Agonistic festivities

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Agonistic Festivities: Urban Nightlife Scenes and the Sociability of 'Anti-Social' Fun

Nightlife venues frequently find themselves in conflict with competing interests in and uses of urban space, and it is a rare occasion when municipal government or law enforcement comes to their defence. This article examines the role of conflict in the ongoing development of urban nightlife scenes, drawing on two contrasting case studies that took place in the autumn of 2016: the forced closure of Fabric nightclub in London and the recognition of Berlin nightclub Berghain as a 'cultural centre' by regional financial courts. The analysis proceeds through a theoretical framework that combines Gregory Bateson's notion of *schismogenesis* with Chantal Mouffe's *agonistics*. The former highlights how contention between groups mutually shapes their identities and social roles, while the latter draws attention to the animosities that arise within pluralistic societies as well as to how such tensions may be managed through political institutions. Both case studies demonstrate how various stakeholders in nightlife scenes tactically adjust their practices in ways that respond to, anticipate, and often avoid open conflict. In certain instances, new roles and procedures are developed to defuse tensions and redirect them towards more productive negotiations between nightlife venues, partygoers, municipal authorities, and local residents.

Keywords: politics; dance; nightlife; schismogenesis; agonistics; gentrification

Introduction

A lot has happened in a year. When the idea for this article first occurred to me in early 2016, I intended to reflect on some simmering tensions that were palpable during my ethnographic research in the electronic music scenes of several cities in Europe and North America. By the time this idea became a paper presented at the 'Dark Leisure and Music' symposium at Leeds Beckett University, the legendary London club Fabric had been shut down by the Islington borough council, and the equally legendary Berlin nightclub Berghain had been granted tax status as a 'cultural centre' on par with opera theatres and museums. These developments both took place on the same day that

summer, and comparisons between the two cases were made again and again in the ensuing public debate. This article uses these contrasting narratives to structure a series of case studies exploring the role of conflict and 'anti-social' fun in the ongoing development of urban nightlife scenes.

Both in music studies and in the anthropology of ritual, a commonplace narrative about music-driven events is that they 'bring people together'. And yet, few things elicit conflict as quickly as non-consensual exposure to the noisy revelry of others. This 'pro-social' assumption about collective music-making overlooks the myriad ways in which such articulations of group belonging and shared taste may antagonize those who are excluded—but not absent—from the scene of sonic conviviality. This article examines the patterns of conflict that arise around urban nightlife events, attending to how liminal, nocturnal leisure practices can disrupt 'normal' urban life in ways that are often framed as 'anti-social' by detractors. These disruptions, in turn, give shape to the (sub)cultural identities and social roles of many of 'stakeholders' in the city's nightlife sector. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork as well as contemporary media coverage and commentary, it highlights how urban nightlife scenes are surrounded by a halo of confrontational encounters that give rise to adversarial social relations between groups competing over urban space and soundscapes. Invoking Gregory Bateson's notion of *schismogenesis*, which highlights the social and cultural productivity of conflictual contact, I argue that nocturnal music scenes do indeed generate social relations—that is, that conflicts around 'anti-social' festivities are nonetheless relational—but these relations arise out of contention rather than mutual affection or shared interests. Turning to the '*agonistic*' politics of Chantal Mouffe, I offer a new reading of the 'politics of fun' by tracking the ambivalent

political consequences of leisure practices in close urban settings, where pleasure and enjoyment often entail the displeasure and discontentment of others.

The article begins with a brief discussion of agonism and schismogenesis, along with some reflections on the ways in which gentrification intensifies hostilities surrounding urban nightlife. All of these discussions serve as a theoretical preface to the case studies in London and Berlin, each of which will be described and contextualized in some detail, using schismogenesis and agonistic politics to highlight the role of conflict in cultural change. A comparative discussion closes this article, considering recent shifts in the municipal-political landscapes of both cities and drawing some insights as to how to better manage the competing interests and power-relations surrounding nightlife.

Agonism

Agonism is an approach to politics that ascribes a central and ineradicable role to negativity in political processes. Derived from the Greek term for struggle, *agon*, it begins by recognizing conflict as an inevitability in pluralistic societies, but envisions ways for channeling this political negativity into productive outcomes—or, at least, mitigating and sublimating it through institutional forms. Notably, it diverges from earlier Marxian lineages of materialist politics, which imagine a harmonious post-capitalist society as both its endgame and the criteria for success; instead, agonism foresees ongoing cycles of struggle as an asymptotic approach to a better world. Agonistic politics reject the Habermasian reliance on a 'negotiation between interests', that is, the creation of consensus through rational-critical discourse (Habermas 1989b, a); instead, 'contention between adversaries' serves as a more accurate description of political dynamics, where various actors strive for access to power (Laclau and Mouffe

1985, Mouffe 2013). For agonistic politics, lingering dissent does not necessarily indicate failure.

A 'successful' agonistic pluralism would thus entail dynamics of conflict and struggle, in a sort of 'conflictual consensus', that is, in agreement about the 'rules of the game' (the institutions that manage conflict) despite disagreement about what they mean or how they should be implemented (Mouffe 2013, 8). Agonism does not celebrate conflict as such, but instead advocates for the creation of (safer, more just) institutions within society for the expression and management of conflict, with an eye towards fairer outcomes and sublimated aggression. Mouffe takes great pains to distinguish between 'antagonism' and 'agonism', describing the former as a 'struggle between enemies' and the latter as one between 'adversaries': 'What liberal democratic politics requires is that the others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned' (Mouffe 2013, 7). Put simply, only agonism is sustainable within 'conflictual consensus', whereas antagonism destabilizes it. She insists that the difference between these two categories of conflict is one of degrees rather than quality, arguing for the importance of putting into place institutions that mitigate hegemony and sublimate aggression. For Mouffe, the institutions that maintain conflictual consensus 'provide the symbolic space in which … opponents recognize themselves as legitimate adversaries' (Mouffe 2013, 13–14).

In any case, the application of agonism here is not normative in intent: I do not mean to promote agonistic politics as a strategy for resolving the conflicts that arise between nightlife scenes, the state apparatus, property investors, and local residents. Rather, I wish to use it as a diagnostic framework for analyzing situations where certain conflicts remain irreconcilable, and yet a way forward is needed. In particular, it

usefully directs attention towards the movement of negative affect, tracing lines of affective flight that suggest how aggression may be sublimated, stymied, or amplified.

Schismogenesis

In his study of the honorific *naven* ritual of the Iatmul of New Guinea, early twentieth-century anthropologist Gregory Bateson defined schismogenesis as, 'a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals' (1958, 175). Derived from the classical Greek terms *schisma* (cleft, division) and *genesis* (creation, generation), it describes a form of divergent cultural productivity elicited by contact across social divides.[1] Although framed in individualist terms in his most well-known ethnography (partly as a rejection of turn-of-the-century sociological concepts such as 'group mind' and 'collective unconscious'), his earlier writings show that this concept was initially formulated with groups in mind. First coined in an article he published in the anthropological journal *Man* (1935), schismogenesis arises out of a debate about the processes and consequences of 'culture contact'. Although most of the other scholars participating in this colloquy focused primarily on colonial encounters, Bateson was interested in analyzing interactions between groups *within* communities that share the same cultural frameworks—for example, different classes, clans/moieties, genders, age-classes, and so on. Bateson foresaw three potential outcomes of such contact: 1) a 'complete fusion'

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[1] 'Schismogenesis' may be familiar to scholars of music and sound through Steven Feld's use of the term as a response to R. Murray Schafer's 'schizophonia' (Feld 1994, Schafer 1969). Although he references Bateson, Feld's notion of schismogenesis bears little resemblance to the original, instead defining it as the recontextualization of sounds that have been separated from their sound-emitting sources.

of both groups, such that they become one homogenous group; 2) the elimination of one or both groups; or 3) the persistence of both groups in a 'dynamic equilibrium'. Bateson argues that this last outcome is of greatest interest to the study of inter-cultural contact, because 'the factors active in the dynamic equilibrium are likely to be identical or analogous with those which, in disequilibrium, are active in cultural change' (Bateson 1935, 181). In other words, he sees the mechanisms of cultural change at play in the ongoing fluctuations of this dynamic equilibrium.

This dynamic equilibrium drives processes of schismogenetic differentiation, which Bateson divides into two categories (Bateson 1935, 1987). The first he terms 'symmetrical differentiation', where both groups share the same repertoire of behaviours directed at one another. Interactions mostly involve echoing each other's behaviour or 'responding in kind', such as boasting, trading insults, sporting rivalry, or commercial competition. 'Complementary differentiation', by contrast, involves each group developing a set of fundamentally different but interrelated behaviours towards one another, 'essentially dissimilar but mutually appropriate' (Bateson 1987, 118). Interactions are thus interlocking and mutually-reinforcing, which Bateson groups into relational pairs that are notable for the visibility of power asymmetries: dominance-submission, support-dependance, and exhibitionism-spectatorship, to name a few. Although it is less obvious how rival groups mirroring behaviour (symmetrical differentiation) leads to differentiation, complementary behaviour leads clearly to differentiation, in that the mapping of a set of differing-but-interlocking behaviours to distinctive groups bolsters distinctions between their social roles, thus prompting group members in turn to articulate these differences through cultural production.

One notable theoretical insight arising from the intersection of agonistic politics and schismogenesis is the suggestion that conflict generates cultural diversity. Bateson's

complementary schismogenesis provides a model for explaining how adversarial

interactions between groups can lead to divergent behaviours that are nonetheless

reciprocally determined, at times mutually mitigating, at times mutually exacerbating.

In turn, Mouffe's conceptualization of agonistic politics suggests that the institutional

management of such adversarial relations lies at the heart of cultural and political

pluralism—provided these relations do not boil over into outright antagonism.

Gentrification

In most of the cases under consideration here, urban gentrification appears

repeatedly as the most salient context for the conflicts surrounding nightlife—although

the impact of fiscal austerity on urban governance undoubtedly plays a role as well

(Finlayson 2016). Rather than frame gentrification as the root cause of all ills, it is more

productive to treat it as a symptom of an underlying struggle for urban space, once that

has intensified and accelerated through the cultural and economic changes that took

place throughout the twentieth century. In other words, as the availability of empty,

low-density, unsupervised urban space dwindles, formerly disused post-industrial zones

and working-class districts have become highly attractive destinations for work, living,

and leisure. These three uses of space, however, make for fraught neighbourly relations;

their intermingling highlights irreconcilable differences regarding needs, norms, and

expectations. The ongoing privatization of public space along with the unpredictable

mobility of post-industrial labour have all exacerbated already-existing tensions

regarding nightlife and its place within the social fabric of the city. For example, the rise

in noise complaints in gentrifying neighbourhoods does not necessarily indicate that

noise was not a problem before the arrival of wealthier, more privileged residents; their

poorer, working-class and often immigrant predecessors may have found the noise of

local bars and nightclubs just as disruptive, but were too politically disenfranchised or legally precarious to appeal to municipal authorities (Bernt and Holm 2005, Novy and Huning 2009, Thrift 2005).

Nonetheless, nightlife venues frequently play a central role in processes of gentrification. Especially in 'underground' music scenes that cater to eccentric tastes and marginalized identities, event organizers seek out inconspicuous locales hidden in the urban interstices and peripheries. This spatial marginalization is largely self-protective, providing refuge from surveillance, moral sanction, hegemonic violence, as well as subcultural tourism. But their gradual flourishing contributes to the attractiveness of the surrounding area for successive waves of wealthier residents with neo-bohemian tastes (Braun 2010, Lloyd 2002). Once the gentrifying *avant-garde* of students and artists have been replaced with young families and creative/tech-sector businesses, nightlife venues are among the first establishments to be forced out of the area over concerns about noise, safety, health, and cleanliness. Nightlife establishments often serve as the vanguard of gentrification, adding to the post-industrial profile of derelict districts, but they also come into conflict with local residents, who experience them as a nuisance and call for more regulatory control (Hae 2011). One of the results of this process is that nightlife itself becomes gentrified: precarious and underfunded nightlife establishments in a gentrifying neighbourhood—often associated with alternative or experimental cultural practices—are gradually replaced by more upmarket or corporate establishments. In this sense, nightlife both serves the interests of urban capitalism and falls victim to its ravages.

'#SaveFabric' in London

On the evening of September 6th 2016, the Islington Council ruled to permanently

revoke the operating license of Fabric[2], a nightclub located in the central London neighbourhood of Farringdon. The council hearing included representatives from the club itself, the Islington Public Health Authority, the Islington License Authority, and the Metropolitan Police. At one o'clock in the morning, after six hours of deliberations, the hearing ended with the Subcommittee Chair Flora Williamson reading out a ruling against the venue that cited 'A culture of drugs … at the club which the existing management and security appear incapable of controlling' as the primary justification for revoking Fabric's license (Hawthorn 2016, Savage and Rosney 2016).

This hearing was called in response to the drug-related deaths of two eighteen-year-olds in June and August of the same year, both of which were linked to Fabric by the Metropolitan Police. Shortly before the weekend of August 12th, Fabric's license was suspended and put under review for permanent revocation (Coldwell 2016). During the four weeks leading up to the September hearing, numerous musicians, music critics, and industry professionals offered up personal testimonies of the club's cultural impact as well as its signal contribution to electronic music culture writ large. Although these statements were scattered across social media channels, many of them were attached to the 'SaveFabric' campaign, which included a Facebook site (https://www.facebook.com/savefabric/), a Twitter hashtag (#savefabric), and an online petition to the city's mayor that additionally included hundreds of heartfelt testimonies from clubbers (https://www.change.org/p/save-london-s-nightlife-stop-the-closure-of-fabric). After the council hearing in early September resulted in a permanent revocation of Fabric's license, there followed a new and intensified wave of support and protest, including more public statements by artists, nightlife industry workers, and local

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[2] This nightclub's name is usually written in lowercase letters only (i.e., 'fabric'), but this styling has not been retained here, to avoid confusion with the common noun.

politicians. Fabric immediately announced that it would appeal the council decision, transforming the 'SaveFabric' campaign into a fundraiser to cover legal costs as well as the costs of maintaining the venue and retaining core staff during the closure (https://www.fabriclondon.com/save-fabric); later that month, electronic music artists contributed one hundred and eleven tracks to a digital album sold on Fabric's website as part of the fundraising efforts (https://www.fabriclondon.com/store/save-fabric.html).

This was not the first time that the club had run up against the regulatory arm of the Islington Council. In December 2014, after four drug-related deaths connected to Fabric had occurred over the previous three years, the council voted to impose strict licensing conditions on the club that would require the use of drug-sniffer dogs and electronic ID scans on incoming visitors (Beaumont-Thomas 2014). The club appealed the decision and succeeded in having it overturned a year later in December 2015, with the judge ruling that these measures would undermine efforts to remove drugs from circulation and would pose public safety risks by lengthening queues outside the venue (Cooper 2015). Fabric's management and legal team seemed to be hoping for a similar outcome when they launched an appeal against the permanent revocation of their operating license—but it never went to court. Scheduled to take place over four days starting on November 28 2016, the hearing was called off one week beforehand, after several days of negotiations between the nightclub, council, and the police. Fabric announced through its social media channels that it had reached an agreement with municipal authorities to reinstate the club's license. However, the joint statement issued by Fabric and Islington Council showed a significant political surrender on the club's part. In the following excerpt from the joint statement, the club publicly accepted all allegations made by the council and the police, retracted its own objections, and distanced itself from its defenders:

> Fabric accepts that its procedures in relation to searching were insufficient, as were its procedures to prevent the consumption and dealing of drugs within the club itself. Fabric accepts that the Police acted reasonably in making the application for a review and that the Authority's sub-committee was fully entitled to revoke its Licence. Fabric repudiates the online abuse aimed at Committee members and Council staff and will permanently exclude anyone who has been found to be involved (Islington Council 2016).

Both of these legal challenges to Fabric's licensing cited concerns for public health and safety, in response to drug-related deaths that were linked by the Metropolitan Police to the nightclub. But throughout these conflicts, Fabric and its supporters complained of a targeted campaign of surveillance and regulatory pressure, both by the Metropolitan Police and the Islington Council (e.g., Boiler Room 2016). In the morning following the latest council ruling, the *Independent* newspaper published an analysis of the hearing documents in which the authors claimed that, 'Fabric's closure was a long pre-planned event, orchestrated by a cash-strapped council, using the police as pawns' (Byers 2016). As evidence to support their claim, the authors pointed to testimonies submitted from an undercover police operation that had been conducted in July, *before* the deaths that triggered the license suspension and council hearing. The written testimonies from this undercover operation, dubbed 'Operation Lenor' with no small amount of gallows humour ('Lenor' being the name of a well-known brand of fabric softener), relied heavily on inference and conjecture to substantiate drug use, while positive comments from the original report about the club's friendly atmosphere and relative lack of violence did not appear in the hearing statement. But why would the Islington Council be invested in shutting down a nightclub that brings substantial business to the area? The authors point suggestively to a spate of funding cuts that have hit the Islington Council and the Met Police in the past years, implying that Fabric's positive impact on the local economy would not benefit these tax-funded organizations as well as other

types of land-use, such as property sales and residential conversion. Both the Metropolitan Police and the Islington Council vehemently denied any interest in Fabric's property or any other form of 'vendetta' (BBC 2016), while supporters of Fabric and other stakeholders in the city's nightlife scenes speculated about the influence of property owners and upcoming urban redevelopment plans. The views of the borough's current residents, however, remained largely invisible in this whole process; concerns about noise, disruptive behaviour, litter, and vandalism were rarely mentioned by those involved. For the Metropolitan police and the Islington Council, the closure was about a permissive 'culture of drugs', whereas Fabric and its defenders framed it as a case of targeted police antagonism harnessing moral panic in the service of gentrification. The only exception to this pattern was MP Emily Thornberry, who mentioned the complaints of her constituents during a discussion panel hosted by *Boiler Room*, a prominent online television broadcaster specialising in electronic music; notably, she worried that the sudden closure of Fabric would result in a proliferation of illicit 'underground' parties that would create further nuisances for residents (Boiler Room 2016).

Although the Fabric licensing hearings were explicitly connected to drug-related deaths, 'off the record' conversations with other electronic music venue managers and event promoters pointed to a correlation between nuisance complaints from local residents and increased drug-related scrutiny by law enforcement. In other words, when the neighbours complained about noise or unseemly behaviour, the local borough police became more vigilant about drug consumption on the premises. Many stakeholders in nightlife scenes take this correlation to imply that drugs policing is applied selectively and punitively to nightlife establishments that have run afoul of more powerful local interests. Due to the stigma and cycles of moral panic associated with the recreational

use of controlled substances, drugs policing can serve as a convenient proxy for non-illegal nuisances and 'undesirable' groups. For venues subjected to intensified police surveillance and interference, these experiences inevitably lead to speculation about what role their marginalised identities play in attracting such attention.

Regardless of whether this is a spurious correlation or a calculated strategy, the perception of persecution only serves to raise tensions between nightlife establishments and nearby residents. Venue operators and promoters have learned to carefully avoid any kind of negative attention, for fear that it may initiate a targeted campaign of surveillance and discipline well beyond the scope of the initial complaint. As a brief example of this, one could look to the Autumn Street Studios, a venue managed by the operators of 'Bloc.' an electronic music festival that ran from 2006 to 2016. Located in a small building in a former industrial complex on the end of a cul-de-sac in London's Hackney Wick, the venue is nonetheless not far from residential buildings; when partygoers approach or leave the venue on foot, they pass well within earshot of local residents. The security personnel do not only manage the entrance and the interior of the venue; they are also deployed along the access drive and up to where it joins the main road. Wearing high-visibility, reflective fluorescent vests to make their role obvious to any observer—peering out the window of a nearby flat, for example—these stewards carefully manage the flow of clubbers to and from the venue. They prevent them from gathering in groups, encourage them to walk to the nearest bus stop or gas station before calling a car service, ask them to speak quietly, and implore them to leave the vicinity as quickly as possible. Wincing apologetically and cajoling politely, the staff repeatedly refer to sleeping neighbours when asking partygoers to reduce their sonic and visual presence.

Both of these examples speak to processes of schismogenesis, apparent in the way that new practices and identities emerge out of conflict with local residents and municipal authorities. At the Autumn Street Studios, stigmatization associated with nocturnal activities and marginalised identities prompt the development of self-policing practices that are deployed tactically to deflect negative neighbourly attention. As the Metropolitan Police's behaviour towards Fabric became increasingly antagonistic, Fabric's own practice of self-policing came to be insufficient in the eyes of the Islington Council, which endorsed the increasingly punitive regulatory control desired by the Metropolitan Police. The self-policing strategies developed by both venues constitute a form of complementary schismogenesis, in that they were adapted to the concerns and complaints of local residents while also anticipating the forceful intervention of the police. The case of Fabric also recalls Mouffe's admonition that, in agonistic pluralism, competing factions should be 'not enemies but adversaries among whom exists a conflictual consensus' (2013, xii). The events surrounding the Islington Council ruling of 2016 serves as an example of Bateson's 'dynamic equilibrium', in that, 'when certain restraining factors are removed, the differentiation or split between the groups increases progressively towards either breakdown or a new equilibrium' (Bateson 1935, 181). In response to multiple pressures and frictions, Fabric's relationships with municipal authorities deteriorated from collaborative to adversarial to antagonistic, resulting in very public, acrimonious legal battles that left the nightclub making a humiliating 'plea bargain' to ensure its survival; the public retraction of Fabric's objections as well as its acceptance of a raft of draconian regulatory measures may represent a new point of equilibrium between the nightclub and its urban adversaries.

'Clubsterben' in Berlin

On September 6 2016, the financial courts of the German metropolitan region Berlin-Brandenburg ruled in favour of the nightclub Berghain, thus reversing a tax rise that had been applied to the venue six years earlier (Electronic Beats 2017, Spiegel 2016). In the process, the court recategorised Berghain in the eyes of the state as a 'cultural centre' rather than an entertainment venue. Berlin-Brandenburg's tax law differentiates between *Kultur* (culture) and *Unterhaltung* (entertainment) for the purposes of corporate taxation: cultural venues such as museums, theatres, and concert halls pay a 7% revenue tax, while nightclubs and other venues considered to be 'entertainment' are taxed at a rate of 19% (Balzer 2016, RBB 2016, Unicomb 2016). From 2005 until 2009, the nightclub paid the lower tax rate as a cultural institution, but in 2009 the local tax authority (*Finanzamt*) reclassified Berghain as an entertainment venue, thus imposing the correspondingly higher tax rate. Six years later, after an extended trial, the court found in the nightclub's favour (2016). The financial benefits of the lower tax rate were likely a cause of not insignificant celebration for the club's staff and management, but the wider world of electronic music focused on the significance of a nightclub gaining state recognition as a cultural institution, thus imbuing it with some of the cultural prestige usually reserved for high-cultural institutions. Indeed, while the text of the ruling seemed to take pains to avoid the phrase 'high culture' [*Hochkultur*], most media reports included the term in their headlines and placed the nightclub alongside opera houses and museums (Bild 2016, Klages 2016, Strauss 2016). Occurring on the same day as the Islington Council ruling against Fabric, comparisons between the two cases were inevitable. Commentators on social media, in the music-industry press and even mainstream outlets held up Berlin as a model of a culturally-progressive city—even though the nature of the conflicts and the means by which they were resolved differed

greatly between the two cases (Morley 2016, Spiegel Online 2016, Spratt 2016).

Despite these comparisons portraying the city as a paragon of progressive municipal policy, Berlin has its own ambivalent history of conflict between nightlife and neighbourhoods. Today, if one travels to the former East Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg and visits the sites of those underground nightclubs, all-night dive-bars, and DIY concert venues that flourished shortly after German Reunification, one will instead find sedate cafés and lounges, daycare centres, and fashion boutiques. During the early 1990s, at a time when the district was underpopulated and mostly derelict, subcultural stakeholders made use of abundant and cheap urban space to set up improvised nightlife venues on shoestring budgets (Bernt and Holm 2005, Heebels and van Aalst 2010, Novy and Huning 2009, Schwanhäußer 2010). In most cases, the surrounding buildings were either uninhabited or not zoned for residential use. As the area gentrified rapidly around the turn of the 21st century, its derelict building stock was bought, refurbished, converted for residential use, and sold to upwardly-mobile professionals and young families.

Property developers did not take local noise sources into consideration— whether out of ignorance or out of a desire to avoid paying for expensive soundproofing—and once the residents had moved in, it was up to the music venues to mitigate 'noise pollution'. Local underground music venues quickly found themselves in close quarters with new neighbours; and even though these music clubs invariably predated the arrival of these residents, the legal onus was on the venue operators to keep the noise in neighbouring residences below legally-mandated levels. In many cases, this noise-reduction was impossible without prohibitively-expensive renovations, and so most music venues in the area were eventually forced to close. The famed live music venue Knaack Club is a well-known example of this story, where the builders of new

residential buildings adjacent to the club did not take the club's noise levels into consideration when designing the building; once the new residents had moved in and begun to complain about noise pollution, local courts ruled that the club was responsible for taking measures to reduce noise pollution and to drastically shorten their hours of operation (Tagesspiegel 2009). Barely six months after that ruling, as it became apparent that operations were no longer financially tenable, the Knaack Club closed its doors (Kalwa 2010).

The case of Knaack Club was one of the first in an ongoing trend of music venue closures in Berlin that came to be termed *Clubsterben* or 'club death' (Paterson 2015, Plaga 2014). The term first appeared in a 2001 article in German magazine *Der Spiegel*, in reference to a slew of legendary Berlin clubs set to close in the near future, beset by hostile neighbours and ardent property developers (Luetzow 2001). The coinage of this term helpfully crystallised and identified a city-wide pattern of attrition, pointing to changes in the surrounding urban landscape. Notably, the ensuing *Clubsterben* discourse posited an ecological narrative where clubs do not start out in conflict with their urban environment. Instead, it is changes to the composition and use of surrounding urban space that renders the environment hostile to these clubs' ongoing flourishing. Latching on to already-existing anti-gentrification sentiment related to sharply rising rents in Berlin, the *Clubsterben* narrative identified under-regulated housing markets and invasive 'urban renewal' projects as the root causes of rising conflict between nightlife establishments and local denisens. Notably, such discourse explicitly acknowledged the temporal priority of most of these venues, using this as grounds for demanding changes to municipal laws regarding nightlife-related nuisances. This discourse led to the establishment by the Berliner Senate of a 1-million-Euro fund, Musicboard Berlin (http://www.musicboard-berlin.de/en/), to reverse the trend of

Clubsterben (Connolly 2012, Pfaffinger and Poschmann 2012). On June 2, 2015, the Berlin Senator for Urban Development and Environment (*Staatsentwicklung und Umwelt*) Andreas Geisel along with MusicBoard and ClubCommission (a lobbying group for nightclub operators; http://clubcommission.de) unveiled the *Clubkataster*: an online map of all music venues in Berlin, both past and present (http://www.clubkataster.de/). According to Geisel, this map would be used during the issuing of building permits in order to ensure that property developers are held responsible for properly soundproofing their own structures, rather than allowing it to fall to nightlife operators (Morgenpost 2015).

As in London, a thread of schismogenesis runs through these accounts, although it takes a different form in Berlin. For the case of Berghain, this can be traced across the seven years between the regional tax authority's imposition of the higher 'entertainment' tax rate in 2009 and its successful reversal in 2016, during which the nightclub altered its programming to align itself with the identity of *Kulturzentrum* (cultural centre) to which it was laying claim. As part of its appeal case, Berghain commissioned a report by prominent nightlife reporter and essayist Tobias Rapp (2009), who argued that the majority of the club's clientele visit primarily for the music, much like a concert. In the years leading up to the court case, the nightclub also diversified and intensified its cultural offerings, including: experimental music programming and workshops throughout the week; live concerts and other non-dance events on weeknights; and partnerships with experimental arts festivals such as CTM (Club Transmediale: http://www.ctm-festival.de/). In a sense, Berghain tactically transformed itself into the sort of *Kulturzentrum* that was legible to the city's political and judicial authorities. The story of Knaack Club may seem starkly contrasting, especially since it already had a nearly sixty-year history as a significant countercultural music venue

before its closure. But in early 2016, Knaack announced that it would reopen in a custom-built venue directly adjacent to Mauerpark, approximately one kilometre from its original location in Prenzlauer Berg (Kappe 2016). Rather than 'Knaack Club', however, the venue would bear the name 'Knaack-Kulturhaus' (Knaack culture-house), reflecting the diverse range of planned cultural offerings based on the venue's expanded design: in addition to a 200-capacity club space and a 1000-capacity concert hall, the Kulturhaus will boast a recording studio, rehearsal rooms, ateliers, a small theatre, and a music library (Strauß 2017).

Conclusion

In both London and Berlin, tensions between nightlife stakeholders have posed a threat to the continued flourishing of local electronic music scenes; in Berlin, however, hard-fought shifts in public image and political engagement show some success in re-channeling hostilities into a sustainable future for urban nightlife. The unfolding of events in both cities provide ample examples of schismogenesis, such as the manner in which Fabric's license revocation and Berghain's tax dispute both ignited public discussion about the cultural status and achievements of these venues. In the former instance the setting was a borough council hearing and in the latter a regional financial court, but both proceedings served as occasions to document and compile evidence of their cultural significance as well as that of each city's dance music scene as a whole. Both controversies incited a tactical campaign at local and international levels that sought to reframe electronic dance music as 'culture' in need of support and 'heritage' deserving of preservation.

One can find schismogenesis and agonistic politics at play in the tactical adjustment of behaviours and identities among venues, partygoers, and municipal

authorities. At Autumn Street Studios, for example, a complex web of alliances and surveillance has coalesced between the venue staff, clientele, neighbouring residents, and local law enforcement. The venue's security personnel strive to deflect negative attention and preempt open conflict with their neighbours by taking on some of the policing tasks themselves. By having self-identified 'stewards' enjoin clubbers to leave the venue quietly and disperse quickly, they reduce the chances of antagonistic encounters while applying a form of 'light-touch' discipline. The delivery of this polite discipline by fellow scene-members rather than uniformed police officers reduces the alienating sense of oppression while still modifying partygoers' behaviour. In Berlin, a different sort of adjustment can be seen in Berghain's tactical 're-branding' through programming, where it recast itself as a locally-engaged *Kulturzentrum* (cultural centre) by gradually adding amenities and activities reaching well beyond the state-determined category of *Unterhaltung* (entertainment). It is perhaps some indication of the effectiveness of this gambit that Knaack Club re-opened as 'Knaack Kulturhaus', with similar changes.

The contrast between the fates of Fabric and Berghain imply that they are opposing narratives, but they may also represent different points in cyclical rhythms of destabilization and adjustment. Notably, Berghain's financial-court triumph and cultural validation marks a recent reversal of fortunes (Bader and Bialluch 2009, Bernt, Grell, and Holm 2013, Bernt and Holm 2005, Colomb 2012, Novy and Colomb 2013, Novy and Huning 2009, Nye 2015, Stahl 2014). As the housing market in Berlin began to heat up around the turn of the century, what was once a relatively stable 'dynamic equilibrium' slid into antagonism between venues, residents, property owners, and municipal authorities. Berghain's predecessor, OstGut, was forced to close when its location was demolished to make way for the massive multi-use sports and events

venue, 'O$_2$ Arena'. It is out of this context of deteriorating adversarial relations that the concept of *Clubsterben* (club death) arose, providing a new and convincing way of narrating this conflict to those outside of the local nightlife community. By framing local musical subculture as yet another characteristic element of Berlin's urban environment under threat by rapid redevelopment, the city's electronic dance music scene managed to harness backlash against overreaching 'urban renewal' projects like the much-maligned Mediaspree (Bader and Bialluch 2009, Bernt, Grell, and Holm 2013, Novy and Colomb 2013). This redirected residents' anger towards the municipality itself and their relationship with property investors, which pushed them the to engage with local stakeholders such as music venues. Self-designated intermediaries played a crucial role in this process, such as Berlin's nightlife lobbying group ClubCommission.

Cultural and political intermediaries were also a matter of discussion in the aftermath of Fabric's closure. After the Islington Council's ruling to revoke the club's license, London Mayor Sadiq Khan (Labour) released a public statement expressing his disappointment. Invoking a discourse similar to Berlin's *Clubsterben*, he noted that 'London has lost fifty percent of its nightclubs and fourty percent of its live music venues. This decline must stop if London is to retain its status as a 24-hour city with a world-class nightlife' (Khan 2016a). Khan reported that he was already in the process of appointing a 'Night Czar', a designated intermediary chosen from the nightlife industry who would be responsible for facilitating productive communication between various stakeholders, such as 'club and venue owners, local authorities, the Metropolitan Police and members of the public'. First announced as a project shortly after his election in May of this year, Khan's 'Night Czar' is modelled on the *Nachtburgermeester* (Night Mayor) of Amsterdam, a representative elected from within the city's nightlife

community to mediate between various urban stakeholders as well as municipal

government (http://nachtburgemeester.amsterdam/english/). Nearly two months after

the borough council ruling, Khan announced the appointment of Amy Lamé as

London's first Night Czar, an artist, performer, and promoter embedded in the city's

GLBT+ communities and nighttime industries (BBC 2017, Khan 2016b). Here, again, is

another example of schismogenesis and agonism: a new political role emerges out of the

conflict surrounding nightlife and the struggle over limited urban space, opening up new

avenues for remapping the city's flows of aggression into something less toxic and less

destabilizing.

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