality' does not make it any more substantial or authentic. The rave phenomenon – that so many (often young) people invested so much time and energy into the culture when it seemingly stood for nothing, produced nothing and meant nothing – created an anxiety in the authorities, in the press and in the government which resulted in extreme measures taken to contain its growth and popularity.

During the 1980s, as the chasm developed between the power of the individual as consumer and the individual's lack of power in the employment market, the seeds of entrepreneurialism and material wealth were planted, yet these were dreams that could never be fulfilled by whole swathes of the population. E culture provided an outlet for this amplified entrepreneurial and consumerist impulse but, at the same time, enabled people to get involved either through making records, setting up parties, entering the drugs economy or simply by dancing in a field surrounded by like-minded people. 'From top to bottom it was about participation rather than observation' (Collin 1997:7). Whilst echoing the Thatcher narrative of market freedom and choice, E culture also expressed a desire for collective experience that Thatcher openly rejected and consumerism could not provide. To use Garratt's

words, 'a generation that had been taught to stand alone and look after themselves began to learn the power of numbers. The raves began to gather up all the disparate threads of youth culture and knit them back together (Garratt 1998: 160). She goes on to say 'the acid house and rave scenes were about a generation denied a place in society as a whole creating a space in which they could express themselves' (ibid. p.321). In the face of unemployment and a grim and grey Britain, it is easy to see how appealing this new spirit of collectivity and empowerment appeared:

> Meaningful work is a distant memory for young people now. Many don't stand a chance. So it's best to start your own society, start creating things for yourself. It's happening through a collective of people regenerating things, showing that dreams can come true. Out of this darkness comes self esteem (*Exodus: Movement of Jah People*, Channel 4 1995).

Despite the original air of positivism and dreams of utopia, once the scene developed the more negative aspects took hold. As with all talk of revolution, when it fails to materialise the believers turn cynical and the views become embittered. In the rave scene the drugs got harder, the music got faster and the fluffy, positive energy of the late 80s, early 90s began to change into a hardened, more aggressively destructive scene of Hardcore, Gabber and speed deaths.

> Perhaps there's a submerged political resonance in there too. Amidst the socio-economic deterioration of a Britain well into its second decade of one-party rule, where alternatives seem unimaginable, horizons grow even narrower, and there's no constructive outlet for anger, what is there left but to zone out, to go with the flow, to disappear? (Reynolds 1992, cited in Collin 1997: 249)

 A decade into the twenty-first century and after twelve years of Labour government, the political landscape of the UK is somewhat different, as is the dance scene and its attendant ideologies. Rave as opposition no longer exists in the same way as it did when dancing beyond two in the morning was outlawed in Britain. Clubbers no longer have the need to contravene laws in order to assert their desire to dance until

dawn. Issues relating to the Criminal Justice Bill and restrictions on all-night dancing are no longer intimately connected. The underground dance scene is no longer explicitly associated with left wing protest movements in the same way that it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, traces of the relationship between party and protest can still be identified at some events, and take their expression in the aesthetic make-up of the night (as indicated by venue, decoration, promotion and style of music) as well as the 'ethics' or 'codes of practice' in operation as the event gets underway. In sum, any discussion of raving as a political act of resistance in itself is fraught with difficulties. Many of those problems lie in our use of terminology and what we understand the word 'political' to mean. Whilst rave culture undoubtedly carved out new spaces, provided alternative ways of being, and offered a certain challenge to dominant culture, pure escapism is not the same as permanent, political change. Social transformation is not an *inevitable* by-product of raving. However, I have demonstrated in this section that the space of rave is not merely a fantasy world set apart from or to one side of the 'real' business of the everyday. Rather, it has a connection to the world in which it finds itself. The club space responds to what is going on outside and vice versa. By repositioning the club space and reading it in relation to performative behaviour, one might suggest that transformation becomes *possible* in this space. How profound that transformation might be and whether it occurs on an individual or collective basis, is then an issue for those who are responsible for controlling, administering and regulating it.

With this in mind, the next section looks at authority's response to clubbing and how it has made attempts to rein it in, normalise it and subsume it into regulated patterns of behaviour.

From illegal to legal

As far back as the Reformation and the suppression of carnival practices, Puritan ideology has had a long history of influence over British culture. The main priorities of this enduring philosophy are a deep-seated hostility to physical pleasure, intoxication, unregulated social gatherings, music and dancing. Puritanism's legacy is a belief in the notion of the human subject as an agent of rationalism and self-control. Legislation, licensing and governance are used to enforce this as the normative state and to discredit intoxicated and ecstatic states as primitive, unseemly and subversive.

Chatterton and Hollands point out that nightlife is always subject to much legal, political and moral regulation and this next section tracks the argument they pursue in *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power* (2003: pp. 47-49). As they say, nightlife exists as an ambivalent space: 'a space in which there is a desire both to accommodate a pluralistic public and to control it through rational strategies of surveillance and discipline' (Lees, 1999: 245, cited by Chatterton and Hollands 2003: 47). The bourgeois class of the Victorian era believed leisure time demoralised and radicalised the working class and therefore tight controls were needed. Recreation needed to be rational; in short leisure had to be respectable, productive and good for both the soul of the individual as well as benefiting the economic development of the country as a whole. Indeed, the last one hundred years has seen a rise in the high-brow tastes of the middle classes (such as orchestra, theatre, opera and ballet) and an increased control of traditional street pastimes and working-class pursuits (such as dance and music halls, burlesque houses, saloons and gin palaces). The night-time drinking economy has been

regulated primarily to ensure workers' leisure does not interfere with productivity. However, in a country of declining industry, there is now the new productivity of the twenty-four hour city. Clubs, bars, pubs and restaurants make up the new 'economy of pleasure' (Lovatt 1995) and nightlife has become a legitimate stage within the urban economy. This, in turn, creates a greater need for regulation, social control, zoning and surveillance. The current economic imperative to keep cities going through the night is clear and yet exists at a time when the fear of crime, in particular anti-social behaviour and 'yob' culture is rising even though crime statistics are falling (Hough and Roberts 2003). As a result, recent years have seen an increased use of CCTV, entry policies, pricing and dress codes marking clear contradictions between regulation and deregulation, between fun and disorder. When regulation becomes too Draconian the natural response is to reject, contest and build alternatives. The excitement of the rave scene and the free party, underground scene that arose from it, was due to the fact that it operated outside the usual limits of regulation and the law. The participants had the sense of creating their own rules, not having them imposed upon them from outside. Drawing on the words of Attali, 'it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences or marginality' (1985: 7). In this way music can be seen as a type of social prophecy. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible. It not only reflects the way things are but imagines the way things might be. This certainly was the case for the early rave scene which is largely responsible for provoking the shift in licensing and public order laws surrounding dancing and drinking in the UK, namely the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Bill introduced by MP Graham Bright in 1990 and the Criminal Justice and Public

Order Act of 1994, Section 63 (1) (b) (source taken from Guest in The Observer, 12/07/09).

'Clubbing and dance culture is all about large groups of like-minded people, and any time people join together to do something they can't do alone, something that wider society's none too keen about, they're being political' (Brewster and Broughton 1998: 27). One could say that because drugs were involved in the rave scene, the government had a duty to become involved. There is, however, another view of why the government devoted so many human and financial resources to curbing rave and subsequently forcing it indoors and into the realms of regulation, surveillance and control. By throwing off the constraints of daytime life and escaping to another world, a generation were beginning to question the rules of normative society. Realising Hakim Bey's vision of the Temporary Autonomous Zone[14] was much more appealing.

> Change is what was really needed. We wanted to identify with our own culture…We were like children who had reached a point in their life where they begin to create and follow their own paths (Anthony 1998: 118).

When the dance collective *Spiral Tribe* organised the huge outdoor rave at Castlemorton in 1992 it was the first time masses of young people (40,000 in total) had gathered in such large numbers and with such force of commitment (see Guest, 2009 for full discussion). The event lasted four days and heralded the end of the large-scale rave scene. The introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill shortly after clamped down on illegal parties, strengthened the property rights of landowners and

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[14] The Temporary Autonomous Zone is a phrase coined by Hakim Bey (born Peter Lamborn Wilson) in *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, first published 1991. The term describes the socio-political tactic of creating temporary spaces that elude formal structures of control and is a concept much favoured by rave culture, particularly those involved in the free party movement and Teknivals.

criminalised trespass and squatting. The bill has been described as 'an attempt to fight social change with the iron heel of legislation' (Brewster and Broughton 1998: 27), its main aim being to 'usher people back into licensed leisure patterns and to proscribe lifestyles that were anathema to the Tory vision of a compliant, consumerist society' (Collin 1997: 221). It can be seen as part of the long history of repression of social pleasure and pleasures of the body in Britain since the Reformation. The Bill defined and proposed to outlaw a particular genre of music, and the infamous 'repetitive beats' mandate was set. The word 'rave' appeared in British legislative language for the first time as civil rights organisations like Liberty condemned the new laws as offending the basic principles of justice (Wadham 2002).

It can be suggested that the responses to rave by both the media and government were attempts to rein in and control the movement. Applying Foucault's analysis of modern power, Martin shows that through its denial and transgression of societal norms, rave posed a threat to the established social order that could only be contained through inspection and regulation (Martin 1999). Little points out that:

> ordering and positioning the morally transgressive is a modern social strategy of containment, regulation and colonisation…The very practice of naming the unconfined, the undisciplined nomad of the city subjects them to classificatory knowledge, to some appearance of order, some rule of identification and regulation. The ability to control the presence of marginals as named subjects is central to the production and preservation of modern city moral order (Little 1995: 17-18).

As Attali reminds us, 'it is possible to judge the strength of political power by its legislation on noise and the effectiveness of its control over it' (1985: 122). It was a priority for the Tory government to control the rave movement and to legislate against the weekly convoys of orbital ravers and free party attendees. Never before had the British government considered young people's music so subversive as to

prohibit it. John Major, for one, did not consider dance and drug culture to be meaningless or apolitical or he would not have gone to such lengths to curtail it. Having devoted a huge amount of resources to halting the rave movement, and having largely failed to change people's hearts and minds on the subject, the Conservative government took the unprecedented action of changing the licensing laws to allow public dancing beyond two am. It was no longer necessary to scramble over fields and farmland and run the risk of arrest. To a certain extent, rave has been ushered into the night-time economy. Whether it has been subsumed by the mainstream or infiltrated it is a matter for debate.

To summarise, there are a number of reasons why governments seek to regulate people's night-time behaviour – financial considerations, security and control, value-laden issues surrounding drugs, anti-social behaviour agendas, the approval of the electorate are the principal reasons of pertinence to this thesis. Legalities and moralities are intertwined and, often deliberately, confused; never more so when social pleasures and pleasures of the body are concerned. Legislation put in place to control oppositional practices reveals as much about the fears of the law-makers as it does about activities of the law-breakers. To participate in an illegal rave or to rail against them was, to some extent, a performance of one's own politics. Highly visual, semi-scripted, performative confrontations played out between police, ravers and politicians were not uncommon. Whilst the threat (or promise) of huge illegal parties has waned, the mythology of this particular movement still infuses the underground club scene and remains a significant historical context for the investigation of performative exchange and relational dialogue.

The central component of clubbing is undoubtedly music. Whilst many other activities may occur, a club is not a club without music. The next contextualising frame is our cultural understanding of music and the part it plays in the construction of space.

Music, Noise and the Contest for Space

Music has long been recognised as one of the building blocks of communal identity and cultural distinctiveness. Drawing on the work of CCCS and Hebdige (1988), it is widely recognised that the young often represent themselves and understand each other by aligning themselves to particular genres of music and their attendant stylistic principles. However, the significance of music to the young goes beyond a simple semiotics of dress and codes of behaviour. Music is a significant weapon in the contest and battle for space, particularly for those who feel keenly a lack of ownership and a sense of dispossession. As Sarah Thornton points out, 'one of the main ways in which youth carve out virtual, and claim actual, space is by filling it with their music' (1995: 19). This notion of music being used as a tool to dispute and challenge how space is structured, organised and controlled is particularly significant to the rave movement and especially pertinent when investigating possible mutations of performance that may take place within its domain.

Turning again to the work of Jacques Attali to determine the social significance of music, we 'must learn to judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festival, than by its statistics' (Attali 1985: 3). In his view music is prophetic, a herald of the times to come. Music makes mutations audible, particularly those of social relations:

> music, the organisation of noise…reflects the manufacture of society: it constitutes the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society (ibid. p.4).

The connection between rave as a type of music and as an expression of dissatisfaction with the way society was structured is clear. When talking about the significance of composing, of taking control of how music is made, produced and received, Attali could be prophesying the changes provoked by Acid House and the rise of 'the bedroom DJ'. Attali encourages the removal of composition from the rigid institutions of specialised music training in order to return it to all members of society. He acknowledges that music is a tool of power and used by those in power to make people forget the violence inherent in their daily lives, to make people believe in the harmony of the world or to silence the people through the tyranny of mass production and the censoring of all other human noise:

> More than colours and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies. With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men. Clamour, Melody, Dissonance, Harmony; when it is fashioned by man with specific tools, when it invades man's time, when it becomes sound, noise is the source of purpose and power, of the dream – Music. It is at the heart of the progressive rationalisation of aesthetics, and it is a refuge for residual irrationality; it is means of power and a form of entertainment (ibid. p.6).

The emphasis on Do It Yourself democracy that continues to pervade the underground dance scene coincides with Attali's notion of 'noise of freedom':

> We see emerging, piecemeal and with the greatest ambiguity, the seeds of a new noise, one exterior to the institutions and customary sites of political conflict. A noise of Festival and Freedom, it may create the conditions for a major discontinuity extending far beyond its field. It may be the essential element in a strategy for the emergence of a truly new society (ibid. p.133).

He goes on to say:

> We are all condemned to silence – unless we create our own relation with the world and try to tie other people into the meaning we thus create. That is what composing is. Doing solely for the sake of doing…Inventing new codes…playing for one's own pleasure…It relates to the emergence of the free act, self-transcendence, pleasure in being instead of having (ibid. p.134).

Resonances with the 'doof'[15] culture of raves are plain. As the interest in noise-making continues to grow and research in this field develops (Stern 2003, Brown 2005 et al), so too does the production and invention of new, accessible instruments and affordable technologies at the disposal of amateur and professional DJs alike. A wealth of music generation software is available. Downloads and samples are available on the internet. Records are being produced with only instrumentation rather than vocals thereby allowing the listener to insinuate themselves into the production, and to enable DJs to mix, meld and appropriate tracks to create afresh. New technologies have made materials more accessible, (re)production more widely available to those beyond large corporations and the appropriation of material more conventional as a method of creating new work:

> Music is no longer made to be represented or stockpiled, but for participation in collective play, in an ongoing quest for the new, immediate communication, without ritual and always unstable. It becomes nonreproducible, irreversible (Attali 1985: 141).

In this way music becomes a collective creation rather than an exchange of coded messages. It is not an unavoidable monologue but a real potential for new relationships, a reflector and refractor of society, a way of perceiving and understanding the world.

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[15] 'Doof' has a number of uses within club culture. It refers to the repeated bass line (doof, doof, doof) of bass-driven dance music but has also been used to shorten the phrase 'Do It Yourself'. In addition, 'Doof' is the German word for 'dumb'. A slogan worn on T Shirts by clubbers states "Ich bin doof".

Other key thinkers have also recognised the importance of sound, noise and music.

For Marx music is a 'mirror of reality', for Nietzsche it is 'the expression of truth'

and for Freud 'a text to decipher' (ibid. p.6). Governments and authorities

acknowledge the inherent power of music and noise through their attempts to control

and contain it. The relationship between noise and space is particularly relevant when

discussing rave as these events often take place in what Stanley calls 'wild zones'

where the law is subverted, avoided or resisted:

> These spaces exist as deregulated spaces and become nominated as 'wild zones' by
> the state. They are not spaces without law but they are spaces of the without-
> laws…These 'wild zones' are the reappropriation and subversion of rational space
> and also alternative spaces where other discourses can be articulated. It is in these
> spaces that "narratives of dissensus" can be expressed (Stanley 1995: 92).

Martin is particularly useful here in revealing the links between music, noise and

power when he applies Foucault's theory of how colonisation and rationalisation of

space was central to the project of governmentality (Martin 1999: 83). In Foucault's

view architecture, discipline and power coalesce to mark out spaces of control.

Alongside these highly regulated spaces exist sites of deregulation which, as Martin

suggests, are somewhat tolerated by governments as total surveillance of space is

impossible to achieve and allows events which take place within them to be framed

as disordered 'other' to society's ordered and sane self (ibid. p.84):

> The response of the state is to nominate "wild zones", fenced off areas in which the
> transgressive is able to be regulated, not directly, but through being directly
> identified as dangerous, as "other", as a problem area. These are ambiguous spaces,
> strategic admissions of failure by the law, but at the same time necessary, as the
> "other" is always necessary in the construction of a "self". These are the spaces in
> which raves are able to take place, in which resistance or dissent becomes possible.
> (ibid.)

The tension between deregulated and regulated spaces in the construction of power is a central feature of the rave movement and its gradual incorporation into licensed venues. According to Bell Hooks, marginality can be 'a central location of the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being' (Hooks 1990, in Prentki and Preston 2009: 83), such as choosing to defy the law by congregating and dancing illegally. Marginal space is a 'site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds' (ibid.). In many ways the marginal or radical space of the rave has been dismantled systematically through a gradual process of it moving closer to the centre, in both geographical and cultural terms. However, the 'noise' created by rave's music in the past cannot be uncoupled from discourses of power and discipline and is particularly pertinent when reading club spaces that still flirt with de-regulation and ambiguity as potential sites of performance and play.

Gilbert and Pearson (1999) offer a useful insight into the material nature of dance music and how this relates to notions of power. Despite being a seemingly trivial and ultimately disposable medium, dance music itself poses a potential threat to establishment and hierarchies of culture. Dance music eschews verbal meaning. It has no lyrics. It is not based on songs. It is largely instrumental and appeals to the most primitive urge to dance to the persistent beat of loud drums. Unless tied down by words or given a fixed and ordered meaning through clear structural syntax, music is often viewed as an inherently dangerous and destabilizing force (ibid.). In response to this, institutions of traditional Western music have sought to police the body within spaces of performance and audience response. Stillness and silence and

the etiquette of contemplation are valued in high-art spaces that turn musical experience into passivity through physical stasis. There is the lingering belief that stillness affords us clarity (for both the musician and the listener) and this helps reinforce the notion of truth and authenticity of the message. However, bass-heavy music recognises we do not 'hear' only with our ears but with our whole body. Clubs are designed as spaces of sensory reception and the sight of people sitting, leaning or standing on speakers to 'feel' the vibrations is common. Music, as with all sound, registers on a different level to language or visual communication. In other words it is a physical experience that is registered through the whole body and so points us to the relationship between music and dancing. The physical reality of music is made most obvious on the dance floor. Dancing is a physical manifestation of the experience of music.

Gilbert and Pearson chart in detail the West's growing mistrust and cultural devaluation of dance music, moving from Plato and Socrates' emergent ideas that music is associated with revelry, physical luxuriance and pleasures of the body through to ideas of the Enlightenment that attempt to move music beyond the merely 'pleasurable' and into the realms of the prized aesthetic of 'beautiful'. With this perspective music moves away from the dance floor and into the concert hall where it can be better appreciated through reflective judgement rather than through physical sensation:

> Musics whose primary purpose is to move our bodies via the materiality of the bass, which often do not offer linguistic meanings, would seem to epitomize everything that philosophical tradition dislikes and distrusts about music (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 47).

The traditional Western dichotomy between body and mind has been mapped on to ideas about the efficacy of music and its place in culture and society. However, there is no simple distinction between body and mind. Our experience of our bodies is always culturally determined and so it is impossible to say how music affects our bodies 'directly' since the ways we respond to sound is also culturally encoded. The interaction between sounds and our bodies will always be part of learned responses, and, indeed, both personal and cultural disposition:

> the active maintenance of this distinction along particular lines is one of the central projects of the dominant tradition in western thought. Modes of experience which make obvious the problematic nature of this division between mind and body, between interior and exterior experience, are therefore among the most prohibited and policed modes of experience within western culture (ibid. p.48).

The 'prohibition and policing of experience' has been brought into effect within the context of the underground dance scene which has, in turn, seen the implementation of Draconian laws to contain, hinder and suppress its attempts to win back space through noise.

To summarise, music can be seen as a weapon in the battle for space. It can be used as a tool to challenge how space is organised, structured and controlled and, as such, has a long history as a tool of power. Music has been used by the rave movement to express dissatisfaction with the way society is governed. It uses music as a way of reconfiguring social relations with an emphasis on the body rather than the mind. Instead of being a preserve of the cultural elite, today music production and consumption is available to anyone who is computer literate through the use of easily accessible, new technologies. The divisions between those who make music and

those who receive it are breaking down. Dance music allows all to participate in the playful creation of culture.

The notion of participation is central to the final section of this chapter. Here we turn to look at the clubber's sense of identity as expressed through the club experience.

The Clubbing Self and Identity

As previously discussed, the transformative potential of clubs has the ability to unsettleb culture and into effect wihtin ntional as a method of uction more ssed 03/03/10] Available from the World Wide Web

stitute those in positions of power. Often beating to the sound of their own drum rather than to a rhythm enforced from above, clubs have at times been distrusted by authorities, viewed with suspicion and subjected to strict control. Clubbing communities that attempt to resist this regulation and control often find themselves operating on the edges of society where they are eventually forced underground and into subversive positions in order to survive. As evidenced by the Stonewall Riots of New York City in 1969, 'the fight for the right to party has often been part of a greater fight' (ibid.), a fight which is bound up with notions of self, identity and acceptance:

> Clubs have always been places hidden from the everyday world, where we can experiment with new identities and lifestyles, where people forced out on to the margins could find space to escape, dance and feel free. Where they could transcend (Garratt 1998: 4).

Clubs are places where perceptions of identity are forged and negotiated, shaped and created in dialogue with others. At times this reshaping of identity is articulated in

clubbing narratives as an 'escape' from identity. Here Melechi describes it as 'a

fantasy of liberation' (1993: 37):

> the spaces which club culture occupied and transformed…represent a fantasy of
> liberation, an escape from identity. A place where nobody is, but everybody belongs
> (Melechi 1993: 37).

Although this 'disappearing act' may seem contradictory to the forging of identity,

we may use performance knowledge to reconsider it as a strategy for personal

discovery. If we view this 'fantasy of liberation' through the lens of performance, it

is possible to read this process not only as an escape from identity but also a

confrontation with self as presently constructed. In the same way that the stage world

offers a distancing from self through the mantle of the fictional character, so too

might the clubber see themselves differently through a similar process of distancing

afforded by the liberating space of the rave. In other words, by loosening the

strictures surrounding self and by affecting an escape (albeit partial and temporary)

we may come to know ourselves a little better. As one interviewee, Jean-Claude, tells

Melissa Harrison, 'there is a point when your perspective shifts slightly and you

realise your clubbing life, your clubbing self, is more important and more central to

your perception of yourself as an individual than the rest of your day-to-day dreary

life…The diva on the dance floor on a Saturday night is the real you and all the rest

is just window dressing' (Harrison 1998: 7). Performance is perhaps a method of

reconciling these two notions of self as its very nature (the not me/not not me

dichotomy as explored by Schechner (1985)) exposes and embraces such fractures in

order to play with them. In other words, through performance it is possible to adopt a

role or play a character that is quite different from 'me' as perceived by others but at

the same time in playing that role, I am still essentially 'me'. One can be 'me' and

'not me' simultaneously. In a similar way to the fictional world of the stage that allows actors to take on the role of a character, the rave space allows for an adoption of new personae and the trying on of new versions of self in relative safety, framed as it is by the playful arena (a concept explored fully in the next chapter). The rave space is temporary, fluid and offers a level of tolerance that promotes playful experimentation. That these new versions of self might then be carried forward into the world of the everyday suggests the rave space may be conceived as a vehicle for rehearsal where experimentation with identity may lead to reshaping or reimagining of it.

The idea that dance culture can operate as a potential site of transformation for participants is echoed by Gilbert and Pearson:

> …dance music cultures have not merely comprised strategies for asserting identity, but means of deliciously slipping through the gaps in preordained identities, into the temporary occupation of new zones of experience which leave the participant revivified and imperceptibly altered (1999: 32).

With its emphasis on pleasure, joy and liberation from the constraints of the everyday, many personal revelations about identity and notions of self are attributed to the rave movement. Many clubbers cite rave as a way of allowing for alternative possibilities, of experimenting with ways of being, of re-producing the self, renegotiating it in collaboration with others, and claim it is an experience which resonates long after the music has stopped (see Hutson 1999: pp.60-63 for individual testimonies).

> The ecstatic dissolution of the self on the dance floor, the transformation of ordinary codes of physical and verbal interaction, is still experienced by many as a life-changing experience which encourages and enables new relationships to the body of both self and other/s (Gilbert and Pearson 1999:107).

Gilbert and Pearson's argument here is that not only does the dance floor offer opportunities to alter our relationship with self, it also allows us to reconfigure our relationships with others (other people who are inhabiting the same space) and with 'other' (different versions of self that may not otherwise be manifest or find expression in our day to day lives).

Drawing heavily on gay culture, rave has adopted a certain camp sensibility, a joy in spectacle, openness and self expression not seen in traditional clubs (Murphie and Scheer 1992: 179). It allows many to step temporarily beyond the suffocating emotional paralysis of aggression and fear that constitutes notions of masculinity in the West:

> Being 'ecstatic' has in many ways replaced previous youth-cultural 'styles of being': being 'political', being 'angry', being 'hard' and even (certainly at the beginning of rave in London) being 'fashionable'. Physical and mental enjoyment becomes a central point of involvement. In many ways, open displays of 'happiness', auto-erotic pleasure, 'friendliness' and enjoyment of dance are traditionally more closely associated with femininity and gay male culture (Pini 1997: 154-5).

The dances of most post-war subcultures are not primarily courtship rituals. Whereas dances like the waltz embody the ideal bourgeois concept of gender relations where the male is dominant and 'leads' and where eroticism is tightly policed, rave offers a space free from the demands of hegemonic gender roles. Many utopian claims have been made for rave's liberating potential not least in its ability to erode sexual difference and offer an un-gendered sense of self for both men and women through a particular 'mind/body/spirit/technology assemblage' (ibid. p.118). Like play, dance has often been subject to marginalisation and trivialisation inasmuch as dancing for dancing's sake can be thought of as essentially non-productive and associated with the feminine realm. Thus it stands in opposition to the traditional function of the

patriarchal provider and, as an understanding of Derrida (1976, 1987) might suggest, indicates a mode of being which is non-phallogocentric and a means of destabilising and unfixing 'truths' about self.

A consideration of the term 'jouissance' is useful here. Jouissance literally translated means 'enjoyment' but has a sexual connotation relating to the rush of orgasm that is missing from the English. It is in strict contrast to 'plaisir' which is described by Barthes as 'a pleasure […] linked to cultural enjoyment and identity, to the cultural enjoyment of identity, to a homogenising movement of the ego' (1977: 9). Jouissance, on the other hand, is something that gives the subject a way out of its normative subjectivity through transcendental bliss, thereby shattering any sense of coherent self and opening the door for new formations. For Middleton, jouissance fractures the strictures of signification through which the subject knows him or herself (1990: 261). According to Gilbert and Pearson, it occurs at points where the grip of gender-enforcing discourse is weakened and broken. It occurs outsider gender and can be understood in the same way as ecstasy that has its etymological root in the Greek word 'ekstasis', literally meaning to stand outside oneself. Jouissance itself might be figured as the noise that is generated at the edges and the in-between points (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999: 104). It is perhaps the 'in-betweeness' of jouissance and how it is experienced on the dance floor that does much to situate the underground club world as a space of liminality. The ecstatic experience of jouissance allows for an opening up of possibilities:

> …jouissance is what is experienced at the moment when the discourses shaping our identity are interrupted and displaced such that identity is challenged, opened up to the possibility of change, to the noise at the borders of its articulation (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 105).

It is these 'in-between points' and how the underground club space might be conceived as a playful arena that revels in the 'borders' of experience that this research is concerned with investigating.

Whether clubbers use rave as a way of forging new formations of self or merely to escape from the old self is an argument still keenly contested and one that will almost certainly remain unresolved. Describing what he calls the 'rituals of disappearance' that took place on Ibiza, Antonio Melechi says 'to understand the pleasures of the dance floor we must move to a different logic of tourism where one comes to hide from the spectre of a former self…to disaccumulate culture and disappear under the dry ice and into the body. This is the jouissance of Amnesia where nobody is but everybody belongs' (1993: 32). For Hebdige (1988), post-war politics of youth are enacted through the spectacle of style which is inscribed on the body, in other words statements of self-expression and displays of alternative identity that are traditionally effected through style and dress codes. Conversely, it has been said that Acid House and rave attempt invisibility by escaping traditional sites of surveillance and mapping new spheres of sound by eschewing identifiable cultures of style in terms of dress and other markers of group identity. As Melechi puts it, 'this is the enigmatic void of Acid House: where the invisible hide and the mute prefer silence, where the ecstasy of disappearance resists the imperative to reveal one's self' (1993: 38). However, it could be said that the party scene allows one to throw off the shackles of self and to dissemble or reassemble self. The costuming, parody and playfulness that exists within the scene would suggest a sense of the performative exists which in turn promotes and allows for alternative versions of self that are malleable and subject to change. Rather than the negative connotations of disappearance and invisibility, the

shape-shifting inherent in club culture encourages a confrontation with self by becoming other, making it a rich and fertile ground for participatory and interactive performances that emphasise playful behaviour and collective creativity.

Melechi talks of the pleasures of loss and abandonment leading to a new understanding of the body and self. In rave the body moves beyond the (male) gaze, beyond the spectacle of the 'pose', and beyond the sexuality of the 'look' and into a cyberspace of sound where one attempts to 'get into' the noise itself. This is articulated by Melechi as a desire on the part of the clubber to implode and ultimately disappear. 'It is now the materiality of the musical signifier which forms the new space of oblivion, as the dancer implodes and disappears into a technological dreamscape of sound' (ibid. p.34). However, if we are to consider this 'new space of oblivion' through the lens of performance and read it as a space where fixed identities can be destabilised through processes of abandonment and pure pleasure in order for them to be refashioned, being 'oblivious' may not have such negative connotation. Rather, by forgetting oneself temporarily, one may be able to construct, shape and establish new versions of identity in the presence of others.

In sum, the 'freedom to party' has long been associated with notions of self, identity and expression. Clubs offer potential liberation from the strictures of self as they provide a space where one can escape identity or reconfigure it in negotiation with others. Jouissance offers a way of shattering a sense of the coherent, fixed self that adheres rigidly to gender-enforcing discourse. Playfulness and performance play an important part here. The performative mode adopted by many clubs allows for alternative visions of self that are both malleable and fluid and, as such, explodes

former binaries between active and passive makers of meaning, offering a dynamic

site for the study of interaction and co-authored, collaborative performance.

Chapter Two – The Club Space as Playful Arena

'Nothing needs less justification than pleasure' (Brecht 1948)

Invoking the frame of play

Play as a human activity and playfulness as a frame of mind lie at the heart of this study. The club context is, in essence, an adult playground – a place where people are at leisure, engaged in free, voluntary activity in a particular spatial and temporal sphere that has been marked out to house such behaviour. Play has recently gained much currency both in academic fields and in the realm of industry and in some ways is experiencing a(nother) renaissance at the start of the twenty-first century. As Turner says, play is 'the joker in the neuroanthropological pack' (Turner 1983: 233) and as such slips in and out of disciplines, slides across intellectual terrains with ease and is invoked by theorists, educationalists, psychologists, social scientists and economists alike as a way of investigating human behaviour and interaction in the public and private realm. This thesis contributes to that knowledge inasmuch as it applies ways of thinking about play to the underground club context specifically and asks how play's generative qualities may be harnessed and utilised in this domain.

This study attempts a particular layering of the play experience in terms of its research design, focus and outcome. Play is called upon both as a methodology and as a theoretical underpinning: the playing space is identified both as a social context (the place of the club) and as a conceptual framework (the space of performance). Furthermore, a number of complementary play frames are invoked and interwoven in order to draw the landscape of play in which the club world operates. These play frames provide us with an understanding of club culture as a cultural platform or

seedbed from which new forms of participatory performance might emanate. The play frames are invoked as an optic of performance. Through this lens we can begin to view these activities as a wider expression of (playful) human behaviour rather than simply as a specialised set of behaviours that take place in a particular setting. It is hoped that by examining performance that occurs in a playful space, specifically a space of conviviality but not a theatre or designated performance place, we may be able to model the processes by which we engage with others in a negotiated and playfully mediated way.

Various discourses surrounding play will be invoked within this chapter with a particular focus on the relationship between playful behaviour and the spaces in which it occurs. My interest is in the spatial characteristics of the club, both physical and psychical, and in how those spatial features and dimensions facilitate entry into the playful attitude. The chapter begins by defining the club space as what I term the 'playful arena'. It goes on to examine the key features of the playful arena and how it is framed and constructed as a world separate from the everyday. The functionalist approach to play is examined alongside a consideration of the non-rational dimension of play within this context. This then leads into an application of the liminal paradigm and a discussion of liminal-liminoid hybridity. The concept of carnival is invoked to bring into focus how spatial practices and performative behaviour might be read as expressions of transgression. The chapter ends by exploring notions of 'liveness' within the club context and drawing out the key features of the underground club as performative environment.

The Club Space as Playful Arena

The central tenet of this chapter is that the club space can be understood as a playful arena. This term is carefully chosen and denotes a number of characteristics that are central to our understanding of how the club world operates. The word 'arena' harks back to the oval space in the centre of a Roman amphitheatre that was used for combat, contests, spectacles, sport and performance. Whilst the club space differs inasmuch as there is little bifurcation in terms of spectator-performer space, it does house comfortably a range of activities that operate on a performance continuum, as suggested by Schechner (2006: 42). This continuum incorporates performative behaviours and activities that include play, games, sport, popular entertainment, performing arts, daily life and ritual all of which can be observed within the club context at various times and in various guises. As Schechner points out, these activities do not stand alone (ibid.), rather they blend and interact with each other in a complex manner. Whilst, as he says, one might not confuse football with ballet or an awards ceremony with a marriage ceremony, it is possible to see how they might share common properties if we use the category of play as a way of understanding them. This is the intention of this chapter – to use play as an underpinning category through which we might read and understand the performative activities that occur within the arena of the underground club space.

For spectators an arena is primarily a place of watching. For contestants it is a place for carrying out actions that are then watched and judged by others. In my modelling of the club as playful arena, any role distinction between 'spectator' and 'contestant' is not so clear. As *playful* arenas, clubs are designed to promote the observational mode and yet, at the same time, encourage participation. Watching and being

watched can happen simultaneously, as can observing and taking part. There is

constant inter-play between different modes of activity. More usually used as a way

of determining the manner in which audiences participate in dramatic activity within

a classroom, Jonothan Neelands' Scale of Participation is useful here (2000). He

suggests audience involvement can be arranged along a scale that operates between

the poles of total participation and extreme passivity. Using this scale as an

interpretative tool one can see how clubbers are able to slide between modes of

engagement. At times their participation is total and they adopt the role of 'players',

or as Neelands' puts it 'everyone who is present is assumed to be part of the […]

action. There is no outside' (2000: 4). At other times there is a more defined

separation between performer and audience and clubbers become 'witnesses' or

'observers' (2000: 5) of performed acts that they are encouraged to respond to in

particular ways (such as clapping, cheering or merely watching). Rather than

operating within one mode of participation only, clubs can provide the opportunity

for the full range of responses and, furthermore, can allow for clubbers to adopt both

observational and participatory roles simultaneously. The conventions of club culture

are sufficiently plastic to support this as a phenomenon. How clubbers participate can

depend not only on how club promoters construct or frame their 'playful arena' both

in terms of structure and content but also on the clubbers' reasons for attending and

the frame of mind they bring with them to each occasion. These frames are now

discussed in more detail.

The club as a playful arena is framed spatially, temporally and psychically (see

Figure 1 on page 97). These frames may be conceived by the club promoters or

organisers or may be constructed by the clubbers themselves. Each frame determines

how one responds to the events that unfold within the arena itself. For example, the spatial frame might relate to the positioning of the venue. If it is an urban night club with a restricted door policy one will behave very differently compared to at a free party that is held in a wooded area at a distance from any other buildings. The spatial frame might also relate to the size, shape and organisation of the venue itself. An event that happens in one small room operates differently to that arranged over a series of rooms with interconnecting corridors, outdoor spaces and balconies. The temporal frame relates to the time scale within which the event unfolds. Again behaviour and attitude will differ if the event is scheduled to last a few hours, an entire night or, in the case of a festival, over the course of a long weekend. The psychical frame relates to the frame of mind with which one approaches the playful arena. What are the expectations the clubber brings with them? What significance does the event have for the participant? How much preparation has gone into attending? Is one attending through obligation, either to a group of friends or because the club is a place of work? Each frame contributes to the clubber's experience of approaching, entering and participating in the event and shapes how they respond and play once inside the arena.

Spatial Frame

Temporal Frame

Psychical Frame

Frames played out and played with

Playful Arena

Conditions played out and played with

Passing through frames as play contract

Group
Couple
Solo

DJ
VJ
Promoter

Bouncer
Door Staff
Bar Staff
First Aiders

Participants bring set of conditions with them:
Purpose
Intention
Context
Subjectivities
Experience

Regular
Newcomer

Performer
Dancer
Stiltwalker
Juggler

Various Points of Entry – literal and psychological

Fig 1: Club as Playful Arena: Frames and Points of Entry

In the figure above a clubber gains entry to the playful arena at varying points and the frames continue to wrap and shape that experience. These points of entry may be literal gateways or thresholds (a physical doorway or the purchase of a ticket, a specified opening time, a dress code and so on if you are a 'punter', or a stage door entrance, an Access All Areas pass if you are a DJ or performer), or these points of entry may be psychologically constructed (for example, entry as a first timer or as a regular, entry alone or as part of a group and so on). Whatever the point of entry, each entrant/participant brings with them a set of conditions that mediate and shape that entry. Furthermore these sets of conditions may well relate intimately to the frames previously discussed. The 'conditions' may include purpose for attending, intentions whilst there, social context, personal details (such as age, gender, race, sexuality).

On point of entry to the playful arena the participant 'contracts into' the space. Again, these 'contracts' are varied and manifest either literally or psychologically. The contract might be one that is an agreement based on the principles of consumerism. In other words, by buying a ticket to the event one agrees to abide by the rules of the place. One has entered a financial agreement and is then subject to any decision taken by the management to enforce the contract as denoted by the purchase of a ticket. However, within the underground scene the contract might be much less clearly defined. Whilst there is usually a ticket and an exchange of money, contracting into a club event often means adhering to certain conventions that are not written down or outlined in any explicit way, as is the case with other cognate activities such as going to the opera or even ordering a meal in a restaurant. This contract may be concerned with the mode of dress one adopts, the way in which one

interacts with others, one's attitude to the consumption of drugs or alcohol. Acquiring knowledge of the implicit contract associated with an event can contribute more fully to one's feeling of genuine 'entry' and involvement than the purchase of a physical ticket. The opposite is also true. If implicit knowledge cannot be acquired or is not made accessible, one may feel excluded from the event even though the purchase of the ticket suggests otherwise. The frames surrounding the playful arena, the point at which one enters it and the contract that denotes one's participation are intimately related and differ with each event. As modelled in the figure above, involvement in a club event is a complex interchange of space, place and person where the frames surrounding each event and the conditions that clubbers bring with them are 'played out' and 'played with' in the arena both in implicit and explicit ways. How this playing occurs and how the space facilitates such play is the subject of the next section.

The Architecture of the Playful Arena

As with any discussion of performance, the relationships between site, player and meaning are intimately connected. The physical dimension of the club space is one of the primary factors in promoting particular behaviours in attendees. This study does not attempt to investigate the sizes, shapes and mathematical dimensions of contemporary club spaces. Rather it is an effort to draw links between how these spaces of play are constructed (both physically and psychically) and the forms of play (and performance) that emanate from them. With this in mind this section begins by looking at the difference between place and space and how human agency is a key factor in understanding how space operates. I then discuss the ways in which club space is kept separate from the world of the everyday in an effort to mark it out

as 'special'. Finally I address the notion of the club as a psychical space of freedom and expression and use Constant Nieuwenhuis' experimentations with architectural design to explore how environmental components might impact on behaviour.

As Thornton points out, club events have always had a strong sense of place. Regular attendees take on the name of the locations they inhabit – clubbers, ravers and so on (1995: 3). Certain nights achieve mythical status within the clubbing community by being associated with a particular building or venue, the *Haçienda* in Manchester being the most famous example. Clubs are physical places (buildings, tents or fields) but they are also understood as spaces that are fluid, unpredictable and dependent on human movement to bring them into being. According to de Certeau space is practised place (de Certeau 1984: 117). Where place is understood as 'an instantaneous configuration of positions' and so implies an indication of stability, space 'exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements' (ibid.). Defined by its internal stability, place is an exclusive and self-regulating system of rules. Place becomes space when people walk into it, dance in it or use it in some other way which 'situates it, orients it, temporalizes it' (ibid.). In other words, human agency is the vital ingredient. Space admits unpredictability or, as Nick Kaye says, 'rather than mirror the orderliness of place, space might be subject not only to transformation, but ambiguity' (Kaye 2000: 5). It is the ambiguities of club space and the processes of transformation that space undergoes that are of interest here. What happens when the place of a disused warehouse or a tent in a field, for example, becomes mobilised by people dancing communally? How does people's behaviour situate space and what are the qualities of clubbing space that make it ripe for play?

To begin it is necessary to consider how the playful arena of the club space is marked off both physically and mentally from the sphere of the everyday. Play usually takes place within a playground – an area set aside for the activity of play. Players have a sense of being cut off, defended and protected, not only architecturally but also psychically, by the special rules that apply within this frame. Izzo uses the Greek word 'temenos' to denote a sense of the sacred circle that wraps play and its players and that can exist both in the physical world as well as in the mind:

> It is not, of course, the physical construction of these spaces that creates temenos. It is our collective regard for their purpose that imbues them with the quality of temenos. Whether the rules within be of law, religion, contest, or make-believe, they are by definition sacred places, temporary worlds within the ordinary world, set apart for and dedicated to the performance of an act apart (Izzo 1997: 9).

The club space is marked off and framed like the courtroom, the playground, the consecrated area or the stage. The playful arena of the club space shares the same basic qualities as the activities of play, games, sport, theatre and ritual outlined by Schechner, namely a special ordering of time, a special value attached to objects, non-productivity in terms of goods and the existence of certain rules or conventions (Schechner 1988: 6). In the same way that these 'special' places are set aside, so too are club spaces. Underground clubs usually open their doors at around eleven pm and shut at dawn giving clubbers a sense of operating in a different time zone to the rest of society who are just waking up as they are going home. The particular entry requirements of certain clubs and the ritual of 'getting through the door' mark the club space as different and distinct from the outside world. Crossing the physical threshold can on its own be an emblem of entering a 'special' place. In addition clubs are granted a strong sense of the symbolic by some clubbers who talk of a particular scene as their 'religion' and of certain clubs as their 'church'. Their choice of words

in this instance suggests that they seek to raise the significance of the club and their

clubbing experience from the profane to the sacred and that their regular attendance

is conceived in a manner more akin to religious commitment rather than

consumption of leisure.

As previously mentioned one obvious way the club space is set aside or marked off

as a 'special' place concerns the temporal frame. Club time operates outside of the

everyday nine to five pattern and occurs when most people are asleep. Clubbing

tends to operate within a different time frame to that of the everyday and keeping

track of time inside the club becomes difficult to achieve and not necessarily a

priority. It is noticeable that many clubbers make a conscious decision not to wear a

watch and no clubs have clocks displayed furthering the sense that time as it exists

within the club is separate from the outside world.

> When a player enters into a play space, he or she knows that it is also "play time". It is time outside the ordinary world, separate and distinct. Time has no bearing on play; it is timeless, having no past or future. Play is always a here-and-now endeavour (Izzo 1997: 13).

When immersed in the here and now of the club space it is possible to bring into

effect a type of 'play time' that bears little relation to how much physical time has

actually elapsed.

Being a 'world set apart' enables the club space to be viewed as an environment that

has the capacity to offer alternatives. Talking of the early days of rave Garratt says,

'overwhelmingly, the acid house and rave scenes were about a generation denied a

place in society as a whole creating a space in which they could express themselves'

(Garratt 1998: 321). At this time the club space became imbued with significance

both as a physical structure where normal rules were suspended but also as a psychical space of expression and freedom and, to a certain extent, this mythology still persists. The movement offered 'a space, an absence, an otherness ...[an] opening up of ...space' (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 32). As a manifestation of expression and freedom the club space itself becomes a highly charged area imbued with great significance for those who inhabit it, not least because, as a playful arena, it offers the potential for what Izzo describes as personal expansion:

> Take average people and put them in a place that allows them to exercise their imaginations without constraint, and they will be childlike and experience freedom and innocence again. Put them in a place of human contact, humour and playfulness where they are celebrated, without condition, simply for who they are, and you will see something within them *expand* (Izzo 1997: 17).

This notion of expansion may be impossible to measure quantitatively but similar convictions are to be found in the work of Constant Nieuwenhuis and Cedric Price, both of whom were influenced by Surrealism and its commitment to challenging restrictive customs and thus revolutionising human experience. This in turn chimes with performances mapped by Stewart Home in *The Assault on Culture* (1991) where performance work combines art practice with disruptive interventions and cultural action.

Writing in the 1970s, Nieuwenhuis envisaged a situation where poetry could be a way of life for the masses, not just the privileged few, and suggested that in a world of increased automation man should turn away from a utilitarian society and embrace his concept of the ludic society where the human is freed from productive work by machines and is thus in a better position to develop his own creativity (1974). For Nieuwenhuis, Homo Ludens (man the player) deserves priority over Homo Sapiens (man the reasoner) and Homo Faber (man the maker). As he says, 'liberation of

man's ludic potential is directly linked to his liberation as a social being' (ibid.). It was his belief that the person who is free to use his time and go where he wants cannot make greatest use of his freedom if he is ruled by clocks and fixed abodes. To this end he developed an idea of a new social space with moveable articulations in which 'Homo Ludens will seek to transform, to recreate, those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs' (ibid.). Through exploration of his environment Homo Ludens will create his domain and explore his own creation freed from the monotonous alteration of day and night. It is this overturning of day and night and the mobile nature of underground parties that many cite as the greatest allure of the club experience, offering an environment not fixed by clocks and walls. According to this conceptualisation temporal inversion and experimentation with physical space are tangible means by which alternative patterns of behaviour might be established.

For Nieuwenhuis, the need to develop creativity cannot be satisfied in a static society and thus the architecture of adult playgrounds must accommodate this. Nieuwenhuis's analysis of environmental components will become useful later in this study when examining the way fluid or mobile play spaces impact on performative behaviour. For him the three main components of environment are:

- architectural elements (physical spatial construction),
- climactic conditions (elements which define the quality of the space such as temperature, humidity and atmosphere) and
- psychological elements (elements that influence one's perception of the space such as eating, drinking, communicating).

As he says, 'if the New Babylonian can transform the environment and the ambience by using the available technical material, if in so doing he can temporarily influence the behaviour of others, he in turn undergoes their influence' (1974). It is party organisers that have perhaps the greatest sense of manipulating 'available technical material' to achieve an effect which is simultaneously visual, auditory, emotional and physical and which makes up the 'kinaesthetic terrain' of the club space (Reynolds 1999:51). As Polhemus suggests (1996), the club has become the playful prototype of the third millennium and is now providing a space in which we can re-engage with play in all its forms. This 'playful prototype' extends beyond leisure, where we are allowed to let off steam, and moves into the realm of pretend play, imagination and invention.

Play, function and irrationality

As everyone who writes about play is at pains to point out, defining play is difficult. As Schechner says, 'play is very hard to pin down or define. It is a mood, an activity, an eruption of liberty; sometimes it is rule-bound, sometimes very free. It is pervasive. It is something everyone does as well as watch others engage in – either formally […] or casually […]. Play can subvert the powers-that-be, as in parody or carnival, or it can be cruel, absolute power' (2006: 79). It is not the task of this chapter to offer a definition of play or to critique how others have argued for it as an expression of culture. Instead, my aim is to locate play as an attitude that infuses the underground club world and to use the model of the playful arena as a way of reading and interpreting activities, behaviours and interactions that occur within that scene.

To provide a conceptual framework for later discussions, this section will now begin to unpick some of the theoretical considerations surrounding play as a human activity and its position within modern, Western society. It will look at how our attitudes to play have developed and how various discourses attempt to muster play as an ideological tool with which to construct narratives and counter-narratives of culture, community, ritual and art. Exploring notions of functionality and applying a hybridised version of Turner's notion of the liminal and liminoid, the chapter will position clubs as potential sites of play and explore how this framing intersects with notions of social and theatrical performance.

The underlying motivation behind this study is that there is much to be gained from the 'play mood'. The examination of the club space as playful arena suggests that activities occurring within the club can be read as contributing to this attitude or indeed can be seen as generating it. Addressing the function(s) of play is, therefore, a central concern and it is to this that we now turn. Much has been written about play as a basic and essential function of life as well as a 'primary act of mind' (Hardy 1977: 12). It is undisputed that play is a fundamental component of existence and a human necessity that is both instinctual and primal. Ascertaining its function, however, is more problematic and often depends on which field or discipline is claiming play as a distinctive feature integral to its practice or domain. For my own purposes, the play function is investigated in terms of its ability to promote interaction, engagement and expression, using the performative mode as both a way of seeing and as a vehicle for doing. However, I explore this function with an acknowledgement of the irrational dimensions of play and how this relates to notions

of deep play (Geertz 1973) and dark play (Schechner 1993: 36) as understood within

the context of underground clubbing and the pursuit of alternative realities.

As the following from Huizinga suggests, play infiltrates and infuses our lives to

such an extent that it becomes implicated in all spheres of human activity, from the

cultural to the spiritual, from the sacred to the profane:

> Play adorns life, amplifies it, and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual
> – and as a life function – and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its
> significance, its expressive value, its spiritual associations, in short, as a culture
> function. The expression of it satisfies all kinds of communal ideals (Huizinga 1949:
> 27).

As a 'life function' play intercedes in a vast range of disciplines including

anthropology, psychology, sociology and education. Sutton-Smith discusses at length

the diversity of play scholarship and the varying ways in which disciplines

conceptualise play's usefulness:

> […] biologists, psychologists, educators, and sociologists tend to focus on how play
> is adaptive or contributes to growth, development, and socialization. Communication
> theorists tell us that play is a form of metacommunication far preceding language in
> evolution because it is also found in animals. Sociologists say that play is an
> imperial social system that is typically manipulated by those with power for their
> own benefit. Mathematicians focus on war games and games of chance, important in
> turn because of the data they supply about strategy and probability. […]
> Anthropologists pursue the relationships between ritual and play as these are found
> in customs and festivals […] Art and literature, by contrast, have a major focus on
> play as a spur to creativity. […] And in the leisure sciences, play is about qualities of
> personal experience, such as intrinsic motivation, fun, relaxation, escape and so on
> (Sutton-Smith 1997: 7).

Whether its function is to be read as psychological growth, educational development,

socialisation, creative expression, or pure enjoyment it is certain that practically all

theorists of recent times have had in common the desire to show that play is useful in

some way or another (Sutton- Smith 1999: 240). This imperative may be as Sutton-

Smith suggests (ibid.) a reaction to previously held beliefs about play being wasteful in economic and religious terms or it may indicate a shift towards a more post-modern approach to and an acceptance of the pursuit of subjunctivity. Play revels in the 'what if' and by operating in this rhetorical mode it remains resistant to fixity and suggests the possibility of alternatives. Furthermore, as well as being inherently slippery as a term it is also ambivalent. In other words, play can occupy two meanings at the same time. Play can be both frivolous and useful, trivial and meaningful, progressive and regressive simultaneously. It is with an acknowledgement of play's ambivalence that my own hypothesis regarding play's position within club culture is developed. Returning to the modelling in **Figure 1**, depending on one's point of entry to the playful arena, play can function as escapism and as confrontation. It can be catharsis and commodity. It can be a form of self-actualisation and a form of mindless distraction. What this leads us to is a notion of play as 'primarily a manifestation of adaptive variability' (Gould 1997, cited by Sutton-Smith 1999: 243). If in its flexibility, play encourages its players to become more adept at responding to change, then it has a central role in the processes of improvisation, imagination and in strategies for interaction – all of which are central concerns for this study in relation to performative behaviour and performance structures that are activated in and around the dance floor.

The atmosphere generated by a club or party via the construction of spatial and temporal frames helps determine the types of play that might occur within a particular arena. The club sets up particular conditions and parameters within which people are invited to play, although this does not necessarily guarantee that play will occur as a matter of course. Depending on the type of club, these parameters tend to

be looser, more liberal and liberating than the 'rules of the game' associated with everyday life where people are traditionally expected to be economically productive. For Huizinga play might not produce material goods but is nonetheless 'productive of culture' because it permits 'innate' human needs for rhythm, harmony and change (Huizinga 1949: 75). What type of culture is being produced within the club context? What forms of rhythm, harmony and change are experienced? On one hand it can be said new forms of musical production and reception are developed through play as DJs experiment with technology that then provokes changes in the aesthetic culture associated with a certain scene. On a more social level it can be said that clubs allow culture to be produced in terms of providing an arena where the shared beliefs and values of particular groups of people can be tried out and negotiated in a playful manner. Although admittedly a nebulous concept, what might be described as the 'culture of the underground' is developed and agreed as participants engage in free play together within an environment that they *believe to be* more tolerant, liberal and elastic than the world outside.

Historically clubs are places where people have been given permission to play or experiment with styles, identities, sexualities and so on, to try on new ways of being in the presence of others – to (re)produce versions of self rather than material products. The production of self as an on-going process is just one of the generative qualities of the playful arena and obfuscates the semantic division between work and play. In the club context, the process of refashioning self is serious play and requires certain conditions in order to function:

> While play may not have an opposite (it certainly isn't work), it does have a few enemies, shame and disgust among them…Play does not thrive in an atmosphere of derision (Burnett 2004).

Previous attempts to define play have begun from a point of determining what play *is not* rather than what it *might be*. This project is, however, just as problematic. What is significant about Burnett's stance above is that rather than defining a direct opposite he suggests play has enemies, in other words there are barriers or obstacles that prevent play from functioning effectively. Whilst play might not always be an indication of free choice, one cannot enter into play effectively in an atmosphere of derision. According to Burnett to be able to play well, one must be able to do so without shame and contempt. As one informant says to Melissa Harrison, in a club 'the barrier of distrust and reserve is removed so you can be open and trusting with other people. That is why clubbing can be such an empowering experience: you go out and lay yourself wide open to people in a way you can't do in normal life, and nothing bad comes of it. Your trust is not abused and you take that away with you' (Harrison 1998: 171). The significance of this play experience as demonstrated in the club environment gives us clues as to how seriously people often take their play and does much to explode the binary that places play in simple opposition to work. Put simply people work hard at their play and believe they gain personal benefits as a result.

To further dismantle any simple distinction between work and play, Turner's work on liminality (1982) can be summoned (and is discussed at greater length in the next section). Exploring van Gennep's work on rites of passage (1960), he points out that in liminal phases of tribal societies work and play are hardly distinguishable. Ritual is both earnest and playful (Turner 1982: 35) and to play in the *limen* is to undertake

a duty, an obligation of great significance to the wider community and, indeed, is a reflection of the work of gods who in their 'lilas make maya' (Schechner 1993: 29).[16] According to Indian philosophy all life can be conceived as a type of playing where the boundaries between what is real and what is unreal is constantly shifting and entirely permeable. If all life is 'maya' (or illusion) then nothing is reliable, fixed or certain. Life is prone to sudden shifts and is essentially playful. In stark contrast, Western culture has in the past associated play with the child or with childish behaviour and relegated it to an inferior position by implication. It has been commonly understood that we 'indulge' in play as a reward for work. As such, play has been tinged with waywardness, with the trivial, the wasteful. It has been associated with the body rather than the mind and, to this end, has been debased and relegated to the lower ranks of significance in terms of value and worth by a society that had the mind/body split rooted firmly in its cultural map.

However, according to Schechner, in recent times non-rationalist notions of playing have re-emerged in the West (Schechner 2006: 106). Furthermore elements of Eastern philosophy and an interest in quasi-spiritual ideologies are recurring themes within the underground dance scene and the culture is ripe for making such a re-emergence physically manifest. A link can be traced here between the volatile, transformative world of maya-lila and the high risk, all-absorbing world of deep play (Geertz 1973). Getting 'into the body', either through repetitive, trance-inducing dance or through the use of mood enhancing drugs, has been read as synonymous with 'getting out of your head'. In other words, the taking of drugs is an irrational

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[16] For a longer discussion of 'maya –lila' in relation to play theory, see Bayliss, A. (1999) Playing with Words: an exploration of ludic terms and the linguistic permeation of play in a cultural context. *Research in Drama Education*, Vol 4(1), pp.73-84

pastime that renders clubbers insensible and unproductive. According to the Puritan-Capitalist work ethic, when the mind loses control of the body the individual ceases to be productive and controllable, leading to chaos that might threaten to disrupt social order and its productivity. Thus a chasm emerges between those activities that can be described as useful and productive and those that are viewed as useless, non-productive, indulgent, hedonistic and marginal. These cultural evaluations are then passed onto the participants who come to be viewed as 'useless', 'trivial' or 'meaningless' themselves. Clubbers have been described variously in the popular press as 'mindless', 'primitive' and 'immature'[17] (they combat this by embracing these judgements and describe themselves as 'nutty', 'mental' or 'off on one') and clubs are often portrayed as sites of self-destruction that need to be subject to strict control.

Conversely, clubbers would recognise the process of 'getting into the body' and 'out of your head' as a means to becoming what I call 'sense-enabled'. By this I mean a process of becoming more in tune with the rhythm, harmony and change (Huizinga 1949: 75) alluded to earlier in this section as an expression of cultural production but one that is rooted in the embodied practices of the dance floor. The often highly risky activities of the underground club scene are expressions of absorption akin to Geertz's notion of deep play where 'men (sic) engage in such play, both passionately and often, and even in the face of law's revenge' (1973: 433). Deep play as encountered by those who engage in extreme sports, motor bike riding, bungee jumping, and other activities where the stakes are high 'draws the whole person into what amounts to a life-and-death struggle expressing not only individual

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[17] See Thornton, S. (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Chapter 4 'The Media Development of 'Subcultures' (or the Sensational Story of 'Acid House') for a full discussion or visit http://www.fantazia.org.uk/Scene/press/magazines.htm for a more informal perspective.

commitment (even to the irrational), but cultural values (Schechner 2006: 106). The deep player feels fully absorbed and, as a result, fully aware of his/her senses.

The concept of becoming sense-enabled by play is central to this study and, once again, returns us to the functional aspects of the work. As Jock Young argues, 'some youth cultures go beyond the deferred gratification of 'leisure' and enter the realm of pure play. They seek worlds of truly subterranean values not governed by the Protestant work ethic or other ethos of productivity and find youthful escape into 'alternative forms of reality' that can pose a potential threat to social order, capitalism and conservatism' (Young 1971: 136). The playful arena or context of the club is not a self-contained, vacuum-sealed environment where sheer childishness and latent hedonism reign for a pre-determined length of time. Rather, it is my contention that the club is a space of potentialities where people are able to experience the full continuum of play from 'paidia' (associated with free improvisation and uncontrolled gaiety) to 'ludus' (the playing of games which require training, skill or mastery in some degree) (Caillois 2001: 29) as a system of rehearsal or improvisation. The playful arena of the underground club can be read as a manifestation and expression of how the irrational dimension of play can indeed be part of its functionality.

Having looked at some of the spatial characteristics of the playful arena and having considered how play might function within this space, I now turn to an exploration of underground club culture and the liminal paradigm.

Underground club cultures and the liminal paradigm

The intersecting concepts of play, flow and ritual which Turner develops in his work on liminality (Turner 1982: 20-59) can be used as key signposts to understanding the clubbing experience and its relationship to performance. I begin here with a discussion of the concept of liminality and go on to explore the ways in which the underground club can be understood as a liminal space whilst keeping in mind the limitations of applying a term that has become intimately associated with the field of Performance Studies and other academic discourses that invoke it in relation to processes of social, spiritual and psychological transformation.

Translated from Latin the word *limen* means threshold. It was a term selected by Arnold van Gennep in his work on rites of passage (1960) and used to describe the phase of transition where 'ritual subjects pass through a period an area of ambiguity, [and experience] a sort of social limbo' (Turner 1982: 24) as they move from one social status or cultural state to another. Victor Turner uses the implications of van Gennep's work in order to develop a model of liminality where the conventions of the everyday might be suspended and new forms conceived by operating predominantly in the subjunctive register. As Turner states:

> I sometimes talk about the liminal phase being dominantly in the 'subjunctive mood' of culture, the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire - depending on which of the trinity of cognition, affect and connation is situationally dominant. […] Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures (Turner 1986: 42).

The liminal paradigm is attractive to performance makers and theorists due to its promise of provisionality and has been used extensively to make claim to the 'transformational potential of theatre and other performative genres' (McKenzie

2001: 34-35, cited by Shepherd and Wallis 2004: 110). Whilst acknowledging the limitations of what has become known as 'the liminal norm' (McKenzie 2001: 49-53), the paradigm is still useful in this context in that the 'in-betweeness' it represents is exemplified by the spatial-temporal characteristics of the underground party as well as the (sub)cultural position it adopts, resting as it does in the grey margins of legality, license and (sometimes 'black market') economies. Examining the club space through the liminal paradigm not only casts light on the activities and behaviours housed therein and provides a framework for an anthropological account of clubbing as a transitory phase of people's lives, it also offers a way of examining how individuals and groups may be pre-conditioned or prepared to respond in particular ways to performance in this setting (a concept that will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five).

Whilst participating in club culture is not an *obligatory* period of initiation into adulthood as in the sense of liminality applied to tribal societies by van Gennep (1960), clubbing as an activity associated with youth culture can be seen as a type of modern day rite of passage – a symbolic phase which signals a shift from childhood pastimes to adult pursuits. Clubbing occurs most frequently between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four and has been read as a method of carving out social space which is autonomous and distinct from that of the adult world (Thornton 1995, Malbon 1999, Chatterton and Hollands 2003). Attendance at clubs declines rapidly in later years which, in turn, coincides with the move out of the parental home and increased responsibilities such as work and family (Thornton 1995: 19). Whilst it can be argued that clubbing is merely a phase that most teenagers go through as an enculturation into adulthood, this does not explain the presence of many older

individuals, couples and groups who continue to associate themselves with certain scenes, the underground movement being one such scene which has a particularly diverse demographic in terms of age and profession.[18] There is, perhaps, an argument to be followed that the club experience affords access to a type of liminal experience for adults whose lives are otherwise determined and, one could argue, constrained by what they do as a job, where they live, what they own and so on. The liminal phase, albeit temporary, permits the dissolution of normative social structures and allows people to revel in the disorderly. The club experience allows people to gain release from the strictures of everyday but also to reconnect with a feeling of looseness, free-wheeling, and disorder (for Caillois, "ilinx") from which new ideas might flow.

Just as the liminal phase is marked by a physical separation of ritual subjects from the rest of society, so too do clubs offer a dark, subterranean world which is protected by both highly visible and invisible codes of entry, door policies and taste/style cultures. As Thornton says, clubs 'offer other-worldly environments in which to escape; they act as interior havens with such presence that the dancers forget local time and place…classically [clubs] have long winding corridors punctuated by a series of thresholds which separate inside from outside, private from public, the dictates of dance abandon from the routine rules of school, work and parental home' (Thornton 1995: 21) or as one clubber described to me 'this is a place out of space and time; outside, time and reality will surely be greeting us when we have to leave' (Interview with MG, 09/12/03). For Broadhurst a key trait of

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[18] Chatterton and Hollands note a tendency towards an extension of the youthful phase in all our lives, a phase they describe as being characterized by liminality and experimentation. Their research found more people in their 20s staying at home, in training or at University rather than entering the world of work (2003: 10).

liminality is the centrality of non-linguistic modes of signification such as the visual, the kinetic, the gravitational, the proxemic, and the aural (Broadhurst 1999: 12-13). Environmental elements within the club space such as loud music, spatial organisation, decoration, lighting, are clear examples of this non-linguistic signification and add to the sense of 'disruption, immediacy and excess' (ibid. p.13) that is characteristic of liminal aesthetics.

Where tribal initiands undergo 'a levelling process' (Turner 1982: 26) in which signs of pre-liminal status are destroyed so that a kind of anonymity is assumed, so ravers undertake various processes to acquire distance from their everyday identity. In terms of costuming and fashioning, clubbers will often adopt particular styles of clothing that mark them out as different from the norm. Exaggerated and flamboyant fancy dress costumes are frequently worn and often tend to follow a theme of fantasy and otherworldliness (fairy costumes, insects or alien outfits are fairly common). Many clubs have areas where tattoo artists will paint faces and bodies with elaborate patterns in UV paint, effectively masking the identity of the clubber to some extent. It is not uncommon for underground clubbers to assume pseudonyms and alter-egos in a further bid to separate themselves from their day-to-day identities.

By cutting themselves loose from their tribe for a period of time, initiands acquire a special kind of freedom. They may occupy a relatively weak position in that society but they are liberated temporarily from structural obligations (Turner 1982: 27). Being 'temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure' (ibid.) may be a socially weak position to occupy but with it comes freedom from obligation and a certain amount of power to 'trouble' the centre. As van Gennep says:

> The novices are outside society, and society has no power over them. […] Thus, although taboos, as negative rites, erect a barrier between the novices and society, the society is helpful against the novices' undertakings. That is the explanation – the simplest in the world – for a fact that has been noted among a great many peoples and has remained incomprehensible to observers. During the novitiate, the young people can steal and pillage at will or feed and adorn themselves at the expense of the community (van Gennep 1960: 114).

The act of standing outside society and yet 'pillaging it at will' may be sanctioned by certain societies as part of a tribal rite of passage for young men but in an industrialised Western society, this marginal positioning is tolerated for very limited periods of time and then subjected to strict control (as discussed in Chapter One on page 84). Troubling the centre by adopting a marginal position in relation to society's normative values and conventions was a deliberate tactic of those involved in the free party movement of the 1990s. Here members sought to combine their desire to dance with an ideology to win back space in the form of large-scale road protests and ecological demonstrations that cost the government many thousands of pounds to resolve. Party/Protest events associated with the underground (such as those organised by the *Exodus Collective* that took place in Luton in the early to mid 1990s[19]) could be likened to what Mullaney calls 'dramaturgy of the margins' (1991: 22). In Elizabethan England, at a time when city walls were first being erected, notions of inside and outside became manifest not only physically but also emerged psychologically in the minds of its citizens. What happened inside the city walls (the rituals, the festivals, the spectacles) was organised around figures of central authority and, as such, was condoned by them. As Mullaney says, by contrast, 'figures we encounter outside the city walls are liminal ones, and the dramaturgy of the margins

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[19] See McKay, George (ed.) (1998) *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*, London: Verso for a full discussion.

was a liminal breed of cultural performance, a performance of the threshold, by which the horizon of community was made visible, the limits of definition, containment and control made manifest' (ibid.). It is my argument that certain aspects of underground club culture are an expression of marginal dramaturgy. What is interesting is that, rather than occurring beyond the limits of the city, these threshold performances are now occurring within its confines and, as a result, are having to (re)position themselves in relation to it. In other words the club or festival that has become a commercial enterprise or a regulated event is specifically liminoid in construction but yet offers access to the liminal experience via the play mood. This will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

Playfulness and fun have now become a key part of the night-time economy and modern urban landscape and, as such, are largely sanctioned and controlled by government policy. The liminal has moved from the margins and closer to the centre. As Chatterton and Hollands say:

> Re-imagined urban centres, then, have become important contexts in which young adults continue to deal with changes in their life-worlds and forge roles and identities…The contemporary city at night, then, is often regarded as a 'stage' which acts as a backdrop for a diverse and varied collection of 'mix and match' youth styles, cultures and lifestyles…The city can be seen to offer abundant resources for experimentation and play, and opens up liminal and carnivalesque social spaces (Chatterton and Hollands 2003: 11).

Whilst urban nightlife is undoubtedly varied and popular and provides opportunities for fun and play, these 'carnivalesque social spaces' are less expressions of autonomous creativity and freedom and more pre-packaged commodities that stand as signifiers of social status and wealth. The night-time economy is a multi-million pound industry which is driven by market forces, branding and unbridled consumerism. As a result, some sections of society are excluded either socially,

economically or both. When this occurs, alternatives emerge which openly reject and contest the dominant scene creating a cyclical effect of invention, incorporation and reinvention. This often finds its first expression in space, location and environment. When clubbing moved out of purpose-built night clubs and mutated into raves taking place in non-traditional spaces such as disused industrial buildings, warehouses or vast outdoor spaces, 'it was partly in pursuit of forbidden and unpredictable sense of place' (Thornton 1995: 22) and partly in pursuit of Hakim Bey's vision of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) which seeks to move people beyond what he calls the 'cartography of Control':

> Revolution is closed, but insurgency is open…And – the map is closed, but the autonomous zone is open. Metaphorically it unfolds within the fractal dimensions invisible to the cartography of Control. And here we should introduce the concept of psychotopology (and – topography) (Bey 1991: 103).

Van Veen (2002) goes on to suggest the TAZ can be read as a pragmatic and psychotopological crack or liminal space, the likes of which have been investigated and made manifest by sound systems and art collectives such as *Spiral Tribe, <ST>* and the *KLF*. It is in these liminal 'cracks' that experimental performance occurs, not only within a club context but in other domains where liminality sets in train a 'blurring of set boundaries' (Broadhurst 1999: 13) and a questioning of 'accepted ideas and belief systems' (ibid. p.59). If we read the underground club space as providing the spatial and temporary frame for liminal cracks to be occupied then it becomes a significant site of alterity and a possible 'seedbed of cultural creativity' (Turner 1982: 28). To what extent underground clubbing has been incorporated into the night-time economy and effectively disarmed remains unclear. What is more certain is that those seeking alternatives to mainstream ideology are drawn to liminal

spaces as they represent spaces of possibility or areas where normative structures are suspended and experimentation can flourish.

Having explored the liminal paradigm in relation to underground clubbing and playfulness, I now turn towards an examination of liminal-liminoid hybridity. This next section brings into focus issues surrounding notions of leisure, choice and commodification more often associated with liminoid institutions (as opposed to liminal phases). However, here I take on board Turner's own view that in complex, modern societies both the liminal and liminoid 'co-exist in a sort of cultural pluralism' (1982: 55). Whilst there are some clear distinctions between the liminal and the liminoid as comparative symbologies, it is possible to see overlap and flow between them, particularly when we take into account the possible functions of the club space when conceived as a space of play. With this in mind I construct a model that suggests a mobile relationship between the liminal and the liminoid, namely where the liminoid institution of a club can offer access to a sense of liminality. This is expressed as operating along a continuum that can be accessed at different points. The section goes onto consider how 'communitas' might be reached and how 'clubbing communitas' might be constituted.

Clubs and liminal-liminoid hybridity

As we have seen it is possible to mobilise the liminal paradigm as a way of interpreting some of the features of the club space. To some extent it is a useful lens through which to view the threshold experiences on offer in this setting and helps to account for the strong belief in the club's transformative powers as held by some participants. The club provides an in-between world where people can shed their old

identities and try on the new. The timelessness of the clubbing space allows participants to reach a 'nowhere/nowhen' (Reynolds 1999: 55) state where normative routines and patterns of behaviour are suspended. However, given their position within the contemporary context of the leisure industry, it is perhaps more appropriate to view clubs as 'permanent "liminoid" settings' (Turner 1982: 55), the liminoid being akin to the liminal experience but an optional construct rather than an obligatory action or phase. The liminoid represents a break from society rather than a duty to it and is removed from the rite of passage context (ibid. p.52). As Turner points out there are a number of similarities between liminal and liminoid phenomena and, taking this into account, this section will suggest that underground club culture offers a particular hybridized formulation where the liminal and the liminoid are interwoven depending on how the club event is framed and entered by organisers and participants. The premise here is that whilst acknowledging the liminal and liminoid according to Turner's modelling are different and distinct phenomena, applied to the club world the relationship between them can be viewed as interlocking concepts that have a relationship to each other. In other words the liminoid setting, or club in this instance, may give rise to the liminal experience and the pursuit of the liminal experience may influence the shape of the club. It is with this interchange in mind that the section continues.

Turner points out that where liminal phenomena tend to be collective and concerned with calendrical, biological or social rhythms, liminoid phenomena tend to be more characteristically individual products even though they might have mass effects (Turner 1982: 54). They are generally not cyclical but continuously generated and occur in places and times set aside for leisure. Clubbing can be quite clearly

categorised as a leisure activity and the experience of collectivity it produces for its

participants may just be one of its 'mass effects'. However, Turner goes on to

suggest that on those occasions where liminoid phenomena are in fact collective they

may be 'derived from liminal antecedents' (ibid.). Communal, trance dancing has a

long history and the links with this and rave culture are discussed at length by Gore

(1997). It may be that as clubbing is consumed on an individual basis and represents

a leisure choice rather than an obligation to social processes it gives merely the

'effect' of collectivity rather than an authentic experience of unity. Whether the

collective experience of clubbing is a reality or a hyperreality, this 'effect' may

nevertheless hark back to a time when collectivity was expressed through communal

dancing and may still provide a means by which one might access what might be

called 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1999) or 'peak experience' (Gardner 1993: 26). The

underground club event may still have what Turner calls 'the stamp of the liminal'

(Turner 1982: 55) on it and might be regarded as 'the cultural debris of some

forgotten liminal ritual' (ibid.).

The clearest distinction between the liminal and the liminoid concerns choice versus

obligation, social duties versus commodity and reintroduces the binary of work

versus play:

> For most people the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of
> choice, not obligation. The liminoid is more like a commodity – indeed, often *is* a
> commodity, which one selects and pays for…One *works* at the liminal, one *plays*
> with the liminoid (Turner 1982: 55).

The notion of choice and freedom is important here and Isaiah Berlin's distinctions

of the two types of freedoms associated with leisure (Berlin 1958, cited by Turner

1982: 36) are useful in framing the club experience. Leisure gives us freedom *from*

obligations, duties and responsibilities and leisure gives us the freedom *to* enter or generate new symbolic worlds, to play with ideas, fantasies, words and social relationships. Furthermore, 'leisure is potentially capable of releasing creative powers, individual or communal, either to criticize or buttress the dominant social structural values' (Turner 1982: 37). Unlike liminal phenomena that tend to be what Turner calls 'eufunctional' and that are designed to contribute to society in a positive way even though they may be framed as 'inversive' (ibid. p.54), liminoid phenomena are more often 'social critiques or even revolutionary manifestos' (ibid. p.54-5). Whilst not everyone who attends an underground club event is necessarily engaging in a socio-political critique of the status quo, the club as a liminoid construct does offer the participant a choice in how they align themselves or reject the mainstream and its normative and normalising structures. The manner in which clubbers consume their chosen leisure activity (as indicated by the type of event they attend, what they wear, the price they pay for the ticket and the type of music they listen to) acts as a signifier of his/her attitude to cultural consumption and production. This in turn may become 'normalising' as the alternative becomes incorporated into the mainstream and any critique of tradition becomes the new 'norm'. Once this happens, new liminoid institutions may arise and the cycle begin again.

As discussed previously, the club world (even if it aligns itself to the underground) is today largely about consumer choice and customer satisfaction and, in this sense, represents a predominantly liminoid construct rather than a liminal one. There is usually a monetary exchange before entering any club or party and those clubbers choose a particular club for the environment, crowd and musical experience it offers.

However, it can also be argued that the liminoid institution has the potential to afford access to the liminal experience. Many clubbers ascribe huge importance to their clubbing practice, likening it to a spiritual transformation with dance-floor epiphanies being couched in religious language.[20] Whilst it is certainly the case that these testimonies may be highly mythologised accounts of what occurs within the club space, it is nonetheless apparent that the ritual elements and ritualised behaviours associated with clubbing do fulfil a sense of the sacred for many people. The club space is represented as a postmodern place of worship (Campbell 2004: 108) and the DJ presides over it. As DJs talk of taking people on a journey with their manipulation of music and beats, so too do people talk of peaks and troughs of sound, of riding the music and of being taken to a higher plane by the person leading the proceedings through his or her choice of music. The DJ has risen to the role of fetishised, digital shaman and the underground dance floor as the home of a new form of worship, Techno*Shamania*m:

> A new generation of empowered youth is rising, who have experienced a blueprint for the next level of human interaction. In the right environment under the guide of the DJ Shaman the collective consciousness is elevated to a higher level: a level that is beyond culture, race, gender or class. A level where you let go your own ego, a level where you experience ultimate freedom (Betz 1995).

Traditionally shamans from tribal cultures deliberately alter their consciousness through the use of particular techniques (such as drums, dance, chant, spinning) in order to effect a metaphysical change in both body and mind, to reach a higher plane and journey to the world of the spirits. In a similar way DJs use recorded music and remix technology to control beats per minute (bpm) and thus effect physical and emotional changes in the crowd. These effects can be monitored formally (changes in

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[20] See St. John, Graham (ed.) (2004) *Rave Culture and Religion*, London, New York: Routledge for a full discussion

heart rate, quickening of dance style and so on) but more often than not these effects are monitored informally by the DJ who then makes choices regarding the next track or mix of tracks, thereby producing a constant feedback loop of interaction with the bodies on the dance floor. As Gore suggests, the DJ's aim is to create plateaux of intensity and to achieve an emotional, physical and social correlation between heartbeat and musical rhythm (Gore 1997: 61). Rhythmic manipulation and juxtaposition of musical textures is at the heart of *Shamania*tic techniques of ecstasy which aim to create terrains favourable to induction of trance (ibid.).

The allegiance and devotional intensity that surround certain clubs suggest there is some sense of ritual obligation emerging at these sites and that time spent at an all night club can be psychologically (as well as temporally) equivalent to a full day's work or a prolonged period of spiritual worship. In this sense it is possible to say that many clubbers do 'work at' their clubbing or at least take their play very seriously, problematising the old divisions between work and play as oppositional constructs. Richard and Kruger go further by suggesting the sweating body on the dance floor has symbolically replaced the exertions of the factory floor. Clubbers will put in an eight hour shift on the dance floor and men stripped to the waist pumping their arms as if they were working at an invisible machine on the assembly line is, as Richard and Kruger say, a particularly 'provocative form of expression because this kind of work does not produce a living but constitutes pure relentless pleasure' (1998: 163).

Whilst Turner states that the liminal is marked off from the liminoid because of its obligatory nature (1982: 42), he does also admit that there are some similarities between the phenomena (ibid. p.53) and the modelling in **Figure 2** attempts to take

that into account. Although the club space occupies a distinctly liminoid position within the postmodern world, it is possible to identify traits of liminality within its parameters and to suggest that these characteristics may be accessed (or, more problematically, consumed) by clubbers who seek ambiguity and ambivalence as part of their clubbing experience.

In the figure below (**Fig. 2**) I have modelled this as a hybrid configuration where the liminal and the liminoid are positioned along a continuum with participants sliding up and down the scale of experience. The club itself may signal which extreme of the continuum is prioritised as a way of preparing and rehearsing clubbers before the night ensues or, indeed, the clubber may determine his/her own position on the scale depending on how he/she identifies the purpose and function of their own attendance.

Fig.2: The liminoid-liminal continuum
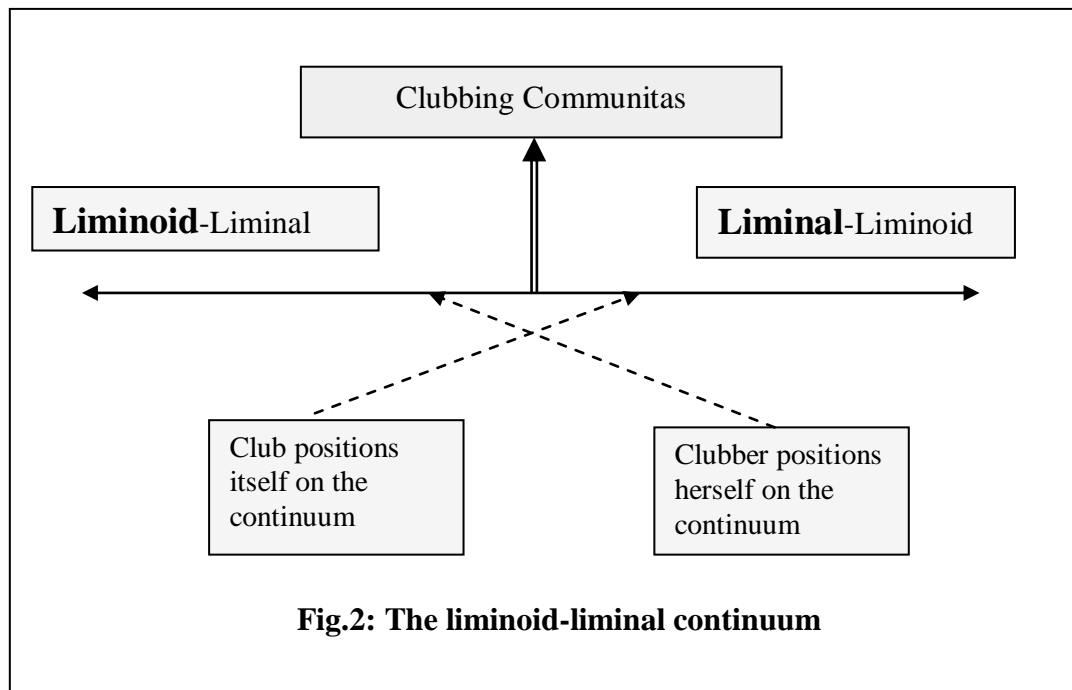
For example, a club night might promote itself quite clearly as a liminoid construct, identifying itself as part of the night time economy and as one of the many possible options on offer to the consumer (situated then on the left side of the figure).

However, the clubber might participate in that same club night not because her attendance represents her loyalty to a brand or product (although it might do that also) but because she believes that particular club will offer her greater access to the state of liminality she has prioritised as being key to her clubbing experience (situated on the right side of the figure). In addition, the model attempts to show that this hybridisation of the liminal and liminoid can result in what I have termed 'clubbing communitas'.

In Turner's view and put simply 'communitas' is a feeling of group solidarity, a feeling of connectivity that is generated during ritual but one that can occur also in 'the workshop, village, office, lecture-room, theatre, almost anywhere' (Turner 1982: 45) He asks:

> Is there any of us who has not known this moment when compatible people – friends, congeners – obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group which is felt (in the first person) as "essentially us" could sustain its intersubjective illumination? (ibid. p.48)

This 'flash of lucid mutual understanding' is one of the key components of the experience of what I call 'clubbing communitas' and occurs at the point on the model where the liminoid construct gives rise to the liminal experience. In clubbing terms this sensation is closest to what Turner calls 'spontaneous communitas', a state that offers a 'direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities' (ibid. p.47). It is a state that provides a means to understanding the impact clubbing can have on individuals and groups who then pursue it as a key feature of a successful night out. As Turner points out, however, 'the great difficulty is to keep this intuition alive – regular drugging won't do it, repeated sexual union won't do it, constant immersion in great literature won't do it, initiation seclusion must sooner or later come to an

end. We thus encounter the paradox that the *experience* of communitas becomes the *memory* of communitas' (ibid.). It is the nature of the club experience that once the peak moment of 'ecstasis', 'jouissance' or 'clubbing communitas' has been reached, it becomes a memory. In an effort to recreate the moment clubbers effectively go shopping for communitas by trying out different club events, different venues, different combinations of drugs in order to experience again the initial sense of unity that made such an impact. In another cycle of invention and incorporation, the liminal experience becomes a commodity on the market place of the leisure industry.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in this section is the complexity of the relationship between the liminal experience and the liminoid institution when applied to the club context and how this may deepen our understanding of the frames in operation as one enters the playful arena. As we move through this chapter, the focus turns now towards playful participation and how that manifests itself in terms of explicit expressions of performativity. In the next section I use the concept of the carnivalesque to draw out these dimensions and how they relate to oppositional practices and protest.

Playing with the Carnivalesque

Reading rave culture through the lens of the carnivalesque is not a new idea but, at the same time, cannot be ignored when investigating the relationship between party, play and the dynamics of space. Like the liminal paradigm, it can be tempting to overextend the analogy of rave as carnival and, by so doing, ignore the complexities and particularities of each phenomenon. However, it is useful to draw on the carnivalesque as a way of positioning club practices, particularly in connection to

Schechner's concept of 'direct theatre' (1992: 102), with the proviso that the contemporary context is kept firmly in mind.

Bakhtin is central to any discussion of carnival and the carnivalesque. For Bahktin, carnival can be described as 'a pageant without footlights' (1998: 250). It is predominantly an event where everyone is an active participant and no division exists between performers and spectators. In the Bahktinian sense carnival is not a pre-meditated activity but a lived experience where normal laws, restrictions and the usual prohibitions of life are suspended. Carnival is a literal and metaphorical place for working out new modes of relationships between individuals, these modes being worked out in half-real and half-play-acted form. Carnival 'permits…the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves' (ibid. p.251). Carnival does not dally with abstract thoughts about freedom and equality but is an opportunity for concrete action where sensuous ritual-pageant 'thoughts' are experienced and played out in life itself. Bakhtin points out that despite the lifting of restrictions that carnival permits, it is always licensed by a higher authority. Permission for ribaldry is granted a temporary licence and, as such, street actions of this nature rarely bring about lasting social change. Rather they bring temporary relief for the masses before the old order is restored (Schechner 1992: 88) and this view certainly pervades discourse surrounding the rave movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Concentrating on structure rather than ideology for one moment, it is apparent that many of the carnivalistic acts identified by Bahktin can be found in the playful arena of the underground party space. Disguise, parody, dualistic images, fire and carnival laughter can all be found within this space and can serve as indicators of how the

club space might be read as a place of playful inversion. Unlike the stage the carnival square is not physically bounded but belongs to the people and acts as a symbol of communal gathering and performative behaviour invading the everyday spaces of streets, taverns, roads and bathhouses. Unofficial gatherings are vortexed, whirling, multi-focussed events which celebrate the erotic and prioritise the body (Schechner 1992: 88). Here parallels with the underground party scene and its appropriation of space are evident. In particular, events like *Tribal Gathering* point to the communal collection of people through its nomenclature and branding, and events like *Berlin Love Parade* are examples of the invasion of everyday space. Bakhtin's sense of the carnivalesque suggests a potent, populist, critical inversion of official worlds and hierarchies that has often been cited in relation to the rave movement (Reynolds 1990, Chatterton and Hollands 2003, Nehring 2007). It has both a joyful, positive aspect to it as well as embodying a critique of social striations:

> On the positive side, carnival suggests the joyful affirmation of becoming. It is ecstatic collectivity, the superseding of the individuating principle in what Nietzsche called 'the glowing life of Dionysian revellers'…On the negative, critical side, the carnivalesque suggests a demystificatory instrument for everything in the social formation which renders such collectivity difficult of access: class hierarchy, political manipulation, sexual repression, dogmatism and paranoia. Carnival in this sense implies an attitude of creative disrespect, a radical opposition to the illegitimately powerful, to the morose and monological (Stamm 1982: 55).

Carnival is the populist utopian vision of the world as seen from below and embraces ritual spectacle in the form of fairs, feasts and processions, dancing, mummery, costumes, masks, parodies, travesties and excesses – all of which manifest at underground parties. Talking of the rave scene, one informant tells Simon Reynolds 'one of the things I found exhilarating…was the idea that there was this whole society of people who lived at night and slept during the day. This carnivalesque idea of turning the ordinary world completely on its head' (Reynolds 1999: 66). The

licence or permission to live temporarily upside down holds a certain allure which

Hodge and Kress suggest might be associated with our experience of time and space

and harks back to the psychological framing set up at point of entry to the club (or

rave) space in **Fig 1**:

> Night is a special time…They are times when social syntagms lose their force…The
> availability of oppositional practices is mapped on to social time and space,
> organized into a system of domains (Hodge and Kress 1988: 66-8).

Like holidays, nightlife is a moment where established order is undone (Rietveld

1993: 64). There is a relaxation of rules and the possibility of escape.

More often than not the possibility of escape is one which is time-bound and framed

within the space of the playful arena. For many, those glimpsed possibilities retreat

as soon as they reverse their journey and exit the club/carnival space, reaffirming the

safety valve theory of rave/carnival as a form of social control. As Sales says, 'there

were two reasons why the fizzy, dizzy carnival spirit did not necessarily undermine

authority. First of all, it was licensed or sanctioned by the authorities themselves.

They removed the stopper to stop the bottle being smashed altogether. The release of

emotions and grievances made them easier to police in the long term' (Sales 1983:

169). The same can be said of rave culture. Although rave was not sanctioned by

authorities, once licensing laws had been changed and the rave brought indoors, in

effect, the events were being permitted by local councils who agreed the licenses.

The question is often asked, what did rave achieve apart from allowing clubs to stay

open longer in order to extract more money from its punters in bar prices, entry

tickets, cloakroom fees and so on? Rietveld would suggest that no counter culture

was established through rave. There was no change as there was no clear view of

what ravers were opposed to (a perspective that chimes with the earlier work of the

CCCS):

> When one escapes instead of opposes, no alternative moral values are proposed at all. This lack of dialectic is what Baudrillard would call 'amoral', rather than immoral. Like an amorphous monster, the 'amoral' raver went 'mental', creating at times a sense of profound panic in the people who desired to make sense of it all (Rietveld 1993: 66, *repeated from p.69 of thesis*).

However, now that the media panic surrounding rave has subsided, the new

generation of clubbers has become more sophisticated in its utilisation of the carnival

mode. The range of events from which to choose is more extensive than ever and

there is significant bleed between events housed in clubs, at festivals, on the street, as

protest, as art event and as performance.

Whilst it is necessary to be sceptical about carnival's potential for revolutionary

change in that it is often part of a stable and cyclical ritual sanctioned by authorities

and ending in a return to the status quo, it is also important to point out that 'it may

often act as catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle' (Stallybrass and White

1986: 14). In the eighteenth century, violent social clashes often coincided with

carnival. This was often due to the calendrical coincidence of holidays and political

events where licentious behaviour, freedom from work and oppositional views

intersect. However, carnivals, fairs and festivals are often politicized when

authorities attempt to eliminate them. As Stallybrass and White say, 'the dialectic of

antagonism frequently turned rituals into resistance at the moment of intervention by

the higher powers' (ibid. p.16). To draw a parallel between the historical example

and the contemporary, raves may well have subsided of their own accord had the

police not put so much energy, time and money into eradicating them. Organising

raves was not necessarily a political act in itself but became politicized when

authorities tried to legislate against them. In this way the events became tied up with

discourses of power, control and civil liberties and with the potential then to make

comment on what Détienne calls 'society's symbolic values':

> To discover the complete horizon of a society's symbolic values it is also necessary
> to map out its transgressions, its deviants (Détienne 1979: ix).

The DiY culture of the underground and the rave scene can be understood as

attempting to create 'a new way of life based on play; in other words a *ludic*

revolution' (Black 1985). First stages of many political uprisings have often been

theatrical and carnivalesque (for example Paris 1968, Tiananmen Square 1989 as

discussed by Schechner 1993: pp. 52-63.) The DiY protest movement in Britain

tapped into this with its Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA) campaign. Whereas

official state festivals tend to be ordered and neatly organized into linear or

rectangular shapes (Schechner 1992: 88), the street party on the other hand is

rotating, hectic and messy and relies on a state of continued creative chaos designed

to confuse and distract those who attempt to control it. In November 1994 the final

clearance of Claremont Road in London by 1300 riot police and bailiffs was

conducted to the sound of rave music. As activist John Jordan recalls:

> This was theatre like you'd never seen it; theatre on a scale that would not fit into
> any opera house. It was a spectacle that cost the government over £2 million to
> enact; a spectacle in which we were in control, for which we had set the stage,
> provided the actors and invited the state to be in our play; to play our game (Jordan
> in McKay, 1998: 137-8).

The campaign developed into *Reclaim the Streets* and huge street parties were held

across London in an effort to take over major roads and 'transform them into

ephemeral festivals of resistance' (ibid. p.139). In essence the events here were

similar to processional performance described by McNamara where the spectator is

given latitude to deal with the event in his own way as it does not rely on dialogue which takes place on a fixed stage but is rather motion through space (McNamara 1974: 19). The spectator is still connected to the total event because s/he is physically immersed within it. The spectator can watch some parts of the event but cannot hope to capture them all and does not have to be involved at all times. The event becomes as much 'a festival alteration of space as it is a performance' (ibid.).

In May 1995 five hundred people danced on Camden High Street to the pedal-powered *Rinky Dink* sound system:

> Once again we were introducing play into politics, challenging official culture's claims to authority, stability, sobriety, immutability and immortality…The road became a stage for participatory ritual theatre; ritual because it is efficacious, it produces real effects by means of symbolic causes; participatory because the street party has no division between performer and audience (Jordan 1998: 141).

Play and performance were central to these events of resistance. There were stilt walkers, jugglers, puppets, climbing frames, sand pits, live music, choirs, banners, art works and sculptures. This multi-focal, multi-vocal event echoes Schechner's description of carnival and its connection with comic theatre:

> When people go into the streets en masse, they are celebrating life's fertility. They eat, drink, make theatre, make love, enjoy each others' company, put on masks and costumes, erect and wave banners, and construct effigies not merely to disguise or embellish their ordinary selves or to flaunt the outrageous but also to act out the multi-plicity (sic) each human life is (Schechner 1992: 88).

Hakim Bey calls for the renaissance of 'festal culture' based around 'spiritual hedonism and tribalism' (2003: 103). Simon Reynolds argues that rave culture fulfils Bey's vision for a 'spiritual project' where the old concept of shrines has been replaced by the concept of the 'peak experience', which functions on both the social as well as the individual scale (Reynolds 1999: 170). However, it is also true to say

that rave is often about 'the celebration of celebration...without pretext or context' (ibid. p.243). The attendant spirituality of the E experience makes it ripe for religiosity but the music and culture has often been criticised as lacking an objective. As Reynolds points out, it is flow without goal, expression without meaning and as such corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's model of the desiring machine. 'Young people have turned to rave culture for the meaning and sense of belonging they once derived from religion' (ibid. p.288) and yet, true to the post-modern condition, they realize the meaning is that there is no meaning. To revel in no meaning, to make space for space's sake, to engage in pursuit of bodily pleasure still has the ability to trouble the structures and strictures of everyday society. The very act of playing, particularly en masse and particularly in a vortexed, whirling manner as in evidence during carnival, has the ability to unsettle, throw off balance, topple social conventions we take for granted and, as such, is an important consideration for anyone engaged in developing performance that is then carried out within these settings, both in terms of the physical shape it may take and the contribution it may make to the context in which it occurs.

The next section attempts to move from a consideration of the club as a space that facilitates playful behaviour toward a framing of the club as a particular type of performative environment. It begins with a closer look at the relationship between the DJ and the crowd and uses this as a template for understanding shifting attitudes to live performance and authorship.

The club as performative environment

Between the 1950s and the 1980s the concept of 'liveness' dominated notions of musical authenticity. This was located in the tangible performance carried out by live musicians in front of a co-located, co-present audience. With more and more music from the 1990s onwards being created by synthesisers, samplers and PCs, sounds were soon being created by other means and transmitted in other ways. Advocates of the rock tradition where bands are made up of a number of people playing distinct instruments often see the DJ with his head down and earphones on as anathema to the 'true' spirit of live/authentic musical experience. In visual terms, the DJ appears to be merely a servant of (or slave to) his machine, pressing buttons that make sounds emerge that have not been generated by him, created by him nor played by him on an instrument that can be picked up and strummed or plucked in the traditional way. However, according to Thornton, what authenticates contemporary dance culture is the 'buzz' or energy resulting from the interaction between the records, the DJ and the crowd. Whether the DJ is static or animated behind the decks or PC is, in fact, not of primary importance. It is the tripartite feedback loop which is put into play which is of significance and gives insight into why dance crowds can feel so involved in the moment themselves rather than being passive consumers of a musical product.

In this climate, then, an innate desire for the performative is emerging in ways that are not located with the 'authentic/live' musician/performer who, traditionally, occupies an elevated position on the stage. Rather, the live element is situated within the crowd. The sense of 'liveness' is displaced from the stage to the dance floor. The performance is channelled onto the dance floor with the gaze being turned away from

the source of the music and back onto the spectator. As Thornton states, 'in the absence of visually commanding performers, the gaze of the audience has turned back on itself. Watching and being seen are the key pleasures of discotheques' (Thornton 1995: 65). Nonetheless, the DJ is still seen as orchestrating the moment and is venerated as one who facilitates the expression of others. The DJ may lack absolute control over the proceedings but is 'still responsible for the creation of a musical space which is formed according to the expectations of the crowd' (Hadley 1993: 64 cited by Thornton 1995: 60). The DJ is now seen as a turntable/PC musician who creates new music in the process of mixing. His/her craft *is* the process. Dance crowds are aware of this and respond in appreciation to the spontaneity, surprise and creativity of the DJ in the moment (which in turn resonates with playful exchange and co-improvisation). The DJ's art form is process-driven; audience response is a key component to the success of the performance. It is essentially a reciprocal art form. Many DJs say they cannot produce a good set at home or in the studio but can only work/play effectively when DJ, crowd, technology and music are in synergy. It is this tripartite feedback loop which sets the tone for many of the other performances that may occur in a club space. In other words there is a process of exchange between the DJ (or performer), the crowd (or participating audience) and the technology (or other mediating structure such as a performed piece of work). Each element feeds off, responds to and nourishes the other, the play between them being generative, synergistic and collaborative in nature.

Perhaps the most visible clue to identifying how clubs are understood as performative environments by those who inhabit them is the way they are organised scenographically. Clubs are decorated to provide a theatrical backdrop for the main

attraction – the clubbers themselves. Elaborate and carefully dressed interiors

compensate for the loss of spectacle provided by performing musicians. Lighting and

the use of strobes, lasers and smoke help create the crowd as spectacle. Computer-

generated images used by VJs act as visual accompaniment to the music. Film,

slides and projections provide figurative entertainment that has been removed from

the stage performance of musicians (Thornton 1995: 57). All these design

technologies help create a total, immersive environment for the participants where

'dream and reality are interchangeable and indistinguishable' (Melly 1970: 9). The

interconnectedness of fiction and reality has clear parallels with the stage world but,

unlike the stage, the club is an environment that is fully participatory. Within this

space divisions between performer and audience are not simply challenged, they are

often dissolved completely or, as Rushkoff puts it, 'no performers, no audience, no

leaders, no egos' (1994: 159-160):

> Within the dark, loud and crowded spaces of events participants themselves become
> both audience and performer simultaneously, and give themselves over to an
> engagement with usually anonymous others (Pini 1997: 126).

In this setting traditional divisions between performer and audience are blurred and

hierarchies broken making it a particularly appropriate location for experimentations

with interactive and participatory performance:

> Sociologists see the current dance mania as part of modern man's revolt against
> being a perpetual spectator. Over the years, they say, the majority of us have done
> less and less participating and more and more watching…Unlike the customers of
> nightclubs or cabarets who pay their money and then sit back to be entertained, the
> customers at discotheques are paying their money to entertain themselves. It's the
> people who are the real show at discos – and they haven't come to find fault.
> They've come to play (Hanson 1978: 8-9).

The second scenographic element worth noting is that of costume. In the playful

arena roles and functions are subject to change and are inherently slippery and this

malleability is often realised through the use of decoration, ornamentation and costuming. Anthony Howell describes the constituent parts of emblematic clothing as being travesty (pretending to be what one is not), camouflage (hiding inside what is already there) and intimidation (taking a part of something larger than yourself). Wearing garments engages with issues of how one projects oneself and how one protects oneself. As he says, 'clothing is the playing-field of the gaze' (Howell 1999:17). The performance self projects an appearance. It projects a gaze and is also gazed upon. The context of the apparel is also subject to manipulation and interpretation. The two basic modes of dress, namely meaning and function, can be altered and made ambiguous if the environment is altered. Howell gives the example of wearing an asbestos suit in a boudoir but we might look at how clubbers dress as fairies or angels, priests or debutantes. The use of travesty in clothing can be seen as mimicry (particularly of the opposite sex) but can also be read as a sign of reversal, a chance to become what one is not, a licence to become 'other' even for a short time.

Drawing attention to oneself has always been part of the club world. Some argue that clubbing is an overt form of display and an opportunity for exhibitionists to show off in a number of outrageous ways that would not be permitted in other walks of life. This may be true and certain clubs do offer particular kinds of extroversions that clubbers may or may not subscribe to. The feeling of otherness or difference promoted by play often expresses itself in 'dressing up' to provide a disguise for the ordinary self. As Izzo says, 'like the actor, the disguised player plays a different part; he *is* another being' (Izzo 1997: 13). Clubbers invest in this notion and feel the club gives them license to do so. They either dress up or down to go out and even go as far as adopting an alter ego for the night which manifests itself as a mobile

performance and finds its expression predominantly in clothing. This costuming, however, is not only about individual self-expression but is articulated as 'gift' (a notion which will be returned to in Chapter Five). The clubber perceives him/herself as part of a circulating 'system' where their effort to attend an event in character contributes to the overall success of the night for others.[21]

As Buckland states, dressing and looking are vital play activities and expressive performance tools for self-fashioning within the club. Dance clubs are spaces to be fabulous (Buckland 2002). Participants fashion themselves and realize imaginative possibilities through dress, bearing, social interaction and dance. The use of costuming is, of course, inherently theatrical and this dimension was exploited by performance artist Leigh Bowery who began costuming himself for London clubs such as *White Trash*, *Asylum* and *Pink Panther*. Bowery 'committed himself to the total theatricalisation of the self, using the nightclub as the stage' (Violette 1998: 15). By 1985 he had become the public face of Tony Gordon's club *Taboo* where 'his costume was his text' (ibid. p.16). Using costume to shock, disturb, embarrass and liberate Bowery describes his role as 'a sort of local cabaret act…the original vaudeville drunkard…If people see me behaving in such an outrageous manner, they won't feel inhibited themselves' (Interview with *LAM Magazine*, Sept 1985 cited in Violette 1998: 17). In an interview with Cerith Wyn Evans, Nicola Bowery says of Bowery, 'he treated every night club experience as a performance' (ibid. p.154).

Put simply, in theatrical terms costume aims to produce a visual representation of character and serves to attract audience attention. Both these aims apply to a greater

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[21] 'I feel that putting on a show every so often spreads the love back into the system'. [Interview with MG 09/12/03 repeated on p.214]

or lesser extent to the clubber who prepares him/herself over a period of hours before leaving the home and entering the club space. The rituals surrounding the preparation of going out, getting dressed, meeting friends, taking drugs, and so on, can be likened to performers preparing (physically and psychologically) to enter the stage. In preparing the body the clubber enters 'club time' (Buckland 2002, Malbon 1999), a temporal space with no clocks where the passing of time is measured by and through the body. Time invested in preparing the body gives us clues as to the clubber's intended point of entry to the playful arena and how they might manipulate the temporal frame in order to access the play mood more fully.

Layering the Play Experience

Whilst play is invoked in this chapter as a frame through which to view certain activities associated with club culture, what I have been more inclined to attempt here is a conceptual layering of the play experience. To this end I have suggested how our cultural attitudes to play have developed, how play can be deployed to fulfil functionalist imperatives, and how it can be mobilised for transgressive radicalism and provide a route towards creativity that can be both individually or collectively expressed. The intention of this chapter has been to position the club space as a site of play and to highlight some of the dichotomies of that positioning. The dualities inherent in theorising about play are mirrored in the dualities or indeed contradictions surrounding the clubbing experience. This chapter has not attempted to resolve those tensions but rather to bring into focus the multi-perspectival approach required when considering club culture and its intimate relationship with performance. The 'conceptual layers' I have suggested point towards a model for

understanding the club space as a potential seedbed where new models, symbols and paradigms may emerge (Turner 1982: 28).

To continue the geological analogy, in this model the club space can be configured also as a horizontal landscape. If one were to drill down, layers of stratification could be identified indicating different moments in time where musical, technological or social developments have changed the nature of the current scene and its horizon – an 'historical layering' as it were. Certain moments of socio-cultural significance (such as the increased use of Ecstasy in the UK, the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act, increased availability of DJ equipment as discussed in Chapter One) act as moments in which seeds are planted, roots develop and new forms grow. Furthermore the 'conceptual layering' and the 'historical layering' can be seen to work in tandem, one informing the other. The play layers I suggest allow for what Van Veen calls psychotopological cracks to appear (2002). If we understand these layers as permeable, cracks or fissures can appear where certain paradigms or forms that have their roots in history or previous moments of time, can push up through to the surface. For example, the liminal phase of tribal societies has re-emerged as a key concern in the study of performativity. In clubbing terms, the desire to reach the "in-betweeness" of liminality manifests itself in trance music, drug intake and an evocation of New Age sensibilities as seen in club decoration, fashion and attitude associated with the underground scene in particular.

To summarise, various discourses surrounding play have been explored within this chapter with a particular focus on the relationship between playful behaviour and the spaces in which it occurs. The spatial characteristics of the club (both physical and

psychical) and how those spatial features and dimensions facilitate entry into the playful attitude have been of special concern. The aim of this chapter has been to offer a topography of play and to consider how theories of play can be brought to bear on clubbing as a social activity. This chapter has used play as a lens through which to view clubbing practices as an expression of collective experience. The trajectory of further chapters in this thesis is to consider the ways in which that playful expression is shaped into modes of performance and the extent to which that performance is structured, signalled and codified.

Chapter Three: Reading the Club Space as a Site of Performance

'The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable' (Carl Jung, 1921)[22]

Introduction

Having established how the club space can be read through the frameworks of play, this chapter now looks closely at the club as a site of performance, a place and space where performance flourishes. It begins to determine what the special characteristics of this space might be and investigates how thinking through performance may illuminate our understanding of the significance clubbing as social practice may have. That modes of informal and formal performance proliferate within the club environment is evident. As well as encouraging playfully performative behaviour in its attendees, a multitude of clubs employ professional or semi-professional performers of various types to decorate, embellish and add value to their parties. Whilst the motivation for this in the commercial club sector is often to provide entertainment which will then result in increased ticket sales, what is of concern here is how the club environment lends itself to performance in such a way. What is its topography and its cultural positioning that allows interdisciplinary performance, which is often highly experimental in form and content, to be embraced by club-goers and promoters alike? How might the club space be read as a site of performance and what is the nature of the performances that emerge in this context? How might the environment itself be read and understood using the lens of performance? How might clubbers themselves be implicated in this?

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[22] Exact source unknown

This chapter begins by exploring three particular contexts (or 'layers', as suggested by the model that concludes the previous chapter) that have influenced the way club performance manifests in the underground scene today. The first of these layers is the flamboyant Ibizan model that emerged in the mid to late 1980s. The second context is the avant-garde club world that developed in the United States in the early to mid 1980s. The third context is the burgeoning UK festival scene of recent times. Alongside these points in dance club history, I introduce a fourth context, namely modes of popular theatre. Here I look at how club performance has been influenced by popular theatrical forms with particular reference to the scenography of these practices, the organisation of popular entertainment and how it is positioned culturally.

The chapter then introduces Stallybrass and White's domains of cultural categorisation as a means of investigating how certain cultural practices may be read as transgressive action (1986) and uses these categories as a way or organising my own reading of underground club culture. The four symbolic domains of psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order (ibid. p.3) are recurring themes that run through the chapter. I begin by looking in detail at clubbing as spatial practice with a particular focus on the phenomenological experience of space. I then move on to explore the concept of the performing body and address questions surrounding liveness. The next consideration is the visual and sonic environment of the club and how the performing body implicates itself into that landscape. The chapter finishes with an exploration of the club as a symbolic site of ritualisation.

The intention of the chapter is twofold. First, it moves the thesis from a broad consideration of the club as a space of play towards an understanding of it as a site of performance. Second, it considers how performance knowledge can be brought to bear on how we read the club space and thus uncover the potential significance of the performative practices it houses.

Club Performance and its Role in the Total Experience

This section focuses upon the emergence of what I class as the 'formal' or 'licensed' performances that may occur within a club space and offers three contextual starting points for this practice. Later in the chapter, the focus turns towards addressing the mediation between formal performance and performance that may emerge spontaneously or 'informally' through clubbers' engagement with the club space and the particular terrain it provides.

With the rise of dance culture over the past twenty years clubs have become places that house a range of formal performances that are seldom advertised or marketed as separate entities.[23] Despite this lack of publicity these performances are witnessed by thousands of people on a regular basis, many of whom would be identified as non-traditional attendees of arts events, despite some attempts to convert clubbers into 'new audiences' for contemporary work.[24] In many instances these performances have become a key feature of the clubbing experience and promoters are keen to

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[23] Many clubs may mention performance companies on their flyers but this is usually in small print towards the bottom of the mail shot. This information is usually to be found alongside details of stalls, visual decoration, special effects such as lasers and so on and is certainly billed as peripheral to the main DJ listings.

[24] An action research project entitled Club Art 2000 was carried out in Birmingham by Fierce Earth in an attempt to measure attendance at contemporary arts events against attendance at dance clubs. High quality contemporary arts taster events were placed in clubs across the West Midlands and clubbers then offered free tickets to other arts events in more traditional spaces. Whilst results were inconclusive as to whether exposure to art practice in clubs translated into arts attendance elsewhere, the report did conclude that clubbers' attitude 'toward contemporary work is clearly positive and they are willing to be challenged' (Club Art 2000 Research, Report July 2001: 40).

incorporate this element more fully into the night's programming. (This motivation is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five with reference to my practice-based research.) It would appear that performance practice has found a site, an audience and a context that is largely invisible to the established art/theatre world. As demonstrated during my field work observations, clubbers witness, participate in, and often relish the opportunity to engage with a range of performance modes, some of which can be highly experimental, without being troubled by any connotations of elitism and exclusion that may surround established arts organisations and events. Whilst many would not translate this experience into attendance at experimental art events beyond the club, it does offer a vehicle through which we may observe and consider how individuals interact with performance practice in general. The club space offers performance practitioners an experimental space in which to develop and create work that is often peripheral to the main event. This work is, by its very nature, context-specific and responsive to its environment. It often has audience participation or interaction at its core and is frequently spectacular and physical in nature. A viral connection between performance happening in the club/festival space and the world of contemporary performance can be traced and is discussed later in this chapter.

The interesting point about club performance is that it is accepted by clubbers as merely one part of the total experience. It is one facet of the night amongst many and thus the stakes of entry are fairly low for the viewer/clubber. As it is not the primary reason for attending an event the work is often treated in much the same way as street theatre or other performance that is happened upon 'accidentally'.[25] It can be taken on its own merit, given attention for a short or long period of time, be

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[25] Further research into this type of 'accidental' performance is now being conducted by A.O'Grady and R.Kill as part of the AHRC Beyond Text Networks and Workshop scheme. The research is entitled '*Festival Performance as a State of Encounter*' and can be viewed at www.beyondtext.ac.uk

revisited or be ignored, as observed many times during my fieldwork.[26] These performances are usually deployed as an embellishment or as an expression of exaggeration. They operate as a signal of the play mode that is then (hopefully) reflected in the behaviour of the crowd, rather than as a theatrical product that stands alone to be judged on its artistic merit or value for money. All the underground party organisers I interviewed talked about embracing performance as a way of celebrating the ethos of their particular nights, creating a more fun and interactive environment for their participants, and establishing an exchange or transaction that was not based solely on money.[27]

> We've never used the word 'nightclub' in any of our ventures. We wanted an open performance space to allow people access to perform, to put on events and to participate in events…There's a unity involved in what we are doing.' (Interview with CS 22/03/04)

In terms of structure, whether any one performance is intended as participatory or not, the 'audience' or clubbing crowd is always implicated in the delivery. With little spatial/physical separation between performer and audience, not only are both roles acknowledged but dialogue between parties is recognised as the primary function of each piece. Thus, performer and audience are engaged in what McAuley terms 'energy exchange' where 'due to the live presence of both spectators and performers, the energy circulates from performer to spectator and back again, from spectator to performer and back again' (2000: 246). The energy exchange within the club context is perhaps an enhanced instance of this model as performer/spectator roles are in a constant state of flux. Here there is a cyclical process of action, reaction and co-creation. Exchanges tend to be fluid, organic and constantly

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[26] One example of this is when I observed a highly provocative installation at Speedqueen, Leeds, UK (2007) entitled 'My name is Bill and I'm a Headcase' and performed by R Kill. A solitary performer sat motionless in a stair well. The performer was dressed in a huge, life-like horse's head, was dressed in overalls and clutched a child's tape recorder to their ear. Coming upon the installation 'accidentally', many clubbers stopped in their tracks for a moment as if they were seeing things and carried on their way. Others laughed and made comment. Many stopped and tried to engage the performer in conversation. One clubber sat next to the performer for a long time and totally ignored their presence despite the fact a crowd had gathered to watch a drag entertainer dancing provocatively with the horse character not two feet from where he was sitting. The refusal of the clubber to acknowledge the presence of the performance developing in front of him became as fascinating to watch as the performance itself. This instance of club performance demonstrated the full range of attention given by clubbers – namely full engagement to complete avoidance.

[27] This was a recurring theme in interviews conducted with seven different underground club organisers between 2004 and 2006.

renegotiated due to the inherent plasticity of space and time and purpose that characterises the social milieu of the club.

The chapter now turns towards mapping three particular club contexts that have provided a genealogy for the emergence of club performance in the underground scene.

Three Routes towards the Emerging Landscape of Club Performance

1. Ibiza

The first contextual route to mention for this type of performance practice emanates from the dance scene in Ibiza in the 1980s. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Ibizan model changed the face of British clubbing dramatically as the notion of 'the nightclub' was reconfigured for a new type of audience. Here clubs developed into sophisticated playgrounds, with highly-decorated rooms arranged over a number of levels. They allowed for optimum crowd gazing, and often employed young people staying on the island for the summer season to dress up, parade or dance in the club. With constant redecoration, investment and innovation, these clubs became places to see and be seen and developed into flamboyant and extravagant stage sets into which clubbers placed themselves alongside licensed performers. Clubs installed fountains, lasers, swimming pools and foam guns in an effort to enhance the physical and sensory experience of the club night. Whilst these devices can be regarded as mere commercial gimmicks designed to draw more people into the night-time economy, what is evident is that people responded positively to this sense of playfulness and demanded its transfer to the United Kingdom once the holiday experience was over. In addition to the architectural 'toys' mentioned above, spectacular modes of performance deployed by clubs at this time seemed to fulfil a desire or need for play that had hitherto been absent from UK nightclubbing and, as such, remain an enduring feature of many club nights in Ibiza and beyond.

Manumission is perhaps the best known Ibizan club night to have established a tradition of incorporating cabaret and burlesque performance into its nights. Manumssion employs a 'show director' to oversee the spectacle which can include anything from stilt walkers to trapeze artists,

strippers, clowns as well as loosely scripted, highly visual narratives. In an interview with one of

Manumission's show directors, Matt Costain, I asked how important the performance aspect was for

the club's organisers, Mike and Claire McKay:

> MC: I think Mike and Claire's natural instinct is just to give, give out for the party. "Come on, you bring the bit you've got and when you get here you'll find more than you could have hoped for. We've got surprises for you that will just keep you going wow!" And they just want that and then as they have done it more and more, they've gone, "OK, it is the performance that's our key into that." (Interview with MC, 14/01/04)

The notion that Manumission's promoters 'give out for the party' is one that has established itself as

part of the club's mythology and brand. Manumission is well known for its use of elaborate and

spectacular performance and, this element is framed as 'the surprise' of which Costain talks or the

demonstration of that 'giving'. That performance is given as a 'gift' is central to the Manumission

ethos and yet not without its complications when considered in association with debates surrounding

gift theory (Mauss 1954, Derrida 1992). Mike and Claire began Manumission in Manchester in

January 1994 and translated the idea to Ibiza in the summer of that same year. Their motivation for

developing this enterprise has its roots in a utopian ideology, the word 'manumission' meaning release

from slavery. They began with the belief that within the space of the party 'you are free to do

whatever it is you want to do' (1999). That Manumission has developed into a huge financial concern

and is embedded firmly in the field of commercial competition on the island, means that high ticket

prices and strict door policies obfuscate any latent notions of freedom and liberty. The 'gift of

performance' is not given here voluntarily and unconditionally but operates as part of an economic

exchange between 'super club' and clubber. This in itself does not mean performative exchange and

interaction does not occur in this context. It means simply that the ethos of gift-giving and generosity

needs to be read as part of the capitalist enterprise rather than as 'an ethical alternative to self-interest'

(Nicholson 2005: 162).

In the clubbing market place of Ibiza it is not uncommon for various clubs to utilise performance for the purposes of advertising their product.[28] Costumed processions run regularly through the streets of the main town. Used as a marketing tool, all are flamboyant, extravagant events and serve to hint at the fantasies contained within the club itself. As one informant tells Matthew Collin:

> And the clientele! Transvestite floorshows, flash young blades from Barcelona with sculptured torsos and immaculate hairstyles, 50 something millionaires prancing in their suits, pop stars sipping champagne, flamboyant gays, people of all ages and nationalities. There would be theme parties where everyone would dress in black…Amnesia, Pacha and Ku were fantasy playgrounds, temples to Dionysus designed to stimulate the senses and accommodate the expression of the wildest desires (Collin 1997: 49).

Although the Ibizan model might be considered anathema to the underground, its utilisation of performance cannot be ignored. Deployed as marketing tools and branding strategies, modes of performance proliferate on Ibiza and lend the island an air of spectacle and festival that, in turn, contributes to the expanding tourist trade that focuses on the clubbing centre of San Antonio. While the scene in Ibiza may have developed into unbridled commercialism it has its roots in a different philosophy, that of the hippy culture of the 1960s. Performance may be put to new uses now but traces of the hippy influence continue to circulate and infuse the contemporary scene.

2. New York

In addition to the showy performances of a hedonistic holiday island, the second route that has shaped club performance stems from the scene in the United States in the early to mid 80s. This particular context is discussed at length in Chapter One (pp. 40-41) with particular reference to the new forms of music emerging from Chicago and Detroit at this time. However, in terms of performance, New York clubs were particularly influential. Here, the idea of the nightclub as art installation was pioneered. Clubbing was conceived as participatory performance with hired artists, sculptors and performers providing lavish, visual environments for clubbers to enjoy. The combination of sophisticated urban

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[28] With the explosion of club tourism, clubs in Ibiza rely heavily on their branding and on brand loyalty to compete financially with each other. Whilst this is antithetical to the ideology of the underground scene, the deployment of performance as an indication of brand is of significance.

club scene and avant-garde art practice transferred to other major capitals, including London, and still exists today for certain promoters who conceive their nights as a hybridised version of club and art practice. Performance in this context takes on a rather more experimental, self-conscious attitude than the Ibizan model where fun, frivolity and holiday excess are the driving factors. In 1980s New York figures such as Leigh Bowery and other 'Club Kids' used the nightclub as a stage for 'the total theatricalisation of the self' (Violette 1998: 15). Their contribution to this scene has been well documented by photographic journalists and documenters of the time. Bowery developed what has been called the 'theatre of embarrassment' and the 'body-in-pain aesthetic' (ibid. p22). The latter of these two modes now exists as a well-recognised Live Art practice and is explored by artists such as Franko B and Ron Athey, both of whom have used clubs as contexts in which to site their own works of performance.[29] Again, a bleed between the club world and that of advances in contemporary performance is evident.

3. UK Festivals

By the early 1990s a sense of the theatrical had become an integral part of the club event in Britain. Some clubs began to host themed nights where clubbers were invited to participate in the visual spectacle by coming in fancy dress. Clubs employed professional companies to dress up, dance and interact with the crowd in character, in turn attempting to encourage an atmosphere of fun, licentiousness and playful shifting of role within this arena. The third route for this type of performance work can be traced to the explosion of contemporary music festivals in the UK[30] where circus, cabaret, carnival, fair, rock concert, rave and New Age sensibilities coincide. At *Glastonbury* 2008 eleven stages were dedicated to theatre and circus alone, with over 1,200 shows taking place over the course of a weekend. In addition to this are the many performances aimed at children, trash installations and numerous walkabout performances that occur across the festival site. Whilst performance practice at festivals is not new, it is possible to see a process of mutual influence between the festival environment and the club space. Clubs such as *Synergy* in London advertise themselves as

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[29] Franko B has performed at both *Fist* and *Torture Garden* and, more recently, Ron Athey performed at the Fierce Festival closing party 2007 which was located in a lap dancing club in central Birmingham.

[30] Over 600 UK festivals are listed on www.efestivals.co.uk for 2008

having an 'indoor festival vibe' and more and more festivals are dedicating themselves solely to dance music (e.g. *Glade Festival*) rather than programming live bands. As participation in these events grows each year, more people are exposed to the integration of music, performance and party. Undoubtedly the seams between these three categories are becoming less well defined, and the confluence this affords offers a particular appeal in terms of engaging with art practice as a constituent part of a greater whole.

Club Performance and the Aesthetic of Popular Theatre

Before turning attention to the particularities of the club space as performance site, it is worth identifying another contextual route to club performance which is distinctly theatrical in its heritage, namely that of popular forms of theatre such as pageants, circus arts and side shows that date back to Medieval times and beyond. As Peter Brook suggests of contemporary practice, 'every attempt to revitalise the theatre has gone back to the popular source' (Brook, 1990: 79) with practitioners like Vsevolod Meyerhold (Leach 1989: 130), Ariane Mnouchkine (Williams 1999: 45-46) and Dario Fo (Farrell and Scuderi 2000: 89) bringing popular forms such as circus arts back to the theatrical stage. Much club performance borrows directly from this resurgence and there is significant resonance between companies such as Archaos, Cirque du Soleil, De La Guarda and the world of the club. Work developed by these companies often deploys the club aesthetic in its scenography, uses hard dance music as its score and, in the case of *Villa Villa* by De La Guarda (Roundhouse, London, 1997), even replicates the rave with a section of the show set aside for the audience to dance. Similarly, many club spaces borrow from these developments in the performance world and use circus acts, aerialists and live drummers as a way of theatricalising and energising the space. The two-way flow between these environments is very much in evidence. As both club culture and (what I would call)

'theatre of spectacle' change at such a rapid rate, a dynamic feedback model is produced as audiences/clubbers/artists demand one environment keeps up with another.

The scenography of popular entertainment is a useful frame of reference here. McNamara divides traditional popular scenography into broad categories understood through their use of space and design (among which he includes street booths and mobile entertainers, burlesque and circus, spectacle, processional performance - all of which are forms found regularly in club performance). Despite some obvious differences, when McNamara talks of the circus space we could just as well envisage the club space that offers 'formal performance' as part of its programme:

> …the circus *[or club space]* makes no attempt to create an environment for the performers separate from that of the audience. Furthermore, the events that take place in the circus *[club]* arena exist in the present time and place in which they are being presented. The arena is constantly transformed by lights, costumes and scenic displays. But it always remains a practical working space…the function of which is neither concealed nor integrated into some overall design scheme'(McNamara 1974: 15-16, my interpolations in italics).

Whilst we might envisage the circus ring as an informal but, nonetheless, tightly constructed boundary, the performing 'ring' of the club space is much more permeable and constructed along conceptual rather than physical lines. Spectators/participants are not arranged in a static, circular manner nor organised in a way that prioritises the centre. As a result, much club performance is mobile (or 'walkabout') and weaves in and around the dance floor in a similar way to processional forms of popular theatre that manifest as 'motion through space' (ibid. p.19) and which give the spectator considerable latitude to deal with the event in his/her own way. As already mentioned clubbers can choose to engage with the performance, observe it from a distance, or ignore it totally. This type of

performance allows for different entry points for the audience and so encapsulates the ideology of choice for those in the spectator role. No one is coerced into watching or giving attention to the whole performance. Being aware of its presence is enough to connect the spectator to the total event 'which is as much a festival alteration of space as it is a performance' (ibid.).

The two types of entertainment environments defined by MacNamara also find direct parallels in club culture and offer us another insight into potential readings of the club as a site of performance. Popular entertainment can be said to fall into two broad types. The first redefine an existing area for a short time (for example, a street or square transformed for the duration of the fair or festival or, in this case, the abandoned warehouse decorated for the purposes of a club night); the second occupy spaces solely devoted to that entertainment (for example a hall of mirrors, a fun house or a purpose-built club). The two environments suggest implicit differences in how the space is to be utilised and enjoyed by its audience/attendees. One is temporary, transient and transformatory (in that it appropriates one space for the service of another kind); the other is permanent, fixed and a visible manifestation of the leisure economy. Historically, underground rave culture would sit within the first category, preferring to find temporary spaces for the purposes of the party. Since the change in legislation and the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act, the underground has been forced to move inside purpose-built club spaces and now more commonly sits within the second category. Undoubtedly this shift has changed the underground aesthetic somewhat. However, performance is often brought into these spaces as a way of rekindling the sense of mobility, carnival and transgression that has since been lost.

In terms of form popular theatre is predominantly accessible and visual. It is often physical, portable, orally transmitted, readily understood. It does not pander to the wealthy and is usually cheap or free. As Brook says, 'by nature the popular theatre is anti-authoritarian, anti-traditional, anti-pomp, anti-pretence' (Brook 1990; 68). In this tradition, 'subtlety and conventional good taste are usually secondary to action, fantasy, and physicality. The script of a popular theatre piece is often little more than a scenario or framework for improvisation, comic business, and spectacular effects' (McNamara, cited by Schechter 2003: 4). It tends to depart from 'legitimate' or 'serious' types of theatre. It is often marginalised by authorities and is thus prone to being ignored or dismissed as unworthy of study or serious attention. In exactly the same way much club performance relies on visual or spectacular effects and has little 'serious' content beyond the immediate. Nonetheless, performance of this nature should not be dismissed as insignificant or without meaning. Its ability to engage with, speak to, play with and creatively invigorate its audience is its very purpose and meaning. Furthermore, its marginal position (popular forms rarely depend on critics or favourable press to survive and, as such, are not subject to the same commercial pressures or restrictions) affords it a certain amount of freedom that can be drawn upon when attempting new forms or subverting old ones.

Whatever precise form it takes, popular theatre is a theatre of the people (Schechter 2003). Popular theatre remains associated with choice, democracy, the working class and the potential to be politically progressive. Popular entertainers have, in the main, received little subsidy from the state and, as Arnold Hauser puts it, do 'not have to take instruction from above […] [they work] out artistic principles simply and solely

from [their] own immediate experiences with audiences' (Hauser 1951: 86). This

ethic runs parallel to the notion that the underground club belongs to the clubber, a

view articulated by a number of organisers I interviewed:

> We've always said it's the people's party and we've always instilled in everybody, the party people, that it's their party and they can get involved if they want. We mean it and it's what has happened. (Interview with PB, 14/10/04)

> People are feeding into it in all sorts of different ways…It's not *my* club: it's *our* club. (Interview with LA, 14/10/04)

Both viewpoints here articulate the conception of the club as an entity that is jointly owned and

communally engaged with. The terms 'being involved' and 'feeding into' provide a sense that the club

event is openly accessible and welcomes participation on a number of levels. This ethos is normally

communicated to clubbers through website material, flyers and posters and can range from being an

abstract exhortation to be part of the event from mere attendance through to practical involvement in

helping with set-up, de-rigging, DJing, VJing and other associated activities.

To conclude this section, the three club contexts as identified earlier (namely Ibiza, New York and UK

festivals) and the historical context of popular theatre offer a particular route map to the type of

performance work occurring in clubs today. Whilst the map, or versions of it, may be of interest in its

own right, what is of concern in this chapter is how a sense of playful performance has become

embedded in the underground scene in particular and has thus established the club space as a potential

site for locating and developing a range of performance practices that prioritise audience-performer

interactions.

Although the next chapter deals explicitly with the *types* of performance that occur in these spaces, it

is not only the existence of performance itself that is of significance here. Rather, the permeable

performances that are enabled in the club space offer a way of 'trying out possibilities' (for both

performers and participant-clubbers). This process is akin to systems of rehearsal, that may, in turn,

lead to a type of knowing or competence that is accessible only through the performative mode. My

argument here, and the focus of *this* chapter, is that this habitudinal engagement with performance in

social-communal spaces offers clubbers a different orientation towards reality and personal

subjectivities. The club space as a performative environment supports and promotes experimentation and offers individuals a system of rehearsal or improvisation that allows them to play with role and identity in the presence of others. In other words, performance allows for the possibility of becoming and being someone and somewhere else, a partial and temporary transformation that nonetheless signals that alternatives are possible.

The Four Domains of Cultural Categorisation

If we are to read clubbing in this way, namely as a potentially transformative social activity, the work of Stallybrass and White offers a useful framework through which we might read certain cultural practices as transgressive action (1986). They identify four symbolic domains that make up the mechanism by which we order and make sense of cultural categories in the West - the human body, psychic forms, geographical space and social formation - and suggest that these categories are never entirely separable. Each category is constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low oppositions, each of which are viewed differently according to whether they are perceived from above or below. Their particular interest lies in exploring how these hierarchies are formulated and how one hierarchy can trouble, invade or disrupt another which, in itself, has relevance for the study of any subculture. As Détienne suggests, 'to discover the complete horizon of a society's symbolic values, it is also necessary to map out its transgressions, its deviants' (1979: ix, repeated on p.134 of this thesis). Whilst some sections of the popular press have labelled underground clubbing practices as deviant and (particularly in the late 1980s) cast Acid House as the new folk devil, my proposal is that the 'deviance' or turning away from normative and normalising social structures that the club space affords, is its potency. It is not my argument that the club space is inherently transgressive nor that clubbing is a disruptive practice in itself. On the

contrary, many 'mainstream' clubs are bastions of conformity and regulation. Rather, it is my premise that the underground club which embraces play, performance and participation acts as a liminoid space where the *potential* for transformation is ever present. The transformations in question may be at the micro or personal level; they may operate on a social or communal basis. They may have no lasting effect or they may represent fundamental shifts in people's patterns of behaviour or value systems. The intention here is not to prove the scope of these transformations but to understand how they might be made possible using the frame of performance as a way of casting new light on clubbing practices.

My focus for the remainder of this chapter is to mobilise Stallybrass and White's four domains as interlocking themes that offer a reading of the club space as a site of performance. Rather than addressing each one in turn, issues relating to space, the body, psychical framing and social formation are braided together with the purpose of situating clubbing as a performative activity that responds intimately to the site in which it occurs. I begin with a consideration of how the club space may be perceived phenomenologically and how this particular experience of space takes on significance and meaning for the clubber.

The phenomenological experience of the club space

As the club space is experienced primarily through the body rather than any hierarchy of sense that begins with sight, Merleau-Ponty (1992) and Deleuze (1993) are both useful points of reference in that they accentuate the importance and primacy of the body as our main perceptive organ (Deleuze 1993: 95). The phenomenological view of how we understand space through our senses (and so

through the body) concerns itself with subjectivity, embodiment and perception.

These three key concepts lie at the heart of club performance and performativity and

point us towards phenomenology as a means by which we may understand the

clubbing/performance arena more fully.[31]

Phenomenology's aim is 'to redirect attention from the world as it is conceived by

the abstracting, 'scientific' gaze (the objective world) to the world as it appears or

discloses itself to the perceiving subject (the phenomenal world); to pursue the thing

as it is given to consciousness in direct experience; to return perception to the

fullness of its encounter with its environment' (Garner 1994: 2). As such, all

performance is a fertile ground for phenomenological inquiry as it deals explicitly

with perception and the constitution of meaning, objects and their appearances,

subjectivity and otherness, presence and absence, body and world. As highlighted in

previous chapters, these concepts are in play also within the club space. Although not

every clubber may describe his or her activity as 'performance' in the conventional

sense of the word, the club space offers itself as a site where objects, subjects and

meanings may be constructed, dissolved and brought into question in a similar way

to the fictive space of the stage. Once we accept this, an examination of performance

and performativity in clubs using the phenomenological frame enriches our

understanding of the night-time experience that many claim has altered them on a

fundamental level and changed their perceptions of themselves in the world and in

relation to other people. Clubbing and performance, taken in tandem, have the

potential to engage 'the operations of world-constitution…as spectator, actor, and

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[31] Furthermore, the phenomenological approach has been embedded in the methodology for this research and has played its own part in determining how I have made sense of club experiences from the point of view of constructing this thesis.

character seek to situate themselves in relation to the world, both make-believe and radically actual, that confronts and surrounds them' (Garner 1994: 3).

Lefebvre's distinctions between perceived space (how an individual experiences and explores actual location), conceived space (as by planners or cartographers) and lived space (denoted as imaginative space where the fully human dwell) are particularly pertinent here (Lefebvre 1991). Lived space, or what Lefebvre calls the 'third space', which is a space of the imagination and thus the most direct correlation to the club space, has the power to refigure the balance between perceived and conceived space. It offers recoded and decoded versions of lived spatialisations and offers veiled criticism of the dominant social order (Shields 2001). It is within this third arena that the work of the Dadaists, Surrealists and other underground organisations dwell. In addition Bachelard (1994) calls for the lived experience of spaces and stresses the augmenting effect imaginative, lived spaces have on real spaces, bringing into play the dialectics of interior experience and exterior reality which is often cited by clubbers as the defining moment of the dance floor epiphany. It is the lived space implied by both Lefebvre and Bachelard that is most pertinent to this research. The club provides a space for the imagination, a space for performative play. Undoubtedly, in many ways the club space is conceived, planned and regulated by the organisers but there is a psychical dimension afforded to the space of the underground that prioritises individual and collective experience and, in turn, promotes the sense that one is able to be 'fully human'.

Utilising the phenomenological approach one is able to illuminate uniquely the experiential duality of the stage and, by extension, the playful arena of the

underground club. Performing on stage or being in the play mode allows an individual to reside within two constructed realities simultaneously - namely the world of the fiction and the world of the everyday. Our experience of residing within these two constructs is linked to how we experience space. The field of performance encompasses both scenic space (the spectacle which is to be processed and consumed by the perceiver) and environmental space (that which is subjectified by physical actors who inhabit the space). As Garner suggests:

> the performance field is characterised by an ambiguity between the perceptual and the habitational…at the centre of this ambiguity is the human body, situated in space while bearing its inscriptions, simultaneously subject and object (Garner 1994: 4).

Furthermore;

> the body is that by which I come to know the world, the perceptual ground against which the world has existence for me; at the same time, it is an object in this world, much (though not all) of which is available to my direct perception (ibid 1994: 50).

The interplay of objective and subjective registers is significant here and refers back to reflective rehearsal systems and processes of improvisation where the ability to see oneself in action is paramount. The facility of acknowledging the perceptual and the habitational simultaneously, and seeing one's place within that dynamic, lies at the heart of performance that seeks to be transformatory.

In addition to this concept of simultaneity, Garner introduces the notion of the reverse gaze where the performer looks out at the spectator and 'the reverse gaze catches me in the act of looking' (1994: 48-49). Club performance plays with this notion particularly well. Performance in this context obfuscates the divisions between watching, being watched and watching being-watched. On the dance floor there are no strict spatial divisions to distinguish performer from spectator and vice

versa. There is often 'ambiguity and oscillation' (ibid. p.51) around who is performing for whom, who is performing performance, and how those performances are being read and received by those inhabiting the space. These uncertainties and fluctuations are part of the fundamental terrain of the club space and, as such, make it a particularly fertile domain for exploring experiential shifts in performance perception and reception.

The next two sections look at how the notion of 'performer' in a club context has moved away from the stage and onto the dance floor. Notions of liveness are addressed with particular reference to the technologically-driven style of music in techno clubs and how both DJs and clubbers deal with presence and performance as a way of building community.

The Performing Body and the Question of Liveness

Since dance culture's rise the literal and metaphorical repositioning of the performer has become one of the key characteristics in configuring a new type of clubber-participant. Attention has moved away gradually from a raised figure performing on a platform for the entertainment of a crowd (as experienced at a gig or rock concert) and shifted back towards the dance floor itself. The 'performers' in this arrangement consist not only of those licensed to perform (such as the DJ or a hired dancer, for instance) but also those who claim the club space as their own stage and site of collective display. As Reynolds puts it:

> [...] it became even clearer that the audience was the star: that guy over there doing fishy-finger dancing was as much a part of the entertainment – the tableau – as were the DJs or bands. Dance moves spread through the crowd like superfast viruses…Each subindividual part (a limb, a hand cocked like a pistol) was a cog in a collective "desiring machine", interlocking with the sound system's bass throbs and

sequencer riffs. Unity and self-expression fused in a force field of pulsating, undulating euphoria (Reynolds 1999: 5).

The notion that rave corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's model of the desiring machine – a decentred, nonhierarchical assemblage of people and technology characterised by flow-without-goal and expression-without-meaning - is not a new one (Reynolds 1999; 246). However, when one begins to read this desiring machine through the lens of performance, goal, expression and meaning take on new resonances. I would argue that all performance has a purpose, a goal. It is the very vehicle of expression and meaning. Whilst the rave may well incorporate the characteristics of a desiring machine, with the workings of the unconscious and of sexual drives as the actions of that machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), it also contains the possibility of extending beyond that. The rave may well find meaning in its meaninglessness but, for many, the access to performative modes facilitated by the rave/club space make it an engine of cultural production and expression. The outcome, means of expression and codified signification of performances emerging in the club space may not be verbalised in the same way as a pre-meditated performance carried out by actors but, nonetheless, the collective acts of performance that take place on dance floors represent an expression of something which is worthy of study. What this 'something' might be is not always articulated explicitly but undoubtedly it is concerned with the moving body (in terms of both an individual's physical body as well as a body of people) in a space imbued with certain transcendental qualities, validated by and in the presence of others.

One of the central issues relating to the body in this field is the question of liveness, particularly when one is concerned with notions of performance, presence and

representation. With an emphasis on recorded, remixed and sampled sound, notions

of authenticity in this context are not rooted in the live quality of the music or the

live presence of musicians as it is in other genres.[32] Rather, the sense of liveness is

located in the crowd and their presence at the party or club event. To complicate this

premise, however, there is an element of invisibility and transience embraced by rave

which makes bodily expression within this particular culture less apparent and less

tangible than other social trends that have focussed on more externalised forms such

as fashion.

> Where other youth sub-cultures have focused on street appearances, or have chosen
> live rock performances for providing the emblematic opportunity for the display of
> style, in rave everything happens within the space of the party (McRobbie 1995:
> 168).

Technology involved in creating electronic dance music leads us to reassess the

position of the performing body. Much music discourse considers the use of

technology in negative terms citing the elimination of human agency and the 'murder

of live music' in favour of cold, mechanical, lifeless music reproduced through

electronic means. Furthermore, the notion of DJ as musician is a highly contested

one. For some the DJ is someone who simply manipulates machines and thus issues

of 'liveness' and 'authenticity' are brought into question. Where digital technology is

used to create the sounds the musician as musical subject is no longer the performer,

or vice versa. It could be said music has become disembodied and is now played

without the metaphysics of presence (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 115). However,

rather than replacing the human agent, digital technologies become an extension of

the DJ as musician and augment what s/he is able to achieve. Digital technologies

place greater emphasis on receiving bodies and so a feedback loop is created between

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[32] See Thornton 1995: Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of authenticity and dance music.

DJ, beat and crowd with the machines involved being the vehicle or tool for communication rather than merely a cold, mechanical means of producing sound. As part of the feedback loop the listener becomes implicated in the music that is played and the status of reception is transformed. The activity of listening becomes embodied as the crowd take on the role of dancers-performers within the club space:

> We are having to rethink our preoccupation with the *phatic*, with the communicative function of art. In its place, a more pragmatic model considers the many ways in wh*ich music functions in combination with its audience; how it is used and* transformed by those it reaches […] (ibid. p.130).

What authenticates contemporary dance cultures is the buzz and energy resulting from the intimate interaction between records, DJ and crowd. In many ways the enduring spectacle of clubbing is the dancing crowd:

> In the absence of visually commanding performers the gaze of the audience has turned back on itself. Watching and being watched are the key pleasures of discotheques (Thornton 1995: 65).

Clubbers become performers for each other and for themselves. These performances emerge due to the 'absence' of a performing figure on stage. The 'presence' of the clubber as performer adopts this role and thus becomes the watched and the watcher simultaneously.

However, in the underground scene where glamour, sexual display and overt surveillance are either shunned or dealt with through parody, the notion of gaze is complex. For some clubbers reaching a trance-like state through dance is highly prized. Dance moves are often made with heads down and eyes closed. For others, connections across the dance floor are sought. Open body stance, smiles and looks are frequent. Welcoming or shunning gaze is seen also in the behaviour and actions

of DJs. Some DJs are not comfortable with the term 'performer' as a way of describing what they do and choose to play down their role by keeping their heads down and focussing on the machines in front of them. Others delight in the ability to make connections with the crowd and see it as their role to 'perform' DJing.

In the underground, where the prevailing principle is of equality rather than hierarchy, many DJs view their position as one of curious duality. They see themselves as part of the crowd as well as responding to it and being responsible for it through their performance. Having interviewed a number of DJs about how they perceive their role as 'performer', one in particular gave me the clearest explanation of how the DJ might embody the dual function of performer-participant, a view that was echoed by other interviewees:

> I came into DJing from a dancer's point of view but I think a lot of DJs are terrible. See, anyone can play records but that doesn't make them a DJ and for years, the first few years of DJing, I didn't even like the term of being labelled a DJ. I really sort of came from the viewpoint that it was actually a performance. And I suppose anyone can be a DJ in the same way anyone can drive a car but it doesn't make me a rally champion. I always carry on from the point of view of it being a performance and about interaction and again, when you get feedback from people who say, "We really love it when you play because you look like you're having such a good time." If I'm not dancing myself, then I haven't quite enjoyed it […] I'm not happy with it because I haven't quite got – if I'm into it everyone, then everyone in the room is going to be into it, or more into it, and if I'm up there dancing and being silly then it gives people license…I've seen DJs who might as well not be in the building. (Interview with CS, 22/03/04)

This notion is reiterated later in the interview but expressed this time in spatial terms. Here the DJ in question acknowledges the tension of being physically separate from the crowd whilst feeling part of its mass:

> There's an element of putting stuff on for a crowd but it's actually from you being a member of the crowd. I don't come from a point of view of isolation as a DJ. I'd prefer me to be DJing in the middle of the dance floor. (ibid.)

To obtain the clubber's perspective on this, I asked several interviewees how significant their awareness of the presence of the DJ was and how that might be acknowledged within one moment:

> AB: So, you know when we were talking before about that moment when it all lifts off on the dance floor and everyone's there? Is that moment about the crowd or do you turn your direction to the DJ?
>
> LB: I don't know. I've had times when it's both. You can turn round to the DJ and just go "Oh my God!" or turn around and look at everyone. It's the energy through and obviously they're the ones doing it to the people. It's all the energy. I prefer being in the middle of everyone if something kicks off, like at a Drum n Bass rave, and the DJ drops in a tune and like everyone goes nuts. And I love just being in the middle of it, all the movement. I just think it's the energy which is obviously created by the DJ through the song he's playing but there's some kind of loop going on there. (Interview with LB, 23/03/06)

The interviewee expresses his desire to be in the centre of the dance floor when a tune drops in and creates a new level of intensity. Being in the centre or at the heart of the action appears to be a way of becoming part of that energy shift. 'Being in the middle of it' is a significant aspect of this clubber's experience. By placing himself in the centre of the dance floor he positions himself at the midway point between DJ (the one 'doing it to the people') and the rest of the crowd who generate the 'loop'. This clubber's intentional positioning within the club involves him in that feedback loop and heightens his engagement with the shift in energy.

From both clubber and DJ there is recognition of the absolute centrality of co-presence and co-located performance which is seen as being responsible for bringing feedback loops of energy exchange into existence:

> I find it very hard to play music on my own. I don't do it. I can't do it. I find it impossible but when you've got that feed and that energy and that vibe from an environment where you are, they're feeding you. (Interview with CS 22/03/04)

The absolute importance of 'being there' is a recurring notion in many interviews I conducted. Both parties, DJ and clubber, are prone to venerate 'the vibe' and atmosphere of an event and view this phenomenon holistically, the result of a confluence of elements rather than attributing the success of a night to one factor alone, such as the music, the venue or the price of drinks. The participants' role in this is fundamental and, as Thornton suggests, 'the crowd becomes a self-conscious cultural phenomenon – one which generates moods immune to reproduction, for which you have to be there' (Thornton 1995: 29-30).

Being resistant to exact reproduction, both the clubbing experience and live theatrical performance share similar connotations and value systems. The crowd's presence is of primary value. The experience cannot and will not take place without their involvement. The crowd's non-verbal contracting into the event is central to its existence as is its emotional and physical implication in the action as it unfolds. This is particularly true for raves and underground parties that tend to be arranged on a monthly basis rather than the regular, weekly slot of more traditional night clubs. The air of the 'special event' places further emphasis on the importance of presence. There is a belief in the moment and a prioritisation of the live that is akin to theatrical performance, being by nature transient, ephemeral and reliant on shape shifting. The heightened sense of 'being there' encourages a performative space to emerge that the crowd are willing and ready to fill.

As one interviewee told me:

> At the Big Chill this year they had this big bird's nest. They made a big bird's nest with hay and a big model of a chicken and they had a person video recording. So we went mucking about in this big nest all dressed up and stuff. We didn't realise this

but at the end of the festival, I can't remember who we saw, but on the big screen came – it just started off this picture of a nest and then they'd edited it so it was just showing clips to – I can't remember the name of the song. It's by LeFleur and it's a really beautiful, uplifting song – and you just saw random people that you'd seen at the festival in this chicken's nest. And then right towards the end of the song we were all there. All our mates. And we were all stood with each other and we were like "Oh my God!" And that was the strongest sense of like – I was just jumping up and down going "Yes!" The sense of belonging there was incredible because everyone was there and everyone had seen you and you knew that there were people in that crowd who had seen us before and then it's there on the big screen at the end of the festival – the last thing of the festival. And it was amazing, incredible…[I felt] proud like I just had to jump up and down screaming because I was proud. I'd been there. People had seen us and it was the friends I was stood with, at that point, watching ourselves on a massive screen at a festival to a song we all loved.
(Interview with LB, 23/03/06)

As this narrative demonstrates, the festival provided an opportunity for 'mucking about' in costume with friends, an activity expressed as trivial, childlike play. Unknown to the interviewee, this playing around was filmed and replayed to the crowd at the end of the event. The accompanying sound track and professional editing would have given the footage filmic qualities and augmented the initial activity that was (presumably) carried out in a relatively unconscious manner. The interviewee's commentary here expresses great excitement at his group of friends and the experience they had in the nest being captured on film and broadcast to a wide audience. This excitement could be read as subscription to celebrity culture, albeit a fleeting moment of fame. However, the tenor of the interview suggested otherwise. The interviewee conveyed the pride he felt and that pride was linked to the idea his group of friends had contributed something to the festival that was worthy of documentation. The witnessing of the performance by others, the acknowledgement that their participation had been noticed and had made a contribution to the larger whole gave a 'sense of belonging' that was clearly a significant and powerful moment for the individual concerned.

Even if attendance at a club is not framed in explicitly performative terms as the instance above demonstrates, physical presence and 'being there' is regarded as a form of participation that contributes to the outcome of the whole event. As another clubber told me:

> AB: Have you ever felt that your participation is –
> AR: Part of the night?
> AB: Yeah.
> AR: Yeah, definitely. Even just being there. I'm on quite a few mailing lists on the internet and I got this "thank you for coming to this event" note which was put up on quite a few forums. Thank you for being there, thank you for making it a success. Because if you're not there, what is there? Nothing. (Interview with AR, 22/03/06)

This interviewee regards his attendance as a form of participation and the follow up e-mail from organisers as an affirmation of that participation. This personal correspondence and acknowledgement of attendance may be a clever marketing tool on the part of organisers who are aware that feeling 'part of' a clubbing community is partly what attracts people to the scene.[33] The extent to which that 'community' is real, imagined or virtual differs from club to club and is dependent on one's understanding of what constitutes 'community'.

The term 'community' is inherently slippery and difficult to define.[34] Whilst it is not my intention to offer a full critique of this term, it is necessary to problematise to some extent as it is a recurring thread in the clubbing narrative and relates to how clubbers perceive their participation in the underground and its performative aspects. Raymond Williams offers a way of conceiving community that is both broad and broadly positive:

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[33] It is relatively common to see stewards circulating the dance floor in order to get clubbers to sign up to mailing lists for the very purpose of direct marketing of their next event.

[34] The issue of community is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, pp.219-222

> Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of
> relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of
> relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social
> organisation […] it never seems to be used unfavourably (Williams 1973: 76).

Sitting within a community one can see how the term might not be viewed
'unfavourably'. However, positioned beyond a certain community and looking at it
from the outside, one might take a very different stance. In recognising the existence
of a community it has to be agreed that there are those who are not part of it, who lie
beyond its limits and who might be therefore excluded from it. It is these feelings of
being excluded from traditional formulations of community (such as the state, the
church, the family) that drive the powerful mythologies of community inherent to the
club scene. Young suggests that the prevalence of longing for community is based
on an illusion and a mis-understanding of the realities of the world we live in:

> The idea of community […] privileges unity over difference, immediacy over
> mediation, sympathy over recognition of one's understanding of others from their
> point of view. Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves
> that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social
> closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic […]
> because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or
> implicitly exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not
> identify (Young 1990: 300, cited in Kruppers 2007: 10).

Community as 'an understandable dream' is a useful term for thinking about how
clubbers incite their experience of participating in a particular scene and provides a
way of making a connection between the beliefs in the positive benefits of clubbing
and the socio-political context from which it emerges. Whilst certain formulations of
community are predicated on notions of inclusion and exclusion, bringing
performance into the frame changes how we might consider the boundaries of

community as rather more permeable and negotiated or, as Kuftinec suggests, as a process of 'redrawing' (1997: 178).

As a site of re-presentation, performance becomes a medium through which this redrawing can occur. The performance process reinforces commonalities, illuminates difference, and alters boundaries of identity (ibid.). If performance can offer a way of altering the boundaries of identity then it offers individuals and groups a means of reconfiguring a sense of self or what Jackson calls the 'disruption of habitus' (2004: 119), a process of shifting and expanding the parameters of a clubber's emotional, sensual and social landscape (ibid. p.115).

Auslander's analysis of the conventional arguments that surround live performance, namely the assertion that live performance builds community, is also useful here. He suggests 'the sense of community arises from being part of an audience, and the quality of the experience of community derives from the specific audience situation, not from the spectacle for which that audience has gathered' (Auslander 1999: 56). This is as true of a club event as it is for the mediatised performances to which Auslander refers. The concept of 'community' arose many times during interviews, the most succinct description being 'it's a family thing' (Interview with LA, 14/10/04). As CS says of the monthly night he has run for the past nine years:

> It's a community gathering. It's a community gathering if nothing else […] I think one of the best named nights I've ever come across is Tribal Gathering – as a name and as a concept because it embodies – it gives that community feel back to it and I think the best parties are the ones that instil a sense of ownership and a sense of community in the people that go to it because it's about the people who go. It's not about a promoter or the DJs either. It's about the people who come. A party is nothing, no matter how much money you've spent, how much thought you've put into it, if no one comes. So to keep people coming month on month, year after year, they've got to feel part of something. (Interview with CS, 22/03/04)

And as one clubber puts it:

> You've got a kind of structure for introducing yourself without actually introducing yourself. They'll acknowledge you and you acknowledge them because you've been in the same space with each other more and more. That happens quite often and there's definitely a sense of community because you're all sharing that one moment. You're all there, together. You can't escape that because you're in the same building, you're in the same room, you're hearing the same things. As a community you're moving together on the dance floor. You may not be speaking but you're interacting. There's no hierarchical power system when you're there. Everyone's got their own thing to bring to it. (Interview with AR, 22/03/06)

The sense of community that AR articulates in this extract is an integration of both spontaneous and ideological communitas (Turner 1982: 47-48). For AR there is a clear sense that in this environment he is able to connect with others. This, in turn, gives him a great sense of belonging and empowerment. As Turner says, 'individuals who interact with one another in the mode of spontaneous communitas become totally absorbed into a single, synchronized, fluid event' (ibid. p.48). AR expresses this as not being able to escape but the implication of this is welcomed. By choosing to be part of that event one indicates a commitment to the ideological communitas that attends it, where 'being' together is more important than 'doing' together (ibid.).

As with many community gatherings which involve or include performances, distinctions between spectators and performers, artists and audience, are fluid and constantly shifting. A community performs to each other, for each other and has little difficulty in attending to the two functions simultaneously. This is not to say the separation between these two roles is dismantled entirely, rather that one may move between roles with ease and, in some instances, embody them both in much the same way as CS talks about being audience to his own performance as DJ. For Auslander, the dynamic of performance itself depends on there being a separation between 'actor' and 'audience'. He argues the 'effort to eliminate that distinction destroys the

very possibility of performance' (Auslander 1999: 56). However, this view seems based on a definition of performance that is rather too narrowly theatrical. When applied to other performance practices, the blurring of binary roles, or facilitating a sense of movement between them, is the preferred and necessary objective. Practitioners such as Boal and Grotowski have tried to bridge the gap between performer and audience for very particular ends and, as a result, abandoned traditional, theatrical performance altogether moving our understanding of what performance might be, and what it might be for, into new realms.

In the club context much of the formal performance element (i.e. the DJ or VJ) is electronic in nature, in terms of both recording and transmission. This sets up an internal distance between the 'performer' (i.e. the DJ or VJ) and the 'performance outcome' (i.e. the music or the visuals). In this way the 'performers' are able to be their own audience contemporaneously with producing or realising the performance. Clearly, this blurs any strict division between spectator and performer. In addition, audiences are more able to implicate themselves in the success of any performance as the 'vibe' created by the energy of their response is key. This then results in a feeling of communality and shared ownership for all present:

> Within the dark, loud and crowded space of events participants themselves become both audience and performer simultaneously, and give themselves over to an engagement with usually anonymous others (Pini 1997: 126).

As is often claimed, rave is primarily a non-verbal space, a place where affinities are based not on language but on ecstatic bodily relations (ibid.). With an absence of verbal text, dance music is better understood through metaphors borrowed from the visual arts such as soundscape, aural décor or audio sculpture (Reynolds 1999: 51).

The emphasis on the non-verbal/aural allows the club space to function as a fluid

landscape in which visual performance can be sited successfully. As the music lacks

any figurative dimension, a place for the performing and transforming body emerges

on and around the dance floor which in itself can have huge significance for those

who do not have access to this experience in their everyday lives:

> The ecstatic dissolution of self on the dancefloor, the transformation of ordinary
> codes of physical and verbal interaction, is still experienced by many as a life-
> changing experience which encourages and enables new relationships to the body of
> both self and other/s (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 107).

Whilst Gilbert and Pearson refer to this as the 'dissolution of self' and rave has been

attributed with facilitating the 'disappearance of self' (Melechi 1993), it is my

contention that rather than a process of dissolving, the club space allows for a

reshaping or reconfiguration of self which can feel transcendental.

Performance in this sense is not carried out by the 'other' on a stage but by the

dancer/clubber themselves. The transcendence or transformation sought on the dance

floor becomes a route to greater self-awareness. The suspension and escape from self

and everyday life is invoked and enacted in order to return to it with new

possibilities. This practice chimes with both Boal's rehearsal of alternatives and

Warner's world-making as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis (page 8).

Buckland's research on the queer club scene in New York draws particularly on this

frame and she cites Schechner in her positioning of clubbing as a 'celebration of

contingency' (Buckland 2002; 126). In this context dancing in a club is seen by

Buckland as both a suspension and escape from the everyday but brings 'movement

from it to construct or rehearse the possibilities for everyday life' (ibid.). Social,

improvised dancing offered an opportunity for rehearsal 'a political imagination by providing a template for knowledge of the self and community with others' (ibid.).

This resonates with Boal's notion that his practice operates in the Subjunctive Mood, a term developed by Victor Turner in reference to social drama and ritual (1982: 82-84):

> The Subjunctive Method is the reinstatement of doubt as the seed of certainties. It is the comparison, discovery and counterposition of possibilities, not of a single certainty set against another, which we have in reserve. It is the construction of diverse models of future action for a particular given situation (Boal 2006: 40).

Where Boal's Aesthetics of the Oppressed allows people to develop fully their metaphoric world in order to build their capacity to imagine, so too might the club world offer a space where 'the capacity to symbolise, to dream, to gain distance through aesthetics' (ibid.) is encouraged. If the club world opens up space for attendees to implicate themselves in a type of communal performance which is socially conceived, collectively played out and involves intimate interaction and engagement with others, it is possible to suggest that that experience will be carried forward into the everyday. The extent to which this system of cause and effect can be proven is problematic however. Research around reduced levels of football hooliganism (Gilman 1994) as discussed in Chapter One (p.63) has attempted to assert that E culture influences social behaviour displayed elsewhere but here one is dealing with the effects of a particular drug on a section of society that had been previously anti-social and violent. Determining how exposure to underground clubbing and its performative aspects shape the way we behave in the world of the everyday is difficult. What is apparent is clubbers' belief in the potency and potentiality of the club space in shaping their responses and interactions with others.

Evidence gathered from interviews with clubbers would suggest that their clubbing self shapes and influences how they behave and respond in their daily lives. Phil Jackson's extensive study on the subject of clubbing and the disruption of habitus comes to similar conclusions:

> The bodily techniques people encounter via clubbing can escape the confines of the club space and can be woven into people's social practices in the everyday world. They grant them new perspectives upon that world that challenge the embodied logic of the habitus (Jackson 2004: 153).

In line with this hypothesis, it is my own argument that one of the 'bodily techniques' on offer in the club space is that of performance. The club affords a certain access to a world of alternatives that are conceived, in part, through the mode of performance and the playful 'what if'. The subjunctive mode operates in a similar way to Brecht's dramaturgy of 'making strange'. By gaining 'distance through aesthetics', the club world allows participants to gain access to an understanding of the performing body and adds to the heightened sense of presence and belonging that many say shapes their day-to-day interactions with others.

The Visual/Sonic Environment and the 'space' for performance

The (mis)appropriation of urban and rural spaces for the uses of underground clubbing has been discussed at length in Chapter One. However, it is useful to examine the acquisition and manipulation of space not only as a pragmatic and ideological concern but also as a question of aesthetics. Relatively recent scenographic and architectural changes to the club space signal a new potentiality for performance. The physical layout and spatial arrangement of clubs affords a heightened sensory experience. An understanding of the event is not received or processed primarily through verbal or spoken exchanges but rather through the

dancing/performing body as described in the previous section. The scenography of

the space has a direct correlation with the type of art/performance/music that occurs

therein.

With the loss of the spectacle of 'live' performing musicians on a raised stage, other

performative dimensions begin to flourish in the club space. Even the DJ is usually

surrounded, and often dwarfed by, huge visual montages, drapes or projected images.

The interiors of clubs are dressed and arranged in such a way as to provide multi-

directional areas of focus for clubbers to inhabit. Great attention is paid to décor,

ornamentation and the organisation of physical space. As Gadamer says in *Truth and*

Method:

> The nature of decoration consists in performing that two-sided mediation; namely to
> draw the attention of the viewer to itself, to satisfy his taste, and then to redirect it
> away from itself to the greater whole of the context of life which it accompanies
> (Gadamer 1975: 140).

This 'two-sided mediation' occurs within the club space in a very particular way –

the decoration of space draws attention to itself (many clubbers cite good lighting

effects and so on as being one element which attracts them to a club) and then, as the

night progresses, the clubbers themselves become implicated in that decoration or

ornamentation, using its effects to reach the peak experience of 'jouissance'. Many

of the visual images on wall hangings and projections are designed to enhance the

effects of hallucinogens and intensify the experience of immersion in and

engagement with space. As one clubber told me when talking of the London club

Fabric:

> Going back to Fabric again, amazing lasers. The lasers are absolutely unbelievable.
> And they go over your heads. They've just got like new, multi-coloured ones and I
> could just stare at them for hours. They send smoke into the lasers, and it just looks

> like there's something solid there and soon they're going to be making shapes above our heads. Honestly, it's amazing. (Interview with MJ, 23/03/06)

When asked why lighting effects of this kind make such a difference to the experience another interviewee told me:

> It becomes a complete experience, I think. Rather than just going and listening to the music, like, it becomes a really big experience, especially when you've got VJs. I think VJs are going to get really, really big […] It's just a complete experience. (Interview with LB, 23/03/06)

Under the influence of drugs and alcohol lighting takes on even greater significance and becomes not only an elaborate accompaniment to music but a means of marrying the visual with the aural as a way of immersing oneself completely in the sensory terrain. When asked about the importance of lighting, projections and other visual embellishments, one clubber said:

> I wouldn't say they were important but they add another thing to the night. Actually at Federation, having the visual things to look at as well as just the audio – the DJ and the VJ – it's much more exciting because there's things happening to that music. You've got your physicality of what you're hearing, you're dancing. Then you've got another person's interpretation of what you're hearing through a projector or through a dancer […] I think that's really interesting. (Interview with AR, 22/03/06)

Strobes, lasers, smoke machines illuminate the crowd allowing *them* to become the object of aesthetic focus rather than giving that attention over to the actor (the one who acts and takes action) of traditional performance. Computer-generated fractals and other abstract designs act as visual equivalents of the music in direct correlation to the synaesthetic[35] effects induced by some psychedelic drugs. Film, slides and video projections punctuate the space with figurative entertainment (Thornton 1995:

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[35] Synaesthesia is a joining together of sensations that are normally experienced separately. Some synaesthetes experience colours when they hear or read words, whilst others may experience tastes, smells, shapes or touches in almost any combination. The sensations are automatic and cannot be turned on or off. People are generally born with it and it runs in families. It is not considered to be harmful in any way. (http://www.syn.sussex.ac.uk/)

57) and create visual landscapes designed to facilitate transcendence and transformation of place, person and object. The abstract, the surreal, the conceptual are all forms which are readily accepted within the club space as a way of facilitating 'transport' to another world:

> The mission was to create the perfect environment, a surreal fantasy playground and abstract world concealed within the walls of an ordinary-looking warehouse. Our man-made Bermuda Triangles helped transport revellers into another dimension (Anthony 1998: 98).

This ready acceptance of a non-realistic aesthetic by clubbing crowds has resulted in the development of a space that can be both popular and highly experimental at the same time. The visual and sonic environment of clubs is generally acknowledged as a site of great innovation and creativity. This emerging art arena has undoubtedly capitalised on certain elements of the remix culture of the 1990s where fashions, music and design became subject to recycling and reassembly as a method of producing new form. As young people began to experiment with accessible technology in innovative and creative ways the Jam exhibition held at the Barbican in 1996 marked the point at which club culture and associated art forms gained some cultural currency within the established art world (Cunningham 1998: 134). Promoters wanting to create a unique identity for their club nights began to experiment with scenography in order to change the physical environment through club decoration (for example lights, lasers, inflatable structures, hangings, art work, projections) and commercial clubs began to spend huge sums of money on this particular visual aspect of the event. As Cunningham points out, the underground scene had a tendency to use low tech equipment to simulate high tech images (out of necessity rather than choice) and so became the testing ground for finding new uses for existing technology. The projections, slides and video material closely paralleled

the music with an emphasis on psychedelics, fractal shapes and cut and paste images borrowed from other sources (ibid.). Langois describes this new sense of visual environment as 'constituting something of a post-modern idiom, consisting as they do of collage, "cut-up", and distortion of time and colours' (Langois 1992: 237).

This post-modern idiom shapes the landscape in which performance then resides. Performances that occur within the club space do so in an intimate relationship with the sounds, lights and images that infuse the space. The visual/aural environment cultivates an aesthetic that resonates with the performances that occur and provides the scenographic dimensions into which performers/clubbers implicate themselves. The next section looks more closely at this 'implication' into space and uses theories of pilgrimage and ritual as a way of investigating the clubber's symbolic relationship with his/her environment.

The Club Space as Symbolic Site and the Ritualisation of Play

In addition to the kinaesthetic topography of the club space, it is necessary to bring into focus the symbolic significance the space has for those who claim it as their own. What the space represents psychically operates in tandem with how it manifests physically. The space of the club offers not only a clear function in terms of sociability and leisure but becomes emblematic of particular ideologies, beliefs and codes and thus resonates as a representational or symbolic site of great significance for many participants and echoes with Turner's notion of ideological communitas where 'being' together is more important than 'doing' together (Turner 1982: 48). As previously discussed, many clubbers talk of their experiences in quasi-religious tones and talk of making 'pilgrimages' to particular events as often as they talk of

stepping into a club as akin to 'coming home'. Theoretical concepts concerning our understanding of pilgrimage sites and pilgrimage rites are useful here and provide clues to understanding the club as site of ritualised play.

Coleman and Elsner use the popular Marian shrine at Walsingham, Norfolk, as a case study (1998). This particular type of Christian pilgrimage may seem a long way from the weekend worship of dance music. However, the characteristics of non-obligatory pilgrimage they identify in this research, find parallels with the context of underground clubbing as discussed later in this section. As Catherine Bell suggests, at the very least, pilgrimage is 'a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities' (Bell 1992: 74). In addition, the act of pilgrimage incorporates explicit ludic elements in which play is valued for its provisionality and its ability to experiment with alternative forms of identity and action (Coleman and Elsner 1998: 62).[36] With this as a frame, we can begin to read clubs as flexible symbolic (or, for some, sacred) sites where provisionality and alterity are guiding principles. Underground parties themselves are flexible locations where temporal and spatial frames are malleable allowing for playful behaviour as well as a play in or plasticity of dimension. Both the physical and psychical architecture of these spaces allows for a degree of self-authorship of space that operates alongside the codes implemented or communicated by the club owners or party organisers.

According to Coleman and Elsner, 'the sacred site is a particular kind of dramatic arena in which an overdetermination of material resources is offered to pilgrims,

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[36] See Bowman (1993) for a discussion of Glastonbury as a pilgrimage site and the increase in the 'spiritual service industry'.

providing props with which to enact their own play' (ibid. p.49). This finds its parallel in clubland where promoters and organisers offer 'props' to clubbers by setting up market stalls and shops which sell souvenirs, glow sticks, lollipops, UV jewellery, face paints and other items which afford a sense of play. The 'sense of collective validation' (ibid p.54) that pilgrimage offers allows participants to engage temporarily in 'ritual excess' (ibid p.57) but, in this instance, it is ritual without obligation and can be entered (or abandoned) at will. Other pilgrimages, such as the Haj for instance, have a prescribed obligation attached to them in much the same way as the liminal phase of primitive tribes was a compulsory rite of passage. For clubbers their pilgrimage is optional: their engagement with a sense of 'in-betweeness' more akin to the liminoid than the liminal. Pilgrimage here provides an option, an alternative, 'a temporary dwelling in an alternative role' (ibid p.58) and this notion coincides with accounts from many clubbers who see their attendance at a club event as ritual and articulate it as such:

> …this is ritual in its truest form…I feel the vitality of the night like an alcoholic must crave his brew. I savour it all. It can't give me enough, the buzz, this gathering of crews, all of us alike yet different…When looking around, you see yourself reflected everywhere, not just in clothing and haircuts, but by the very presence of the people in the club, it is a wedding of attitude. (Informant cited by Harrison 1998: 63)

For the *Reclaim the Streets* movement of the 1990s, the direct action of organising street parties to disrupt and intervene in what the group perceived as official culture's claims to authority, sobriety and control is expressed explicitly in terms of ritual theatre and echoes much of the previous discussion surrounding intentionality and the performer-audience binary. Play and performance were central to this movement – stilt walkers, jugglers, puppets, sand pits, climbing frames, dance, banners, art works, live music, sound systems, choirs, sculptures – all were deployed as a means

of breaking with the linear and the orderly in favour of the vortexed, whirling and

creative chaos of the party. The intention is articulated explicitly in terms of

instrumentalism and efficacy:

> The road became a stage for participatory ritual theatre; ritual because it is
> efficacious, it produces real effects by means of symbolic causes; participatory
> because the street party has no division between performer and audience (MacKay
> 1998: 141).

As Hughes-Freeland points out, the three categories of ritual, performance, media

(all of which can be said to reside within club culture) raise questions about the

framing of reality, forms of participation, limits of representation and questions of

scale (1998: 10). All three categories are in some sense virtual realities (in that they

are mediated by technologies either magical or mechanical) and sit in

contradistinction to sensate, everyday reality. Ritual and theatre both sit somewhere

between reality and the imagination. They both involve some suspension of disbelief.

This is potentially the same for the club world, where participants enter the space

with an expectation of some sort of lasting transformation or temporary suspension

of everyday realities. Ritual, as play or performance, deals not just with facts but

with possibilities and represents 'a fusion of the dreamed-of and lived-in orders of

reality' (Geertz 1966: 28). Ritual is not a text with a pre-established structure of

meanings but something which emerges as participants bring together bits and pieces

of knowledge in the performance: it creates reality and selves experientially

(Hughes-Freeland 1998: 15). Ritual and theatre both construct magical spaces that

operate beyond the ordinary. Both spaces act as sites of passage and sites of possible

transformation of place, person and object. Both playground and player act as dual

agents. They show simultaneously what is there and what is not there and

communicate a double negation (the not me/not not me dichotomy), which holds the potential for transcendence of self, status and role:

> …performer training focuses its techniques not on making one person into another but on permitting the performer to act in between identities; in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality (Schechner 1985: 123).

The intersection of ritualised play, party and participation, resistance and performance is a combination embedded in underground club culture. Any one of these constituent parts may be more prevalent or apparent at any given time. Furthermore, the existence or co-existence of these elements may not be uppermost in each clubber's consciousness. However, it is my proposition that this particular blend of social formation and human activity lies at the heart of reading the club context as a cultural category which may, in turn, give rise to new modes of embodied interaction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the club as a site of performance and to identify the special characteristics of the club space in terms of the way it lends itself to and encourages performative behaviour. The discussion has moved from a broad understanding of the club world as a playful arena, as explored in Chapter Two, to a more focussed investigation of how play in this field may be read as or develop into modes of performance. As well as identifying three key historical contexts that have done much to establish club performance as it stands today, the chapter has applied a number of theoretical engines that illuminate our understanding of the club space as a performative environment. The overarching purpose of this is to assert that having access to a space that is immersive, participatory and

performative has positive benefits for clubbers although any measuring or formal evaluation of this functionality is highly problematic reliant as it is on clubbers' own testimonies, narratives and mythologies . Nonetheless, by braiding together theoretical considerations of space, the body, psychical dimensions and social formations, my intention has been to mirror how the underground club space negates particular divisions or distinctions that operate elsewhere in people's everyday lives and offers them an event that braids together different facets of their existence. These categories are interwoven within the chapter to indicate how they are interwoven within the club experience.

As previously mentioned, individuals talk frequently of their clubbing self as being more 'real' than their everyday self. They describe their clubbing community as 'family'; they describe entering the club space in terms of 'coming home'; and use quasi-spiritual vocabulary when they talk of dance floor experiences as 'epiphanies'. That the underground club provides an opportunity to connect with one's space on a physical and psychical level, in the presence of others, makes it a potent space that functions for some in a symbolic way. The club no longer exists *only* as a commercial institution for the purposes of leisure. It can acquire emblematic qualities associated with the family, with values and ethics, with spiritualism, with notions of identity and self-hood. The powerful and evocative terminology ascribed to the club space by its participants indicates the significance it has to their lives (albeit one which is temporary or functions during a particular phase of a clubber's life). It is my argument that the existence of performative play as a guiding principle to these events gives rise to the belief in club space as 'special'. Not only does the prevalence of performative play contribute to the clubber's sense of involvement, ownership and

belonging but it also signals the potential for imaginative transformation and transgression of seemingly fixed realities.

The performative terrain that the underground club world affords offers the ordinary clubber entry into Schechner's 'paradigm of liminality'. It is here that the potential for alterity resides. The various performance genres that emerge in the club space provide opportunities for simultaneity of role. In other words, clubbers can be themselves and their alter ego simultaneously. They can be audience and performer at the same time; they may shift between the two roles or occupy one position only for varying lengths of time. As with much recent research into contemporary performance, questions involving audience role, activity and responsibility are key to our understanding of any performative event. Determining whether an audience member sits within the largely passive observer role, whether they become an active participant (either literally or metaphorically), or whether they can enter the drama and become an integrated performer in the piece is an issue addressed by most practitioners seeking to uncover new ways of engaging the public. As the central question of this thesis is concerned with participatory formations, examining the shifting categories of observer, participant and performer is of primary concern. Where might the lines between these categories be drawn? Indeed, is it useful to do so? Are they helpful to our understanding of authorship and reception? Or do they serve merely to restrict and limit our total engagement with a piece by presupposing our positioning in relation to the action as it unfolds? The following chapter looks closely at performance interactions within the club space and attempts to address the questions raised here.

Chapter Four: Performative Interactions within the Club Space

'Like life in all its forms, to live is the art of improvising.' (Boal 2006: 69)

Introduction

The club space is by definition a location where people come together to interact socially. It is a communal space that houses groups of people, both known and unknown to each other. It presupposes a willingness and a desire to make connections, to influence and to be influenced by music, dance and the existence of other people whilst sharing the same environment. Having determined the ways in which the club space might be read as a site of performance, this chapter now focuses more specifically on performative interactions that occur in this context and how these interactions contribute to feelings of collectivity, community and social exchange. Before doing so it is useful to detail the range of performances that may occur within the club space (not all of which are interactive) and how this may mirror a continuum of contemporary performance practice elsewhere in the field. The first section of this chapter begins by categorising club performance observed during the fieldwork phase of this thesis. Later the chapter moves onto a theoretical consideration of interactivity both as a performative device and as a vehicle for achieving immersion and embodied participation.

Towards a Categorisation of Club Performance

At this point it is important to state that over a five-year period of ethnographic research it is impossible to get a complete and accurate picture of all the performances being programmed in every club across the country. Beginning in Summer 2003 and ending in Summer 2008, as a solo researcher I visited twenty-

three different underground club nights or free parties (many occurring on a monthly basis which I attended a number of times) and seven dance music festivals. I also spent one full research week in Ibiza. Whilst this fieldwork is extensive it represents a sample determined as much by availability and opportunity as by systematic targeting of particular events. As such, the sample represents a personalised experience which occurred within a specific time frame and, thus, it offers one perspective on the myriad club events occurring across the country and beyond at the same time. It is also worth noting that within a given time frame any club scene is likely to mutate, develop and progress according to a number of factors, often to do with venue availability, economic pressures, changing musical scenes, and so what might have been observed at the beginning of the research may no longer be in existence.

As with all live performance club performances are intentionally ephemeral, transitory and resistant to exact reproduction. However, having visited a wide range of clubs and events over a sustained period of time, it has been possible to identify and locate the various different ways in which clubs utilise performance modes. Broadly speaking, my research points towards the existence of five categories of clubs that seek to infuse their events with performance. These categories are indications of marketing strategies as much as conscious ideologies and there is significant overlap between the divisions. They may be codified as the following:

1. Clubs that host professional acts as programmed entertainment
2. Clubs that employ regular/resident performance companies
3. Clubs that encourage performative participation

4. Clubs that house one-off or bespoke performance/art works

5. Events that blur club event and art event

The first category is the club night that hosts performances by professional acts and entertainers. The line-up may be different each time the club opens and the music may stop so that attention is given over to that particular performer for the duration of the act. *Duckie* is an example of this type of configuration.[37] The event has been running for eleven years and is hosted weekly at the Vauxhall Tavern in London but, supported by Arts Council England, it is gaining increased attention both nationally and internationally. Describing itself as 'Post-Poofter Purveyors of Progressive Working Class Entertainment' it is rooted firmly in the capital's gay scene and has done much to promote and blend the worlds of live art, cabaret and pub/club culture, providing a springboard for contemporary companies such as Reactor who have a particular bias towards interactive performance.[38] In 2007 they hosted 'We are 10: Duckie gets Childish' as part of Birmingham's *Fierce Festival* (27/05/07) describing the event as a 'return to their childhood with a pop and performance playpen'.[39] This event was described in the local press as 'a cosmopolitan happening that blurs the boundaries between clubbing, cabaret and performance art' (*Birmingham Metro*, 31/10/03) and mirrors the Edinburgh-based event, *SiLENCiO*, which sought to blend experimental live art, performance and cabaret, and which operated at around the same time and into 2004. Similar events in this category would be the less well-

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[37] See www.duckie.co.uk

[38] Reactor, a Nottingham based company, performed 'The Reactor Russian (Shit) Bears' at Duckie on 13/11/03 and went on to perform Barge Inn as part of LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) on 15/15/04. The company are now well established as an experimental art collective specialising in collaborative one-off projects. See www.reactorweb.com

[39] See www.fiercetv.co.uk

known *Über Cabaret* hosted at the Custard Factory, Birmingham, from 2003. Most recently *Duckie* produced 'Gay Shame Goes Girly: a festival of femininity' (04/07/09) describing this event as 'a pro-femme funfair for post-gay chicks and chaps. An arty farty party for the clitterati…and a nightclub packed with things to do!' They continue to be the current leaders in hosting events that blend the club scene with the art world and presenting playful performance that has a politically progressive edge.

The second category is the club that employs performance companies (or a single resident company) on a regular basis to perform either on a raised stage, amongst the crowd or both, as the club night is in progress. These companies will be a regular feature of the night and their performances will often alter according to the theme of the event. This category is relatively common and is in evidence in both mainstream clubs such as *Manumission* in Ibiza as well as audience-specific clubs such as *Federation*[40]*,* a monthly gay night that began in Leeds. Companies such as Transfiguration, the Curious Company, Urban Angels Circus, Funding Pending, One Love have all worked in the club environment as residents at various times and their experience of these venues is discernible in the performance work they create beyond this context.

As an extension to this, the third category is the club night that encourages performative participation by the clubbers themselves. The theme of the event may well be advertised in advance and the space will be dressed and prepared accordingly. The focus here is on fun and frivolity, and many of these nights have a

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[40] See www.clubfederation.com

sense of carnival where fancy dress, mask and masquerade are the guiding principles. These events are often situated firmly in the mainstream, corporate club world, for example, the recent trend in 'School Discos', but can also be found at the more experimental end of the scale with organisations such as *Kaos* running regular themed nights such as 'Salon des Artistes', 'Altered States of Amerika' and 'Heralding the Apocalypse'.[41] Organised by promoter and artist Lee Adams, 'Salon des Artistes' bills itself as 'A Night of Melancholik Kabaret, Apocalyptic Performance Art' and offers detailed information on dress codes which encourages clubbers to enter into the theme of the night as participant performers. Also within this category sits the more underground event that does not draw a clear distinction between performers and participants but attempts to establish the total environment as an interactive performance party with a conscious focus on creativity and communal expression. Events such as *Planet Angel*[42], *The Synergy Project*[43] and *Fatmoon*[44] would fall into this category with the latter two events having a heavy bias towards the UK festival and free party scene.

Less common are the one-off or bespoke performances created by professional artists that are made specifically for a club space. This fourth category would signal a club

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[41] See www.kaoslondon.com

[42] Planet Angel has been running for the past ten years and describes itself as 'the ultimate interactive party'. Its mission statement expresses it as 'an ever-expanding network of like-minded people, and a free-spirited, interactive environment where people can be creative, be themselves and feel comfortable.' See www.planetangel.com

[43] The Synergy Project is a large club night and extended community who operate in London. They describe themselves as a showcase for emerging and established talent. Their mission statement says 'by combining the large creative pool of this buzzing urban metropolis with the sincerity of those working in an applied activist field, Synergy creates a unique conscious mix - full of art, joy and creativity as well as thought provoking performances, mind stimulating artwork and films'. See www.thesynergyproject.org

[44] Fatmoon is a Sheffield based free party collective who run regular events at every full moon. See www.fatmoon.co.uk

promoter who views his/her club as a potential platform for showing new work

which may be challenging in terms of form and content. Examples of this type of

work would be Moti Roti's interactive photography installation, *Swaraj in Focus*, at

93 Feet East in 2001 or *Cay* by Barriedale Operahouse, a five-hour performance

installation at *Subterrania* in London, also in 2001.

Finally, the fifth category is the event that blurs club space and art space in a more

conscious manner. These events are often 'curated' and take either the club world

into the gallery space or the gallery into the club space. Perhaps the most renowned

of all these experiments were the *Club Research* events organised by Shinkansen

from 1994.[45] In a similar vein Gallery 291, situated in a renovated church in

Hackney, experimented with a monthly night entitled 'Vaudeville'. Whilst running

as an established gallery they attempted to incorporate the club vibe into their

environment whilst providing 'innovative performances [that] go head to head with

live music in amongst installations, video walls, DJs and little environmental

surprises' (taken from club flyer, 18/09/03). Similarly *The Five Years Club* ran

'Suicide is Painful' on 27/07/03, the second event in a series of one-off site events

where guest artists were commissioned to curate the evening and to reinterpret the

club environment in whichever way they chose.

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[45] Shinkansen is an artist-led research and production unit specialising in the performative use of digital technologies. In 1995 they ran the first bi-annual Club Research events, taking live art into a London club and inventing the M.J. (Movement Jockey) concept. In 1996 they awarded three Club Research Commissions to young sound and movement artists to create works for the London club venue The End. In 1997 they developed Club Research International, a touring production showcasing London and local club/theatre artists in an immersive club style performance night. www.shinkansen.co.uk

The manner in which these categories of performance are deployed within various clubs signals not only the underlying ethos of the club promoters and clientele but also mirrors the attitudinal shift of those making and responding to performance. The continuum of how audiences receive and participate in performance work is represented fully in this arena and, as with all club scenes, mutates and changes at a rapid rate, a change that is led predominantly by audiences/clubbers rather than by funding councils, arts organisations or established cultural institutions. Regardless of the type of performance occurring, what is apparent is a willingness and predisposition on the part of clubbers to accept, embrace and engage with performance in this context. As evidenced by the analysis of performance practice in Chapter Five, this is true particularly if the work is playful, acknowledges the clubbers' presence and allows for creative interactions. Club performance can take many forms and by no means all performances in this context have the intention of being interactive, participatory or communal. However, because of the organisation of the club space and the manner in which clubbers inhabit that space on both a literal and symbolic level, a feeling of collective celebration and social cohesion through the performative mode is often a significant by-product. This in turn contributes to powerful notions of presence and the sense of 'being there' that heightens clubbers' engagement with the event.

Having outlined how club organisers programme and utilise performance, the chapter now focuses more closely on interactivity as a theoretical concept. First, it seeks to outline the premise of interaction as a key concept in contemporary performance. The chapter goes on to explore the possible functions of interactive performance

within the club space and the implications this has for both artist and audience who are engaged in a mutual process of improvisation. The chapter looks more closely at the ethos of social and creative interaction that infuses many underground club spaces, which then serve as embodied platforms or seedbeds from which performance springs. The final section of this chapter concentrates on how performative interaction may be achieved within the club space. It takes into account the belief in an ethos of participation and social interaction from clubbers themselves and proposes a route through sensory immersion in the club environment to physical participation and interaction. The chapter asks what is the nature of the performative interactions occurring in the club space and how do these emerge formally and informally? How can the ethics of participatory and interactive performance illuminate our understanding of the potency ascribed to the club space as a potential site of transformation?

The Ubiquity of Interaction

Over the past decade there has been an increased interest in notions of interactivity from a range of different disciplines. Computing, video gaming, television, mobile communications, websites, art works and museum exhibits frequently lay claim to being interactive, despite the word being easily contested in a number of instances. In a world increasingly driven by technology, remote communication is more commonplace and, indeed, necessary to conduct business, pleasure and to facilitate day-to-day conversations. The promise of interactivity is the promise to reconnect people, places and objects in a manner that feels responsive, mutual and immediate. To be interactive has become a twenty-first-century preoccupation and its ubiquity within our language points towards, and often promises, a sense of empowerment,

equality and reciprocity between the individual and the larger institutions with which we come into contact such as the broadcast media, arts organisations, our employers, the information highway. High value is placed on interactivity as a concept, at times at the expense of examining the quality or nature of the exchanges that take place as a result of its presence within a particular system or framework. To have the facility or function to be interactive is undoubtedly highly prized, and often expected, in today's mediatised society. However, achieving meaningful interactions and deploying new methodologies, whether technological or not, to order to facilitate true dialogic exchanges between individuals or groups is not always of primary concern. Often *how* one can interact is given priority over the *quality* or *significance* of the interactions taking place.

Similarly much interactive art is valued for its ability to *be* interactive rather than for its innate, aesthetic qualities or the meanings it may provoke for its audience. The nature of the interaction and how it is made possible is more often the focus of the work. Ailsa Barry talks about the myth of new 'interactive' media[46]:

> The reality is that the use of new media and its interaction often disengages the viewer. This disengagement is inherent in the very act of interaction, and its dogmatic binary yes/no choice. No room for the enigmatic here, and audiences participate less for the promise of content and more for the concept of interaction (Barry 1996: 139).

In other words much interactive media/art can be somewhat hollow when the very fact that one is able to interact with it takes precedence over the content. This in itself opens up a series of questions to consider when creating, realising and evaluating

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[46] See also argument by Beryl Graham 'Playing with Yourself: Pleasure and Interactive Art' (1996) where she gives overview of the vast claims made for interactive art and offers an analysis of the type of 'pleasure' these works are intended to produce.

interactive work. Is interactive art primarily about the experience of interaction, the quality of the interaction or is it about the result of that interaction? Is interaction the goal or the means by which we reach the goal? For Matt Adams of Blast Theory it is certainly the question of meaningfulness that underpins the company's drive to be interactive:

> We've always had a tremendous interest in interaction, dialogue, what it means to talk and to speak, how you might engage other people in conversation. Is it possible in a theatrical context to engage an audience in conversation? Does that always involve a diminution of what can be said or is it possible to do that in such a way that your audience can, however collectively, articulate things that have a precision or a specificity or a voice? […] Essentially our interest in interaction is, what that is meaningful can be said within this interaction? How do you establish a context in which we cannot just interact with each other but do so in a way which is meaningful? (Interview with Matt Adams, 01/07/08)

It is worth noting that Blast Theory started their practice by creating work for club spaces, so a heightened awareness of the relationship between flexible social contexts and meaning-making has prevailed from the outset. With a similar ethic, this thesis focuses on how one might engage clubbers in 'conversation' through the performative mode, even though that conversation may not be a verbal dialogue but rather one negotiated through physical and visual exchanges. By examining and developing interactive performance within the social context of the club space, what might be learnt about engaging audiences and promoting participation in other contexts? The numerous social interactions that occur as we go about our daily lives are the fundamental building blocks of how we understand the world and our place within it. Any study of interactive performance, particularly when sited in a social setting such as the club space, needs to begin with this premise. As Schechner says of his experiments with the Performance Group in the 1960s when the company sought to establish a democratic relationship between all performers and audience alike, 'participation occurred at those points where the play stopped being a play and

became a social event' (Schechner 1973: 44). However, as Fischer-Lichte points out, any gathering of people (including those attending a theatrical play) is a social event (2008: 43). Performance and social event do not have to be put in opposition. In fact, Schechner claims that in the example of the Performance Group's production of *Dionysus in 69,* the 'participants were able to experience the entire performance as essentially social' (ibid.). Perhaps in the club context clubbers experience performance socially but also experience clubbing performatively. From a post-modern perspective holding these two practices simultaneously is not as challenging or as radical as it may once have been. However, the nature and quality of social interactions taking place within the club do have a bearing on and a relationship with the nature and quality of performative interactions that might occur. The significance and meaning ascribed to social interactions that take place within the club space also influence how interactive performance might be read and responded to in this context.

Ideologies of Interaction

For performance practitioners, as opposed to individuals or groups drawn from fields such as visual art, museum studies, computing or broadcast media where the drive to be interactive has a different set of imperatives, to be dialogic and to engage one's audience in the interpretation, creation and circulation of meaning has its roots in a long tradition of aesthetic, political, ideological and social concerns. Fischer-Lichte provides a detailed, historical account of how artists have pursued greater participatory forms in an attempt to transform spectators into actors (2008: pp.11-23). Performance artists, Dadaists, Surrealists, members of the Fluxus movement have all deployed a number of tactics to facilitate the dissolution of audience-

performer boundaries that Fischer-Lichte suggests could be called 'the performative

turn' (ibid. p.22). Susan Bennett too traces the development of what she terms the

'theatrical event' (1997: 104), where experimental theatre practitioners such as

Barba, Brook and Grotowski began challenging the ways in which audiences related

to, received and participated in the action in an attempt to 'explore the connections

between social life and ritual, and the theatrical performance' (ibid. p.105). For

Victor Turner, theatrical performances are structured experiences 'which probe a

community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished

values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them'

(1982: 11). Developing performance structures that allow the audience to become

active in that process of questioning the status quo and suggesting remedies for

society's ills, is one of the predominant concerns of practitioners wishing to create

work that is democratic. This is the key motivation behind the work of Boal and

other theatrical pedagogues who have been influenced by the Theatre of the

Oppressed. As Milling and Ley suggest, 'Boal advocates what is in many respects a

blameless theatre, in which all are participants rather than practitioners and receptors

and are involved in an effort of social progress' (Milling and Ley 2001: 143). To this

end, Boal developed a range of theatrical devices and structures that were designed

to promote interactivity. His mission to empower the spectator and to transform

him/her into the 'spect-actor' is articulated by Boal in overtly political language:

> I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the
> people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may
> utilise them. The theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it (Boal
> 1979: 122).

Whilst I am not suggesting interactive performance that exists in clubs is necessarily

political, the motivation to be interactive does have its roots in a politics of

democracy and empowerment that chimes with the ideology of the underground club space. As Bogad says, 'alternative worldviews need an alternative space in which to be developed and shared' (2006: 47). For many, the world of the underground club is a space that is able to house alternative worldviews and is a site in which opposition to the dominant world order is expressed through music, dance and the use of intoxicants. Whilst one is unlikely to see clubbers engaged in anything akin to Boal's Image Theatre, Forum Theatre or Legislative Theatre in a conscious attempt 'to rehearse direct confrontation with the state' (ibid. p.49), it is possible to see clubbers using interactive improvisation as a way of performing identity, playing with meaning and expressing commitment to social engagement. Whether this is translated into direct action of any kind or, indeed, indicates an expression of political democracy is impossible to prove. However, what can be argued is that the interactive imperative evident within the underground club exists within a framework where play, ideology and sociability combine, rendering it a significant arena in which performance practitioners and artists may develop greater understanding of the improvisational attitude.

Implications for artist and audience and the improvisational attitude

Whilst much of the current theory associated with interactive performance in contemporary practice sits within the technological world, interaction is primarily a psychological phenomenon rather than a technical one (Wechsler 2006: 63). Although specialising in live performance and motion tracking, Wechsler is at pains to point out the fundamental characteristics of interaction from which technological developments spring:

> One certainly does not need cameras and computers to be interactive. Interactivity is simply the instinctive back and forth energy which occurs when animals come together to speak, gesture, touch, or, in the case of humans, create art (ibid.).

It is evident that an audience is never completely passive regardless of whether what they are watching is described as 'interactive' or not. A performance only becomes such by the presence of an audience. As McAuley says, 'in the theatre, due to the live presence of both spectators and performers, the energy circulates from performer to spectator and back again, from spectator to performer and back again' (McAuley 2000: 246). In other words, even if an audience's interaction is largely silent, internal dialogue and reciprocity is integral to the live experience. The extent to which that sense of interactivity is prioritised or made visible, however, is variable. As Popat points out:

> …in interactive artworks the power given to the audience is far greater, and they are made aware of its existence. If the communication between artists(s) and viewers is to be two-way with mutual effect, then the focus of the artwork shifts. Instead of a completed product, the interactive artist designs a framework that contains the potential for the creative experience of the participant (Popat 2006: 34).

In this instance the artist is responsible for creating the structure, the framework, the environment within which the participant plays and the input of the participant, or the dialogue to which s/he contributes, is a central element of the work itself.

Undoubtedly, interaction changes the way an audience engages with and receives/contributes to the work. The work obtains a greater proportion of its meaning from the audience itself and audience participation becomes vital to the content of it. Interactivity is therefore a mechanism through which one may blur the distinctions between artist and audience. Both parties are co-creators in the work, breaking down the boundaries between the roles (Barry 1996: 139) which has been

both an aesthetic and ideological imperative for many twentieth-century performance practitioners.

In a performance setting there exists the potential for a number of different kinds or channels of interaction. Interaction may occur between artists, between artists and audience, between audience members, and between the artist or audience member and a computer system. Whatever the configuration or flow of connections between participants, interactivity 'depends on a certain degree of looseness, or openness in the artistic material, which allows for a convincing exchange to take place' (Wechsler 2006: 63). Philosopher and technology theorist Paul Virilio likens this to the play of a mechanical part when it comes loose in its housing (Sans and Virilio 1996: 24). Rather than bringing the pleasure we would normally associate with the term, 'play', in this instance, suggests an 'unaccustomed mobility with respect to reality. To play today, in a certain sense, means to choose between two realities' (ibid.). This play in the system (or the potential to become unfixed, unfastened or loose) is what both artists and audiences of interactive art deal with as they negotiate their way through the work.

The 'looseness' that Wechsler describes is similar to the phenomenon of improvisation. In many ways improvisation in performance terms involves a degree of letting go, of making space for unanticipated occurrences:

> The improvisational experience is a field of experimentation where we may learn to transcend previous borders of freedom. It is a space of experience where processes of listening are expanded to the extent that there is nothing 'wrong' or without value. We find ourselves in a space emptied of experience where something more honest may come out of the hidden (Fritz Hegi, in Ruud, 1995: 97).

Improvisation has been described as the nexus of relational activity – variously, the ebb and flow of listening and responding (Nachmanovitch 2007), a transformative way of being, knowing and doing (Yarrow 2007), and as a way of living as well as a way of performing (Britton 2007). Improvisation as a practice is very much rooted in the here and now, the present moment. It is committed to process rather than product and revels in the joy of the unexpected. For improvisation to occur there has to be a willingness to embrace immediacy, to engage with risk and unpredictability. In this sense, openness to improvisation (and by extension, interaction) can be read as an ideology. Improvisation is attitudinal. It is a politics of working *with* people, not against them or, as Yarrow puts it, 'improvisation is a plurality rather than a binary' (Yarrow 2007). With this in mind, it is my contention then that interaction is not merely a fashionable medium of our times that exploits and maximises technological developments in various ways. Rather, those actually committed to interactivity are, in fact, expressing an ideological position which relates to how we make connections with other people and, as a result, find shared ways of understanding what it means to be human.

It is my argument that the club space is predominantly a space of improvisation – not only social improvisation that occurs whenever people meet in the same place and respond to each other through the back and forth of everyday dialogue and exchange but also a space of performance improvisation that occurs under the gaze of others. Those who improvise within this space do so by utilising various performance registers, modes and languages in a constantly changing transaction that characterises improvised material. At its most basic, improvisation is a living, embodied interaction between a variety of elements. One may improvise alone but be

interacting with the space, the music, the light, an object and so on. One may improvise with another person or a group of people. In most improvisations of a dramatic nature an audience is presupposed. In the club space this is more problematic as an audience cannot be assumed but, as already mentioned, the club is a place of watching and being watched so, an audience of sorts cannot be disregarded. Improvisation requires close attention to others. It requires the development of listening skills which, within the club context, means not only listening and responding to the music, chat and general 'noise' of a crowded space but also an opening out of attention and an awareness of others' physical presence and psychic energy. This opening out of attention is in opposition to Stanislavski's 'circle of attention' where the actor draws a circle around himself to block out interruptions and distractions from others. The paradox for the club context here is that, as I have argued, many clubbers engage with dance music as a way of entering a trance-like state for the very purpose of blocking out external distraction. Others take to the dance floor primarily to interact or play with other people. As with other modes of performance that attempt to engage audiences in direct and physical ways, the challenges here are myriad. No audience is homogenous. Not every member of an audience can be expected to respond in exactly the same way or interpret the same moment in a similar manner to the person next to them. This is amplified within the club context due to the fluidity of the space, the ability of the crowd to look away, move on or disrupt the performance and the wealth of other activities that compete for attention at any one time. The challenges presented by this duality for club performers who seek to interact with the crowd is explored more fully in Chapter Five where my own practice-based research is discussed.

Interaction and the play of the club space

A certain feeling of play is necessary to generate interactive effect. If a piece is completely fixed it cannot be interactive. As Brian Eno suggests, unfinished is perhaps a more useful term than interactive. Unfinished 'implies that you, the user, are also the maker of the experience' (Eno in Leckart 2008) and, as such, responsible for its outcome and the meaning it then transmits. By embracing looseness and play, issues concerning control, integrity and ownership of the piece immediately come to the fore for artists working in this mode, as does the importance of conveying the rules of the interaction to the participants. Here, then, there is a tension between free play and rule making/breaking. This tension needs to be managed carefully by practitioners wishing to embrace unpredictability as an ingredient of creative engagement whilst at the same time ensuring that the interaction can continue without breaking down completely.

Broadly speaking, artists working with interactivity are providing the means by which audience members might access art works in a more democratic and empowered way (see Flisher 2008 for a full discussion). This may take the form of technologically driven work such as Stelarc's *Prosthetic Head* (2002), Paul Sermon's *Telematic Dreaming* (1992) or Blast Theory's series of works such as *Uncle Roy All Around You* (2003) and the more recent *Rider Spoke* (2007). It may also manifest in practices that are pedagogically conceived such as Theatre in Education programmes or interactive theatre practices developed to provoke social or political change at a local, national or international level, for instance Theatre for Development programmes or Theatre for Health. By making rules and codes explicit, they increase the accessibility of the work and thereby prioritise engagement and interactivity as a

fundamental ideology that often drives the content of the work as well as its form. As Graham points out, the successful interactive artist works in much the same way as a good host at a party (1997). Speaking about his own particular form of interactive theatre, Gary Izzo suggests his work attempts to be 'both inclusive and reactive to its audience. It changes in response to the audience's influence. It also creates, or re-creates, a bond of community, and thus restores, if only for a few hours our lost sense of belonging' (Izzo 1997: ix). Izzo talks of his participants as 'guests' and describes the stage as an environment that encloses both the audience (guests) and the actors. Each guest has a role to play. The outcomes of each scene depend on the guests' responses. The guests are as responsible as the actors for determining the progress of the theatrical piece:

> A guest who spends time in the sacred circle relinquishes inhibition and doubt and finds the freedom that leads to empowerment. A guest will begin to feel vital and valid. How else could you feel when you are in complete command of your reality – when the world around you values you without reason or condition? (Izzo 1997: 17)

The ability to invite participants in, make them feel welcome, listen to their contributions and respond accordingly lies at the heart of any effective, social interaction and is a useful model to apply to interactive art. To extend the analogy further, one may set the scene and make all the necessary preparations for a good party, but without the investment, goodwill and energy of your guests, the event may well fail or spiral out of control.

It is exactly the aesthetic and creative potential of this unpredictability that motivates companies such as Blast Theory to site their work in fluid, urban spaces and to utilise interactive technologies that are what Mark Weiser (1994) calls inherently

'seamful'[47] (Interview with Matt Adams, 01/07/08). In a similar manner to Graham's party or Blast Theory's urban street performance, the very nature of the club as a fluid, changeable and malleable space (both literally and metaphorically) means that any performance which occurs within it, is subject to and co-exists with the plethora of interactions already happening as a result of the social context. The sense of belonging and ownership Izzo ascribes to his own interactive pieces is echoed by many club-goers who feel 'vital and valid' in the club context as a direct result of the ethos of performative interactivity that infuses and drives these particular events. The underground club space provides a framework for social interactivity that, in turn, lends itself to the housing of interactive performance. The link between play and interaction is an intimate one. Many club performances are intrinsically interactive and playful but the extent to which clubbers are invited to play along clearly varies. The focus of my own practice is to explore how far this invitation may be extended and to what effect.

Immersion – Participation – Performative Interaction

One of the enduring mythologies surrounding rave culture since the late 1980s is the ethos of participation. Whilst the underground club scene may have changed considerably since the idealism of this period, the belief in clubbing as being an active contribution to a social engine that has the potential for significant meaning-making is still present. There exists the notion that by attending a rave one is not simply consuming a ready-made product but helping to shape its outcome through participating in it and surrendering oneself to unexpected interactions within the temporal and physical space of the event. This begins with the belief that within the

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[47] In relation to ubiquitous computing, Weiser advocates the development of 'seamful systems' (with beautiful seams as a goal) rather than 'seamlessness' where everything is rendered the same by virtue of its invisibility (1994).

underground there is a non-judgemental attitude and a more malleable and flexible appreciation of social groupings, which may be as temporary as they are intense. As one interviewee states:

> I like the sociability of the people there. You go to a mainstream club and everyone sticks to their little friendship groups whereas, in more alternative clubs, everyone talks to everyone. I went to … [*inaudible*] a few weeks back and we got a table and just sat down and I think I spoke to about twenty people on that night that I'll probably never see again. They told me their life story and I told them my life story and then we danced together. [Interview with AR 22/03/06]

Here the interviewee states that one of the key factors of the underground experience is a type of extreme 'sociability' that extends beyond the immediate group of friends with whom you attend the event. His view of 'mainstream clubs' is that groups in this context stay closed or exclusive. His belief is that in 'alternative clubs' people are more open to dialogue and conversation with others. Furthermore, he describes these exchanges not as instances of small talk or polite conversation but as the swapping of 'life stories'. Although significant and important information about each other is the currency of the interaction, the interviewee admits he is unlikely ever to meet the same people again making the exchange both fleeting and ultimately disposable.

Interviewees stated frequently that they sought out places and spaces within the club that intentionally facilitated interactions with other people, including strangers, and that this became a type of release from the restrictions of working day or the routine and conventions associated with the everyday:

> Just going out and being able to like just be free and to speak to whoever and have a really great time as a sort of release. [Interview with LB 23/03/06]

> I have been in clubs and stuff and thanked God for this opportunity to be on the same level as everyone else and just feeling alive and not being bogged down with work and the general routine. [Interview with NH 23/03/06]

Finding out more about people who were previously unknown to you was cited often as one of the priorities of a night. Whilst one may have entered the club with a distinct set of companions, the ultimate aim of the night seemed to be to cast a wider net out into the club and, as a result, implicate oneself in the network or system of associations provided by the event. Rather than drawing a tight fence around you and your direct circle of friends in order to protect you from the otherness of strangers, encounters with other people that were hitherto strangers were actively sought, even if those encounters were momentary or impermanent.

The promotion of social interaction which extends beyond your immediate friendship group was expressed as a sense of freedom and licence that many interviewees felt was missing from their everyday lives and which they articulated as being childlike or playful in essence:

> You can explore spaces and talk to complete strangers and meet new people. You're not judged for asking questions that you'd never ask in real life. Yes, it's definitely playful and the way you walk, move around the space, has a different pace to normality. It's just a totally different experience from the wear and tear of the everyday. [Interview with AR 22/03/06]

What is significant here is that the interviewee identifies the club world as different to 'real life'. In other words, the implication is that, for him, the club space operates within the temporal frame of play which is constructed on the basis of a different reality where one communicates more honestly and even moves with a different quality and at a different pace.

The way in which these spaces operate according to more open social codes results in a greater sense of what many expressed in terms of 'being oneself' [Interview with AR 22/03/06]. Furthermore, there is the recognition that the club or festival environment allows a release from restricting social codes that usually apply:

> […] the liberation of being in a place where no one actually cares who you are or what you are and the more underground you go the more that becomes the case. [NH]

This release from the strictures of everyday identity lends itself to clubbers experimenting with playful costume, fancy dress and masquerade – a phenomenon observed at almost every club event I attended during the period of research. Expressed explicitly in theatrical vocabulary in the final statement, one of my interviewees talks about his habit of attending raves dressed in full Highland regalia:

> I came into clubbing back in late 91. Then it was all peace, love, unity and respect. Both a recognised movement and a political force. Where cheap DIY nights were the rage and dressing up made the night. To me that 'vibe', for a better word, is still a part of what I consider a night out. And although we have grown old and the movement faded into the commercial mainstream, I feel that putting on a show every so often spreads the love back into the system. [Interview with MG 09/12/03]

Putting 'love back into the system' highlights the notion that for many the underground club operates on assumptions of generosity and gift rather than on consumption or exchanges of material benefits. Rather than connecting with people because of their economic value or worth in that particular market place, in terms of either social, cultural or sexual capital, the implicit underground club code promotes interaction as a form of contribution or, as one interviewee puts it, 'everyone's there to say 'yeah' rather than 'no'' [Interview with AR 22/03/06].

AB: Lots of underground clubs promote an ethos of democracy, participation […] and interactivity and we touched on it a little bit but have you ever experienced that sense of –

Equality?

AB: Yeah. That kind of democracy and the feeling that your participation is –

Part of the night?

AB: Yeah.

Yeah, definitely. Even just being there – I'm on quite a few mailing lists on the internet and I got this thank you for coming to this event note which was put up on quite a few forums, thank you for being there, thank you for making it a success. Because if you're not there, what is there? Nothing. You're just going to have a DJ and some drink and that's not part of the thing. So just by turning up you're already contracting to be part of the thing and then, quite a lot of my friends do poi and juggle and stuff, at home, so they've got their thing to take to it. I like the fact that everyone's got their story, their skill to take to it and present to other people. [Interview with AR 22/03/06]

This willingness to contract into the night as both instigator and receiver of social/performative exchanges influences and shapes the communality of the night which, in itself, forms the criterion for its ultimate success as an event in the eyes of its participants.

As Collin succinctly puts it 'E culture - from top to bottom…was about participation rather than observation' (Collin 1997: 7) and, in some circumstances, this holds true of the underground scene today. This ideology is reflected in various flyers and promotional statements put out by clubs and sound systems to signal their own philosophy of the rave experience:

If participant-driven experience does not make you think, sweat, cry, laugh or be left in a general disarray of confusion-malfunctions, mission (ob/sub)jectives have not been sufficiently assigned. We have not done our job' (*<ST>* flyer, mission statement, Van Veen 2002).

The heightened experience of inclusion and belonging goes some way to explain the great significance many clubbers ascribe to their clubbing, which goes far beyond the realms of commercial consumption of a particular leisure activity. As one interviewee describes it, the feeling of being 'very included and wanted and loved' [Interview with MJ 23/03/06] often leads to the clubbing experience being described in spiritual or religious ways. This was reiterated by three separate interviewees:

> I'm not religious but at that point I became really really spiritual and I felt like there was a line going through me and through the universe and just coming straight down on that moment there and I felt really really complete and the whole thing about it, it was incredible. [Interview with LB 23/03/06]

> A lot of people describe clubs as the new church and places like that that are all inclusive and have a policy of inclusivity is just so similar to the atmosphere in church, well, most churches anyway, the idea that you don't have to pay any money to be there, you don't have to give anything if you don't want to. You're allowed to be there in that space. [Interview with NH 23/03/06 (my interpolation in italics)]

> I got introduced to the scene through one of my friends who is a Quaker and I thought this situation really reflects that religion and your political viewpoint and I really like your viewpoint. I agree with it and I agree with that religion. I agree with the things that you do so I've got an identity with you, you've got an identity with this space and therefore have I got an identity with this space? Have I got the same political viewpoint as most of the people in this room? […]Peace, freedom and equality […] I think those spaces sum up those three things really well. I've never seen a fight in a drum n bass club. I've never seen a non-equal, judgemental slant. It's an equal space where everyone's allowed to do their thing. It's a really friendly religion. Its main phrase is "a clenched fist cannot shake hands". So much of that happens in a space like that. People who don't know each other that well go up and hug each other. That wouldn't happen in any other place I can think of. [Interview with AR 22/03/06]

Not only do these testimonies indicate a fervent belief in the spiritual dimensions of clubbing, they offer an insight into the powerful ideologies clubbers attribute to the events themselves. Notions of 'completeness', 'inclusivity', 'equality' are all conveyed as being fundamental to the ethos of the underground club. These concepts are not understood by participants as marketing tools or unique selling points but as by-products of a scene that allows them access to the spiritual, quasi-religious

dimension without having to subscribe to any form of obligation associated with organised religion. The underground club, which today generally operates as just one of the clubbing commodities on offer within the spectrum of the leisure industry, seems resistant to being positioned as such by its attendees who prefer to frame it as a free space, both economically and psychologically.

Often the devotional intensity of the club experience is directed towards the DJ whose task it is to understand the feelings of a group of people, respond to them and direct them to a higher state of consciousness through the manipulation of music . For Brewster and Broughton the role of the DJ is not merely a functional or technical one, but rather one which takes on shamanic qualities. As they say, 'in the hands of a master, records become the tools for rituals of spiritual communication' (Brewster and Broughton 1999: 11). The idea of communion here is central. 'It's about breaking the audience/artist boundary, about being an event, not just watching one' (ibid.):

> […] you're no longer just an isolated individual. A dancefloor is about collective action, making you an active participant, a vital component. You're creating the event, not just consuming it – the spectacle doesn't exist without you (ibid. 390).

For many, the desire to participate in a rave or underground party is to engage in a conscious process of disorientation and re-orientation (McCall, 2001: 14) and, as discussed at length in Chapter One, from the late 1980s onwards the manner in which buildings, industrial sites and open spaces began to be used by party organisers had this function in mind:

> At some point in history nightclubs became places of grand spectacle – great throbbing systems of sound and light, otherworldly places that can shake reality right out of your bones; and clubbers were transformed from members of an audience into

active, reciprocating participants, vital components of the transcendent music ritual (Brewster and Broughton 1999: 72).

In turn, this led to a proliferation of themed nights where clubbers were encouraged to dress up accordingly and to immerse themselves in the event using the codes of theatricality to experiment with and confront shifting identities:

> Themed parties drew attention to the fact that going to any club was a special staged event in which clubgoers were invited to cast themselves, whether as futuristic cyberslut, S/M leather boy, Judy Garland on mescaline, or any simply fabulous dramatis personae of the demimonde. This invitation to be fabulous, this acting out of fantasy might have been more "real" than the quotidian reality of everyday life for its participants. They told the story of their experience and their imagination (Buckland 2002: 63).

Innovations in both music and event production gathered pace during the 1990s and competition between crews and sound systems led to greater sophistication and experimentation in the field of creative interaction. Multi- and inter-disciplinary performance became an integral part of this movement. Spaces were augmented with visual artwork, video projection, sculpture, textiles, circus acts, fire breathing, light displays, sonic art and a host of other activities that led to events being experienced as huge art installations of which the clubbers themselves were a part.

This change in how the club space was conceived and perceived provided a creative platform for a rich mixture of artists, many of whom were interested in the ethics of participatory or interactive work. Talking of 'performance as collaboration' (2000:7), Birringer develops a theory of spectatorship that locates the object of the gaze not on the side of the spectator but in-between performers. He suggests 'collaborative work rehearses dis-orientation: it evolves from encounters and experiences of diverse local infrastructures, common and dissimilar ground shared by people of different backgrounds and border knowledges, and from the creative and expressive methods,

practices, and perceptions exchanged' (ibid. p. 69) and it is this model that infuses

the club space as a site of performative interaction and shared creativity which blurs

the categories of producer, consumer, actor and receiver, meaning-maker and

interpreter.

Whilst infused with the imagery and technological aesthetics of digital media and

computer art, the club remains, Thornton suggests, as 'the site of tangible human

interactions' (Thornton 1995: 57). Being surrounded by other people with diverse

experiences and backgrounds but having the belief that there exists a shared ideology

which then frees one up to behave without adverse judgments from others is a

recurring narrative of many of the interviews I conducted. This shared and mutual

understanding that many interviewees expressed as a central feature of the

underground club scene is articulated as 'being on the same level'. Although it could

be argued the demographic of many clubs is fairly narrow, the underground scene

would appear to allow for a wider range of participants, in part due to its ethic of

inclusivity.[48] Despite pointing out the diversity of the club crowd (in terms of age,

background, career, interests and so on), the belief that there is a fundamental

'sameness' is also central to the formation of the clubbers' meta-narrative. This

shared ideology transforms the notion of the 'clubbing community' into a more

enacted sense of 'communitas' as expressed by Turner. In other words the temporary

community housed within the space of the club participate in a shared experience

that is often expressed as an intense and acute awareness of being part of a greater

whole. The feeling of togetherness and social cohesion is experienced and expressed

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[48] I have attended a number of events where the age range spanned from clubbers who were in their mid-teens to clubbers who were 60 and above.

through movement, taking interaction beyond the verbal range and into the physical register of communal, social dance.

This is perhaps linked to the belief in the moment – aided by the properties of MDMA, a common club drug characterised as an 'empathogen-entactogen'.[49] In the club space there exists a sense of 'being lost in the moment' or revelling in the here and now. The focus is on the present tense and the presence of bodies sharing the same space for a similar purpose. This is described paradoxically by the same interviewee as an intensely personal experience:

> Sometimes you are totally lost in the moment, in a song, a beat, in the way that your chest is vibrating with every pulse of the bass. Sometimes I shut my eyes and feel like I am in a totally different world, where I feel unbelievably liberated, and a huge smile spreads across my face, and I can feel the music surge through all of my body and the rhythm beats in time with my heart, as if the music's beat has become the beat of my heart. My arms go up in the air, I start jumping about and squealing. That's when I get lost in my own moment. [Interview with CL 05/05/06]

As well as getting 'lost in one's own moment' and having a highly individualised experience as described above, the club experience also provides access to the collective, group experience. For some the club experience allows one to experience 'liberation' and 'unbridled freedom' (as described below) that becomes part of a shared mythology between groups of friends which, in turn, becomes part of that group's history through memory and transmission of memory:

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[49] The term "empathogen" to describe MDMA and other closely related phenethylamine "empathy drugs" [MDA, MDEA, MBDB] was proposed by Ralph Metzner, Dean of the California Institute of Integral Studies, at a 1983 conference at the University of California at Santa Barbara. The term "entactogen" was coined in 1986 by Dr David Nichols, Professor of Medicinal Chemistry and Pharmacology at Purdue University and co-founder of the Heffter Research Institute, to refer to substances that generate a sense of "touching within" or "produce a feeling in one's innermost being". (taken from Utopian Pharmacology: Mental Health in the Third Millennium, MDMA and beyond at http://www.mdma.net/). (See also footnote 6)

> You are linked to all those people who are in that club with you at the same time. You are like a community sharing this one huge experience; this freeing, emotional, fun, liberating journey…And if you go clubbing with a friend/friends/or partner you immediately have that link of unbridled freedom that you experienced together. It's a bond that no one can break. It forms in your mind as a memory, a memory of an emotional event that can never be changed. [Interview with CL 05/05/06]

Whilst this sense of community is at its peak within the club itself, some participants attempt to extend its effects beyond the time-frame of the club event, a process that is facilitated further by the use of internet and other digital means:

> There's places on the internet where you can see photos, speak to people you've seen at that club. You might not know them that well but you can bump into people in the street. […] So there's always that – it's part of the identity thing. It's their identity too. You've got something in common with them so you may as well play on that. You've got something in common with them so you may as well talk about it and experience more things together. [Interview with AR 22/03/06]

That sense of community then extends beyond the hours of the event itself and is made manifest through the use of social networking sites, internet discussion rooms, Facebook groups and so on. The desire to be seen as a member of the club (even when it has no official membership structure), belonging to or being 'part of a group' that identifies itself as emblematic of a particular club night and its attendant ethos, is an important aspect of the clubbing experience for some:

> […] you become part of that entity; you become part of the name of that club, part of its reputation. You're one of the things about it that people go and judge the club on. [Interview with AR 22/03/06]
>
> […] you feel like really part of a group […] everyone feels like as one and everyone wants to stay together. [Interview with MJ 23/03/06][50]

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[50] For note, interviews with AR, MJ, LB and NH were conducted over an intensive two day period in March 2006.

It is this yearning for interconnectedness that places live performance at the very heart of what could otherwise be described as a technologically-driven environment. Rather than presenting a uni-directional version of the world, authored or scripted by a single writer or limited group of people belonging to a performance company, symbolic meaning and the process of doing/being/living are tied together through the participants' experience of the party as an embodied performance event. Interactions within and across the space are multi-directional and polyvocal. The performance itself is in continual process as the night unfolds and more participant-performers engage with the context and become agents within it. In turn, this process is performed through interactions with others, with the musical text and with the dimensions of the space (both literal and symbolic). The club space operates as a complex system made up of many parts with the potential for numerous interactions of various sorts. These units of interaction that occur continuously throughout the night result in unpredictable outcomes and the club becomes a site of emergence situated on what is known in the science of complex systems as the Edge of Chaos,[51] a period of turbulence from which new order may emerge.

To summarise, the focus of this research is to examine not only the various types of interactive performances that occur within a club space but also to find ways of reading the club space as an immersive environment in which clubbers may position themselves as potential players, participants or performers. The premise here is that clubbers literally inter-act (that is, take up a position in-between that of performer and audience with considerable play between the two roles) with the space, with the

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[51] The phrase 'Edge of Chaos' was first coined by computer scientist Christopher Langton in 1990 (Langton, Christopher G. 'Computation at the edge of chaos' *Physica D*, 42, 1990).

context and with each other. As discussed in Chapter Three, through its architecture, arrangement and audio-visual terrain, the club space offers varying degrees of sensory immersion. Clubbers allow themselves to be enveloped in the environment, both physically and emotionally. The club space literally and metaphorically draws them in towards the centre of the event and, thus, provides a route to embodied participation. Clubbers talk often of their participation in an event and the primacy of 'being there' as a contribution to the night's success. By prioritising an ideology and practice of individual and collective involvement, engagement and, to some extent responsibility, the underground club is already prepared to house performative interactions which rely on positive exchange and dialogue in order to function.

It is worth noting that not all club experiences follow a natural progression from immersion to participation to interaction. Many times during fieldwork, I felt unable to immerse myself fully or to engage in any complete or satisfactory manner due to my role there as observer/analyst. What I am proposing here is that the *potential* for immersive experience (which may lead to a sense of contribution and performative exchange) is ever-present but that it is not easily achieved and relies upon a number of influencing factors that cannot be entirely prearranged. When certain factors integrate successfully (be that the music, the spatial dimensions, the group dynamics, the ingestion of certain drugs, the energy of the crowd and so on), the 'magic' of the underground club night, often expressed in quasi-religious tones, is created:

> Something magical happens to me during those twilight hours on Sunday morning. It is on the Sabbath that I always find my god. I am as nomadic as the others wandering from warehouse to warehouse to warehouse and have my soul awakened. The music thunders through my flesh, the notes swim within my veins. DJs spin their scriptures with eloquence, zest and assurance. The bass rattles my lungs and beats in unison with my heart. If I close my eyes I can watch my flesh melt away and my soul rise between the spaces of sound. (McCall 2001: foreword)

Chapter Five – Frameworks for Creating Interactive Club Performance

'We're fools whether we dance or not, so we may as well dance' (Japanese Proverb)

Introduction

The following chapter describes and analyses a series of interactive performance pieces that were devised for a club space and developed by myself with a team of volunteer performers. In the early stages of research for this thesis my work was largely ethnographic. I began by observing and examining the characteristics of the club space, moved towards a conceptual consideration of the club space as a playful arena, and progressed to investigating how performative interactions of a more formal nature might be analysed within this setting. Once the ethnographic phase was underway it became clear that an additional way to tackle the research territory would be to conduct practice-led research that would approach the same ideas but along a different trajectory. The intended route for this phase of the research was to begin by creating interactive performance pieces, and then to consider how those pieces encouraged physical participation and how that process of embodiment helped to frame the club space as a place where people can engage creatively in dialogic exchanges that are framed by the performative mode. The overarching aim of this was to investigate how flexible performance structures and strategies may be applied to a particular site and context to allow for varying degrees of performer-audience interaction to take place.

Research Design

At the beginning of my research the aim was to observe a range of professional and semi-professional performance work created specifically for clubs in order to analyse its participatory and interactive qualities *in situ*. The three main research questions

that guided my observations in the initial period of ethnographic fieldwork in various UK clubs were as follows (outlined also on p. 21):

1. How do modes of professional and semi-professional performance operate within the fluidity of the club space?

2. Are performances signalled as such and how does this impact on audience response?

3. What is the nature of the interaction between formal performance and creative clubbers?

It became apparent quickly, however, that this was not the single most effective method of gathering data or of answering these questions in a satisfactory way. Whilst on occasion it was possible to see samples of work from companies and some useful data was collected, the experience proved to be rather random. Whilst the DJ line-up was often published in advance, the theatrical/performance elements of a club event were not always advertised (it being considered a value-added activity of the club rather than one which is the central feature of the night). If a club event did announce a performance presence, definite performance times were never given and so, in a large space and often over a period of six hours or more, it was easy to miss work that was occurring. Having interviewed a number of professional performers early on in the research, it became clear they themselves felt that their practice was often constrained by practicalities such as budget, resources and staffing and their desire to experiment artistically was, at times, at odds with the demands of the club managers, DJs, promoters and security staff. One club performer, who specialises in aerial and stilt work, told me that in more commercial clubs performers are booked to

provide mere 'eye candy' for clubbers and that promoters 'don't really have any concerns for the performers. You can't have much creative say in what you do…They're not really up for experimenting and you always feel in jeopardy of not being paid or not being paid the amount that's been agreed'. (Interview with DS, 20/02/04) These constraints clearly had an impact on the type of work being carried out in these venues and thus limited the scope of practice I would be able to see.

Taking these factors into account it became apparent that an additional way to investigate specific notions of interactivity and participation would be to create a series of bespoke performance pieces that would be designed with my own research focus in mind, in partnership with a supportive club organiser or crew. The observation of performance work created by others for a club context continued throughout the study and was used to inform the performance design. My aim, then, became to devise a number of pieces to address specific notions surrounding performance, participation and play, ranging from improvisational forms of visual theatre through to technologically-mediated digital works. The practice developed along two main threads. First, in collaboration with BigDog Interactive (formerly .:thePooch:.), the *iPoi Project* was developed using mobile, wireless technology. This has since been performed in a range of different locations and has gone through a number of iterations and design prototypes. Results of this work have been published in a number of journals and presented at conferences both nationally and internationally.[52] Secondly, I formed my own performance company,

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[52]Sheridan, Dix, Lock and Bayliss (2004), Bayliss, Sheridan, Villar (2005) and Sheridan, Bayliss, Bryan-Kinns (2006, 2007).

…floorSpace…[53] The company has concentrated on developing highly visual, mobile performances which are character-based and designed to interact physically with clubbers on the dance floor. It is this work which forms the basis of this chapter with analysis of the practice drawing on some of the play theories as discussed in Chapter Two. It is important to point out that the work of …floorSpace… bears close relationship to performance work that is characterised by the term 'walkabout' (Mason 1992, Carlson 2004) and follows in the tradition of companies such as Natural Theatre, Scharlatan Theater and Théâtre Décale. The intention here was not to invent a new type of practice but to develop a new model for theorising and conceptualising this type of practice and for examining in close detail how this work operates within the context of the underground dance floor, a space that is already imbued with notions of playfulness and performative behaviour.

The research questions that framed my observations of performance work already occurring in club spaces enabled me to formulate a design ethic for my own practice. Witnessing and interacting with a host of professional, semi-professional and participant performance over an extended period of time enabled me to develop a performance strategy which tested out what I had begun to consider to be the essential components of interactive performance within the club context. These components will be explored in detail later on in the chapter.

The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in a range of clubs across the UK but largely situated in Leeds, Sheffield and London. The performances carried out by

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[53] The company has now been operational for three years and we continue to make bespoke performances for underground club nights and festivals. The company's website can be viewed at www.embracefloorspace.co.uk

…floorSpace… have taken place in the North of England, namely Leeds, Sheffield and Lancashire. Many of the nights attended for participant-observation were chosen because they incorporated some element of performance into their format: circus artists, walkabout characters and fancy dress nights were regular features. As I became more familiar with the events and made contact with promoters and organisers to gain follow-up interviews, it became clear that these nights were often envisaged as 'platform[s] for emerging artists' (Interview with CS, 22/03/04). Certain promoters viewed providing playful performance as a significant (if not central) part of their remit. These organisers were open to experimental forms and practices occurring within their own club context and they proved highly supportive in allowing the research to develop through the application of performance practice.[54]

Central Considerations for the Company Framework

Although much material to do with interactivity rests within the technological domain and although I had spent an amount of time working with computer technology as a mediating factor in interactive club performance, the motivation behind the work of …floorSpace… was to develop performance pieces that were intentionally 'low tech'. My interest here was to explore what mediations (both structural and material) might be deployed within a performance in order to facilitate effective, reciprocal exchange as exemplified by the generative qualities of the feedback loop between DJ, technology and crowd. Having observed the visual and physical cues DJs use to assess the energy of a crowd in order to play with their

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[54] Since the inception of the company a number of strong partnerships have been formed with underground club nights and festivals, particularly Fatmoon Psychedelic Playgrounds and *Shamania*. The company take regular bookings for performances and the work has served as a springboard into further research into 'Festival Performance as a State of Encounter' (see footnote 25, page 149).

responses and to deepen their levels of participation, I wanted to use this as a model for investigating the mediations or 'prompts' by which clubbers may begin to interact with and enter physical performance.

In July 2006 this period of practice-led research began. Five undergraduate students from the University of Leeds with a strong interest in interactive performance and processes of improvisation agreed to participate in the research as performers and the company was established. The intention, at this time, was to create three different pieces of work -which later became known as '*VIPs*', '*Dogs*' and '*Tea Party*'. These were performed at the first *Shamania Festival*[55] in the Ribble Valley, Lancashire, in conjunction with *Fatmoon Psychedelic Playgrounds*[56]. Whilst performing at a festival has its own set of considerations and concerns, the *Fatmoon* tent at *Shamania* operated as an underground club space in its own right within the broader context of the festival. As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the underground club event does not have by necessity to take place indoors. Furthermore, this particular underground dance festival had a commonality with rave culture and the free party movement that made it an ideal environment for situating the company's work.

All the volunteers were made aware of the research territory before agreeing to participate in the project. As well as performing they agreed to record their thoughts, experiences and reflections both pre and post performance and to take part in follow-up interviews and questionnaires. The performers were made aware of the various developmental stages of the project (devising – performing – recording – reflecting).

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[55] www.Shamania.co.uk

[56] www.fatmoon.co.uk

I felt it important for them to be aware of and acknowledge all stages of the work and see them in relation to each other – not as discrete phases but as overlapping entities that would help the work progress. My aim was to develop company members as reflective practitioners and to use reflection-in-action techniques (Schön 1983) both in rehearsals and during performance.[57]

At the very start of the process I felt it essential to share a set of key points with the volunteers in order to provide a clear framework for the practice. The first of these was that the intention behind the work was to create the pieces together - a joint process with shared responsibility for the work. Whilst I would lead the group as company director, advising them, steering them and shaping what they produced, their sense of ownership of each created piece was extremely important. In line with the democratic nature of the performance outcome and the ethos of democracy valued by the Psytrance[58] festival community in which we would largely work, it was vital that our process reflected that ideology. Furthermore, the nature of the work was to be that of collaboration – between performers and between performers and audience. There might be a direction to the piece but as it was to be intentionally open-ended and flexible, it could not be the product of one person's vision. As the performers would be realising the work themselves and performing in a fairly risk-laden environment, then it was essential to me that they felt entirely comfortable with and within the performance. To be certain of this it was important they contributed to

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[57] Although this research was intended to take place over a limited period of time, the company has continued to grow and diversify and, at time of writing, we are about to perform our seventh bespoke performance. Allowing the practice to develop in this way has provided rich material for research and has allowed me to refine and rethink a number of concepts relating to the research questions outlined in the previous section. Whilst the practice discussed in this chapter took place in 2006, the reflections and analysis contained within this chapter are written with the benefit of a further two years' experimentation.

[58] Psytrance is a shortened version of Pyschedelic Trance, a type of layered dance music characterised by strong bass beats, synthesised drums and other instruments and operates at approximately 140 – 150 bpm.

the creation of the work and were committed to its successful execution as a result.

Performers' investment in this practice has been central to the establishment of the

company's ethic. Drawing heavily on Etchells' manifesto *On Risk and Investment*,

all performers have embraced the notion that working in a collaborative manner in a

context which is in a state of constant physical and psychical flux, requires one to be

'bound up with what you are doing, to be at risk in it, to be exposed by it' (Etchells

1999: 48). As one performer told me at the end of the first *Shamania* festival, 'the

space itself affords us as performers a sense of creativity and risk' [HW]. Examining

the relationship between the performers' sense of creativity and the audience's ability

to create in collaboration with them has been a further outcome of the work.

Most volunteers joined the company because they were already committed to the

underground dance scene and had considerable personal attachment to it. When they

agreed to participate in the research it became clear that levels of personal investment

would be high. As well as commitment to the project itself, volunteers were

committed to the context in which they would work and to participatory and

interactive theatre practice in general. As Etchells suggests, high degrees of

investment raise the stakes of any performance and whilst it may leave us 'naked,

with slips and weaknesses, with the not-yet and never-to-be certain' (ibid. p.49) the

reward is that 'investment forces us to know that performative actions have real

consequence that go beyond the performance arena' (ibid.). Etchells urges

performers to ask:

> When this performance finishes will it matter? Where will it matter? Will
> the performer carry this with them tomorrow? In their sleep? In their psyche? Does
> this action, this performance, contain these people (and me) in some strange and
> perhaps unspeakable way?
> I ask of each performance: will I carry this event with me tomorrow? Will it
> haunt me? Will it change you, will it change me, will it change things? (ibid.)

Etchell's manifesto operated as a conceptual underpinnng while the company worked through the rehearsal process and performed the pieces *in situ*. The three key terms of risk, investment and play continue to infuse the work of …floorSpace… and act as anchoring concepts for much of what is discussed further in this chapter.

The second key point I felt it necessary to share with the volunteers at the outset was that the work created was to be part of a research project. Its intention follows the lines of Practice as Research as laid down in the AHRC-funded project PARIP – that research is embedded in the practice to bring to light analysis and to deepen research questions.[59] Whilst the work may seem extremely playful in its design and in its development, it had to fit certain criteria to be useful as research data and to provide opportunities to analyse interaction. This consideration throws into relief the debate surrounding the work-play tension that is explored in relation to the cultural positioning of play in Chapter Two and is one that exists in many of the creative industries where the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of telic and auto-telic activity are in constant flux. In this instance it was imperative that the company recognise they would be engaged in a form of work – creating, shaping and crafting performance for a very particular purpose even though it would have the look and feel of 'play' in its development, design and outcome.

The third key area was to share with them some of the principles that had begun to emerge from my period of ethnographic fieldwork. These are outlined below:

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[59] http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/

1. Environment – The aim of this practice was to create site-specific work, or more accurately, context-specific work. When creating work of this kind it was essential performers knew the environment and understood how it operated *without* the presence of performance before overlaying performance onto it. People do not go clubbing specifically to see performance although many cite the performative elements of a club event as that which marks it out as 'special' and allows it to be read as a playful arena with the particular ordering of time, space and objects that accompanies it. The unexpected, the element of surprise, the 'madness' of performance marks it out from the ordinary and thus the convivial space of the club becomes a playing space of potentiality and provisionality. Many seek out those clubs that encourage and support a performative environment because of that context's desire to engage with the not-for-profit ideology of playfulness – in other words, a beautiful waste of time. If people have entered the club without the expectation of seeing performance, then performance itself must not get in the way of the 'serious' business of clubbing. It must not get in the way physically by taking up too much space or by preventing people from dancing or drinking. It must not be overtly combative or oppositional to what is going on in the crowd. Primarily people go clubbing for fun – it is a weekend activity far away from the world of work. Whilst there is potentially a large crowd available as spectators to the performance, it would have been inappropriate to seize this opportunity to stage a piece with content fundamentally oppositional to the context (for example a piece dealing with serious social issues or one which has an obscure artistic intent). The performances needed to work with the flow of the club and the flow of the crowd. They needed to take into account the environment in which they occurred, resonate with it and add to the texture and quality of the club space. In the same way that the performances aimed to

invite people to participate, interact and play, the crowd, the club and the management had invited us as a performance company into their environment – there was a mutual reciprocity at work which was finely balanced and based on notions of understanding, respect and negotiation. In creating work of this nature the company needed to be acutely sensitive to their surroundings and aware of the spatial frames that were in operation. The performers needed to take into account not only the wider frame of the festival as a cultural space set apart from the world of the everyday and operating according to different codes and conventions but they also needed to be fully aware of the environmental components that Nieuwenhuis suggests influences one's capacity for 'ludic potential' (1974). In the context of the dance tent the space was constantly in flux, the performance mobile and subject to disruption, interruption and interjection. The performers needed to reassess constantly what they were doing and how it impacted on the physical and psychical environment in which they found themselves.

2. Space – Aligned with an appreciation of context, it is essential that the performers thought carefully about the way the space itself operates. Clubs are large open spaces designed for a variety of social activities. They hold large numbers of people who establish the 'rules of the space' implicitly and explicitly and determine the points of entry into the playful arena as explored in Chapter Two. The gatekeepers of this activity may be club owners, promoters or security staff, or indeed the clubbers themselves who engrave the space with their own (usually) unspoken codes of conduct. It is vital that performers tried to key into these rules before considering how their own performance might operate alongside them. What are the dynamics of the space? Where are the focal points? Are there hot spots of attention? Are there

cool spots that are ignored or under-used? Are there interesting dimensions to the rooms, corridors, bars and toilet areas that could be exploited for performance purposes? Are there practical considerations to be taken into account such as floor covering, potential for spilled drinks or wet areas, health and safety concerns?

3. Culture – Clubs allow groups of people to get together who are bound by a shared culture, albeit a temporary and often elusive one. This manifests itself in terms of the type of music played, the dress codes (or lack of them), the style of dancing, sexual mores, attitudes to drugs and drink and so on. As adult playgrounds clubs give license to a whole set of social behaviours that differ from the day time world of work, school, family and economic production. It is vital to be aware of what codes are in operation and to determine how these codes are likely to affect behaviour so that one may work with that particular dynamic rather than against it.

4. Performance – Working in such a fluid space, performers needed to be acutely aware of how they themselves carry the signs of performance with them. At various times during the night, sharing the same space as the crowd, they may or may not be 'in role' or 'on stage'. It was necessary to consider how the performance signalled itself as beginning and ending and how the performers themselves managed their transition from performing to not performing. How the performance declares itself determines how people respond to it. Any performance with an emphasis on playful participation can be risky. By inviting people to play with the performance, control of the piece is shared so that it becomes a joint responsibility between performer and audience. By relinquishing too much control the piece threatens to fall apart. By not providing enough openness the piece cannot be truly interactive. At best the outcome

will be largely unknown until it is finished and yet it must progress according to the structures set up at the start by the performers or initiators of the piece. It is important therefore to decide how much of the outcome can be determined by the participants. How much control will be given to them? How can the participant status of 'inter-actor' be achieved? What are the rules of the game and how are these explained or made apparent?

5. Content/Style – Clubs work on a visual-auditory continuum. The assault on the sense of hearing in such a club cannot be underestimated when creating performance work. Music is as loud as legality will allow. The bass is often so deep it can be felt through the body not just through the ears. The volume of the music disallows much room for talk (or verbal text in terms of performance) and so other methods of communication are sought. Clubs have a strong sense of visual aesthetic. They tend to be highly decorated with wall hangings, art works, projections, backdrops and so on and the crowd tend to augment their own presence with costuming of their own, adding to the spectacular/carnivalesque nature of the event. Light (and the presence of dry ice, fog and smoke machines) is obviously an important factor in working with the music and in establishing the space or, indeed, obscuring it through visual disorientation. The performance pieces created needed to take into account the visual-auditory continuum of the club space as well as considering the challenges presented by working in outdoor festival sites where the environment can change quickly from outdoor spaciousness to cramped, dark tented areas. The performance pieces needed to embrace these particularities, making them work in their favour rather than allowing them to impede the results.

6. Contrast – Creating work that plays with contrast is key to establishing how one might signal a performance. If one can identify the features of a club environment (for example, noise and movement) and then identify its opposite (for example, silence and stillness), one can then play with a crowd's expectations of that particular context. By creating the opposite, you say to your audience, "I understand the reality. I know what I should be seeing but wouldn't it be interesting if…" This can be applied to character-led work as well as to discrete qualities of movement. The 'what if' principle can be very effective in this context and has been utilised by a number of professional companies such as Funding Pending Live Art[60] whose performance piece from the late 1990s, *The Sisters of Percy*, involved highly made-up nuns moving around the club space interacting with participants. The 'what-if' principle of performance practice of this nature coincides with the conceptual 'what-if' of the subjunctive mood as explored by Turner (1986: 42). In this context 'the maybe, the might be, the as if' (ibid.) find tangible form.

7. Risk - The final consideration for performers concerns risk. Returning to Etchells' provocation, similar to the full of absorption of deep play (Geertz 1973) 'investment draws us in. Something is happening – real and therefore risked – something seems to slip across from the private world to the public one – and the performers are 'left open' or 'left exposed'' (Etchells 1999: 48). The aim of …floorSpace… practice is to facilitate 'real' or genuine transactions between performers and audience and these transactions or exchanges take place beyond the 'private' space of the fictional stage

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[60] Now called FrictionArts and run by artists Sandra Hall and Lee Griffiths, Funding Pending Live Art was a Birmingham-based performance company making work for a range of settings and contexts. It was their practice for Atomic Jam at the *Q Club* in Birmingham that first inspired me to conduct this research. Early discussions with them were influential in shaping my initial ideas for this thesis. Their current work can be found at www.frictionarts.com

where actors can be somewhat protected by theatrical convention. In the festival or club environment there is an added complication as not only is there a risk within the performance (it is improvised and thus unfinished in both form and content and so relies on the willingness of an audience to participate) but the context itself is risky and unpredictable. Large numbers of people are in attendance in a potentially unfamiliar space. Drink and drugs are likely to be involved. Many people have had no sleep. The floor may be slippery, the exits unclear, the dance floor crowded. It is essential, therefore, that the company had an understanding of the risks associated with the work, both conceptually and practically, and were able to both embrace its qualities and manage its outcome.

Whilst performances in this context might seem extremely playful, both in terms of devising and outcome, there is a duty of care to both performers and audience that infuses the work at both logistical and conceptual levels. There were obvious safety issues for performers working in such a risky and unpredictable environment that needed to be taken into consideration. In addition, performers had a duty of care to the audience. The 'rules of the game' had to be sufficiently clear and the parameters of the performance made sufficiently explicit so that the audience members were not exposed or made to feel vulnerable. The Greek term for hospitality ('philoxenia') is useful here. Literally translated it means 'love to strangers' which rhymes helpfully with the notion of a good interactive performance being like hosting a good party (Graham 1996: 171). However, the Derridean notion that hospitality requires an acknowledgement of ownership, possession and control in order to exist also needs examining (Derrida 1995: 70). To host one has to be in a position of power. In order to retain control of your status as host, the role of guest needs to be demonstrated and

maintained and the uninvited excluded. In other words, in order to be hospitable one has also to be inhospitable, another Derridean possible-impossible aporia (Derrida 1992, 1995). The notion of hospitality, duty of care and shared responsibility for each other is undoubtedly echoed in the ethos of the festival itself and the PLUR (Peace Love Unity Respect) ideology of the wider clubbing community; and yet it is worth asking, if that community feels as if they are being embraced by hospitality, who is the owner of that environment? How that balance of power and control is negotiated through the risk and play of interactive performance exists at the core of …floorSpace's… work and is discussed in relation to the analysis of practice later in the chapter.

Developing a Poetics of Interaction

From ethnographic fieldwork and close consideration of the club space as a potential performance space, I identified four elements that were embedded into each devised performance structure in order to elicit interactive responses from the crowd. I articulated these concepts as incongruity, generosity, improvisation and playfulness, and explored them in rehearsal with the volunteers as a means of developing a poetics of interaction that would characterise the work.

1. Incongruity was established as a key concept that became a guiding principle for each devised performance. This assisted us in choosing the characters, setting, narratives, visual gags and so on that were then developed with the audience. As the club space or festival tent is not set up primarily as a traditional performance space, the crowd's reading of the space is not conditioned in the same way as it might be in a theatre building which has its codes of disciplinary behaviour deeply engrained within the architecture (Kershaw 1999: 62). In the club space there is no darkened

auditorium, no proscenium arch, nor foyer that signals how one should behave as 'audience' at any particular time. Similarly those in attendance have not come to the club, party or festival with the primary purpose of watching performance and may not consider themselves as potential audience members at all. Thus it was essential that the performers signalled themselves in such a way that helped clubbers 'read' the performance. Clearly, many of the social interactions going on in the convivial space of the party may be considered to be 'performances' in themselves and, as such, multiple 'micro' or 'invisible' performances may be said to be in train during the course of the night. However, the purpose of this particular work was to encourage participation. From my perspective, it was ethical to provide people with clues as to the rules of the game, even if those rules were not spelt out explicitly. The aim was not to trick people into participating, nor was it the intention to make people feel uncomfortable, uneasy or humiliated. As previously discussed, play cannot thrive in an atmosphere of derision (Burnett 2004). If an image is incongruous and provokes curiosity, laughter, a smirk, a wry smile in recognition then its status as performance has been signalled and audience members can position themselves in relation to it in an informed way in order ultimately to gain entry to its structure if they so choose to. Because of the lack of formal *mise en scène* the performers hold the performance entirely in (and on) their body. Learning how to embody incongruity as an aesthetic informed each of the devised pieces.

2. Generosity – the second central principle of this work was that performance be offered as a gift, an unexpected extra that has been created as a primarily visual treat. The performance existed as something that had been shaped specifically for an occasion. Generosity was embedded also within the performance structure itself. The intention was to give the participants a variety of artefacts as they came into contact

with the work, a tangible manifestation of the main intention of the piece. In this way the performance structures were conceptualised as invitations; invitations to play or as invitations to a party. Hind uses the metaphor of a series of open doors to express this concept, suggesting her practice provides a series of gateways for participants to pass into and through the play structures she has set up (Hind 2007; 15). The play routes offered are then navigated by participants' choice, either consciously or unconsciously, and this, in turn, represents their playful or non-playful approach to the event. Players were able to enter multiple worlds by crossing the various thresholds on offer and thus pass from the real to the imaginary (ibid.). With the …floorSpace… work being consciously framed as an invitation, people could decline or accept as they saw fit. There were varying levels of acceptance of the invitation – from total immersion to partial observation. All these levels were acceptable and welcomed as the performance was set up as a gift. The notion of gift-giving through performance was a successful element in each of the three pieces. It provided a socially acknowledged framework for exchange and transaction, physically in the form of objects and psychologically in the form of creative interactions and improvisations. During the festival a number of people asked the company how much we were getting paid to perform. When we answered that we were doing the performances for free, many were incredulous and could not accept that we would go to so much trouble for no financial gain. As one performer commented:

> People were confused as to why we would perform for free. Why do we want to give them something for nothing in return? However, as the weekend progressed and we became more recognised on site, people started to get the whole notion of the experiment. We were not asking anything from them, just that they interacted and enjoyed our performative gift. [NH in post-performance discussion 21/07/06]

There was a sense of generosity that presupposed some sort of reciprocity and yet did not demand it. Taking into account Derrida's views on the gift as a possible-impossible aporia (Derrida 1992, 1995), there is a sense that participants and performers may well be drawn into a giving-taking cycle where the gift is associated with a demand for a response. However, in this instance, the cycle was not intended to be viewed as an imposition on the receiver or as an obligation to be fulfilled. It did not depend on financial exchange and consciously attempted to afford free-play between performer, participant and observer roles. Rather, the gift was offered as a way of facilitating reciprocity and acknowledging mutual benefit through the creative act. The emphasis was on pleasure - pleasure in the moment and mutual pleasure in the engagement and interactions provoked by the performance. Clearly, by offering a performative gift that gives license to and opens up channels of play, there was the possibility that audience members might play disruptively, thereby spoiling the invitation and testing the hosts' sense of hospitality to see where the limits of the contract lie. This again connects to levels of risk associated with this type of practice. The skill of the performer here was to be able to allow for and manage playful behaviour from within the role and without losing control of the performance structure, to understand the various manifestations of play, and to acknowledge that 'dark play' (Schechner 1993: 36) too has a role in creativity.

3. Improvisation – both the process and the performed outcome relied heavily on improvisatory structures. The sense that the audience were co-creators of the work was central to the performance and so each piece had to have a certain element of openness in order for the outcome to be alterable and thus truly interactive. There is a temptation to suggest that improvised work cannot be rehearsed. However, I propose

that the opposite is true. As improvised structures are so open and changeable and essentially unknown, it is perhaps more important to rehearse and solidify certain elements of the work so that improvisation can spring from a solid foundation. This is the strategy we adopted as a company. Performers had well-rehearsed moments acting as interchangeable building blocks that they could then feel sufficiently confident to move away from through improvisation, rather like the troupes of Commedia dell'arte. Performers needed to create information or respond in a certain way on the spot, with no script. The adopted role needed to become an extension of the performer. As with any game, it was important to know the parameters and how far the rules could be tweaked, moulded or challenged. Despite having tightly rehearsed sections within it, the practice we developed required performers to be able to draw on improvisational techniques, depending on the levels of interaction and participation they stimulated. Often this would happen in a one-to-one exchange with a participant but, more often than not, the company would have to make a collective decision on when to move away from rehearsed sections and move smoothly into a looser framework, responding in the moment to what was occurring around them. When improvising as an ensemble in this way, a sense of flux characterised the work. The rules were in constant negotiation but could not become too loose or the 'game' threatened to collapse.

4. Playfulness – a key feature of all the work, and indeed the main thrust of this thesis, was playfulness. The concept of play concerned the nature of the context (the festival or club as playful arena), the quality of the performance (amusing, fun, absorbing, quirky, light, flowing) and the characteristics of the interactions (negotiated, dialogic, risky, unpredictable, within given parameters). As previously
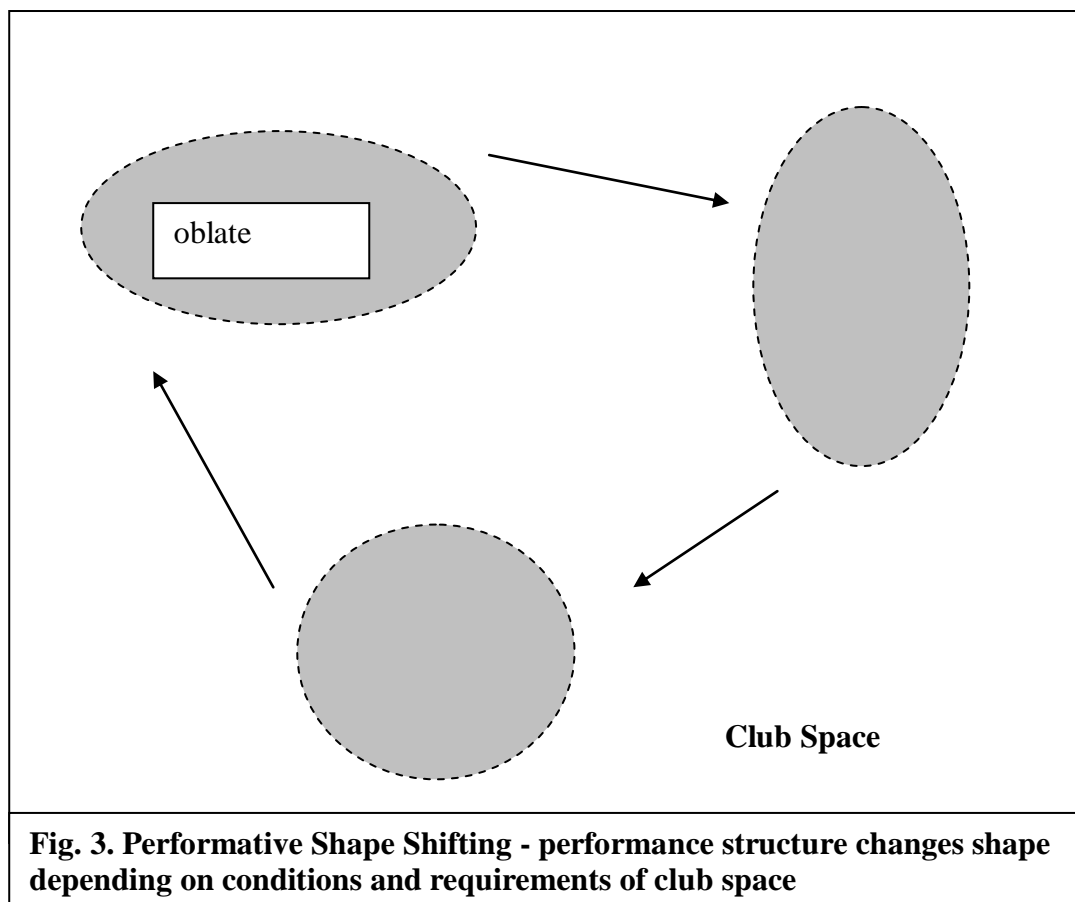
mentioned, there was a sense in which the performance structures being created were invitations to people to play. Like any invitation there was no obligation to accept the invitation. There were those who purposefully declined. There were those who might have liked to accept but felt unable to do so for whatever reason, and then there were those who accepted and entered into the spirit of the performance with an openness and willingness to be 'along for the ride' (as in Caillois' use of the term 'ilinx' 2001) and allowed the play to drive their levels of involvement. As a company, the key was to extend the right sort of invitation at the right time to the right person to affect the greatest, most effective take-up. By inviting people in to play with us we aimed to facilitate their entry into a heightened sense of the play mood where roles are malleable and possibilities open. Using Schechner's notion of concentric performance frames (1988), we wanted clubbers to make a creative journey through the pieces themselves. First we wanted our audience to begin to recognise the play frames in operation – through costume, visual clues, performance register and so on. Secondly, we wanted them to accept the constraints of play as determined by the rules of the game we set up. The final stage was then to encourage the participants to play with the structure by asking them to playfully challenge those frames, shift them in collaboration with the performers and, thus, potentially affect or alter the performance outcome. The performance structures extended an invitation to enter the play space as a physical construct but also as a psychical space where potentialities are tried, tested and contested. How performers dealt with this and managed it within the performance itself became a test of their own courage and flexibility.

Performance Modelling – Porous Spheroids

Conceptually, the performance pieces that I created for this project can be understood as porous spheroids, that is a geometrical shape similar to a sphere but which can be prolate (elongated, like a rugby ball) or oblate (flattened like a frisbee) depending on the rotation of its ellipse, or indeed, remain spherical. The concept here is that whilst the performances have a definite shape to them, this shape is mobile and fluid. In its spherical form it can roll around the space. It can be viewed from a number of different perspectives and angles and does not prioritise any notion of 'front' (Goffman 1969). It does not have sharp, delineated edges that may suggest chronological or narrative-driven structuring where corners are turned as the action develops. Rather, the shape circulates around the chosen playing space, finding moments in which to rest, flattening out to encompass a wider area of space or elongating to squeeze through tighter gaps on the dance floor.

This process of flattening and elongating responds not only to the physical conditions of the space, where performers may need to huddle together in a tighter formation due to narrow corridors or a crowded dance floor, but also to the psychical conditions of the space. In other words, the performance may spread out or tighten up depending on how willing clubbers are to be involved and enveloped by the work and how well the performance is being received on the dance floor. The prolate shape keeps performers together in tight formation, working mainly through rehearsed or choreographed sections and signalling themselves quite clearly as an ensemble. The oblate formation loosens the structure itself and locates performers at a greater distance from each other. This elongation allows for a greater blurring between the 'rehearsed space' of performance and the 'improvised space' of the club

as the performative frame is widened. Whilst this configuration affords greater opportunity for one-to-one interaction between performers and clubbers, it is also the moment at which the sense of ensemble is at its weakest. Performers have to be aware how far the structure can be stretched before it is necessary to reform, regroup and so bring the performance back to a spherical shape from where it can once more circulate around the space.

Fig. 3. Performative Shape Shifting - performance structure changes shape depending on conditions and requirements of club space

In addition to the spheroids being prone to shape-shifting, their structure is porous. It is punctured with holes that allow for penetration or various points of entry for others to access. These holes, gaps or permeable layers are also prone to fluctuation as the company negotiate their way around the space, making collective decisions from within the performance as to when these opportunities for audience intervention and incorporation may be made more visible. The model, as shown below, is intended to operate in such a way that clubbers may enter and exit the performance structure at different points and may choose to stay within it for varying lengths of time. Others may choose to remain in observer mode, situating themselves either close to the performance or remaining at a distance from it. As indicated by the white circles in the figure, the places of entry may be more or less obvious or explicit depending on the choices the company make in extending the invitation to play.

Performance Structure

Participant entry/exit points
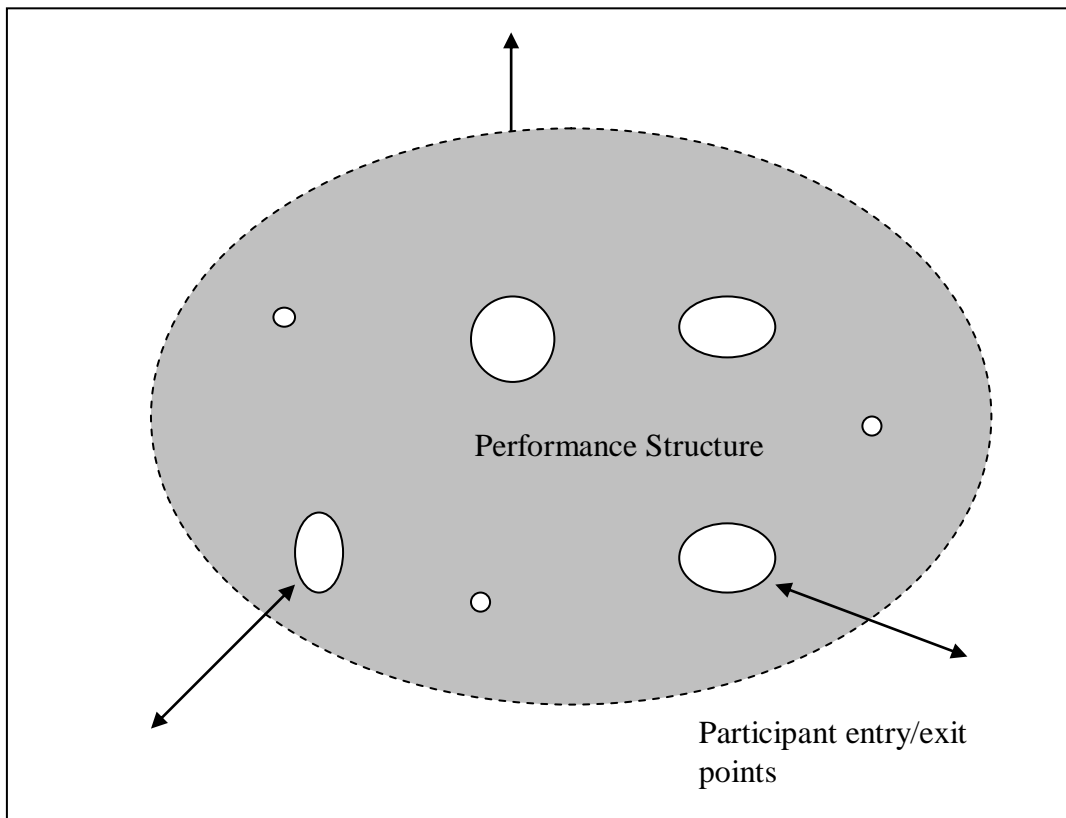
Fig. 4. Porous Spheroid – gaps appear within the structure to allow clubbers to enter and exit the performance and to move make transition from observer to participant-performer

Conceptualising the performance structures as porous spheroids will be used as a means of analysing the practice of …floorSpace… during what follows later in this chapter.

Examining Practice: … floorSpace…

I now return to the three initial research questions as outlined at the start of the chapter. In this section I offer some answers to the questions raised using …floorSpace… performances from *Shamania* 2006 as source material and evidence. The three performance pieces carried out at this event are outlined briefly below in order to give the reader sufficient knowledge of the format and content of the work. Critique of how they functioned in relation to the play theories developed in Chapter Two (and indeed the subsequent elaborations in Chapters Three and Four) is woven into this section. Having established the concept of the underground club as playful arena in this previous chapter, it is useful now to consider how each of the performances carried out by …floorSpace… generated playful behaviour in members of the crowd. This section identifies in particular the 'play contract'. It looks at how performers played with their audience and how the rules of that play were established, managed and, at times, subverted. It examines what signals for play were given and how those were read variously by members of the crowd. It looks at how play frames encouraged members of the crowd to move from the role of observer to participant/performer. The section explores to what extent this play was scripted or improvised and the levels of risk and safety associated with this variance. Referring back to the special ordering of place and time in relation to play, the section looks at how the performances indicated that 'playtime' had begun so that participants could make an informed choice to enter the playing space of the performance itself – given the intentionally loose framing deployed at times. It explores the environmental considerations that shape how play develops and refers back to the concept of

liminality to address both the in-between nature of interaction itself and the in-between nature
of the festival or underground club as 'threshold space'.

Performance 1: *VIPs* (Friday 21st July 2006, approx 10.30 – 11.30 pm)
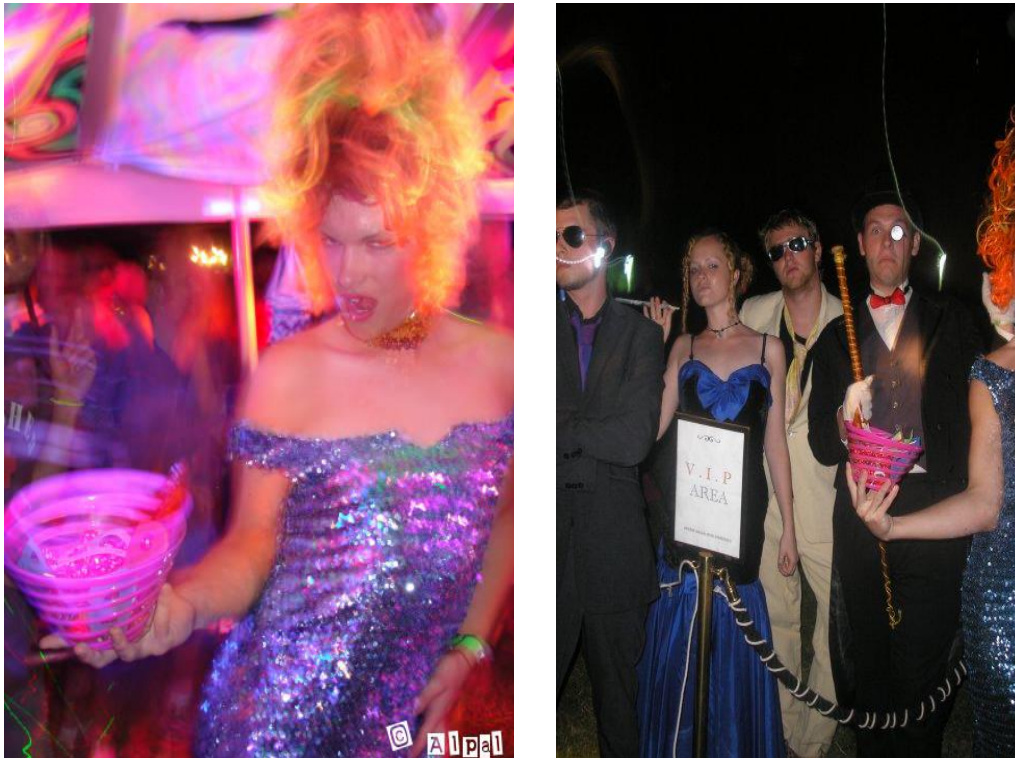
Fig 5: …floorSpace… perform '*VIPs*' at *Shamania*, July 2006
Photographs courtesy of Alan Blay and Ian M Palmer

VIPs was envisaged as a portable mini show. The intention was to set up a space within a
space – a roped-off area that functions as a pastiche of VIP lounges that exist in 'super clubs'
and do much to reinforce the cult of celebrity, establishing distinctions between 'ordinary'
clubbers and glitterati. Any notion of exclusivity or separation is anathema to the
underground club scene and thus the VIP area sets up an immediate signal of incongruity
within that particular context. The piece developed by formulating a set of character parodies
– *VIPs*/celebrities (glamorous but wearing clothing inappropriate to the context such as ball

gowns, feather boas, sun glasses and so on), a bouncer (wearing a sharp suit, sun glasses, silent, enforcing a strict door policy, the gatekeeper of the inner VIP area), a 'door whore' (a drag queen offering drinks, sweets, party favours, cigarettes, checking dress codes), a ticket tout (advertising Access all Areas VIP passes, wearing a shell suit). The piece developed quickly, inspired by a prolonged period of playful dressing up by the company who were invigorated by the chance to devise material from a visual starting point, namely costume.

The roped-off area, created by using heavy metal poles and ropes found in theatre foyers, provided a mobile setting which delineated the space clearly on the dance floor and went some way to demarcating a quasi-formal performance area. The rope itself could be detached as clubbers were 'allowed in' to the VIP area. In this way it operated as a tangible representation of the porosity model, demarcating the performance area and signalling precisely the moment when clubbers made the transition from observer to participant-performer. For this piece character roles were very clear and based on a known/observed world that the company felt very comfortable parodying. It consisted of a range of choreographed patterns that could be sequenced together in various ways that allowed for experimentation in terms of speed, pace and juxtaposition. The bouncer and 'door whore' worked in a different manner to the *VIPs* themselves. They operated as mediating characters between the inner and outer world of the VIP area and the fictional/factional space. The 'door whore' had the key role in inviting people in to play the game, allowing the audience access to the rules of the game but simultaneously playing with them. The bouncer meanwhile managed the 'queue' to the roped-off area, vetting entrants and ensuring they were attired correctly and adhering to the dress codes of the VIP suite (bow ties, feather boas, sun glasses and so on were made available to participants to extend the sense of role play).

Performance 2: *Dogs* (Friday 21st July 2006, approx 2.00 am – 2.20 am)

Fig 6: …floorSpace… perform '*Dogs*' at *Shamania*, July 2006

Dogs was envisaged as a walkabout character performance with the company creating a pack of stray *Dogs* roaming around a dance floor together and interacting with the crowd in the hope of attracting a potential owner. In essence it consisted of three modes of performance – rehearsed moments of 'dog behaviour' delivered together as an ensemble piece, improvised interactions with the audience, and choreographed dance sections. The piece was devised to rely heavily on costume to signal its status as a performance. A series of synchronised moments would reinforce this and move it beyond mere costumed characters with little intentionality, to a designed performance that had moments of choreography within it that existed simultaneously as a structure open enough to allow for engagement from the audience. The set of building blocks that the company had to work with comprised:

- Solitary character work
- Performer-audience interactions

- Performer-performer interactions

- Whole group interactions

Performance 3: *Tea Party* (Saturday 22nd July 2006, approx 6.00 pm – 7.00 pm)

Fig 7: …floorSpace… perform '*Tea Party*' at *Shamania*, July 2006

'*Tea Party*' was devised as an improvised, mobile performance in the format of a picnic that would resonate with the outdoor festival setting but exist in stark contrast to it. It had a defined theatrical framework in that it was set in a particular era, costumed accordingly and involved developed characters who had names, relationships and back stories built into the given circumstances. The piece was created via an intentionally relaxed devising process. I was keen for the company to explore a different environment for this third performance so it was planned as an outdoor piece to be carried out during the day. The intention was for it to work as a visual pastiche. It contained no choreographed moments and relied solely on the performers' ability to sustain the improvisation as it unfolded within the festival site.[61]

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[61] Since *Shamania* 2006, these three performance pieces have undergone further iterations and new pieces have since been developed. See company website for more information and photo documentation www.embracefloorspace.co.uk

All three pieces worked in different ways, afforded different types of interaction and provided rich material for considering my three main research questions. This material is now addressed in more detail in the following section.

1. How do modes of professional performance operate within the fluidity of the club space?

Where the work is located within a club space has perhaps the biggest impact on how the performance is 'read' by the audience. The physical positioning of the work not only impacts on how the performance is delivered but also how it is received, understood and engaged with by clubbers. This is associated with how spatial frames are constructed, how visible they are and therefore how easily they may be read and understood. If the performance takes places upon a conventional 'staged' area, that is one which is usually raised above the crowd and bathed in light as a means of focussing attention, the clubbers (or 'audience') are relatively well versed in how that particular performance is to be read. There is an inherent distancing acquired through physical positioning. The performance occurs without interruption or intervention and is there to be observed and appreciated for its visual aesthetic. As much of this type of performance in the club context has no element of mimesis, it is much more usually dance oriented or spectacular in nature, such as fire breathing or angle grinding, there may well be direct acknowledgment of both the performer and audience's presence but exchange between the two parties is normally based on eye contact and smiles alone. The performer remains above the crowd, distanced both physically and psychically as an expression of performative hierarchy or as a signal of performance commodity, such as dancers in cages or set on pedestals in more mainstream nightclubs. They draw attention to themselves by means of accepting, and revelling in, the crowd's gaze. Performers are usually

situated alongside the DJ or along the same sight-line and so the crowd's attention is channelled in one direction.

However, if club performances do not take place on a designated stage, how are the dynamics between performance and audience created, managed and maintained? Less frequently performance work takes place in corridors, in poorly-lit corners, amongst the dancing crowd. This type of work is much more difficult to locate conceptually and therefore is more problematic in terms of audience reception and response. It is this positioning of work that …floorSpace… was particularly concerned with exploring as its remit was to facilitate direct interactions with clubbers. Operating in the shared space of the dance floor and surrounding area was a pre-requisite for each performance piece that was developed. Clearly the club space as a potential site of performance has much weaker distinctions between the traditional roles of performer and audience than that defined by the conventions of theatre. The practice of …floorSpace… sought to examine the seams of these distinctions. Its very *raison d'etre* was to encourage clubbers to move from the observer mode through to participant, and to become performer within the piece itself. To facilitate this, each performance was created by stitching together separate pieces of material in order to make a whole. The seams holding the material together could be loosened or tightened depending on what was required at any given moment. To enable clubbers to work their way through the seams or folds of the performance, the work had to be located in close physical proximity to the crowd. To that end, all performances took place in or around the dance floor.

Decisions taken about where to locate each …floorSpace… performance within that fluid space occupied by clubbers played a large part in how the flow from observation to participation and interaction was facilitated. By trialling each of the three pieces, it became

obvious that clubbers required a certain amount of time for observation so that the performance could be 'read' and 'assessed' from a distance before they were prepared to engage with it physically. Before clubbers were prepared to 'contract into' the performance, they needed the opportunity to stand back for a while, reflect upon it and then orientate themselves to it. Finding a spot at the edge of the dance floor or utilising height in the form of augmented costumes and extended gestures, helped clubbers watch the performance unfold from a slight distance; as the work progressed into the midst of the dance floor the audience felt more able to approach the piece, dancing with the characters, accepting various props as gifts and so on; until the final stage was reached and some participants entered the performance by assuming their own roles and shaping the performance in collaboration with the company.

This process was particularly evident in *VIPs* where the invitation to 'perform' was heightened by the demarcation of the roped-off area and the prerequisite of donning appropriate costume. Entering the 'performance space' and dressing up not only gave a tangible indication of the moment at which spectator became performer, it also provided a literal point of entry into the piece and indicated a clear shift in role. Whilst many clubbers were happy to watch from afar, others participated around the edge of the work, chatting to the bouncer and the 'door whore'. Others entered the fiction for considerable lengths of time and were reluctant to leave. This in itself presented the company with a problem. At times a participant's desire to play threatened to dominate the performance and effectively prevented others from being able to participate. Prior to this we had not considered how an invitation to play might have to be retracted and the extent to which this was in opposition to our ethics of inclusivity and collectivity.

The role of the 'door whore' did much to facilitate the invitation to play. It is worth noting that this character was completely mobile and at liberty to walk around the main performance structure, move away from it and draw people towards it. Standing outside the roped-off area, the 'door whore' was able to interact verbally with people on the dance floor and explain the rules of the game from within the role (for example, 'the VIP area has a strict dress code', 'you need a tie to enter', 'only the very posh and very important can come in', 'you'll need to queue'). Incorporating presents and gifts in the form of sweets, dressing up items and stickers encouraged further participation and worked as visual gags for those standing on the periphery of the performance looking in. As the performer playing the role of 'door whore' comments:

> People wanted to know who we were, what we were doing and why. I surveyed the tent and went my separate way from the others in order to hand out invites. To my surprise people started to approach me and ask for invites. After very little time, people had got the game and were starting to understand the rules of performance. [NH, post-performance discussion 21/07/06]

(Incidentally, this served as an example of the oblate spheroid in action. The 'door whore' was able to move away from the rest of the company, extending the performance beyond the tight confines of the VIP area itself and offering clubbers a way to move towards the performance and enter it for themselves.) In *VIPs* the cues for audience participation were very clear and were reinforced by the other characters in the piece. As one performer says, 'We signalled our intent by actually showing the observers how it was done, effectively we were setting the rules' [LB, post-performance discussion 21/07/06]. This statement in itself indicates that whilst the company were aware of the need to establish certain parameters in order for the game to function, this 'setting of rules' could in fact veer towards overt control and regulation rather than promoting free play and co-authorship as was originally intended. The tension between establishing clear frames of play and allowing them to emerge

collaboratively with participants without becoming rigid or oppressive is an ever-present concern for this type of practice and one which we continue to grapple with as a company.

As an experiment the company made the decision to take the performance out of the centre of the dance floor and move it to the periphery of the tent to enforce the joke that the enclosed VIP area was essential and desirable for the 'toffs' - even in a completely open space such as a field. It had a totally different flavour in this setting –even though in effect it had only moved a matter of yards away, reinforcing the notion that environmental considerations can impact greatly on how a performance is interpreted and engaged with. The noise levels were a little quieter allowing for greater conversation, participants were happier to stay inside the performance for longer as they were not in the centre of the dance floor but rather more shrouded in darkness. However, the positioning of the performance at the threshold to the tent made it harder to read and locate for some. One participant believed the bouncer character to be a real member of security and became confrontational when she thought her friend was being searched for drugs. It took careful handling in role to defuse this situation and to re-establish the positive interactions that were occurring in this threshold space. For the performers what had been a constructive experience of play quickly descended into a situation that was alarming and disturbing and resulted in them augmenting the more humorous aspects of the piece to avoid similar misunderstandings occurring again. This incident indicates the impact of spatial positioning on audience reception, the challenges associated with working in liminal spaces where meanings may already be blurred and slippery and the potential risks involved for the performer who is then required to shift their position from within the role adopted.

After a period of walkabout performance *Tea Party* found its more permanent performance location close to but just outside the main *Fatmoon* tent. Once the performance had been established and a critical number of audience members had joined in and, perhaps significantly, sat down which fixed the performance in a more formal sense, performers were able to move away from the immediate vicinity of the picnic to make short forays into the festival, thereby encouraging more people to attend. Returning to the main performance area on a regular basis was necessary to keep the fiction progressing and to support participants' contributions to it. A sense of movement and flow became apparent, with characters moving in and out of the main area of focus which, in turn, allowed a shift of attention from characters to participants and back to characters, almost like a relay race run in slow motion where the baton of improvisation is passed from one player to the next with the responsibility for keeping it aloft lying with the collective group. The balance of the piece kept tipping one way and then the other. The control was passed from company members to participant-performers and back again and was achieved largely through careful manipulation of proxemics.

> During these times when the audience were playing back I became an observer to their performance and it became like a game of tennis swapping between observer and performer which is interesting as it added an amount of unpredictability to the event. [JW post-performance discussion 22/07/06]

This is another example of the oblate spheroid in operation. Having established the performance structure through costume, character and setting in the first instance, and by loosening the seams sufficiently to allow participants into the piece, performers were able to elongate the performance, move it beyond the picnic site itself and to adopt a more 'observational role' as participants adopted a more performative one. In this instance it was much easier to manage the balance between rule setting and co-authorship as discussed in relation to *VIPs* and this, in turn, is linked to the difference in environmental conditions. *Tea*

Party took place in daylight. It occurred in an outdoor space that was neither constricting nor dominated by music. In this context playful interactions could be both physical and verbal in nature and play could develop using narrative as well as visual cues. Subsequent iterations of this performance have proved equally effective in terms of audience engagement, participation and free play. This suggests there may be limitations to what can be achieved in terms of co-authored performance on the dance floor where environmental conditions threaten to overwhelm effective communication although a method for compensating for that is offered below.

As the potential 'audience' of club performances are neither fixed by space (they are able to move physically away from or towards the performance at any time) nor by convention (there is no compulsion for them to watch obediently and applaud at the end), to what extent is it possible to focus their attention and participation? It has already been pointed out that the club space is organised horizontally and is multi-perspectival. According to the conventions of bourgeois theatre of the modern period and contemporary forms arising from this tradition, performers or actors move and 'take action' on the stage whilst audiences 'hear' the work in stillness. Conversely, the club space is an environment in a process of constant movement, inattention and flux. The crowd may be dancing, mingling, talking, flirting, drinking and so on as the performance is in progress. Throughout history performances have carried on as the 'real' business of everyday life continues, the Elizabethan stage being the obvious example. Allowing performance work to develop alongside the often chaotic ebb and flow of a festival or club night proved to be a particular challenge at *Shamania* but is one which, with experience, we have become more accustomed to managing. Developing a set of transactional strategies has been key to this. Such strategies include providing clear signals of entry to the performance structure; creating mediating characters who are able to converse

with the crowd and make the rules of the game as explicit as conditions require; offering

tangible exchanges of gifts or artefacts to signal a commitment to exchange and reciprocity;

working from within role to support and guide participants' contributions through playful

modelling. By deploying transactional strategies within the performance structure attention is

focussed in much the same way as one might carry out a conversation in a noisy or crowded

room. The exchange may not be particularly lengthy or sustained. It is rarely reliant solely on

verbal communication. Instead the interaction is transitory yet often intense, uses non-verbal

communication strategies as a way of reinforcing the point, and embraces part-attention

rather than requiring a person's undivided attention for the duration of the exchange.

2. Are performances signalled as such and how does this impact on audience response?

Connected to the issue of locating work physically within the club context, is the challenge of

signalling the work conceptually and distinguishing it as 'performance'. Without the defined

codes of practice of the stage-auditorium bifurcation and the expectations of a traditional

audience coming to watch a show where all who attend have entered a 'contract', how do

mobile performances within the club declare themselves as such? How does the work

announce itself as performance in an environment where certain visual elements are already

heightened and attention is purposefully disoriented? Do certain 'rules' or conventions need

to be established in order to encourage response and interaction?

In order to encourage clubbers to move into the performance and take some ownership of it,

it is necessary to identify how the practice of …floorSpace… is distinct from the practice of

clubbing itself. In previous chapters I have pointed out that some similarities do exist

between the playfulness of the club environment and the playfulness of the stage world,

between the performances of clubbers and the performances of actors. Perhaps the best way

to articulate it is that these practices exist along a continuum. Whilst most every day practices such as deciding what to wear for an interview, how to address a colleague at work and so on, involve a degree of intentionality, meaning making, and symbolic register, the theatrical stage takes this to its extreme. Club performances operate somewhere in the middle of the continuum – neither wholly in the world of the everyday nor wholly beyond it. If this is so, what marks out mobile club performance as 'different'?

One might argue that it is not important for the performance to be signalled in any explicit way and that a crowd should be allowed to respond to the unfolding action according to their own interpretation of what they are witnessing. However, due to the particular nature of the festival or underground club context which already exists in a state of 'threshold', it is my assertion that it is crucial that performance is received as such and that its presence does not upset the fine balance of the social milieu of the party. The first performance of *Dogs* threatened to do just this and, by reviewing my field-notes, one can see how the energy and aesthetic of this first iteration was at odds with the context and did not communicate the appropriate signals to facilitate positive interactions:

> As soon as the company left the immediate campsite dressed for '*Dogs*', they began to interact with people who were making their way to and from the dance tents, standing by their tents, waiting for the toilets etc. They asked them to throw bones, spray them with flea spray. The performers seemed to be trying to lift their own energy levels by throwing themselves completely into role and injecting as much dynamism as they could muster into their characters. They barked, jumped and gambolled their way to the Fatmoon tent but, as an outside observer, I could sense immediately that their enthusiasm was having an adverse affect on the festival goers. By barking and racing through the field, their performance was at odds with the general feel of the festival at 2.00 am. People were visibly backing away from the performance which seemed aggressive and forceful for this time in the morning. The noise the performers created was very disconcerting and made people jump and feel uneasy. The crowd were not expecting a performance to take place and thus did not know how to read this frenetic group of people that had suddenly appeared on the scene. As the company approached the tent, one person was heard to say of one of the performers, "That guy's off his head!" Despite the dog costume, the face paint, the fake ears and so on, the performers were insufficiently distinguishable as performers and, as such, their actions were bizarre, out of place and unwelcome.

> The costumes had been designed to work alongside the club or festival aesthetic so boots had been sprayed with UV paint, glow sticks were wrapped round wrists, UV netting made up one of the waistcoats and so on. Whilst this may have worked had the dance floor been a little quieter, in the crowd the costumes did not help create a clear signifier in the same way as the VIP piece. The face paint (which we had not applied until this particular evening) also seemed rather frightening and made the crowd back away rather than come towards the performance. Furthermore, the performers entered the space as individuals rather than as a group and so their actions were not read as choreographed or rehearsed intentions (a factor we had stressed within the process as significant to maintain). (AB field notes, 22/07/06)

As this first performance of *Dogs* demonstrated, if the performance is not signalled sufficiently clearly and if it occurs at a time when physical and mental disorientation are at a peak, the performance is not only poorly received but can affect adversely the atmosphere of the dance floor and prompt people to move away from rather than towards any form of participation. Without the physical stage as a concrete signifier the distinguishing marks of a dramatic performance need to be carefully considered and selected. Even though the *Dogs* piece involved costume, make up and choreographed movements, this alone was not sufficient to signal clearly that what was happening was 'performance'. The visual aesthetic of the piece was too similar to the 'real' context and thus did not stand out in any distinct way, making the behaviour of the performers alarming rather than humorous. The signals of performance were insufficiently clear; the energy levels of performers at odds with the context they were entering; the performance structure oblate in configuration when a tighter prolate shape was required. In this instance the seams of the performance had been loosened to an extent where the whole was unrecognisable for the audience and thus participation in it was limited. The 'failure' of this particular performance provided perhaps the richest data for research purposes. It allowed me to compare performances (we performed *Dogs* twice, making certain changes to address the issues discussed above); confront the risks associated with this type of work; reconfigure the performance using the porosity model as a framework for evaluating how to achieve greater participation.

To summarise, without the codes and conventions afforded by theatrical architecture, how performers signal or carry the performance on and in their bodies becomes a central concern. For …floorSpace… this is achieved in a number of different ways. Firstly the performative register is established through costume and the deployment of a prolate performance structure where the sense of ensemble is established. Secondly the quality of movement performers adopt is key to communicating a sense of the theatrical. Through synchronisation, canon, slow motion and other physical techniques, audiences are made acutely aware of the highly rehearsed nature of the work and are also able to identify the seams of the performance once certain sections are repeated. In *VIPs* synchronised movement worked particularly well as it provided a visual focus for observers and helped people realise they were watching a rehearsed piece of performance rather than some rather strangely dressed people behaving in a peculiar way. In *Tea Party* the attention to scenographic detail achieved the same effect and instantly attracted people towards the performance. As soon as the company entered the field they were able to strike poses using the contours of the landscape to maximum effect so that people even a long way away could see something out of the ordinary was happening. These living sculptures or half-still images set the tone for the piece. They helped with the visual communication and helped to clarify signals for festival-goers, encouraging them to participate. The audience had time to receive the signifiers provided and then were able to build on these from what they knew. The rules of the game were clearest in this piece: all performers agreed that this was, from their perspective, the most playful of the three performances. As actors they improvised or played with each other but also engaged in sustained play and improvisation with audience members/participants. During post-performance discussion, one performer suggested they were in fact 'teaching the audience to play from within their role' [NH 22/07/06]. This statement suggests the performer's belief

that the performance had a functional dimension that he articulates as a process of teaching and learning.

Finally, proxemics and the physical relationships between performer and performer, performer and space, performer and audience, performer and inter-actor are central in encouraging and facilitating generative play in this context. This can never be fully prepared for as each space and each configuration or dancing crowd is different and unpredictable in its construction and manifestation. However, as the practice has developed, the company have become far more attuned to assessing what strategies to deploy at various times by being immersed in the performance structure whilst maintaining an acute awareness of the dynamics of the context at the same time.

3. What is the nature of the interaction between formal performance and creative clubbers?

In creating a range of bespoke performances, as a company we have been able to explore how slightly different modes of performance elicit different interactions and responses. Responses change according to a host of different factors, including venue, time of performance, the amount of alcohol or drugs that have been consumed, numbers in attendance – in other words the spatial, temporal and psychical frames that wrap each event. Whilst evaluating all of that is too big a task for this research, what has been considered is how the different performance pieces we have created have elicited different responses. Now that each piece has been performed a number of times, it is possible to see patterns in crowd reception emerging. A clear relationship between the open/flexible structure of each piece and the way in which clubbers engage with it has developed.

Both *Dogs* and *VIPs* are set up in such a way as to provide small performative moments (or micro-performances) that occur throughout the dance floor. This may occur on an individual level, where one performer interacts with one audience member or participant or this may occur between a group of performers and a group of audience members or participants. These micro- performances promote a sense of intimacy within a large public, social space. The existence of interactive performance in this space customises the experience for each participant and makes it different for each person. These are special, crafted moments that are designed to be truly dialogic and are aimed to create a ripple effect which goes on to generate further instances of play beyond that initial moment. One moment of performance or interaction occurs and is then talked about by participants who tell each other stories of what just occurred. This unfolding narrative then coincides with another moment occurring elsewhere and, at times, coalesces with the group coming together in the space for choreographed moments. This domino effect provides both evidence of the impact of participation and is the vehicle by which it is promoted. There is a unique depth of field on the dance floor – one-to-one moments happen in the immediate space around you. If people talk to you they talk into your ear to make themselves heard over the noise. There is an intimacy and a closeness but at the same time a sense of a larger whole. It is possible to scan a crowd, to see oneself as part of that crowd, and to catch a glimpse of a moment much further away that is communicated by the visual rather than the auditory. Each …floorSpace… performance aimed to exploit the tension between telescopic and microscopic communication and to see to what extent it might contribute to the sense of 'clubbing communitas' as expressed in Chapter Two (p.128) where 'feelings of connectivity' (Turner 1982: 45) and 'lucid, mutual understanding' (ibid. p.48) allow people to confront their role as part of a larger social grouping

Inter-Action and the In-betweeness of Participation

When setting up work that aims to investigate interactivity and participation, it is essential to allow for the development of 'inter-actors'; by this I mean the role that occupies the space between production and reception. By allowing participants to act as collaborators within the performance one is accepting that parts of the performance will remain unfinished until the intervention or participation of an unknown outsider is manifest. This has clear implications for both the devising process and the performance structure. How this can be planned for and managed without losing a sense of the overall shape of each piece has become a central feature of the company's work.

VIPs afforded different levels of participation. There was full immersion in the piece (both physical and psychical) where people were keen to enter the VIP area, got dressed up and even went into role when conversing with the other characters. According to the company, approximately 60% of participants who entered the VIP area adopted an accent, a pseudonym and a back story as they played along with the performers. Other participants entered the VIP space physically but remained 'themselves' and communicated in their own register. As one performer describes:

> I would always introduce myself and shake their hand in a very posh and eccentric manner;
> "Alicia Fotherington-Smythe, darling!" and they would often reply in an eccentric manner;
> "My name's Pandora Donnahue" or they would reply in a contrasting manner, "I'm Clare".
> [MJ post-performance discussion 22/07/06]

As well as group interactions one-to-one interactions occurred throughout the piece with company performers being able to develop a micro-narrative with a participant on an individual basis. This was largely due to the fact that in the context of a noisy dance floor it was impossible to communicate verbally without shouting directly into the ear of the person immediately next to you. Nonetheless this created a sense of intimacy in a public space that

seemed much welcomed by participants that came towards the performance and entered into it.

In *Tea Party* the central activity of the performance, having a picnic, held the shape of the work together. It gave everyone involved a defined task to engage in, kept both performers and audience occupied and provided a certain level of security when otherwise conversation may have dried up. It was an example of play that followed a well-rehearsed 'script'. The play had a clear frame, social conventions attached to it and a delineated set of rules that could then be inverted or subverted, parodied or mocked. It was clear that some of the audience members came to listen to the unfolding conversations rather than to eat. Others were drawn by the promise of cake and tea. Many were happy to be approached by the characters and were happy to join in as the approaches or invitations made were gentle and non-invasive. These invitations were signalled by a wave and a 'hello' across the field and so gave all participants time to decide whether to join or not. The over-politeness of the characters helped the piece enormously as invitations could be offered to audience members within the given circumstances of the piece. This, in turn, encouraged people into the performance because the characters functioned as hosts and took care of their guests (again in the spirit of 'philoxenia') – both in terms of providing them with food and drink but also by introducing them to each other and illuminating the 'rules of the game' or the manner in which participants might identify a point of entry for themselves and contract into the play.

To conclude, as discussed previously, how our performances work in tandem with the open, fluid environment that clubbers have established through their own presence in the space has become a central concern of the company. Our aim has always been to ask how formal performance might highlight, support and reflect the clubbers' own creativity and allow for

its development rather than establish a hierarchy that threatens to disempower. The clubbing community has ultimate ownership of the club space. Performance cannot preside over it but needs to find its own place within it. Negotiation, invitation, communication are vital. How these notions are made clear and how these conditions are negotiated is of primary concern. How might they be embedded in the performance? Having conducted the practice-led research, it is now possible to identify a pattern of interaction in this particular context. Initially people express an interest through observation but generally are wary and cautious. Then they begin to enter the performance structure once they have identified the rules of the game and the given circumstances. Finally they begin to challenge the performance structure and the performers to see how far they are able to have an impact on the game or the play. This can threaten to destabilise the piece to the point of collapse or to a point where it is ultimately handed over and relinquished to a different set of performers. The unpredictability of interactive work can threaten to overwhelm the piece and those who perform it. Much interactive work is based in the technological and thus the personal 'risk' to the present performer is limited. If interactivity is to be given an opportunity to thrive then it has to be on the understanding that it might, indeed, fail. To enter into a dialogic relationship with another person requires a certain amount of trust. To make oneself vulnerable is perhaps the greatest gift a performer can give but it is not without its hazards.

Challenges and Benefits for …floorSpace… at *Shamania*

The function of conducting this practice-led research has been to test out theoretical concepts to do with contextual performance *in situ*. The benefit of creating live work that addresses my original research questions has been considerable. Not only has it allowed me to develop hypotheses about the nature of performance work and how the playful arena operates in relation to the club space, but the practice has led me to develop and refine a model for

interactive work which may be applicable to a range of situations where promoting

participation is central. The key terms of play, risk and investment have guided both the

rehearsal phase and the performed outcome. Embracing these concepts has led me to address

not only the challenges performers face when developing or realising work which relies on

audience involvement, but also on the conditions necessary for participants to commit to

taking an active part in the creative act of collaboration and performative exchange.

From both performers' and participants' point of view, the pieces developed provided an

additional layer to the already vibrant environment of the festival tent. The performances

sparked 'interest', 'excitement', 'curiosity' and 'energy' [post performance evaluations].

> It added to the sense of freedom and fun that was massively present at the festival. I personally felt it and I'm sure every person there was aware of it. [LB post-performance evaluation 04/09/06]

The aim of each piece was to create opportunities for playful interaction so that the potential

of the site as a playful arena could be maximised through the performative mode. The extent

to which this promoted 'clubbing communitas' in the crowd is perhaps impossible to prove.

However, what is more demonstrable is the impact working in this way had on members of

the performance company.

> We are creating an imaginary scenario which is quite bizarre to its surroundings; similar to children when they play make-believe. Because the performance isn't scripted or heavily rehearsed it means that as performers we have the freedom to improvise; which leaves space for playful interaction with audience members who want to join in. [MJ post-performance evaluation 25/09/06]

Having the 'freedom to improvise' and 'space for playful interaction' was not only seen as a

powerful experience in terms of audience engagement but theorising how playfulness might

be promoted offered greater understanding of how to augment its effects. This was achieved

through a variety of means in order to create a world within a world – in other words, the

performance pieces worked as micro 'plays' within the wider context of the playful arena, another example of layering of play experience as discussed in Chapter Two. Loose improvisatory structures and moments of exchange and transaction were put into effect using the model of porous spheroids. Each piece provided a solid framework through which to observe the shifting roles of performer, participant and observer all of which remained fluid and organic as the performances developed. The seams between sections of performed material were tightened or loosened as the situation demanded and this allowed participants to enter, exit and remain within the performance for varying degrees of time and at varying levels of intensity.

> Because the interaction was playful and informal, people could decide to participate to the extent that they felt most comfortable with, therefore the roles would constantly switch and change as people so desired. [MJ post-performance discussion 22/07/06]

Initially I had envisaged the roles of observer, participant and performer to be adopted by audience members but quickly realised that all three modes were present within the company also. As more 'audience' joined in with the performances, members of the company adopted more observational roles whilst still maintaining their characterisation. The ability to relinquish some performative control without letting the performance structure collapse has been key to the success of each piece and tests the performers' skill in terms of negotiation and collaboration to the full.

All performers talked about the rewards offered by working in this fluid environment. The challenges associated with working in a risk-laden context and with an open structure which is essentially handed over to participants can be overwhelming; however, the benefits seem to outweigh these anxieties. Performers all cited the necessity of being close as a group and having an implicit understanding of how each member might respond through performance. Performers commented on the scope of the pieces in terms of developing their own creativity

and spontaneity through performance. Each company member has commented separately on

the creative freedom each performance piece, situated within a club or festival space,

provides for them as practitioners:

> The most rewarding thing about the work is the freedom to create within it. It's unlike straight acting where the director tells you where to stand and you have to be regimented and stand in a particular light or say a particular line. In this work you have to make decisions according to the context you are in at that particular moment. You have to be aware of the crowd, the space, the rest of the group and work with it, go with the flow. [LB post-performance discussion 21/07/06]

They also acknowledged the challenges associated with the shift in attention from pushing a

performance out towards an audience to encouraging a move from the audience in towards

the performance itself.

There are clearly some limitations in creating performance work for the club or festival

environment and it is not my argument that this context provides the ultimate environment for

experimental, interactive work that cannot be facilitated elsewhere. Needless to say two of

the pieces under discussion in this chapter worked particularly well as they complemented the

cultural context of the space and played in a fairly gentle way with participants and their

expectations of what might happen in that space. They were not particularly challenging in

terms of what they demanded from an audience nor were they highly avant-garde in their

format. Had they been taxing in either form or content potentially they would have been

ignored or completely rejected by an audience. They would not have functioned on any level

and therefore any attempt to model interactive performance structures would have been

thwarted.

To a certain extent performance in this context will always operate at the spectacular level, a

visual treat for clubbers or festival goers who are already enacting their own micro-

performances and adopting social roles for the purpose of watching and being watched in a context that is already inherently playful. Work of this kind can quite easily be treated as mere 'eye candy' for people already at leisure. Furthermore the space in which this work is carried out, namely the playful arena of the club space, already incorporates some of the traits of liminality. It already functions as a space of in-betweeness where the possibility of alternatives is common currency. It may be said that audiences in this context are pre-conditioned to respond positively to participatory performance and that analysis of how people play in this context is necessarily skewed. However, by situating participatory performance in this context and developing models by which we might theorise the work, it is possible to analyse a range of strategies developed to facilitate how audiences engage with performance through the paradigm of play, These models might then be transposed to other settings and provide a means by which practitioners may visualise performance structures under scrutiny and the spatial, temporal and psychical frames that surround them.

Chapter Six - Conclusions

This concluding chapter reiterates the main aims of the research and draws together the varying strands of investigation. This has encompassed a consideration of historical, social and cultural perspectives concerning clubbing practices, the pursuit of ethnographic material within UK club culture and the development of practice-based methodologies to investigate how performance work may be created that takes into account the dynamics of this particular context. The chapter recounts the research journey undertaken and summarises the main findings of each of the previous chapters. Throughout it raises a number of additional questions that may be posed as a result of the work in this thesis. It offers suggestions for further lines of enquiry that have flowed from this particular investigation and asks how the models created here may be usefully applied by those working in contexts and circumstances beyond the space of the underground club.

A Reiteration of Intentions

This thesis has set out to position the underground club space as a playful arena and to develop new models for conceptualising performance practices within this context. The investigation has followed two main strands. First it has asked how the underground club space might be read as a site in which participatory performance occurs. Second it has sought to examine how performance work might be developed within this context. To address these two strands it has been necessary to begin by looking at how we read, understand and analyse the practice of clubbing by drawing attention to its particular features and by using performance theory to guide and frame our viewing. To this end it has been pertinent to explore how clubbers use space and to what ends. Beginning with the principle that the club space already supports various modes of participation and interaction, the research has aimed to ask how that particular characteristic might be mobilized to facilitate our understanding of

interactive performance practices that take place elsewhere. The thesis originally set out to answer these questions by surveying a range of existing performance practice taking place within the UK club scene. The limitations of this quickly became apparent and so the direction of the thesis has adapted and changed accordingly. Whilst participant-observation has continued to be important in terms of the content and context of the investigation, the research questions have been addressed instead through the interlocking processes of historical, theoretical and practical analysis.

The study has set out to establish the concept of the playful arena as a tool for interpreting how club space operates and to explore how frames of play inform and shape interactive performance work in this context. As stated in the introduction, my background in education and pedagogical practice has meant that investing in spaces that allow individuals and groups to explore potential has always been a personal priority. Orienting the club as a space of alternatives, possibilities and of playful imagining makes it potent not only for clubbers but also for those wanting to experiment with a brand of performance that has a particular function, namely that which is intended to promote person-to-person communication, and designed to engage audiences in co-authored, improvised performance work where ownership and responsibility are the guiding principles. Identifying the special characteristics of space (in this instance, clubbing space) has helped to determine what that offers for both the physical and psychical possibilities of new modes of performance. Using the club space as a context in this way, the thesis has developed a model for theorisation that could be transposed to other forms of performance happening in different contexts that may house cognate activities. It offers a way of conceptualising performance by expressing it in terms of what physical and organisational shape it takes, in this case the porous spheroid. This approach has helped to articulate how performance structures function and operate in

situations that are constantly changing, unpredictable and malleable. This has implications

not only for practitioners who wish to better understand their own compositional practices but

also for those interested in engaging audiences in contexts that lie beyond the realm of the

conventional theatre building, where reception cannot always be as tightly controlled as it

might behind the proscenium arch.

Embracing Duality within the Research Process

This thesis began with a personal account of a clubbing experience that was, in its own way,

an epiphany. This may have gone against academic tradition but I maintain it resonates with

the rationale for both the content of this work and also the manner in which it has been

carried out. Throughout the period of research there has been constant interplay and

negotiation between subjective experiences and analysis or critique of those experiences.

Rather than ignore or deny this aspect, it has become an essential part of the thesis. As

participant-observer, as practitioner-researcher and as academic-clubber I have found myself

in the position of straddling two (potentially oppositional) standpoints simultaneously. Not

without its challenges, this has given me particular insights that have been woven into the

fabric of this work and served to illuminate its contents.

Structural Overview

Beginning with a broad consideration of the club context this thesis has introduced a number

of theoretical frameworks that have been applied to explorations of clubbing as social

practice by other researchers in the field. The investigation has moved from historical

perspectives of clubbing practices into a consideration of play theory and how this can be

related to the clubbing experience. The study has then turned to establishing the club space as

a site of performance – effectively moving from a wide understanding of play paradigms into an exploration of the more distinct category of performance. A continuum of performance types has been articulated as a schema in order to give insight into the nature of work one could expect to see operating in a variety of clubs. Close attention has been paid to investigating performative interactions and how these manifest within the club worlds. Finally the thesis has examined practice-led research, work that has developed organically over the course of the study. A number of bespoke performance pieces that were created for the *Shamania* festival have been analysed and from this a model for interactive performance has emerged. The intention here has been to formulate a model for creating and executing performance work that seeks to engage audiences in fluid and dynamic spaces that can, in turn, be applied to a variety of contexts.

The Research Questions – summary of findings

Whilst a number of research questions flow from this study and have been addressed within each chapter, the central research questions of this thesis were identified at the beginning as:

- ➢ How might underground club spaces be read and developed as new environments for democratic/participatory/interactive performance?

- ➢ How are these performative spaces of play created, navigated and utilised by those who inhabit them?

In this next section I take each chapter in turn, articulating them as five distinct stages within the research process, and summarise the main theories and findings that relate to these two central concerns.

Stage One - Contexts

By braiding together a variety of historical, social and political contexts relating to rave and the underground club scene, I have shown how this particular culture cannot be viewed in a

vacuum. It relates intimately to what is going on in the world and can be seen as a response to it. Chapter One outlines 'the underground' as a musical scene but also positions it as a set of attitudes that places it in opposition to mainstream or dominant culture (although these terms have been problematised in that section). Exploring the various historical contexts has established how club culture is situated within the cultural landscape and how it might be understood as an expression of cultural practice.

By discussing musical developments, changes in patterns of drug use, legislation enforcement, debates surrounding noise/power/control and how clubbing relates to identity politics, I have shown how clubbing histories can be traced in terms of change. Ideology of change is a powerful undercurrent to underground club culture. It contributes to the clubber's belief in the scene's recuperative benefits and its transformatory potential. The chapter traces the narratives of participation, the ideology of democracy and notions of community that have infused the underground over a number of years. Taken to its furthest point, commitment to these (loosely formulated) ideas have translated into forms of cultural activism, creative defiance and performative protest that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s in particular, led to a conviction in rave's potential to transform society. To what extent any societal transformation happened will always be contested and will vary according to one's personal involvement in the scene and the perspective that has afforded them. Undoubtedly rave did not cause the tangible revolution that it at times promised but it is my premise that it did create opportunities for rehearsal where new formations of space could be tried out. Operating within the symbolic register, underground dance allowed for an exploration of alternatives that promoted the confluence of body/space/mind and sought connections between them. That this happened in the presence of other people, and often in direct

contravention of the law, led to a sense of collective agency that was both evocative and provocative and resulted in stricter laws being introduced to bring it under control.

In opposition to this view, some argue rave is mere escapism and will therefore, ultimately, achieve nothing. The same could be said about theatre - that it is mere fantasy, escapism, indulgence in a dream world where reality remains unchanged. However, it can be suggested that by escaping reality and by imagining that you are someone or somewhere else, you are able to bring into view a range of possibilities that might not otherwise have been perceived. In line with many other theatre practitioners with an interest in social or educational change, it is my view that through the dramatic frame you free yourself. Through this frame you are able to see yourself objectively and (potentially) re-negotiate the construction of self. In a similar way to the world of play or the fictional world of the stage, the Temporary Autonomous Zone of the rave can be a site of shape-shifting. In this zone notions of the fixed self are released. In the limen binaries are blurred, questioned and dismantled. To occupy this zone, or to work/play within it, has implications for those producing performance work that deliberately dismantles actor-audience boundaries in order to produce positive benefits for the participants that engage with it.

Stage Two – Playful Arena

In the second chapter I have turned my attention to play theory and drawn on a number of paradigms to position the club space firmly within this frame. Within it I have provided a particular layering of the play experience. Here play is used both as a methodology and as a theoretical underpinning. The playing space is identified as a social context (the place of the club) and as a conceptual framework (the space of performance within the club). By connecting playful behaviour with spatial characteristics I have drawn direct links between

the activity itself and the place/space in which it occurs. This is used as an apparatus for performance analysis later in the thesis.

In this chapter I have established the concept of the club space as playful arena and provided a model for interpreting it as such. In my model the playful arena is a space that allows observation and participation to occur simultaneously. It affords access to the full scale of involvement along a continuum. I have shown how the arena is framed spatially, temporally and psychically. The model provided demonstrates the various points of entry into the playful arena and how they can differ according to our reasons for attending an event and the conditions that one may bring at point of entry. These points of entry may be literal or psychological in their makeup. Having entered the arena we bring with us culturally conceived attitudes to play. These attitudes are deeply embedded in club culture but also serve as useful tools for investigating the way play informs our understanding of how narratives of community, ritual, art and performance are constructed and 'played out'.

Without attempting any definition of what play is or is not, the chapter has explored possible functions of play and what might be gained from dwelling in the play mode. Whilst most would agree with the basic premise that play is central to life, a basic human function, opinions will vary in response to the following. What is the rationale for play? What does it allow us to do? How can that be put to use within a variety of contexts? How does it inform performance practice? For the purposes of this research I propose that the play function promotes creativity, engagement and expression. Play uses the performative mode as a way of seeing and as a vehicle for doing. In the club we can experience the full continuum of play, from *paidia* or free improvisation to *ludus* and skilled game playing. If to play requires free choice, then clubs offer a sense of freedom to experiment, even if that 'freedom' is illusory

and controlled to a greater or lesser extent by the party organizers or authorities that license it.

In addition to the application of play paradigms I have shown how the liminal paradigm can be used to illuminate the club experience. This has been achieved by examining the characteristics of the club space and how they enable a sense of disorientation that is required to achieve liminal status. I have drawn parallels between clubbing practices and liminality in order to determine why people ascribe such significance to their clubbing activity. Often clubbers talk of it as a transformatory phase of their life that often extends beyond youth. The club affords access to the liminal experience for adults whose lives are otherwise determined by what they do, where they live and what they own. They are able to reconnect with a sense of freewheeling and disorder. Rather than being a negative, this sense of disorder can be read as the fertile ground from which new ideas may flow. Play allows us to try out alternatives in relative safety. Through disorderly play we may be able to trouble the centre. Furthermore, I have shown that playfulness and club culture have the ability to be read as expressions of marginal dramaturgy – particularly the underground and rave scene that seek occupancy within the Temporary Autonomous Zone. The main suggestion that arises from this is that the club space may have a function that is felt beyond the world of play, influencing how we act, interact and take creative action in the other parts of our lives. Rather than being trivial, pointless and meaningless, the very fact that it allows one to play without necessarily having to 'produce' anything of material worth gives it its meaning.

The second model I have proposed in this chapter concerns liminal-liminoid hybridity and clubbing communitas. Here I have argued that whilst it is acknowledged that the club is a liminoid institution, it is also one that can offer access to the liminal experience that may then

result in a sense of 'clubbing communitas'. I have configured the model as a continuum to take into account the different points of entry at which a clubber might access each event. This allows us to see that clubbers do indeed have a creative dialogue with the spaces they occupy and that their individual circumstances, needs and sets of conditions may determine how they choose to use the space. The model also shows a sense of movement across the continuum that may be both physical and or psychical in its expression.

In this section of the research I have mobilised various play theories and conceived them as layers that are horizontally organised. Using a geological analogy, these layers rest one on top of the other providing a cultural history of how attitudes to play have developed over time. It is my proposition that the club space can be understood as a type of seed bed that sits on the surface of this history. Significant cultural flashpoints associated with the scene sow fresh seeds and from these new ideas grow, ultimately changing the horizon. Club culture is constantly changing, developing and transforming. This organic process can be in response to what is happening in the world at a particular time but it also stems from what has gone before. If the layers are understood as permeable, certain paradigms or forms can push through from below and reappear at the surface. In other words, there is a sense of movement and exchange between the surface and what lies beneath – past, present and future in conversation with each other.

Stage Three – Club as Site of Performance

In Chapter Three the research has focused on the club as a site of performance. Here I have set out to determine the special characteristics of the space that encourage performance to flourish. It has also investigated how thinking through performance illuminates our understanding of clubbing as social practice. I have mapped out three layers or contexts that

have influenced how club performance manifests, both as formal/licensed work or as spontaneous performance emanating from within the crowd. The three contexts in question are Ibiza in the mid to late 1980s, New York in the early to mid 1980s and the current festival scene in the UK. The fourth context introduced looks at how club performance is influenced by popular theatre modes and lends a theatrical dimension to how we might read the material covered in the previous three layers.

One key point that arises from this work is that club performance is merely one part of the total event. It is not the primary reason for attending a club night but it is a key factor in signalling how the event is to be read. Evidence from a range of field trips, observations and interviews would suggest that large numbers of people are engaging with contemporary performance practice in a variety of forms within the clubbing context. These practices might be highly experimental and aesthetically challenging and yet remain rooted in the tradition of popular performance, making them accessible and engaging for a crowd that may not necessarily identify themselves as regular attendees of arts events. A question that arises from this, but one that lies beyond the remit of this thesis, may be posed as follows: Does exposure to club performance alter the way people engage with art practice elsewhere? In addition, a further line of enquiry to pursue would be to determine whether there is a connection or tangible flow between how popular theatre forms influence club performance and how club culture influences contemporary performance.

The main contention of this chapter has been that the underground club that embraces play, performance and participation acts as a liminoid space where the potential for transformation is present. Permeable performances in clubs offer a way of 'trying out possibilities' for both clubbers and performers. For the clubber these systems of rehearsal might concern

experimentation with subjectivities of self. For the performer they might concern experimentation with aesthetic form and modes of reception. The club offers a lived space that is simultaneously a space of the imagination. Here the opportunity arises for clubbers to reconcile both parts of their existence (the day-to-day and the imagined) and so to gain a sense of being fully human. With a disruption of conventional audience-performer binary there exists the opportunity to see oneself in action. A clubber can be both performer and audience simultaneously. Indeed in this context fluctuations between the two positions are embraced.

With the rise of the DJ and the increasingly sophisticated use of technology, club culture has pre-empted a performative shift where the spectacle is located within the crowd rather than on the raised platform of a stage. Rave is essentially a non-verbal space. The absence of verbal text in the music allows club space to function as a fluid landscape in which visual performance can flourish. As music within this scene lacks any figurative dimension, a place for the performing body emerges on and around the dance floor. Furthermore, club nights have an air of the special event where one's presence builds the spectacle in which one is participating. This, in turn, leads to a 'veneration of the vibe', where 'being there' and being 'in the moment' is highly prized. As evidenced by this research, the existence of performative play as a guiding principle gives rise to the belief in the club space as 'special'. This sense of 'specialness' connects it to other modes of activity that are marked out as separate from the everyday - including ritual, pilgrimage, theatre and religion. In this arena, senses are heightened and the self becomes more malleable. Transcendence on the dance floor can provide a route to greater self-awareness that is often described in quasi-religious or spiritual tones. The club allows individuals and groups to explore the 'what if' question and operates within what both Turner (1982) and Boal (2006) have called the Subjunctive Mood.

Performative play contributes to the clubber's sense of involvement, ownership, belonging and presence but also signals the potential for imagination, transformation and transgression of seemingly fixed realities. The extent to which this is taken into the world beyond the club is harder to determine. This research has set out to demonstrate that the potential for this is present but further work would need to be carried out to measure those effects and their impact on daily behaviour. Augmenting audience connectivity with a view to increasing engagement is a concern for many performance practitioners and the investigation of how the special characteristics of the club space facilitate this can be translated to these other fields. The models suggested in the fifth chapter and the analysis of work *in situ* should provide the apparatus for practitioners wishing to further their understanding of how space operates to maximise a sense of audience 'presence'.

Stage Four – Performative Interactions

Having looked broadly at the club as a site of performance and the particular spatial characteristics that facilitate this, the study has focused its attention on examining performative interactions in the club context and how these interactions result in feelings of collectivity, community and social exchange. Before this point is reached, however, I have undertaken a categorisation of club performance in order to demonstrate the varying ways in which clubs utilize performance or how performance manifests within the club environment. I have suggested five different categories although, undoubtedly, there is significant overlap between them. The categories cover a continuum that moves from instances where professional acts are programmed into the night and the music stops so that full audience attention can be given to the performers, through to clubs that encourage performative participation from the clubbers by promoting fancy dress or the adoption of alter egos. The categories help signal the ethos of the club promoters and indicate how the clientele may be

expected to behave or respond. Perhaps the categories themselves are not particularly important, although they may well prove useful when attempting to define or describe what is taking place. However, what is more interesting is that the range of club performance work as established by the schema, shows that the full range of how audiences receive and participate in performance work is represented and, generally, embraced by those present.

Evidence from this research has shown that there is a predisposition on the part of clubbers to welcome and engage with performance in a variety of ways. In a world where the drive to gain new audiences is ever more pressing, it might be useful to examine why the club world has no trouble engaging its participants with what is often highly experimental work. It is my premise that performance work of this nature is accepted and embraced due to a number of factors. Firstly, as previously mentioned, performance work is not the main reason for attending the event. It is merely one part of the night and is seen as a 'value added' extra. Thus the stakes in observing the work or participating in it are fairly low. In addition, the work has an inherent or ready-made relevance as it is in constant dialogue with the audience it addresses. It has an innate sense of involvement as it does not operate behind a proscenium arch but prefers to mingle with the crowd and respond to it. Furthermore, it tends to dismantle notions of elitism by subscribing to modes of popular theatre and thus does not claim to be 'high art' with all the attendant connotations of hierarchy that implies. In this way performance and party are intertwined and become intimately connected. A sense of collective celebration is established through the performative mode and feelings of group cohesion flow from it.

Having outlined the premise of interactivity as a key concept in contemporary performance, I have focused on the positive benefits to be gained from interaction. In other words, I have

concentrated on what is to be gained from being dialogic and have asked what effecting

transaction and exchange between participants might achieve. The motivation to be

interactive has its roots in the politics of democracy and empowerment, notions that chime

with the ideology of the underground. The underground is a space that is able to house

alternative worldviews. Whilst this may not translate into direct action it may, however, at

least inform our understanding of the improvisational attitude and the role that plays in how

we do take action and how we work out ways of being in the world. I have examined this

with particular consideration of performance that happens in places of sociability or

conviviality. This offers some interesting parallels with Schechner's sense of the

'performance event' (1973: 44). Perhaps it can be surmised that clubbers experience

performance socially but also experience clubbing performatively. The intimate relationship

between the social and the performative dimensions make it a potentially compelling

experience, each aspect wrapping around the other in a manner akin to the 'entertainment-

efficacy braid' (Schechner 1988). Fundamental to the rave ethos is that by attending you are

not merely consuming a ready-made product but helping to shape its outcome by

participating. The promotion of social interaction in the underground renders it ripe for

situating performance within it that is inherently interactive. That it offers the potential for an

immersive experience can be an extremely potent lure. Testimonies from interviewees

suggest interactions within the club do resonate with how they perceive themselves and

others in the world of the everyday. This suggests there is a relationship between the two but

much further work would need to be done to examine these views more rigorously.

Stage Five – Frameworks for Creating Interactive Performance

Chapter Five consists of close analysis of performance pieces that were made to further

understand the club as a site of democratic and interactive performance. The aim for this

phase was to create work, to explore how these pieces might encourage physical participation, and to consider how processes of embodiment help frame the club space as a place where people can engage creatively in dialogic exchanges framed by the performative mode. The overarching aim was to investigate how flexible performance structures and strategies can be applied to a particular site and context to allow for varying degrees of interaction to take place. The practice-based research phase allowed me to address the three central questions effectively, namely:

1. How do modes of professional and semi-professional performance operate within the fluidity of the club space?

2. Are performances signalled as such and how does this impact on audience response?

3. What is the nature of the interaction between formal performance and creative clubbers?

Establishing the performance company …floorSpace… has allowed the work to develop over a period of time. My intentions have been to explore what mediations might be deployed within a performance to facilitate effective, reciprocal exchange. In addition I have sought to ask what are the prompts by which clubbers may begin to interact with and enter a performance?

In line with the ethos of democracy within the Psytrance community, the …floorSpace… framework has been developed collaboratively with company members and there has been a shared responsibility for furthering an understanding of it. Along with collaboration as an underpinning theme of the work go risk, play and investment (terms taken from Etchells

1999). The framework for the practice has stemmed from some of the principles gleaned from the ethnographic phase of this thesis. These considerations may be listed as follows:

➢ environment (an understanding of the context and the application of performance to that context);

➢ spatial considerations (implicit and explicit rules of the space, how does space function practically and metaphorically?);

➢ culture (what codes of behaviour are operating and how visible or covert are they?);

➢ performance (how might performance be signalled in a fluid and multi-focal space? How does one maintain the balance between interaction and flow of the club?);

➢ content/style (how might the work resonate with the visual-auditory continuum on which the club operates?);

➢ contrast (how might contrast or incongruity aid how performance is signalled and therefore 'read' by a clubbing crowd?);

➢ risk (all interactive work contains elements of risk as it relies on improvised exchange between people but in this context there is the added risk of the environment itself which is unpredictable. There is a need to take care of both performers and audience in a practical sense but also the need to take into account ethical considerations and to 'take care' of the audience from within the performance structure. This may involve carefully sharing the rules of the game with participants so that their involvement is maximized but it may also involve acknowledging the potential vulnerability of participants and negotiating that successfully without losing control or sight of the performance itself.)
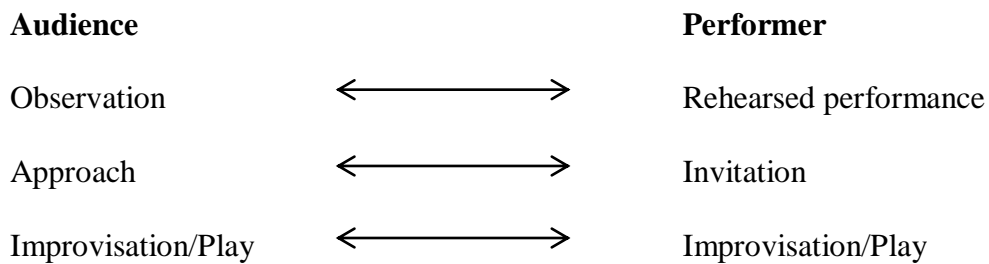
The initial framework as outlined above has developed into a poetics of interaction that I have articulated as four key terms: incongruity, generosity, improvisation and playfulness. Rather than being arranged horizontally, I conceive these terms in a similar manner to Schechner's concentric circles where 'the larger disc contains all those smaller than itself' (1988: 70). However, in this model there is a sense of outward motion from the centre to the outside that represents the process of the work from conception to execution. Incongruity is the core style of the work and sits at the centre of the model. It is our starting point for devising and the stimulus from which we work. Generosity is the ethos that drives the work and shapes it as it develops into a coherent structure. Improvisation is the means by which the work is carried out and the manner in which people engage with it. Playfulness is the intended outcome. Each element flows from the previous element and is wrapped by the next.

Having developed the practice and carried out performances in a range of contexts, I have been able to conceptualise the performance structures as porous spheroids. This visual conceptualisation has helped to articulate, locate and analyse what is occurring during the performance time. The performance structure is conceived as a shape that can circulate around the space but can also flatten or elongate according to necessity. It can be responsive to context, space and audience and allows for a play between the 'rehearsed space' of performance and the 'improvised space' of the wider club context. The porosity of the shape allows points of entry and exit for the audience. The model has become a useful tool for analyzing the performance work both during and post performance and provides the means by which one might map the shape of the performance onto the nature of interactions that are occurring. The model helps us to identify the following key elements:

➢ Levels of interaction

➢ Points at which interaction occurs

➢ The decision-making process of performers from within role

➢ Heightened moments of play

➢ The responsiveness of performance to space/context

Returning to the three research questions to do with how performance operates in the fluid space, how it is signalled and what types of interaction it promotes, I offer the final conclusion. If performance work takes place on stage within a club, then any 'reading' of it is fairly unproblematic. The audience locate it conceptually with ease and respond to it accordingly. On the shared space of the dance floor, the seams of distinction between audience and performer are less distinct. This is a more challenging place to situate work and is a space of exchange that lies at the heart of interactive performance of all kinds. I would propose that this type of work functions in the following way and with both audience and performer progressing through three phases.

Audience		**Performer**
Observation	⟷	Rehearsed performance
Approach	⟷	Invitation
Improvisation/Play	⟷	Improvisation/Play

Being able to reach a point where both audience and performer are able to improvise and play together, having progressed through the previous stages, is the ultimate aim of the work. To make the transition from one phase to another relies heavily on being in control of the signals you give. These signals may be verbal or non-verbal, explicit or implicit, articulated or implied. For …floorSpace… these signals have been communicated primarily by establishing

the prolate performance structure clearly, (either through costume, through specific movement quality or through mobile scenography) and then by allowing the structure to diffuse into the oblate form allowing for increased access by participants.

In response to the question concerning the nature of the interaction between formal performance and creative clubbers, and at the risk of sounding flippant, the simple answer is that it depends on the nature of each piece. Every performance elicits a different type of response and each one provokes varying degrees of participation. However, one can begin to see how the qualities of each piece correspond to the qualities of the responses gained. Perhaps a more interesting question to ask is how these performances or interactions contribute to the clubbing experience and how do they shape the space? This thesis has begun to address this issue but there is clearly more work to be done in this area and further research will be carried out via the AHRC-funded scheme Beyond Text, *Environments for Encounter*.[62]

Inevitably work of this nature leaves us with a number of additional questions that are still to be posed. Returning to the original motivation for this thesis, namely a belief in the positive benefits of clubbing as an expression of communal play, it might be pertinent now to ask what is the impact of experiencing performance within the club context? How does performance interrupt, intervene in or augment our experience of the club night and does this alter the way in which we behave beyond the space of the playful arena? Performative interactions might be experienced individually or as a group. They are bespoke, tailored,

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[62] An eighteen-month research project entitled '*Environments for Encounter'* under the Beyond Text scheme is to be conducted by A. O'Grady of University of Leeds and R. Kill of Leeds Metropolitan University. This research began in April 2010 and will situate interactive performance work in three contrasting European festivals in order to carry out a comparative analysis of the effect of space, environment and context. www.beyondtext.ac.uk

personalized and dialogic. What effect does that have on us when we live in a world that is predominantly depersonalized, technologically mediated and mass produced? What implications does this have for interactive performance practice work that occurs in other contexts? While these questions still remain at this point and further longitudinal study would be required to address them fully, it is my hope that the open, interactive compositional practices and theoretical models I have developed in this thesis may help provide a new means for exploring them and formulating possible answers. The original contribution to existing knowledge as contained within this thesis is the distinct and novel treatment of the underground club as a playful arena and the development of new models by which one might theorise performance practice occurring in these spaces. The construct of the playful arena can be used as a tool for (re)reading and (re)defining the activities housed within the club space which, until now, have been regarded as emblematic of leisure rather than play in its broadest and deepest sense. The playful arena not only signals the physical and psychical frames that shape the clubbing experience but also helps to define the landscape within which particular performance practices sit. This thesis makes an explicit connection between adults at play and playful performance and offers new apparatuses for analysing how that operates in practice.

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