

CHAPTER 2: THE (TEMPORALLY) EPHEMERAL CLUB,
THE QUEER COUNTERPUBLIC

“You can just appreciate the moments without having to meet them properly...you can enjoy dancing, a fleeting moment, touching, maybe making out, without having to engage further.”

Interviewee MS

“I can go up to a guy in a club, express interest in a guy and that's fine - that's the bottom line of what a queer party is”

Interviewee AY

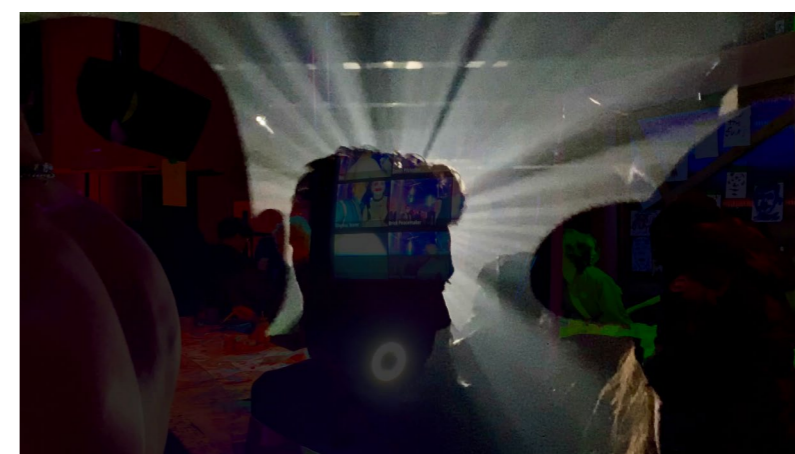
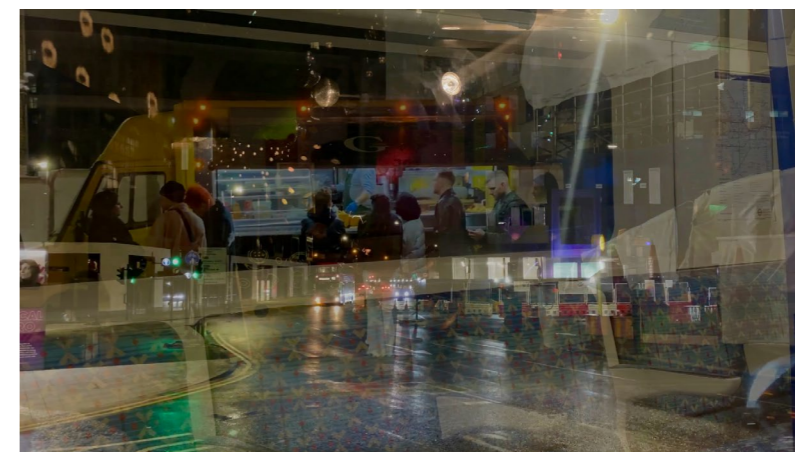
“I don't find the environment of clubs very sexual...in London they are not designed in a very nice way. I don't seek it, it happens”

Interviewee KD

Interpreting interviewee's experiences of the queer nightclub together with the concept of the Queer Counterpublic allows us to understand how these spaces allow for a queer form of intimacy. Berlant, Lauren and Warner (1998) define the concept of the Queer Counterpublic as a reaction to heteronormative society; a 'queer world-making project' of undefinable spaces and 'incommensurate geographies' (p. 558). Crucially, a Queer Counterpublic requires non-heteronormative forms of intimacy between people that do not relate to narratives of domestic space, property and reproduction (p. 558), and in this view the typology of the queer nightclub can be understood as such. Queer nightclubs allow for intimacy between patrons, in a non-heteronormative way, by utilising and relating to sex as a means of belonging rather than as a reproductive and generational function (p. 554). Sex in this sense is not merely limited to intercourse, rather it encapsulates sexuality and sex culture through a mixed, overlapping and undefined reading. Interviewees explained how they found open-minded attitudes towards sex in terms of orientation and practices, mostly in queer nightclubs, providing them with a feeling of acceptance that they might not feel outside of the club, establishing an intimate and safe space: "... the feeling of security in being accepted for who I am rather than what I do, it plays into my mind as a sex worker...in a queer space I feel like I'm appreciated for me" (Interviewee JA). In essence, the common understanding that other people share similarly open views about sex establishes a safe space – intimacy and sex in the queer nightclub imbue a sense of belonging.

Intimacy in the queer nightclub is not temporally fixed, rather it is temporally fluid, as experienced in promiscuous acts that are not defined by a fixed or expected timespan. Berlant, Lauren and Warner argue: "heteronormative culture of intimacy leaves queer culture especially dependent on ephemeral elaborations" (p. 562). In the context of the queer nightclub, this argument seems shortsighted and overly referent to heteronormativity – it indicates a reliance on short-lived moments as the only form of intimacy. Instead, the potential for intimacy in the queer nightclub to be transient, and to not be, should be considered as an essential characteristic that makes a nightclub queer. Further, Berlant and Warner argue how promiscuity has been stigmatised as non-intimate to such an extent that it is described as anonymous (p. 560); however, the queer nightclub, as a Queer Counterpublic can subvert this understanding of promiscuity and instead celebrate the temporal possibilities it allows for, short-lived and long-lived intimate experiences, as means of facilitating a queer form of intimacy. Queer nightclubs can be spaces that allow for promiscuity, an intimate or sexual act that can take any amount of time, as a socially accepted norm. Sex and sexuality, as has been previously defined, is established as a possible means of relating and feeling a sense of belonging that is fluid in its timespan. When asked to attempt to define a queer nightclub, interviewees described a space where the quality of engaging and interacting with others was not defined by the amount of time the interaction took, but by potential for intimate and sexual moments to happen irrespective of this. Intimacy is described as having a transformative effect in encouraging patrons to redefine what forms of intimacy are acceptable, as explained by interviewee T1: "You see someone being sexual or being naked or being free, sometimes for a second or for the whole night...It expands your mind in terms of what's possible and what's acceptable. There is an openness, and

that's very exciting". Therefore, in a queer nightclub the temporal nature of intimate moments, whether explicitly sexual or not, is not considered as a factor in determining the level of intimacy or quality of experience, rather one of many facets of the uncertain and exciting experiences of the space. Stills of the short film (Figures 5-9) illustrate the transient and open-ended nature of both interactions and the spaces they inhabit in the queer nightclub.



FIGURES 5-9 (RIGHT)
Stills from the short film.

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APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Eight interviews of patrons of queer nightclubs were carried out in their homes. Each interview lasted between 10-20 minutes and interviewees were asked to retell their experiences of queer nightclubs in the first instance e.g. "Tell me about the last time you went out, about the club, the night and what you enjoyed". Follow up questions were made to critique answers and understand how the interviewee relates to the space at different scales e.g. "Why is the feeling of intimacy so important to you?" and "You mentioned you enjoyed the feeling of being around a lot of bodies, can you expand on this?". Key interview responses are summarised in figure 10.

Site visits were made to three nightlife events in East London that are marketed towards the queer community: Howl (hosted at Colour Factory, Hackney), Adonis and Riposte (both hosted at The Cause, Tottenham).

FIGURE 10 (RIGHT)
Summary of interview data gathered

INTERVIEWEE	TIMESTAMP	COMMENT	THEME	SCALE
TI	1:30	when you enter the club it's a lot more freeform...you don't know who you're gonna meet/kiss...it's nice to embrace the uncertainty in your night	uncertainty	club
TI	3:00	you really inhabit a club...	inhabitation	club
TI	10:00	the icons of clubs, NYC in the 80s with drag scene, rave culture in London and Amsterdam in the 90s, berlin clubs of 2010s. You adapt to each icon atmosphere. You are in a lineage of hedonism that you adapt according to your own experience	club history and identity	club
TI	16:50	you see someone being sexual or being naked or being free...sometimes you see these things for a second and sometimes it carries on all night... you see them being super outgoign or outbullish in a joke you didn't think was possible. It expands your mind in terms of what's possible and what's acceptable. There is an openness that is very exciting. We get to go wild, go further, set your own rules. It's a reset. It's a liberation and an extension of what's possible	sex and behaviour	club
MS	5:00	the experience is very intense...a spiritual experience where you feel yourself getting constructed and deconstructed. You feel like you are part of something, you are experiencing something bigger than you	bodily experience	body
MS	6:20	it's much easier to navigage the space without caring how you look, letting you be	self awareness	body
MS	6:55	taking into account what's going on there...all these people who are half naked/dancing/making out/having sex, it feels freeing and repectful at the same time...I was dancing with a thong for 10 of the 14 hours I was there, I wouldn't do that so easily in other places, being exposed and feeling OK about it	self awareness	body
MS	8:00	it's not just a space that allows this to happen, it's a wider personal/relational work	self awareness	body
MS	9:30	it's bringing us closer, creating memeoires together,	memory	body
MS	10:00	you can just appreciate the moments without having to meet them properly, you can enjoy dancing, a fleeting moment, touching, maybe making out, without having to engage further	sex and behaviour	body/club
MS	11:30	if it's a bigger night where lots of friends are there, something special, there is more expection to go all the way, take more drugs, be more sexual	misc.	body
MS	13:00	memories are connected to feelings, that's what keeps it alive. When you are high/tired, it's hard to keep track of what's going on	memory	body
MS	15:20	the space is important to cool down, rest, relax, to have a cigarette, when that's missing it feels oppressive, perefer having two spaces	spatial design	body
JE	1:40	not sure if places are always inclusive, we flock to these places in a tribal way, they are inclusive to anyone who is an outlier, I remember the first time I Went to Berghain I found the school weirdos there. There are a lot of different demographics of queer people and that's why I'm not goin gto GAY every weekend	identity	body
JE	2:30	the more people the bigger it feels	spatial design	body
JE	3:20	there's a freedom about a party being at an illegal venue, not a club, you feel safer.	safety	urban
JE	4:30	queer parties feel tribal, to protect a community. Tribal is not neccesairly a bad thing, just an instict. Why queer spaces exsit and why people flock to them.	club history and identity	urban
JE	6:00	spaces are inclusively exclusive	diversity and inclusivity	urban
JE	7:30	things are changing, more women, sometimes I feel I'm one of three women. Should people be allowed to have things just for their demographic?	diversity and inclusivity	urban
JE	10:20	sense a protectiveness over space from queer people that I've never seen from straight people because they don't feel marginalied	identity	urban
JE	11:20	don't like skin contact, but going out has desensetised me. Attitude around sex has desensetised, how much on show it is	sex and behaviour	club
JE	12:40	I'm very squeamish around people, I don't like skin, if someone touches me (recoil), I remmeber I used to wear short sleeves, slowly my clothes got shorter as I got desensetised		
JE	13:30	intellectually my ideas about sex were liberal, but instinctively my bodilyreactions weren't, queer spaces have made a change. No one is being predatory towards me	sex and behaviour	club
JE	16:00	same people, same music, intimate, you become part of a tribe, boundaries change, connections with people are those that take years to build	intimacy and relating	club
JE	18:00	queer clubs are like church, a form of church	identity	club
JE	19:00	clubs in UK are missing side rooms, smoking areas are important (laugh), heaters, not cramped, basically not anything that's like XOYO	spatial design	
JE	20:30	workship themselves, go there for the community, loose yourself, especially with techno	identity	club
JE	22:20	release, given a space where you can talk about things you don't allow yourself to talk about, you forget after anyway	intimacy and relating	club
BN	1:00	a good night is seamless, loosing yourself, dancing to smoking, don't come out of the experience, a bad moment can knock you off, a queer nightclub doesn't have that	intimacy and relating	club

BN	3:00	queer clubs are more inclusive, better vibe, feeling included	diversity and inclusivity	body
BN	4:30	music has to be on point, social side of smoking provides a break	misc.	club
BN	8:00	in a smaller club where you recognise people, builds a sense of community in a night,	intimacy and relating	urban
BN	9:00	moments in the night where everything comes together, a great conversation, leave the club having learnt something	intimacy and relating	club
AY	0:30	like the cause, favourite club, adventurous place, prefer the venue than the people	personal experience	urban
AY	1:20	exploring the club, a series of rooms, doing stuff you're not supposed to do but it's not that serious, it reminds me of being a teenager	spatial design	club
AY	3:00	papa loko vs adonis, lots of bodies and a sense of adventure vs being in any old space	personal experience	body
AY	5:00	used to make me feel excited when people were into me, being desired, parties like adonis make you feel bad to say no to someone	intimacy and relating	club
AY	5:45	I just don't care about pulling the day after	intimacy and relating	club
AY	9:00	papa loko can be about pulling but not dominant force, people are nice.	intimacy and relating	club
AY	9:40	if you want a good time don't go to a big gay night and feel good	intimacy and relating	club
AY	11:00	favourite night in london going to succulent	personal experience	club
AY	12:30	what made succulent good was the drugs in the cold, pride of going out, dancing by myself	personal experience	club
AY	13:00	when you enter a club and there's no one to meet you, it feels like you're free. I could pull people or I could dance in the corner by myself		
AY	14:00	I don't have a separate day and night identity. Queer culture can be all or nothing sometimes which is an issue	identity	club
AY	15:00	needing to navigate not wanting to go to afters after queer nightclub	personal experience	club
AY	17:00	I find it tricky to talk to people outside the club	intimacy and relating	club
AY	18:50	exclusivity of clubs, bad example of queer nights,	issues	club
AY	20:45	gay life should not be defined by struggle	identity	urban
AY	20:20	a queer party is one that is marketed towards gay people. Difference between queer club and queer party	club history and identity	urban
AY	22:50	I can go up to a guy in a club, express interest in a guy and that's fine - that's the bottom line of what a queer party is	intimacy and relating	club
AY	0:10	inherent queerness is nothing because we are all inherently queer, if I go to office there are gay people there. Different from being explicitly queer. Clubs having a door policy is a form of being explicitly queer. I don't know what being inherently queer is	identity	body
AY	1:30	25:30 because if you're open minded you're inherently queer, it's there, and by not being an asshole you're being inherently queer		
JA	0:15:00	I feel free and I feel welcome, in a queer space I feel like I can be touched, I feel valued and wanted, without expectation	sex and behaviour	body
JA	2:00	security in accepting who I am rather than what I do, plays into my mind as a sex worker, in a queer space I feel like im appreciated for me	identity	body
JA	3:20	I am celebrated but on top of that I can utilise my body in how I dress, appreciate in a non sexual but also sexual context, sexual without expectation	sex and behaviour	body
JA	4:10	in a heteronormative context there is so much more of an expectation to fuck, girl plays into a role, in a queer space you can act in a fluid way,	sex and behaviour	body
JA	5:00	a queer space is where I feel free and can have a hug	intimacy and relating	body
JA	6:30	perfect queer club is where security is lax, music has euphoric moments, people are dressed up, you can catch smiles, no expectations for sex	sex and behaviour	body
JA	7:20	if you catch eyes with someone in a queer space it's a nice experience, vs in a heteronormative space the expectation is you want to fuck, which sucks	sex and behaviour	body
JA	11:10	if you're not empowered and gorgeous you're not seen in these queer spaces, an issue that needs to be addressed	issues	body
JA	12:50	there is more love in the queer community because of the diversity, multiculturalism	diversity and inclusivity	body
DO	0:30	Berghain is a place where queer people can have a central place but not sure if I would call it a queer club specifically	club history and identity	club
DO	3:00	for hours you live in an alternate reality, it seems like your only reality, you behave and interact differently from ordinary life, different codes, the way you are performative	intimacy and relating	club
DO	4:30	build an alternative world where you model yourself, a lot of things are accepted more than in normal world	intimacy and relating	club
DO	5:30	what is a queer nightclub? Freedom	club history and identity	club
DO	6:30	it would be an undefined place, a space where you can take drugs, a place where identities are the underdog/deviant in society are welcomed/included/cherished, people feel their gender and sexuality is respected	club history and identity	club

DO	8:00	sexual identity plays a massive role in people I want to be with and relate to	identity	club
DO	8:20	I don't want people to expect me to have sex because I'm there, and that sometimes makes me a little uncomfortable	sex and behaviour	club
DO	9:00	I feel a lot of intimacy with friends, sometimes with strangers	intimacy and relating	club
DO	11:00	I wouldn't say Hackney is a gay neighbourhood, although it is easier to find queer like minded people there	identity	urban
DO	12:00	historically trans people have been important to queer spaces. I have not been exposed to many trans people as parties fail at including trans people. The few trans people I know have taught me a lot about other ways of being/possibilities. trans and non-binary people have helped me understand that there are a lot of ways of being, that there are many intersections between gender identity/sexual orientation and how important it is not to overlook members of our community	identity	body
DO	14:45	trans people have helped expand my view of sexuality, it has encouraged me to push my gender boundaries	identity	body
DO	16:00	trans people presence has made me question things and understand them as artificial ideas e.g. how we dress and be one thing or the other	identity	body
KD	1:30	Queer spaces don't make enough money to sustain a venue, maybe not enough people to sustain them. People go to events rather than venues. I don't care about venues	club history and identity	urban
KD	4:40	impermanence is the nature of nightlife and going out, you live a fantasy when you go out. Social norms are suspended	uncertainty	urban
KD	9:00	going out in London is a social thing and it has a certain freedom. Also substances can have a therapeutic effect	club history and identity	club
KD	10:15	queer nightlife is referent to heteronormativity. It is something like a heterotopia, existing at the hinterlands of what is deemed normal. Similar to queer ballroom culture in NYC in 60-80s	club history and identity	club
KD	13:00	more parties in central london are more gay than queer, and more of the nights in east london are queer	club history and identity	urban
KD	13:45	trans people have always been part of the queer nightlife scene. There is a marked change in gender non-conforming behaviours	identity	body
KD	15:00	trans people have always existed in the community	identity	body
KD	16:10	most people that go out aren't interested in trans people/issues, feminity is seen as attractive	identity	body
KD	17:45	I don't find the environment of a club very sexual, in london they are not designed in a very nice way. I don't seek it, it happens	sex and behaviour	club
KD	18:30	after covid, due to anxiety, I was not used to a party atmosphere, everyone is at a different level	personal experience	club
KD	20:00	what is a queer nightclub? It is subjective, feeling safe, comfortable, I see a community of people - that's what makes it queer for me. There are gatekeepers, but I don't agree with that. It doesn't have written rules	club history and identity	club

