

**Whose party is it anyway? Music-making, urban
development and neoliberalism in Newcastle upon Tyne,
1995-2010**

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Abstract

This thesis assesses some of the socio-spatial impacts of city branding and culture-led regeneration in Newcastle-upon-Tyne,¹ in North East England, on local music scenes during the period 1995—2010. It critiques in particular the ways in which the process of neoliberalisation in Newcastle has shaped local urban development and culture. While focused on the local, the study seeks also to highlight how the reproduction of urban music scenes is intertwined with much broader economic and political currents.

It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on aspects of popular music studies, urban and cultural geographies, and cultural theory. A range of methodologies is employed and extensive use is made of the internet as both archive and research tool. It is above all grounded in lived experience, the author having been a local resident and active musician since 2003.

The first two chapters provide the context in which Newcastle became known as the ‘Party City’, an image created as part of a city (re)branding campaign designed to promote ‘NewcastleGateshead’ as a cultural destination. Analysis focuses on the strategies by which this was achieved, and the ideology and motivation behind the campaign.

Three case studies are then presented that examine the impacts on local music scenes of the closures of three well-known venues, each of which was an important space for various scenes. Analysis positions Newcastle’s music scenes in relation to shifts in capitalist accumulation.

In conclusion, an assessment of the post-Party City period validates points made throughout the thesis, with some suggestions as to strategies that Newcastle might develop to allow music-making to be incorporated more constructively into its vision for a vibrant contemporary city.

¹ Hereafter referred to as Newcastle

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, John Burlinson, who died during my third year. Despite our differences in musical taste, I know he would have found this study fascinating.

Acknowledgements

I firstly would like to thank my mother, Nina Burlinson, without who my return to education would not have happened. My supervisors, Dr. Nanette de Jong and Dr. Ian Biddle have both been enormously supportive. The AHRC sponsored the second and third years of my study. Tom Caulker, Jonathan Miles, Carl Taylor, Cait Read, Callum Costello, Kate Hodgkinson and Amy Wardley all gave up their time to be interviewed. My friend and erstwhile housemate Kristian Clark, an oracle of music in Newcastle. Dr. Matthew Ord, who trod the rocky path to doctorhood with me. My sister Natalia Diaz Burlinson had space when I needed it most. And, last but by no means least, my partner Joanne Hedley, who has always been there, and still is.

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Part 1: Setting the scene

Chapter 1: Introduction

From the mid-1990s until the end of the 2000s, Newcastle-upon-Tyne¹ became known to many as the 'Party City', an image arising from a broader campaign of 'culture-led regeneration' during which the built environment was transformed in pursuit of a 'brand image'.² This thesis evaluates the extent to which the closures of three important music venues during that period impacted on the music scenes that used them. It examines the processes of urban change of which the closures were a part, how these affected aspects of Newcastle's musical life and local cultural activity more broadly. A multi-disciplinary approach is adopted, drawing on popular music studies, cultural geography, critical theory and urban studies, in order to situate locally specific cultural dynamics within the context of changing global politico-economic currents, namely the shift towards flexible accumulation³ and the concomitant rise of neoliberal ideology.⁴ As such, the analysis pays particular attention to the constraints placed on local music-making by external forces, represented most overtly by the instrumentalised reconfiguration of the built environment. However, other policy-related processes brought about largely by deregulation, such as changes in licensing and the growing influence of the private sector on the trajectory of urban development, are equally significant in this respect. The conclusions offer an overview of the spatial effects of the Party City period and some of the strategies employed by those affected to adapt to the changed environment. Some suggestions as to how music could be more constructively incorporated into Newcastle's future development are also proposed. It should be noted that this thesis is not intended to be an overview of all of Newcastle's musical culture. The initial point of departure for the study was the observation that, in and around the city, there is a host of musicians and audiences of vastly broader musical scope than is regularly represented in the city's venues, largely due to the changes that occurred throughout the years in question. There are numerous music events every week in

¹ Hereafter referred to as Newcastle.

² Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public policy in the Party City: The spectacle of culture, gender and locality', *International Journal of Public Administration* 33 (2010), 779-789, 780.

³ See for example David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

⁴ See for example David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); also Neil Brenner & Nik Theodore, 'Neoliberalism and the urban condition', *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 9/1 (2005), 101-107.

Newcastle, and if one's taste falls within a certain range then there is no doubt that musical provision will be more than adequate. However, the loss of space for music has increased the pressure on that which remains, meaning fewer local artists and small-scale promoters are able to access venues at peak times (i.e. weekends), to reach reasonably sized audiences; there has also been a resultant narrowing of the types of music available. Positive appraisals of musical life in Newcastle have appeared with some regularity, but the health of the scene is usually gauged by the number of bands that are deemed likely to achieve commercial success,⁵ rather than highlighting the more innovative corners of local music-making. Also, some music scenes, such as jazz and folk, have experienced far less disruption than others, a point that can arguably be linked to broader social relations and the general trajectory of development in Newcastle; these music types are relatively easy to accommodate and also fit more easily into the gentrifying image Newcastle has pursued over the past decade in particular. As such, they do not figure prominently in the following chapters, which are more concerned with those musical networks in the city that have been most affected by local development, and why it is that this has been the case.

Research gap

Newcastle is a distinctive city in terms of its history, identity, culture and politics. Yet, it has attracted relatively little attention from within the academy. Most scholarship on the city, and indeed the North East in general, is concerned with the quite dramatic socio-economic decline it experienced throughout the twentieth century, and the changing capitalist environments that gave rise to that process. From a musical point of view, there is hardly any academic literature. The only book to analyse popular music in Newcastle in any depth is Andy Bennett's *Popular music and youth culture*,⁶ published in 2000, which examines certain local youth identities and how these are articulated through music. Bennett, however, makes few attempts to situate the musical activities of these youth groups in a broader urban-political context. Several books and papers were published around the Millennium that examine the changing function and provision of nightlife in general, in the context of youth culture within a framework of broader urban and economic change. This research was carried out by Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands of Newcastle University's sociology

⁵ See for example Melissa Mean & Charlie Tims, 'In Concert: Growing NewcastleGateshead as a music city' (NGI/DEMOS, 2005).

⁶ Andy Bennett, *Popular music and youth culture: Music, Identity and Place* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), one of the few other texts that deals with popular music in Newcastle.

department.⁷ However, music only figures in these studies as one of many elements of nightlife, and there are few in-depth discussions of the role of specific venues or local scenes. Nevertheless, the scarcity of literature means that these authors are referred to extensively, particularly Chatterton and Hollands. The lack of published work also meant that online resources were fundamental to the study, with journalistic and / or nostalgic blog posts, press articles, and often lengthy forum discussions all proving valuable.

This thesis differs significantly from most other studies of music scenes in that the 'youth culture' context of many such analyses is not considered relevant here. People of all ages engage with and experience music, and most of the music forms discussed (for example rock and metal, or techno) have been around long enough for their protagonists, and many of their fans, to be well into their fifties and older. Contemporary youth socialisation has also been transformed by the internet and so-called 'smart' phones, which have influenced the formation and reproduction of music scenes as they have so far been understood. The need for groups to physically gather in space to forge identities through signifying practices is now less pressing, and entire (sub)cultures can now exist solely online.⁸ In a broader political context, several years of neoliberal 'austerity' have meant that the dynamics of local nightlife are very different now than they were even as recently as 2010. Young people have been among the worst-hit by 'fiscal consolidation', especially in the North East. In Newcastle, the proportion of young people out on the town at the weekend is noticeably lower than in the last decade, as changes in the labour market have left young people on the whole with significantly less disposable income. This thesis is less concerned with the finer demographic details of music scenes than with the role of scenes in the broader cultural life of cities, and as such youth culture is not one of the frames of analysis. Overall, much has changed since the aforementioned studies were written and no research of any sort has since been undertaken into popular music in Newcastle, least of all any that makes explicit the links between local music-making and urban and political change more broadly. The research presented here, then, is long overdue.

⁷ Paul Chatterton has since left Newcastle.

⁸ Alexis Petridis, 'Youth subcultures: What are they now?', *The Guardian*, 20/03/2014 (<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/mar/20/youth-subcultures-where-have-they-gone>).

Analytical context

Alongside the focus in this thesis on music and its place in urban development and culture runs a critique of city branding and regeneration, and the concept of place as product in the neoliberalised environment. Pertinent in this respect is Adam Krims's argument that, contrary to the tendency among popular music studies to situate 'place' (or 'the local'), as somehow resistant to globalising currents,⁹ 'the global' and 'the local' are in fact the same thing - 'two different faces of a single, overarching hegemonic process'.¹⁰ Krims avoids the term 'neoliberalism', preferring to describe post-1980s cities as 'post-Fordist'. However, he is referring to the same process, and for the purposes of my analysis the terms neoliberalism, or neoliberalisation, will be used. As Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore point out, neoliberalism 'is always articulated through historically and geographically specific *strategies*'.¹¹ The forthcoming chapters will show that the socio-spatial transformations and repercussions examined here have resulted from the drive to attract capital to Newcastle. This has generated a series of locally specific (and largely unsuccessful) strategies, but stems from nationally and globally induced pressures. Distinctive local geography, politics and cultures have all played important parts in this process, steering the city's development in a particular direction and, from an analytical perspective, illustrating the contextual and path-dependent nature of neoliberalism.¹²

The concern to keep in mind the bigger picture when analysing music scenes owes much to the work of Krims, who observes both that 'the transformations of the physical space, flows and pace of life in the city cannot help but inflect expressive culture',¹³ and that 'music's role in shaping discourses of place may hinge on urban transformations that are inseparable from larger patterns in global development'.¹⁴ The three case studies presented in the second part of this thesis each represent different aspects of the influence and local interpretation of neoliberalism on urban development, but link the reproduction of local music scenes to changes in the broader politico-economic environment. More specifically, and perhaps more importantly, though, these studies focus on the spatiality of the processes in question and the role of geography in those processes. As Krims points out, 'not all social relations are

⁹ Adam Krims, *Music and urban geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Brenner & Theodore, 'Neoliberalism', 102, emphasis in original.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Krims, *Music*, XIX.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

fundamentally spatial but just about all of them are *spatialised*'.¹⁵ Noting that an increasing number of works within popular music studies have begun to foreground spatiality, and to frame social issues as 'somehow fundamentally geographic',¹⁶ he proposes that 'the examination of music through that rubric...offers the possibility to see music as part of the spatialisation of social relations and also as a consequence of that spatialisation'.¹⁷ Krims's point is clearly demonstrated in three different ways by the case studies in this thesis. Music-making does not happen in a vacuum, and to ignore or gloss over the broader frameworks within which cultural activities must take place risks overlooking important issues often fundamental to the functioning of those activities.

One of the main intentions of this thesis is to show how urban music scenes are, like all cultural activity, inextricably embedded in the workings of capital at all scales, and how, as Krims is careful to point out, 'the cultural' and 'the economic', far from representing separate spheres of activity, 'find unity in the context of a *totality*'.¹⁸ This is not to be confused with a deterministic reading of music's relations with urban and political change, for which some have criticised Krims's approach.¹⁹ The study presented here follows Krims in that it 'treat[s] broader urban change and specifically musical practices as particular locations in a single mode of production (capitalism), at a certain point in history'.²⁰ This thesis notably departs from Krims, though, in that it is not concerned with specific musical texts or characteristics, but more with the collective actions of those involved with music and their relations with external forces.

Urban music scenes, the dynamics of which necessarily differ from city to city, are in themselves obviously products of agency. However, it must also be acknowledged that these formations are as much the products of geography and power relations (for example with agents of local authority) as they are of the agency of individuals or groups. To suggest that Krims's approach somehow undermines the agency of individuals involved with music²¹ misses one of his most important points. Bohlman complains that 'musicians, dancers, listeners, consumers, the agents whose actions connect music to culture, are all relatively

¹⁵ Krims, *Music*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI.

¹⁹ Sara Cohen, 'Bubbles, tracks, borders and lines: Mapping music and urban landscape', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 137/1 (2012), 135-170, 158.

²⁰ Krims, *Music*, XXI.

²¹ Cohen, 'Bubbles', 158.

absent, invisible, or inaudible in [Krim's] book'.²² Following Krim's again, I would argue firstly that music and culture are not two separate spheres of activity that require 'connection' by the actions of agents, by which Bohlman presumably means individual humans acting on the ground, but that they are both part of a single whole. For those whose apparent absence Bohlman finds so disturbing,²³ music is culture, and culture is music. Equally, to talk about music and / or cities is to talk about people, and in this sense people are implicitly present throughout Krim's analyses. The absence of individual voices does not, in my view, necessarily 'remove [people] from the history, production and reception of music',²⁴ and least of all 'from the very cities they inhabit'.²⁵ To disconnect and isolate music, culture, cities and people is exactly the type of hermeneutic and analytical pitfall that Krim's warns against; I would argue that to read his work as guilty of doing so, as Bohlman appears to do, indicates that the guilt in fact lies with the reader.

Another point to consider here is the notion of agency, and agents, or perhaps more precisely, actors. Bohlman demonstrates above the common tendency to think only of individual people as agents. In addition, the admittedly subtle distinction between agency and power also appears to catch him out, as revealed by his acknowledgment that 'authors sometimes have no agency when it comes to choosing the covers for their books'.²⁶ It is not agency that makes such decisions, but power. As the second case study in this thesis will show, agency can only produce tangible results in conjunction with power. More to the point, actors that exert agency can be collectively constituted. For example, the government, the council, the police, corporations and music scenes all function and exert agency (and, if they possess it, power) as single entities. As such, the notion of agency in this study is broadened to include more abstract and detached forces than the individuals directly involved.

Thesis structure

Part one

This work is divided into two halves. Part one consists of four chapters, the first of which introduces the thesis, explains methodological approaches and identifies key authors and

²² Philip Bohlman, 'Adam Krim's: Music and Urban Geography', *Music and Letters*, 90/2 (2009), 322-324, 324.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

works. Chapter two sets out analytical frameworks, including terminological definitions and how some of the main concepts that inform the following chapters have been theorised. It then relates these to each other, setting the context for the thesis as a study that keeps one eye on local details and the other on the global 'big picture'. Chapter three begins by discussing the construction of the Party City in the context of neoliberalising Newcastle. It explores demographic and cultural aspects, moving on to map the city's drinking zones before analysing class relations and the role of music in Party City nightlife. Chapter four firstly offers a summary of regeneration phases in Newcastle since 1980. The emergence of place marketing and city branding is discussed, followed by an examination of the ideological function of city branding. Part one concludes with an account of how the Party City brand image fed into broader media representations of Newcastle, allowing certain stereotypes to dominate perceptions of the city and its people, at the expense of diversity.

Part two

The second half consists of case studies of three popular and important local venues, all of which closed during the period 1995-2010, with a short introduction explaining the reasons for choosing them. These were the Mayfair Ballroom, Riverside and The Cooperage. Each of the case studies represents a different aspect of how neoliberalisation has affected urban development in Newcastle, and through that how it has affected the music scenes that used the venues in question. Analysis of the Mayfair is based on 'urban pathways', an idea drawn from Ruth Finnegan's classic study of musicians in Milton Keynes.²⁷ This concept has been used by a number of scholars including Sara Cohen, some of whose work on Liverpool figures in the discussion. The Mayfair was replaced by an indoor leisure mall, a change which drastically altered the flows of people in the city centre.

Riverside analysis centres on agency and highlights the ways that actors outside of the immediate networks of local musicians can limit the possibilities available. Attention is drawn here to historical context, following Krims's point that 'the historical situations in which...agencies are exerted...form the constraints of those agencies, the ensemble of relationships that unites them'.²⁸ Also important in this discussion is the economic determinism of the neoliberal environment.

²⁷ Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

²⁸ Krims, *Music*, XL.

The Cooperage case study examines relations between the public, the council and the venue's corporate owners, and the process behind its closure, through the analytical theme of stories. It describes the role of stories in the formation of networks and the construction of identity, history and culture, and how these are communicated through music and the built environment. Finally, the idea of branding as the ideological deployment of stories by capital is considered, and the relations between the stories of capital and those of people. The concluding chapter offers an overview of the impacts of regeneration and the resulting spatial transformations on local music. It also offers some suggestions as to how music could be incorporated more constructively into Newcastle's future development. A general theme runs through the thesis of highlighting contrasts between the rhetoric and the reality of regeneration in the city, one of the main questions being that of whose interests the transformation of the city represents. Overall, the thesis is concerned with issues of diversity and access to space for all aspects of local musical culture, and the impacts on these of the Party City image and the changes that accompanied and supported it.

Methodology

This thesis is a multi-disciplinary study, and as such employs a range of methodological approaches to draw together a relatively disparate array of sources. Theories, ideas and critique drawn from popular music studies, cultural and critical theory, urban and cultural geography, and marketing and branding theory all figure in the forthcoming analyses. This is largely due to a desire to emphasise the point that none of the processes described, from music-making and nightlife consumption to city branding and regeneration, happen in a vacuum. All are part of, and intrinsically connected by, much broader economic and political currents. This point cannot be overstated but all too often appears to be overlooked, particularly in studies of local music scenes. The theoretical framework is broadly Marxist, being concerned with issues of social equity and democracy on the one hand, and the economically deterministic tendencies of Neoliberalism on the other. Following Krims, Harvey and others, the main critique here is of the commodification and marketisation of increasing aspects of everyday life, specifically the way these forces have come to guide the direction of urban development, and the impacts that the demands of capital have had on space for music-making in Newcastle.

Archival research

One of the principal techniques used in this thesis is archival research. The role of materials such as council reports, namely the cultural strategies laid out by the City Council around the turn of the Millennium, is fundamental to the arguments set out throughout the study. One of the main themes is the examination of the contrast between neoliberal regeneration rhetoric and the realities of regeneration in practice, which rarely correspond. Archival work also necessarily underpins the sections that deal with historical content, like the origins of local identity in Newcastle and the broader North East of England, the trajectory of local economic development (or the lack thereof), and those parts which discuss the meanings of neoliberalism. Despite Newcastle's widely acknowledged position as the regional capital of the North East, and of course its reputation as the Party City, published resources concerning local venues and music-making are scant. Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands of Newcastle University's department of sociology appear to be the only scholars that have conducted any significant degree of research, and their work forms one of the main sources for this thesis, although it is more concerned with nightlife patterns in general than any specific aspect.

Ethnographic techniques

While there are numerous studies of music scenes and venues in many major UK cities, for example Bristol, Manchester, Glasgow and Leeds, there are few that deal with 'fringe' cities like Newcastle. As stated above, published resources regarding any aspect of music-making in Newcastle are scarce, and for this reason it was necessary to employ ethnographic research, in the form of interviews, to gain further insight. Interviewees ranged from local promoters and artists to club owners and venue staff; a co-author of one of the few books written about a Newcastle venue, Riverside, was also interviewed. It was particularly interesting that several interviewees themselves raised without prompting some of the subjects I had planned to raise. Given their varying roles, which included a nightclub proprietor and board member of the BID,²⁹ an underground dance DJ and promoter, and a council worker and author, this suggested that some of the issues dealt with in the following pages were both familiar and of relatively broad concern. Ethnography was also a way to ensure that the subtler dynamics of music scenes were taken into account.

²⁹ Business Improvement District; these organisations represent the effective privatisation of city centre management and will be discussed later in the thesis.

It may be noticed that figures of authority, for example representatives of the City Council or police, are conspicuous by their absence in the ethnographic data. This is because I considered the council's view of culture to be represented in the various documents they have published. Equally, the police have made their positions on local culture clear enough through their actions, a point that will be elaborated. These bodies have the means to publish, publicise, enact and enforce their views and ideas, whereas the public generally do not, especially cultural minorities like music scenes. The ethnography conducted for this study is intended to give voice to some of those that usually go unheard or unheeded. All interviewees had a great deal of experience to draw on and a great deal to say, and their participation was invaluable to the arguments put forward in the thesis.

Another important ethnographic aspect of the research presented here is that of participant observer. This side of the project really began over a decade ago, when I first moved to the North East. Since then I have been an active musician in the Newcastle area, involved as a drummer, DJ and occasional promoter in several local scenes, including metal, punk, reggae, hip hop and techno. As time has progressed I have witnessed many profound changes in the urban environment, the most immediately affective of these obviously being the closures of music venues around the city and the surrounding area. Although two of the three case studies in this thesis concern venues that had closed before I moved to the area—The Mayfair Ballroom and Riverside—their closures were recent enough that the local music scene was still adapting to the loss of these important spaces. The third, The Cooperage, continued to function for long enough for me to have played several gigs and attended several club nights there, but closed sufficiently long ago that I could observe how the local dance scene in particular had to adapt.

One of the most common complaints I have heard from a range of local musicians and audiences throughout my time here has been that Newcastle does not have enough venues. It was these observations and countless conversations of this nature with local musicians over the years that provided the initial spark for this thesis. My experiences of music-making in Newcastle have often been tinged with frustration. These have ranged from dealing with promoters and venues as a band member or DJ, being an audience member searching for and attending events, or promoting small gigs and club nights (I have done both); the latter proved to be one of the most frustrating experiences of all. In contrast to the increasing difficulties I and many others have faced, particularly regarding the search for suitable space,

promotional literature about Newcastle continues to claim that the city has a ‘...huge selection of theatres and music venues all within easy reach of one another’,³⁰ and vaunt the ‘...eclectic, buzzing nightlife that [the city is] famous for’.³¹ Such claims and descriptions are, from my experience and that of many others, misrepresentative at best, and bear little resemblance to the rather homogeneous feel of the city centre by night, but this is the language of marketing. This thesis will put the reality of regeneration and music-making in Newcastle into perspective, contrasting the language of city branding and cultural strategies with the effects on local everyday life of nearly two decades of neoliberal spatial reconfiguration.

Online resources

As valuable as the data from interviews were, this thesis would not have been possible were it not for the internet. As both an archive and a research tool, the internet provided the richest source of data regarding the role played by venues that no longer exist or have closed. The lack of published works mentioned above meant that effective use of online resources was fundamental to this study. As well as current pieces, press articles that date back well over a decade in some cases are available online, as are digitised versions of books, papers and other documents. Blog posts often contain information unavailable elsewhere, and research hubs such as *Live Music Exchange* bring together work from all over the world.³² There is, of course, also an ethnographic element to online research.

Social media, online forums and the comment sections of press articles all contain a multitude of posts by individuals, often in lengthy discussions about a vast range of topics. Many participants in online discussions were clearly very knowledgeable about certain subjects and took regular, active part in multi-user exchanges, while others simply offered their opinions in single comments; these all proved to be valuable sources. It should be pointed out, though, that my use of online resource does not represent a 'social media ethnography' as such, in that I did not participate in discussions or conduct interviews online.³³ The social media sources used here were all archived, mostly discussions that took place at the time of the events being analysed, whether this was the closures of the case

³⁰ 'Bars, pubs and clubs: A night on the Toon', *NewcastleGateshead.com*, n.d. (<http://www.newcastlegateshead.com/food-and-drink/bars-pubs-and-clubs>).

³¹ Ibid.

³² See www.livemusicexchange.org.

³³ John Postill & Sarah Pink, 'Social media ethnography: The digital researcher in a messy web', *Media International Australia*, no. 145 (2012), 123-134.

study venues or opinions on how the Party City was developing in general. This was a deliberate choice on my part. I considered it important to convey how Party City development and venue closures were perceived at the time, leaving the assessment of longer term impacts for the conclusions. Many of those who frequented the venues in question now have families and have moved on from activities like clubbing. In this sense, the thoughts expressed in these old posts may otherwise have been unobtainable, as opinions and tastes change over time—how many times have we each wondered, on hearing an old favourite record years later, what it was we liked about it? A face-to-face interview conducted years later might well yield very different results. Online data of this type is effectively frozen in time, textual snapshots of thoughts and dialogues. In this sense, social media sites and forums, while containing ethnographic data, were treated as empirical sources.

Official materials like government pamphlets and other documents are also stored and can be accessed online, as well as the resources of the world's universities and other institutions. The library at Newcastle University provided digital copies of more journal papers than it would have been possible to access in hard formats. Likewise, the archived theses of former PhD candidates at other universities were very useful. Photographic data is of course also another great strength of web-based research, as people upload digitised versions of old images, as well as those recently taken and shared online. Access to such a volume of images in the physical world would be impossible, as most are stored in the personal photo albums and hard discs of hundreds of individuals. It is also important to note, however, that for all its strengths, the internet as a research site is neither fixed nor permanent, and therefore is not wholly reliable. Websites and pages can be removed, posts edited or deleted, dates and authors are often not specified and the same photos are sometimes shared by thousands of users. Issues of authenticity such as these can cloud the identification of an original author, or make the verification of a story very difficult at times. The final case study in this thesis is a good example, as it required the use of offline ethnography in the form of a face-to-face interview to verify a version of events, one of many circulating on various internet forums, all of which sounded equally plausible.

Lived experience

As the preceding passages make clear, the research from which this thesis is drawn is grounded above all in lived experience. As a resident of a small former pit village on the edge

of the Borough of Gateshead, some ten miles from Newcastle city centre, I have been able to maintain what I consider to be a critical distance from the urban surroundings about which I have written. Some may argue that an accurate picture of urban musical life can only be produced if one is immersed in the environment, but I would counter this. My visits to the city centre have been frequent, but not daily. I would argue that this means I have noticed the changes in Newcastle's built environment more keenly than someone who has been continually surrounded by what is a relatively gradual process; the 'creeping' tendency of urban development is a point raised by numerous commentators.³⁴ Also, to have been involved with several (not necessarily compatible) local scenes means that my allegiances are not biased towards any particular group. To have witnessed as a musician this period of physical and cultural transformation first hand, but also from a 'safe' distance, puts me in a good position to write about some of Newcastle's musical life.

The timeframe I have selected of 1995 — 2010 is not an officially designated period for the Party City, but represents the years throughout which I consider local urban change to have been at its most transformative, and the Party City image most prevalent. 1995 was chosen as the start due to Newcastle being voted 'eighth best party city in the world' in that year. I selected 2010 as the end of the analytical period as that year saw the end of thirteen years of Labour government and the election of a Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition; funding for culture dried up and local government budgets began to shrink rapidly as harsh cuts were immediately ushered in across the country.

³⁴ See for example David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); also Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Chapter 2: Definitions and distinctions

This chapter outlines the analytical and theoretical contexts of the thesis. The opening section outlines the use of the terms 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream', explaining the analytical necessity of condensing diverse nightlife cultures into a simple binarism, while acknowledging the complexities of what may at first seem a comfortably familiar concept. Some of the ways that 'the mainstream' has been used as a term of reference and theorised as a cultural space in key sources of this thesis are first considered and critiqued. Following this is a discussion of the role of music in 'mainstream' nightlife and how it can function as a cultural marker. The chapter then moves on to the broader frameworks in which music scenes and other cultural activities are embedded, and the idea that such activities are inescapably subject to possibilities and constraints imposed by those frameworks. The most explicit of these, it is argued here, are spatial. Spatial and physical constraints, though, also require ideological and regulatory elements to be effectively enforced. Harvey talks about 'the construction of consent',¹ a reference to the implementation of neoliberal policy that could also be applied to city branding; this point is introduced here. Capitalist tendencies that have become especially acute under neoliberalism, namely concentration and rationalisation, are then examined in relation to their effects on urban development and culture. A summary of these phenomena and the ways that neoliberal market logic has increasingly shaped urban life moves on to consider Newcastle specifically, and the role of the city's distinctive geography in the dynamics of local development. The chapter ends with a theorisation of music scenes, including a discussion of scenes as spaces of culture and identity, and their socio-economic role in urban life; the importance of music venues also features here.

'Mainstream' vs. 'non-mainstream'

The terms 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream' are perhaps the most important and the most frequently used in this thesis. However, they are also the most problematic, as is the dichotomy set up by their use (and indeed the idea of a cultural 'mainstream'). Some explanation is therefore required. It should first be pointed out that the terms are employed here to make a pragmatic analytical distinction between types of nightlife. To avoid further

¹ David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005), 39.

confusion, 'nightlife' refers to entertainment that revolves in one way or another around music and drinking; activities like eating out, cinema- or theatre-going, bowling, etc., are not included. Although somewhat crude, a theoretical binarism is necessary; obviously, there is a multitude of divisions within the sphere of 'nightlife', but observing them all would make for an extremely unwieldy analysis. More specifically, the reconfiguration of Newcastle city centre between 1995 and 2010 clearly privileged one particular branch of nightlife over a whole range of other musical experiences, which were collectively marginalised in the process. Use of the terms 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream', then, is a way to construct a more streamlined analysis, but is also intended to reflect the polarisation of nightlife culture spatialised by the Party City.

This distinction is based primarily on the role of music, which I would argue is the most consistent marker. 'Mainstream' nightlife, Chatterton and Hollands observe, is 'consumed by overlapping groups, entails a range of types of provision and is internally divided in terms of behaviours and styles'.² Yet, the music that accompanies it, regardless of venue style or clientèle, tends to be the same: explicitly commercial music, the majority of which is, or has been, in the charts (it could of course be argued that all popular music is 'commercial', but again this would be unhelpfully pedantic). This is a sufficiently consistent rule to be analytically useful, enabling 'mainstream' to represent a single cultural space, while acknowledging the numerous divisions within it. The familiarity of the term 'mainstream' may suggest that it is relatively simple to identify and distinguish types of nightlife. Lawrence Grossberg points out, though, that conceptions of 'the mainstream' are 'a matter of degrees and situated judgements',³ making any attempt to pin 'it' down very difficult. The monolithic implications of the term bely a fluid and amorphous space that simultaneously functions as a marker against which groups like music scenes 'imagine their social world, measure their cultural worth and claim their subcultural capital'.⁴ A more detailed theoretical discussion of these ideas takes place in chapter three, but the task here is to clarify the main differences between nightlife described in this thesis as 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream'. It is

² Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 85.

³ Lawrence Grossberg, 'The Politics of Music: American Images and British Articulations', *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. XI, 1-2 (1987), 144-151, 148.

⁴ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 96.

important to note that the criteria are necessarily generalisations, the reasons for which will become clear.

'Mainstream' nightlife

The nebulous nature of the term 'mainstream' makes it difficult to conceptualise. As Sarah Thornton states, 'when investigating social structures, it is impossible to avoid entanglement in a web of ideologies and value judgements'.⁵ Several authors whose works inform this thesis refer to the mainstream and / or mainstream culture, and it is worth briefly looking at their approaches in relation to Thornton's statement. Criminologist Phil Hadfield, a former DJ, describes 'high street' nightlife as 'thoroughly populist, as constituted by mainstream options relating to music, dress, social comportment and cultural norms'.⁶ This analysis is useful, but falls into the analytical trap described by Thornton. For Hadfield, the term 'mainstream' describes a 'standardised and homogenous range of products and services',⁷ associated with the 'proliferation of themed and branded venues operated by major corporate players',⁸ and which have increasingly displaced independent businesses and 'local idiosyncrasies'⁹ in city centres over the last few decades. However, he tells us little about the nature of the 'mainstream options' to which he refers, or how mainstream products and services are 'standardised and homogeneous'.

Similarly, Andy Bennett describes how, due to moderate commercial success in the city, 'a number of venues on the mainstream club circuit in Newcastle now offer 'specialist' nights on which particular urban dance music styles such as *house* and *techno* are featured'.¹⁰ He also notes that these styles are seen by such venues as a means to generate extra income on weekday nights. The historical context of Bennett's observation should be pointed out here, as some house music became highly commercialised and was commonplace in many 'mainstream' clubs by the early 2000s, while techno largely disappeared from UK nightlife relative to its popularity in the 1990s. Bennett also talks about how, for its regulars, the quality of the DJs at the club night around which his analysis is centred 'set it apart from the

⁵ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 92.

⁶ Phil Hadfield, *Bar Wars: Contesting the night in contemporary British cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Andy Bennett, *Popular music and youth culture: Music, Identity and Place* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 85 (emphasis in original).

more mainstream clubs in Newcastle'.¹¹ Again, we are given little idea of what these 'more mainstream' clubs might look or sound like, other than that some dance music forms are unfamiliar to them and that they seem to stand in opposition to music scenes.

Hadfield and Bennett both use the term 'mainstream' in such a way that it is presumed the reader will understand what it means, and to an extent this is true; I would tentatively suggest that most people have a relatively consistent idea of what constitutes 'mainstream', however vague the finer details may be. In the context of these two analyses it is arguably clear enough—but what is this idea? As soon as a workable definition is needed, it evaporates, leaving behind a messy pile of contradictions. For example, the Bigg Market area of Newcastle and the drinking culture that surrounded it, around which the Party City was initially centred, were very much 'local idiosyncrasies', and several of the venues were independently-owned. Yet, for local music scenes (and for this thesis), it epitomised 'mainstream' nightlife.¹² Equally, The Cooperage, which features in the third case study of this thesis, was a haven for numerous local music scenes, but was part of a corporate portfolio.

Chatterton and Hollands see 'the mainstream' as 'the dominant mode of young adults' consumption of urban nightlife culture', but also acknowledge the difficulty of defining it, and its bluntness as an analytical instrument.¹³ Being specifically concerned with the socio-cultural dynamics of different nightlife spaces, they rely more heavily on a defined conception of the mainstream than Hadfield or Bennett. Going further in their identification of 'mainstream' characteristics, Chatterton and Hollands suggest that mainstream nightlife is 'characterised by smart attire, chart music, commercial circuit drinking, pleasure-seeking and hedonistic behaviour'.¹⁴ While more detailed than Hadfield's, this description also shows some of the pitfalls of defining 'mainstream'. Several of these points apply to any form of nightlife— 'pleasure seeking' is surely the point of all nightlife. Chart music (and other commercial music forms) is perhaps the most overt indicator of 'mainstream', and will be returned to shortly. Circuit drinking, while most strongly associated with mainstream drinking culture, was also a characteristic of Newcastle's rock scene until the venues and

¹¹ Bennett, *Popular*, 89. See also Chatterton & Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 89.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscapes*, 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

pubs that formed the rock circuit had all closed. Smart attire is one aesthetic trait of mainstream nightlife, but football shirts were also synonymous with the Party City image during the early 2000s;¹⁵ equally, concert hall audiences generally dress smartly but would not be considered 'mainstream'. Another common image of Party City culture was 'the drunken hedonism that flows from pubs and clubs onto the streets.'¹⁶ For Chatterton and Hollands, this also typifies mainstream nightlife, but again the tendency towards excess is certainly not exclusive to that arena of culture. Ultimately, they state that 'the unifying factor of the mainstream is commercially viable and profit-orientated provision'.¹⁷ This makes sense, but again, holes can be picked. For example, the O2 Academy, one of Newcastle's largest live music venues, is part of a national corporate chain, clearly profit-orientated and 'commercially viable'—few risks are taken with programming—but it would fall into the 'non-mainstream' category here.

It is less straightforward than it may seem, then, to tag any one characteristic as 'mainstream'. But there must come a point at which it is analytically necessary, however contentious, to gloss over certain exceptions and contradictions. Chatterton and Hollands identify mainstream nightlife with 'the well-recognised weekend commercial provision of chain and theme pubs and traditional nightclubs',¹⁸ and for the purposes of this thesis this is a suitably loose definition. Like the authors referred to here, a degree of academic rigour is forfeited in presuming that readers of this study will have at least an interest in, and level of familiarity with, nightlife and music types, and be aware of what is usually meant by the term 'mainstream'.

The role of music in mainstream nightlife

If there is a 'unifying factor' in mainstream nightlife, I would suggest that it is music. Returning briefly to the observation that music in mainstream venues is largely the same, Hadfield, a former DJ in 'high street' venues, offers some useful insights into the role of music in this branch of nightlife. Music, he explains, is actively deployed as a tool for social control in such venues, specifically to maximise alcohol sales, and is fundamental to this process. The mainstream DJ is introduced as the 'focal point for entertainment within the

¹⁵ Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public policy in the Party City: The spectacle of culture, gender and locality', *International Journal of Public Administration* 33 (2010), 779-789, 783.

¹⁶ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Changing our 'Toon': Youth, nightlife and urban change in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Newcastle University Press, 2001), 74.

¹⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightsapes*, 85.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

venue',¹⁹ who is also required to '[act] as a mouthpiece for venue management, conveying messages to the crowd regarding drinks promotions, future events and last orders at the bar, etc'.²⁰ This immediately contrasts with non-mainstream dance events such as those studied by Thornton, where the DJ is an artistic performer and highly unlikely to talk over their 'tunes', except perhaps in cases like medical emergencies. The risk-averse nature of mainstream nightlife means that niche music of any genre is very rarely, if ever, heard in such venues. As Hadfield states, 'playing predominantly to one's own tastes, or to the tastes of a minority, young or predominantly male audience', would be seen in a mainstream venue as 'problematic' DJing.²¹ This again contrasts with non-mainstream dance clubs where the DJ's taste is (usually) the reason audiences attend, indeed many dance DJs have loyal followings and status 'similar to that of established rock performers'.²²

Hadfield goes on to explain that it is the mainstream DJ's task to 'create an atmosphere of carefully orchestrated abandon',²³ and one bar manager he cites is explicit: '[m]usic policy is a clever form of manipulation that most people do not recognise, even people in the industry...it is much more important to control the crowd with music than it is to control the crowd with security staff'.²⁴ Relating this to the DJ, Hadfield describes how 'DJs working in mainstream venues spoke of being constantly aware of the possibility of being severely reprimanded, or even sacked, for playing the wrong music at the wrong time'.²⁵ This has been taken even further by some high street chains, who '[consider] music policy to be of such importance to the atmosphere and concept of their venues that their DJs are no longer afforded professional discretion; fixed playlists are imposed by the company's head office and strictly policed by the managers of each unit'.²⁶ These observations suggest that the employment or booking of DJs by mainstream venues is a primarily economic move. The DJ in these cases has little or no creative input, a figurehead in a 'deliberately controlled and deskilled' musical environment.²⁷

¹⁹ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 99.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Bennet, *Popular*, 89. See also Thornton, *Club CULTures*.

²³ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 99.

²⁴ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 99.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The point of this elevated level of control over the music is to achieve the 'appropriate balance between engaging entertainment and provocative over-stimulation',²⁸ removing as many elements of risk as possible to maximise alcohol sales. This is reinforced by various extra-musical measures: the concern to prevent trouble within licensed premises, for example, often reflected in pricing policy, is not to be mistaken for a genuine concern for customers' welfare, but rather the fact that spending time and resources dealing with incidents impinges on the efficient sale of drinks. Likewise, spaces for music performance like stages are conspicuous by their absence in many mainstream venues, as they cut into drinking space (as does customer seating, hence the term 'vertical drinking').²⁹ Much like indoor malls, as many aspects as possible of the consumption space are specifically designed to encourage spending. However mainstream venues present themselves, then, and whichever markets they target, the music, which has to perform a specific function, cannot stray too far from a proven format. 'Upmarket' or 'downmarket', 'classy' or 'tacky', cocktails, trebles or beer, these nightlife spaces all sway to the same beats.

Mainstream nightlife as a female-orientated environment

The mainstream nightlife environment, then, is a carefully engineered space largely created through music. Over the past few decades it has also been increasingly geared towards perceived female tastes. Hadfield cites a female DJ who explains that '[mainstream] premises are party-orientated. It is geared towards the female, y'know, we try an' encourage female-friendly around our premises. Yes, men will follow, but you have to create a happy atmosphere for the average woman'.³⁰ This point feeds into the construction and imagination of 'the mainstream' as a feminised / feminine space.³¹ Thornton draws attention to Andreas Huyssen's arguments that 'mass culture has long been positioned as feminine by high cultural theorists'.³² The club cultures she researched from 1988 until the mid-1990s synonymised conceptions of the mainstream with 'the recurrent trope of the handbag',³³ even though the music and accompanying styles had changed during the period (quite drastically) from chartpop to acid house,³⁴ as rave culture began to be co-opted. A detailed

²⁸ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 99.

²⁹ See for example Hadfield; also Chatterton & Hollands. This trend appears to have become less prevalent in recent years.

³⁰ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 100.

³¹ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 104.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

critique of these ideas is beyond the remit of this thesis, but the foregrounding of women in mainstream nightlife is undeniable.

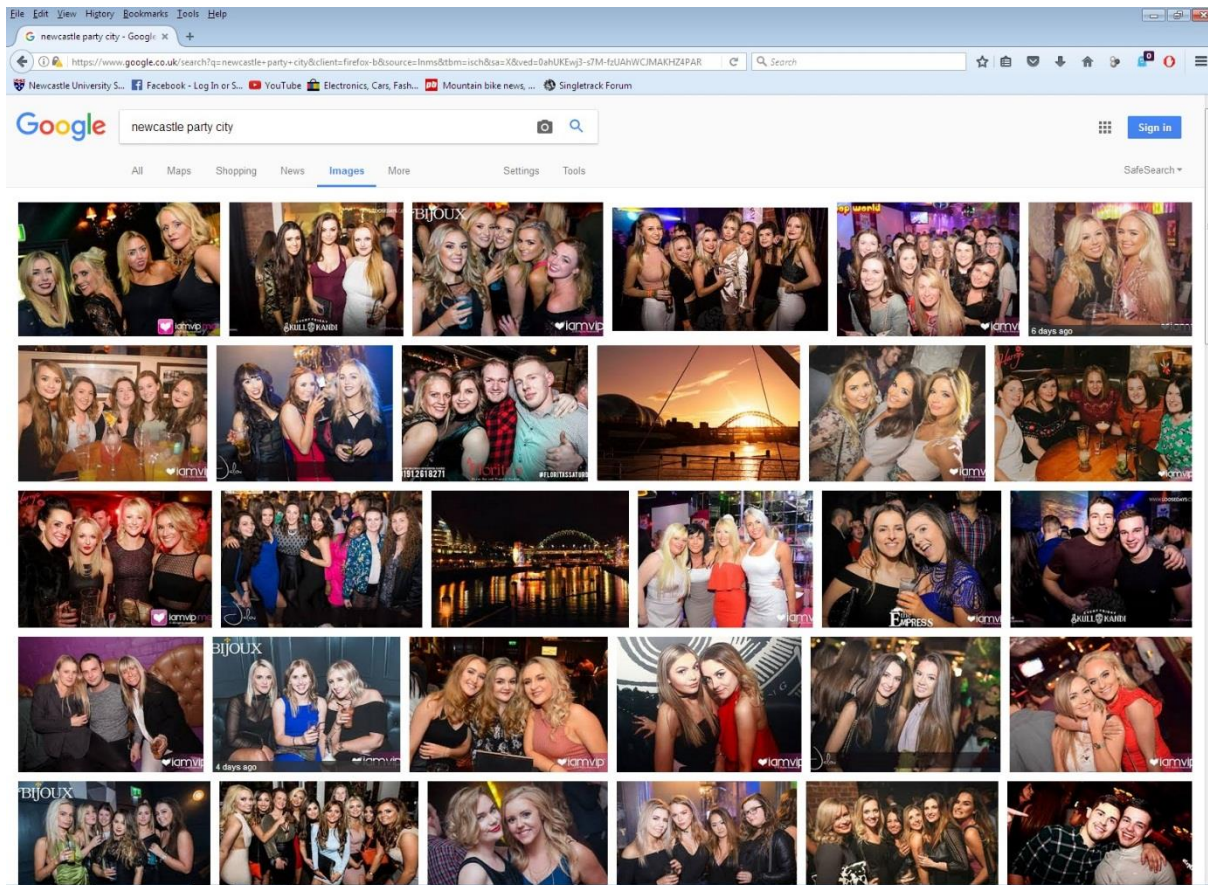


Fig. 1: A screenshot of image results for the search terms 'Newcastle party city', July 2017.

This need to cater primarily for women, though, and to ensure their safety and happiness, is more cynical than it may seem. It stems from the function of mainstream nightlife as a catalyst for sexual encounters; it is the prospect of such encounters that drives alcohol sales. As one large operator in Newcastle states,

If it was just the drink that people wanted you would buy a six pack, sit in the house...but actually as a company we sell, covertly, we sell sex, whether it is just a chance of a meeting of the opposite sex or...introductions that go further, we are the in which those introductions are made.³⁵

While this is undoubtedly a factor in all forms of nightlife, the chance of sex has been identified by numerous commentators and researchers as the primary driver of mainstream nightlife.³⁶ The explicit sexualisation of social interaction in mainstream nightlife was particularly acute in Newcastle throughout the Party City period where, as Chris Wharton *et al* observe, there existed an 'exaggerated polarisation of gender roles as represented by the

³⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 106.

³⁶ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 93; see also Chatterton & Hollands.

hypersexual appearance of young women and the machismo of the Newcastle United football shirted young men'.³⁷ This was exacerbated by the media, in which 'the spectacle of Newcastle's party culture...was represented by the scantily dressed and often drunken bodies of young women';³⁸ it seemed that the crudest of advertising tactics had been deemed appropriate to market Newcastle as a destination. By contrast, non-mainstream nightlife is more frequently seen by women as safer, offering spaces where they can socialise and dance without fear of unwanted male attention. Indeed, 'rave' or dance culture exhibited a gender balance previously unseen in British nightlife, as it 'worked to "unlock" the heterosexual coupling associated with the dancefloor, with its emphasis on the individual dancer, the music and the collective group'.³⁹

The mainstream as a majority

A common notion in conceptualisations of the mainstream, and one worth addressing briefly, is that the term refers to a majority taste. This idea is entrenched by the media through marketing language, such as 'the new (cultural artefact) *everyone's* talking about', or phrases like 'must-have', 'essential', etc. The use of hyperbole is of course a standard method of promoting a product and attempting to ensure its visibility in the marketplace. Attributing universal value to an object arguably appeals to the sense of empowerment generated by group membership; a particularly acute example of the negative effects brought about by such marketing techniques might be the tendency of schoolchildren, on 'non-uniform' days,⁴⁰ to mock those of their peers who are not sporting the latest fashionable item, which for some can be traumatic (the same often applies to music taste, as personal experience again testifies).

However, the 'majority taste' narrative is highly misleading. It is important to bear in mind that despite perceptions, mainstream culture is a *minority*, albeit a very conspicuous one. Using radio as an example, in 2000, BBC Radio One, the youth-orientated arm of the BBC's various radio stations (target audience is the 15–24 age group),⁴¹ that mostly plays the latest commercial pop music, had a listening audience of 11.5 million, representing only 11% of all

³⁷ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public', 783.

³⁸ Ibid., 784.

³⁹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 152; see also Thornton, *Club Cultures*; Bennett, *Popular music*.

⁴⁰ Some schools that require uniforms to be worn have a day each year where pupils can wear what they like.

⁴¹ 'BBC Radio 2 and Radio 4 hit record Rajar figures' *BBC News*, 01/08/2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-23523977>).

UK radio listening.⁴² By 2015, this had dropped to 9.5 million, the lowest figure since 2003.⁴³ Radio Two is geared towards a slightly older audience, and is slightly more diverse in its programming, but would still be positioned as mainstream relative to Radio Three (classical music), or Radio Four (news, current affairs, radio plays); in the same year Radio Two claimed to be ‘the UK’s most listened-to radio station’,⁴⁴ reaching 10.2 million, who ‘tune[d] in for 13 hours a week on average, giving it a 13% share of all listening’.⁴⁵ This rose to a record high of 15.44 million in 2013.⁴⁶ None of these figures shows that a majority of the population listens to mainstream radio—even if the BBC audiences were combined with the various commercial stations in the UK, it is arguably unlikely that they would exceed the 30 million or so required for a majority. Also, Radios One and Two (along with commercial stations like Galaxy FM) are commonly played in workplaces such as shops, kitchens and construction sites, meaning that the listening figures are unlikely to represent the number of individuals who listen to those stations out of choice.

Newcastle's nightlife is a good example of the mainstream’s appearance of majority. At the peak of the Party City years, around the Millennium and the early 2000s, the city centre could accommodate nearly 100,000 drinkers.⁴⁷ The visibility of this branch of nightlife, which involved large numbers of people out on the street at any one time as groups wandered between pubs and bars, gave the appearance, particularly on a busy weekend, that it was the most popular form of nightlife. Again, perspective is key here—Newcastle’s population is nearly 300,000, and many of those drinkers were visitors, the Party City image being an effective tourist attraction. Coupled with disproportionate media representation of mainstream entertainment in Newcastle compared to other forms, the impression that this was a majority taste was strong.

It could be argued that this idea of the mainstream as a majority is largely the result of over-representation in the media, or more precisely, the 'mainstream' media (television, radio, magazines and newspapers). As Thornton states, ‘the media are bound to be an important

⁴² ‘Breakfast rejects boost Radio 1’, *BBC News*, 02/10/2000 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1004220.stm>).

⁴³ John Plunkett, ‘Radio One loses nearly 1m listeners as Nick Grimshaw hits 12-year breakfast low’, *The Guardian*, 21/05/2015 (<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/may/21/radio-1-loses-1m-listeners-nick-grimshaw-bbc-4-extra-6-music>).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Plunkett, ‘Radio One’.

⁴⁶ BBC News (no author), ‘BBC Radio 2 and Radio 4 hit record Rajar figures’ *BBC News*.

⁴⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 20.

source of information about other social groups and, consequently, a means of orientating oneself in the social world'.⁴⁸ It is worth bearing in mind, then, that much of the global media is controlled by the same powers that control the music industry. Martin Scherzinger's account of media cross-ownership by multi-national conglomerates, discussed later in this chapter, illustrates the extent to which this has increased over the past few decades and the consequent rationalising effect on music production, particularly with regard to radio play.⁴⁹ In much the same way that corporate leisure operators seek to control every aspect of consumption within their venues, these enormous media organisations pursue similar goals in terms of global audiences for the cultural products from which they profit.

Thornton states that the mainstream is 'read off media texts',⁵⁰ conceived by 'club crowds' (or any other group that constructs itself in opposition to the mainstream), with 'the aid of national television and tabloids.'⁵¹ Presenting mainstream culture with marketing language like that described above, it is exactly the intention of the mainstream media not only to create an impression of universal value, but also for that impression to dominate public consciousness. Given the global reach of corporate media conglomerates, and their ability to marginalise or shut down alternative sources (although this seems to be changing), it is perhaps unsurprising that notions of majority continue to inform conceptions of the mainstream. It would be more accurate, though, to see the mainstream as a space constituted at any one time by a conglomeration of different identities, tastes, classes, cultures and markets, as we will see in Chapter three; herein may be another reason for its appearance as a majority.

'Non-mainstream' nightlife

As might be expected, 'non-mainstream' nightlife is also difficult to define. In this thesis, the term encompasses the range of musical styles and experiences that one would be unlikely to encounter in mainstream venues. This includes music of any genre, although the most commercial styles are usually not heard. It generally refers to live music events like gigs and concerts, underground club nights and free parties, and jazz or folk sessions. It is tempting to suggest that the music is the reason for attendance in non-mainstream nightlife rather than drinking or socialising, but here again, problems arise—plenty of people choose to visit

⁴⁸ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 109.

⁴⁹ Martin Scherzinger, 'Music, corporate power and unending war', *Cultural Critique*, 60 (2005), 23-67.

⁵⁰ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

mainstream venues for the music. Conversely, people may well visit non-mainstream venues just to socialise. One main difference between the two is that operators of more conventional non-mainstream venues (bars, pubs, music venues) appear to be prepared to take risks that their mainstream counterparts would not, suggesting that while profit margins are still important, they are less of an overriding priority. Allowing the evening's audience to be dictated by a specific, possibly obscure, music genre could potentially lead to poor attendance, a risk that a mainstream venue could not take. Non-mainstream venues also make little attempt to control the music, except through general music policies (no hip hop or techno, for example). Music policies can limit the possibilities for events, especially in a small city like Newcastle, but examples in non-mainstream venues of rigid music control in pursuit of drinks sales are rare. Control might be exercised where events are based around a particular style, like hip hop or techno nights, but this is obviously to attract the relevant audience rather than to boost alcohol sales.

Non-mainstream venues include music venues and clubs, i.e. spaces designed for musical performance; pubs and bars that play music types not heard in mainstream venues, performed live or otherwise; warehouses and other spaces that are not specifically music or nightlife spaces but can be adapted to function as such—these might include people's houses and outdoor venues like quarries, woods or beaches. Non-mainstream nightlife can in theory take place anywhere, another important point that sets it apart from mainstream nightlife. In Newcastle, venues for non-mainstream events were gradually squeezed of the city centre during the Party City period. By 2010, most were on the city's fringes or some distance away in suburbs. This geographical marginality, however, should not be read as entirely negative, nor as the result of outside forces. Music scenes, particularly those that consider themselves to be 'underground', often choose to distance themselves from mainstream areas. As Bennett observes, 'spatial isolation serve[s] to prevent intrusion' from undesirable groups, usually meaning drunken mainstream revellers.⁵²

For such scenes, the venues around which their communities are based can offer safe spaces for the construction and exploration of identities, or simply socialising to music that they like in ways unacceptable in mainstream spaces (indulging in recreational drug use, for example). Also, this distance also contributes to the scene's ability to maintain a sense of exclusivity.

⁵² Bennett, *Popular*, 90.

Interestingly, many of the social divisions that can be observed in mainstream nightlife also appear to be far less prevalent. A more diverse and balanced demographic is often, though not always, visible at non-mainstream venues and events, in contrast to the relatively strict divisions of the mainstream that will be elaborated later. Dress codes are very rare, and while people often do dress up to go to gigs, clubs, sessions or parties, to be refused admission on the grounds of one's attire would be unlikely; this is standard practice at most mainstream venues. Violence is also much less commonplace; any disturbances most often being caused by the intrusion of outside groups. Again, this usually means drunken mainstream revellers (or, ironically, the police). Violence or harassment against women is rarely tolerated and crowd members will often deal with such incidents themselves. Confirming these assertions, Chatterton and Hollands found that non-mainstream nightlife venues and consumers tended to be more tolerant and inclusive, less inclined towards violence or harassment, and more likely to prioritise the type of music played.⁵³

Like the mainstream, this rather crude analytical approach does not do justice to the diversity and complexity of non-mainstream nightlife culture. The two overlap in many ways, share numerous characteristics and are continually shifting, especially as neoliberalism has a tendency to co-opt anything that can be made profitable, and profitable markets are never static for long. Further complicating this is the subjective and relative nature of the mainstream, which is represented by different characteristics depending on perspective—this is what Grossberg means by 'degrees and situated judgments'. Nevertheless, the preceding pages have shown that it is possible to conceive of 'the mainstream' as a single, albeit fluid, space, positioned in opposition to 'the non-mainstream'. For the purposes of this thesis, subtler complexities must be put to one side, but the diversity of cultures that make up the sphere of nightlife is acknowledged.

Neoliberalism in theory and practice

The term 'neoliberalism' has been commonplace in academic research since at least the mid-2000s, although its existence as an economic and political doctrine is widely acknowledged to have originated in the mid-20th century, with the writings of Friedrich von Hayek and the formation of the Mont Pelerin Society.⁵⁴ Neoliberalism remained marginal until the 1970s, when through the influence of various well-funded think tanks it began to gain traction as a

⁵³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*.

⁵⁴ David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005), 20.

solution to the financial instability spreading across the globe. Brenner and Theodore explain that, '[t]he concept of neoliberalism has been widely used to characterize the resurgence of market-based institutional shifts and policy realignments across the world economy during the post-1980s period'.⁵⁵ In short, neoliberal theory holds that unfettered market logic is the only way to bring about individual freedom and a share of society's wealth for all, and is opposed to any form of state intervention in the activities of capital. There are, of course, enormous contradictions between this theoretical position and neoliberalism as it has unfolded in practice, not least the rapidity with which extraordinary inequalities of wealth have developed, and the conspicuous reliance on a 'strong and if necessary coercive' state.⁵⁶ As Peck and Tickell point out, 'while rhetorically anti-statist, neoliberals have proved adept at the (mis)use of state power'.⁵⁷ The incoherence of neoliberalism as a theoretical framework is further revealed by Harvey's observation that, 'when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, [they] are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognisable'.⁵⁸ He concludes that neoliberalism has been a '*political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of an economic elite', and that 'the theoretical utopianism of neoliberal argument has...primarily worked as a system of justification and legitimation for whatever needed to be done to achieve this goal'.⁵⁹

Most analyses of neoliberalism, while acknowledging the frustratingly diffuse nature of this movement in political economy, have tended to agree that there are certain consistencies in the shifts it has engendered throughout the capitalist world. One of the principal signifiers of neoliberal 'governance' (a new political lexicon is one of the associated trends),⁶⁰ is an apparent 'rollback' of state powers and the erosion of local democracy. This has generally been accompanied by the widespread deregulation of private sector activity, particularly in the finance and corporate sectors. The idea that state power has been 'rolled back', however, is misleading, as state power is in fact fundamental to the implementation of neoliberal policy. A more accurate description would be that state / market relations have

⁵⁵ Neil Brenner & Nik Theodore, 'Neoliberalism and the urban condition', *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 9/1 (2005), 101-107, 102.

⁵⁶ Harvey, *Brief*, 21.

⁵⁷ Jamie Peck & Adam Tickell, 'Neoliberalising Space', *Antipode*, 34/3 (2002), 380-404, 381.

⁵⁸ Harvey, *Brief*, 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc Wacquant, 'NewLiberalSpeak: Notes on the new planetary vulgate', *Radical Philosophy*, 105 (2001), 2-5.

been reconstituted, with state power becoming a tool to enforce neoliberal policy and defend private property and institutions of capital.⁶¹ Indeed, Harvey identifies the protection of the financial sector by the government as one of neoliberalism's key principles. This, he observes, was first enacted in New York in the early 1970s and subsequently became 'the gospel' of the International Monetary Fund.⁶² 'If there is a conflict between the well being of financial institutions and the well being of the population', he says, 'the government will choose the well being of the financial institutions; to hell with the well being of the population'.⁶³

It is worth noting here, as Peck and Tickell state, that 'like globalisation, neoliberalisation should be understood as a process, not an end-state'. Pointing out the substantial differences in 'actually existing neoliberalisms' around the world,⁶⁴ they add that 'it is also contradictory, it tends to provoke counter-tendencies, and it exists in historically and geographically contingent forms'.⁶⁵ This is the reason for 'the non-trivial differences, both theoretically and politically, between the actually existing neoliberalisms of Blair's Britain, Fox's Mexico or Bush's America'.⁶⁶ The UK became one of the epicentres of neoliberalism once Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979.⁶⁷ The policies implemented by her government in the early 1980s led to catastrophic socio-economic damage across the country for working people, from which some areas have still yet to recover, especially in the North East. Conversely, (parts of) London and the South East boomed as the financial institutions based there enjoyed unprecedented growth; Brenner and Theodore point out the 'spatial selectivity of neoliberalism as a political strategy',⁶⁸ and this geographically uneven development can be seen to occur at all scales from the global to the local. Wealth inequality soared and the market, 'depicted ideologically as the way to foster competition and innovation, became a vehicle for the consolidation of monopoly power'.⁶⁹ This economic concentration will be the subject of discussion shortly, but first it is worth looking at how neoliberalism has affected cities.

⁶¹ Brenner & Theodore, 'Neoliberalism'.

⁶² Harvey, 'Neoliberalism and the city', *Studies in Social Justice* 1/1 (2007), 1-12, 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Brenner & Theodore, 'Neoliberalism', 103; see also Peck & Tickell.

⁶⁵ Peck & Tickell, 'Neoliberalising', 383.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁸ Brenner & Theodore, 'Neoliberalism', 105.

⁶⁹ Harvey, *Brief*, 26.

Neoliberalising the city

One of the most conspicuous aspects of neoliberalism has been the changed economic function of cities, manifested in the built environment. Much has been written on the transformative processes that have affected cities across the world over the last few decades.⁷⁰ Described variously as post-Fordist, neo-Fordist, post-industrial, postmodern, and neoliberalised / neoliberal,⁷¹ all of these terms refer to cities, mostly in the 'developed world', that have been reconfigured according to shifts in the mode of capital accumulation in the late twentieth century. Numerous accounts of these transitions have been produced, hence this thesis is not about to provide another one, but it is worth outlining the ways that cities have changed in their economic function and how this has been reflected in their design. From a system often described as 'Fordist', i.e. from mass production and consumption, and heavy, labour intensive manufacturing based in Western urban centres, accumulation has moved into a phase in which most manufacturing happens in Southeast Asia, taking advantage of low labour costs resulting from levels of human exploitation now (officially) unacceptable in the West. The formerly productive cities of the West, meanwhile, now function as centres of finance, service and consumption. In short, what these changes represent is the spatialisation of changes in the mode of accumulation and the requirements of capital.

In the UK, several trends in urban development can be observed which are generally considered to have been set in motion by the Thatcher government elected in 1979. Drastic reforms of local government finance took place after 1980 in response to a 'noble rearguard action against neoliberal policies' mounted by a number of left-wing city councils,⁷² in particular Sheffield, Liverpool and London.⁷³ Harvey identifies this shift as a second key principle of neoliberalism, where the function of local government moves from a 'managerial' role to an 'entrepreneurial' one, the priority of which is the 'creation of a good business climate';⁷⁴ this move towards 'urban entrepreneurialism' had been taking shape

⁷⁰ See for example David Harvey, 'Neoliberalism and the city', *Studies in Social Justice* 1/1 (2007), 1-12; Brenner & Theodore, 'Neoliberalism'; Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck and Eric S. Sheppard (Eds.), *Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban Frontiers* (London: Guilford Press, 2007).

⁷¹ See for example Harvey; Brenner & Theodore; Peck & Tickell; Chatterton & Hollands; Krims.

⁷² Harvey, *Brief*, 59.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Harvey, 'Neoliberalism', 9.

since the early 1970s.⁷⁵ With budgets dramatically reduced by central government after Thatcher's election, councils had no choice but to enter into 'a framework of zero-sum inter-urban competition for resources, jobs, and capital'.⁷⁶ Forced to devise ways to attract capital, cities began to be treated as products to be marketed, leading to the spread of 'place marketing'; over the last decade or two this has morphed into 'city branding' as the commodification process has evolved. This fundamental change in urban administration vastly increased the influence of the private sector over the direction of development, which became more focused on profitability than social equity. 'Prestigious' developments including luxury housing and executive office suites formed the core of successive regeneration projects in Newcastle from the 1980s onwards, while most of the population were still adjusting to the devastating loss of employment and income from the departure of heavy industry.

Clearly, the requirements of business and finance are at odds in many ways with those of people. Several conspicuous trends in the built environment emerged from this economic reconfiguration (although many of these have been evident for much longer than the last three decades). These include gentrification, where development increasingly targets more affluent markets; attendant shifts in the provision of housing, services and cultural facilities; the mobilisation of city centres as arenas for market-based economic growth and 'elite consumption practices'⁷⁷ (Newcastle city centre has always been a centre of consumption, local production having occurred outside the city itself);⁷⁸ and, in many cases, a seemingly disproportionate focus on external markets such as tourists and students. These trends, driven by profit-based criteria, frequently lead to increasing homogenisation, particularly of architectural styles, retail and entertainment; a concomitant (perceived) loss of identity, for which branding is intended to compensate; heightened control of social space and a blurring of the boundaries between public and private; and a reduction of 'locally embedded' services and activities as non-local, often transnational corporations take over provision.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Harvey, 'From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: The transformation in urban governance', *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 71/1 (1989), *The Roots of Geographical Change: 1973 to the Present*, pp. 3-17, 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, 'Cities and the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism"', *Antipode*, 34/3 (2002), 349-379, 368.

⁷⁸ Bill Lancaster, 'Newcastle: Capital of what?', in *Geordies: Roots of regionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 1992) 53-70, 55.

⁷⁹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 3.

This process is visible in Newcastle today, where development has clearly been designed to attract 'cash-rich', middle-class consumers, whose higher level of disposable income has come to drive city centre growth, mainly through tourism, retail and leisure.⁸⁰ More recently, purpose-built student accommodation has come to dominate development. Meanwhile, there remain 'large swathes of intense deprivation' surrounding the city.⁸¹ The city centre and wealthy suburbs are kept 'clean and safe' for affluent markets, but less than two miles away, the much poorer streets of Byker, most visibly its main street Shields Road, are continually awash with rubbish. This point did not escape one member of the judgment panel for 'NewcastleGateshead's bid to be European Capital of Culture 2008. Tom Caulker, proprietor of Newcastle nightclub World Headquarters, was involved with the bid, and explains that,

one comment, I think it was Miranda Sawyer made to me, she said, you know, the problem with the bid here is, you know, you've got this... you've got all these beautiful buildings, you've got all this, that and the other, but you've also got kids in Byker running around with no shoes on...do you know what I mean? And no one seems to give a fuck...I'm like, hmmm...she's got a point.⁸²

As Krims points out, '[i]t will not be difficult to imagine that a change in the function of metropolitan economies will entail profound shifts throughout virtually every register of life...if a city supports a different economic activity, then multiple registers will also shift'.⁸³ These shifts entail 'mutations in the character of its spaces, its buildings, its retail storefronts, its residential stock and, just as important, the kinds of people that will inhabit it.'⁸⁴ From the point of view of this thesis, the latter point could arguably be repositioned as the most important of these shifts, as a change in the kinds of people that inhabit a city will also bring changes in the types of cultural activities available. People may well follow infrastructure and development, which was the thinking behind the 'property-led regeneration' of the 1980s and 1990s, but neoliberal city centre developments have increasingly targeted only the most profitable markets; music scenes are not in that group. Chatterton and Hollands draw attention to the primacy of design in contemporary cities, which is 'geared increasingly towards attracting desirable consumers, repelling undesirable ones and maximising consumer spending'.⁸⁵ They point out that,

⁸⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸² Caulker, personal interview, 16/03/2015.

⁸³ Krims, *Music*, xviii.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscaapes*, 26.

mainstream commercial spaces are designed environments which connect with widely held social and ideological values and the desire of particular social groups to distinguish themselves through not only material but symbolic or positional goods.⁸⁶

This ties in with Krims's discussion of the role of music in 'the design-intensive city',⁸⁷ where music becomes part of the interior design of commercial spaces, deployed as a means of enhancing the consumption environment. Associations and connections communicated through music allow consumers to identify and locate themselves within that environment, as well as guiding them through it and stimulating the impulse to consume. As the city becomes an increasingly instrumentalised space, then, the question becomes one of the extent to which the tastes of those markets occlude those of others who may live in, or wish to use the city.

Neoliberalisation and local dynamics

Brenner and Theodore importantly observe that,

neoliberalism does not engender identical (economic, political or spatial) outcomes in each context in which it is imposed; rather, as place-, territory- and scale-specific neoliberal projects collide with inherited regulatory landscapes, contextually specific pathways of institutional reorganization crystallize that reflect the legacies of earlier modes of regulation and forms of contestation.⁸⁸

The dynamics of Newcastle's socio-cultural life owe much to residual local attitudes carried over from the region's industrial past. This section is intended to draw attention to what Hudson describes as the 'cognitive lock-in' that seems to characterise the North East region,⁸⁹ both in culture and in policy-making circles. Hudson's focus on 'instituted behaviour' and 'cognitive lock-in' is an overlooked but useful way to examine some of the processes behind the formation and reproduction of local cultures, from music scenes to policy-making. He explains that,

"Instituted behaviour" can be thought of as embracing a wide spectrum from the informality of habits, norms, and routines (often unexamined and unthinkingly performed, symptomatic of a Gramscian hegemony of some ideas and ways of thinking over others) to the formality of behaviour within the state and its constituent apparatuses and organisations.⁹⁰

A level of cognitive lock-in has been clearly apparent in the UK since Thatcher's imposition of free market economics, her famous claim that 'There Is No Alternative' (affectionately known as TINA)⁹¹ and the reinforcing of this notion by relentlessly presenting it as 'common

⁸⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 26.

⁸⁷ Krims, *Music*, 127.

⁸⁸ Brenner & Theodore, 'Neoliberalism', 102.

⁸⁹ Hudson, 'Rethinking', 583.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 586.

⁹¹ Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the 21st-century city* (London: Penguin, 2009), 9.

sense'. Successive governments since then, central and local, appear to have been unable to conceive of any other way to structure the running of a country than to cede economic control to the market, despite the obvious catastrophic failures evidently endemic to this approach.⁹²

The North East is a relatively isolated region that became locked in to a very specific economic trajectory through policy that was heavily influenced by local industrial elites. This first created a 'virtuous spiral of path-dependent growth', before bringing about a spectacular downfall.⁹³ Hudson points out that 'the effects of the legacies of habits and routines established as constituent moments in the formation of the...region's 'traditional' economy are easily observed.'⁹⁴ One of the most important of these was that 'the strict gender division of labour established as a necessary part of the "old" industrial economy broke down'.⁹⁵ Indeed, in the North East 'many men found genuine difficulty in coming to terms with permanent unemployment and their role as domestic workers whilst their wives worked outside the home for a wage.'⁹⁶

Interestingly, though, as the basis of identity construction in the North East had shifted from production to consumption,⁹⁷ during the Party City years an equally strict gender division could be observed in Newcastle's mainstream drinking culture. As Wharton *et al* point out, football (and drinking) culture, compensating for the loss of masculine status brought about by deindustrialisation, 'provided a...masculine identity represented by a particular brand of regional chauvinism, bravado, and the uncompromisingly emphatic black and white shirt'.⁹⁸ Traditional values in Newcastle, then, continue to be passed down through generations,⁹⁹ but have arguably been displaced into other spheres of life now that production has largely disappeared from the region. Nayak's account of the 'Real Geordies', a group (or subculture)

⁹² Some have argued that Thatcher in fact had little idea of the forces she was about to unleash with the 'Big Bang' deregulation, and that once 'out of the box', there is little any government can do to tame the market; Tony Blair acknowledged this shortly after his election in 1997. The market's rapidly growing influence over politics was demonstrated by the ousting of John Major in 1992, brought about by the deliberate devaluation of Sterling on global stock markets, initiated by some of those that considered his policies on Europe in particular to be misguided. For more information see the Adam Curtis documentary series *The Mayfair Set*.

⁹³ Hudson, 'Rethinking', 587.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 587.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ See for example Chatterton & Hollands; also Nayak.

⁹⁸ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public', 783.

⁹⁹ Anoop Nayak, 'Last of the "Real Geordies"? White masculinities and the subcultural response to deindustrialisation', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21 (2003), 7-25.

of local male youths, suggests that many of the children of former workers ('grafters') carry with them the values of their fathers and grandfathers. Without the work environment in which to play out these identities in their original contexts, though, they are 'nostalgic about a time they have never experienced';¹⁰⁰ these transitions in local identity are discussed in more detail in Chapter two. Of more immediate interest to this section is the idea that such patterns of retained sensibilities exist not only in local culture but also in the realm of local government, the so-called 'political classes'.

If residual values can be observed in local culture, and the fact is considered that local politics has also been an area in which entrenched attitudes have persisted for a long time, then it surely cannot be too hard to imagine that local government is equally vulnerable to instituted behaviour and the perpetuation of cognitive lock-in. As Robinson points out, '[d]ecades of domination by one party (the Labour Party) has not served the region well. Debate has been stifled and local politics is sterile, lacking imagination and vision. Local government, run by a male gerontocracy, looks and sounds out of date and paternalistic.'¹⁰¹ This evaluation certainly chimes with the responses of all of the interviewees for this thesis, as well as the research of Chatterton and Hollands, and many comments posted by locals to online forums and discussion boards.

It will become clear throughout this thesis that the conservatism of Newcastle City Council and the local magistrates has been a long-running problem for those involved with local nightlife, mainstream or otherwise. One of the most common explanations for this stance, apart from the issues described above, is a distinct lack of contact with different cultures, arguably stemming in part from the city's geographic isolation and the historic absence of large-scale immigration of ethnic minorities.¹⁰² Local promoter and DJ Jonathan Miles spent several years living in both Chicago and Berlin, and made this point by way of an interesting comparison drawn from his own experiences in Newcastle and abroad:

JM: in Berlin there was this sort of fairly famous squatted bit of land right in the middle of the business district, right up until about, sort of 5 or 6 years ago, which was a group of...anarchist, transsexual gypsies, they were living in gypsy caravans, and they would have parties there every weekend, even as the new skyscrapers were going up around them...this was like literally what had been a bit of wasteland and there had been caravans on it since the wall came down, these like German-style caravans that look a bit like gypsy caravans...

IDB: I know what you mean, Bauwagen?

¹⁰⁰ Nayak, 'Last', 19.

¹⁰¹ Fred Robinson, 'The North East – A journey through time', *City* 6/3 (2002), 327.

¹⁰² See for example Nayak; Bennett; Robinson; Chatterton & Hollands.

JM: Bauwagen, yeah. And you know, if you imagine that like, in Newcastle, the police wouldn't even be able to...pop in and try and have a word with those people with a straight face, just with them being transsexual, never mind them being anarchists, never mind them putting on unlicensed parties, never mind it being in the middle of the business district, but you know, in cities like Berlin, they just don't bat an eyelid at things like that, they've seen it all before, and in Newcastle, you're talking about senior police that go back to their houses in Darras Hall and Chester-le-Street and places like that, you know, and a lot of them the only time they've ever left the North East will be when they went to Spain on holiday with their family, you're not talking about the most sort of, um...cosmopolitan, or the most open-minded of people...¹⁰³

This insulation from 'outside' cultures can hardly have been a positive factor in helping local authorities to understand the value and the dynamics of non-mainstream cultures like music scenes; the problem has also perhaps been compounded by the perceived 'loutish' image of Newcastle's mainstream drinking areas in local and national media,¹⁰⁴ to which those in control will arguably have had very little actual exposure. One licensing official interviewed by Chatterton and Hollands admitted that '...other than going to the theatre, they rarely ever ventured into Newcastle city centre in the evening'.¹⁰⁵ How anyone in such a position can make a balanced judgment on a licensing application, when they are effectively refusing to further their understanding of the cultures that their decisions affect, is a question that surely must be raised here. Miles refers to Paul Rubinstein, Newcastle Council's head of arts and culture in the years around the Millennium, pointing out that,

you can't expect someone like Rubinstein, if he's not interested, to understand the difference between D.A.V.E. the Drummer and the Blue Monkey, you know...you can't expect him to, but *you would expect him to see it as his business to find out*, but he had his own agenda, you know, and it wasn't part of it.¹⁰⁶

Clearly, though, the mediators and gatekeepers of 'culture' in Newcastle have not made it their business to find out about the city's numerous music scenes and their attendant cultures, but instead have continued to allow their strategies to be informed by negative stereotypes and prejudices on the one hand, and pressure from mainstream operators on the other. Arguably the biggest losers from this limited understanding of music cultures in Newcastle have been the dance-orientated club scenes that have associations with recreational drug use, and have been subjected to some of the most heavy-handed policing of all of Newcastle's nightlife,¹⁰⁷ despite the conspicuous lack of the type of trouble that characterises the mainstream scene. Indeed, the one North East scene that perhaps more

¹⁰³ Jonathan Miles, personal interview.

¹⁰⁴ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Miles, personal interview (emphasis mine); DAVE the Drummer is a techno artist and the Blue Monkey was a club in Sunderland.

¹⁰⁷ Miles, personal interview.

than any other represents both 'homegrown', or 'grassroots' culture, and the willingness of authorities, the media and to an extent the general public, to ostracise, suppress and demonise groups that they do not understand, is that of Makina, or 'New Monkey'.¹⁰⁸

A scene that has gone largely unnoticed in the North East,¹⁰⁹ despite being almost entirely bounded by the region's geographic borders, this music originated in Spain, and is a form of fast, energetic dance music. Adopted by North East working-class youths (pejoratively known as 'charvers'), it was embellished with a style of MCing not dissimilar to that of early hardcore rave and jungle. Mirroring the ethos of underground hip hop, their lyrics depict lived experience in some of the most deprived wards in the country. Often involved with drug dealing, car theft and other petty crimes, these young people and their music only appeared in the local public consciousness when a Sunderland club, the New Monkey (from which the music took its nickname; this was the refurbished Blue Monkey club mentioned by Miles) that hosted Makina nights was shut down in 2010. The owner was arrested for allowing the sale and use of recreational drugs on his premises, and a news release from Northumbria Police made clear how they viewed this local scene and its members:

These men knowingly allowed drugs into their premises making the place a haven for druggies around the region. It's this behaviour which caused misery to the lives of residents in and around the club who had to put up with crime and disorder...The club blighted the city for far too long and I would like to praise everyone for their hard work and commitment in bringing the issue to a positive conclusion...I would like to thank all those who had the courage to stand up to the New Monkey club¹¹⁰

This is strong language indeed, and shows absolutely no attempt to understand the culture or the people involved, least of all to try and accommodate what could arguably have been far less of a problem had it been dealt with differently. Prohibition has proved to be ineffective at best, and at worst can lead to death through overdosing, as happened on one occasion at this club. The authorities, though, were clearly determined to stamp out what they saw as a 'blight', rather than recognising that it was a genuine cultural movement borne of a lack of outlets. Many considered those involved to be distasteful and / or anti-social; this was also the case with mainstream nightlife, especially in the Bigg Market area, yet the

¹⁰⁸ Mark Rimmer, 'Listening to the monkey: Class, youth and the formation of a musical habitus', *Ethnography* 11 (2010), 255.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Gibbins, 'I grew up with Makina, the Geordie youth culture phenomenon that's been slept on for a decade', *Vice*, 01/06/2015 (http://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/blog/makina-the-youth-culture-phenomenon-taking-over-newcastle).

¹¹⁰ Northumbria Police, 'News release: Men found guilty of drug offences', *Northumbria Police*, 11/12/2007 (https://www.northumbria.police.uk/news_and_events/news_releases/details.asp?id=7220).

alcohol-based culture around which that part of the city revolved was allowed to continue and expand.

Ironically, far more trouble has stemmed from mainstream drinking culture than from any local underground scene. Newcastle city centre now has to have a mobile police station set up at weekends, and one of the city's most popular mainstream drinking streets turned out to be the most violent in the North East. Evidence, it seems, is no match for entrenched attitudes. Although the perceived drunken abandon of the Party City years may be a thing of the past, the 'upmarket' establishments that have replaced the 'riotous funpub disco bars'¹¹¹ are every bit as mainstream, and arguably even less likely to bring about cultural innovation or increased diversity, as the clientele is largely of an older generation.

Another indication of the cognitive lock-in of Newcastle's elites, in both the public and private sectors, was the noticeably 'top-down' imposition of the cultural agenda, of which the Party City was a significant part, particularly regarding the city's bid for European Capital of Culture 2008, and the UK Capital of Culture. Wharton *et al* take the view that,

the bidding process to be UK Capital of Culture was an urban managerialist project, driven by private and public sector elites in pursuit of economic rather than cultural goals. A narrow and particular view of culture was employed as a means of achieving these managerial goals, not as an end in itself. As an elite process, the voices of local and regional culture were largely excluded.¹¹²

The primacy of the economic agenda in Newcastle and the wider North East cannot be understated, given the repeated failures of both central and local government to find an effective means to bring about some form of recovery since the loss of industry. This is not to suggest that there has been no improvement since the 1980s, but the region's prosperity is relative. Robinson points out that, '[The North East] has become more prosperous—while staying at the bottom of the league...[It] simply lags behind, now attaining the level of affluence reached in the South East about 20 years ago.' This is due in large part, as Hudson observes, to the fact that,

official conceptions of public policy, of the causes of the 'regional problem' and of appropriate policy responses to it, remained locked into a restricted conceptual space...The market as a resource-allocation mechanism became increasingly seen, normatively, as *the* right and proper solution to the 'regional problem'. If it failed to produce prosperity in the North East, this reflected failings in and of the region, to be addressed by people in the region, allied to appropriate supply-side policies.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 12.

¹¹² Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 785.

¹¹³ Hudson, 'Rethinking', 589 (emphasis in original).

This approach, narrow and restricted in scope, can be seen to inform the cultural policy of the late 1990s and the 2000s, where ‘culture’ manifestly did not include those movements that arguably represent its most organic forms, such as music scenes. With the right developmental framework, these cultural formations can help bring about the kind of economic revitalisation that the authorities were / are so desperate to achieve,¹¹⁴ but the process is more abstract and results perhaps take longer to materialise. The short-term approach of neoliberalism, though, does not allow for—indeed, actively works against—such slow, longer-term strategies.

It appears that attempts to diversify and revitalise the local economy have failed spectacularly, as Newcastle continues to depend on too narrow an economic base. This ‘all or nothing’ tendency could be seen as another form of instituted behaviour persisting from the days of heavy industry, and can be discerned throughout the branding campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s, when the city appeared to be overwhelmingly reliant on profit generation from the mainstream leisure sector. This pattern continues today, as the construction of student accommodation seems to be enveloping the whole of Newcastle at an alarming rate. There is barely a vacant building or plot of land that does not have on it either a completed or near-completed development, or a sign announcing a forthcoming one (the university, in fact, has been playing an increasingly larger role in the city’s brand image over the past few years, an issue that will be discussed in the concluding chapter). It seems that the authorities have yet to figure out how to cope with more than one ‘regeneration’ idea at a time, which, considering that the current state of the regional economy is largely due to past failures to diversify, does not bode well for the reproduction of local musical culture.

Neoliberalism, then, as a mode of accumulation, is expressed through spatial reconfiguration as much as through economic and legislative restructuring. Newcastle’s history and identity have been shaped by centuries of tension between industrial, working-class culture and the prominent global role of North East capitalist elites. These have led to the development of some distinctive socio-political tendencies, as well as a regional economic framework that has proved to be quite resistant to change. Although four decades is a long time in certain respects, in terms of regional economic development it is only a brief moment. Indeed, many former industrial workers who found themselves unemployed at the end of the 1970s

¹¹⁴ Kate Shaw, ‘Independent creative subcultures and why they matter’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19/3 (2013), 333-352.

are still alive, as are many of those who made fortunes from the labour of others. Their values have been passed on to their descendants, who are now middle-aged at most, and in such an isolated region it is hardly surprising that there may still exist attitudes that could be seen by some as parochial, insular or even 'backwards'. If locality is central to any particular form of neoliberalism, as is widely acknowledged,¹¹⁵ then the reconfiguration of Newcastle's built environment and the cultural activity that takes place within it could be seen as the spatialisation of the local peculiarities described in the preceding paragraphs.

Concentration

At the beginning of the 2000s, the leisure sector and the night-time economy were deregulated and mobilised by the New Labour government as engines of economic growth in urban centres.¹¹⁶ The deregulation necessary for what in effect amounted to a corporate 'land grab' of urban territory, in pursuit of maximising profits from 'flexible accumulation', has unsurprisingly led to several negative but familiar tendencies. These tendencies, namely concentration of ownership (or monopoly / oligopoly formation) and rationalisation of products and services, are of course nothing new (the first Act of Parliament to curb monopoly formation was passed in 1624), but the progress made in the mid-twentieth century towards alleviating these decidedly unhealthy economic patterns has been all but completely reversed by continuing neoliberal deregulation.

As Chatterton and Hollands point out, 'in 1930 there were 559 brewery companies in the UK, [but] by 1998 there were only 59'.¹¹⁷ By the Millennium, 'four brewers control[ed] 81% of the beer sales in the UK'.¹¹⁸ After the 'watershed event' of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report of 1989,¹¹⁹ which led to the Supply of Beer Orders Act, brewers divested themselves of pubs, being limited by the Act to ownership of no more than 2000 premises. This led to the appearance of 'pubcos', some of which were new companies, often financed by international financial organisations, and others which were formed by the brewers themselves to circumvent the new regulations.¹²⁰ These pubcos then took the place of the

¹¹⁵ See for example Brenner & Theodore; Peck & Tickell; Harvey.

¹¹⁶ Phil Hadfield, *Bar Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

¹¹⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 13.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

brewers as the dominant force in UK licensed premises. In 1989, pubcos owned around 16,000 outlets; by the year 2000, this had increased to 49,000.¹²¹

Nightclub ownership has also been subject to these processes. The deregulation of nightlife coincided with the rise of DJ and dance music culture, which had drawn attention to itself through the illegal raves of the late 1980s. These largely outdoor events had become big enough that they were starting to threaten the profits of the alcohol industry, which could not be tolerated.¹²² Legislation was passed in 1994, largely at the behest of the alcohol lobby, in the form of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, designed to 'kill rave in its original subcultural form'.¹²³ Rave, having been 'safely corralled within licensed premises',¹²⁴ then became 'clubbing', and was ready to be exploited for profit by the alcohol companies, who had been eyeing the movement from the other side of the legal fence for some time. Predictably, the club scene became increasingly commercialised, 'infused with an alien alcohol-orientated aesthetic',¹²⁵ and opened to corporate branding.

With corporate interests tapping into the 'subcultural capital'¹²⁶ of rave, clubbing developed the same familiar tendencies. Within a few years, 'superclubs' such as the Ministry of Sound in London and Cream in Liverpool had become global brands, selling the clubbing lifestyle to millions. While there were still numerous local independent operators in most cities, by 2000 these were starting to close, for several reasons: police intervention due to suspected drug use, noise complaints from new urban residents, or loss of the property to developers. The venues that replaced them, if indeed they were replaced, were more commonly owned and operated by corporate interests, usually with 'portfolios' of other clubs, along with hotels, bars, health clubs and other such staples of contemporary urban 'hospitality and leisure'.

Concentration of ownership, then, is a defining characteristic of neoliberal economic terrain. Nightlife provision, being a relatively recent area of deregulation and subsequent rapid growth in the UK—the idea of the '24-hour city' and the mobilisation of the leisure sector as a regeneration strategy only came to the fore in the 1990s—has proven particularly

¹²¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 14.

¹²² Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 59.

¹²³ Ibid. It is worth noting here that raves began not as a grassroots, 'resistant' subculture, as is often portrayed, but as a purely money-making endeavour. The 'resistant' element that developed into the free party scene was a later offshoot of the first raves. See the BBC documentary *1989: Summer of rave* for more information.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 59.

¹²⁶ Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

susceptible to this phenomenon; indeed, it is one of the main reasons identified by Chatterton and Hollands for the negative impacts on diversity in Newcastle's cultural life. It is surely hard to see how the intense concentration of ownership and control of nightlife venues to a tiny number of non-local corporations can be anything but detrimental to the development of an inclusive and diverse urban soundscape. In Newcastle, it has led to a scenario in which 'independents are walled out'.¹²⁷ Caulker explains that,

when I came in there was lots of, you know, young individuals trying to get in and couldn't get in, now...it's virtually, other than here [his club, World Headquarters], I don't know where anybody can get in...like I say, to play at the table...unless you win the lottery, you can't get to the table to play.¹²⁸

Newcastle's geography has arguably played a part in enabling these economic patterns, indeed it could be one of the main reasons for their pronounced development in the city. Monopolies and oligopolies have historically been a prominent characteristic of Newcastle's unusually compact city centre. Indeed, the world's first international energy cartel was born on the banks of the Tyne in the Middle Ages, that of coal.¹²⁹ An organisation known as the Hostmen, who controlled all trade in the city not already connected with a guild, realised that if they controlled the small keelboats, or 'wherries', that transported mined coal from the banks of the river out to the large ships, or 'colliers', that could only anchor in the deep central channel due to their size, then no matter who owned the mines, they would have to rely on the Hostmen to see their profits. This organisation became so powerful that even Queen Elizabeth I could not do anything to break their stranglehold on the country's (and the whole empire's) fuel supply.¹³⁰

This scenario was only possible due to geographical peculiarities, which could also be seen to have facilitated the control of the city's nightlife establishments by criminal families throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, when 'there was [sic] about 3 or 4 guys who owned everything, who had all the licenses and had it locked down'.¹³¹ Not only ownership of premises, but also control of the city's doors was in the hands of gangsters. After a drive-by shooting at an 'exclusive' Newcastle nightclub, one local bouncer recently commented that,

¹²⁷ Caulker, personal interview.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Edwin Black, 'Chapter two Hostmen section – expanded', *Internal Combustion Book*, 2006 (<http://www.internalcombustionbook.com/Hostmen.php>).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Caulker, personal interview.

In the 90s before badges and licences the doors were associated with criminals. The majority of them were ran by hard men and it was a dangerous place to work...Viv Graham [a local gangster] ran the doors in Newcastle. The bars were full and bouncing but they were controlled by violence.¹³²

This level of control would arguably not have been possible in a larger or less compact city, such as Leeds or Sheffield, where gang 'turfs' would probably be more spread out and difficult to monitor. The introduction of door registration schemes and licensing that accompanied the corporatisation of urban nightlife, as well as technologies of enforcement such as CCTV, eventually brought about the end of the gangs' monopoly, but it could be argued that the same geographical features that enabled them to control the city so tightly also contributed to the rapid takeover of city centre premises by leisure chains (national and local), and the high visibility of the homogenisation of nightlife.

Where this might have been restricted to a particular area, or several areas, of a larger city (Manchester and Leeds being good examples), Newcastle does not have sufficient space to accommodate multiple zones for different kinds of nightlife—or perhaps more accurately, those in control of development appear not to view the city as having enough space. It clearly does, but with its limited area, and a small, relatively poor local market, it would seem reasonable to suggest that from a business perspective, as much space as possible needs to be devoted to profit generation, with the minimum number of distractions; that which is not already suitably developed must be made as attractive as possible to prospective investors. A zone catering to less profit-orientated, non-mainstream activities in Newcastle's compact city centre, such as the former Handyside Arcade,¹³³ 'a genuine Victorian architectural gem',¹³⁴ demolished in the late 1980s to make way for the Eldon Garden Mall, would arguably cut more deeply into potentially profitable 'consumerist space' than it would in a larger city, diffusing money-making opportunities.¹³⁵

Newcastle's geography, then, has arguably played a historically important role in shaping local economic patterns. Its small size and compact nature would seem to be conducive to

¹³² Katie Davies, 'Tup Tup Palace shooting: former doorman Steve Wraith lifts the lid on life in the industry', *Chronicle Live*, 09/06/2015 (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/tup-tup-palace-shooting-former-9418385>).

¹³³ The Handyside Arcade was an indoor arcade in the city centre that housed a number of alternative record shops, second hand clothing shops, cafés and other places of curiosity, and functioned as a social hub for the city's non-mainstream groups and subcultures. Numerous parts of the city could have been developed in a similar way, however the construction of enormous quantities of student accommodation has taken precedence in the last few years and there is now little space left for anything less profitable.

¹³⁴ 'History and culture', *World Headquarters*, (<http://www.welovewhq.com/history-culture/>), n.d.

¹³⁵ Leslie Sklair, 'Iconic architecture and the culture-ideology of consumerism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27/5 (2010), 135-159.

concentration of both ownership and the types of activity available, a point that will be discussed presently. In terms of nightlife, neoliberalism and the legislative changes that have accompanied it have done little to change this, other than facilitating a transition in control from the hands of a few local businessmen and gangsters to those of an equally small number of corporate chains, some of which are local, but increasing numbers of which are not.¹³⁶ With this shift towards non-local ownership also comes a severing of ties with both the local economy, as profits are siphoned away to major financial centres (or tax havens), and, importantly, with local culture.

Rationalisation

Another tendency to emerge from a concentrated market is, as Chatterton and Hollands observe, the 'rationalisation' of 'product' (a term which is now applied to just about everything, from soap to cities), or from a slightly different perspective, the 'duplication of the most profitable use'.¹³⁷ Jane Jacobs observed in 1956 that '[d]iversity is crowded out by the duplication of success',¹³⁸ an apt description of the process experienced by Newcastle during the Party City period. While many pieces of promotional literature from the Party City period appear to suggest that there is something for everyone, in fact the choice of night-time entertainment was becoming increasingly limited as more and more bars and 'funpubs' appeared. The branding and theming of nightlife venues, a practice which came to the fore during the Party City period, was a key tactic in this process. While in the years leading up to the Millennium, 'a distinctive feature of Newcastle [had been] its resilience to branding',¹³⁹ post-2000 developments in local nightlife nonetheless saw a significant rise in the number of branded establishments, as the city's network of local, independent operators began to crumble.

Rationalisation has of course long been a feature of the development of capitalist societies; the advent of agricultural and industrial machinery and the accompanying division of labour, as observed by Adam Smith, marked the beginning of what could arguably be referred to as the primacy of efficiency. The current global dominance of corporations, with their fiduciary duty to maximise shareholder returns, has led to the increasing penetration of rationalising strategies into everyday life. Regarding music, Scherzinger observes that '[d]ue to the

¹³⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 24.

¹³⁷ Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1984), 259.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹³⁹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 25.

extreme concentration of ownership of the mass media in recent years, the culture industry has become a major site of centralised power in the twenty-first century'.¹⁴⁰ Recorded music in particular, 'is the most concentrated global media market today: six leading firms...are estimated to control between 80 to 90 percent of the global market'.¹⁴¹ Scherzinger argues that 'media cross-ownership and joint ventures tend to reduce competition, lower risk, and increase profits.'¹⁴² This, he says, 'has forced musical production to succumb to the advertising, marketing, styling, and engineering techniques of increasingly uniform and narrow profit-driven criteria'.¹⁴³

In short, rationalisation has come to guide not only decisions as to what kind of music gets played and distributed, but what kind of music gets produced in the first place. Vouching quite convincingly for the continued relevance of Adorno and Horkheimer's notoriously bleak assessment of the 'mass culture industry', Scherzinger's critique focuses on the U.S. radio market; there is, of course, a huge amount of music being produced by American musicians that certainly does not conform to corporate, rationalised criteria, while musical production in the UK is arguably even further from this somewhat dystopian scenario. However, in terms of the mainstream, Scherzinger's points nonetheless appear to be valid. It would of course be ridiculous to suggest that all musical production will eventually fall under the control of profit-driven corporations and subjected to the criteria Scherzinger identifies, especially given the propensity of musicians for reaction against such trends. Within mainstream entertainment however, as evidenced by the playlists operated by many leisure chains,¹⁴⁴ these characteristics can definitely be observed, both in the music and in the nature of the spaces in which it is deployed and consumed. Krims makes the point that 'music *characterises highly designed spaces*'.¹⁴⁵ While nearly all contemporary urban spaces can be described as 'highly designed', mainstream nightlife venues have to be among the most 'design-intensive', appealing directly to and, importantly, guiding the aspirations and identities of their clientele, while simultaneously shielding them from potentially disruptive or distracting outside influences.

¹⁴⁰ Scherzinger, 'Music', 24.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. This figure is from 2005.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 102.

¹⁴⁵ Krims, *Music*, xxxvi, emphasis in original.

An effective way to decrease production costs and therefore boost profits, rationalising in terms of nightlife means less ‘real’ choice of entertainment types and an increase in the ‘pseudo-choices’ that have come to characterise contemporary consumption—‘McDonalds with a marble bar’.¹⁴⁶ Branding and theming has become an increasingly common way to mask the rationalisation process and, importantly, the concomitant reduction of choice. Having a portfolio of several brands under its control allows the same company to appeal to different market segments without competing with itself.¹⁴⁷ Branding, or more accurately *rebranding*, also allows for the continual recreation of demand, as old brands become ‘tired’ and the waning novelty of the ‘latest addition to the circuit’¹⁴⁸ is translated into falling profits. Examples of branded venues in Newcastle include such ubiquitous names as J.D. Wetherspoon pubs and their upmarket range Lloyd’s No. 1, also Yates’s wine bar, the Pitcher and Piano, and several local chain establishments such as Chase (Newcastle Quayside’s outlet now closed). As Chatterton and Hollands point out, ‘all large operators are now organised around branded divisions rather than geographical areas’,¹⁴⁹ which surely has to bring about a level of detachment from any local idiosyncrasies—the very thing that gives a city its identity. Hadfield notes, ‘as with the temples of daytime consumption, one high street can look much the same as another’,¹⁵⁰ while at a global level, Sklair points to ‘transnational social spaces’,¹⁵¹ referring to those spaces ‘like globally branded shopping malls, theme parks, waterfront developments and transportation centres, that could literally be almost anywhere in the world.’¹⁵² Newcastle may have displayed an initial resilience to branding in nightlife,¹⁵³ but being a city ‘generally considered to be at least a decade behind neighbouring cities such as Manchester and Leeds’,¹⁵⁴ by 2010 it was only the Georgian architecture of Grainger Town (and, of course, the Geordies themselves) that enabled the city to retain some of its distinctiveness. Even in such a marginal city, it was inevitable that the corporate way would assume dominance sooner or later.

¹⁴⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 79.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 48.

¹⁴⁹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 48.

¹⁵¹ Sklair, ‘Iconic’, 139.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 24.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

As with city branding, ‘one of the central aims...is to develop customer loyalty’. However, this style of control from a distance can, and often does, lead to decidedly negative effects on local cultures. One of the most negative, and perhaps ironic of these is the tendency to ‘bite the hand that feeds’.¹⁵⁵ What Hadfield is suggesting by this is that the branding of venues owned and operated by non-local companies, which has been met with derision from ‘consumers, the media and industry insiders’,¹⁵⁶ reveals ‘a longing among certain sections of the industry to distance themselves culturally and aesthetically from their core consumers.’¹⁵⁷ Hadfield refers to Ritzer’s identification of corporate-controlled, ‘sanitised and predictable consumption environments’,¹⁵⁸ in which ‘non-places’ result from the shifts in global capitalism. Thus,

the concept of ‘something’ implies a social form that is indigenously conceived, locally controlled, and generally rich in distinctive content [such as Newcastle’s Bigg Market]. This something contrasts with ‘nothing’—that which is centrally controlled and conceived and relatively devoid of distinctive content.¹⁵⁹

This is particularly pertinent to Newcastle and the Party City image. The ‘infamous Geordie drinking culture’¹⁶⁰ that spawned the brand image in the first place has been gradually and deliberately ‘priced out’, largely due to its ‘undesirable’, working class image, as well as the issues of social disorder arising from such high levels of mass alcohol consumption. Indeed, in a recent press article this was explicitly acknowledged as a deliberate strategy by a council representative, who explained that ‘the Bigg Market is our next ‘ambition street’. Grey Street [Newcastle’s most exclusive street] has come along fantastically and it’s continuing well, so the next vision is what we can do for the Bigg Market and how we can *improve* it. We are hoping to see *better quality* venues opening up in vacancies that are there’.¹⁶¹ The terminology used here is revealing in terms of how the pricing out of less affluent (or less profitable) consumer groups from city centre activities is perceived to be an inherently positive thing; the strategic changes in city centre provision will be discussed in more detail in the conclusions.

¹⁵⁵ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 49.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*.

¹⁶¹ Kate Proctor, ‘From Party City to Trendy Toon – How Newcastle went upmarket’, *ChronicleLive*, 13/12/2014 (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/party-city-trendy-toon---8280468>); (emphases mine).

These processes of concentration and rationalisation are, like all capitalist dynamics, ultimately expressed in spatial terms. The segmentation of markets, 'inherently a technology of domination'¹⁶² in both physical and symbolic senses, is another aspect of rationalisation, and central to the maximising of corporate profits. As described above, one way to achieve this is through the branding of premises targeting different consumer groups, which involves the deployment of distinct aesthetic codes that tap into consumers' aspirations and identities. Such strategies, however, are far more effective in conjunction with supportive spatial configurations, i.e. zoning. Control of space through property ownership, as mentioned above, means control of the flows of people that use a city.

While it is fundamentally important for mainstream venues to be located in 'right' place, which will be elaborated later, it is equally important (to their owners) for non-mainstream ones, especially those with the type of image that may be seen as repellent to mainstream consumer tastes (such as techno clubs or punk venues) not to be anywhere near them; it could be argued that there was an element of this thinking involved in the decision to demolish the Mayfair, or at least, not to provide a replacement rock venue in the area where it had stood. As gentrified, 'upmarket' mainstream spaces come to occupy increasingly large proportions of city centres, particularly Newcastle, it is the implications for non-mainstream, particularly grassroots music-making that are particularly worrying. Economic pressure from increasing rents and prohibitive licensing costs have meant that insufficiently profitable venues, especially those in the city centre, simply cannot function.¹⁶³

Grey Street, mentioned above, is a good example. Until 2013, it was the location of the long-running Legends rock club, which by the time it closed was the only rock club left in Newcastle. By the time of its closure in 2013, Legends hosted various club nights and live bands (though these were diminishing in number due to the O2 Academy's 'monopoly over the city'),¹⁶⁴ as well as student nights, and was, importantly, an independent venue (although the property was owned by the Ladhar Group, one of Newcastle's largest property-owning families).¹⁶⁵ As student publication *The Courier Online* observes,

¹⁶² Douglas B. Holt, 'Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (2002), 70-90', 71.

¹⁶³ Ian Mason & Kate Bennett, 'ScENE in crisis?', *The Courier Online*, 18/11/2013 (<http://thecourieronline.co.uk/scene-in-crisis/>).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Elliott Bentley, 'Who owns Newcastle? Mapping the owners of the Toon's bars and clubs', *The Courier Online*, 23/04/2012 (<http://thecourieronline.co.uk/who-owns-newcastle/>).

Legends...offered a nightclub away from the relentless tide of chart remixes and dubstep that saturates the rest of the city's nightlife. While many would refer to it as 'a dive', in many ways its grimy appearance was Legends' greatest charm. It was all about substance rather than style, and the cheap drinks, large dancefloor and dimly lit corners gave it everything an alternative nightclub could want. Seemingly everything except enough cash coming through to keep it going.¹⁶⁶

Predictably, Legends was replaced by a more upmarket establishment (a branch of Harry's Bar), which serves food and cocktails. It clearly targets the more affluent local market, in keeping with the exclusivity of Grey Street, voted 'the finest in Britain'¹⁶⁷ in 2011 (it has won several such awards since 2000). Where groups of black-clad rock fans and exuberant students could once be observed smoking outside (post-2007) the doorway of Legends, there now stands a somewhat ostentatious arrangement of street furniture and outdoor tables, in keeping with the 'café society' image.

Further illustrating the importance of having the 'right' people in the 'right' places, and the desire in Newcastle for an upmarket image, in 2014 the newly refurbished City Tavern, a pub formerly frequented by rock fans among many others, was the object of a boycott by the local rock community and some severe internet backlash. This was for the ejection by the pub's owner of a small group of heavy metal fans, due to their appearance; they had already been served drinks by a member of the bar staff. The owner justified his actions with the following statement:

Since the recent change of ownership and the completion of a major refurbishment, thanks to a different philosophy City Tavern is now very different from the pub it once was. Customers enjoy a food-led bar with a laid back ambience and our focus is on serving great food and great beers in comfortable surroundings.¹⁶⁸

A poll on the *Chronicle* website asked the public if the owner was right to eject the group; 93 percent of those who participated said no.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the gentrification of Newcastle's nightlife and a marked reduction in the choice of venue types has proceeded apace.

The spatial reorganisation of city centres on corporate terms, as briefly outlined here, applies not only to nightlife but could be seen as the rationalisation of social space in much broader terms. Rationalised products on sale in rationalised environments to consumers who, if contemporary 'lifestyle'-based identities are taken as being constructed through

¹⁶⁶ Mason & Bennett, 'ScENE'.

¹⁶⁷ Vik Lyer, 'Newcastle's Grey Street is voted the finest in Britain', *The Independent*, 17/09/2011 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/newcastles-grey-street-is-voted-the-finest-in-britain-5360403.html>).

¹⁶⁸ Mike Kelly, 'Rock fans were kicked out of a Newcastle pub because of their outfits', *Chronicle Live*, 27/05/2014, (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/city-tavern-newcastle-rock-fans-7176377>).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

consumption choices, as is widely accepted, must surely be as 'rationalised' as the products, symbols and spaces through which they interpret the world. These trends arguably indicate that capitalism, consciously or otherwise, has brought about a process that could only be termed the 'rationalisation of society', which under neoliberalism has reached a point where business practices are not only incorporated into broader strategies of social organisation, but have in fact become the guiding and shaping forces behind those strategies.

What is implied, then, by the use of 'the ownership and control of property, land use and commerce' as a tool to 'mould the human ecology of cities',¹⁷⁰ is the spatialisation of both the mode of accumulation—in this case neoliberal capitalism—and the (local) power structure that ensures its continued reproduction; interconnected and mutually supportive channels of power converging, crystallising and controlling in and through (territorial) space. It could also be argued that specific local patterns of urban reconfiguration represent corresponding local interpretations of neoliberalism, which is widely accepted to be locally contingent.¹⁷¹ As Ray Hudson points out, quoting Nigel Thrift, '[s]pace is an important part of governmentality, because "to govern it is necessary to render visible the space over which government is to be exercised. And this is not simply a matter of looking: space has to be represented, marked out".¹⁷² The conservatism of Newcastle's authorities, which has been mentioned already, is a common theme in discussions and analyses of local culture, particularly non-mainstream forms. The broader changes in Newcastle's urban core, from those in the built environment to the regulation of local culture and city space, could be seen to represent the spatialisation of local interpretations of neoliberalism, informed by a distinctive set of local attitudes and behaviours. It is these local idiosyncrasies to which discussion will now turn.

Broader frameworks and the limits of agency

The ability of urban music scenes to reproduce themselves is subject to constraints imposed by seemingly unconnected powers largely outside of their influence (they are not, of course, unconnected, but operate from a remote location relative to the everyday functioning of a music scene). This is not to say that scenes are completely at the mercy of those powers, which would risk taking the argument in a crudely deterministic direction, but many analyses

¹⁷⁰ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 132.

¹⁷¹ See for example Brenner & Theodore; also Peck & Tickell.

¹⁷² Ray Hudson, 'Rethinking change in old industrial regions', *Environment & Planning A*, 37 (2005), 581-596, 590.

of such social formations arguably overemphasise the local agency that can be exerted in pursuit of self-determination and reproduction. As Krims points out, 'just as a historical situation can only be inferred from many acts and products of agency, so does any given agency take its shape, force and meaning from the historical situation in which it is conceived and executed'.¹⁷³ The agency of any musician will always be subject to constraints, simply because musicians do not (usually) hold power. Grassroots cultures such as underground music scenes will always find ways to do the things that motivate them, hence the term 'grassroots': a piece of ground may be concreted over, but eventually grass and other plants will find ways through the cracks that inevitably appear over time.¹⁷⁴ Left unattended, nature will eventually reclaim it, meaning constant maintenance is required to keep unwanted organisms in check. If this idea is translated to the maintenance of order in human society by those who wish to control it, there are various means by which this can be achieved.

As Hadfield observes, ownership and control of property and land use are powerful tools for the moulding of urban human ecologies,¹⁷⁵ but on their own these can be challenged and even overcome. The squat / free party scene described by Chatterton and Hollands¹⁷⁶ is a good example of spatial appropriation by resistant or subversive elements of grassroots urban music culture. However, in the decade or so that has elapsed since the time of that writing, such strategies have been actively undermined, in some cases even criminalised, by numerous legislative changes. Many of these have been specifically designed not only to aid private sector control of urban life and the pursuit of profit, but also to curtail the agency of any potentially subversive, or simply undesirable groups.

Much like the enclosure acts of the early nineteenth century, then, erecting fences or passing laws would not by themselves have been sufficient. Such an extensive program of class appropriation required a complete system to succeed; that is to say, the fencing off of land could only succeed when backed up by the combined forces of legal, ideological and physical power. In the neoliberal era, the subjection of local authorities to market logic has been accompanied by widespread deregulation, the most pertinent to this thesis being those of planning and licensing laws; the increasing privatisation of urban public space and

¹⁷³ Adam Krims, *Music and urban geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), XL.

¹⁷⁴ Thanks to Dr. Adam Behr for this analogy.

¹⁷⁵ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 132.

¹⁷⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*.

city management, and attendant physical / technological measures to control the social use of city space (such as private security, design features in the built environment, for example 'anti-homeless spikes' and deliberately uncomfortable seating, and CCTV). Also of great significance is the deregulation of the financial sector, which has allowed the most world's powerful companies to acquire undue influence over the direction of urban development, culture and everyday life.

In addition to all this, the personal opinions and prejudices of 'gatekeepers', such as judges and magistrates, the police, landlords and venue managers, local or otherwise, can act as further obstacles to the reproduction of music scenes. Newcastle serves as a particularly acute example of all the processes mentioned here, due to several peculiarities. Its geographical isolation meant that very insular, class-bound local cultures were able to develop over many centuries.¹⁷⁷ More recently, national trends such as music have traditionally taken much longer to reach the area than, say, Manchester or Leeds. The small, compact city centre, now privately managed, leaves little room for grassroots culture and non-mainstream provision, for example retail. This, combined with the region's slow and still far from complete recovery from deindustrialisation, arguably accentuated the degree to which Newcastle has been transformed by the commodification of the urban environment relative to many other UK regional capitals.

As well as legal and economic power, the corporate appropriation of city space has been aided by the symbolic and ideological power of marketing and branding. These mechanisms are designed not only to attract investment capital and consumer spending, but also, as Robert Shaw argues, to 'mould and govern subjectivities'.¹⁷⁸ Minority groups such as non-mainstream music scenes are often marginalised by exclusion from the 'brand image', which, as the contemporary mode of marketing cities, necessarily ignores or suppresses any conflicting subjectivities. Minority voices, it could be argued, then effectively recede in the popular consciousness, thus diminishing their presence. An example of this might be the degree of popular support garnered by a grassroots campaign to save a music venue, which will probably not be much if most people have been convinced that a leisure mall will be of more benefit to the city.

¹⁷⁷ See for example Benwell Community Development Project, *The making of a ruling class* (1978); also Hudson.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Shaw, 'Alive after five: Constructing the neoliberal night in Newcastle-upon-Tyne', *Urban Studies* 52/3 (2015), 456-470, 457.

This is perhaps the most sinister side of the Party City marketing campaigns, which worked simultaneously not only to marginalise and suppress the type of musical activity that the council's cultural strategy was ostensibly designed to enable, but also to mask that process. One might even go as far as to position city branding as a relatively recent addition to the array of 'ideological state apparatuses', with elements such as private security and CCTV functioning as the corresponding 'repressive state apparatus'.¹⁷⁹ If corporate power has, as some have argued,¹⁸⁰ usurped the state as the predominant controlling power of our time, then this would surely not seem too far-fetched; marketing could certainly then be seen as a form of indoctrination, having taken the place of organised religion as the most prominent form of the moulding of collective subjectivity by elites. To return to Shaw, whose study of 'constructing the neoliberal night' in Newcastle focuses on this aspect of neoliberalisation,¹⁸¹ 'people need not just to be encouraged to act in a certain way, but to be co-opted into believing that neoliberal policies will benefit them'.¹⁸²

The preceding paragraphs are intended to highlight the ways in which various forces, not explicitly connected to music, come to bear on urban music scenes through what Lefebvre terms 'the production of space'.¹⁸³ The processes outlined above all had profound spatial effects which helped to propel the consumption-orientated Party City image to saturation point, until the changing requirements of capital began to lead the city's development in a different direction

Scenes, networks, cultures, identities

The term 'scene' describes the networks that grow around cultural forms, in this case music genres. Perhaps the best way to theorise scenes is through Actor Network Theory (ANT), with which Bruno Latour is closely associated.¹⁸⁴ There is not the space here to conduct a full-blown ANT analysis, but the basic idea would be that scenes can be explained as networks consisting of human and non-human actors. Indeed, it is non-humans that bind such networks together; one has only to imagine what would be left if the non-humans in

¹⁷⁹ Louis Althusser, *Essays on ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).

¹⁸⁰ See for example George Monbiot, *Captive State: The corporate takeover of Britain* (London: Pan, 2001); also Klein, *No Logo*.

¹⁸¹ Shaw, 'Alive', 456-470.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 457.

¹⁸³ Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

¹⁸⁴ See for example Latour, *Reassembling*.

any scene were removed from the equation. That being said, for the purposes of convenience and to avoid confusion, human actors will be referred to as 'members'.

Actors in the network of a music scene would include firstly the music, which connects fans, artists, managers and promoters, and also equipment, spaces such as venues, shops, rehearsal / recording studios and all of the relevant staff, record labels and distributors, and media such as magazines and websites, and those who create and contribute to such media. Visual styles are also often part of music scenes, so clothing designers and retailers, graphic designers and artists, writers, illustrators and web designers, photographers and film-makers would also be included. Further removed but no less important would be manufacturers of equipment (musical instruments, electronic equipment, clothing), the construction industry (who build studios, venues, etc.), transport (drivers and vehicles). The network could be expanded yet further to include, for example, property owners, power companies, banks, the state. It is tempting to refer to these as 'secondary' or perhaps 'indirect' connections, as they are not part of the scene *per se*, but the influence these seemingly distant elements can exert on the scene's dynamics and development is worth some consideration; these broader connections will be discussed later. Scenes, then, are networks far larger and more complex and interconnected than might at first seem.

The formation and reproduction of music scenes has been a widely studied area that has fascinated scholars of various disciplines. In the late 1970s the visibility of punk drew attention to music-orientated social formations, which were initially theorised as 'subcultures' by scholars working at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, most famously Dick Hebdige.¹⁸⁵ The tendency to group according to musical taste has been a primary mechanism of (particularly youth) identity construction since the advent of rock 'n' roll. Music scenes are generally thought of as non-mainstream (although any group based on any shared interest could be called a scene, mainstream or otherwise), and often positioned as 'resistant' to the dominant culture. The idea of the 'scene' developed from subcultural theory, which did not sufficiently allow for the subtleties of these social formations; music scenes are fluid spaces, their boundaries porous and often overlapping, and they are in a continuous process of mutation (these, of course, are also properties of music genres). Scenes, then, can arguably be thought of as the social manifestation of changes in, and interpretations of, music forms. A complex relationship exists between

¹⁸⁵ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The meaning of style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

scenes and the mainstream, which continuously seeks to co-opt scenes and simultaneously repels them.¹⁸⁶ As explained earlier, it is partly the desire to maintain sufficient cultural distance from the mainstream that drives the constant mutation of music forms and their associated scenes.

Scenes offer to their participants the opportunity to fulfil the seemingly contradictory desires to both be a meaningful part of a group and to assert their individualism and self-determination, but also to explore new individual and collective identities. As a place and space of belonging, scenes also offer sanctuary to those who perhaps feel that they do not fit in with the societal norms that surround them; Shank found that many of those that comprised the rock and roll scene in Austin, Texas, explicitly described the scene in terms of family, home, and feelings of safety and the freedom to be the person they wanted to be;¹⁸⁷ Newcastle's Riverside inspired similar sentiments. However, the coherence of a scene can vary, from a tight-knit community such as that described above, to a casual, occasional assemblage. Also, not all of those directly involved with the music, are necessarily part of the scene, indeed some view 'the scene' with disdain, a position informed by notions of authenticity and related to conceptions of the mainstream. Members can be part of a music network but not part of the scene. Equally, members can be, and often are, part of several scenes, musical or otherwise, and move between them. This is particularly true of those who are part of peculiarly urban scenes such as skateboarding and BMX; while the activity is the primary focus, these scenes often have strong links to hip hop culture, and also encompass areas such as music, film, journalism and fashion styles. As such, members involved with these aspects will also often be part of the relevant scenes.

Some scenes, then, following the definition sketched out here, can be reasonably described as 'cultures', and indeed many, particularly larger and / or more coherent scenes, have their own hierarchies, codes, values and markers. Thornton's study of dance club cultures, and Keith Kahn-Harris's exploration of the extreme metal scene,¹⁸⁸ both draw on Bourdieu to detail the complex and idiosyncratic, yet simultaneously familiar and standardised ways in which the concept of 'cultural capital' (or, in these cases, 'subcultural capital') enable these

¹⁸⁶ See Thornton; also Klein, *No Logo*.

¹⁸⁷ Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), chapter 6: 'The performance of signifying practice'.

¹⁸⁸ See Thornton, *Club Cultures*; also Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme metal: Music and culture on the edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

scenes to construct their own means of social discrimination, establish boundaries and ensure exclusivity. These markers of capital are often scene-specific, such as linguistic jargon and fashion styles, and others are only partially so, such as possession of fetishised records or an encyclopaedic knowledge of the music's history.

The point is that these structures and hierarchies replicate those of capitalist society in general. Few music scenes, if any, are so far removed that their structures represent genuinely alternative forms of social organisation; no matter how deeply immersed in the scene, members must ultimately operate within the dominant framework. Bourdieu suggests that these systems are devised due to the limited economic power of those involved, who tend to be (often relatively affluent) younger people. To feel that they can exercise self-determination, the usual markers 'of the bourgeois world which they cannot really appropriate'¹⁸⁹ are eschewed, their distance from that world expressed through 'a refusal of complicity whose most refined expression is a propensity towards aesthetics and aestheticism'.¹⁹⁰ Scenes, then, are, or can be, effectively 'micro-societies'.

While these descriptions may seem to imply a degree of cohesion, it is worth bearing in mind that, as mentioned before, it is the non-human element, the shared interest that to a greater or lesser extent binds scenes together. In this respect, they can also be described as 'imagined communities'.¹⁹¹ Benedict Anderson, theorising nationalism, explains that such communities 'are imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, and yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.¹⁹² This is arguably less applicable to a small local music scene than to those of national or global scale, but even within a single city, it is rare (but not unheard of) that every member of a scene knows, meets, or even hears of one another.

It is more commonly the case that scenes seem to consist of multiple small groups, or cliques, who may or may not know each other, but—crucially—*feel* as though they know each other. This feeling is produced, reproduced and strengthened on the occasions when they are collected together in a single space: the music event (this is why certain venues can

¹⁸⁹ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 102.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 6.

attain special status within scenes). The image of their communion that exists in the minds of scene members, and which is channelled through the music, is a powerful connective agent. Some scenes, or elements of scenes, do espouse particular ideologies (anti-capitalist / anarchist in the free party techno scene; white power / Nazi punk-rock; the counterculture of the 1960s), and could feasibly form actual communities, irrespective of the shared music taste. However, it is arguably more likely that without the music, most scenes would be little more than disparate groups of people.

The fact is, though, that the shared taste in music does exist, and because of this, scenes are more or less interconnected. This generally tends to be scene-to-scene on a geographic level, and inter-scene at the local. Examples might be a large-scale festival at which scenes from around the host country, and perhaps from other countries, come together for a weekend, or a smaller local event to which several local scenes contribute, such as a club night featuring several different (but often related) forms of dance music; in Newcastle, constraints on space have recently forced this type of collaboration between scenes, a point which will be discussed in the conclusions. Mutual support and / or influence between scenes also stems from the fact that many music genres are either offshoots of broader genres or hybrids of different genres. The latter is nicely illustrated by the 'nu-metal' scene that gained popularity in the 1990s, which was a fusion of heavy metal and hip hop that drew together numerous aspects of each, including musical characteristics, lyrical content and vocal delivery, but also fashion styles and generic ethos.

Local scenes are also intrinsically connected to place. As they are experienced socially and spatially, like all human activity, they are therefore also geographically idiosyncratic. All cities (and of course their populations) being unique, this gives rise to local interpretations of and uses for music—the idea of a 'local sound', for example, as theorised by Sara Cohen in her work on music-making in Liverpool.¹⁹³ This is perhaps best represented by the pre-internet phenomenon of record labels 'cashing in' on local scenes, such as 'Merseybeat', the Seattle grunge scene, death metal from Florida, or the 'Madchester' scene of the 1990s. The spatial and / or cultural peculiarities of cities can also lead to distinctive local tendencies, for example where scenes are forced to seek out alternative spaces, such as the warehouse

¹⁹³ See for example Sara Cohen, *Decline, Renewal and the City: Beyond the Beatles* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); see also Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett & Stan Hawkins (Eds), *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

party phenomenon that began in London as a result of the government and police clampdown on illegal outdoor raves in the late 1980s.

While the enormous changes in the music industry brought about by the internet may have dampened the possibility of global recognition through music scenes recurring for other cities in the future, it nonetheless represents the extent to which local music scenes can raise a city's profile—in effect, doing the job of branding. The important difference is, of course, that music scenes tend to be less driven by the profit motive and therefore, unsurprisingly, generate less profit. In the neoliberal city, this amounts more or less to a death sentence, regardless of any 'coolness' that the scene may confer, and scenes often find that they are squeezed out by more powerful and profitable interests.

Scenes, then, are multi-scalar formations, existing with varying degrees of interconnection at local, national and global levels. As explained above, though, the 'community' often ascribed to music scenes by their members, for example the 'metal family', is to a large degree imagined. The initial development of heavy metal in the West represented an expression of predominantly white, working-class male frustration with the perceived oppressiveness of industrial labour, whereas its appropriation by different peoples as it spread across the globe has led to the attribution of some very different meanings. Perhaps the most vivid example of this is the development of Scandinavian black metal, with connections to far-right tendencies including white separatism and anti-semitism, and that of Jewish metal in Israel; given that a prominent Israeli metal band actually received a bomb in the post from the notorious Norwegian black metal artist Varg Vikernes, it is difficult to imagine any sense of community forming between the two.¹⁹⁴

The value of scenes to urban life

As well as functioning as socialising mechanisms, scenes are also breeding grounds for innovation, the 'primordial soup of cultural evolution',¹⁹⁵ spaces where musical boundaries can be modified, tested and repositioned. The small-scale, local music scenes of the world are the foundries in which new sounds and styles are forged and new identities fashioned. It is to local scenes that global corporations look in their quests for new styles to appropriate and repackage as the latest 'must-have' commodity. The fact that so-called 'talent scouts'

¹⁹⁴ *Global Metal*, dir. Sam Dunn, Scott McFadyen & Sam Feldman, DVD, 93 mins (2007: Banger Films).

¹⁹⁵ Kate Shaw, 'Independent creative subcultures and why they matter', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19/3 (2013), 333-352, 333.

are employed by major record labels, or 'cool-hunters'¹⁹⁶ by 'lifestyle' brands such as Nike, represents this process perfectly. In musical terms, one has only to think of the rapidity with which the sounds of acid house in the 1980s, or dubstep in the 2000s, both born in the studios of amateur London DJs and producers, began to appear in mainstream pop music.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, the work done by local scenes fuels the national and international music industries, emphasising the importance to cities of maintaining a range of venues through which local musicians can develop.¹⁹⁸

It is widely accepted that the most vibrant cities tend to be those with diverse economic bases, which includes having a number of creative scenes. In terms of monetary contributions to local economies, music scenes are valuable because they can develop into entrepreneurial micro-economies,¹⁹⁹ feeding into local retail, tourism, leisure and the night economy, and also helping to boost a city's cultural capital and 'brand image'. By 'catalysing the transition from consumer to producer',²⁰⁰ scenes create opportunities for individuals and groups to establish themselves as professionals in various capacities, for example as artists, promoters, venue managers or designers. Newcastle's Riverside, the second case study in this thesis, provides a good example of this process.

These transitions, from fan / consumer to producer, not only help to diversify local economies but also urban cultural life, ultimately giving cities atmosphere, the elusive 'buzz' or 'soul' that branding projects inevitably fail to create.²⁰¹ The socio-cultural benefits of local scenes, and the possibility of translating those benefits into economic growth, are well documented, hence the drive to attract the so-called 'creative class' that resulted in the global 'culture city' trend of the 2000s of which Newcastle was a part.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Klein, *No Logo*, 72.

¹⁹⁷ Thornton, *Club Cultures*; see also Alex Niven, *Folk Opposition* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012).

¹⁹⁸ Adam Behr, Matt Brennan & Martin Cloonan, 'The cultural value of live music from pub to stadium: Getting beyond the numbers', Arts and Humanities Research Council in conjunction with University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, 2013.

¹⁹⁹ See Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

²⁰⁰ Shaw, 'Independent subcultures'.

²⁰¹ Anna Minton, 'Northern Soul', DEMOS/RICS, 2003.

²⁰² Florida, Richard, *The rise of the creative class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, the community and everyday life* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

What do scenes need in order to function, develop and reproduce? Drawing on Frith, Webster describes the local musical life of cities in terms of a 'live music ecology',²⁰³ listing several 'ingredients' necessary for a 'healthy musical city'.²⁰⁴ These are:

access to music, including music shops and venues; the right sort of spaces for both the production and consumption of music; 'musical time' [time to develop as a musician]; opportunities for freelance work; an influx and outflow of people; and a blurring of the boundaries between professional and amateur musicians.²⁰⁵

Adding to this list, Webster also points out that 'there needs to be...a range of venues (small, large, "professional", "amateur")...in order for new talent to be allowed to develop, as well as an environment in which there can be an overlapping of these "amateur" and "professional" spheres.'²⁰⁶ This point is further highlighted by Behr *et al*, who cite Guy Dunstan of the Birmingham NEC and the National Arenas Association. Dunstan explains that 'some of the issues and where the support is needed is at the smaller end of the scale, and at the grassroots level. Because we're reliant on artists being developed through that network and scaling up to arena acts'.²⁰⁷ A range of venues, then, is imperative if local amateur musicians are to be able to develop their skills and move, should they desire, into the professional sphere. This means that cities 'need a network of musical pathways around them that are "on the beaten track" and "off the beaten track", namely those that are relatively easy to find and those that require more effort or are relatively hidden';²⁰⁸ these urban musical pathways will form the core of the analysis in the first case study of this thesis, the Mayfair Ballroom.

Webster's research focuses on the role of promoters, and she adds that a network of promoters is also necessary to ensure the musical health of a city. However, regardless of the number of musicians and promoters, record labels and rehearsal spaces, or the size of a local audience for any given form of music, the overriding criterion must surely be space to perform. Opportunities for work, the existence of musical pathways, and chances for amateur and professional²⁰⁹ musicians to encounter each other all depend on the availability

²⁰³ Emma Webster, 'Promoting live music in the UK', PhD thesis (2011), University of Glasgow, 57.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Behr, Brennan & Cloonan, 'Cultural value', 4.

²⁰⁸ Webster, 'Promoting', 57.

²⁰⁹ The distinctions between 'amateur' and 'professional' are complex, as Finnegan points out. For the purposes of this analysis however, these terms are defined loosely according to the most common conceptions, i.e. those that earn a living from music, and those for whom music is more of a recreational activity. There are all sorts of difficulties even with these definitions, but that is a different discussion.

of appropriate spaces in which music events can take place. In the 1990s, not only did Newcastle have a broader range of venues, but it was still possible for scenes to exist without the need for dedicated spaces. Empty warehouses were more plentiful and could be squatted, punk gigs and dance parties occurred in large shared houses.

Throughout the Party City period, though, these spaces were gradually shut down. Warehouses, if not secured for development, were boarded up and closely monitored, with changes in squatting law making it all but impossible to put on a party. Gigs and large house parties in residential areas, such as that described by Bennett,²¹⁰ became increasingly hard to organise due to gentrification, which brought with it noise complaints and police responses. In terms of music venues, this thesis will show that many of the musical pathways that once existed in the city were eliminated by spatial reconfiguration. Of the new ones that have appeared, many failed to take root. Those that succeeded are conspicuously few, and remain scattered around the fringes of the city; the case studies that follow will illuminate these changes.

The importance of venues to the scene

Venues, for the duration of a live music event,²¹¹ are the liminal spaces in which individuals can experiment with, explore and construct identities. More importantly, though, it is the collective energy that can be generated by a (well-attended) live music event that helps form the bonds that give the scene its coherence. Shank describes the ways in which some performances can be 'magical',²¹² those occasions when all the ingredients for collective transgression come together, that elusive moment when the energy of a crowd ignites a venue, the boundaries between performers and audience collapse. For a scene to grow and develop, like any other social formation, it relies on the constant assimilation of new members. Introduction by friends is of course the obvious way in which this happens, but another important element of scene reproduction is accidental discovery. Unexpectedly happening across a night that turns out to be transcendental, perhaps by overhearing music while passing by outside, or attending a night on a whim because the flyer caught one's

²¹⁰ Bennett, *Popular*, 92.

²¹¹ The definition of 'live music event' used here is that suggested by Webster, which includes both music played on 'real' instruments and music provided by DJs and electronic live acts for dancing; the important point is the participatory aspect.

²¹² Shank, *Dissonant*, 126.

attention, can be one of the most rewarding musical and social experiences, and often invokes the strongest feelings of identity and belonging.²¹³

It is also often the case that those who become immersed in a scene will go on to become producers in one way or another, as mentioned above. Much like one of Shank's interviewees, whose 'wish to become a musician rose to the level of felt desire only after he was already there, a member, a motivated participant in the cultural practice of local music-making',²¹⁴ my own desire to become a techno DJ in the mid-1990s developed only after I had been involved with the Manchester techno scene for some time. Before that, I had been unaware of the possibility—practice changes ideas, and inspires them. For the next few years, DJing became my *raison d'être* and techno culture shaped my social life (had I shown a similar level of commitment to the viola, I might not have been expelled from a conservatoire the year before).

Those who identify strongly with a local scene will also tend to identify strongly with the city, and often the venues. This sense of loyalty then feeds back into both the city and the scene, renewing motivation and often making the transition into economic benefit. For this reason, it seems bizarre that a city like Newcastle, struggling as it has done to reinvigorate its local economy, has been so negative in terms of allowing its music scenes the space to flourish. Accidentally encountering a techno club in Newcastle, for example, is now near enough impossible, as events occur less than monthly, a situation that has existed since the closure of the Cooperage, the third case study in this thesis.

Continual replenishment of the scene is fundamental to its survival. The search for meaning that drives the scene is the source of its energy, the chase being the goal, as opposed to the catch; the journey rather than the destination. Scene members need to continually re-perform the identities to which they are seeking to give shape, which of course requires regular events. The sense of loyalty to the scene, and often to the specific venue, can lead to a concomitant sense that failure to attend an event is somehow letting the scene down; at least, it certainly can feel as though one is missing out. The feeling of belonging, and that one's presence has meaning in that particular space, is eroded through lack of contact, as are the networks that bind the scene together. Shank observes that,

because of the flux and tension that create the conditions necessary for a scene, no scene can ever last very long. Each effort at self-representation...participates in the struggle to codify and stabilise the

²¹³ Shank, *Dissonant*, 133.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

possible meanings the scene can produce. Once these meanings have reached a certain level of stability...then those definite meanings no longer function within musicalized signifying practice. The music, becoming simply music—an aesthetic form to be appreciated within its own set of generically generated expectations. And the scene moves elsewhere.²¹⁵

On a less theoretical level is the simple fact that people's priorities change over time. As scene members grow older and their lives move on (having children, for example), a lack of new recruits means that the scene will begin to shrink. If this continues, it will eventually wither to a point where it is arguably no longer a 'scene' as such, but merely a group of friends dancing to music every now and then; this has been the feeling at many techno events in Newcastle since the closure of The Cooperage. As for the local band scene, again the lack of exposure for this aspect of music in the city means that newcomers are unlikely to stumble across gigs. In many cases, audiences at these events consist largely of friends of the band, and the tendency for these audiences to leave when their friends' band has finished is common. Local band 'festivals', where the term is applied to a whole day throughout which up to ten bands may play in a single (usually small) venue, often become a 'revolving door' of bands and their retinues, with little or no continuity in the crowd.²¹⁶

Musical development also plays an important role in scene formation and decline. As genres fragment, which occurred at a phenomenal rate in dance music from the 1990s onwards, new forms developing their own scenes will inevitably attract members away from an already existing scene, which begins to lose its appeal as the sounds become more familiar. Musical developments, then, have a social consequence, illustrated well by the evolution of dance music over the last twenty years. Dance music scenes in the early to mid-1990s revolved around forms that were relatively new and still evolving, genres were fewer in number and easier to define. By the Millennium however, genre fragmentation had resulted in a list of 'more than 300 names'.²¹⁷ On the one hand, in favourable circumstances this could lead to an enormously diverse range of local events. On the other, in a city with few venues, it can lead to huge pressure on the small amount of space available, as people jostle to book

²¹⁵ Shank, *Dissonant*, 192.

²¹⁶ Again, this is an observation based on personal experience. Having played several of these 'festivals', they appear to be more of a way for promoters and venue owners to exploit the willingness of local bands to play for nothing. One band finishes, they and their 'crowd' leave to make way for the next band and their friends, and so on; this tendency surely undermines any notion of 'exposure', the usual excuse given for not paying bands. It is common for everyone except the musicians involved in these events to get paid.

²¹⁷ Kembrew McCleod, 'Genres, Subgenres, Sub-subgenres and More: Musical and Social Differentiation Within electronic/Dance Music Communities', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 13 (2001), 59-75, 60.

venues at optimum times, i.e. weekends, up to several months in advance. These issues are dealt with further in the concluding sections of this thesis.

The historicity of scenes, like the pathways through which members make sense of their urban (and musical) surroundings, is another important element to be considered in any analysis of urban musical culture. Many of the historical situations that allowed the development of scenes, such as availability of derelict buildings or under-developed areas of city centres, came to an end with the acceleration of the neoliberalisation process that transformed cities like Newcastle in a relatively short space of time.²¹⁸ This is particularly pertinent in the case of scenes which, as pointed out above, develop around the venue rather than the music.

Although the music is obviously still the binding element, in a city such as Newcastle, which has never had a huge number of 'alternative' venues, a space that accommodates a range of non-mainstream tastes and hosts sufficiently regular events can become a sanctuary. As the final destination of a night out, often with transgression the intention from the start, these 'special' venues can become sites of ritual. Some music types can also involve practices like drug use, sexual experimentation or violent dance forms, and the spaces in which they are experienced can offer a safe environment, in physical and cultural senses, for exploration and indulgence in such transgressions. Quasi-religious symbolism and language frequently appear in discussions of contemporary life, for example the idea of shopping malls as 'cathedrals of consumption',²¹⁹ so it would not be difficult to see music venues as 'temples of transgression'.

Unfortunately for scenes though, despite this central significance to those who visit them, music venues are not classed as places of worship. They are ultimately commercial operations that must make a profit if they are to continue to function. While there are isolated examples of state-funded popular music venues, such as The Waterfront in Norwich,²²⁰ these are few and far between, and not without some predictable bones of contention, for example objections about value for (public) money from locals who do not use them. The Star and Shadow cinema in Newcastle, a multi-media venue and the UK's largest solely volunteer-run organisation, has attracted such criticisms. From this

²¹⁸ Minton, *Ground Control*.

²¹⁹ Sklair, 'Iconic', 140.

²²⁰ John Street, 'Local differences? Popular music and the local state', *Popular Music*, 12/1 (1993), 43-55.

perspective, it is not difficult to see why non-mainstream music venues might not be desirable in the neoliberal city, even though councils such as Newcastle's have repeatedly extolled the virtues of the 'creative industries' and their economic contributions over the past two decades. The principal reason is that they cut into space for corporate profit-making, as the Party City project and the trajectory of daytime shopping provision both demonstrate.

Space under neoliberalism has been instrumentalised, meaning that all space, private or public, is seen as potential profit-making space (as Minton was told at a conference about BIDs, 'the trading environment is the public realm and the public realm is the trading environment').²²¹ Newcastle's urban centre has undergone some dramatic transformations over the last two decades that have been visibly geared towards the attraction of mainstream consumers and the exclusion of undesirable, less affluent and/or low spending groups, as this thesis will show. Added to the relatively insignificant revenue generated by even successful non-mainstream venues, the types of people that are likely to be part of a non-mainstream scene (particularly those with, for example, a perceived outlandish appearance, or associations with drug use and other illegal activity), are often seen to be detrimental to more 'respectable' businesses plying their trades nearby.²²² Music venues, then, have been among the hardest hit spaces by urban development in 'post-industrial' cities, especially marginal ones such as Newcastle. Consequently, minority cultures such as music scenes, despite their widely acknowledged contributions to the vibrancy of urban life, also bear the brunt of neoliberal development policies. Constraints on exposure due to the loss of venues and/or the unwillingness of existing venues to take even small financial risks with programming, restrictive policies surrounding publicity and licensing, and the overwhelming promotion of mainstream leisure choices has led to a situation that actively prevents scenes in the city from developing.

The final point to be made here is that music scenes are dependent on much broader politico-economic currents from which they cannot be disentangled, a point often missed by academic studies. Although scenes are largely self-organised and often function on the fringes of the conventional economy, which implies a degree of agency that rightly should not be ignored or glossed over, that agency is nonetheless constrained to a greater or lesser

²²¹ Minton, *Ground Control*, 41.

²²² Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 116.

extent by urban politics. Scenes are often positioned as 'resistant' by those wishing to emphasise the anti-establishment, or at least anti-commercial stance to which many of them lay claim, but the spaces that scenes require are rarely controlled by them. Agency, then, and the ability of scenes to operate within their own parameters, should not be overestimated.

It is worth pointing out here that scenes as described here, i.e. crowds or congregations,²²³ have arguably begun to fade as the primary social formation of youth culture. Scenes of course still exist, but as the internet has penetrated deeper into everyday life, the need for people to physically gather in space no longer appears to be as urgent. Identities can be constructed and played out online, with the introduction of the smartphone playing an especially pivotal role in the ways that young people interact with and interpret the world. It could be argued that this is partly why cities have developed in the ways that they have, as young people's disposable income no longer flows along the same channels and their need for physical spaces is very different in comparison to the 1990s or 2000s. This is not, of course to say that it has disappeared, and the exclusion of young people from urban centres through spatial design is clearly visible. The idea, though, that this has occurred because young people no longer constitute such a high-spending consumer group in the physical high street is arguably not so far-fetched. There is not the space here to conduct an in-depth inquiry into these quite profound changes in processes of socialisation; indeed, the topic is worthy of its own PhD. However, the phenomenon will be considered in the concluding sections of this thesis as part of the reason why Newcastle's scenes may have had to struggle to rebuild themselves after the dissipation of the Party City.

²²³ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 110.

Chapter 3: The creation of the Party City

Origins of the Party City

This chapter will provide some background to the processes of regeneration that led to the inception of the Party City, and the cultural dynamics from which the image was derived. Newcastle in the mid-1990s had appeared on a list of the world's top ten party cities, and it is argued here that this led to the incorporation of the night-time economy into the city's brand image. The transformation of Newcastle city centre is situated in the context of a rapidly expanding night-time economy mobilised nationally by the government to stimulate urban economic growth. This expansion of nightlife was driven by powerful alcohol and leisure industries that had 'been lobbying hard for deregulation of their business interests'.¹ In practice, it seemed like leisure chains had been given free rein by the local authorities, and during the late 1990s and early 2000s, licensed premises proliferated at a spectacular rate. The chapter outlines the main nightlife zones and phases of development in Newcastle, and how changes to the built environment altered the use of the city centre according to the changing requirements of capital. This section is intended to provide the socio-spatial context for the case studies that follow in the second half of the thesis. After mapping the city's nightlife, the chapter goes on to discuss Party City culture and demographics, including the nature of divisions within the types of nightlife classed here as mainstream, and the homogenising tendencies of corporatised entertainment.

Considering its marginal position in the UK, both geographically, and economically since the mid-twentieth century, Newcastle is nonetheless well known outside of its own locality for two major reasons. One is its position as the regional capital of the North East - the city of the 'Geordies', the name by which the city's indigenous population are known (often broadened to include that of the North East generally—defined here as the counties of Tyne and Wear, Durham and Northumberland) and the distinctive dialect spoken there. The other is its now well-established reputation as the Party City, or the 'Party Toon', 'The Toon' being the affectionate Geordie name for Newcastle and its football club. The story of Newcastle's emergence as the Party City is closely linked to various efforts to encourage market-based

¹ Phil Hadfield, *Bar Wars: Contesting the night in contemporary British Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

growth in the local economy through the adoption of 'culture-led regeneration' in the late 1990s, an increasingly popular global trend at the time. Arguably the peak of the cultural branding activity in Newcastle was a bid for the title of European Capital of Culture 2008, submitted in 2003, in partnership with the neighbouring town of Gateshead. The bid failed, but accompanying the image-making and marketing exercises designed to promote the city and bolster the ECOC bid was a profound transformation in the built environment which entailed equally profound socio-spatial changes.

This chapter seeks to convey the centrality of the spatial to the commodification of culture and identity represented by the Party City project, and the resulting marginalisation of some music scenes and other cultural minorities. Analysis will therefore focus on the mechanisms by which these spatial changes were brought about. Processes of urban change are examined in the context of a neoliberal politico-economic framework that forced cities all over the country into competition with one another for investment and consumer capital. Throughout the chapter, comparisons and contrasts will be drawn between the rhetoric of neoliberal regeneration policies and the actual changes that took place in the city. It will be argued that the disparities revealed by this analysis represent a distinctly local variant of broader, global processes of neoliberalisation,² have tended to exacerbate rather than ameliorate urban inequality and social exclusion in pursuit of private profits, to the detriment of cultural diversity and the possibility of creating a truly 'vibrant' city.

The turn towards the leisure and culture sectors, including the night-time economy, as tools to stimulate economic regrowth in many UK cities since the departure of heavy industry is, of course, not unique to Newcastle. However, the degree to which 'mainstream' drinking culture and its accompanying social mores have become entrenched in the local and national imagination of the city, and the ways in which this idea and image of Newcastle was constructed, relied heavily on distinctive local identities and histories. Successive regeneration projects and city branding campaigns reconstructed the city on terms favourable to capital, with certain aspects of local identity and culture appearing to be privileged and promoted while others were variously marginalised, neutralised and/or

² Neil Brenner & Nik Theodore, 'Neoliberalism and the urban condition', *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 9/1 (2005), 101-107, 102.

commodified as necessary; the latter process was helped along by one or two fortuitous events on which the relevant agencies quickly capitalised.

The first of these events occurred in 1995, when the American travel guide Weissmann Travel rated Newcastle at number eight on a list of the 'world's top ten party cities'. The only UK city to feature, Newcastle's 'countless pubs'³ were cited as the main reason for the accolade. Chatterton and Hollands, whose book *Changing our 'Toon'* (2001) is one of only a handful to analyse Newcastle's nightlife cultures, describe the Weissmann example as 'well worn' only five years after the event, going on to predict (correctly) that it would 'no doubt linger for several decades'.⁴ Newcastle was then, in 1999, also voted 'best UK city to visit' by readers of *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine, adding more impetus to the drive to boost the local tourism and leisure infrastructures. The city was rated as 'the most user-friendly, with the best restaurants and nightlife, and offering the best value for money'.⁵ This reputation has continued, with the city again voted 'best UK city' in 2014 by readers of the *Guardian* and the *Observer* newspapers.⁶

These two events undoubtedly lent extra clout to the place-marketing campaigns which, it was hoped, would help achieve some sort of economic revival. Like many other beleaguered northern cities, Newcastle had, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, been struggling to find ways to combat severe economic decline. Official recognition of the city's capacity to support a high level of social alcohol consumption, easily sold as 'a great night out', was quickly seized on by (non-local) consultancies enlisted to help turn Newcastle into 'a business friendly city with a strong cultural brand image'.⁷ Softened though it was by alignment with more salubrious aspects, such as arts and 'culture' provision, the city centre's picturesque and distinctive architecture, or the extensive local shopping facilities, the Party City image became one of the primary mechanisms for marketing Newcastle. Although

³ 'The world's top party towns', *The Seattle Times*, 28/05/1995 (<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19950528&slug=2123314>); see also Nick Donaldson, 'A night on the Toon', *The Independent*, 23/09/1995 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/a-night-on-the-toon-1602520.html>).

⁴ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Changing our Toon: Youth, nightlife and urban change in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Newcastle University, 2000), 10.

⁵ 'Newcastle wins "best city to visit" award', *Local Government Chronicle*, 17/09/1999 (<http://www.lgcplus.com/newcastle-wins-best-city-to-visit-award/1406998.article>).

⁶ Harry Pearson, 'The UK's best city: In Praise of Newcastle-upon-Tyne', *The Guardian*, 22/11/2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/nov/22/newcastle-travel-best-uk-city-galleries-restaurants>).

⁷ Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public Policy in the Party City: The Spectacle of Culture, Gender, and Locality', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33/14 (2010), 779-789, 780.

symptomatic of a more general move across the UK towards the use of the leisure, entertainment and cultural industries as economic stimuli, Newcastle's appearance as the only UK city on Weissmann's list must have been a welcome gift for those in charge of marketing and promoting the city.

As if to prove Chatterton and Hollands' point, references to the 'world's eighth-best party city' still surface regularly. Bailey *et al*, for example, in their positive appraisal of culture-led regeneration in Newcastle and Gateshead, refer to the vote as 'recent',⁸ even though their paper was written a decade later. Another example is the 'Why Newcastle' page of Newcastle University's Business School website,⁹ where the vote is described in the same way,¹⁰ despite nearly twenty years having elapsed since the event; most of the prospective undergraduates at whom the page is presumably aimed would still have been babies in 1995—hardly 'recent' from their perspective. In both cases, the year in which the vote occurred is not specified. The use of the term arguably implies a continuing reliance on the 'lingering' Weissmann title (a rare instance, at the time, of positive international recognition for Newcastle), as well as the degree to which the Party City image has become embedded in the 'the Newcastle brand'. The primary concern of this thesis, however, is to illuminate the socio-spatial impact of the Party City's expansion on the reproduction of local music scenes and non-mainstream cultural life more broadly.

Why Newcastle?

There are several reasons why Newcastle was so well suited to the Party City image, not least its function as the North East's regional capital. Newcastle is often incorrectly described as an 'industrial' city,¹¹ however it is more accurate to describe it as the commercial and administrative capital of an industrial region;¹² this role meant that the city was perhaps shielded slightly from the worst of the fallout of deindustrialisation. Newcastle serves not only the North East, but also Teesside, Cleveland and North Yorkshire to the south, Cumbria to the west, and, to a degree, southern Scotland. Coach trips to Newcastle and to

⁸ Christopher Bailey, Steven Miles & Peter Stark, 'Culture-led urban regeneration and the revitalisation of identities in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East of England', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10/1 (2004), 47-65, 62.

⁹ Newcastle University Business School, 'City of Newcastle', last updated May 2012 (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/nubs/about/why/newcastle.htm>).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lancaster, 'Newcastle: Capital of what?', 55.

¹² Fred Robinson, 'The North East: A journey through time', *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 6/3 (2002), 317-334, 318.

Gateshead's MetroCentre, the largest indoor shopping centre in Europe at the time of its construction, regularly arrive bearing drinkers and shoppers. North Sea ferry services to the Netherlands mean that the city is also a popular weekend shopping destination for overseas tourists, and until 2008 a ferry crossing to Bergen in Norway was also in operation.¹³

The area's industrial past, with strong cultural links between heavy manual labour and equally heavy drinking, meant that there was already a very high number of pubs in existence, and by the mid-1990s discos and nightclubs had also begun to multiply. This constituted a solid leisure infrastructure, ripe for expansion. By the early 2000s, as deregulation began to take place, the city was home to 'a dense network of over 200 licensed premises and a capacity to hold nearly 100,000 drinkers',¹⁴ the number continuing to rise for several years. This proved to be unsustainable, and was followed by spates of closures as the market reached saturation point, as well as compounding social problems. There have since been various alterations to legislation surrounding Newcastle's nightlife, one of the latest being a levy imposed on premises that sell alcohol after midnight, 'to help fund the cost of policing the night-time economy and cleaning up after drinkers have staggered home';¹⁵ Newcastle is the first council to have used this policy.

Alongside the city's physical infrastructure, Newcastle possessed a cultural one: 'Going out for Geordies...its like a religion' [sic].¹⁶ Heavy drinking has formed an indisputably significant element of the Geordie identity, formerly playing a central and more purposive role in processes of masculine socialisation within the heavy industries. However, after the industry was swept away, and the employment with it, the drinking remained (alcohol has, after all, long been one of the last refuges of the destitute).¹⁷ Along with this 'hedonism in hard times' ethic,¹⁸ the profound gender rebalancing of the region's workforce from the 1980s onwards saw a huge increase in the number of women engaging in weekend socialising and drinking. This meant that by the 1990s, that particular strand of local identity was no longer an exclusively masculine domain, although it has been argued that the polarised gender roles

¹³ Donaldson, 'A night on the toon'.

¹⁴ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 20.

¹⁵ Chris Tighe, 'Venues for late night revellers face drink levy by councils', *Financial Times*, 5/07/2013 (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0582ae0c-e594-11e2-ad1a-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2n6XPqvXp>).

¹⁶ Hollands, *Friday Night, Saturday Night: Youth cultural identification in the post-industrial city* (Newcastle: CURDS, 1995), 21.

¹⁷ Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (St Alban's: Panther Books, 1969 (1892)).

¹⁸ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, 'Changing times for an old industrial city: hard times, hedonism and corporate power in Newcastle's nightlife', *City* 6/3 (2002), 291-315.

referred to earlier were a response to this shift.¹⁹ Combined with the Geordies' reputation for friendliness, the branding and selling of Newcastle as a Party City made for an effective strategy, the 'groundwork' already having been done. A brief explanation of the origins and characteristics of the Geordie identity is worthwhile here.

Geordie origins

A strong regional identity had developed in the North East over thousands of years. John Tomaney describes the integration of the North East and its people into the United Kingdom as a 'long, uneven and highly problematic process'.²⁰ The political and cultural framework within which this process has taken place, he argues, has been crucially influenced by geography (the region's proximity to the Scottish border on one hand, physical isolation from the rest of England and distance from London on the other),²¹ and a long history of conflicting power relations and antagonism towards outside control, stretching back to pre-Roman times. In the nineteenth century, this regionalism began to develop a highly politicised aspect as industrial capitalism, powered largely by North East production and manufacturing, shattered traditional social structures and ways of life. Industrialisation brought hundreds of thousands of migrants to the North East from around the UK and Ireland, and many new towns sprang up to house those working in the rapidly expanding mines of the Great Northern Coalfield,²² and the shipyards and engineering facilities along the rivers Tyne and Wear. However, profits the magnitude of those enjoyed by the major nineteenth century industrialists could only be achieved through mass exploitation—a fact of which the national workforce became increasingly aware.

As market-based relations began to reshape British society, the polarising effect of the conditions in which workers existed gave rise to various movements of radicalism, critique and agitation. These led to the creation of the trade unions, culminating in the founding of the Trades Union Congress in 1868, and the passing of the Trade Union Act three years later by the liberal Gladstone government, which legally recognised the rights of workers to organise (though strike action was still under tight control). Despite, or perhaps because of, the hardship of the labour, the necessity of co-operation and solidarity, and the degree of

¹⁹ See for example Chatterton & Hollands.

²⁰ John Tomaney, 'In search of English regionalism: the case of the North East', *Scottish Affairs*, no.28, Summer 1999; 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² Robinson, 'The North East', 318; see also Colls, 'Born again', 3.

exploitation to which workers were subjected, the enormous size of the North East workforce also meant that the recently formed trades unions quickly grew into a formidable socio-political force. In the first half of the twentieth century, 'using the vehicle of the Labour Party, working-class people...took control of local government';²³ by the mid-twentieth century Durham County Council was 'dominated by the National Union of Mineworkers'.²⁴

The trade union traditions and Labour Party loyalty to which these relations gave rise also continue to define local political sensibilities amongst the general public. The Durham Miners' Gala, for example, now in its 133rd year (in 2017), is still one of Europe's largest trade union gatherings, while South Shields is the only parliamentary constituency since the Reform Act of 1832 never to have elected a Conservative MP. The solidarity many workers felt between themselves, their communities and their localities married well with an already strong regional identity, lending an equally distinctive flavour to North East trade unionism and industrial culture. According to Tomaney, the intense regional class conflict briefly described above has indeed given '[local] social relations...a particular character and coloured cultural and political practices in the region'.²⁵ Along with a strong (masculine, white, heterosexual) work ethic, though, went an equally strong drinking culture.

The 'working man's weekend'

One of my friends calls it the 'working man's weekend', which is where you go out on a Friday night with the lads, and on a Saturday you go out with your girlfriend for a meal or something. Then on a Sunday morning you play football for a league, and that is the Geordie working man's weekend.²⁶

Central among North East cultural practices was the 'working man's weekend', a ritual that continues to inform aspects of local social life,²⁷ and from which, as a local cultural 'product', the commodified Party City image was drawn. Industrial social life and identity were structured around the routines of hard manual labour throughout the week and heavy drinking at the weekend. These routines were supported by rigid gender roles that seem to persist among certain communities, particularly those of the former 'working-class

²³ David Byrne, 'Industrial culture in a post-industrial world: The case of the North East of England,' *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 6/3 (2002), 279-289, 284.

²⁴ Colls, 'Born again', 10.

²⁵ John Tomaney, 'North East England: A brief economic history', *Paper for the NERIP conference, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2006*, 5.

²⁶ Robert Hollands, *Friday night, Saturday night*, (Newcastle: CURDS, 1995), 57.

²⁷ Anoop Nayak, 'Last of the 'Real Geordies'? White masculinities and the subcultural response to deindustrialisation', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (2003), 7-25, 18.

aristocracy', meaning the skilled trades that once provided employment for hundreds of thousands of male North East workers.²⁸ Young men would be introduced to alcohol by their fathers and older colleagues, with pubs and working mens' clubs forming the main spaces of socialisation; these were also important 'breeding grounds for community solidarity and trade union activity'.²⁹ Although the industry that gave rise to the 'infamous Geordie drinking culture' has long since disappeared,³⁰ the drinking culture itself has endured. Nayak quotes a 1971 study of Tyneside which remarked that 'the region "has rarely been far from the top of the nation's drunkenness table"'.³¹ Another, from the mid-1980s, found that 'the strongest tradition followed by the young adults we knew was drinking alcohol'.³² In 2009, the charity Drinkaware pronounced Glasgow and Newcastle the 'binge drinking capitals of Britain';³³ the *Daily Record* reported that 'nobody we spoke to on Tyneside was surprised to hear their city was at the top of the bingeing charts'.³⁴ It is worth noting, though, that in contrast to contemporary drinking culture, getting uncontrollably drunk was traditionally frowned on and seen as unmasculine; a 'real' man could hold his drink, a learned skill.³⁵ The culture of the Party City, on the other hand, was represented by a 'global image of Newcastle as just somewhere to hoy as much alcohol down your neck and go home and piss the bed'.³⁶ This image has been perpetuated, indeed celebrated, by the television show *Geordie Shore*, discussed later.

Clearly, the Party City was not simply a product of marketing consultancies' efforts to design a suitably attractive brand image, or of aggressive promotion and expansion by newly deregulated leisure chains, but was rooted in a culture and tradition specific to the region. Drinking is deeply entrenched in Geordie culture, and 'remains firmly tied to [the region's] industrial heritage'.³⁷ Many young Geordies retain the values and culture of their parents and grandparents, albeit displaced and reconstructed through consumption choices. Nayak

²⁸ Nayak, 'Last', 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, 'Changing', 12.

³¹ Nayak, 'Last', 18.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Brian McIver, 'Glasgow and Newcastle: the binge drinking capitals of Britain', *The Daily Record*, 2009 (<http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/glasgow-and-newcastle-the-binge-drinking-capitals-1038419>).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ As a resident of a former pit village, I have had numerous conversations in the local social club, where my partner is a barmaid, with former miners and steelworkers who take pleasure in reminiscing about their drinking exploits and working days.

³⁶ Caulker, personal interview.

³⁷ Nayak, 'Last', 18.

observed that his research subjects, a group called the 'Real Geordies', were 'nostalgic about a time they had never experienced',³⁸ indulging in masculine exhibitionism when out drinking as a means to 'displace, and so retain, the occupational meaning of 'Geordie' in the dead zone of industrial inactivity'.³⁹ Given the controversy that surrounded the expansion of the night-time economy, it surely seems plausible that had the mass social consumption of alcohol not already been so deeply embedded in local culture, the promotion of Newcastle as a drinking destination might well have proved more difficult. But neither was it a simple case of telling people to come to the city and drink. For the Party City to be an effective vehicle for economic growth, an image was required that put the idea of Newcastle as a drinking centre into context, with the participation and consent of (at least a portion of) the local population.

The construction of the Party City

The Party City image resulted from profound transformative processes taking place in Newcastle across the physical, economic and symbolic realms. Some of these, namely those in the economic environment, were localised manifestations of broader processes of neoliberalisation. The physical and symbolic aspects, on the other hand, were necessarily rooted in locality and its accoutrements - a makeover programme, for both the city and its people, based on a more business-friendly reconfiguration of the historic local identity. The Weissmann vote could not have been more timely in this respect, handing a new, market-ready image to design consultants charged with rebranding the city, and the Party City theme quickly became one of the mainstays of the new, commodified Newcastle. In 2000, the NewcastleGateshead Initiative was set up to coordinate a bid for the title of European Capital of Culture 2008, an exercise which has been both criticised and applauded. Some have claimed that Newcastle and Gateshead engineered a 'cultural renaissance' that resonated with the cities' populations and cultures, in tune with the 'soul' of the region,⁴⁰ while others have argued that the whole thing was little more than a 'vehicle for securing [economic] regeneration...driven by private and public sector elites',⁴¹ which ignored a whole

³⁸ Nayak, 'Last', 19.

³⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁰ Minton, *Northern Soul*; see also Bailey, Christopher, Miles, Steven and Stark, Peter, 'Culture-led urban regeneration and the revitalisation of identities in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East of England', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10:1 (2004), 47-65.

⁴¹ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 785.

range of local cultures in favour of a narrowly defined 'policy product'.⁴² It is interesting to note that the more positive appraisals were those written contemporaneously, whereas more recent articles, with the benefit of a decade's hindsight, tend towards the negative.

The ECOC bid was part of a larger campaign to market NewcastleGateshead as a 'city of culture'. Alongside various architectural and cultural mega-projects in the early 2000s, such as the opening of The Sage Gateshead and the Baltic art gallery, or the hosting of a stage of the Tall Ships Race, the Party City image was heavily promoted as part of a post-industrial, market-friendly cultural identity that revolved around 'hyperconsumption' and culture-as-spectacle.⁴³ It has been argued that this positioning of consumption *as* culture, and of promoting a certain definition of culture as a means to an economic end rather than for its own value, worked to mask not only the privileging of certain ideas of 'culture' over others, but also the effacing of important class aspects of the region's industrial past and socio-political sensibilities. These processes resulted in the effective exclusion of large parts of the local population from local cultural life (in the sense of culture as lived experience, as defined by Raymond Williams).⁴⁴

The council published their definition of 'culture' in a document produced in 2002, entitled *Building Bridges: A strategy for culture in NewcastleGateshead 2002—2012*, where it was described as,

everything we don't have to do to live, but need to do to feel alive. It is what gives meaning to our lives....We see culture as everything that enables people and communities to articulate what they believe and see as valuable or meaningful...This approach to culture includes everyone, since we all have cultural values, tastes and enthusiasms.⁴⁵

The reality could not have differed more. Mainstream drinking proliferated hugely, at the expense of diversity, while at the other end of the scale, 'high' culture enjoyed a boost to its already privileged position. Large amounts of public funding were funnelled into several 'iconic' mega-projects, namely The Sage Gateshead and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. During the same period, however, as the council admitted in 2002,

Newcastle lost its two best loved live music venues - the Mayfair and the Riverside, neither of which has yet been satisfactorily replaced. And culture clashes persist - the growth of the

⁴² Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 785.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Raymond Williams, 'Culture is ordinary', in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 3-14.

⁴⁵ Newcastle & Gateshead Councils, *Building Bridges: A Strategy for Culture in NewcastleGateshead 2002 - 2012* (2002), 2.

commercial leisure sector and the decline of independent operators is an ongoing cause for concern.⁴⁶

This raises the question of why, if these issues were really ‘a cause for concern’, it was four more years before Newcastle regained a (corporate) music venue to replace the two (local, independent) it had lost, and why the mainstream commercial leisure sector was allowed to continue growing until the recession of 2008. Transforming a city can take a long time, and to expect instant results would be unrealistic, but blatant contradictions such as these throw the disparities between rhetoric and practice into stark relief. Also implied is the level of influence commanded by the private sector on urban development due to local authorities’ state-enforced reliance on private investment, and their consequent unwillingness and / or inability to counter corporate expansion.

The transition from a marginal city with countless pubs to the more corporate Party City was propelled by a raft of deregulation measures introduced by the ‘New Labour’ government elected in 1997. Deregulation of the alcohol industry followed their re-election in 2001 and, coupled with the deregulation of licensing procedures, enabled large chains to consolidate their power more quickly. Lengthy court proceedings to exploit legal loopholes were no longer necessary to achieve their goals for expansion, or to prevent competitors from achieving theirs.⁴⁷ The councils’ proclamation, in 2002, that more proposed changes to licensing laws would herald ‘new opportunities to diversify the night-time economy’,⁴⁸ has an unsettlingly hollow ring in hindsight. At the same time, the deregulation of planning and development laws, the continued erosion of local authority powers and budgets, and the resultant increase in the leverage of private capital over the local state made the acquisition of new land and/or premises easier and faster for private developers. Councils were made to sell off land that was not being profitably developed, or passed compulsory purchase orders forcing many small businesses (however successful) out of their premises, to ‘assemble’ plots adequate to satisfy private sector demands.⁴⁹

In particular, Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 meant that it was ‘in the local authorities’ interests to allow schemes to balloon beyond all reason, in the hope of

⁴⁶ Newcastle & Gateshead Councils, *Building Bridges*, 19.

⁴⁷ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 64.

⁴⁸ Newcastle & Gateshead City Councils, *Building Bridges*, 43.

⁴⁹ Fred Robinson, ‘Pride of Place – the final assessment of the Grainger Town Project’, 2003.

creaming off the fat of developers' profits for the public good'.⁵⁰ As Wainwright points out, 'Section 106 agreements entail a financial contribution to the local authority, intended to be spent on offsetting the effects of the scheme on the local area',⁵¹ however, '[i]n practice, since council budgets have been so viciously slashed, Section 106 has become a primary means of funding essential public services'.⁵² This again clearly illustrates the degree to which local authorities have been manoeuvred into a reliance on private capital, at the same time that the neoliberal 'small state' rhetoric and the demonisation of the public sector were ramped up in the mainstream media. The situation has worsened dramatically since 2010; the North East was publicly singled out for cuts by David Cameron in 2011, and many Labour-controlled councils, including Newcastle, were soon 'on [the] brink of financial collapse'.⁵³ The introduction of further cuts has recently been announced in the wake of the vote to leave the European Union, painting a bleak picture for Newcastle's future.⁵⁴

With the council appearing eager to capitalise on the city's new title (despite protests from some), and perhaps also worried that license refusals would lead to loss of inward investment, leisure chains enjoyed a period of unprecedented growth in the early 2000s.⁵⁵ Less successful venues, in particular many of the ailing traditional pubs, were bought and refurbished, to be reopened as trendy bars, 'funpubs' or discos.⁵⁶ Loopholes were exploited to transfer out-of-town licenses to city centre premises.⁵⁷ Previously non-licensed premises, such as shops, were also bought and converted if in the right location. Perhaps the most prominent project was that of The Gate, a large, purpose-built indoor 'leisure complex' constructed on the former site of Newgate House, the office building whose basement had housed the Mayfair Ballroom. The overall look and feel of the city centre changed dramatically during this period.⁵⁸ Aesthetically there were undeniable improvements, as the grandeur of Newcastle's distinctive but dilapidated and dirty architecture was restored.

⁵⁰ Oliver Wainwright, 'The truth about property developers: how they are exploiting planning authorities and ruining our cities', *The Guardian*, 17th September 2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/sep/17/truth-property-developers-builders-exploit-planning-cities>).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ John Harris & Rowena Mason, 'Funding crisis leaves Newcastle facing "impossible" cuts and social unrest', *The Guardian*, 24th Nov 2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/24/funding-crisis-newcastle-impossible-cuts-social-unrest>).

⁵⁴ Dan O'Donoghue, 'Newcastle set to be hit with a wave of £139m "devastating" welfare cuts', *ChronicleLive*, 01/07/2016 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/newcastle-set-hit-wave-139m-11551355>).

⁵⁵ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 67.

⁵⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*.

⁵⁷ Cait Read, personal interview, 27/05/2015.

⁵⁸ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 780.

There can also be no doubt that the changes brought about a degree of economic revival, at least for some.

However, regeneration also enabled socio-spatial patterns in the city centre to be manipulated in favour of business, rather than creating a genuinely diverse public space. This contributed to increasing homogeneity and social exclusivity in the city centre both by day and by night; according to the rhetoric surrounding the regeneration projects, this was the exact opposite of the intended outcomes in those respects. If the measure of success was, as with the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation in 1988, the degree to which property values increased,⁵⁹ then it is easy for anyone to say that these projects were successful. If, on the other hand, there was any truth in the councils' expressed desire to 'create a truly diverse city which provides the space for many cultures to flourish',⁶⁰ rather than just shopping, tourism and business, then serious questions surely must be asked about the extent to which this was achieved.

Locating Party City culture

The phrase 'Party City' is perhaps easily misconstrued as a reference to diversity in Newcastle's nightlife. However, its usage was generally a reference to the sheer number of mainstream venues, and the apparent homogeneity of city centre nightlife was undoubtedly one of its most visible aspects. This effect increased between 1995 and 2010, leading to criticism over issues of diversity and inclusivity from various circles, including academics and local authorities.⁶¹ One very noticeable trend in mainstream nightlife provision is 'a clear attempt to introduce more upmarket and sanitised environments.'⁶² This process was identified by Chatterton and Hollands in the early 2000s, and has accelerated since this thesis was started. It is worth stating here, though, that while nightlife provision in Newcastle city centre has clearly undergone a large-scale shift 'upmarket', this arguably represents a shift in the constitution of the mainstream rather than a move away from it. It is surely no coincidence that the proportion of older clientele appears to have risen significantly over a period during which young people have become economically disadvantaged by neoliberalism. In this sense, 'mainstream' is also historically specific. There

⁵⁹ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 22.

⁶⁰ Newcastle & Gateshead City Councils, *Building Bridges*, 29.

⁶¹ See for example Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*; also Anna Minton, *Northern Soul: Culture and creativity and quality of place in Newcastle and Gateshead*, DEMOS/RICS (2003)

⁶² Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightsapes*, 86.

is no doubt that local demographic characteristics have changed since 2010, and that the feel of Newcastle city centre has changed with it. However, the socio-spatial effects of the changes that took place to support mainstream drinking culture, specifically the displacement of music scenes, remain. To better imagine the centre of Newcastle over a weekend at the height of the Party City period, it is worth taking a few moments to get a feel for the kind of experience one might expect on a ‘canny neet doon the Toon’ (a good night down the town).

Depending on one’s perspective, walking through Newcastle city centre on a busy Friday or Saturday night during the Party City years could be either an exciting or an intimidating experience. At its height, the sound of crowds thronging in the streets could be heard from Central Station, echoing between the tall façades of the distinctive Grainger Town⁶³ architecture. By the turn of the Millennium, the city centre could accommodate nearly 100,000 drinkers;⁶⁴ on several occasions in the mid-2000s I personally witnessed streets so packed that it resembled a busy dance floor, requiring the judicious use of elbows and shoulders to make progress through the oblivious revellers. The breadth of appeal that mainstream drinking culture exerted in Newcastle for well over a decade was manifest in the clientele, which spanned a wide range of ages, occupations and income levels. These were reflected in the theming or branding of establishments and the circuits which connected them. None of the drinking zones were further than a few minutes’ walk from each other, however, and many chose to ‘warm up’ in cheaper pubs before moving on to trendier, more expensive locations. The streets would become increasingly busy, with groups of drinkers excitedly making their way between venues, growing more unsteady as the evening wore on, and monitored closely by a significant police presence. As the crowds dispersed, the less pleasant side to the Party City would often reveal itself: unconscious drinkers sprawled on the floor, illuminated by the flashing blue lights of emergency ambulances; pools of vomit on the pavement or in shop doorways; outbursts of violence in the queues that would form at taxi ranks or outside late-night takeaways. This was a growing problem, and by the end of the 2000s a mobile police station was a regular weekend fixture.⁶⁵

⁶³ The name ‘Grainger Town’ refers to Richard Grainger, a local architect who designed a large portion of Newcastle’s city centre in the mid-19th century. The tag ‘Grainger Town’ itself resulted from a regeneration programme in the early to mid-2000s.

⁶⁴ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 20.

⁶⁵ Tom Caulker, personal interview, 16/03/2015.

Gender balance across the city was roughly equal in terms of numbers, but there was also 'strong evidence of exaggerated polarization of gender identities'.⁶⁶ This corresponded largely to mainstream popular culture in general, with displays of hyper-sexualised young women, aggressively macho young men and a distinctly narcissistic bent becoming ever more commonplace and overt. However, in Newcastle it could be argued that a strong working-class, masculine industrial heritage contributed to this aspect. As Bill Lancaster points out, "'hard Geordie lads" are not supposed to feel the cold'.⁶⁷ The flyers and posters of many Party City bars and clubs featured scantily-clad young women, while website photo galleries were, and still are, dominated by pictures of young and often equally scantily-clad female customers. Indeed, it has been argued that amid the barrage of images that accompanied the Party City variant of 'culture as spectacle' / consumption as culture,⁶⁸ the spectacularisation of young women's often intoxicated bodies was one of the linchpins of the Party City marketing campaigns, and Newcastle more broadly.⁶⁹ Arguably reinforcing and helping to perpetuate this heavily gendered culture and space, Newcastle has for a long time also been a popular destination for 'stag' and 'hen' parties, who come from all over the country to tour the city's venues, though this trend has dissipated noticeably in recent years. Newcastle's student population, which approximately doubled between 1995 and 2000,⁷⁰ and has remained in excess of 40,000 since the turn of the Millennium,⁷¹ is an undeniably important element of the Party City's consumer base, both economically and culturally. Students bring in significant revenue for the city's mainstream licensed premises, but were in the past also often heavily involved with live music and other related aspects of local nightlife, for example organising events such as gigs or club nights, or performing as musicians. Indeed, research conducted by Hollands between 1995 and 2001 implied that without the student contribution, local nightlife provision may well have been even less diverse. However, the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 into the higher education system by the Blair government, and their subsequent increases over the following decade, has arguably reconstituted the relationship between students and universities, and affected the

⁶⁶ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 783.

⁶⁷ Bill Lancaster, 'Newcastle: Capital of what?', in R. Colls & B. Lancaster (Eds.), *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 53-70, 55.

⁶⁸ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 783.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Robert Hollands, *Friday Night*, 58.

⁷¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 92; The Complete University Guide; student figures taken from 2011 census (<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/cities/newcastle/>).

role of students in local cultural life. As Cait Read, co-researcher of Chatterton and Hollands, points out, 'now students are kind of so busy paying for their degree or doing extra-curricular activities to make their CV perfect that they're not going to be, kind of, putting on club nights'.⁷²

At the other end of the nightlife spectrum, dedicated 'student nights', often themed ('80s nights, '90s nights, Halloween nights, etc), are a long-standing fixture at many mainstream venues. These nights offer some of the cheapest drinks promotions and, more controversially, some of the most lascivious (some would say sexist) advertising strategies. Some nights are promoted by the venues themselves, while others are multi-venue events run by student unions or national operators. One of the most prominent, and notorious, of these, *Carnage UK*, which organises city centre 'pub crawls' for undergraduates in cities across the country, has been the object of campaigns to ban it since 2009, due to perceptions that they encourage irresponsible drinking and harm students' welfare. 'They take students on pub crawls that degrade the participants, put students' welfare at risk and lead to antisocial behaviour. They make their money and then disappear, leaving student unions, police, and sometimes even the hospitals to pick up the pieces',⁷³ was one former NUS⁷⁴ vice-president's less than glowing appraisal. Despite ongoing campaigns and various incidents of violence and even rape,⁷⁵ the night is still running, its popularity with students as great as ever. *Carnage* may be an extreme example of organised binge-drinking, attended by a minority of students (albeit a very conspicuous minority), but the overtly sexualised theme of the night and the social problems that often accompany such large-scale alcohol consumption are nonetheless commonplace within mainstream nightlife.

Ethnicity is an issue that has long set Newcastle apart from most other UK cities.⁷⁶

Historically there has been far less diversity in the ethnic makeup of the local population, though this has changed rapidly since 2010. Throughout most of the period under examination here, however, it was largely the case that non-white groups often felt that they could not participate in the delights of the Party City, due to fears of potential racial

⁷² Cait Read, personal interview.

⁷³ Amelia Hill, 'Student pub crawls face ban amid backlash over drunken disorder', *The Guardian*, 08/11/2009 (<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2009/nov/08/philip-laing-carnage-binge-drinking>).

⁷⁴ National Union of Students.

⁷⁵ Hill, 'Student pub crawls'.

⁷⁶ Andy Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth Culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 4.

harassment;⁷⁷ being an 'almost exclusively white' city is undoubtedly one of the factors that have contributed to Newcastle's socio-cultural distinctiveness.⁷⁸ Bennett points to the socio-spatial segregation of Newcastle's ethnic minorities, specifically the Asian population 'largely, but not exclusively' concentrated in the city's western suburbs of Fenham and Elswick, which, he observes, represents a 'self-contained if not ghettoised world for the Asian population of Newcastle'.⁷⁹ Drawing attention to the distinct lack of nightlife provision for the Asian community in the city centre,⁸⁰ Bennett found while researching the Newcastle bhangra scene (such that one could be said to exist), that 'with respect to young Asians, there were no weekly events or club nights designed to cater for their particular musical tastes'.⁸¹ This has not changed in the 17 years since the study was published. He adds that, at the time of his research, 'there were no bhangra bands in Newcastle and only two bhangra DJs'.⁸² Interestingly, violence between young Asian men in Newcastle at bhangra events in 1994 'resulted in all of the major Newcastle nightclubs imposing an indefinite ban on bhangra events'.⁸³ While violence is, according to Bennett, 'rarely if ever encountered at similar events in other cities', it was commonplace among young white men in mainstream Newcastle nightlife, yet it is impossible to imagine bans being imposed on their preferred music types.

Until 2010 or thereabouts, based on evening entertainment, visitors to the city could be forgiven for thinking that Newcastle was home to no ethnic minorities except a small Chinese population; the 'Chinatown' area is confined to a single back street and physically isolated from the rest of the city, but at least provides evidence of some ethnic diversity. There has been a visibly marked rise in the number of non-white groups in Newcastle over the last five years or so, but the main reason for this change is the increase of international students to the city's university, who are a mostly transient population and tend not to consume the local nightlife on a particularly large scale. The African population in Byker has also grown, but again seems to keep mostly to that area. I would argue that these shifts in population are unlikely to affect the provision of city centre nightlife, for the simple reason

⁷⁷ Bennett, *Popular*, 12; see also Hollands.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 117.

that non-white immigrants do not (yet) represent a sufficiently lucrative market. Likewise, daytime facilities in the city centre have changed very little to reflect what appear to be substantial increases in ethnic diversity. There is little research on ethnicity within Newcastle nightlife, but a detailed discussion is outside the scope of this thesis. With little to no visible presence of ethnic minorities, social divisions have tended instead to be 'intra-white' and to revolve around class relations, an important point that will be examined later in this chapter.

Spatial segregation also isolates Newcastle's gay community, some arguing that this is one factor that might have contributed to homophobia in the Party City.⁸⁴ Bars and clubs that cater for the gay community are still confined to one corner of the city centre known as the Pink Triangle.⁸⁵ Chatterton and Hollands cite an undergraduate study in which 'an overwhelming 83 per cent of [the] sample identified "safety from the threat of homophobia" as an important characteristic of the area'.⁸⁶ The development of a gay village in Newcastle has been a source of friction for both consumers and venue owners alike,⁸⁷ partly due to council intervention and attempts at marketing. Demonstrating (again) a lack of understanding of how urban cultures and cultural spaces develop organically, the council 'became vocal about its wishes to see a gay scene thrive'.⁸⁸ One venue owner described this as 'the worst thing that could ever have happened because everyone that has got property now does not want to sell it. What might have cost you £40,000 last year will now cost you £1 million. Nobody will sell anything round here now, which is crippling the gay scene'.⁸⁹

It has been suggested that greater integration of gay and straight venues or changes in door policy across the city centre might help diffuse attitudes and reduce incidents of homophobic violence.⁹⁰ The masculine, white, heterosexual industrial culture from which the Party City image was derived, along with Newcastle's relative isolation and lack of demographic diversity, has meant that acceptance of other groups has perhaps taken longer than in other cities; the dissipation of mainstream nightlife since 2010 has arguably helped to diffuse incidents of confrontation and harassment in the city centre. This does not of course mean that intolerance has gone away, but the groups responsible for such behaviour

⁸⁴ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 83.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscaapes*, 168.

⁸⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 82.

⁸⁸ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscaapes*, 167.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁹⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 84.

no longer hold sway in local nightlife; this is clearly a topic worthy of further debate, but, as with issues of ethnicity, a detailed discussion is outside the remit of this thesis.

Whatever the view of the Party City image and its effects on local cultural life, its popularity was undeniable, and despite its many issues and detractors, mainstream mass drinking culture in Newcastle was undoubtedly one of the city's principal economic engines, attracting (until the recession) tens of thousands over the course of a busy weekend. The Party City image also came to represent for many, particularly for the media, one of the central pillars around which new, consumption-based definitions of Geordie identity were constructed. Vestiges of the local industrial-regionalist identity remained, namely the penchant for heavy drinking and fanatical support of the local football team (although this is arguably no greater than in any other single-team city), but these were wholly removed from their generative socio-political contexts, 'their cultural weapons confiscated'.⁹¹ Instead they became, in the popular imagination and certainly in the mainstream media, Geordie characteristics in and of themselves. It will be argued in the next chapter that the Party Toon image became, to an extent, something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, demonstrating both the ideological function of city branding and its exclusionary, inherently political nature.⁹²

Mapping the Party City

Newcastle drinking zones

Licensed premises occupied a significant proportion of Newcastle city centre, with well over 200 venues in existence at the height of the Party City period.⁹³ Much like our increasingly instrumentalised daytime shopping areas,⁹⁴ these were largely clustered together in zones according to income-based target markets. While minority cultures (or less profitable markets) suffered a clear loss of space throughout the period, the mainstream zones have also been subject to geographical change. In this case, though, spatial reconfiguration in the city centre helped rather than hindered cohesion, with mainstream zones becoming more consolidated and therefore busier. The result was a noticeably monocultural city centre with premises that catered almost exclusively for mainstream tastes.

⁹¹ Lancaster, 'Newcastle: Capital of what?', 55.

⁹² Gary Warnaby and Dominic Medway, 'What about the "place" in place branding?', *Marketing Theory*, 13/3 (2013), 345-363, 347.

⁹³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 20.

⁹⁴ Jon Goss, 'The Magic of the Mall: An Analysis of Form, Function, and Meaning in the Contemporary Retail Built Environment', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83/1 (1993).

One of the aims of this thesis is to trace some of the geographical shifts engendered by the creation of the Party City and its subsequent expansion, to gauge what effects this urban reshaping had on some local music scenes. It is worth providing first a more detailed description of Newcastle's drinking zones, and their relative positions in the market-segregated city centre. This is partly to familiarise the reader with Newcastle's urban environment, but also, perhaps more importantly, to highlight the fundamental role of spatial reconfiguration as a tool for changing and manipulating urban socio-cultural patterns and flows of capital, and the impacts of these changes on local cultural dynamics.

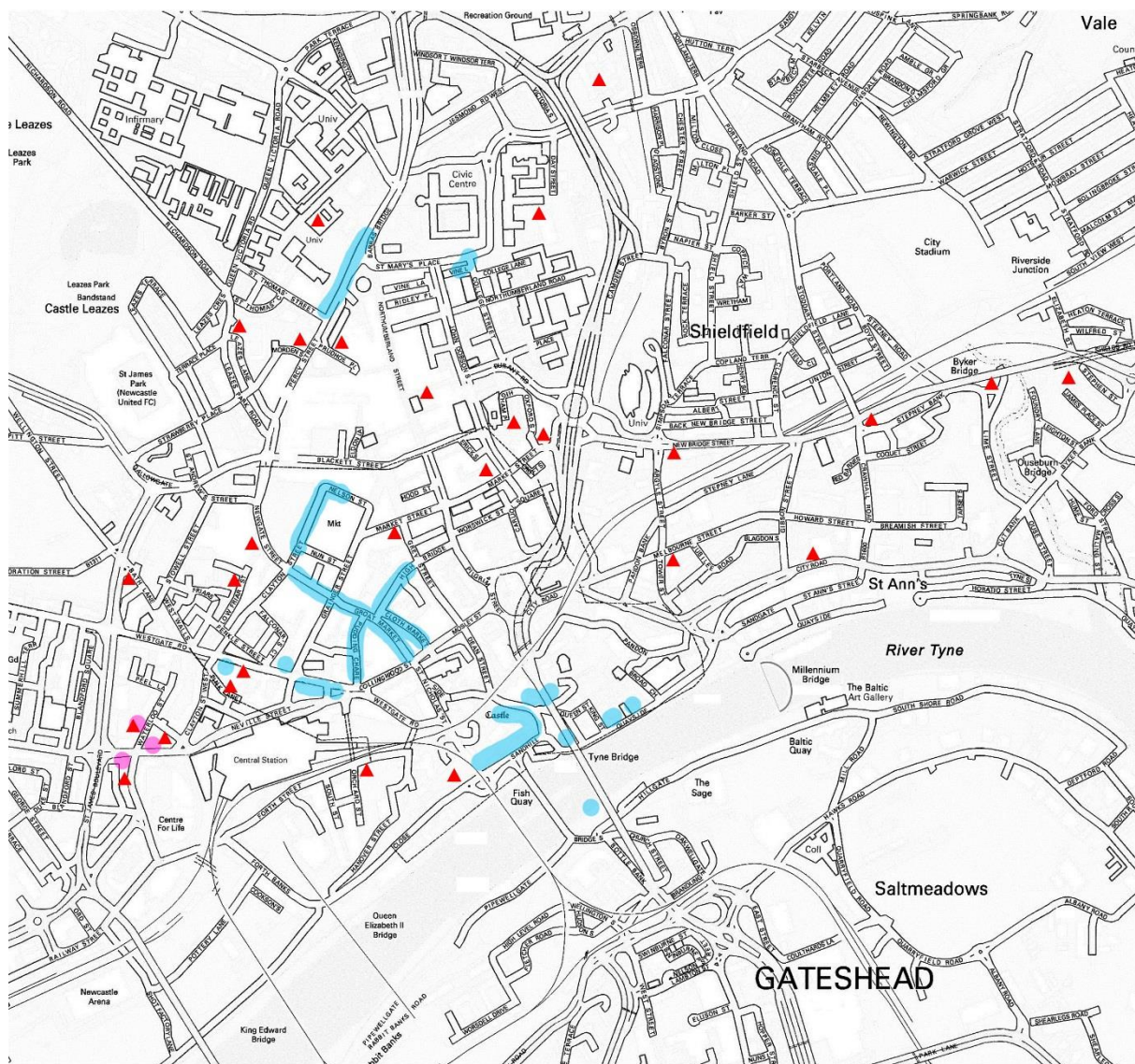


Fig. 2: Newcastle city centre, 1995. Mainstream drinking zones are indicated in blue, non-mainstream venues in red, gay venues in pink.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ All maps in this thesis are modified versions of the tourist map freely available from Newcastle Central Library, published by Newcastle City Council. Modifications were done by myself.

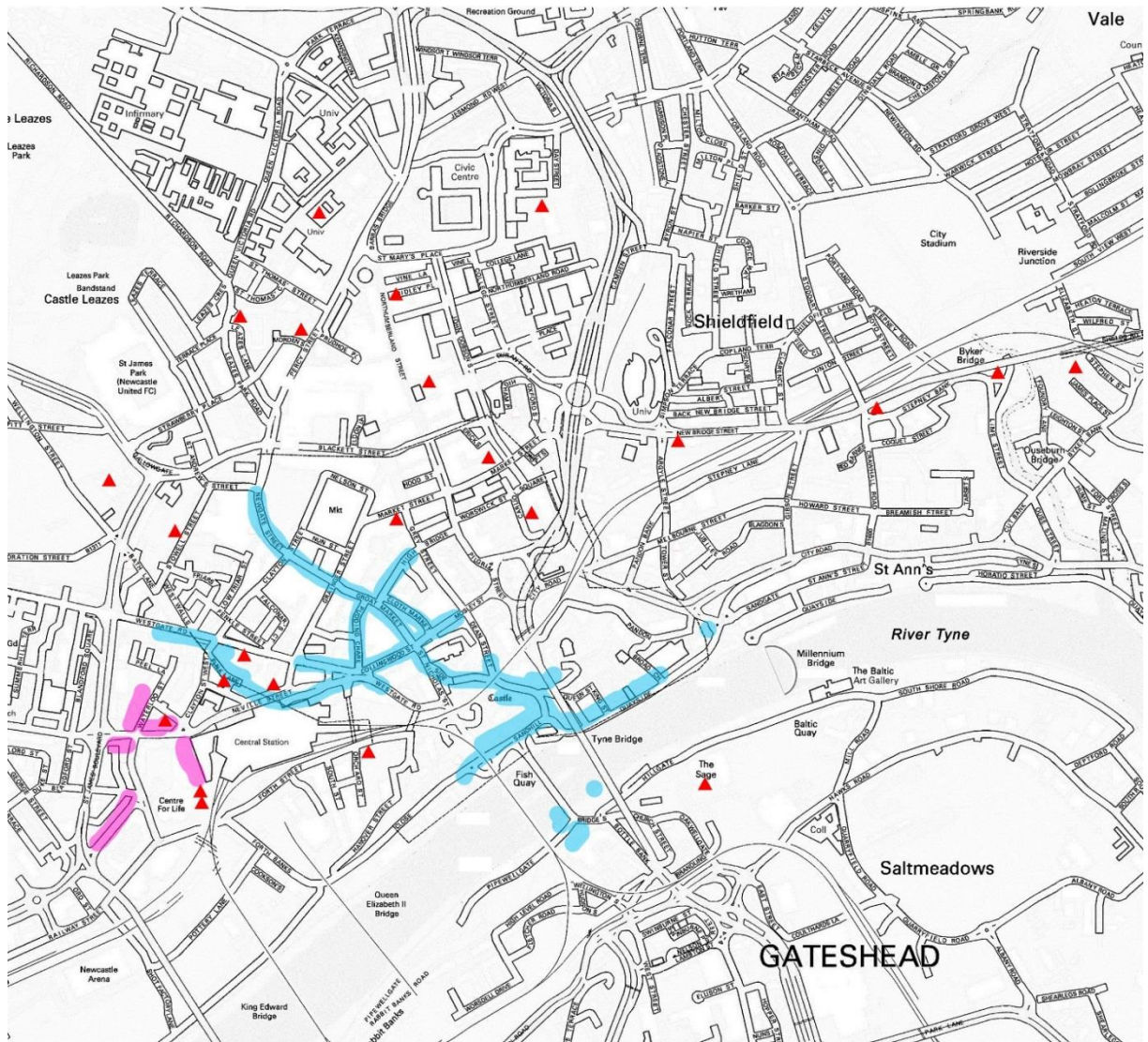


Fig. 3: Newcastle city centre, 2010.

It should be pointed out that Newcastle does not have officially designated zones, the term being used here descriptively to refer the areas of the city where nightlife venues could be found during the Party City years. These were mostly concentrated in a few main areas, so the use of the term 'zones' seems appropriate. The fact that there is no official entertainment zone, or district, has arguably led to some of the friction between nightlife and recent residential developments, an issue that will be discussed later. By 2010, two primary drinking zones existed in Newcastle. Between them, these two zones represent both the genesis and the culmination of the Party City's development. One is the Bigg Market (including Cloth Market, Groat Market and Pudding Chare), the city's oldest and most famous drinking zone. This area was something of a local phenomenon, but by the end of the 2000s, the drinking culture of a bygone age finally appeared to have been subsumed by

the corporate, commodified present.⁹⁶ The other main zone is the so-called 'Diamond Strip', Newcastle's most recent, most expensive and, by 2010, most popular zone. Several other zones existed but were not as large or concentrated, some consisting of only a handful of venues, while mainstream expansion meant that spaces for non-mainstream nightlife became increasingly marginal and fragmented throughout the 2000s.

The Bigg Market

The Bigg Market, whose name derives from a type of barley sold there, has existed as a trading, socialising and drinking zone since the seventeenth century. A lively area of 'numerous hostelrys, taverns and gambling dens',⁹⁷ it enjoyed a less than favourable reputation as a centre of 'debauchery, drinking, boisterousness and violence'.⁹⁸ This may no longer be deserved, but persisted to some degree until at least the end of the 2000s. Chatterton and Hollands point out that the Bigg Market had long been considered a place to avoid by many groups, for example ethnic minorities, students, or those not wishing to participate in mainstream local nightlife, as it was here that the social problems associated with the Party City were most likely to be encountered.⁹⁹ The reputation for violence was also linked to perceptions of class and class-based patterns of consumption. Originally frequented by the upper classes, it was not until the nineteenth century that working class drinkers began to gather in the Bigg Market,¹⁰⁰ associations with whom have also persisted ever since. In spatial terms, the area was an 'intimate and dense network...stretching across a tightly bound labyrinth of cobbled streets, creat[ing] a stage between these pubs for roving groups of lads and lasses'.¹⁰¹

The Bigg Market's central location meant ease of access from all major transport hubs, its densely packed pubs and bars creating an easily navigable and easily controlled network. Catering primarily for 'the consumer base described in marketing circles as the Mass Volume Vertical Drinker (MVVD)',¹⁰² the area was characterised by many premises next door to one another, playing loud commercial chart music. In a strange twist, though, dancing was actually prohibited in a number of venues due to technicalities of licensing. Cheap drinks

⁹⁶ Hollands, *Friday night*; see also *Changing and Urban Nightscapes*.

⁹⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 74

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Hollands, *Friday night*, 54

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 75

¹⁰² Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 84

promotions were a prominent feature of these venues, most of which were sparsely furnished to maximise consumer capacity, hence the phrase 'vertical drinking'.¹⁰³ The trend for this type of venue was a major reason for the diminishing amount of space for live music. Most Party City developments occurred in close proximity to the Bigg Market, with the effect of keeping drinking circuits as compact as possible. The area formed the nucleus of the Party City during its peak years, the general pattern between 1995 and 2010 being one of territorial expansion. Mainstream pubs, bars and clubs multiplied, while less commercial, less profitable forms of nightlife such as live music were squeezed out of the city centre. This expansion visibly slowed after the financial crash of 2008.

The Gate

The Gate is an indoor entertainment complex built on the site of the Mayfair Ballroom, which was demolished in 1999. The main structure is barely visible apart from a huge glass façade, which, at 24 metres high, was the largest structural glass expanse in Europe at the time of building.¹⁰⁴ The centre's website claims that 'The Gate's developers aimed to create a radically different entertainment offer with flagship bars and restaurants',¹⁰⁵ although how exactly they planned to achieve 'radical' difference with 'flagship' entertainment is, I would argue, something of a mystery. Perhaps Newcastle is the only city in which branches of this specific combination of ubiquitous leisure brands (Pizza Hut, Nando's, Empire Cinemas, Frankie and Benny's, T.G.I. Friday's, Lloyd's No.1 Bar, etc.), are all housed in a weatherproof structure; the ideological functions of marketing and promotional language will come under closer scrutiny later in this thesis.

Although the stretch of Newgate Street occupied by The Gate is not technically part of the Bigg Market, alterations were made to the road layout when The Gate was built, pedestrianising a busy traffic junction and redirecting vehicles (and undesirable social groups) away from the area. This was coupled with the opening of several new bars on the adjoining stretch of road, meaning that by the time The Gate opened in 2002, the two areas ran seamlessly together and effectively began to function as part of the same circuit. This did not mean, however, that the clientèle was homogenous. Although the music, drinks and surroundings were largely the same, diversity within the mainstream crowd could be

¹⁰³ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 84

¹⁰⁴ 'About us', *The Gate* (<http://www.thegatenewcastle.co.uk/about-us>).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

distinguished, perhaps due to the Bigg Market's lingering reputation. The Gate, being an indoor mall, perhaps offered a feeling of security that the open streets and 'roving groups' of the Bigg Market did not. As the 2000s wore on, rising drinks prices and the closures of several important venues meant that groups that had previously kept their distance from the Bigg Market, mainly students,¹⁰⁶ began to frequent the area. An internet television programme broadcast since 2010 by students of Newcastle University, called *Bigg Market Banter*, suggests that the area is in fact now predominated by students; this could of course be the programme's intention, but the atmosphere of that part of the city has changed noticeably in the last ten years.

The Quayside

The Quayside is not strictly part of the city centre, and is several minutes' walk away. However, until the mid-2000s, it was one of the city's primary drinking zones, along with the Bigg Market. The area was for several hundred years the commercial hub of Newcastle, and home to some of the city's wealthiest merchants, as well as being a centre for military and industrial activity. Like the Bigg Market, the Quayside also has a 'long history as a place of entertainment, drinking and rowdy behaviour',¹⁰⁷ and was home to various 'brothels, hostelries and inns'¹⁰⁸ which serviced the needs of the many sailors, keelmen¹⁰⁹ and pitmen who frequented the area. Along Sandhill, many original buildings still stand, making that part of the Quayside one of the most visually impressive parts of Newcastle.

The drinking venues of the Party City period were contained within these, some of Newcastle's oldest and finest buildings, many of which carry Grade 1 Listed Building status.¹¹⁰ The Cooperage, the only venue in the area not to have catered to the mainstream crowds (closed in 2009 due to noise complaints), was built in 1430. Next door to an English Heritage office, a pub, Offshore 44, occupied half of the ground floor of the famous Bessie Surtees' House,¹¹¹ which dates from the 16th and 17th centuries; the pub was reopened in July 2014 as a US-style bar and 'smokehouse' by one of Newcastle's biggest leisure chains, Ladhar

¹⁰⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 77.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Keelboats, or keels, were shallow barge-like vessels that carried cargoes of coal from the banks of the Tyne to the collier vessels moored in the middle of the river, which were too large to moor at the bank.

¹¹⁰ A system of preserving historic buildings in the UK.

¹¹¹ Bessie Surtees was the daughter of a local banker, Aubone Surtees. She became famous after eloping in 1722 with John Scott, 1st Earl of Eldon, who later became Lord Chancellor.

Leisure.¹¹² On the other side of the Swing Bridge from the Guildhall stands Neptune House, which dates from around 1880 and originally housed the city's fish market. It was converted into a nightclub in 2000, and in 2010 was converted again into a live music venue. As a brief aside, it is interesting that this relatively new venue trades under the name Riverside, but has no connections to the venue that appears later in this thesis. The Newcastle-based chain that owns it, Tokyo Industries, has a policy of 'non-branded' music venues, and a portfolio of some thirty clubs and venues around the country, including Newcastle's Digital nightclub, the city's largest club, and Tup Tup Palace, its self-proclaimed most exclusive one.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Quayside was extensively regenerated as a centre for business and leisure-based consumption. Known for being 'upmarket', the Quayside was the zone of choice for those who preferred to spend more on their drinks, until it was supplanted by the Diamond Strip in the mid-2000s. The Quayside's subsequent decline was nothing short of spectacular, the thronging streets of the post-millennium years almost completely deserted by 2010. There are several arguments as to the cause of the Quayside's decline in popularity. Several local businesses claim that the reconfiguration of Quayside streets in 2004-5, which involved pedestrianising The Side (a central street that connects the Quayside with the rest of the city), and the consequent drop in road traffic and vehicular accessibility, was to blame.¹¹³ While there may be some truth to this, the Quayside still becomes regularly congested with high volumes of traffic that it was obviously not designed to handle; how an increase in vehicular access would help the businesses in the area is unclear, as a large number of parking spaces were also removed. Counter to this argument, others place the beginning of the Quayside's decline earlier, at around 2002-3, citing the beginnings of the Diamond Strip as the main cause. This theory, put forward by (among others) consultants yellow book in a 2010 Quayside Scoping Report commissioned by Newcastle City Council and 1NG (the local city development company),¹¹⁴ is of particular interest and will be discussed shortly.

¹¹² 'Offshore 44 becomes Hop & Cleaver on the Quayside' *The Journal*, 25th July 2014 (<http://www.thejournal.co.uk/business/business-news/offshore-44-becomes-hop--7508067>).

¹¹³ 'Newcastle Quayside business people want rejuvenation', *The Journal*, 21st July 2010 (<http://www.thejournal.co.uk/business/business-news/newcastle-quayside-business-people-want-4454884>).

¹¹⁴ yellow book, 'Newcastle Quayside Scoping Report' (2010), 15.

The 'Diamond Strip'

Consisting of two streets, Collingwood Street and Mosley Street, to the east of Central Station, the 'Diamond Strip' moniker is said to have originated with the 'marketing people'¹¹⁵ involved in the area's population with new bars in the mid- to late 2000s, and has since become the common term of reference. With the Bigg Market zone extended northwards by The Gate, the formation of the Diamond Strip at its south end created an unbroken run of bars, clubs and pubs reaching the area around Newcastle's Central Station. The Diamond Strip title refers to those bars on Collingwood Street and Mosley Street, to the east of Central Station, but there are bars on adjoining streets whose operators will use the Diamond Strip tag to promote their venues, wishing to be associated with the 'upmarket' image and reputation.; the same flexibility of boundaries is often found in estate agents and letting agencies in order to maximise rental returns, for example when properties are located on the edge of a more profitable postcode area. The Diamond Strip effectively filled in the space between the area around Central Station, where various bars and pubs can still be found, and the Bigg Market. This meant that one could drink one's way from the station, along the Diamond Strip, then up through the Bigg Market and Newgate Street to The Gate, with no more than a few seconds walk to the next destination.

As its name suggests, the Diamond Strip targets more affluent consumers, with prices in many venues among the most expensive in the city. As one local blogger points out, 'since this is the "upper-class" area of Newcastle you do get a few pretentious idiots'.¹¹⁶ Most venues operate a dress code and strict door policies, however this appears to depend on trade. The same blogger relates the presence of 'cool kids' to highly discriminatory admission policies during busy periods, complaining '[w]ear the wrong thing, look a bit off, and you will not be getting in if the place is busy (on the other hand if it's quiet you will never have a problem—double standards!'.¹¹⁷ One of the most popular clubs in this area, Tup Tup Palace, is not on the main street but a few seconds' walk away, opposite Newcastle Castle Keep. A self-proclaimed exclusive venue, targeting the more affluent end of the North East clubbing market, this 'daring new club...attempted to bring a sense of cosmopolitan

¹¹⁵ 'Diamond Strip area bars and pubs', *EntertainmentNewcastle*, 2011 (<http://www.entertainment-newcastle.com/cityguide/bars-and-pubs/diamondstrip.html>); see also NewcastleVIP nightlife blog.

¹¹⁶ NewcastleVIP, 'The Diamond Strip', *NewcastleVIP*, n.d. (<http://www.newcastlevip.co.uk/the-diamond-strip/>).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

[sic] to a city generally well known for its working class roots'.¹¹⁸ The club became popular with footballers and other local celebrities, such as the cast of the internationally popular television show *Geordie Shore* and local pop singer Cheryl Tweedy (subsequently Cheryl Cole) of the band *Girls Aloud*. It is one of the few mainstream clubs in Newcastle that books high-profile DJs, but these nonetheless represent the more commercial end of their genres, which are usually hip hop or house.

Instrumentalising space in the Party City

The Party City, like any other city, was not a static space, either in terms of the built environment or the socio-cultural terrain. Drinking zones shifted around the city, with corresponding shifts in the flows of people. The engineering of spatial configuration to manipulate consumers in retail spaces is well documented, as is the scientific work done in pursuit of the instrumentalisation of both space and music.¹¹⁹ Much of this writing concerns malls and retail spaces. However, city centres and the night time economy are no different, since sellers of alcohol want to sell as much as possible. Maximising opportunities to spend and encouraging consumers to do so is a priority for all such businesses. Whether in a purpose-built, indoor space like a mall, or a city centre undergoing regeneration, the principles are the same. The strategies employed to these ends are often masked by promotional language ('Newcastle City Centre is now even better...Alive after Five has introduced permanent late night opening'),¹²⁰ or by cosmetics and attractions / distractions; free public ping-pong tables around the main shopping areas, temporary 'pop-up' beaches on the Quayside and public film screenings at Grey's Monument have been among the tactics of Newcastle's Business Improvement District, NE1. While these projects may appear to be about enhancing the urban environment, and are undoubtedly enjoyed by many, they are ultimately motivated by profits. Commenting on the 'clean and safe' policy now operated across most UK city centres, a BID manager interviewed by Minton admitted that, 'it's nice to make it clean, but we're not doing it for the community agenda. We're doing it for the bottom line'.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Inside the Palace, dir. Nick Donnelly, 23/05/2008, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQd7x7FQI50>).

¹¹⁹ See for example Goss; Sklair; Minton.

¹²⁰ NE1, 'Alive after Five', *Get into Newcastle* (<http://www.getintonewcastle.co.uk/alive-after-five/>).

¹²¹ Minton, *Ground Control*, 42.

I want to argue here that the shift from the Quayside to the Diamond Strip as Newcastle's main upmarket drinking zone represents a strategy of spatial engineering largely conforming to the principles that underpin mall design.¹²² One of the main issues with the Quayside was the 'friction of distance' created by its relative isolation from the rest of the city centre. Eliminating this spatial aspect would boost alcohol profits by concentrating consumer spending in a more compact area. This shift also paved the way to reconstructing the Quayside for a more affluent, middle-class market, many of whom may well have found mainstream drinking culture to be distasteful and even threatening. After several fallow years, the Quayside has recently been repopulated, this time with respectable-looking 'eateries' and pubs clearly aimed at an older, more reserved and more affluent market. Although the popularity of the Diamond Strip and its supplanting of the Quayside as Newcastle's upmarket zone is often framed as the spatial result of changing consumer preferences, it also seems reasonable to suggest that it was equally due to the strategic purchasing of venues by leisure chains; consumer demand does not open new premises by itself. As venues open and close in different locations, so the geography, popularity and, indeed, existence of zones changes over time, as do their implied boundaries. Often these shifts are attributed to changes in consumer tastes, or the (in)ability of businesses and management to respond to these changes. The scoping study cited earlier confirms this, offering several possible reasons for the decline in nightlife activity on the Quayside:

The decline of the evening economy has been attributed to a number of factors, including:

Change of ownership of licensed premises, with a number of highly regarded locally-owned businesses being acquired by national and regional chains: it has been suggested that the latter might not have understood the local market well enough and may have been slow to adapt when faced with the need for change.

The rise of new evening economy hotspots, including the Collingwood Street/Moseley Street "Diamond Strip", The Gate, Jesmond and Ouseburn; these locations cater for different market segments but are all perceived to be more conveniently located.¹²³

Explanations such as these clearly emphasise the agency of consumers, and appear to position businesses as struggling to keep up with the whims of fickle customers. On the surface, this perspective might seem logical enough. However, consumer preferences can just as easily be manipulated. Location is famously paramount to ensuring business success, and operators employ many different tactics to secure premises 'at the fulcrum of an

¹²² Goss, 'The magic of the mall'.

¹²³ yellow book, 'Newcastle Quayside Scoping Report', 15.

established drinking circuit',¹²⁴ or to prevent competitors from doing so.¹²⁵ Acquiring premises in close enough proximity to these 'fulcrum' points enables the new venues to be incorporated into a circuit relatively seamlessly, meaning high profits from the outset. Indeed, the rapid expansion of one of the dominant local chains throughout the Party City years, the now defunct *Ultimate Leisure*, was predicated on exactly this tactic. Their former chief executive, Bob Senior, boasts that, 'one of the reasons we're so successful is our ability to identify prime sites in the fulcrum position of established drinking circuits'.¹²⁶

But even the most established circuits had to begin somewhere. Opening a bar just around the corner from an already popular venue will more than likely attract customers who are already in the vicinity and know they can easily move elsewhere if the new place is not to their liking. Faced with the choice between a few minutes' walk down a steep, cobbled hill, or a few steps around the corner, it seems reasonable to suggest that the latter will be the most popular. Several new venues later and, assuming customers are successfully retained, the foundations of a new circuit are laid. The importance of 'spatial agglomeration' to retail and leisure business is indisputable,¹²⁷ and if a company is big enough, like *Ultimate Leisure*, 'you can create your own mini-circuit within your own building boundary'.¹²⁸ This comment arguably confirms the theory that agency in the formation of socio-spatial patterns in fact rests predominantly with businesses and landlords. Customers can indeed choose not to patronise certain venues or zones, but they can also be encouraged or manipulated into choosing different ones; if a zone or venue closes, the option is eliminated. Convenience is a powerful tool for the retailer, as few consumers will deliberately go out of their way for something they can obtain closer by.

In this way, the crowds of revellers whose presence had begun to cause friction on the Quayside, with its growing number of affluent residents, were coaxed away from an area initially intended to be more upmarket, and up the hill into a new, conveniently positioned extension to an already busy drinking zone. Viewed from this perspective, it is not hard to imagine that the inception of the Diamond Strip and the resulting concentration of drinkers was a deliberate strategy, rather than a failure of business to respond to changing consumer

¹²⁴ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 62.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹²⁸ 'CEO interview: Ultimate Leisure PLC', *The Wall Street Transcript*, 18th September 2000 (<http://www.twst.com/interview/6295>).

tastes. It makes sense that a concentrated, compact circuit is more profitable for venue operators, and throughout the Party City period, the geographical patterns produced by the openings and closures of Newcastle venues, and the gentrification of local nightlife and culture, point towards economic rather than cultural or civic goals. Newcastle's mainstream drinking zones were always well defined, but by 2010, as explained earlier, they had been effectively merged into one continuous loop, meaning consumers could spend less time moving between venues and more time at the bar.

Profitability aside, there are other reasons for this consolidation of space. A concentrated crowd is easier to police and control, meaning more efficiency for both venue owners and local authorities alike. It is difficult to argue that a boisterous drinking culture such as that which existed in Newcastle will not pose problems if allowed to spread unchecked, or that the increasingly common anti-social behaviour that accompanied it was in any way acceptable. Keeping drinkers confined to one central area would help local police monitor and control any trouble, while also presenting a more profitable arrangement for venue owners. Perhaps confirming this, a member of the local police, some of whom were also vocally opposed to the mass drinking culture that pervaded the city, acknowledged that through strategic spatial change, 'you can influence people's behaviour, you can design out the problems'.¹²⁹ Given also that various figures, particularly among the local council, had long been calling for a 'move away from the loutish Party City image',¹³⁰ the suggestion that the Quayside / Diamond Strip shift was as much a deliberate strategy as an organic economic process may not seem so far-fetched.

The spatial concentration of mainstream drinkers may make good business sense, but its corollary is the loss of that space, or set of spaces, for other groups. Although there were one or two non-mainstream venues within the city centre's boundaries, and physical exclusion from a city centre is rarely explicit or enforced, the overwhelming presence of drunken and sometimes violent revellers amounted to a form of spatial / territorial appropriation. Were another, less profitable, group to attempt to colonise an area of the city in such a way, their efforts would surely meet with immediate suppression. Throughout the 1990s, as the wholesale 'consumerisation' of city space was still gathering momentum, it may have been possible for some minority groups to appropriate sections of the city 'by

¹²⁹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 46.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

claiming them as their own'.¹³¹ As the 2000s wore on, however, legislation and urban governance became increasingly intolerant towards alternative, unsanctioned uses of space. Skaters, for example, are one 'nuisance' group that have been subjected to 'designing out' of city centres. A range of measures have been adopted by local authorities and private urban landowners, including physical anti-skating features in the built environment (the now-ubiquitous metal knobs that adorn benches, ledges and walls), and on-the-spot fines, in order to prevent the city's topography being used in non-prescribed ways,¹³² thereby deterring shoppers.¹³³ In Newcastle, goths and punks have also been 'harangued due to their negative effects on consumers'¹³⁴ by local businesses who claimed the presence of these groups was damaging to their profits. Homeless people are another example of undesirable groups subjected to exclusion, among the techniques for which is the installation of 'anti-homeless spikes'.¹³⁵ Hadfield points out that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, which was largely a move to suppress the burgeoning, illegal 'rave' culture of the time, was passed with the ostensible intention of protecting local communities. These, it was argued, 'should not have to put up with, or even fear the prospect of, mass invasions by those who selfishly gather, regardless of the rights of others'.¹³⁶ Rave culture had famously 'eschewed alcohol and licensed premises',¹³⁷ and therefore constituted 'behaviour [that] could not be tolerated (it was beginning to affect the bottom line)'.¹³⁸ Hadfield goes on to compare the political suppression of rave with the government's 'subsequent defence of business interests in relation to extended hours and cumulative impact',¹³⁹ observing that,

[t]he new night-time high streets...encouraged the "mass invasion" of public and private space by large crowds of intoxicated young people...and generally caused distress to innocent residential communities. The difference was, of course, that, unlike rave, the proceeds of this particular form of psychoactive consumption could be channelled into the pockets of corporate investors and used to drive the economic renaissance of post-industrial cities.¹⁴⁰

¹³¹ Hollands, *Friday night*, 18.

¹³² Adam Jenson, Jon Swords & Michael Jeffries, 'The Accidental Youth Club: Skateboarding in Newcastle-Gateshead', *Journal of Urban Design*, 17:3 (2012), 371-388; see also Minton, *Ground Control*.

¹³³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 116.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Leah Borromeo, 'These anti-homeless spikes are brutal. We need to get rid of them', *The Guardian*, 23/07/2015 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/23/anti-homeless-spikes-inhumane-defensive-architecture>).

¹³⁶ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 59.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

In addition, the laws surrounding squatting, which constituted an important element of rave and particularly free party culture, have been made progressively tighter over the past few decades, with squatting eventually criminalised in 2012. This has made any attempt to appropriate space almost impossible, and has been diligently enforced; aggressive protection of private property has been a central part of the neoliberalisation process.

While certain minorities, then, were increasingly excluded, ‘designed’ or literally hounded out of city centre spaces by day,¹⁴¹ usually due to perceived negative impacts on retail profits, the night-time colonisation of the city centre by intoxicated and often far more anti-social young adults went largely unchallenged, except in political rhetoric. What is more, it proceeded with both corporate and government backing, to the detriment of urban diversity and more effective approaches to regeneration. This is not to say that local authorities were either oblivious or indifferent to the negative aspects of mainstream drinking culture—clearly they were neither. However, the New Labour government were intent on further deregulation that would allow market forces to shape patterns of development. Correlations between alcohol consumption and street violence need no introduction, yet the number of new mainstream premises exploded in the early 2000s while the New Labour government wilfully ignored the advice of experts. Hadfield reveals that expert advice was actively ignored in favour of pacifying the alcohol industry.¹⁴² Home Office Minister Hazel Blears, discussing the Licensing Act 2003, was frank in her dismissal of the issues regarding social order raised by government-appointed advisors, saying, ‘I respect the scientific view, but it wasn’t for us. We needed practical measures...Alcohol is a legal product and it is a huge part of our economy.’¹⁴³

On the topic of anti-social behaviour, it is worth noting that it is overwhelmingly mainstream venues that are the hubs of disturbance. Outside The Gate, opposite the spot where the Mayfair once stood, a mobile police station has become a regular weekend fixture; as Caulker points out, ‘[t]he Mayfair never used to have that!’¹⁴⁴ The Bigg Market, as explained earlier, has long been perceived to be a place of violence, actively avoided by almost everyone but its regulars throughout the Party Toon years.¹⁴⁵ In 2014, Collingwood Street

¹⁴¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 116.

¹⁴² Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Caulker, personal interview.

¹⁴⁵ See Hollands.

(the main part of the Diamond Strip), along with Westmorland Road (another area popular with drinkers on the edge of the Pink Triangle), 'earned the unenviable title of being the North East's most violent postcodes'.¹⁴⁶ Despite the well documented connections and conclusive evidence that mass alcohol consumption is one of the biggest causes of street violence, though, it was non-mainstream nights, especially underground dance music clubs, that tended to be the objects of police raids or closures;¹⁴⁷ this continued to be the case throughout the 2000s (and to an extent still is). Equally, non-mainstream venues applying for new licenses or extensions to existing licences would often encounter objections from the police, while the leisure chains continued to amass premises.¹⁴⁸

Urban spatial segregation and class

Segregation in the built environment has long been one of the most fundamental and conspicuous aspects of urban development; there cannot be a single urban centre in the world that does not contain 'upmarket' and 'downmarket' shopping areas; districts identified by ethnicity or sexual orientation; 'cultural quarters' where artistic and creative groups agglomerate; and so on. Underlying this segregation are economic forces generated by capitalism's need to ensure the appropriate conditions for efficient reproduction and profitability. As neoliberalism has exacerbated the wealth gap, economic segregation in general has become even more visible, the most affluent literally erecting barriers to their poorer neighbours; the rise of gated communities is testament to the atomisation of society brought about by such extreme polarisation of wealth. At the other end of the scale, much newly-built, so-called 'affordable' housing in the UK remains too expensive for many of those who arguably need it the most—younger working generations, whose relative incomes have declined sharply over the last decade (this is perhaps one of the principal factors behind the changes in Newcastle over the past few decades; a desire to change the city's image may have existed, but the move upmarket is arguably as much the result of business responses to shifts in profitable markets). Likewise, service provision in less affluent areas, especially outlying ones such as the former pit villages of the North East, is often poor

¹⁴⁶ Sophie Doughty, 'Chronicle Crime Hotspots: City centre streets most violent in North East', Chronicle Live, 4th June 2014 (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/chronicle-crime-hotspots-city-centre-7217753>).

¹⁴⁷ Bennett, *Popular Music*, 86.

¹⁴⁸ Caulker, personal interview.

compared to that found in wealthier urban zones, leaving the poorer areas stuck in a cycle of neglect and disinvestment.

The negative effects of such uneven development are clear, with economic exclusion ultimately breeding fear and mistrust.¹⁴⁹ In a broader context, Harvey points out that cities have, ‘from their very beginnings...depended on the availability of surplus food and labour,’ and so ‘urbanisation and class formation have, therefore, always gone together’.¹⁵⁰ One of the thorniest of political issues, class is ‘the foundational inequality necessary to the reproduction of capitalism.’¹⁵¹ Harvey’s argument that ‘the answer of existing political power is either to deny that class exists, or to say that the category is so confusing and complicated...as to be analytically useless’,¹⁵² can usefully be augmented with a third tactic, which is to publicly confront the class issue and glibly promise to eradicate it; all are reflected in claims made by successive governments since the 1960s. Harold Wilson ‘made a famous pitch for a classless society at the [Labour] party conference in 1963’;¹⁵³ Margaret Thatcher ‘declared war’ on both the upper-class element of her own party and on the country’s organised working class; John Major followed Wilson and ‘famously declared that his aim was to create a “classless society”’;¹⁵⁴ while Tony Blair simply claimed that ‘the class war is over’.¹⁵⁵ The idea that ‘class’ either no longer exists, or is no longer relevant, in a country that has operated a system of hereditary peerages and ‘ridiculous titles’ since the Middle Ages,¹⁵⁶ not to mention retaining a monarchy, is arguably one of the most bizarre tropes in British politics. But this deflection means that ‘the question of class gets evaded, denied or ignored, whether it be so in hegemonic intellectual constructions of the world...or in practical politics’.¹⁵⁷ At a time when the increasing disparity of wealth is at the forefront of popular consciousness, Harvey’s observation could hardly be less pertinent.

One reason that claims of a ‘classless society’ wash at all with the British public has to be the relentless neoliberal rhetoric of entrepreneurialism and aggressively acquisitive, possessive individualism. This has been propagated by the national media under every government

¹⁴⁹ Minton, *Ground Control*.

¹⁵⁰ David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (London: Profile, 2010), 166.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ The Economist (no author), ‘Back to class war?’ *The Economist*, 2000 (<http://www.economist.com/node/314058>).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ T. Dan Smith, quoted in Alex Niven, *Folk Opposition* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012), 49.

¹⁵⁷ Harvey, *Enigma*, 232.

since Thatcher, whose economic policies 'were meant to render class irrelevant'.¹⁵⁸ Instead, the deregulation she introduced, for which business had been clamouring since the social-democratic reforms of the post-war period, could in fact be seen to have reanimated the class system. From the point of view that the ruling class is represented by particular sets of actors, namely (in the UK) the aristocracy and landed gentry, and that these were to some extent politically marginalised under her regime, Thatcher at least partially succeeded in her mission. However, where her government succeeded more thoroughly was in the construction of a system that enabled a business class which had been in the ascendancy since the 1950s to effectively stage an economic coup and take control of British politics.¹⁵⁹ Harvey describes neoliberalism as 'a project to achieve the restoration of class power';¹⁶⁰ after three and a half decades, he seems to be roughly correct. He also notes, though, that 'while neoliberalisation may have been about the restoration of class power, it has not necessarily meant the restoration of economic power to the same people'.¹⁶¹

Returning to urbanisation, Sklair's identification of 'transnational social spaces', which include 'globally branded shopping malls, theme parks, waterfront developments and transportation centres, that could literally be almost anywhere in the world',¹⁶² is useful here, as it highlights an important connection between capitalist globalisation and local urban development: Driving the intensified exclusion and gentrification in contemporary cities are economic pressures exerted by a 'transnational capitalist class' (TCC) to 'turn cities that were once centres of productive labour into sites devoted to the culture-ideology of consumerism'.¹⁶³ Mainstream culture, of which a discussion will follow, could be said to represent a 'transnational cultural space', in that it too is much the same anywhere in the world and controlled by the TCC through global corporations.¹⁶⁴ Sklair elaborates, explaining that 'consumerism in the capitalist global system can only be fully understood as a culture-ideology practice where cultural practices reinforce the ideology and the ideology reinforces the cultural practices.' Sklair argues that 'those who lead the TCC see its mission as organizing the conditions under which its interests and the interests of the capitalist system

¹⁵⁸ The Economist, 'Back to class war?'

¹⁵⁹ *The Mayfair Set: Four stories about the rise of business and the decline of political power*, dir. Adam Curtis, TV documentary in four parts, 240 mins, (1999: BBC).

¹⁶⁰ David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶² Sklair, 'Iconic', 139.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

can be furthered in the global and local context.¹⁶⁵ This echoes Harvey's point that neoliberalism more or less amounts to a '*political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.'¹⁶⁶ The British businessmen that used financial markets to undermine political power from the 1960s until the 1990s, caused global economic upheaval with their activities and arguably laid the foundations for the TCC.¹⁶⁷ Sklair identifies the TCC as 'seek[ing] to exert economic control in the workplace, political control in domestic and international politics, and culture-ideology control in everyday life through specific forms of global competitive and consumerist rhetoric and practice'.¹⁶⁸

Sklair's interest lies predominantly with the role of 'iconic' architecture. However, the assertion that 'in the era of capitalist globalization the dominant force driving iconic architecture is the transnational capitalist class',¹⁶⁹ must be applicable to urban (re)development in general, given that its main purpose is now to attract globally mobile capital. This being the case, even though for the last thirty years plus, the rhetoric of regeneration has largely followed Jacobs in recognising that 'the connection between diversity and urban vitality and economic growth is considered paramount',¹⁷⁰ urban development in the UK has nevertheless continued to foster exclusion at the expense of diversity; to exacerbate economic, spatial and cultural inequality; and to favour the needs of capital over those of people (the creation of a 'good business climate'). Reconfiguring the class system in much the same way as the Industrial Revolution had done several hundred years previously, the neoliberalisation process can indeed be seen as a mechanism to achieve the politico-economic aspirations of a contemporary global ruling class.

Class associations and Party City drinking zones

Bringing discussion back to the Party City are the socio-spatial effects of this 'structurally adjusted' class system and the way that social divisions formerly constructed according to relatively consistent ideas of class have been fragmented, and to an extent supplanted by

¹⁶⁵ Sklair, 'The transnational capitalist class and iconic architecture', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29/3 (2005), 485-500, 486.

¹⁶⁶ Harvey, *Brief*, 19; emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁷ *The Mayfair Set: Four stories about the rise of business and the decline of political power*, dir. Adam Curtis, TV documentary in four parts, 240 mins, (1999: BBC).

¹⁶⁸ Sklair, 'Transnational', 486.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁷⁰ Emily Talen, 'Zoning and diversity in historical perspective', *Journal of planning history* 11/4 (2012), 330-347, 330.

those of consumer markets. The reduction of citizens to consumer groups identified by alpha-numeric categories ('ABC1', 'C2DE', 'MVVD', etc), may represent a form of 'democratisation' through the market, in that movement between socio-economic categories is now less ordained by extra-monetary attributes than it has been in the past. However, this does not also signify a democratisation of access to monetary wealth, nor a departure from past social attitudes. Money clearly continues to imbue many of its possessors with a sense of superiority and entitlement, which is further inflated by the pandering of business and neoliberal governments to those who have more to spend. Indeed, neoliberal jargon like 'high net worth individuals' both implies and reinforces the idea that those without money are worth nothing; neoliberal policy of course reflects exactly this attitude.

The expansion of the Party City and its culture is a useful example of both uneven capitalist development at a local level, and of the influence of neoliberal market logic on cultural and spatial aspects of urban development. In contradiction to more socially democratic approaches, the most lucrative markets receive the highest investment and, therefore, the best provision. Investment in cities is visibly skewed towards those groups with the greatest economic power, whether this is due to high levels of individual wealth or to mass volume consumption. Less profitable sectors, meanwhile, are sidelined or ignored altogether. This effect could be seen throughout the Party City branding campaign and culture-led regeneration. In the present era of transnational oligopolies, the same process has come to affect nearly every sphere of life, the field of cultural production being a prime example. Scherzinger, for example, examines the effect of rationalising strategies operated by major record labels after having been subsumed into far larger multi-media conglomerates. The rationalisation that inevitably follows media cross-ownership, he suggests, dictates not only which type of music receives the most exposure, but eventually the type of music that gets produced in the first place. Scherzinger states that

in many cases, the tendency is increasingly to concentrate resources on profitable sectors and then to diminish those sectors to a category of profitable stars...the calculated strategy to reduce risk inevitably reduces investment in those genres and forms that prize unpredictability and experimentation.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Martin Scherzinger, 'Music, corporate power and unending war', *Cultural Critique*, 60 (2005), 23-67 29.

If this approach is applied to nightlife provision, it is not hard to imagine how a small city centre like Newcastle might look after fifteen years of development; Jacobs's warning that 'diversity is crowded out by the duplication of success' clearly fell on deaf ears.¹⁷²

The perceived 'monoculture' of the Party City, though, was not without its divisions. While Party City nightlife has been criticised for its apparent homogeneity (this thesis is guilty of the same—an explanation will follow), mainstream drinking culture is in many ways a diverse and diffuse space, 'inhabited differentially by a range of groups from across the social spectrum, although in different ways'.¹⁷³ Despite the monolithic implications, different groups need to identify and position themselves within mainstream culture, which is structured hierarchically like any other social space. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through spatial segregation, but accompanying the spatial aspect is an ideological one, namely the common conflation of monetary wealth with the idea of class. Terms like 'upmarket', 'sophisticated', 'high end' and 'more discerning' are routinely used to describe places that sell more expensive things, and the consumer groups that those places target. This of course implies that those who cannot afford expensive goods or drinks must therefore be 'unsophisticated' or 'less discerning' in their taste, as though they have any choice. Like daytime shopping zones, nightlife is spatially organised according to perceptions of class.

Newcastle, as a predominantly white city, developed social divisions in its nightlife that revolved more around perceptions of class than may be the case with other UK cities. Although not exclusive to the North East capital, the city's compact centre and relative lack of minorities meant that the process was perhaps more visible than elsewhere. Further change since 2010 has left the city centre almost unrecognisable in comparison to the start of the Party City period. It is now devoid of any space for minorities, all such areas that previously existed having been systematically shut down to make way for mainstream consumerist facilities and student accommodation. But as late as the mid-2000s, the differences between the Bigg Market, the Quayside and the emerging Diamond Strip were stark, and clearly divided by class, or more accurately, price.

¹⁷² Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities*, 261.

¹⁷³ Robert Hollands, 'Division in the dark: Youth cultures, transitions and segmented consumption spaces in the night-time economy', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5/2 (2002), 153-171, 163.

In the early 2000s, the Bigg Market was still a decidedly working-class area, which for many of its clientele provided an opportunity for socialising, the expression of group identity and a chance to escape the stark realities of life in the post-industrial North East. Others, though, looked down on what they saw as ‘the more coarse [sic] and vulgar elements of an industrial working class in terminal decline’.¹⁷⁴ This part of Newcastle has since become more diffuse and gentrified, the drinking culture that centred around it falling into Chatterton and Hollands’ class of ‘residual nightlife’, which largely corresponds to working class social practices that they say have become marginal to the priorities of neoliberal urban development.¹⁷⁵ The Quayside, meanwhile, was the location for ‘style-conscious’, wealthier drinkers. In the early years of the Party City, the separation between the two areas was as obvious socio-economically as it was geographically.

Interestingly, Hollands found that many of the stereotypes surrounding the Bigg Market, like the reputation for violence and promiscuity, were in fact incorrect. Bigg Market regulars, contrary to the stereotypes, ‘were more likely than any group to stress the socialising aspects of going out, including cementing existing friendships, making new friends or just going out to have a laugh’.¹⁷⁶ Quayside drinkers, on the other hand, tended to frame their preference for trendier, more expensive venues in class terms, often deriding those less affluent.¹⁷⁷ This is not to suggest that their ‘downmarket’ counterparts were less aware of class issues, but rather that ideas of social standing may have been less important to them in defining their socialising. At the peak of its popularity in the early to mid- 2000s, some Quayside prices began to approach those found in London.¹⁷⁸ The Quayside at this time, and subsequently the Diamond Strip, exemplify the ‘upgrading’, or gentrification, of mainstream nightlife observed by Hollands and others.¹⁷⁹ The successful marketing of these more expensive venues depended on and exploited existing perceptions of class and social mobility. Hollands identifies ‘the increasing numbers of young professionals and service employees in many United Kingdom cities’,¹⁸⁰ as one of the reasons for the success of these ‘more exclusive places’,¹⁸¹ explaining that they ‘act to separate this group out somewhat

¹⁷⁴ Hollands, *Friday Night*, 57.

¹⁷⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 84.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 79.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Hollands, ‘Division’, 164.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

from the more traditional mainstream, providing an atmosphere for networking, socializing and meeting other social climbers'.¹⁸² But how did Quayside clientele of the time identify it as a 'higher class' area?

A BBC Tyne online discussion board dating from around 2002 asked whether the Bigg Market was losing its appeal, and contains several illuminating comments. Firstly, there are more negative comments than positive ones, mostly posted by people who did not drink there. Class perceptions are frequently explicit and often poke fun at Bigg Market drinkers. One, after describing the Bigg Market as a 'squalid, after school club for charvas',¹⁸³ goes on to suggest that 'perhaps the big market has a purpose after all it keeps all the charvas away from respectable people [sic]'.¹⁸⁴ The author then states that 'I want a good quality bar with a better class of person so I go to the quayside'.¹⁸⁵ This attitude is evident in many of the comments on this page, and mirrors some of the ways in which Thornton found underground club cultures distinguished themselves from mainstream audiences, particularly the derisory tone.¹⁸⁶ Another author ties together a string of Bigg Market stereotypes, claiming that '[t]eenagers and birds with blotchy legs in tight tops and miniskirts, and those young 'uns who like to go out, get trolleyed and have a fight, before a kebab, seem to be the only people going there'.¹⁸⁷ The sexist tone of this comment continues, the author going on to state that 'Quayside offers class, reasonable priced drinks (£2.50 a treble vodka inc mixer) and decent women to look at. Does anyone wonder why it's nicknamed the meat market? Horrible, dirty, urine soaked place!'¹⁸⁸

Taste is of course a primary signifier of class, most notably elaborated by Bourdieu. In consumer culture, taste, and implicitly class, are defined through consumption choices; in a mainstream nightlife context these are represented by drinks and venues. A different comment on the same discussion board states that, '[i]f you have any taste you will hit the quayside, jesmond or if you're a bit older...the haymarket. The bigg market is great for one thing, it keeps the toerags away from the rest of us!'.¹⁸⁹ Again, there is a clear sense of

¹⁸² Hollands, 'Division', 165.

¹⁸³ Rutt, Holywell, in 'Has Newcastle's Bigg Market lost its appeal?', *BBC Tyne: Have Your Say*, n.d., circa 2002 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/have_your_say/bigg_market.shtml).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 99.

¹⁸⁷ Lee, Newcastle, in 'Has Newcastle's Bigg Market lost its appeal?'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Nick, Chester-le-Street, in 'Has Newcastle's Bigg Market lost its appeal?'.¹⁸⁹

superiority, and the geographical separation of the Bigg Market from the other zones is seen as a desirable means of segregation, based on perceptions of class. Similarly, one of Chatterton and Hollands respondents stated, 'It might sound really snobby but a certain class of people go there and I generally don't seem to fit in there as well as the Quayside. I'm a cocktail person'.¹⁹⁰ The choice to 'hit' more exclusive areas, is not, of course, just a matter of taste; the necessary funds and the 'correct' appearance and demeanour are also required. The contempt expressed by these aspirational consumers for those who frequent the Bigg Market is obvious, as are the class associations attached to different consumption choices. Are 'cocktail people', however, any less likely to indulge in excessive drinking or anti-social behaviour? Personal experience of the Quayside by night during the mid-2000s suggests otherwise. I played drums in a band between 2005 and 2007, when the area was still very popular but heading 'downmarket'. The weekly Friday night drive to and from rehearsals would take me along the length of the Quayside and through the attendant crowds. At the end of the night, on my return journey, the behaviour of many Quayside drinkers was often every bit as lascivious and unruly as that of the Bigg Market stereotype. I would be regularly stopped by drunk individuals or groups staggering into the road in front of me; on one occasion, a particularly intoxicated young man proceeded to kick my vehicle on discovering I was not a taxi. As the Quayside declined and cocktails gave way to cheap trebles, the upmarket Diamond Strip absorbed many of its former drinkers. However, as mentioned earlier, the main street on which most Diamond Strip venues stand was recently pronounced to be one of the two most violent streets in the North East.

More expensive drinks, then, clearly do not eliminate the problems commonly associated with the cheaper end of mainstream nightlife. These observations echo Chatterton and Hollands' statement that '[i]t is debatable...whether such "gentrified" venues have resulted in lower alcohol consumption, less violence and fewer social problems'.¹⁹¹ 'Pricing oneself out of trouble' is among the most commonly cited reasons for the gentrification of mainstream nightlife,¹⁹² and refers to the idea that violence is less likely to occur with 'the right clientele',¹⁹³ i.e. wealthier, more aspirational people—'the value-added end of the

¹⁹⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 79.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 113; see also Chatterton & Hollands.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

market'.¹⁹⁴ This comment is revealing, as the goal of any pricing policy is profit. Many upmarket venues are as busy as their cheaper counterparts on a Friday or Saturday night, but the drinks they sell are several times the price. The connections between wealthier consumers and higher profits are well known, but the gentrification of the Party City effectively priced out those whose culture gave rise to the whole idea: working-class locals.

Diversity and homogeneity in the Party City

Spatial divisions in mainstream nightlife, then, physically separate consumers according to their spending power, playing to perceptions of class to attract target markets. This hierarchical structure mirrors capitalist society in general, with taste acting as the principal marker. It also mirrors society, though, in that socio-economic categories contain diverse identities, cultures and personal tastes. The early subcultural theory developed by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies tended to portray the mainstream as homogeneous, 'a rather blunt instrument' of hegemony.¹⁹⁵ In this sense, it was a way to represent 'visions of hegemony as an abstract and monolithic structure of domination which allowed little or no possibility of resistance',¹⁹⁶ and against which subcultural theory was itself a response.¹⁹⁷ In seeking to position subcultures as 'resistant', largely due to their conspicuous subversion of aesthetic style (for example mods and punks), studies in subcultural theory found 'pockets of resistance...everywhere they looked, wherever there was an isolatable and identifiable subculture'.¹⁹⁸ However, as Thornton observes, 'rather than making a clear comparison...and confronting the ethical and political problems involved in celebrating the culture of one social group over another...the chimera of a negative mainstream [was invoked]'.¹⁹⁹ This approach obviously misses the important, indeed fundamental point that 'there is no single mainstream...but a variety of mainstream scenes',²⁰⁰ and is not dissimilar to ways in which the mainstream has been invoked by music scenes, where it stands in for everything that the identity of the scene is *not*.²⁰¹

The mainstream has also often been thought of as having a centre and a periphery (which is true in a certain sense, though multiple centres and peripheries would be more accurate).

¹⁹⁴ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 114.

¹⁹⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 85.

¹⁹⁶ Grossberg, 'Politics', 148.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 93.

²⁰⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 94.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

These relations, though, are far more complex than the idea suggests. Grossberg offers a more nuanced assessment, describing the mainstream as ‘a collection of overlapping cultural styles, defined by sets of productive and consumptive practices’,²⁰² which is ‘constantly incorporating and rejecting pieces of the margins’.²⁰³ Taking this further, he points out that ‘the margins are not inherently marginal, they only come to be expelled in this way in the context of the ongoing fluid articulations of the mainstream’.²⁰⁴ The transient nature of trends and fashions is central to capitalist reproduction, and means that ‘marginal’ can only refer to a temporary state, as the number of once marginal music styles that become familiar and then fade from visibility demonstrates. This reading of the mainstream as a fluid and diverse space aligns with that of Chatterton and Hollands, who draw attention to the presence of ‘numerous overlapping groups’.²⁰⁵

In contrast to its construction as undifferentiated, ‘mass’ culture (a view that owes much to the Frankfurt School), then, the mainstream is a ‘bricolage of cultural codes and historical debris’,²⁰⁶ a space occupied simultaneously and transiently by numerous different groups and identities that dip in and out of it, rather than offering an identity in itself. Yet the mainstream can be as much a place of belonging as any scene or subculture; Grossberg goes as far as positing the mainstream as ‘the postmodern subculture’.²⁰⁷ Thornton observes that ‘one function of a disparaged *other* like the mainstream is to contribute to the feeling of community and sense of shared identity that many people report to be the primary appeal of clubs and raves’.²⁰⁸ One of her interviewees confirms this, saying that ‘[t]he appeal of clubs comes down to people who you would like to surround yourself with. Being with people who are similar to yourself creates a feeling of belonging’.²⁰⁹

Viewing this alongside some of those interviewed by Chatterton and Hollands about mainstream nightlife in Newcastle offers some interesting comparisons. The Bigg Market was the main area around which the Party City image was initially centred, and being densely packed with pubs and bars, it ‘creat[ed] a stage...for roving groups of lads and

²⁰² Grossberg, ‘Politics’, 148.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscaapes*, 85.

²⁰⁶ Grossberg, ‘Politics’, 148.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 111.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

lasses'.²¹⁰ One regular states, 'it's actually great to be in one of those groups, I do it sometimes with the lads from work...it feels really powerful in a horrible sort of way...it's just like you are...accepted, you know...like you own the city'.²¹¹ The specific type of nightlife, while central to the speakers, is perhaps irrelevant; what is clear here is the (perhaps rather obvious) function of nightlife as a mechanism of socialisation and an opportunity for group formation, and the resultant empowering sense of belonging.

A useful insight into the nature of mainstream culture can be gleaned from the statement, 'I do it sometimes with the lads from work'. The comment reveals an important difference between the mainstream and 'peripheral', or personal, cultures and tastes. It is unlikely, for example, that all 'the lads from work' share a common identity outside of the workplace. This suggests that the mainstream offers a space that accommodates and emulsifies multiple identities, where there is 'something for everyone'—a common phrase in promotional material for Newcastle's nightlife; music scenes and other taste groups can only function this way to a limited degree. Chatterton and Hollands also suggest that a desire exists among mainstream consumers for 'ease of access and familiar environments, and a rather uncritical—or perhaps undeclared—stance towards issues such as profit, ownership and exclusion within the city at night'.²¹² They go on to point out, though, that 'this is not to say that people are cultural dupes in their leisure time, but rather, obviously, that the majority of us choose to focus on socialising, pleasure and status-seeking during a night out, rather than critiquing and academically deconstructing the 'ins and outs' of what makes nightlife'.²¹³

These points are well illustrated by personal experience. Outside of higher education, I am a mechanic at a large local bicycle shop. Like many employers, the company organises a staff night out every Christmas. A visit to, say, an Indian restaurant might involve a group that could consist of musicians, students, scientists, sportspeople, motorcyclists, computer technicians and paramedics; the same group could also be seen to consist of heavy metal fans, hip hop fans, punks, ravers, fans of commercial pop, folk music lovers, and those with no specific musical taste or interest in music. Following the meal is often a visit to a city centre bar or club, the destination decided by a majority vote on whichever suggestion seems least objectionable. Many in the group would avoid such venues outside of these

²¹⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 75. See also *Urban Nightscapes*.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

occasions, but for the duration of the night out, personal identities and tastes are temporarily occluded by the transient group identity, 'bike shop staff'. Due to the amiable relations between all the staff, the fact that few of us are socialising in accordance with our personal tastes or identities represents a compromise made for the purposes of an enjoyable night out.

'Mainstream', then, is not an identity *per se*, but rather consists at any one time of whoever has chosen to visit. This includes regular consumers or, as in the case above, those who partake on an occasional basis to socialise with a group of mixed, possibly incompatible personal tastes. This is perhaps why Newcastle appeared to pursue this area of entertainment to the detriment of more specialised interests and tastes, the Party City representing an effort to attract the broadest possible audience, thereby maximising consumer spending. In this sense, the mainstream must be seen as a fluid and diverse space. As the preceding discussion indicated, though, those 'outside' of mainstream culture such as underground music scenes often perceive it to be monolithic and homogenous. Thornton adds that it is often thought of as indicative of indiscriminate music tastes and a lack of individuality,²¹⁴ which raises the question of why these perceptions might exist.

The process of co-optation is seen by those groups that wish to position themselves as exclusive or superior as a degenerative process. This view echoes that of the Frankfurt School, particularly in the case of the appropriation of non-mainstream music forms by commercial interests. As the sounds of (niche, exclusive) underground music genres begin to appear in (mass, unsophisticated) commercialised forms, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the necessary cultural distance. The culmination of this process is the appearance of previously niche sounds in the mass media, for example the charts, exclusivity being impossible to maintain by this point. This process also occurs within the mainstream, most obviously where upmarket venues begin to attract a 'mass' audience. This is often accompanied by a drop in prices as more affluent clientele move on. Newcastle's Quayside is a good example: its upmarket image began to fade as the 'cocktail people' that frequented Quayside venues in the early 2000s began to abandon the area for the newly emerging, more exclusive Diamond Strip.

²¹⁴ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 99; this viewpoint is also prominent in discussions of heavy metal; see for example Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and culture on the edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

The point here is that although there is diversity in the social backgrounds of mainstream consumers, the music in mainstream venues, whatever their target market, remains largely the same. Across the relatively narrow range of genres played in such venues, from rock to pop and dance, it is without exception the most commercial end of those genres that mainstream venues deploy; the idea of 'deploying' music may seem a little awkward, but in the context of mainstream nightlife the term is apposite. It is arguably this consistency in the musical environment of mainstream venues that gives rise to the idea that 'the mainstream' is a homogeneous cultural space, while the fact that it is all commercial, 'mass' music might suggest to some that mainstream consumers must be indiscriminate in their tastes, or lack individuality. As the personal example above shows, though, such assumptions are risky.

Hadfield's synopsis of the mainstream nightlife environment paints a somewhat bleak picture:

In licensed estates across the country, crowds are now fed a repetitive diet of tired, safe, and nostalgic party music, night-in, night-out. DJs are not permitted to adapt their sets to reflect personal tastes, or the preferences of locally idiosyncratic crowds...the night-time high street, far from being a romantic milieu of self-expression or self-discovery through music, is an arena which constrains the creative urges of producer and consumer alike. Risk-averse corporate culture holds both groups in an iron grip in its quest to govern every aspect of the music, mood and social control nexus.²¹⁵

Hadfield perhaps misses the point here that such forms of nightlife are not necessarily intended to be about 'self-discovery through music'—if that is the desire, other nightlife options (hopefully) exist to satisfy it. Equally, what constitutes 'self-expression' is surely up to the individual. But he does identify the root of homogeneity in mainstream nightlife: the rationalising corporate culture of leisure operators. Regarding the differences perceived by upmarket consumers between themselves and their less affluent counterparts, Chatterton and Hollands observe that 'the extent to which this stylisation of nightlife represents a broadening of choice within the city is...debatable.'²¹⁶ Many consumers also recognise this; as one of their respondents points out, 'people want to belong to that elite crowd, but what people do not realise is that it's actually McDonald's with a marble bar'.²¹⁷ Equally, a local blogger echoes the points made here about music in mainstream clubs, complaining that,

they all seem to be the same these days...Tup Tup Palace, The Cut and others are very similar in the crowds they pull in, same music all over the place, same attitudes. Then you have the others, Blu

²¹⁵ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 102.

²¹⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 112.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

Bambu, Mood, The Attic, Liquid/Envy which are different but the same, different crowds to the above but still the same crowds go to these, similar music and so on...²¹⁸

The sameness of the 'pseudo-choices' offered by mainstream nightlife, then, is not lost on many of its consumers, but the point must be reiterated that creativity or exploration is not the purpose of such entertainment. While other options exist in Newcastle, the expansion of the Party City seriously eroded the possibilities and availability of alternatives. Those who do not find Party City culture appealing have, in many cases, actively avoided the city centre.

One local states that,

the whole of Newcastle is filled with lads (and lasses) who spend too much money trying to drink themselves into oblivion. It doesn't matter where you go it's the same the only thing different about the people who go to the Quayside is that they have a little bit more money to waste.²¹⁹

Whether it is incorrect to label Party City nightlife as homogeneous seems, considering this statement, irrelevant. The fact is that a significant number of people feel that their tastes and interests are underrepresented and / or ignored. Calls for more diversity have been common since the at least beginning of the Party City era, as the research of Chatterton and Hollands, as well as comments by nightlife consumers, shows. However, such a shift has yet to be forthcoming. With city space now disappearing fast under a wave of purpose-built student accommodation, the question of how easy it might be in the future to diversify the city centre must be raised.

²¹⁸ NewcastleVIP, 'Good nightclubs in Newcastle?', *NewcastleVIP, 2010* (<http://www.newcastlevip.co.uk/good-nightclubs-in-newcastle/>).

²¹⁹ Sarah, Gateshead, posted on BBC Tyne, 'Has Newcastle's Bigg Market lost its appeal?'

Chapter 4: The ‘Newcastle brand’

Regeneration in Newcastle: a synopsis

There were various reasons why the Party City image became such a dominant cultural force in Newcastle. Some of these were economic changes connected to broader processes of neoliberalisation; in this respect, many of the changes in Newcastle were no different to those occurring in other cities. But the brand image developed for Newcastle was arguably unique in that it exploited the reputation of its people—the Geordies—and their distinctive local identity, as friendly, football-loving and heavy drinking party-goers, for whom ‘going out...is like a religion’.¹ This amounted to the commodification of identity,² a phrase borrowed from Barry Shank’s study of the music scene in Austin, Texas that describes the process perfectly. This chapter will concentrate on the ideological aspects of city branding, namely how the Party City image gained traction not only among visitors, but also among locals. Harvey describes the ‘construction of consent’,³ the process by which neoliberal policies representing a significant departure from previous politico-economic structures could be enacted in the UK and the US. This idea also applies to city branding, which to succeed in attracting capital must first gain the consent of local populations. Thus, the function of branding is twofold, involving both outward and inward projections.

The image of Geordies created by and for the ‘Newcastle brand’ was one that deliberately ignored the richness and breadth of local cultures and identities. The term technically refers to a birthplace (originally the banks of the River Tyne), but was appropriated and attached to a set of values that had little to do with the cultural identity from which the name was culled. A brief history of the development of Geordie identity is included in this chapter, followed by a discussion of media representations of Geordies outside the North East, specifically in the television programme *Geordie Shore*. This series encapsulates the process described above, and the way that the commodification of identity excluded and marginalised many locals’ idea of what it means to be a Geordie. A brief background of regeneration in Newcastle will help contextualise the arguments that follow.

¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing our ‘Toon’*, (Newcastle: Newcastle University Press, 2001), 72.

² Barry Shank, *Dissonant*, 191.

³ David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

The effects of deindustrialisation in the North East need no introduction. The almost complete dependence on the industries of coal mining, shipbuilding and heavy engineering meant that the departure of these enormous sources of employment left the region crippled: 70,000 jobs were lost in the period 1971-1984, a fall of 43%, compared to a national average of 6.6%.⁴ The city of Newcastle fared slightly better than the rest of the North East due to its position as a centre of commerce and consumption.⁵ Nevertheless, as Akkar points out, it was left with,

high rates of unemployment, the deterioration of its urban fabric, the loss of its living and working population, vacant and underused properties, traffic congestion, limited provision of car parking, a lack of green open spaces, poor-quality public realm and a lack of investment.⁶

The Tyne and Wear Development Corporation

Regeneration in and around the city began in the late 1980s, with the appointment of the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation by the Thatcher government. The TWDC was launched in 1987 by Nicholas Ridley MP,⁷ (probably not by coincidence) a descendant of one of Tyneside's original elite banking families, members of which have held increasingly influential Parliamentary positions since the 18th century.⁸ As part of the 'second wave' of Urban Development Corporations,⁹ the UDCs' remit was to 'achieve local economic growth by providing the physical infrastructures and locales appropriate for the new industrial and commercial sectors'.¹⁰ The idea behind this approach, known as 'property-led regeneration', was that the reconstructed built environment and improved infrastructure would, with the help of 'place marketing', attract new investment, which would then spur economic growth. The test of the corporation's success, Ridley told local leaders, would be 'the extent to which

⁴ Müge Akkar, 'The changing "publicness" of contemporary public spaces: a case study of the Grey's Monument Area, Newcastle upon Tyne', *Urban Design International* 10 (2005), 95-113, 98.

⁵ Bill Lancaster, 'Newcastle: capital of what?', *Geordies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 53-70, 55

⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷ Anna Minton, *Northern Soul: Culture and creativity and quality of place in Newcastle and Gateshead*, RICS/DEMOS (2003), 22.

⁸ Benwell CDP, *The making of a ruling class* (Newcastle: Benwell CDP, 1978); Matt Ridley, chairman of Northern Rock at the time of the bank's collapse in 2008, is another family member.

⁹ Organisations of 'non-elected local government',⁹ or 'quangos' ('quasi non-governmental organisations'), the UDCs were set up by the Thatcher government in 1980 and represented a major shift in processes of local democracy. They were controversial due to their lack of accountability and the fact that they were nonetheless funded by public money. They were also granted extensive planning and development powers, including that of compulsory purchase, which enabled them, to an extent, to circumvent the democratic process.⁹

¹⁰ Rob Imrie & Huw Thomas, 'Urban development policy and Urban Development Corporations' (Liverpool: Paul Chapman Publishing, 1993), 14.

land values increased'.¹¹ It was this era that saw the rise of place marketing as one of the linchpins of neoliberal urban policy.

Property-led regeneration was based on the 'trickle-down' theory that guided neoliberal economic thought more generally. The idea has since been widely discredited,¹² having failed demonstrably at all levels to produce anything but extreme polarisation of wealth and heightened social division (although this not, of course, prevented the continuation of such policies).¹³ Despite claims of sensitivity to, and integration of, the needs of local communities,¹⁴ the TWDC's projects were centred, perhaps rather predictably, around the most profitable types of development. Luxury waterfront residential, retail and office space, and upmarket leisure provision such as marinas, as in the TWDC's 'main achieved development',¹⁵ St. Peter's Basin, and its North Tyneside project, Royal Quays. In Newcastle itself, regeneration work was concentrated on the Quayside and several other former industrial waterfront areas along the north bank of the Tyne. Almost all the schemes carried out by the UDCs in their designated cities, including Liverpool, Sheffield, Stockton and London, featured waterfronts as their 'flagship' developments.¹⁶

The development of the Quayside, despite being one of the TWDC's 'flagship' projects, endured a seven year delay before work actually began, and even then required enormous incentives such as large injections of public money, the TWDC's 'gift of land to the developer',¹⁷ and "'phenomenal" investment in parking and other infrastructure'.¹⁸ The Quayside had, since the loss of industry on Tyneside, been largely derelict, 'a dilapidated swamp of broken down wharves and warehouses',¹⁹ and the work done under the administration of the TWDC certainly improved the area in terms of appearance and access. However, the predicted positive economic impact, apart from the boom in drinking establishments in the early 2000s, has yet to materialise for several reasons. Newcastle

¹¹ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 22.

¹² Larry Elliott, 'Revealed: how the wealth gap holds back economic growth', *The Guardian*, 9/12/2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/dec/09/revealed-wealth-gap-oecd-report>).

¹³ See for example Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the 21st-century city* (London: Penguin, 2009).

¹⁴ See for example TWDC, *A vision for the future*, 1990.

¹⁵ David Byrne, 'Petty markets versus maritime industrialism', *British urban Policy and the Urban Development Corporations*, 89-103, 98; Byrne discusses in detail the TWDC's approach, and several of their main projects.

¹⁶ Stuart Cameron, 'Gentrification, housing redifferentiation and urban regeneration: 'Going for Growth' in Newcastle-upon-Tyne', *Urban Studies* 40/12 (2003), 2367-2382, 2371.

¹⁷ yellow book, *Newcastle Quayside Scoping Report*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 20.

gained a few new hotels, a pleasant riverside promenade, a new law court building and some luxury residential and office developments, but ‘nothing earth-shattering. It’s a predictable late twentieth century model, it’s become a “smart” environment as opposed to scruffy, but there’s nothing stunning which would bring people from far and wide.’²⁰

Byrne, assessing the TWDC’s activities, points out that ‘the tragedy of all of this is that it [was] directed at a market which does not exist’.²¹ When the theory behind property-led regeneration is considered alongside the continuing economic reality of the North East, namely the fact that there is relatively little money in the region, it is hardly surprising that it was, on the whole, a failure. Businesses are rarely willing to invest in areas where profits are likely to be low, and the North East has been the country’s poorest region for some time. The ‘exclusionary and divisive’ tendencies of neoliberalised urban development continue to ‘establish citadels of the rich in confrontation with the ghetto poor, with the poor admitted as service personnel and otherwise excluded by cost’.²² Property-led regeneration in the North East, then, did little to address any of the structural economic problems that continue to dog the region, the only group benefiting in any significant way being the developers.

The Grainger Town Project

By the mid-1990s, a large proportion of Newcastle city centre was in severe decline, much of the built environment suffering from both a lack of maintenance and under-occupation (up to 47% of the buildings were classified as ‘at risk’, with another 29% classed as ‘vulnerable’).²³ Ironically, a significant cause of the decline at this time, particularly the under-occupation of premises, was the impact of earlier attempts at regeneration. A large proportion of retail and business occupants had relocated from the mid-1970s onwards,²⁴ initially to the Eldon Square shopping centre, and later the Metrocentre in Gateshead, in the case of retailers. Several of the new business ‘parks’ and office developments created under

²⁰ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 20.

²¹ David Byrne, ‘Planning for and against the divided city’, *Towards a Post-Fordist welfare state?* (London: Routledge, 1994), 136-154, 149.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Fred Robinson, ‘Pride of Place: the final assessment of the Grainger Town Project’ (Newcastle City Council, 2003), 5.

²⁴ John Pendlebury, Conservation and Regeneration: Complementary or Conflicting Processes? The Case of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne’, *Planning Practice & Research* 17/2 (2002), 145-158, 149/150.

the TWDC's administration,²⁵ as well as being custom built to 'accommodate modern use',²⁶ carried Enterprise Zone status. This amounted to tax incentives, and many businesses accordingly relocated away from the city centre. In addition, the regenerated Quayside had 'absorbed much of the demand for growth for leisure uses such as restaurants and pubs.'²⁷

Grainger Town, the name being 'a label developed in the early 1990s by the city council for a large part of the historic core of Newcastle...as part of an effort to revive and revitalise the area',²⁸ takes its name from Richard Grainger, a prominent speculative developer of the mid-1800s. Grainger was 'responsible for a phenomenal amount of development in Newcastle at that time',²⁹ although much of the area designated Grainger Town by the City Council in fact has 'little or nothing to with [his] developments'.³⁰ The Grainger Town Project was a 'public-private initiative', and in terms of improving the aesthetics of the built environment, largely successful, though the project did not proceed without some conflict between the parties involved.³¹ Those representing the business and property sectors were keen to demolish large proportions of the 'historic stock',³² while those who were more conservation-minded preferred modification. Again, improvements in the built environment were undeniable, as were the increases in retail and office rental values in the area, which were seen as proof of economic revitalisation.³³ The 'vision' for Grainger Town, drawn up by US consultancy EDAW in 1996, was to create a 'a high quality environment appropriate to a major European Regional Capital', with a 'reputation for excellence...focused on leisure, culture and the arts, retailing, housing and entrepreneurial activity.'³⁴ However, as various commentators have pointed out,³⁵ and as appears to have been the case with most regeneration projects around the country,³⁶ economic growth became the dominant goal of the GTP. Rather than the 'diverse', 'vibrant' places that regeneration projects often claim to be aiming for, or preserving the city's heritage for its own sake, the result is more commonly the creation of

²⁵ Pendlebury, 'Conservation', 155.

²⁶ Paul Greenhalgh, Mary Lou Downie, Peter Fisher & Mike Barke, 'Grease to the Wheel or a Spanner in the Works? An Investigation of Office and Industrial Occupier Displacement and Property Market Filtering in Tyne and Wear Using the Chaining Technique', *Regional Studies* 37/4 (2003), 381-394.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁸ Pendlebury, 'Conservation', 149/150.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Robinson, 'Pride', 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6

³⁵ See Pendlebury; Akkar; Chatterton & Hollands.

³⁶ See for example Minton.

'mainly consumption-oriented, highly speculative, commercial and prestigious environments.'³⁷

In terms of provision for arts and culture, the demolition of the Mayfair Ballroom, to make way for The Gate leisure complex, happened as part of the GTP, but no replacement venues were included in the project. Dance City, a large dance studio on the very edge of the area, and the Waygood Gallery, were both supported by the Project, but as the Final Assessment Report admits, '...while substantial progress has been made, Grainger Town's cultural and arts base is limited and there remains scope for more activity, better venues and greater diversity. Some of that may be provided through the market, but much also depends on public sector support and funding.'³⁸ The Grainger Town Project, then, while having an undoubtedly beneficial effect on Newcastle's historic urban fabric, did not do much to improve cultural diversity in the city, especially for non-mainstream interests; music-making specifically in fact lost space during this bout of regeneration.

'Culture-led' regeneration

As the previous chapter briefly outlined, the much applauded and (at the time) internationally renowned culture-led regeneration of 'NewcastleGateshead' in the early 2000s was connected to the joint bid for European Capital of Culture 2008, which failed; Liverpool was awarded the title for that year, the judges taking the view that Liverpool's bid had been 'more successful in including the diversity of people it represented'.³⁹ Comprising the most conspicuous of the region's 'mega-projects', the Gateshead (south) bank of the Tyne became a cultural 'hotspot'. The BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art was created in the renovated Baltic flour mill, and Norman Foster's design for The Sage Gateshead music centre was constructed a little closer to the Tyne Bridge. These two buildings were complemented by the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, the world's only tilting bridge, which provides pedestrian and cycle access to the Newcastle side of the river. As iconic architecture goes, The Sage is among the most distinctive structures in the world, and the development of the riverside area has led some to talk of the 'regeneration of Gateshead'.⁴⁰

³⁷ Akkar, "'publicness'", 99.

³⁸ Robinson, 'Pride', 15.

³⁹ Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public policy in the Party City: The spectacle of culture, gender and locality', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33/14 (2010), 779-789, 785.

⁴⁰ See for example Minton, *Northern Soul*; also Christopher Bailey, Steven Miles & Peter Stark, 'Culture-led urban regeneration and the revitalisation of identities in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East of England', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10/1 (2004), 47-65.

I would argue that this is contentious: the only parts of Gateshead to have been comprehensively redeveloped are the strip of previously derelict land fronting the river and visible from the Newcastle side, and the former central shopping area Trinity Square. The rest of the town and the wider Borough, on the other hand, remain in much the same state as they were before the 'arts corridor'⁴¹ appeared. It is also perhaps telling that the most positive appraisals of culture-led regeneration in Newcastle and Gateshead were more or less contemporaneous with the opening of the 'cultural icons' described above. Minton admits that 'it is only a year and a half since [BALTIC] opened',⁴² yet talks about how the two cities 'offer a clear example of successful transformation from coal city to culture city, underpinned by a dynamic form of urban entrepreneurship'.⁴³ Likewise, Bailey *et al.*, drawing on the results of a ten-year longitudinal project that began in the mid-1990s,⁴⁴ proclaim the success of the Quayside's cultural developments, but again they had barely been open for a year at the time of writing.

Given the timeframes involved, these positive assessments seem prematurely conclusive. Urban change can indeed happen quickly in terms of aesthetics, and can bring with it a superficial appearance of social change as people renegotiate their surroundings and pathways. There is also an element of novelty involved: three shiny new cultural icons, an explosion of bars, pubs and clubs, and the transformation of the Quayside into an 'urban public park with an unbelievable level of public ownership',⁴⁵ are surely bound to attract attention in the short term. But the wider effects on local society of such large-scale reconfiguration can take a great deal longer to settle. Wharton *et al.*, writing in 2010, point out that 'it is too soon to judge the long-term impact of the Party City and emphasis on hyper-consumption'.⁴⁶ They see culture, in the sense of the conception that informed this phase of Newcastle's regeneration, as 'a policy product of local government, regeneration partnerships, government agencies and business interests'.⁴⁷ This resulted in 'culture as display—a visible spectacle of culture...where citizen and community involvement is only that of the spectator'.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Changing our 'Toon'*, (Newcastle: Newcastle University Press, 2001), 3.

⁴² Minton, *Northern Soul*, 24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ Bailey, Miles & Stark, 'Culture-led'.

⁴⁵ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 20.

⁴⁶ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public', 781.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 779.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 781.

Bailey *et al*, perhaps somewhat ironically, claim that culture-led regeneration in Newcastle and Gateshead was successful, 'precisely because economic benefits were not [the] primary motivating force'.⁴⁹ However, to contest the notion that Newcastle and Gateshead adopted culture-led regeneration as anything other than a means to attract capital seems rather obtuse. Also, Bailey and his co-authors fall into exactly the trap highlighted by Krims, in that they position 'the local' as somehow resistant to 'the global',⁵⁰ when in fact the two are both different facets of the same hegemonic process.⁵¹ Suggesting that 'successful urban regeneration is not about a trickle-down effect at all, but...about revitalising cultural identities in a way which represents a counter-balance to broader processes of cultural globalisation',⁵² Bailey *et al* fail to see that the 'revitalisation of identities' celebrated in their study is in fact a local strategy that plays an integral part in those broader global processes. Where the investment in cultural facilities is interpreted as an investment in the local population, because 'culture matters for its own sake',⁵³ this chapter will presently show that although this is true in one sense, the motive for that investment was in fact to give the cultural brand image some credence, for without the belief of local people, it would not have been effective.⁵⁴

Why the big party? The need for a brand image

The Party City image, seen from the perspective of a city in obvious need of economic revitalisation, represented an opportunity not to be missed. The distinct lack of workable strategies for regional economic revival, due largely to constraints imposed by central government, combined with the deregulation of licensing and alcohol sales, meant that the creation of a hub for mainstream nightlife represented a guaranteed way to secure investment. However, the idea of the Party City also represented a powerful semiotic weapon that could be used to dissolve some of the long-standing associations with the industrial, working-class past that had shaped the city and its people, and was likely to deter business. It was exactly this local history, though—or, more accurately, certain aspects of it—that, at the same time, enabled the Party City image to be constructed so successfully.

⁴⁹ Bailey, Miles & Stark 'Culture-led', 61.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵¹ Adam Krims, *Music and urban geography*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 32.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁴ Fred Robinson, 'The North East: A journey through time', *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 6/3 (2002), 317-334, 321.

Place marketing strategies rely on local characteristics and peculiarities, and while the condition of Newcastle's built environment may have left much to be desired, its distinctiveness gave it potential. One of the biggest hurdles facing the realisation of this potential was transforming the city's image as the grey, rundown capital of an ex-industrial region, with all the negative associations that come attached to such places: 'the old, the polluted, the out of date'.⁵⁵ There was little chance of any serious level of investment happening as long as Newcastle was viewed as a dreary and, more importantly, working-class city. A pressing need existed for a new, exciting brand-image that would show the world that Newcastle had purged itself of this 'unattractive heritage'⁵⁶ and was ready to take its place, cleansed and commodified, in the neoliberal consumerist economy. Legitimised by the Weissmann vote, the Party City presented a ready-made brand image that would both guarantee rates from investment and be relatively easy to go about constructing, both in physical and symbolic terms. The vote was in some ways a lifeline for Newcastle's local economy, adding momentum to programs of development in the dilapidated city centre, which in turn began to be repopulated. On the other hand, it also illustrates the tendency of neoliberalism to commodify social reproduction itself. Under the banner of 'culture', marketing took an already existing and important social process—social drinking—and turned it into a spectacle of consumption-as-culture, reconstructing and promoting it as one of Newcastle's defining characteristics.

The night-time economy as a mechanism for growth

Alcohol may be the material commodity that drives most nightlife, but it is ultimately the social experience that consumers pay for. In pursuit of this experience, people become commodities themselves—numbered objects, valued and grouped according to the level of their economic activity. McGuigan refers to Rifkin's coining of the term 'cultural capitalism', by which he 'does not just mean the priority of an information and service economy over an industrial economy; he means the commercialisation of experience itself'.⁵⁷ This seems to fit well with the idea of 'consumption-as-culture', exemplified by the Party City and other such spectacular displays that city branding projects now include by default.

⁵⁵ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public', 782.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jim McGuigan, 'Neo-liberalism, culture and policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11/3 (2005), 229-241, 234.

Hadfield points out that '[d]uring the middle to late 1990s, many municipal authorities in Britain had political ambitions to create a "24-hour city"'⁵⁸ (this morphed into the 'creative city' in the early 2000s, particularly after Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* gained popularity among politicians; the 'smart city' is one of the latest city marketing buzzwords). These ambitions were largely based on arguments that cities in which the streets were busy around the clock 'would not only be livelier and more prosperous, but also safer and more welcoming due to the creation of a diverse and inclusive mix of after-dark activity'.⁵⁹ To achieve this new style of city, the growth of the leisure sector, particularly the night-time economy, was seen as a central requirement. The arguments in favour of the 24-hour city revolved mainly around talk of diversity, vibrancy and inclusivity, but also the promise of increased safety and less crime, as the quote above illustrates, and were easily lent a somewhat populist slant. Who, after all, would not benefit from, or want, a safer and more welcoming city? The same thinking lies behind the 'clean and safe' policies implemented in recent years by BIDs (Business Improvement District), now operating in all major cities.⁶⁰ With the prospect of increased profits for business that would inevitably follow the repopulation and renovation of city centres, it seemed that everyone was a winner.

Having adopted an urban development policy that required the expansion of the night-time economy and the leisure sector, widespread deregulation became necessary to facilitate this goal within the desired timescale, and to keep business happy. As pointed out previously, many UK city centres experienced transformative leisure- and culture-led urban change in pursuit of new, consumption-based, 'postmodern' images and identities. However, only Newcastle appeared in the Weissmann top ten. Not to capitalise on this globally recognised accolade must have seemed ludicrous to many, especially the operators of the city's drinking establishments. With a new legal framework specifically designed to help maximise profits, a city centre ripe for development and a new, internationally marketable image, it is not hard to envision the resulting fervour with which the leisure chains went about their colonisation of Newcastle's compact city centre.

⁵⁸ Phil Hadfield, *Bar Wars: Contesting the night in contemporary British cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Minton, *Ground Control*, 37.

Commodifying identity: 'place branding'

From the 1970s onwards urban governance underwent a transition from a managerial model in which the local state was responsible for service provision and resource allocation, to a more 'entrepreneurial' model.⁶¹ This forced local authorities into market competition, both with the private sector for service provision within their own jurisdictions, and with each other for investment and consumer capital to stimulate local economies. As the powers and budgets of local authorities were eroded by successive neoliberal governments, along with waves of privatisation and deregulation to bring about the marketisation of everything, this 'framework of zero-sum inter-urban competition'⁶² meant that private capital began to exert more influence on the trajectory of urban development. Cities themselves became increasingly viewed and treated as commodities, or 'place products',⁶³ as did those who inhabit them, and strategies to attract capital began to follow the same models as marketing campaigns for any other product. Hadfield, discussing the rise of the branding of licensed premises by leisure chains, explains that '[i]n contemporary marketing, the building of brand image and brand awareness is seen as essential in helping companies to make their products stand out in a crowded marketplace'.⁶⁴ The same applies to contemporary cities, particularly those of the deindustrialised developed world. To attract capital, cities must offer the right conditions for investors, and to realise these conditions, the practice of using public money to subsidise corporate costs has become standard procedure. However, in a world of globalised, highly mobile capital, and a 'symbolic economy' in which the power of the image reigns supreme, a favourable economic deal alone is not enough.

'Place branding' is described in marketing circles as 'the process whereby places are associated with wider desirable qualities as perceived by target audiences'.⁶⁵ The 'dual aim' of place branding is, theoretically, 'to form a "unique selling proposition" that will secure visibility to the outside and reinforce "local identity" to the inside', through the association of the place with 'stories' about it'.⁶⁶ These stories are designed to 'create a compelling narrative, whereby identification with—and attachment to—the place is achieved...and, as a

⁶¹ David Harvey, 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism', *Geografisker Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, volume 71 No. 1 (1989), 3-17, 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶³ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?'.

⁶⁴ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 47.

⁶⁵ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 346.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

consequence, some form of place competitive advantage is gained'.⁶⁷ Clearly though, this approach, which takes for granted the idea of place as a 'product' to be marketed, is highly problematic from a sociological perspective. Who, for example, are the 'target audiences' of such campaigns? What does it mean to 'reinforce local identity'? Whose identity is being reinforced, and why? Whose stories are being told—or more to the point, whose are being left out? Given that the designers of these branding campaigns are charged primarily with achieving 'competitive advantage', and are also often external consultants, where does that leave those whose 'dominant perception[s] and experience[s] of the place in question'⁶⁸ may conflict with those being promoted, especially considering 'the inherent selectivity of...place elements'⁶⁹ in constructing suitably attractive 'narratives'?

A more critical perspective on this process sees the creation of a city brand image 'not only...as an outward pitch but...as an inward projection creating a cultural veneer...intended to interpellate the people of the rebranded city to a cultural perception of themselves; to see themselves as fit to be part of this rebranded lifestyle'.⁷⁰ This type of 'top-down' approach, in which an 'identity' engineered by marketing consultants is effectively imposed on a city and its people, is certainly nothing new, neither is it a practice peculiar to the post-industrial period. Colls describes the way in which "'Northumbria" was reborn yet again'⁷¹ in 1973, 'this time in Grosvenor Crescent, SW1':⁷²

P&A Management Consultants were hired to advise on tourism. First, they laid out the North East as an economic audit. Second, they fiddled with the history and geography to suggest Durham City as regional capital, or 'product leader'. Third, they concluded that something they called 'history' was the region's best asset.⁷³

Having estimated some five years later that approximately sixty percent of regional revenue from tourism 'had come from business conferences and socioeconomic category A and B visitors',⁷⁴ the director 'called for aggressive marketing among those categories'.⁷⁵ Forty years on, there is little to suggest that anything has changed. The same strategy has been identified by Middleton and Freestone in the 'culture-led regeneration' projects pursued

⁶⁷ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 346.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁷⁰ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 788.

⁷¹ Robert Colls, 'Born again Geordies', in *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 26.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Colls, 'Born again', 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

throughout the 1990s and 2000s, of which the Party City, despite criticism from some local politicians, was an important, if slightly incongruous, part. Some suggestions in response to the questions above, and more detailed discussion on the political and cultural implications of Newcastle's rebranding, will follow later in this chapter.

Branding Newcastle and the North East

Since most cities have existed for significantly longer than the idea of place branding, clearly there will already be numerous narratives in existence. Indeed, the very concept of 'place', particularly the idea of 'place identity', is itself a process (rather than an outcome),⁷⁶ of negotiation and conflict between these narratives. Andy Bennett's positing of 'the local' as a space in a continual state of flux, 'a highly contested territory...crossed by different forms of collective life and the competing sensibilities that the latter bring to bear on the interpretation and realisation of a particular place',⁷⁷ is useful here. But branding has become the *modus operandi* for contemporary urban centres. This multiplicity of narratives, many of which will inevitably run counter to those seen as 'desirable' by marketing consultants, must therefore be reduced to something tangible, standardised and less problematic, to 'project[...] a universal "reality" of the place product to relevant audiences'.⁷⁸ These 'realities'—although quite how they can be 'universal' when they are explicitly aimed at certain groups—are constructed in various ways. Characteristics of a place that will fit in with the promotional agenda are first selected. Historic significance, surrounding natural beauty and distinctive architecture, for example, have all been used in the creation of brand images with which to promote cities. If a city or region is fortunate enough to have been home to a famous personality, such as a pop star or a best-selling author ('South Shields used to bid welcome to careful drivers. Now the drivers are welcomed to "Catherine Cookson Country"'),⁷⁹ those too become tools in the image marketer's box, reduced to 'unique selling points' of the place-product.

To market the North East and the Party City, the region's people themselves, or more accurately, a carefully engineered image of 'the people', became one of the 'attractions' promoted to external markets. A strong regional identity, being 'proud of their roots', is

⁷⁶ Mihalis Kavaratzis & Mary-Jo Hatch, 'The dynamics of place branding', *Marketing Theory*, 13/1 (2013), 69-86, 71. This idea has been explored by thinkers in many disciplines, for example Lefebvre, Harvey, Castells, Bennett.

⁷⁷ Andy Bennett, *Popular music and youth culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 53.

⁷⁸ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 357.

⁷⁹ Colls, 'Born again', 27.

something Geordies are renowned for even outside of their own locality. Many see their North Eastern-ness as more important than Englishness.⁸⁰ Prominent local singer-songwriter Richard Dawson illustrates the extent to which this sentiment can develop, saying that he ‘wouldn’t consider Newcastle to be part of England, but it’s becoming more and more anglicised and it’s frightening’.⁸¹ Shaped by a long history of conflicting power relations with the South, and geographical isolation from the rest of England, with the inhospitable landscapes of the Pennines to the west and the North Yorkshire Moors to the south, Geordies are as different from their Southern counterparts as the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh.

In the age of branding and the ‘culture-ideology of consumerism’,⁸² however, this quite profound socio-cultural difference, arguably worthy of some sensitivity in policy-making, is also reduced to a ‘unique selling point’ to be capitalised on—local people as a ‘local product’, as opposed to the locality being produced *by* the people. Incorporating the local population into the brand image may at first sound like a step towards the type of inclusionary strategy advocated by those marketing theorists who seem to be keen to avoid the ‘top-down’ approach. However, this was no such acknowledgment of the vast spread of narratives from whose interplay the construction of place is derived. Just as certain physical, historical or cultural attributes of a place are selected over others and manipulated according to the requirements of image-makers in pursuit of the most effective lure for capital, certain favourable aspects of the Geordie identity were teased out and moulded into a depoliticised stereotype-caricature, fit for display and consumption in the marketplace.

Reassembling the Geordie

As explained above, the purpose of place branding is twofold, in that it aims to create and project both an outward image attractive to investors or visiting consumers, and an inward one designed to ‘reinforce local identity’ and cultivate a sense of ‘attachment to place’. This being the case, those that oversaw the branding of Newcastle would surely have found much of their work done for them. Geordies, as any visitor could not fail to notice, are fiercely proud of their region and their city. While a distinctive North East identity clearly exists, the homogenising, depoliticising and commodifying tendencies of the branding

⁸⁰ Hollands, *Changing*, 9.

⁸¹ Abi Bliss, ‘Richard Dawson’, *The Wire* 369, October 2014, 37-43, 43.

⁸² Leslie Sklair, ‘Iconic architecture and the culture-ideology of consumerism’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27/5 (2010), 135-159.

process in Newcastle are equally clear. It could be argued that the very naming of a social group is in itself a homogenising act, implying a sense of unity that may well not exist—the ‘imagined community’, as theorised by Benedict Anderson in his work on nationalism.⁸³ Many Geordies may indeed be heavy drinkers and fanatical football fans (as are many inhabitants of every other city), but there are, of course, many others that are not. They may all be proud of where they come from, but reasons for regional or municipal pride can vary, and connections with leisure or consumption choices are in reality tenuous at best. Marketing, however, can invent such associations, even where none exists. This is, of course, one of its primary functions: ‘to affect expectations, to reconstruct history, to change meanings and switch meanings according to the groups targeted’.⁸⁴

Through marketing Newcastle as the Party City, the cultures and identities of the city and its people were effectively manipulated and reduced to a homogenous reflection of mainstream consumerism. This was then presented to both external and internal markets as a universal ‘local identity’. For visitors, the city’s ‘soft infrastructure (its people and their character)’,⁸⁵ was ‘developed’ as an attraction, the spectacle of which could be sampled by ‘tourists, stag parties and businessmen’ at St. James’ Park on matchday, or by night in the city centre on a ‘romanticised “Geordie night out”’.⁸⁶ For locals, their part was simply to perform the stereotype portrayed by the brand image, a role that many duly accepted (they had already been doing it for years). It was surely no coincidence that the elements of local identity selected to construct the ‘branded’ Geordie happened to be those that were both the most conspicuous and the most profitable.

It is not the intention to suggest here that people were somehow fooled into becoming the passive victims of evil marketing campaigns, aiming to turn them all into unthinking consumer automatons. To reiterate a previous point, the success of the Party City image relied on the participation and consent of locals, which could only be secured by promoting an image in which many would recognise themselves. Colls points out that ‘regional culture as a commodity has to be ‘bought’ first by those who in some sense possess it already’.⁸⁷ Had the idea been completely fabricated, it would surely have fallen flat, as several others have

⁸³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁸⁴ Colls, ‘Born again’, 27.

⁸⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Colls, ‘Born again’, 28.

done. The 'Here. Now.' campaign, for example, launched in 2001, failed, according to Robinson, 'not just because it was not done well but, principally, because it [was] not believed'.⁸⁸ There were evidently many in Newcastle with whom the idea of the Party City resonated—enough for it to take hold and, as we shall see, become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Marketing theorists widely acknowledge that brands 'exist in the mind of the market, and so brand management is the management of perceptions'.⁸⁹ Illustrating how the market's perception of Newcastle has been 'managed', the following statement from a marketing website, written in 2012, states that, '[t]he nightlife and the passion for Newcastle United underscore a leading city brand'.⁹⁰ It would seem, then, that despite the leader of Newcastle City Council's claim that '[o]ver the last few years we've worked hard to change [the Party City] image—to address the terrible, social, economic and health effects of excess alcohol consumption',⁹¹ that drinking continues to figure prominently in the city's image; the site quoted above also states that Newcastle is 'commonly assumed as a leisure brand'.⁹² Evidently, the council still have some way to go. While the authorities may be able to curb the continuing proliferation of the Party City through legislation, their influence over the popular media is limited (if indeed they have any). It is this sphere, namely television, that presents arguably the biggest obstacle to those who have sought to dislodge the Party City image.

Geordies in the media

The effectiveness of television as a marketing tool, and in terms of 'managing perception', needs no introduction. Representations of Newcastle and the North East on television are scarce, consisting of a handful of celebrity presenters, pop singer Cheryl Cole, and Newcastle United F.C. In 2011, however, MTV began to air a 'reality' show called *Geordie Shore*,⁹³ a spin-off of the American series *Jersey Shore*. The series has run for seven seasons to date, with an eighth currently being filmed, and has proved immensely popular at national and global levels. The show, whose slogan on the MTV website is 'Get mortal and get your tash

⁸⁸ Robinson, 'The North East', 321.

⁸⁹ Kavaratzis & Hatch, 'Dynamics', 30.

⁹⁰ Andrew Stephens, 'City brand leaders – Newcastle', *Creativebrief*, 2012 (<http://www.creativebrief.com/blog/2012/08/23/city-brand-leaders-newcastle/>).

⁹¹ Nick Forbes, 'Newcastle's alcohol journey', *Let's talk Newcastle*, 2013 (<http://newcastlecitycouncil.wordpress.com/2013/12/10/newcastles-alcohol-journey/>).

⁹² Stephens, 'City brand leaders'.

⁹³ *Geordie Shore*, series dir. Max Barber / Michael Rees, MTV, 2011 - (<http://www.mtv.co.uk/geordie-shore>).

on!',⁹⁴ originally stated that it 'follows a group of lads and lasses from Newcastle living and working together'.⁹⁵ This may sound innocuous enough, but *Geordie Shore* has proved highly controversial. This is partly due to its voyeuristic nature: cameras follow the cast everywhere, broadcasting everything from drunken vomiting and fighting in nightclubs to sexual encounters in the house's bedrooms. However, the main objections have been to the promotion of what are perceived to be negative and 'outdated' stereotypes.⁹⁶ Although ostensibly representing Geordies, however, the lifestyles of the *Geordie Shore* cast appear to be based more around hedonistic mainstream tastes and a narcissistic approach to consumption than any traits traditionally associated with the Geordie identity. They also display a relatively high level of disposable income, contrary to Rosenberg's claim that the cast are 'chavs'.⁹⁷ Brief glimpses into their everyday lives suggest a level of affluence not enjoyed by those unfortunate enough to have been tarred with that pejorative class-based moniker; few 'chavs' could afford to live on a 'new-build' estate, or drive a brand new, privately registered car, as various cast members do. Rosenberg's appraisal may be slightly wide of the mark, but drawing attention to the class issue is nonetheless important to an analysis of Party City culture.

Of most interest to this discussion is not the lascivious or narcissistic tendencies of the cast (staged or otherwise, passed off as 'drunken antics'), but the ways in which the show constructs and continually reinforces associations of Newcastle and 'Geordie-ness' with certain behaviours and characteristics. This is done mainly in the first episode through 'soundbites' and the frequent repetition of distinctive local images. Throughout the episode, members of the cast often talk about 'proper Geordies' or 'true Geordies', equating the identity with traits arguably more representative of mainstream popular culture than any local sensibilities, and all of which illustrate clearly the transition from a production-based identity to one that revolves around consumption and image.

⁹⁴ *Geordie Shore*, MTV, 2016; The phrase 'get mortal' means to get as drunk as possible, while 'get your tash on', coined by one of the show's cast, means to kiss someone; it was recently added to the Collins Online Dictionary due to the extent of its general usage, illustrating the show's popularity.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; the page has recently been updated and this description no longer appears.

⁹⁶ Kunal Dutta, 'Boat comes in for Geordie Shore as tourism booms', *The Independent*, 26/02/2012 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/the-boat-comes-in-for-geordie-shore-as-tourism-booms-7440945.html>).

⁹⁷ Alyssa Rosenberg, 'U.K. Version of 'Jersey Shore' Is Realer, Sadder Than the Original', *The Atlantic*, 12 Aug 2011 (<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/uk-version-of-jersey-shore-is-realer-sadder-than-the-original/243157/>).

Confirming this theory, cast member James, having boasted to viewers that ‘the hardest graft I’ve ever done is probably doing my hair’,⁹⁸ goes on to explain, ‘It’s the Geordie law—you’ve got to have a tan. No true Geordie would walk around looking like a ghost’.⁹⁹ He is, however, talking about fake tan; Newcastle is famous for many things, but a sunny climate is not one of them. On entering the bedroom, James, who according to his agent’s website in 2014, ‘devotes his life to working out, drinking and partying’,¹⁰⁰ is clearly happy with the arrangement: ‘dumbbells in the corner...mirror...it’s a Geordie lad’s dream room’. Such displays of ‘hyper-masculinity’ are constant, with a distinctly narcissistic element. This could be seen as the result of over-compensation for the displacement of such exhibitions from industrial labour to consumer society. Chatterton and Hollands observe that the rise of this type of behaviour amongst (mostly) young male Geordies has been attributed in part to ‘vigorous gender restructuring in the labour market’ in the post-industrial period.¹⁰¹

The female cast members are presented in similarly stereotypical and overtly sexualised manner—episode two treats viewers to Sophie’s announcement that ‘the year of the slut has already begun’.¹⁰² Sex is as high on the womens’ agenda as their male counterparts, as this quote illustrates, and they are every bit as ‘predatory’, exhibitionist and, if necessary, violent, as the men. A predilection for alcohol is presented as being even more pronounced in the girls’ case; although all of the cast are drinking within minutes of arriving in the house (‘been in the house five seconds and she’s offering us a drink already—proper Geordie bird’),¹⁰³ it is invariably the female members who are shown in the most undignified scenarios. These include falling fully dressed into a hot tub, crawling on the bathroom floor while vomiting, and being carried semi-conscious to awaiting taxis after a night out in the Party City. This image of young Newcastle women was, according to Fenwick *et al*, integral to the marketing strategies of the 2000s. They observe that,

In a book published by Magnum photographers in 2000, intended to offer observations of the way that the millennium was celebrated across Britain, the main photograph of Newcastle is of a girl in clinging Lycra exposing her breasts. It is the only photograph in the book that uses that kind of image.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ James Tindale, *Geordie Shore*, MTV, 24/05/2011.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Client profiles: James Tindale, *Bold Management* (<http://www.bold-management.com/home/clients/james-tindale/>), 2014. The site has since been updated and Tindale is now a fully qualified personal fitness trainer.

¹⁰¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 7; see also Nayak.

¹⁰² *Geordie Shore*, ‘Episode 2’, MTV UK, 2011.

¹⁰³ Jay Gardner, *Geordie Shore*, ‘Episode 1’, MTV UK, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Fenwick, Whickham and Fawcett, ‘Public’, 784.

Such imagery, then, was not only central to Party City marketing campaigns, but also seemingly reserved for Newcastle, despite the prevalence of this type of behaviour all over the country at the time.¹⁰⁵ But perhaps the most overt example of the commodification of identity is illustrated by one of 18-year-old Holly's introductory statements. Being from Teesside, she is not technically a Geordie, as the Tyneside-born members of the cast are keen to point out. However, she tells us, 'obviously I do class myself as a true Geordie because it's more of a lifestyle...you go out, you get pissed, you don't give a shit what anyone thinks about you'.¹⁰⁶ Despite the protestations of her fellow cast members ('She's nee Geordie...she's not one of us'),¹⁰⁷ it is clear that some consider the regional identity to be something that can be bought into: a 'lifestyle'. According to this thinking, anyone from anywhere can now be a 'Geordie', simply by adopting the necessary values and behaviour, and drinking in the 'right' places.

Along with the cast's own explanations of what it means to be a Geordie, as mentioned earlier the programme is punctuated every few minutes with footage of Newcastle and the surrounding area, particularly local icons such as the Tyne Bridge, The Sage Gateshead music centre and BALTIC art gallery on the Gateshead bank of the River Tyne, the Angel of the North and aerial footage of the city. Every time a member of the cast speaks to the camera individually, it is in front of a backdrop of one or other of these images. This is admittedly a commonly-used stylistic device for this type of television, but nonetheless has the effect of continuously reminding the viewer where the cast are from, and the kind of people that come from there, reinforcing such associations. The lifestyles of the cast could not, on the whole, be further removed from the roots of Geordie identity, seemingly reflecting more closely mainstream consumer taste, hedonistic self-obsession and a sufficiently high level of disposable income. Such lifestyles are common across the whole of the UK, as the increasing number of similar television shows and the long-running health and social concerns over binge drinking demonstrate. Yet, *Geordie Shore* makes a point of conflating lifestyle and behaviour with both class and locality. The show reinforces a very narrowly defined stereotype that, for many Geordies, has nothing to do with their identities or cultures. It would appear, then, that marketing and the use of television have successfully reduced a

¹⁰⁵ Several television series were broadcast during the 2000s with titles such as *Booze Britain*, which showed footage of binge drinking gathered from cities across the UK.

¹⁰⁶ Holly Hagan, *Geordie Shore*, 'Episode 1', *MTV UK*, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Jay, *Ibid*.

distinctive and historic regional identity to a consumer product, available on the market to anyone who has the money and the inclination.

The Geordie Shore effect

Reactions to *Geordie Shore* in the North East have been polarised. While the cast are now *bona fide* (if minor) celebrities, seen by some local young people as role models, many more do not see it so positively. Many locals, including the Member of Parliament for Newcastle, Chi Onwurah, and other civic leaders, expressed outrage after the show's first broadcast, objecting to what was perceived to be an extremely negative portrayal of Geordies and Newcastle cultural life. The MP in fact planned to raise questions in Parliament as to 'the acceptability of the participants being plied with drink',¹⁰⁸ adding, '[b]y putting these young people in this situation, it is encouraging them to lose all their dignity. It's totally unrepresentative of Newcastle'.¹⁰⁹ This type of reaction was widespread across the region. Amongst the protestations was the creation of a *Facebook* page called 'R.I.P. Geordie Pride', which more than 20,000 people initially joined;¹¹⁰ an online petition was also started, demanding the cancellation of the show and describing it as 'a disgrace to Newcastle's pride and culture'.¹¹¹

MTV, in response, have claimed that 'the programme makes Newcastle look vibrant and exciting',¹¹² and that '...the qualities that come across in the characters...are really admirable qualities and...that's a really positive perspective on the North East'.¹¹³ How many in the North East would agree is debatable, but the widespread outrage of local people who felt insulted and embarrassed suggests that it is a minority. A year after the show's first broadcast, hotels and travel agents around Newcastle began to report that the popularity of *Geordie Shore* had boosted local tourism.¹¹⁴ This was interpreted by the local press as a tangible benefit to the region, which is admittedly hard to dispute. However, although other possible reasons for the increased tourism are suggested, the report appears not to consider

¹⁰⁸ Richard Moss, 'Newcastle MP Chi Onwurah at war over Geordie Shore', *BBC News*, 7 June 2011 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-13685728>).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Daily Mail (no author), "'These idiots embarrass us": anger in Newcastle as locals slam Geordie Shore after its first episode', *Daily Mail*, 26 May 2011, (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1391036/Geordie-Shore-slammed-angry-Newcastle-locals-embarrassing.html>); the page has 6,728 'likes' at the time of writing.

¹¹¹ 'Get MTV to cancel Geordie Shore NOW!', *iPetitions* (<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/cancelgeordieshorennow>).

¹¹² Moss, 'Newcastle MP'.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Dutta, 'Boat'.

the negative effects of such large-scale alcohol consumption to be worth mentioning, in particular the anti-social behaviour. Neither does it question whether the extra tourists might in fact be contributing to these problems; it is surely not too far-fetched to suggest that visitors inspired by *Geordie Shore* might have similar interests to those promoted by the show, which after all provides no other perspective on the region.

Opposition to the Party City image has been widespread since its inception, both from locals and civic leaders. It is interesting to note, however, that despite long-standing calls to 'move away from the loutish party image towards a more upmarket one',¹¹⁵ it is only in the last few years (since the numbers of city centre drinkers have begun to wane), that any effective action has been taken to counter both the drinking and the image. One possible explanation, mentioned above, is that large corporate operators now wield a disproportionate level of power when it comes to dealing with local authorities, whose budgets and powers have now been systematically cut for over three decades. This has left many councils with few options but to take whatever form of investment they can. A former planning officer cited by Chatterton and Hollands states that, 'if you get a planning application...and it's for a multi-million-pound development like the one on the Mayfair site...I mean you can't say I'm turning this down because it's corporate',¹¹⁶ suggesting that this is perhaps more than conjecture. Another factor may be that profitable markets have shifted; the young people that constituted the main Party City market have had relatively less disposable income since the end of the 2000s. Business responds to such shifts by altering provision, so perhaps the changes Newcastle has experienced over the last seven years are as much down to economic currents as any efforts to change the city's image.

The continuing popularity of *Geordie Shore*, while owing much to the self-evident mass appeal of such voyeuristic television, also indicates that such perceptions of Newcastle have yet to be dislodged, particularly outside the region. The recent noticeable drop in the number of city centre drinkers is arguably as likely to be the result of the recession as a change in local drinking habits; attendance at other music and club nights has also fallen over the last few years. However, although the figures have played into the hands of those wishing to distance Newcastle from the Party City image, as well as freeing up some space in the city as mainstream venues have begun to close, it also seems unlikely that a genuinely

¹¹⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, 'Changing', 122.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 58.

diverse city will be the direction in which the 'Newcastle brand' is taken. The more upmarket image indeed seems to have become the route taken, but this is beginning to result in even more exclusive city centre nightlife provision. It also seems unlikely that minority music interests, such as those discussed in the following chapters, will figure prominently in the construction of such an image.

As explained above, brands depend on consistency to maintain the desired associations, perceptions and meanings within their target markets. The paramount importance of perception is illustrated by the existence of 'dilution laws'. These permit the owners of trademarks to legally challenge new trademark applications deemed to pose a threat by weakening, or 'diluting', the established meaning of the mark,¹¹⁷ whether it could result in consumer confusion and / or affect profits. With this in mind, and given the considerable power and influence of the alcohol industry, it does not require a wild leap of the imagination to see *Geordie Shore* functioning in a similar way to a promotional campaign designed to prevent dilution of the Party City brand. The question arises of whether it was entirely coincidence that the series first began to air around the same time as the numbers of city centre drinkers, the programme's main target market, began to fall. The boost in local tourism attributed to the show's popularity seems to indicate that, even if not explicitly designed to attract more drinkers to Newcastle, as an advertising campaign for the city's mainstream nightlife, it has worked.

For those locals whose identity is reflected in the Party City image and *Geordie Shore*, the branding process, backed up by the popular media, has functioned exactly as it should. Presenting the spectacular lifestyles of the cast as being rooted in local culture, even though they are not all Geordies, and reinforcing associations of the city and its people with those lifestyles, has effectively enabled the appropriation of the title 'Geordie', as well as the physical space of the city centre, by a particular social group. Those who may recognise themselves in *Geordie Shore* may well feel pride in the televised confirmation of their 'Geordieness', but perhaps also see in the programme an image to live up to. The number of fan pages on the internet indicates that this is probably the case, as did the scene in Newcastle city centre at weekends until recently. In the process, these young performers of the Geordie 'brand' function simultaneously as both target market *and* local asset, their own consumption deployed to attract other drinkers. Confirming this idea, when the celebrity

¹¹⁷ Mark Bartholomew, 'Advertising and social identity', *Buffalo Law Review* (2010), 932-976.

cast of *Geordie Shore* go out for their first evening of work, their job turns out to be that of promoting drinks, from the windows of a limousine driven around the city centre.

Mainstream drinking has always been the most lucrative area of nightlife in Newcastle, and as stated in the opening chapter of this thesis, many will often participate in mainstream entertainment to socialise with groups of mixed taste. However, there has been little space left for those who do not fit in with the mainstream, consumption-based 'brand narrative'¹¹⁸ for Newcastle. Too multi-faceted an image would perhaps threaten brand consistency, although the silencing of other voices is an issue of increasing concern among marketers and Marxists alike.¹¹⁹ Whatever the case, the decrease in provision for non-mainstream interests is clear, and it does not take a great deal of exploration to find that the stereotype of the Party City Geordie has been loudly and consistently challenged by many local musicians and artists.¹²⁰ That mainstream entertainment has come to dominate the city centre, and to an extent now represents Newcastle outside the region, has bred a degree of resentment among non-mainstream groups. This suggests that social cohesion and diversity was in fact damaged rather than enhanced by the Party City marketing campaigns. The question of whose party, and whose culture, continues to go unasked, and unanswered.

¹¹⁸ Stephens, 'City brand leaders'.

¹¹⁹ See for example Warnaby & Medway; also Harvey.

¹²⁰ See for example Bennett, *Popular*.

Part 2: Case studies

Introduction

Part one of this thesis offered an account of the rebranding, city imaging exercises that took place in Newcastle from the mid-1990s onwards, particularly the focus on mainstream nightlife as a driver of economic growth. The 'Party City' image so assiduously cultivated by corporate leisure chains and the city council during a period of 'culture-led regeneration' certainly affected the city's cultural life, but did the cultural strategy fulfil its brief of creating a 'truly diverse' city, as well as increasing the city's economic prosperity? Or, as various commentators have argued,¹ was private sector economic growth in fact the primary goal, with nightlife development led by corporate operators seeking to maximise profits, at the expense of diversity? Part two consists of three case studies which examine in more detail some of the impacts on Newcastle's music scene of the spatial reconfiguration that occurred in pursuit of the new, leisure-orientated brand image. By 2010, it is argued, the overwhelming dominance of the Party City image had in fact depleted, rather than enhanced, cultural diversity, despite the stated aims of the council's cultural strategy and regeneration rhetoric.

The three venues studied here had all ceased trading by 2010. The Mayfair Ballroom was demolished in 1999 as part of a large-scale city centre regeneration project. It had been one of Newcastle's largest and most important live music venues, and a 'spiritual home' for local rock fans in particular. Riverside, Newcastle's answer to the famous Armadillo World Headquarters in Austin, Texas, closed in the same year, primarily due to financial difficulties, highlighting the monetary risk involved with running live music venues. Riverside was taken over by a national chain, refitted and reopened as the 'superclub' Foundation. The new club, though, lasted less than half the time that Riverside had been open, closing in 2006. Finally, The Cooperage, a live music and club venue on the Quayside, closed in 2008 and has stood unused ever since. It had accommodated a wide range of non-mainstream music events, but gentrification in the Quayside area played out in an increasingly familiar way.

¹ See for example Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public Policy in the Party City: The Spectacle of Culture, Gender, and Locality', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33/14 (2010), 779-789.

These case studies draw on various approaches to the study of urban music cultures and cultural life in the neoliberal economic environment, including urban, cultural and economic geography, cultural theory and popular music studies, with a focus on the spatial dynamics of cities under neoliberalism. Mapping the impacts that the loss of these important venues had on local music scenes and contextualising them within a rapidly changing politico-economic framework, the remainder of this thesis illuminates the extent to which Newcastle's remodelling as a 'culture city' actually produced largely the opposite of the 'inclusivity' around which the whole regeneration strategy was ostensibly based.² The losses of the venues in question, it is argued, had profound spatial consequences that fundamentally altered the use of city space, and were instrumental both in a process of rationalisation by leisure chains, and a desire to control local nightlife and, by association, the city's image, on the part of local authorities. The contrasts between regeneration rhetoric and reality continue to anchor the discussion throughout this part of the thesis, which also aims to identify possible reasons for such disparities.

Concluding the thesis is a brief assessment of the aftermath of the Party City years, and some suggestions as to approaches that might be considered to counteract what some perceive to be a move towards creating an even more exclusive city centre. Changes in Newcastle's urban environment appear to have accelerated since 2010, namely the 'upgrading' or gentrification of nightlife, not to mention the haste with which the 'culture city' narrative was dropped once the Labour government lost power in 2010; the coalition government that replaced it issued cuts so punitive that the city council was able to claim that it had no option but to cut its *entire* arts and culture budget (the phrase 'doing a Newcastle' became journalistic slang to describe other cities doing the same),³ a controversial issue that will also figure in the concluding discussions.

Why these case studies?

The three venues studied here were selected primarily because of their local status and centrality to the scenes that formed around them. Each one instilled strong a sense of ownership into the groups who frequented them. They provided spaces outside of mainstream nightlife in which individual and collective identities could be formed and

² Newcastle City Council & Gateshead Council, 'Building Bridges: A strategy for culture in NewcastleGateshead 2002-2012'.

³ Charlotte Higgins, 'Culture clash as threat of 100% cut in arts funding divides Newcastle', *The Guardian*, 29/01/2013 (<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/jan/29/culture-cut-arts-funding-newcastle>).

explored, cultivating and reinforcing senses of group belonging and social ties. They also connected people and space, mediating those connections through the music that brought them there in the first place. The closure of each of these venues stemmed from a rebranding process that was directing development according to a particular aesthetic, economic and ideological vision. Yet, each one occurred in its own distinct set of circumstances, reflecting different facets of neoliberalisation in Newcastle. These can be loosely identified as: the expansion of the mainstream leisure and retail sectors as a driver of economic growth; increasing residential developments in and around the city centre (a relatively new phenomenon for Newcastle, which, due to the history of its development as the commercial hub of an industrial region, rather than an industrial city *per se*, had not had the inner city slums that characterised many other UK cities); the near-impossibility of maintaining an unprofitable operation in the (provincial) neoliberalised city; and the related need for council revenue from development. Each of these processes influenced decisions made by the council, venue owners, property developers and leisure operators that had huge negative impacts on local music scenes. None is peculiar to Newcastle, but the combination of local geography, the construction of a particular brand image and the city's specific economic situation led to losses of space that were arguably as detrimental to the aims of the rebranding process as they were to local musical life.

Chapter 5: Case Study - The Mayfair Ballroom

Introduction

The Mayfair Ballroom was not only Newcastle's most famous live music venue, it made Newcastle famous. This may seem like hyperbole, but until its demolition in 1999, for bands and fans alike, the Mayfair made Newcastle worth visiting. The loss of this venue, coupled with the closure of the Riverside in the same year, was arguably the biggest blow to the local live (popular) music scene in the city's recent history, from which it has yet to recover. The venue was central, both socially and spatially, to local musical culture at every level. Along with Riverside, it could have fitted in perfectly with the council's cultural regeneration strategy, however this was evidently not how they saw it. Tom Caulker, proprietor of Newcastle's last remaining independent nightclub, board member of the NE1 city centre management company and a respected local businessman, is succinct in his recounting of the events surrounding the loss of the Mayfair, explaining that

The thing with the Mayfair was just the classic thing of, you know, the owners of the Mayfair took the money, the council put a compulsory purchase order on them, shut them down, that was it. 'We're having a mall, fuck you'...and it wasn't like, 'we're having a mall, we'll relocate you to - ', it was, 'we're having a mall, fuck you', you know? ¹

The following case study will show not only that the Mayfair's contribution to the vibrancy of Newcastle's nightlife was much greater than simply providing a venue for touring bands, but also the primacy of social control in the neoliberalising of contemporary city space.

The Mayfair: a brief history

By the time of its demolition in 1999, the Mayfair's reputation was legendary. From 1964 onwards, the venue hosted regular performances by the biggest rock bands of the time, and was also home to 'Europe's largest and longest-running rock disco'.² Touring bands would include Newcastle on their itineraries as a matter of course, the Mayfair being somewhere that was loved as much by the artists as the audiences. Acts to have appeared there over the decades included The Animals, Pink Floyd, Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, Thin Lizzy (these last two on the same night), Deep Purple, Kraftwerk, Metallica, AC/DC, The Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart's Original Magic Band, The Police, The Ramones, Motörhead, Venom, Bon

¹ Tom Caulker, personal interview, 16/03/2015.

² Marshall Hall, 'The Mayfair', *Newcastlestuff.com* (<http://www.newcastlestuff.com/mayfair/1960s.htm>); page no longer exists.

Jovi, Gil Scott-Heron, Billy Bragg, Nirvana and Led Zeppelin, whose first ever UK gig was at the Mayfair. They were booked to play as the Yardbirds, who had disbanded on returning from a tour of the US, and played as Led Zeppelin instead, although the tickets still had the Yardbirds' name on them.^{3, 4} In its later years, the Mayfair also hosted performances by Kylie Minogue and Robbie Williams, as well as the North East's most famous large dance event, Rezurection. Nostalgic local press articles regularly describe the venue as 'iconic',⁵ the Newcastle Chronicle having set up a *Facebook* 'timeline' for readers to share their memories and photos.⁶

The Nirvana gig at the Mayfair was one of the most infamous in Newcastle's music history. Promoted by Tom Caulker, it was their first performance outside of the US since the release of their album *Nevermind* (Newcastle had also hosted their first ever European show at the Riverside, two years earlier), and the night had obviously sold out. An interesting and revealing anecdote regarding the gig, and the 'regulation' of Newcastle nightlife at the turn of the 1990s, can be found on the 'Culture and History' page of the World Headquarters nightclub's website. It is worth quoting in full:

It was months prior to the release of *Nevermind* that we booked them, but as the show approached, that album was released & totally blew up. *Smells like Teen Spirit* entered the charts at no 7 the week of the show, Nirvana were the biggest band on the Planet & we had them booked into a 1500 capacity venue. Gulp...! As you can imagine it was total sold out madness & we had never seen anything like that before, or since. The Mayfair's door staff totally exploited the situation, collecting in all the tickets & then reselling them in the pub over the road. Anyone without tickets, that had come to the door, they had sent over there to wait. It was the biggest scam we had ever faced & we were busy inside the venue with the band, totally unaware it was happening & powerless to stop it until they had made a killing—Of thousands...

By the time Kurt & chums hit the stage, there must have been over 3000 people in that venue & you literally couldn't move. People broke bones that night (well we knew a guy who broke his thumb at least). We had worked so hard to put it all together & once we realised what had happened, it was a real proper kick in the teeth & hands down—the scam of the decade.⁷

As stated above, the Mayfair was something of an institution on the UK circuit for international touring bands. At the very beginning of the 1990s, it also played an important part in the development of dance music in the North East. Local indie promoter Paul Ludford had turned his attention to the rave scene that had been burgeoning across the UK since

³ Hall, 'The Mayfair'.

⁴ David Morton, 'Remember when: Led Zeppelin rock Newcastle Mayfair', *Chroniclelive.co.uk*, 3/10/2013, (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/remember-when-led-zeppelin-rock-6133489>).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Accessible from the article above.

⁷ World Headquarters (no author), 'History and culture', *WeloveWHQ.com* (<http://www.welovewhq.com/history-culture/>).

1988's 'Second Summer of Love', and organised an event called Rezerrection at the Mayfair. The event ran for two years, kicking off the underground dance scene in the North East. By 1993 it had moved to larger accommodation in Edinburgh, but in the short time it ran in Newcastle, it too had gained legendary status, as well as launching the careers of several local DJs.



Fig. 4: The Mayfair Ballroom, entrance.⁸

Along with the higher profile events, the Mayfair was also a venue that local bands aspired to play, as it represented the 'next step' in building local followings and raising their profiles. The existence of a local venue that provided the opportunity to play in front of up to 1,500 people was a crucial stepping stone in the development of bands' careers and the local music scene in general. It meant that bands did not have to leave Newcastle in order to experience the process of playing a larger venue nor, importantly, incur the high costs that often accompany such excursions. Local bands that have achieved commercial success are regularly used to promote Newcastle's cultural life, however it is rarely mentioned that all of these left the city in order to do so. Although bands have for a long time felt that they

⁸ Image from 'Mayfair nightclub: Your memories of the iconic Newcastle Mayfair 15 years on', *Chroniclelive.co.uk*, 21/08/2014 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/mayfair-nightclub-your-memories-iconic-7654186>).

needed to go to London to realise their ambitions, the loss of the Mayfair meant that important preparatory work could no longer be done at home.

Newgate House, and inside the Mayfair⁹

The Mayfair occupied the basement of Newgate House, a large building fronting Newgate Street, which contained mainly offices, with retail premises at street level. Built in 1961-62, it was the first building in Newcastle to be constructed as part of the building boom of the 1960s,¹⁰ in which large swathes of the historic city centre were demolished. A modernist, functional building typical of its time, of concrete construction with a fascia of Portland stone and patterned green tiles, it dominated the view up Newgate Street from the Bigg Market. The ground floor had originally housed a supermarket, Moore's, the interior of which, according to a local historian whose mother was an employee, consisted of 'a series of "circular counters" with assistants...in the middle of each circle, to serve you what you wanted to buy.'¹¹ The Newcastle Weather Centre and Inland Revenue offices had also been located in Newgate House, but like many of the others who had rented office space there, they had left by the end of the 1990s.

It is worth piecing together an impression of the venue, as many accounts by regular gig-goers describe not only the pathways through the city that led them to the Mayfair, but also the pathways and routines they followed once inside; the spatial habits of people and groups are much the same at every scale, a point which will be discussed shortly. With no books yet published about the Mayfair, information on the nature of its interior is scarce. To do this for a space that no longer exists however, extensive use of internet archives and forums is necessary. Local musician Roger Smith has a website on which he gives 'a personal perspective'¹² on life as a working musician in the North East during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He provides descriptions of local venues, accompanied by photographs and anecdotes of performances and. His description of the Mayfair is cursory but enough to give a rough idea of its shape, explaining that,

⁹ The following section draws on work previously conducted by myself as part of a Masters degree in 2011.

¹⁰ Geoff Phillips, *Tyneside: Then and Now* (Durham: GP Electronic Services, 2002).

¹¹ Newcastle Historian, posted in 'Remembering HISTORIC NEWCASTLE - Old Photos, Maps, even Stories . . .' *SkyscraperCity.com*, 2010, 48 (<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=55955735#post55955735>); All internet posts cited are public domain and can be accessed directly through search entries: I have treated them as empirical texts and as such, authors have not been anonymised. Posts also appear in their original form.

¹² R. Smith, 'Ready Steady Gone: Gigging in the North East, 1965-1972 – A Personal Perspective', *Readysteadygone.co.uk*, n.d.

The entrance to the Mayfair was on the corner of Newgate Street and Low Friar Street (now the site of the Gate Leisure Complex). It had an oblong-shaped ballroom with a large balcony right around the room. There were several bars with seating areas on the balcony plus more bars downstairs in the areas surrounding the large dance floor.

In the sixties and seventies there was a circular revolving stage which enabled bands to set up on each side and follow on from each other without a break in the music. When a really popular band appeared there would often be a wooden barrier in front of the stage to stop over enthusiastic fans getting at their idols.¹³

We know the venue's capacity was roughly 1,500, which gives a reasonable idea of the venue's size. A balcony overlooked the rear of the stage, providing 'a good place for people to stand and aim abuse or even missiles at the band if they didn't like them'.¹⁴ Several photographs of the entrance at street level show a reasonably large but otherwise fairly innocuous cinema-style multi-doorway tucked into a corner. An illuminated panel was attached to the wall on the right, where posters were displayed, with similar, unlit panels on the left, at right angles to the doorway. A rigid canopy sheltered the area immediately outside the doorway, where the Mayfair's name was mounted in neon. Interestingly, the 'feel' that this little area lends to the street is now also a thing of the past. The drive towards 'clean and safe'¹⁵ cities has become a mainstay of (largely privately operated) contemporary city centre management. In particular, posters are no longer allowed anywhere in the city centre except for the inside of some takeaways and in some pubs. The boards that secure empty buildings are now conspicuously devoid of any decoration, except perhaps developers' logos; this point is discussed in the conclusions of the thesis.

Other websites exist containing photos uploaded by regulars at the club which can be used to corroborate these initial descriptions. The rise of social networking sites such as Facebook has seen a huge number of users becoming prolific uploaders and archivers of photographs, videos and audio recordings, and written accounts of nights out. The Mayfair has two dedicated Facebook groups,¹⁶ both publicly accessible, and both of which contain over a thousand photographs, often with personal captions, plus discussion boards where fans recount their memories. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums have also recently published online a set of photos taken when the Mayfair first opened.¹⁷ Between the various internet

¹³ Smith, 'The Mayfair', *Readysteadygone.co.uk*, n.d. Due to the openly accessible nature of the internet, this information appears in several other places on the internet in the same, or similar, form. The lack of dates on many of these sites makes it difficult to ascertain who the original author was, however the descriptions are consistent and there are no reasons to suggest they are not accurate.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the 21st-century city* (London: Penguin, 2009), 44.

¹⁶ 'I used to go to Newcastle Mayfair' and 'The Mayfair Rock Club', both at www.facebook.com.

¹⁷ Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, Photostream, *Flickr.com* (https://www.flickr.com/photos/twm_news/).

sources, it is possible to gain a much more detailed idea of the physicality of the space. Pictures of the dancefloor taken from the first-floor balcony, for example, show the crowd bathed in red light some 15ft below, the ceiling approximately the same height above it. The ceiling itself was spanned at intervals by large gold beams, and from it were suspended some modern club lighting gantries. These hung in between the original 1960s fittings, which were solid futuristic-looking chandeliers, in the same gold as the beams. There are also pictures of the various bars, the staircases and blue-and-white tiled toilets, and other features such as the circular box office area and the illuminated entrance display, which stood half way down the main staircase into the venue. The words 'Welcome to the Mayfair Suite' were illuminated in neon, bordered by three large mirror balls.

Pictures, however, can only convey a limited idea of what it was like to be in a space. Internet discussion boards, on the other hand, can provide information that would not be possible to communicate visually. Among the posts in these forums can be found, for example, descriptions of the carpet and sofas, sticky after years of spilt beer, the greasy chips and burgers served at one of the bars, and the hot, sweaty, airless atmosphere of the small room known as the Gearbox, where heavier forms of music such as punk and death metal (or gabber if it was a dance night) were played. Further exploration on other sites not directly connected with the Mayfair, or even with music in general, can also be useful. In the Newcastle section of a global forum for architecture and urban environment,¹⁸ for example, there are entries by two people who worked in the kitchens, and describe the areas 'behind the scenes', such as the tiny, inadequate goods lift that serviced the kitchen, the fire escapes, and the sheer awkwardness of loading and unloading band equipment through a very small service aisle.¹⁹ Many of these descriptions appear only as throwaway remarks in longer conversations, often about unrelated topics, but the information they contain is invaluable in creating a more complete mental image of the club as a space.

Video upload sites such as *YouTube* are also extremely valuable for this type of research; the use of technology for the transfer of analogue recordings to digital format has resulted in a multitude of old, private footage becoming available online. These, although few, can take us a step closer to an imaginary night in Newcastle's most famous club. A video of Nirvana

¹⁸ 'Newcastle and the North East – ASK A QUESTION HERE if you are looking for information', *www.skyscrapercity.com*, Newcastle Metro Area forum (2010), 56 (<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1046553&page=56>).

¹⁹ *delicolor & DXNewcastle*, *Ibid.*, 56.

performing their 1991 hit 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', from the gig mentioned above,²⁰ conveys well the energy of the mosh pit, occasionally obscured by the silhouette of a crowd-surfer, and pulling back from time to time to show a sea of rising and falling heads as the whole crowd jumps up and down as one, whistling and cheering. Tom Caulker's assertion that the venue must have been full to twice its nominal capacity could well have been correct, as the camera is remarkably still considering it was being shot from within the crowd; it was so packed that the user could literally not move. Audio recordings also appear on this site, accompanied by a slideshow of still photographs in the absence of video footage. The whistles, screams and shouts of excited Northerners punctuate the songs, and the viewers' comments, many of whom were there (if we are to believe them), confirm that the night was indeed as good as it sounded. Again, though, it is the personal narratives provided by internet users which give the extra depth necessary to construct, in as complete a way as possible, any image of a space, and the pathways and networks that any space is a part of, that only exists in memory.

The Grainger Town Project

As the Millennium approached, Newcastle's need for regeneration and economic revival grew. The city centre was dirty and dilapidated, many buildings were empty or under-occupied and economic activity was beginning to stall. The large indoor shopping centre Eldon Square, constructed in the 1970s in the northern part of the city centre, along with out-of-town retail centres such as Gateshead's Metrocentre, and the business parks built as part of the TWDC's regeneration strategy of the 1980s, had drawn businesses and shoppers away from Newcastle's former retail centre in the south part of the city centre. In the early 1990s, the name Grainger Town was coined by the city council for a large part of the 'historic core'²¹ of Newcastle. The name is derived from Richard Grainger, a prominent developer in the early to mid-19th century. Many of the buildings are listed and the area as a whole is visually stunning; Grey Street was voted the 'best street in Britain' in 2002.

As 'heritage' and the preservation of historic buildings became increasingly incorporated into the neoliberal toolkit for urban economic growth from the 1980s onwards, the Grainger Town Project was conceived to bring about the regeneration of Newcastle's foundering local

20 Curmudgeon [uploader], 'Nirvana – Smells Like Teen Spirit – Newcastle upon Tyne – 1991', *www.Youtube.com*, 2009 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SDX5GzykKI>).

21 John Pendlebury, 'Conservation and regeneration: complementary or conflicting processes? The case of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne', *Planning practice and research* 17/2 (2002), 145-158, 149.

economy.²² A public-private consortium of investors and stakeholders eventually coalesced as the Grainger Town Partnership, which included English Heritage, regeneration agency English Partnerships, the city council and a number of property developers. A regeneration strategy was drawn up in 1996 by US consultants EDAW. The EDAW report 'served as a defining vision for those at the heart of the regeneration of Grainger Town',²³ however it did not proceed without some tensions between the parties involved, namely the conservation-orientated partners and those in the property sector.²⁴

Newgate House was by this time mostly empty except for a few shops at street level and the Mayfair in its basement. The building no longer profitable, the site was acquired through 'land assembly'²⁵ for developers Land Securities, the largest owner of commercial properties in the country,²⁶ who put forward a planning application in 1998 for 'The Gate', an indoor 'leisure mall'. Architecturally, The Gate is a more contemporary building, boasting 'possibly the highest total glass wall construction in the UK'.²⁷ Initial objections were lodged by several bodies however, including the Grainger Town Partnership's Urban Design Panel and the City's Conservation Areas Advisory Committee, due to the 'monolithic form and a perceived insensitivity to the character of the area'.²⁸ Even though the proposal '[ran] counter to the council's own commissioned analyses of the area',²⁹ The Gate's development was identified as a 'key priority scheme' by the Grainger Town Partnership, raising the question of corporate leverage within the Project, and local regeneration more generally. The suggestion contained in the GTP's Final Assessment Report, *Pride of Place*, that '[w]ithout the Project...some developments—such as The Gate—would have gone ahead anyway',³⁰ arguably hints that the council had already made up their mind, and that the influence of corporate capital played a large part. A high-profile campaign was mounted to save the Mayfair, endorsed by several of rock's biggest local names, including Mark Knopfler of Dire

²² Hereafter referred to as the GTP.

²³ Pendlebury, 'Conservation', 150.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Land assembly is a planning power that enables formerly separate tracts of land to be assembled as a single site to increase profit-making potential, often using compulsory purchase.

²⁶ Land Securities (no author), 'About Us', official site, 2011 (www.landsecurities.com/aboutus).

²⁷ Space Decks official site, 2011 (www.spacedecks.co.uk).

²⁸ Pendlebury, 'Conservation', 430.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Robinson, 'Pride of Place: The Final Assessment of the Grainger Town Project', Newcastle City Council, 2003, 19.

Straits,³¹ but to no avail, and the building was demolished in 1999, taking the Mayfair with it. Pieces of the dancefloor and other fittings, such as the letters from above the entrance, were salvaged by regulars as memorabilia.³²

The Gate is populated entirely by mainstream entertainment and leisure brands. A proclaimed 'wide range'³³ of restaurants consists of seven national chains (T.G.I. Friday's, Frankie and Benny's, Coast to Coast, Nando's, Pizza Hut, Zaza Bazaar and Handmade Burger Co.), and one locally owned Italian restaurant (Nino's). Bars and nightclubs in The Gate all play commercial music of one sort or another. Opera Piano Bar has live music performances by small ensembles or solo artists, but this is a small roster of regular artists who function more as background music, as opposed to the place being a live music venue *per se*. Opera was a later addition to The Gate's 'offering', however; for the first ten years of its operation, bars and clubs within the mall were of a similar type to those found in the Bigg Market. Since the building was acquired by Crown Estates in 2012, there has been a drive towards more 'family friendly' establishments, leading to the closure of several bars and their replacement with restaurants. There is also a large casino and a sixteen-screen cinema in the building.

As stated elsewhere, the idea behind The Gate was, according to the official website, to 'create a radically different entertainment offer with flagship bars and restaurants'.³⁴ Considering that there are other outlets of at least four of The Gate's chain restaurants in Newcastle, two of which are within easy walking distance, and that the only discernible differences between the bars inside the building and others nearby and around the city are the décor and the names, it is difficult to see how this constitutes a 'radical difference'. More seriously, Robinson points out in the GTP final assessment report that 'restaurants in Newcastle's China Town [situated in Stowell Street, behind The Gate] are struggling to compete with newer restaurants and café bars and The Gate has created a barrier blocking the area.'³⁵ The council's claim that their regeneration strategy was designed to encourage diversity and economic growth appears to have been at least partially contradicted by their own actions, deliberately placing a large obstacle right in front of an arguably valuable sector

³¹ Laura Caroe, 'Rockers revive spirit of magical Mayfair: 10 years on and music fans relive venue's glory days', *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 10/08/2009.

³² The singer from now-defunct local heavy metal band XLR8R, Mark Savage, has the letter 'e' from above the door, and various local members of the rock community I have spoken to have pieces of the stage or dancefloor.

³³ The Gate, official site (www.thegatenewcastle.co.uk).

³⁴ 'About us', The Gate official site (<http://www.thegatenewcastle.co.uk/about-us>).

³⁵ Robinson, 'Pride', 16

of the local economy; growth may have been achieved, but at the cost of diversity, and with the main beneficiaries being corporations, not locals.

The site assembled by the council for The Gate clearly presented an opportunity to open up that part of the city, integrate China Town and diversify the flows of people into and out of the area. This is a good example of the type of social manipulation and control exercised by city councils and BIDs via spatial reconfiguration. By choosing instead to enclose the entire block and install a cluster of mainstream, non-local consumerist options, diversity was reduced (and corporate profits increased) by simply eliminating any reason for non-consumers, or undesirable types of consumer, to be there. The question must also be raised here as to the 'the use of public money to subsidise entertainment and nightlife facilities for the profit-hungry corporate sector'.³⁶ Various commentators have pointed out the difficulties faced by independent operators compared to their corporate competitors,³⁷ such as high property values and rents and a complex regulatory system requiring expensive legal representation. The inability of the local state to resist short-term gains offered by corporate investors, as Chatterton and Hollands observe, 'inevitably leads urban regeneration in a particular direction...of more concern, it also allows the local state to literally divest responsibility for how central nightlife areas should develop and who they are for'.³⁸



Fig. 5: 'Assembled' site of The Gate, including the former site of the Mayfair Ballroom³⁹

³⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 107

³⁷ See for example Chatterton & Hollands; this problem was also raised by Tom Caulker in a personal interview.

³⁸ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscapes*, 107

³⁹ Image taken from Pendlebury, 'The conservation of historic areas in the UK: the case of Grainger Town, Newcastle-upon-Tyne', *Cities* 16/6 (1999), 423-433, 431

Changing urban pathways

The idea of 'musical pathways' as a metaphor to theorise local musical practices was posited by Finnegan in her classic study of music-making in Milton Keynes. Others have put this idea to use, such as Cohen in her writings on Liverpool. The model conveys a more dynamic way to think about the fluidity and transience of links between people, their musical practices and the (urban) environments within which these take place. Finnegan states that,

'pathways' more or less coincided with the musical 'worlds' presented [earlier in the book] but avoid the misleading overtones of concreteness, stability, boundedness and comprehensiveness associated with the term 'world'. 'Pathways' also reminds us of the part-time nature of much local music-making (people follow many pathways concurrently, and leave or return as they choose throughout their lives), of the overlapping and intersecting nature of different musical traditions, and of the purposive and dynamic nature of established musical practices.⁴⁰

These ideas are of course true of human life in general, not just music-making. Finnegan also talks about job pathways and housekeeping pathways. We exist in space, therefore our understanding and negotiation of the world we inhabit, and indeed of the relationships between ourselves and our fellow humans, must ultimately be expressed spatially.

'Pathways', in a physical sense, are quite simply the only way in which we can navigate and make sense of our (spatial) surroundings, whichever 'world' we happen to inhabit, musical or otherwise. Cohen also invokes Ingold's idea of 'lines', a similar idea in that he suggests that 'knowledge we have of our surroundings is forged in the very course of our moving through them'.⁴¹ Pertinent to this study is the observation that 'things fall into and out of sight, as new vistas open up and others are closed off';⁴² this idea will be returned to shortly.

'Circuit drinking',⁴³ referred to by Chatterton and Hollands as one of the characteristics of mainstream nightlife, is something of a phenomenon. Towards the end of the 1970s, changes in nightlife patterns meant that 'youngsters wanted large rooms with music at high volume, and not only wanted to move from pub to pub, but expected to be able to fall out of one into another almost next door'.⁴⁴ But it was not only mainstream nightlife that revolved around circuits. Certainly, until the Mayfair was demolished, circuits within Newcastle's rock

⁴⁰ Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 306

⁴¹ Sara Cohen, 'Bubbles, tracks, borders and lines: Mapping music and urban landscape', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 137/1 (2012), 135-170, 166.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, 'Theorising urban playscapes: Producing, regulating and consuming youthful nightlife city spaces', *Urban studies*, 39/1 (2002). 95-116, 109.

⁴⁴ Bennison, Brian, *Heady Days: A history of Newcastle's public houses, Volume 1: The central area* (Newcastle: Newcastle libraries and information service, 1996).

scene, for both audiences and musicians, were well established. Rock and its associated music forms have traditionally been very popular in the area, and it must also be stressed that as far as there is such a thing as an 'underground/mainstream continuum' in any music genre or culture, the rock scene that revolved around the Mayfair was probably closest to the mainstream end. The rock venues may have been fewer in number, and not in such proximity to each other as their mainstream counterparts, but there were several definite, established circuits through the city centre. The following exchange by these former regulars took place on a rock forum:

Electric Gypsy: We used to do The Percy, Trillians, Fat Sams, The Mayfair then sleep in the back of my car in the Strawberry car park.

Meegle: haha that's amazing! Our route was almost identical, except we started at the Farmers (straight off the bus at the Haymarket, see?), and on nights when money was tight, me and a mate drove up and slept in the car behind the Percy! The seats on my Fiesta were surprisingly comfortable when they were dropped right back.⁴⁵

This comment appeared in a local press article about a demolished pub, the Farmer's Rest, a popular live music venue:

George Hymers: Oddly enough as opposed to the last couple of posters the Farmer's for me in the late 70's was definitely a rock pub. We started at the Jubilee, then came through to the Eldon Square, sub-basement Northumberland Arms then up the alley and down the stairs to the Farmer's, then across the road to the Haymarket, The upstairs room in the Percy Arms and then The Three Bulls Heads. Back around the top to the City Tavern then back down Northumberland street to the Jubilee. The rock circuit.... Then when the pubs closed... down to The Mayfair. Every weekend, don't know how I did it....⁴⁶

Accounts such as these are common in internet discussions of years gone by in Newcastle's nightlife, suggesting that Newcastle city centre prior to the demolition of the Mayfair was more diverse in its demographic and cultural mix. Although these particular reminiscences are provided by drinkers however, for bands the Mayfair was also the culmination of a route, or pathway. As bands build local followings, the venues they can expect to fill increase in size. Various venues mentioned above used to host live music performances, for example Trillians, with the Mayfair being the pinnacle of local achievement for many. The Mayfair, then, was the final destination of a number of rock music pathways that crossed and uncrossed as they wound their way towards a common end point, at which all of the

⁴⁵ 'Crashdiet?', thread started by KelseyKrash, *hardrockhell.com* (<http://www.hardrockhell.com/community/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=5926&start=15>).

⁴⁶ David Morton, 'Remember when: The Farmer's Rest pub in Newcastle – then and now', user comments, *Chroniclelive.co.uk*, 01/09/2014 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/remember-when-farmers-rest-pub-7690286>).

hitherto separate groups came together: the scene, that assemblage of people who had joined the 'rock pathway', of all the available pathways, at that point in their lives.

Pathways are not, however, etched permanently in space or time. Finnegan points out that,

none [are] permanent in the sense of being changeless, nor [can] they survive without people constantly treading and reforming them; new paths [are] hewn out, some to become established, others to fade or be only faintly followed, others again to be extended and developed through new routings by the individuals and groups who patronis[e] them.⁴⁷

Krims's perspective, which focuses on the historicity of 'situations within which...agencies are exerted',⁴⁸ can be usefully brought to bear on the notion of pathways. While Cohen is critical of his apparent undermining of individual agency,⁴⁹ Krims specifically points out that his 'explicit interest...lies in the "big picture"',⁵⁰ going on to explain that 'just as a historical situation can only be inferred from many acts and products of agency, so does any given agency take its shape, force and meaning only from the historical situation in which it is conceived and executed'.⁵¹ Pathways are certainly a product of agency, and people make, choose, or are led onto pathways, as Finnegan observes. However, the historical situation in which those pathways can be 'hewn' can by definition only be transient, and as stated in the quote above, only survive by being constantly trod by people, much like Shank's conception of the scene; if the pathways disappear, the scene (in a particular configuration) withers.

Cohen states that pathways 'can be left and rejoined',⁵² and this might be the case in the metaphorical sense. Rock music, as a pathway in life, is likely to exist in one form or another for some time. The demolition of the Mayfair however, in combination with the closures of other connected venues and the lack of a replacement venue for six years after the event, shows that rejoining a pathway, or forging a new one, is not always easy, or even possible. If the spaces are removed between which urban pathways weave, then it is difficult to see how any exercising of agency on the part of actors involved with music can reform those pathways. Without them, not only is the scene diminished, along with the possibilities available to musicians, but also the chances of new people being led onto those pathways, or discovering them on their own, further reducing the ability of a scene to form or reproduce.

⁴⁷ Finnegan, *Hidden*, 306; emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Krims, *Music and urban geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), XL.

⁴⁹ Cohen, 'Bubbles', 158.

⁵⁰ Krims, *Music*, XL.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Cohen, 'Bubbles', 158.

Of course, if alternative spaces appear, are built, appropriated or discovered, the possibility for continuation exists, however this is becoming increasingly difficult for various reasons in Newcastle, as described earlier. Returning to Ingold's idea of horizons, where 'new vistas open up and others are closed off', the reshaping of Newcastle's musical pathways could certainly be seen to represent a 'closing off'. The old idiom 'out of sight, out of mind' arguably rings true as a description of the ways that the neoliberal city operates - consumers cannot be reminded of the 'fallout' of capitalist processes. People are unlikely to explore possibilities if they are not aware of them. In much the same way that we tend not to stray too far from familiar physical pathways, especially if we have no reason to, the sense of discomfort that stems from finding ourselves in unfamiliar territory also extends to cultural activities.

The metaphor of pathways can be usefully extended to understanding our cultural alignments and changing tastes. If we are to imagine our journeys through life as navigating a landscape, as Ingold and others have suggested, it is fairly easy to position mainstream consumption choices as the 'main roads', or paths, through that landscape. Just as finding ourselves in an unfamiliar part of town, particularly if that part happens to be poor and rundown, can be an intimidating experience, to expose ourselves to unfamiliar cultures, musical or otherwise, can have the same effect. Many people will simply not take the risk of that exposure, choosing instead to stick to those paths that are more easily readable. To set off into the unknown is a brave decision, for which many in contemporary life have neither the time nor the inclination. The relatively insecure nature of the labour market, increasing demands on time making the balance between work and leisure more precarious, and a media that has become dominated by corporate interests have arguably dulled the collective sense of adventure. The predictability of mainstream nightlife is, as Chatterton and Hollands point out, a product of highly risk-averse corporate culture. Citing Hannigan's reference to 'riskless risk',⁵³ a description of mainstream environments that 'offer the dual image of "safe excitement" and predictability',⁵⁴ they argue that 'familiarity and risk-aversion are key aspects which many people seek from consumer experiences'.⁵⁵ Such consumers, they claim,

⁵³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscaapes*, 112.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

'are wary of experimenting beyond what they know'.⁵⁶ This is a slightly sweeping generalisation, but the point is nevertheless a valid one.

The relationship between place and ideology is also discussed by Chatterton and Hollands, who, citing Cresswell, state that 'certain places contain particular meanings and expectations of behaviour',⁵⁷ and that '[m]ainstream nightlife often represents instrumental and choreographed rather than liminal and serendipitous space'.⁵⁸ The idea that we are 'told' what to do by corporate marketing and media is perhaps easy to dismiss with the argument that the explosion in 'niche' consumption choices simply represents the response of markets to consumer demand. However, demand is easily manufactured—hence the primacy of advertising—and taste is easily guided and manipulated by marketing, as chapter three discussed. The identity politics of the 1990s arguably sparked an explosion in product 'pseudo-choices', rather than its intended aim of gaining recognition for multifarious differences, in the process providing marketers with a whole new range of ready-made categories to target. The physical space of mainstream society, then, mirrors the sanitised, rationalised spaces and products found in corporatised culture. Chatterton and Hollands, while again perhaps guilty of generalising to an extent, observe that

Mainstream society has its own set of rather overt taken-for-granted norms and sense of limits, reinforced and circulated by an ever-growing media and advertising industry. In day-to-day urban life there are few presentations of alternative possibilities and little questioning of the legitimacy of the dominant social order. In this way, mainstream nightlife is a 'normative landscape' in which particular actions and behaviours have become pre-inscribed, tolerated and accepted, while others are not. This is a geography of common sense which renders unacceptable the other, the different, the dirty.⁵⁹

Corporate operators will obviously rationalise provision, given their legal obligation to maximise profits. Arguments that they bring investment and jobs are at least partially true. However, when councils claim to be acting in the interests of the communities they are supposed to serve, but contradict their own reasoning and rhetoric by facilitating further corporate expansion, questions surely must be asked. It is difficult to see how shutting music venues to make way for yet more mainstream entertainment contributes to the enhancement of diversity or vibrancy. Even when the fact is acknowledged that councils have few options in terms of raising investment revenue, why make these claims when they so frequently turn out to be false?

⁵⁶ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscales*, 112.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Returning to Webster's discussion of music-making as an ecology, and the ingredients necessary for a 'healthy musical city', the importance of pathways is raised again: 'cities need a network of musical pathways around them that are 'on the beaten track' and 'off the beaten track', namely those that are relatively easy to find and those that require more effort or are relatively hidden.'⁶⁰ But the 'designing out' of certain groups from cities, as illustrated here, involves precisely the elimination of pathways other than those desired by controlling powers. The Mayfair and the Newcastle rock circuit are just one example of this. Squeezed out by the expansion of the Party City, and later by the drive towards creating a more upmarket image (from which the Party City itself has now suffered), the pathways available to local alternative music cultures have been steadily eroded to make way for the spatialisation of the 'Newcastle brand'. A 'musical health check' on post-Party City Newcastle, then, would likely throw up some alarming results.

The Mayfair as a cultural centre and the value of music venues to cities

The place of music in society needs no introduction. There are innumerable accounts of historic musical events, memorable performances, moments of social cohesion and disruption marked by musical moments. Experiences and memories of musical events are also, however, experiences and memories of space and, as stated earlier, our understanding of the world must ultimately find a spatial expression. All (or at least most) of us have a memory that associates a particular place with a particular, 'special' song, for example. Likewise, venues can come to hold enormous sentimental value to music fans, being the spaces in which some of the most magical,⁶¹ or transgressive musical events, and therefore the most vivid memories, occur. For those involved with music scenes, the existence of a certain venue can be enough for them to move to a city, or at least make the trip on a regular basis. The Orbit in Morley, just outside Leeds, for example, was a techno club that became a destination for lovers of that music from all over the country—a site of pilgrimage for the devout.⁶²

Unfortunately for those scenes and, in the long term, for the city, the cultural (or subcultural) capital conferred on a city by a venue is often not enough to ensure its

⁶⁰ Emma Webster, 'Promoting live music in the UK: a behind the scenes ethnography', PhD thesis, unpublished, Glasgow University (2011), 57.

⁶¹ Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

⁶² Nick Dunn, 'Third tier rave towns: The Orbit in Morley', *City Imaging*, 171.

continued operation.⁶³ As Frith *et al.* state, '[e]very major city in the UK seems to have its own legendary venue which has been lost'.⁶⁴ The Orbit closed when its owner was released from jail after serving a sentence for tax evasion. Unaware of (and unconcerned with) the culture that had built up around his premises, he immediately sold up and the venue became a restaurant. Other famous examples of this process include CBGB's in New York, a site with an illustrious history of hardcore punk, credited with the 'discovery' of Patti Smith and The Ramones.⁶⁵ CBGB's closed in 2006 after a rent dispute, despite a high-profile campaign to save it. London dance 'superclub' Turnmills which closed in 2008 when the lease expired and the building was developed into offices. Perhaps representing the only instance in which a city recognised that demolishing a famous venue was a mistake, and made efforts to rectify this (for economic rather than cultural reasons, though) was Liverpool's Cavern Club, reputed to be 'the world's most famous club'.⁶⁶ Pulled down in 1973 after closure due to financial problems, the current Cavern is a replica of the original, built as part of the development of various sites of 'Beatles heritage', and is now the centre of a local micro-economy revolving around 'Beatles tourism'.

For music communities, then, social life revolves and becomes ritualised around venues, as it is the venue where most 'signifying practices'⁶⁷ take place. Barry Shank describes in detail the processes of communal identity construction at play in music scenes, particularly the way in which specific venues are often central to a scene's existence. They are temporal and spatial places of 'liminality'—that unreproducible state where 'the blurring and crossing of thresholds and boundaries; the breakdown of historically fixed categories; the exposure of ambiguities; the fluidity and hybridity of identities; play and absurdity; and uncertainty'⁶⁸ become possible. For many music scenes, who often situate themselves as social outsiders, and for whom the music is the defining aspect of collective and individual identity, the venue often takes on the role of sanctuary, being one of the few times and places in which they can collectively celebrate their 'otherness'.

⁶³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Thornton *Club Cultures*.

⁶⁴ Frith, Cloonan & Behr, *Cultural value*, 5.

⁶⁵ D. Fowler, 'Legendary punk club CBGB closes', BBC News, October 2006.

⁶⁶ S. Cohen, *Decline, Renewal and the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 190.

⁶⁷ Shank, *Dissonant*, 118.

⁶⁸ Katherine Butler Brown, 'Liminality and the Social Location of Musicians', *Twentieth Century Music*, 3/01 (2007), 5-12, 5.

Only accessible at certain times, venues not only facilitate the collective pursuit of liminality but also the intersection of lives otherwise separate from each other. New ties are formed, existing ones strengthened, the scene consolidates the collective mental image of itself. The night out is a ritual, the journey to the venue a pilgrimage, and music the medium through which collective identity and solidarity are communicated. The rock and metal communities of the North East are not tiny minorities as local music scenes go; as Caulker states, 'Newcastle's always been a really big city for rock, you know, rock was always popular here.'⁶⁹ The Mayfair, then, was a spiritual home and a site of ritual to those involved. For musicians, as mentioned above, the presence of a legendary venue and its place in local music history can be equally important. In their case study of Camden's Dublin Castle, a small venue formerly frequented by Amy Winehouse, among others, Frith *et al.* comment on the value of this local history, the licensee quoted as saying, '[s]ometimes I believe that bands play there just to say that they've played in Camden, or just to say that they've played in a particular venue where these major artists have performed. I think that that gives it its uniqueness'.⁷⁰

Playing in such venues enables musicians to feel that they are a part of that history, contributing to it and at the same time, deriving their own cultural, or subcultural, capital from it. This is an important part of a musician's development, and cannot be recreated, designed or bought. To be able to say 'I was there', 'I played there', is something that arguably exerts a certain pull on all of us, music-related or otherwise (famous football pitches are another example). Recognition of the importance of these stories—the notion of stories will be expanded in the third case study—is evident in all sorts of places. Newcastle council attached a commemorative plaque to the wall of a Heaton flat where Chas Chandler, bassist for The Animals and the man who brought Jimi Hendrix to England, lived. As the licensee of the Dublin Castle says, '[w]e get people travelling from Japan who come to the Dublin Castle because they know Amy Winehouse played there...they sit down and they're thinking, "I'm drinking where she drank". And I think that makes you feel like you're part of that scene which you want to belong to'.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Caulker, personal interview.

⁷⁰ Frith, Cloonan & Behr, *Cultural value*, 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

This sense of musical history reaches further into society, however. Much like local heritage, which has become an industry in itself and a primary tool for place marketing and city branding, especially in cities like Newcastle, it then ‘...feeds into the local economy, and the wider tourist economy, as a result of the musicians who have frequented the area in the past.’⁷² Given the extensive list of famous artists who played at the Mayfair, and the continuing frequent name-dropping of commercially successful local musicians to promote Newcastle, such as Sting, Bryan Ferry or Maximo Park (all of whom had to leave the city in order to achieve that success), one might imagine that the Mayfair’s history would have been considered to be worth preserving. As Caulker states,

the Mayfair was there, and now it’s been knocked down to make a mall, the Gate, and that is, to me...it isn’t a commitment to culture...the Mayfair should have had a preservation order put on it, because of people like Led Zeppelin playing there...someone should have said, ‘even though there’s a short-term win here, with this thing, we should retain this, so we retain the history and fabric of the city’.⁷³

Clearly, for some the musical history of a city is considered as much a part of the urban fabric as the built environment, the industry on which the city was built, or indeed the more profitable aspects of local culture that constituted the core of the Party City brand image. When considered alongside the fact that the Mayfair was demolished during a period of culture-led regeneration, and a surge in the drive to promote local tourism, the fact that this high-profile musical history appeared to carry no weight whatsoever seems even more contradictory to the council’s claims. Instead, the decision to demolish the Mayfair had largely the opposite effect to that which the council said they were aiming for, depriving the city of a significant musical and cultural centre, and reducing diversity. For six years after the Mayfair’s disappearance, Newcastle had no music venue of a comparable size and, importantly, style. Its eventual replacement was, predictably, provided by a corporate national chain, the Academy Music Group, who refurbished the former Majestic Ballroom (the first venue in Newcastle to have hosted a rock ‘n’ roll concert) as one of their branded venues. While events there have proved relatively popular, there are many who do not consider it an adequate replacement for the Mayfair, particularly in terms of its programming. Caulker suggests that,

the shutting of the Mayfair killed the touring band scene, because although you’ve got the O2 Academy, it’s a far bigger venue, you know, and hasn’t got, you know...isn’t run by people who set it up because they loved it, so they’re not going to take chances on programming bands that, you know,

⁷² Frith, Cloonan & Behr, *Cultural value*, 7.

⁷³ Caulker, personal interview.

you wouldn't see, they're only going to put on bands who are going to do big dollar, and they're going to charge big dollar prices.⁷⁴

Common complaints about the venue include poor sound quality, poor beer and restrictive policies. The venue is also run by a national chain registered in London, raising questions about its contribution to the local economy relative to the Mayfair. Much like the supermarkets that have attracted huge amounts of criticism for putting many local shopkeepers out of business, chains such as the Academy group can be seen to have largely the same effect on music venues. While it might be tempting to argue however, that the site should have been developed by a local operator, there are few, if any, that could have undertaken such a large-scale project. This is one of the biggest problems facing urban development in general: only the biggest companies can now afford the high rent and overheads that come with city centre premises, music venues being among the highest-costing premises to set up, as well as returning some of the lowest profits. It would also have been difficult, if not impossible, for the council to have provided the funding necessary to retain or reconstruct a venue the size of the Mayfair, much as it would seem to have been in their interests from the point of view of diversity and culture.

The city council, in one of their own regeneration documents, quote from Chatterton and Hollands book, *Changing our 'Toon'*, so evidently the publication did not go unnoticed. More importantly, acknowledgment of both the issues raised by the book regarding the increasing corporate domination of local nightlife, and the cultural importance of the Mayfair, and the city's other legendary venue, Riverside, is explicit:

Culturally, NewcastleGateshead is a fast changing place. "Who would have guessed ten years ago that a...new bridge would have been built across the Tyne creating an art/music corridor, been recently voted top UK tourism city by readers of Conde Nast Traveller magazine, or be bidding...to become the European Capital of Culture in 2008?" [quoted from Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing our 'Toon'*] Yet just a few years ago, Newcastle lost its two best loved live music venues - the Mayfair and the Riverside, neither of which has yet been satisfactorily replaced. And culture clashes persist—the growth of the commercial leisure sector and the decline of independent operators is an ongoing cause for concern.

And the Party City tag is not new. Our cultural history has always been sociable and vibrant.⁷⁵

As pointed out elsewhere in this thesis, if the loss of those two venues was a 'cause for concern', one has to wonder why it was six years until any replacement, satisfactory or otherwise, was forthcoming. The Academy had not been opened by this point, and

⁷⁴ Caulker, personal interview.

⁷⁵ Newcastle & Gateshead City councils, 'Building Bridges: A strategy for culture in Newcastle Gateshead 2002 - 2012.

throughout the six-year period until its appearance, the 'commercial leisure sector' continued to grow. Even if the council were not entirely behind this development, as several quotes from councillors and police representatives suggest, their actions suggest that they did not consider it worth their while—or within their power—to intervene. The Mayfair, in conjunction with the Riverside, could arguably be seen to represent as important a space as the Cavern Club in Liverpool. The Beatles may occupy the top spot for popular music history generating tourist revenue, but the Mayfair's history was an asset that many think should have been retained. Other cities have since recognised the importance of music to their heritage, Birmingham perhaps being the most prominent with their exhibition, 'Birmingham: Home of Metal', dedicated to showcasing the development of the heavy metal genre, which was pioneered by Black Sabbath in that city in the late 1960s. Perhaps in the future Newcastle will realise that a cultural gem was lost by demolishing the Mayfair and learn from what was clearly seen as a huge mistake by a large part of the local population.

Chapter 6: Case study - Riverside

Introduction

Riverside, like the Mayfair, closed in 1999, and was another venue that had gained a 'legendary' reputation that spread well beyond the city of Newcastle. However, Riverside was a different place altogether, from its inception as a state-funded, youth-run co-operative and its role as a cultural centre as well as a music venue, to the diversity of its programming and the nature of the scene that formed around it. Like the Mayfair, there are very few resources with which to build a retrospective picture of Riverside, however one book has been published.¹ This book, and a face-to-face interview with one of its co-authors, therefore provide the primary sources for this case study. These are backed up by a number of online resources, mostly brief accounts posted by former co-op members and regular giggoers. It is abundantly clear, even though nostalgia once again lends a slightly rose-tinted view to most accounts, that Newcastle has not had a comparable venue since Riverside's closure.

The point of departure for this case study is the historical situation in which Riverside came about. The confluence of local political and socio-economic conditions, urban development and musical change at a specific time—the mid-1980s—created a set of circumstances which a small group of motivated young people were able to exploit, pulling together the necessary resources and support to realise the project. The chapter will provide a brief history of the venue and discuss the scene that developed around it, then go on to show how the conception and execution of Riverside, as a musical centre and a cultural movement, were possibilities that sprang from that specific set of historic circumstances. The idea of this study is to unravel the ways in which Riverside's existence, as both a venue and a scene, was influenced by and dependent on national and global politico-economic currents. These broad currents may appear to be only remotely connected to local music-making, but in fact play a key role in shaping and guiding such projects.

¹ Hazel Plater & Carl Taylor, *Riverside: Newcastle's legendary alternative music venue* (Newcastle: Tonto Press, 2011); At the time of writing a documentary is also in production, however its release has been delayed due to funding issues.

The chapter will then move on to illustrate the ways in which the venue's transition from a co-operative to a private business, and its subsequent closure, resulted from economic pressure exerted by the rapid neoliberalisation of the UK economy. The difficulty of operating within the neoliberal system according to different (in this case opposing) principles highlights its totalising nature. Following Krims again, one of the main questions this case study will raise relates to the agency of actors involved with music-making: to what degree is that agency enabled and constrained, both by historical situations and the broader frameworks within which musical worlds operate? Given the pace of change since then, would it be possible, for example, for a similar group of people to successfully execute such a large-scale venture now, or could they have done so even just a decade later?



Fig. 6: Riverside, Melbourne Street, Newcastle.²

² Image from Donna Petch, 'Newcastle music venue documentary needs support!', *The North East Hub: promoting the North East*, www.thenortheasthub.com, 18/06/2013 (<http://thenortheasthub.com/blog/newcastle-riverside-music-venue-documentary/>).

Riverside co-op and the beginnings of the venue

Riverside was situated on the edge of the city centre, a marginal location ideally suited to the development of a scene that eschewed mainstream entertainment. The list of bands that played the venue was impressive, retrospectively. Many went on to achieve global success, however at the time they were relatively obscure—this was part of the Riverside ethos. These included the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Faith No More, Primus, Nirvana (their first ever European gig), Fugazi, Conflict, the Rollins Band, Oasis, Blur, The Verve, De La Soul, The Pharcyde, Mudhoney, The Jesus and Mary Chain, the Happy Mondays and Radiohead. World music played an important part in the programming, acts having performed there including The Bhundu Boys, Black Umfolosi and Mory Kanté. As well as bands, Riverside also hosted comedy and spoken word events and, from the early 1990s onwards, dance music club nights. The house night Shindig in particular became internationally renowned, featuring ‘superstar’ DJs such as Sasha, John Digweed, Laurent Garnier and Masters At Work. After Riverside closed, the building was bought and transformed into what was meant to be Newcastle’s ‘superclub’, Foundation, as leisure chains surfed the breaking wave of dance club culture. However, Foundation was less successful, lasting only five years before closing (ironically, this was partially due to a surge in live music attendance during the 2000s). The building is now an office block, with a private gym occupying the space that hosted so many historic performances.

The foundations (no pun intended) for what was to become the Riverside co-operative were laid down in 1982. Newcastle around this time was anything but an effervescent urban centre brimming with creativity and ‘culture’. Deindustrialisation, already well into its final phases but accelerated by the Thatcher government, had only recently taken what was arguably its most savage bite out of the local economy, leaving hundreds of thousands out of work and with little to no hope of improving their prospects in the near future. For the first time since the industrial revolution, a whole generation of (male) school-leavers did not have the security of a waiting job in the shipyards or coal mines. Perhaps understandably, the disaffection and anger of punk, post-punk and particularly heavy metal had many fans among that part of the local population. More important than the musical characteristics of these genres, though, was the culture spawned by punk in particular—the ‘D.I.Y. ethos’, as it is commonly referred to. The idea that music-making did not have to be (or, indeed, should not be) mediated by commercial interests, and the growth of a music culture that revolved

around independent record labels, fanzines, 'guerilla' gigs and self-produced merchandise, had taken hold in certain elements of Newcastle's youth culture. There was a good number of local bands, as there always has been in Newcastle, but, as Hazel Plater and Carl Taylor point out, 'there were few options outside of the Working Men's Club circuit, which whilst a bastion of great musicianship, did not allow much, if any, original material or scope for diversity of sound'.³ This was compounded by the fact that 'national touring bands were bypassing [the] city—there was no venue with an appropriate size and booking policy'.⁴ Local alternative bands, then, not only had nowhere to play, but also had very limited opportunities to see the bands who they looked to as role models. In short, there was no environment in which local young people interested in music could participate and develop, whether as musicians, other related roles (engineers, technicians, promoters etc.), or fans. It should be reiterated here that the Mayfair was a 1,500-capacity venue, and while local bands often supported bigger acts, the possibility of a headline gig for any but the most established, though worth aspiring to, was relatively small.

One of the most unusual aspects of Riverside was that it was a state-funded venture, which for a popular music venue is rare. Numerous council-run workshops and meetings were set up in the early 1980s for local young people interested in developing a local music scene, offering advice and support for all aspects, from bands and promoters to lighting technicians and sound engineers. Eventually it became clear that a venue was needed for the project to progress any further. A collective formed, known at the time as Metropolis, which was assisted by several local professional musicians, including Neville Luxury of the post-punk band Punishment of Luxury; this collective spent time researching and drawing up plans, and eventually submitted a bid for £250,000 to the council. The funds came initially from central government, via the city council, from the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, a Conservative government initiative that some argued was designed to 'keep disaffected youth off the streets'.⁵ Metropolis also began to seek support from the entertainment industry more broadly, starting a petition that gained nearly 2,000 signatures, including that of the influential BBC Radio 1 DJ John Peel. Trips to venues in other cities that could serve as potential models for the project were also organised. Metropolis then merged with another local collective, Band Aid, who had also been seeking funding for a similar project. The new

³ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

organisation became known as Lula Music, 'a so-called "self-help" group for musicians',⁶ and was run 'by the members *for* the members'.⁷ This distinctly politicised, democratic approach was to be retained for the first decade or so of Riverside's operation. It is worth noting that most of those involved were less than twenty years old; as explained earlier, the Tyneside / Geordie identity was shaped by political struggle and social democratic values still run deep in local communities.

A grant was eventually offered by the council of £120,000.⁸ Various fundraising projects were set up, including the production of an EP featuring local bands and a series of gigs (despite the shortage of venues; the irony was not lost on the organisers). Lula Music eventually became Riverside Entertainments Ltd, and were joined by another local youth collective, Factor E,⁹ a group who were interested in running small, creative businesses in the space. After nearly two years of the project languishing due to a string of unsuccessful attempts to secure a building that fell within the budget, a derelict print warehouse formerly belonging to the Mawson, Swan and Morgan company on Melbourne Street was identified as suitable premises. This building was on the outskirts of town, at the east end of the Quayside, an area which at the time 'wasn't somewhere you kind of readily hung around'.¹⁰ For an alternative scene such as that which brought Riverside into existence, this was arguably a bonus. Mainstream nightlife, which although had not yet been fully mobilised as Newcastle's *raison d'être*, nonetheless dominated local culture and many felt that the city centre was not for them.

The new venue was less than half the size of the Mayfair, with an initial capacity of 450. This meant an intimate space that was perfectly suited to the underground nature of the scenes that would grow up around Riverside. Of the £120,000 grant, £42,000 was spent on the building, while renovation, adaptation and repair work came in at £90,000. The council topped up the grant with £30,000 of their own money in order to cover the final costs.¹¹ The co-op were insistent on installing the best P.A. and lighting rig that they could afford. £14,000 was spent on the P.A. system and £15,000 on lighting, as well as a sprung

⁶ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 15.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Taylor, personal interview, 29/07/2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

dancefloor.¹² Several other alterations, such as the removal of several brick columns supporting the ceiling, were not carried out due to the expense. Members of the co-op took turns to sleep in the building during the renovation process as the works had made it 'less than secure'.¹³ Riverside opened on the 13th of June 1985, with a temporary bar licence, an issue that would come to cause terminal financial problems for the venue.

Riverside ethos and politics

The circumstances surrounding Riverside's inception were highly unusual for a popular music venue, as few such spaces have been funded entirely by the state. The Waterfront in Norwich, which opened a decade or so later, is one example.¹⁴ As John Street points out, contrary to venues for 'high culture', such as concert halls, art galleries and theatres, popular music has long been seen as 'a free-standing commercial venture not requiring or deserving public support'.¹⁵ Seen from this perspective, the fact that a small group of young musicians and music fans managed to successfully bid for enough money to set up a popular music venue seems all the more remarkable. But the process that led to Riverside's inauguration was the result of a remarkably well-organised and, importantly, highly politicised campaign which, at the time, could arguably only have happened in a small number of locales around the country—Liverpool perhaps, but most certainly Tyneside, for reasons that will presently become clear.

As stated above, the initial drive for the Riverside bid came from the motivation and desire of young local musicians, inspired by the punk and post-punk music of the late 1970s and early 1980s, to develop a platform from which to cultivate a coherent Newcastle scene. The punk scene, in its rebellion against what it saw as mass culture, had given rise to an 'alternative' music industry, propelled largely by the D.I.Y. ethos of its enthusiastic participants. Newcastle at the time lacked a venue at which young people excited by the new music could attend performances by the bands they loved, as these bands were neither of the necessary stature to fill the Mayfair, nor would they have been appropriate bookings for the working men's club or pub circuits. One contributor to the *Riverside* book explains that

¹² Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ John Street, 'Local differences: popular music and the local state', 'Local differences? Popular music and the local state', *Popular Music*, 12/1 (1993), 43-55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

Everyone was pissed off that all these great bands were playing Leeds then heading up to Edinburgh totally omitting Newcastle as there wasn't a suitable venue. The Mayfair was great if a band could pull a minimum of 1,000 but obviously the bands coming through would be playing to 200.¹⁶

Local alternative bands were also struggling to find venues at which to perform and develop as musicians, thus several collectives were formed to further their aims. Again, it is worth pointing out that this was the first generation of male school-leavers on Tyneside that did not have secure jobs waiting for them. They had witnessed the closures of coal mines and shipyards across the region, of which the resulting socio-economic damage was catastrophic, leading to the highest unemployment levels in half a century and social unrest across the country. A 1984 survey of Gateshead school-leavers found that 'for 90%, the immediate experience after school was being out of work'.¹⁷ To put the scale of economic devastation into perspective, 'according to Newcastle Education Committee statistics, by the end of September 1974, 80 per cent of the City's school-leavers for that summer had found jobs; the comparable figure for the end of September 1983 was 16.6 per cent'.¹⁸

The summer of 1981 had witnessed prolonged rioting in several cities, most prominently in the Toxteth area of Liverpool and Brixton in London. This resulted in the setting up of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme by the Thatcher government both to encourage young people to start their own businesses and to promote the ideology of entrepreneurialism in which Thatcher herself believed so strongly. However, it was also seen by many as a way to 'massage embarrassing unemployment figures',¹⁹ and to avoid further rioting²⁰ as conditions for working people continued to deteriorate under her tenure. The scheme consisted of payments of £40 per week, slightly above the normal amount for benefit entitlement. Numerous 'creative' businesses were started under the scheme, which 'offered a way for many would-be musicians, comics, artists, designers etc to get the jobless tag off their backs and so have time to concentrate on building a business'.²¹ Several of these start-up businesses went on to become successful, including Earache Records, Creation Records, *Viz* comic and the Superdry clothing brand, as well as several artists including former Turner

¹⁶ Paul Henderson, in Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 39.

¹⁷ Ben Pimlott, 'Unemployment and "the unemployed" in North East England, *Political Quarterly*, 56/4 (1985), 346-360, 352.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Barbara Gunnell, 'One leaf that David Cameron should take out of Thatcher's book', *The Guardian*, 06/01/2011 (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jan/06/new-enterprise-allowance-david-cameron>).

²⁰ Taylor, personal interview.

²¹ Digby Pearson, '80s government enterprise allowance scheme and labels', *askearache.blogspot.com*, 26/10/2008 (<http://askearache.blogspot.co.uk/2008/10/80s-government-enterprise-allowance.html>).

Prize winner Jeremy Deller.²² Many more did not last beyond the first year of their existence, however, due to the high number of start-ups being one-person operations.

By 1984, paid by the Conservative government via the City Council and assisted by the Northern Region Co-operatives Development Association, the collective that had coalesced into Riverside Entertainments had expanded the scope of its vision for a music co-operative to include other types of business. A hairdressing salon and a vegetarian café were among those to open, as well as rehearsal and exhibition spaces, art and photography studios, and there were plans to open a second-hand clothing shop. The idea was to turn the building into a cultural centre, or what would now be called a 'creative hub'. A free local listings magazine, *Paint It Red*, was also published by Riverside and became 'influential in developing the burgeoning music scene'.²³

The fact that the Riverside venture was driven almost as much by politics as it was by music could be seen to highlight the centrality of political struggle to the social dynamics and identity of Tyneside. Bearing in mind the fact that many of the young people involved would have been well aware of the strong tradition of trade unionism in the region, it seems reasonable to suggest that this culture of worker solidarity and collectivised decision-making at least partially informed the approach of the Riverside co-operative. As Taylor states,

a lot of people stood in direct opposition to Thatcher's government, including the people that set Riverside up...Thatcher's economic policies were decimating the industries up here, there was a lot of unemployment, particularly among young people, and I think that really kind of coalesced and gave people a focus.²⁴

Their insistence that the music venue and cultural centre was democratically run as a co-operative, then, had resulted at least in part from a reaction to the socio-economic scenario in which they found themselves. Equally important is the fact that these young people were as proud to be Geordies as any who might have matched the rather negative football-obsessed, heavy drinking stereotype—the 'Geordie brand' discussed in chapter three, that was to become such a significant part of the Party City image; the case studies presented in this thesis clearly show that a wide range of tastes and cultural alignments other than, and often explicitly opposed to, the stereotype propagated by Party City marketing campaigns, exist among Geordies.

²² Gunnell, 'One leaf'.

²³ Andy Balman, in Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, preface.

²⁴ Taylor, personal interview.

Riverside music policy

While the political agenda was certainly important to the Riverside collective, their determination was fuelled above all by their love of music, their frustration at the lack of musical opportunities in Newcastle, and their resulting desire 'to improve the city and create some kind of creative community with all the other bands, artists and likeminded people who were around at that time'.²⁵ This is not to say, though, that the political aspects of Riverside's operation could be disentangled from the music. It may well have been the case that 'to most people Riverside was just about the gigs',²⁶ but it was the adoption of a well-defined, anti-commercial political stance among the venue's management that afforded them the liberty to pursue such an unusual programming policy. The idea had been from the start to run Riverside on a 'by the members, for the members' basis, with a £1 membership fee endowing the member with the right to vote. Plater and Taylor state that 'a 1986 Riverside membership form describes Riverside as, "*a unique arts and entertainments centre, organised as a community co-operative, working for the benefit of its members*".²⁷ As such, bands and other acts were booked largely because the members wanted to see them, rather than because they would bring in large profits.

Numerous examples can be found attesting to this aspect of Riverside, mainly in the form of quotes compiled for the *Riverside* book. Davey Bruce, who went on to establish popular Newcastle venue The Cluny after he left Riverside, explains that, '[t]here was nowhere for people to go to play gigs that would lose money! The Mayfair would have gigs on but only the perceived 'bankers', the City Hall—'bankers', the Uni and the Poly a little less so, but Riverside had to be there to take the risks! It put gigs on that no-one else would touch.'²⁸ Former DJ Nik Barrera states that, '[u]ltimately, Riverside was a venue driven by the team's taste, not by financial, fashion or shallow reasons and, at its time, it came to represent the under-represented culturally in the region'.²⁹ Continuing in this vein, former promoter Andy Hockey describes how Riverside

gave people access to such a variety of music. If the venue couldn't do it itself, it gave the opportunity for other people to do it. The diversity of the place was often down to outside promoters and not those ones from London or Manchester, but from Newcastle and the surrounding area. It was the myriad of events run by such a diverse bunch of people that made Riverside.³⁰

²⁵ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 15.

²⁶ Balman, in Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, preface.

²⁷ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 27 (italics in original).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

As well as a level of diversity in programming not found at any other venue, Riverside also contributed significantly to the development of many bands' careers, local and otherwise. Dedicated to providing a platform for 'up-and-coming' bands, Riverside's booking policy enabled many aspirational musicians to make the move from the back rooms of pubs to playing in a 'proper' venue. In its formative years, the experience was as new and important for the Riverside staff as it was for the bands who performed there, as many of them were also new to their respective roles. Local bands were frequently booked as support acts for national and international touring bands, giving them valuable experience in playing to larger audiences and sometimes leading to their own headline slots and tours. Prior to Riverside's appearance, it was practically impossible for a local band to build a sufficient following in Newcastle for them to move up to the larger venues. Riverside, once it had opened, was the only place in the city in which this crucial stage of a band's development, particularly in the 'alternative' genres, could be nurtured. As local promoter Phil Hughes states,

It was one of the venues that really felt like a real venue, it was a place that all the local bands wanted to play and when you got asked to play either the Live and Giggling nights or got offered a support slot with a touring band you really felt you'd made it. It was definitely an institution and along with the Mayfair and the Broken Doll was very much a part of the Newcastle music scene. Venues now seem a bit clinical, a bit corporate and lacking the personality that the Riverside had.³¹

Riverside played a similar role in the development of dance music events in Newcastle during the 1990s. Various club nights had run at the venue since the late 1980s, including indie nights, world music nights and the popular Bliss night, at which a palette of music consisting of 'everything from metal to indie to hip hop to Northern Soul to football novelty records'³² was played. The growth in popularity of dance music, however, led to its suppression and eventual 'corralling'³³ into licenced premises by the government and the alcohol industry³⁴ in the early 1990s, coinciding with the culmination of long-running financial problems for Riverside. Economic pressure had forced the abandonment of the co-operative and Riverside's management company was privatised, a move which was unpopular among many of the members—more will be said about this later.

³¹ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 183.

³² Richard Hudson, in Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 75.

³³ Phil Hadfield, *Bar Wars: Contesting the night in contemporary British cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Dance nights offered a new and important avenue for generating income, as well as maintaining the diversity of entertainment for which the venue was renowned. Perhaps the most famous club night to have run at Riverside was Shindig, which went on to become one of the most famous in the country (it is now a 'premium clubbing brand'). The first Shindig event at Riverside was held in May 1994, providing 'intelligent house and garage for classy clubbers with designer everything and a carefree attitude'.³⁵ Big name DJs were the main attraction at Shindig, which continued after Riverside became Foundation; it was arguably the prospect of hosting it that made the idea of a 'superclub' seem feasible in Newcastle at all. Interestingly, although Foundation was a purpose-built, high-tech dance club, Shindig's founder and current owner Scott Bradford, among others, has stated that the club's best years were those between 1994 and 1999, while running at Riverside.³⁶

Much like the musicians and fans that started Riverside because there was nowhere in Newcastle for them to play or see the bands they loved, Bradford started Shindig along with some friends in 1992 because 'there was nowhere for us and our friends to go in the city. We had to travel to Middlesbrough and Leeds to go to clubs'.³⁷ Having run for two years at the former Rockshots nightclub, Shindig's organisers 'got muscled out by the doormen',³⁸ and approached Riverside (the issue of gang involvement in Newcastle nightlife will also be discussed shortly). Shindig became the regular Saturday night event, growing in popularity throughout the late 1990s and becoming a financial mainstay for Riverside, 'despite most of the venue's staff not really understanding the music'.³⁹ It was not the only dance night, however, with other nights catering for different elements of dance running throughout the '90s. These included Viva, a weekly techno and trance night; Bloated, also a techno night, which during the mid-1990s played host to pioneering artists such as Jeff Mills and Andrew Weatherall; The Bing Bong Rooms, a hip hop and trip hop night that went on to host 'monthly specials featuring sets from the likes of Goldie, DJ Food and Coldcut',⁴⁰ and Avanti!, a world music night that was eventually replaced by Shindig.

³⁵ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 100.

³⁶ Scott Bradford, interview with *The Crack Magazine*, reposted in [nucastle.co.uk](http://www.nucastle.co.uk), 07/06/2011 (<http://www.nucastle.co.uk/threads/the-crack-interviews-scott-bradford-shindig.74777/>).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 163

Riverside, then, not only provided Newcastle's non-mainstream band scenes with a space at which they could pursue both their musical and, for some, political interests, but later also came to play a similar role in the development of local dance scenes. The testimonies of many former regulars suggest that the democratic approach, and the fact that all of the venue's staff were music lovers, contributed to an atmosphere and sense of authenticity unlike any other venue in the city at the time, and seemingly at any time before or since; there is certainly nowhere like it now. Newcastle's alternative and dance scenes are small, disparate and fragmented, resilient but continually struggling to reassert themselves due to the lack of appropriate spaces and regular events around which coherent scenes can develop.

Behind the Riverside scene: idealism and market forces

As the preceding pages have indicated, Riverside was a venue that functioned both as a performance space and a cultural centre. A coherent and lively scene formed around the venue, which gave (mostly) young local musicians and music fans a focal point and a 'safe' space in which they could explore music, politics, identities and, for some, career paths in music-related areas. It is worth pointing out here that this was not necessarily a local band scene, in the sense of that described in Shank's account of Austin, Texas. Indeed, according to one member, 'the local bands remained quite disparate';⁴¹ the reasons for this will be discussed shortly. The core of the Riverside scene, though, was still more than just a group of young people with similar tastes in music. The venue, as a politically charged project driven by collective energy, engendered a loyalty that seemed to transcend the stylistic boundaries by which music scenes are often demarcated. There was a general musical commonality in that the programming was relatively obscure and not found anywhere else in Newcastle, in the early years especially. Many Riverside regulars, though, were drawn together by the venue, rather than being followers of a specific genre that went wherever their musical interests would take them. People would seemingly go to Riverside often with little regard to which club night was on, or which band was playing, knowing that they would probably enjoy the music anyway. More importantly, perhaps, these people knew that they would see friends and strengthen bonds, reinforcing both their own positions as part of the scene, and ensuring the reproduction of the scene itself.

⁴¹ Dave Cook, quoted in *Riverside*, 73.

While the Riverside scene was nothing extraordinary in terms of the dynamics of urban musical culture, the fact that it was a largely self-generated project that was not only successfully set up, but also maintained (albeit in different guises) for over a decade, is certainly noteworthy. The notion of an energised group of young people banding together as a grassroots organisation to overcome a perceived problem - in this case a lack of venues and the need for a cultural focal point - is also nothing new. Indeed, many parallels can be drawn between Riverside and, for example, the Armadillo World Headquarters in Austin, Texas, set up a decade earlier,⁴² or the Waterfront in Norwich a decade later.⁴³ But the historical situation in which the Riverside project took place, that of 1980s Newcastle, puts Riverside in a relatively unusual context, and also raises the question of why it was that the venue commanded such loyalty. There are, of course, various reasons, most obviously the fact that it was the only place in town where certain forms of music could be heard, and the point must be reiterated that many regulars were just there for the gigs. However, it is worth examining the social dynamics that gave rise to this scene and, for a time, ensured its reproduction.

Riverside, as the first half of this case study has described, was set up with clear aims and intentions for both music and management policy. The idea to run the venue as a co-operative was one of the linchpins of the project, the young people that started it being keen not to allow issues of profitability to compromise programming or management. To this end, a membership scheme was put in place which, although it later became part of the venue's stipulated licence conditions, had been the idea from the very start. The membership fee endowed each member with a vote, which represented a tangible stake in the project as each member could potentially affect the way things were run. For the founding Riverside members, then, the venue was 'their' space in more ways than one. Not only had they a literal stake in the venue, through their membership of the co-op, but they had also a personal stake brought about by the enormous amount of time and effort they had invested in setting the place up. Their lack of experience meant that they had learned 'on the job' how to build and run a music venue and operate as a co-operative. This was an

⁴² Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 53.

⁴³ Street, 'Local differences?'

impressive enough feat in itself—the initial building and running of Riverside was far from plain sailing, and by all accounts did not become any easier during its fifteen-year existence. The effort required to bring the project to fruition, though, was multiplied by numerous obstacles that the team were forced to contend with in the process. The arduous nature of this process, however, seemed to instil a correspondingly heightened sense of ownership among the founding members, and galvanised the team’s determination once the venue was up and running. The main obstacle to the co-operative throughout Riverside’s existence was, perhaps unsurprisingly, money. Music venues, especially those of a non-mainstream orientation, fall notoriously short when it comes to profit generation, and Riverside was no exception. The co-operative’s financial woes dogged the venue until the very end—indeed, brought about its privatisation in the mid-1990s, and eventually its demise—but were not entirely of their own making, raising questions about the limits of agency in the economically deterministic environment of neoliberalism. When the venue was ready to open, Newcastle magistrates refused the application for an alcohol licence. This obviously created significant cash-flow problems from the very start. One of the longest-running complaints about nightlife in Newcastle is that the City Council, magistrates and local police have been so conservative that they have contributed, through regulation, to the stifling of much cultural activity in the city, particularly music. Such complaints were frequently recorded throughout Chatterton and Hollands’ work on Newcastle’s nightlife, conducted in the mid-1990s and into the 2000s, as well as being the single most consistent point made by everyone interviewed for this thesis.

A music venue with no alcohol licence is arguably doomed to struggle. Riverside ‘became jokingly known as “Lemonade City”’,⁴⁴ and as Plater and Taylor point out, ‘it was highly ironic that a left-leaning co-operative in Newcastle was being supported by Conservative government funding whilst the Labour-run Newcastle City Council, where this whole thing started, was failing time and time again to grasp what Riverside could be’.⁴⁵ As a result of the decision to refuse Riverside an alcohol licence, by the end of the venue’s first year, the Riverside co-operative was in such financial trouble that they were forced to make redundancies. The debt incurred during this initial period set the stage for a decade of struggling to keep the venue open, with various campaigns and donations necessary to

⁴⁴ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

prevent its closure. After five years, in 1989, the venue was granted a licence to open until midnight on weekdays, but no late weekend licence was forthcoming until 1993. Less than a year later, Riverside was privatised in a controversial and unpopular, but financially necessary move.

Scenes, cliques and cartels: networks and power in Newcastle

There are conflicting views as to the motivation behind the denial of an alcohol licence for Riverside. It could be argued, and has in fact been suggested that the council, for whatever reasons, simply did not want the project to establish itself. Andy Balman, who became Riverside's chief representative, states that, 'there was this idea of giving us the money and watching us fail and then the next time anyone asked for help it would be, "well we've done this before and look what happened"'.⁴⁶ Taylor, on the other hand, states that while he was not sure that the council actively wanted the project to fail, 'at the time there was this...cabal, really, between a lot of very rich...pub owners and nightclub owners who really didn't want to see this young upstart of a club opening on the other side of Newcastle and dragging people across from their pubs and clubs into that area'. Perhaps the council felt under pressure from these very powerful local businessmen, or worse— it would not have been the first time that corruption influenced the direction of council policy in Newcastle.⁴⁷

On top of the financial difficulties, there are numerous accounts of trouble with the local gangs that effectively ran local nightlife at the time, who were concerned about what they may well have perceived as new competition. One incident, recounted by resident DJ Niall Mercer, involved 'about 20 doormen from the town [coming] down...I hid in the dressing room when people started pulling knives on the dancefloor'.⁴⁸ Even before the refurbishment of the building that housed Riverside had even been finished, 'word had gotten [sic] around that the "local mafia" were going to send a team down to wreck the place'.⁴⁹ At this time, Newcastle's nightlife was under the control of 'about three or four guys who owned everything, who had all the licences and had it locked down',⁵⁰ and who

⁴⁶ Andy Balman, in *Riverside*, 19.

⁴⁷ The leader of Newcastle's Labour City Council in the 1960s, T. Dan Smith, was famously jailed for corruption, largely relating to building contracts.

⁴⁸ Niall Mercer, in *Riverside*, 72.

⁴⁹ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 20.

⁵⁰ Tom Caulker, personal interview.

enforced their control through violence and subterfuge.⁵¹ Being outside the city centre and catering to a very different crowd perhaps meant that in its early years Riverside had a relatively easy time avoiding the worst of the cartel's attention, but the points above show that even an explicitly non-mainstream venue, with absolutely no pretensions to 'poaching' any of the mainstream clientele, was not entirely safe. According to a member of Riverside's security, the crew were given the contract as 'part of Riverside trying to break the monopoly that the town gangs had over the club security business. This was also part of the difficulty that Riverside had getting an alcohol licence, and extending the licence they were eventually granted into a late licence—they were outside of local cliques and were therefore seen as a threat.⁵² This type of behaviour, which is really just a relatively benign form of corruption, has certainly not disappeared. Local DJ and promoter Jonathan Miles made some interesting points during an interview, which are worth quoting at length. He offered the explanation that,

business culture exists as well as the 'culture' culture that we're talking about, and you know, that they have their own connections of...where they get their drink from and who does their decorating, and who...the building contractors that they use...all of these sort of things, where they hire their staff from and things like that, and it's all kind of, it's like sewn up, *it's like a kind of scene that they've got...*

⁵³

This point highlights the tendency of people to group together in every walk of life. In such a compact city as Newcastle, with its limited space limiting opportunities for profit, it is perhaps unsurprising that business would be conducted in this way. Miles goes on to describe some of his experiences with promoting dance events, saying that

I remember [name] used to love doing this kind of stuff [in the early 2000s], he'd ring around looking for drinks promotions from random drink importers and distributors, that had no connection to anything in Newcastle at all, and so, you know, to get their name on the flyer they'd supply, like, a load of cases of some kind of beer and we'd get into a venue and we weren't allowed to actually offer it because they had deals in place with different suppliers already...

...even things like, you know...fireproofing our drapes and things like that...those venues, they have their own people that take care of making sure the place was, you know, fireproofed properly, we'd go and...ring around and get the cheapest person, you know...some company in Gateshead who would fireproof the material, and it would cause all kinds of hoo-ha, because we had the certificates to show it had been done, it just didn't fit into their business culture...so there's like a business culture that ends up...having undue influence over what's actually like a cultural scene.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Katie Davies, 'Tup Tup Palace shooting: former doorman Steve Wraith lifts the lid about life in the industry', *ChronicleLive*, www.chroniclive.co.uk, 09/06/2015 (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/tup-tup-palace-shooting-former-9418385>).

⁵² Sue Regan, in *Riverside*, 46.

⁵³ Jonathan Miles, personal interview, 08/05/2015 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The adversity faced by the Riverside co-operative, then, was clearly not insignificant. Financial problems, a lack of cultural understanding and open hostility from the local criminal underworld amounted to a whole array of obstacles. As Balman states, '[t]he fact that [Riverside co-operative] had survived nearly ten years was testament to the commitment and tenacity of all those involved and the fact that [it] was so important to so many people that they would not let it die'.⁵⁵

Solidarity and sanctuary in the Riverside scene

Like any other well-loved music venue, Riverside was also a space of ritual and liminality. Its location on the outskirts of the town centre, which at the time was a relatively underdeveloped area, was ideal for a scene that desired minimal contact with the mainstream elements of local nightlife. A 'clear demarcation between the Quayside and the Melbourne Street area, and the rest of the city centre'⁵⁶ existed which allowed Riverside-goers to enjoy their musical and social activities almost entirely unmolested. One regular describes the sense of ownership and intimacy stemming from the venue's seclusion that many others also felt: 'the walk to the Riverside took us down a lot of quiet roads along which we didn't pass any of the main city centre bars and busy night-time spots. This seclusion, for us, made the club our own little secret and our own personal venue.'⁵⁷

Riverside differed from the Mayfair, then, in two important ways. The first was this relative isolation, which for a club that was both new and run by young people would have been a definite bonus in Newcastle, especially during the 1980s and early 1990s when nightlife in the city was still a violent, semi-criminal world.⁵⁸ The second was the sense of ownership described above, which developed among the club's members a type of loyalty that saw many people attending gigs of all types, based on the venue rather than the music; the Mayfair, while it undoubtedly had a loyal scene, was much less varied in its programming. People would visit Riverside to explore new musical experiences as much as to enjoy those with which they were already familiar. Stage diving, crowd surfing, the launching of projectiles, 'riots', sexual encounters, and recreational drug use were all regular occurrences,

⁵⁵ Balman, in Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, preface.

⁵⁶ Taylor, personal interview.

⁵⁷ Colin Harrop, in Taylor & Plater, *Riverside*, 170.

⁵⁸ World Headquarters (no author), 'History and culture', www.welovewhq.com (<http://www.welovewhq.com/history-culture/>), n.d.; there is much more interesting information about Newcastle nightlife on this page.

which contributed to the seemingly frequent atmosphere of transgression that many describe. Taylor recounts his experience of a Riverside gig in vivid detail:

you were in the middle of this maelstrom of like, you know, kind of anger, flying around, and you just, you know...a really good gig at the Riverside you'd come out covered in sweat, can't hear anything, dripping with blood...the Jesus Lizard gig at the Riverside in 92, I had some friends at the Mayfair, and after the gig I walked up to the Mayfair to meet some friends in there, and one of my friends said, I remember it so well, you walked in, and he said, you were covered in sweat, and piss, and spit, and blood, and he said you were dripping, literally you were like, walking in water, and he said, did you have a good gig? And I said, 'wow'...he said, you just said, 'wow', and he said you could tell you'd had a fantastic time...⁵⁹

While it is important to remember that there must also have been many less exciting events, as there are at any venue—nostalgia has a distinct tendency to gloss over the mediocre—it is nonetheless the case that such transgression is all but impossible to achieve in contemporary UK urban nightlife. Gentrification, corporate influence and the desire for 'riskless risk'⁶⁰ among today's aspirational, 'cash-rich, time-poor' middle class, a litigious obsession with health and safety and, in Newcastle at least, a seemingly persistent refusal on the part of the authorities to understand underground cultures and related issues such as recreational drug use, have led to a noticeably 'sanitised'⁶¹ (but more profitable) cultural terrain.

Having described the cohesion of the Riverside scene, it is worth returning to the point that it was not necessarily a local band scene, such as that described by Shank in his study of Austin, Texas, or indeed that which existed just a few miles south of Riverside at The Bunker in Sunderland, which is still running. The Bunker is in many respects a similar operation to Riverside, in that a group of unemployed, disenchanted young musicians acting as a collective were able to set up a practice room complex in a disused building (of which Sunderland still has many more than Newcastle). It may be that the fact The Bunker is primarily a rehearsal space rather than a venue which was the reason for its success in bringing local bands together. Riverside, on the other hand, finding itself saddled with substantial debt within a year of opening, perhaps failed to foster a strong local band scene because, according to a founding member, staff 'got a little bit caught up in trying to make money to keep it running and the way to do that was to promote more headline acts'.⁶²

⁵⁹ Taylor, personal interview.

⁶⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 10.

⁶¹ Chatterton & Hollands, see also Krims; Minton; Hadfield.

⁶² Dave Cook, in *Riverside*, 73.

Historicity, agency and power: The Riverside context

While Riverside was certainly an example of the agency of local music-making youth, this section of the case study will illustrate some of the ways in which local musical activity is inextricably linked to much broader networks and currents. The analysis will follow Krims in examining how the agency of the Riverside collective was shaped, and to a certain extent steered, by a specific set of historical circumstances. That agency was validated by a series of encounters with power and structure, both equally produced by those circumstances, that went in the co-operative's favour. Those encounters, it will be argued, could only have played out in such a way during a specific short period, the first half of the 1980s. Indeed, it was only due to that specific historical situation that the idea existed as a possibility. Had the project been conceived ten years later, or ten years earlier, it is highly unlikely that it would have achieved the same success, and in all probability would have remained a collective dream in the minds of those idealistic young people, regardless of any agency on their part. Even if the current City Council were supportive of an idea such as Riverside, decades of diminishing power and resources would arguably not permit them to entertain it, let alone run workshops to help groups formulate their ideas, and least of all consider funding the entire venture. In short, a project like Riverside would be impossible now, for various reasons which will become clear over the course of this section.

Possibilities

The key factors that made Riverside possible, aside from the initial idea (which of course came from the young people involved), would appear to have had nothing to do with the agency of local music-makers. These were: the availability of (government) money, the availability of empty buildings, and the value of those buildings. All of these resulted from a fleeting confluence of politico-economic currents and geographical peculiarities, namely the bleak economic terrain left in the North East by the final dismantling of UK industry, the social upheaval to which that process gave rise, and the profound ideological changes ushered in by the Conservative government elected in 1979. It was only the existence of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme that presented the Riverside collective with the possibility of bringing their idea to fruition, and Newcastle City Council with the possibility of financing them. The City Council, though, first had to make the decision to do so—they could have refused, as they did with other aspects of the project, which will be discussed shortly.

Had it not been, then, for the unpleasant scenes taking place most prominently in Liverpool and London, and the ideological position of the Conservative government that led them to respond to those problems in a particular way, the scheme might not have existed. Had that been the case, then neither would the possibility of Riverside's bid for funding. There may have been other avenues that have not been detailed, but it seems unlikely that any of the young people involved would have had alternative access to the amount of money required. This is, of course, conjecture, but based on the information available—that these were unemployed, working-class youths from the North East, whose prospects compared to those of the previous generation were drastically limited, and who had decided to try and use non-mainstream music to avoid the socio-economic *cul-de-sac* faced by many of their peers—surely seems a reasonable enough hypothesis.

Also, given the highly risky nature of the endeavour (in economic terms), it seems equally unlikely that some local entrepreneur or wealthy philanthropist would have invested the capital.⁶³ Music venues are notoriously difficult to run at a profit, and considering Riverside was explicitly designed to cater to minority tastes in a small city, the risk would be greater still. Speculation aside, it is clear that while Riverside as a venue and cultural project could hardly have been any more locally embedded, its existence as a possibility in the first place resulted from the interplay of much broader politico-economic changes, albeit locally mediated and interpreted. As Taylor confirms, 'if the application had been turned down, Riverside would not have come into existence'.⁶⁴

Securing the money was the first and most difficult step. The process had involved meticulous planning and research to present a convincing case for Riverside, which had been all the more difficult due to the collective's lack of experience. One might reasonably imagine that there had been numerous other applications for the money, and as such the collective's diligence and determination paid off. However, it was not the agency of the music-makers alone that delivered the funding, but the conjunction of that agency with that of the City Council, with whom rested the power to make the final decision. Without the council's co-operation (the scope of whose power was itself the product of a specific historical moment), the efforts of the collective would have failed. Once the funds had been granted, the collective had to find a suitable building that fell within their budget. Again, this

⁶³ It is worth bearing in mind here that there were far fewer such people in the area at the time.

⁶⁴ Taylor, personal communication on *Facebook*, 11/11/2015.

only existed as a possibility during that short period between deindustrialisation and regeneration. The departure of industry from the North East had left behind large numbers of empty warehouses and factories, as well as large tracts of derelict land where other facilities had been demolished, particularly along the river.

The under-occupied, rundown Quayside and its surrounding streets were something of a no-go area, and property values were accordingly low at the time. However, by the end of the decade, as detailed elsewhere in this thesis, the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation's strategy of property-led regeneration had been launched, and was on its way towards fulfilling its brief of pushing up local property values.⁶⁵ This period, the end of the 1980s, marked the beginning of the return to the urban core, the start of the gentrification process that has gathered pace since the 1990s and 2000s. It also meant the end of readily available, relatively cheap empty buildings in which to make music venues. This shift was of course not confined to the UK. The mobilisation of cities as centres of consumption, business and finance became one of the linchpins of globalised, neoliberal economic reform, as many commentators have observed,⁶⁶ but the process had been slowly taking shape since at least the 1950s. When Thatcher came to power in the UK, and Reagan in the US, at the end of the 1970s, the programme of industrial and financial deregulation that they rapidly set about implementing allowed the process to accelerate drastically, which it has continued to do ever since.

The Riverside collective, then, were in a good place at the right time in terms of the possibility of their ambitions succeeding, but this aspect of the venue's history shows the degree to which local cultural activity is interwoven with, and to an extent dependent on global politico-economic currents. Newcastle may have had to wait longer than many other UK cities for 'post-industrialisation' to arrive,⁶⁷ but the change was inevitable. To purchase and fit out an entire warehouse for £150,000 would have been impossible ten years later, as the Quayside was undergoing regeneration. Land and building values had increased dramatically while availability had correspondingly diminished. Again, the agency of local music-makers is surely of little consequence when faced with such forces.

⁶⁵ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 22.

⁶⁶ See for example Harvey; Brenner & Theodore; Peck & Tickell.

⁶⁷ Taylor, personal interview; see also Chatterton & Hollands; Robinson; Hudson.

The preceding paragraphs have shown how the Riverside project, while something of a triumph for those involved, and for non-mainstream music in Newcastle, was nonetheless fundamentally reliant on external powers and historical circumstances, even before it had acquired physical or legal form. As Krims points out, 'just as a historical situation can only be inferred from many acts and products of agency, so does any given agency take its shape, force and meaning only from the historical situation in which it is conceived and executed'.⁶⁸ Sara Cohen argues that his approach deliberately avoids issues of individual agency, is deterministic and 'undermine[s] the agency of the music-makers involved as well as the ways in which relations are routed through people and created through interactions between people themselves, and between people, sounds and material things'.⁶⁹ Yet the Riverside context exemplifies the ways in which, as Philip McIntyre points out, agents (or actors) are 'always dependent on structure and the structures an agent encounters allow the possibilities that an agent is predisposed to choose from'.⁷⁰ Krims and McIntyre are primarily concerned with musical expression, whether in composition or production, but the social aspects of music, such as the production and reproduction of local scenes, is arguably even more determined by outside forces.

The scene may not function as a medium of musical expression in the same way as a composition, but music scenes are nevertheless nuclei of innovation, spaces in which the aesthetic codes that define musical boundaries can be explored, tested and changed. This would surely mean that scenes constitute an equally, if not more, important aspect of music-making to consider when analysing the relations between music, people and the city. Analysing music from the perspective of the 'big picture', I would argue, includes by default all of the people through which relations are routed. Far from undermining individual agencies, such an approach allows the whole web of connections from which agency emerges to be revealed and examined. In the same article that she criticises Krims's analytical position, Cohen herself draws attention to the 'boundaries of music-making',⁷¹ which, she observes, can be 'generic, legal, aesthetic, geopolitical, and so on'.⁷² She also

⁶⁸ Krims, *Music and urban geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), XL.

⁶⁹ Cohen, 'Bubbles, tracks, borders and lines: Mapping music and urban landscape', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 137/1 (2012), 135-170, 164.

⁷⁰ Philip McIntyre, 'The systems model of creativity: Analysing the distribution of power in the studio', *Journal on the Art of Record Production*, Issue 03 (Nov 2008), 7.

⁷¹ Cohen, 'Bubbles', 167.

⁷² *Ibid.*

acknowledges that 'musicians...confront and push against boundaries that are outside their control, such as those that prevent access to musical places and resources and are enforced and maintained through strategies of policing and surveillance'.⁷³

These points are all true, and it is surely the case that these external boundaries, such as they exist at any historical moment, are the ones that constrain or enable the possibilities of agency, thus guiding the actions of individuals and groups. This is exactly Krims's point, while Cohen appears to be contradicting her own argument; however much agency can be attributed to local music-makers, there are always 'gatekeepers' of one sort or another that must be successfully negotiated before any music-making can take place. The Riverside collective undoubtedly exercised their agency very effectively, acquiring their own relative power and temporarily transforming the structure against which they were pushing. As this section has shown, though, that agency was shaped by historical circumstance and gained its transformative force only after a positive connection had been established with aspects of power and structure outside of their control. This is in no way meant to undermine the decisions and actions taken by the collective, but as the following paragraphs will show, it was also constrained by them, and the structure eventually proved too strong.

Constraints

It has already been pointed out that had the application put forward by the Riverside collective been rejected, the venue would never have existed, regardless of the agency of those involved. Happily for Riverside, the council approved their bid, granting them an initial £120,000 and then topping that up with another £30,000 of their own money.⁷⁴ The decision to provide this extra funding in particular would suggest that the council considered Riverside to be a worthwhile project, as the grant covered the costs of purchasing the building, hiring architects, renovating and converting the building, and the purchase of equipment such as the PA and lighting systems and the sprung dancefloor. However, as Plater and Taylor state, by the time the venue was completed, '[t]here was little left to actually run the building with'.⁷⁵

It was at this point that the Riverside project began to experience some of the constraints imposed by power to which all agencies are, to a greater or lesser degree, subjected. While

⁷³ Cohen, 'Bubbles', 167.

⁷⁴ Taylor, personal interview.

⁷⁵ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 19.

the council had enabled the Riverside co-op to realise their project by providing the funds they needed, when the time arrived for the venue to officially open, the application for an alcohol license, as explained earlier, was rejected by the magistrates. This was obviously a major blow to the co-op; it is fairly widely accepted that popular music venues generate the bulk of their revenue from the sale of drinks, especially those whose programming consists of less popular, non-mainstream acts and events, as did those at Riverside.⁷⁶ It does not seem too far-fetched to presume that the council would have been aware of this—Newcastle’s music scene may have had its shortcomings, but venues and the micro-economies within which such places operate were certainly nothing new to the city.

The exact reasons behind the refusal of the license are unclear, but the decision provoked confusion and anger among the co-op. One member asked, ‘[h]ow crazy was this? It was funded by the local authority, who knew what the plan was. How was a live music venue supposed to get any sort of income?’⁷⁷ Riverside’s promoter described the project at this point as, ‘essentially a non-viable business entity sustained by staff willing to work for the £40 per week Enterprise Allowance paid us [and a large pool of volunteers]’.⁷⁸ The situation certainly seems odd, as one might imagine that having provided the funds, the council would wish to see their investment succeed. One of the most common explanations was the conservatism of the local authorities, who at the time were widely seen to be ‘the most conservative in the country’.⁷⁹ This, as pointed out earlier, has been a long-running complaint in Newcastle, mentioned by every person interviewed for this thesis, as well as featuring prominently in the research on local nightlife by Chatterton and Hollands. Promoters, artists, consumers and venue owners alike all complained that the strict regulation stifled diversity, excluded many from city centre nightlife and made it difficult for new entrants to the market.

It is likely that this conservatism was linked to a perception of paternalistic duty informing the authorities’ stance. Cait Read, a co-researcher of Chatterton and Hollands, states that

There was this chief of police who had the final say, basically...he actually did a really candid interview with [my co-researcher] Bernie [Byrnes] about, you know, it’s not going to change until I retire, and this is how it is, and this is, you know, for the sake, for the good of the people of Newcastle or whatever...⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; see also Chatterton & Hollands.

⁸⁰ Cait Read, personal interview, 27/05/2015.

It has been argued that the region's geographic isolation and deeply entrenched local values have led to a state of 'cognitive lock-in'⁸¹ among its population at all levels, from the working classes to elites.⁸² Hudson argues that this has contributed to the region's failure to adapt to the changing economic environment since the departure of heavy industry. In cultural terms, it has also led to a relative lack of contact with 'outside' cultures, and a concomitant lack of understanding. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that the paternalistic view described above among those in power, along with any other personal prejudices that may have existed, could have stemmed from this somewhat insular tendency, and could explain a great deal about the local authorities' attitude towards the regulation of nightlife in Newcastle.

However, it is quite likely that there were other factors at play. Taylor's point about the 'cabal'⁸³ that existed between Newcastle's wealthy pub and club owners and its councillors and magistrates has already been mentioned. Also, the scenario described above by a local promoter, in which a 'business culture' existed (and very probably still does) that operated through established networks, and which would work against any who attempted to disrupt the established arrangements, is another facet of this system. The North East has a long history of this type of behaviour - the growth of the region's economy throughout the 18th and 19th centuries was in fact dependent on business relationships that Hudson refers to as 'untraded interdependencies'.⁸⁴ By this he is referring to the arrangements between local capitalist elites, whereby capital and power were tightly controlled and remained in the same circuits.⁸⁵

Protectionism has long been a common practice in business, and the night-time economy is of course no exception. Hadfield describes this aspect of nightlife in detail,⁸⁶ having witnessed and participated in numerous court battles over planning and licensing, as well as going 'behind the scenes' on the sides of both local authorities and the (mostly corporate) leisure chains and bar operators who challenge them. In most cases, such arrangements are

⁸¹ Ray Hudson, "Rethinking change in old industrial regions: reflecting on the experiences of North East England", *Environment and Planning A* 37 (2005), 581-596, 586; see also Jo McBride, 'Mapping worker collectivism: Some evidence from River Tyne industries in the North East of England', *Work, Employment and Society*, 20/3 (2006), 583-591.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Taylor, personal interview.

⁸⁴ Hudson, 'Rethinking', 586.

⁸⁵ See also *The Making of a Ruling Class: 200 years of capital diversification on Tyneside* (Benwell CDP, 1978).

⁸⁶ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 67.

enforced through the legal system, incidents such as the refusal to grant Riverside's license being a good example (if, of course, that was the motivation, or at least played a part in the decision). However, as described earlier, the venue was also subject to several rather less diplomatic encounters with powers that may have felt threatened by the new venue, namely the gangsters who controlled Newcastle's venues and their doors.

As a brief aside, an interesting aspect worth mentioning here is that of human geography: what if Riverside had been on the other side of the Tyne, in Gateshead? It is informative to consider the significance of the role of locality, or more specifically local power structures, in informing the personal values and actions of gatekeepers. As Minton points out, 'Gateshead Council has been an unusually stable political authority, characterised by flexibility and delivery...By contrast... the picture of Newcastle...is of an authority that has, at least in the past, been dogged by vicious political infighting and personality politics'.⁸⁷ It is interesting to note that 'the driving force behind the Angel, Baltic, Millennium Bridge and Sage Music Centre was Gateshead Council,'⁸⁸ and that 'Newcastle was at times strongly opposed, and only came to embrace the culture-led regeneration agenda in the mid-1990s. For a time, Newcastle City Council was even against the building of the Millennium Bridge'.⁸⁹ Worthy of note here is the fact that it is Newcastle that has enjoyed most of the benefits of the increased tourism resulting from that period of regeneration. The point of this paragraph, though, is not to speculate on what the outcome for Riverside may have been, had they fallen under Gateshead's jurisdiction, but to show how the personal values and motivations of gatekeepers, which are importantly linked in various ways to locality, may also play key roles in shaping, enabling and constraining the agency of musicians.

It is clear, then, that there were other local actors working specifically to counter the aims of the Riverside co-op. These, however, were also backed by power that the co-op, as a group of young people from a different cultural background and without the necessary connections, could not access. These opposing actors clearly influenced the process of constructing Riverside, both as a business venture, which they made more difficult, and as a cultural scene, which they inadvertently strengthened. But the forces that brought about the final closure of the co-operatively run venue were altogether more powerful and abstract.

⁸⁷ Minton, *Northern Soul*, 17.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The economic framework of neoliberalism has been described elsewhere in this thesis, appropriately referred to by Sklair as the 'culture-ideology of consumerism'.⁹⁰ It has proved difficult to resist, as even resistance is co-opted; that which cannot be successfully co-opted and commodified is swiftly and effectively shut down.⁹¹ It was the pressure exerted by this rapidly globalising economic framework, combined with the authorities' seemingly deliberate undermining of Riverside's ability to become financially self-sustaining, that forced the co-op to compromise on their collectivist ideals, led to the venue's privatisation, and eventually its closure.

Finding themselves having to lay off staff by the end of the first year of operation was perhaps not unexpected for the Riverside co-op. They knew from the beginning that the venture would be a struggle, especially when the alcohol license was refused. A license was eventually granted, but this was for normal pub hours (i.e. alcohol could only be served until 11pm), and numerous conditions were attached, including the membership scheme described above. The scheme, while fostering a sense of ownership among members, also had the negative effect of deterring many people from joining: 'It was very much an unfortunate compromise from day one',⁹² according to Riverside's promoter. Enterprise Allowance money then ran out in mid-1986,⁹³ leaving the venue 'on the brink of collapse'.⁹⁴ The council were among those chasing Riverside, for unpaid tax in this case, although Balman's statement that '[e]veryone tried desperately to make it work but we had been misinformed about rate relief...'⁹⁵ suggests that it was partially the council's own fault that they had not got their money—or that Riverside had again, for one reason or another, been deliberately hobbled by the same powers that had originally financed them; the venue was also covered by a Deficit Pick Up grant of £20,000 per year which came from the council—most of which went straight back to them.⁹⁶

Club nights were established to try and generate revenue, with various fundraising events and donations also helping to sustain Riverside. Volunteers were heavily relied on to keep

⁹⁰ Leslie Sklair, 'Iconic architecture and the culture-ideology of consumerism' *Theory Culture Society* 27 (2010), 135.

⁹¹ See for example Scherzinger, 'Music, corporate power and endless war', *Cultural Critique*, 60 (2005), 23-67. There are of course exceptions to this, but on the whole the rule applies.

⁹² Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

gigs happening; also mentioned earlier was the tension between programming acts that would bring in money and those that they wanted to promote for purely musical reasons. The venue continued to accrue debt and was unable to pay its staff according to the original intentions of the co-op,⁹⁷ with bailiffs sent in at one point 'to take walking possession of [the] PA system'.⁹⁸ Despite the rapidly increasing debt, Riverside continued to operate as a co-operative, with help from the Northern Regional Co-operatives Development Agency and numerous changes in management and company structure, until it could not be sustained any longer. In 1994, less than a year after Riverside had finally been granted a late license (after a decade of operation), the co-operative was put into voluntary liquidation. A letter printed in local culture magazine *The Crack*, explained that

Survival was frustrated both by the lack of revenue achieved subsequent to the fragmentation of the organisation into five separate companies, providing the co-op with only part of the total revenue of Riverside, but leaving Riverside Entertainments Ltd [what remained of the co-op] to carry the burden of Riverside's 'historic debt'.⁹⁹

Privatisation was a controversial move, going against all of the original motives and ethics of the co-operative. There was friction between many of the staff by this point, and several long-serving individuals left, seeing the privatisation of the venue they had helped to set up as something of a kick in the teeth, not least because it was funded with public money. Questions surely have to be asked about the council's position on the whole affair. They had funded a venue that, by the time of its privatisation, had built a reputation as one of the best in the country, and operated according to collectivist values that remained strong in the North East. It would seem to make sense, then, that the city, about to embark on a regeneration project that revolved around culture, would do what it could to support the venue, and the activities it hosted. However, the opposite seems to have been the case, as the last few pages have shown.

It is fair to say that the council were well aware of the venue's value to the local music scene, and very likely its national standing; in the 2002 Cultural Strategy for NewcastleGateshead, the council themselves described Riverside, along with the Mayfair, as one of the city's 'best-loved' venues,¹⁰⁰ lamenting the fact that neither had yet 'been satisfactorily replaced',¹⁰¹ yet

⁹⁷ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 29.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰⁰ Newcastle City Council & Gateshead Councils, 'Building Bridges: A strategy for culture in NewcastleGateshead 2002-2012', 19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

it was six years until Newcastle once again had a venue that could accommodate touring bands. The point has already been made that it was more than likely that the council could not offer any financial support by the time of Riverside's existential crisis, even if they had wanted to. Local authorities had been subjected to widespread erosion of powers and budgets since the 1980s, as successive neoliberal governments had continued with the mission of privatisation on the one hand, and cuts to public services on the other. However, the evidence suggests that Newcastle council were at best indifferent to Riverside's survival as a co-operative, and at worst actively wanted it to fail, as some hinted.

Privatisation, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not solve the venue's problems. Staff were still unable to take home the wages they were supposed to, and debts continued to grow. Successful club nights such as Shindig helped Riverside continue as the region's most important underground venue, which persisted for five more years as a private business, obtaining an open license in 1996 that removed the need for the membership scheme, but the Newcastle scene was simply not big enough to sustain it. In 1999 a local entrepreneur bought the venue, and its staff were made redundant. It was leased to London-based national chain Po-Na-Na Leisure, who immediately set about converting the building, at a cost of £600,000—four times the original cost of the building and all the work it needed to become a venue—into the so-called 'superclub' Foundation.¹⁰²

Foundation lasted only five years. The venue was no longer suitable for live music due to the reconfiguration of its interior, and, rather ironically, 'a resurgence in the popularity of live music took place in the Noughties [2000s], taking people away from club culture and towards gigs and festivals'.¹⁰³ The still-successful Shindig club night moved to new city centre club Digital in 2005, signalling the final closure of the building that had once housed one of the most significant musical and cultural projects in the country, let alone in Newcastle. It is now an office building, barely noticeable among the largely unremarkable, regenerated Newcastle Quayside. The following quote is taken from the core text of this case study, *Riverside*. It seems an apt summary for the story of this unique music venue, but also bears continuing relevance to contemporary cultural life and urban development in Newcastle:

As often happens, people focussing on short-term profit and short-term cultural trends destroyed an important community asset that could have prospered once live music took off again in the Noughties. On the plus side, Riverside had deliberately or otherwise trained a whole cohort of people in a whole

¹⁰² Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 194.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 195; see also Mean & Tims, 'In Concert: Growing NewcastleGateshead as a music city' (NGI/DEMOS, 2005).

range of technical, managerial and entrepreneurial skills, and liberated from the building, they made things happen all over Newcastle, the UK and even the world. It was do-it-yourself socialism, not 'wait for the party line' socialism and as such, hopefully way ahead of its time. It attracted people like me to live in the city—people who might never have given it a moment's thought or written it off as a place of coal dust, flat caps and whippets. It contributed to the musical education of two generations of North Easterners with cultural consequences that are with us still. And it was a place where a lot of people had a lot of fun and made a lot of friendships and memories.¹⁰⁴

Ultimately, then, as with the origins of the venue, Riverside's entire existence was as dependent on outside agencies and powers as the agency of those who had conceived and executed it. The fact that it had run for so long as a co-operative could be seen as a temporary transformation of structure, a DIY co-operative running thoroughly against the grain of the broader UK economic trajectory being no mean feat. But neoliberalism has ways of shutting down that which does not conform to its requirements. This is not to say, of course, that had Riverside been a private venture from the start, it would have survived any longer. Indeed, being a non-mainstream music venue, it would probably have lasted even less time; the commitment of the young people who started the whole thing was arguably the reason for its longevity in the face of such enormous pressure.

The spirit of Riverside arguably lives on in the Star and Shadow Cinema. Although forced to relocate in 2014 after the building's owners decided to use the site where it had stood since 2006 for student accommodation, a new property has been successfully secured and renovated, and is scheduled to reopen in autumn 2017.¹⁰⁵ The largest volunteer-run organisation in the UK, it operates as a co-operative and hosts various types of event, from films and music performances to screen-printing workshops and an anarchist library. It remains to be seen how much leeway is granted in respect to music, as club nights in particular were an issue at the former site due to noise levels. The organisation has certainly demonstrated commitment and tenacity though, and will hopefully be able to maintain one of the country's most respected alternative cultural sites.

¹⁰⁴ Plater & Taylor, *Riverside*, 199.

¹⁰⁵ Coreena Ford, 'Star and Shadow to move into former furniture store in Newcastle', *ChronicleLive*, 05/10/2015 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/business/business-news/star-shadow-cinema-move-former-10198487>),

Chapter 7: Case study - The Cooperage

Introduction

The following case study will discuss the role of The Cooperage, a popular Quayside venue, and the effects of its closure, using the theme of stories and storytelling. The Cooperage is one of the oldest buildings in Newcastle, and in this sense it exudes stories; the sight of its ancient timbers and twisted façade is a visual invitation to contemplate the multitude of tales that comprise its six hundred-odd-year history. This case study will recount the story of The Cooperage and use the idea of storytelling and story-writing to examine the ways that networks such as music scenes are built; the role of venues within those networks; how identity, history, culture and place are constructed, contested and located; and how, within the neoliberal mode of accumulation, cities are appropriated, reimagined and commodified as 'place products'. As an analytical lens, stories help elucidate some of the reasons that venues such as The Cooperage, and the networks they support, are important nodes of urban culture and contribute to a city's economic resilience. Stories are building blocks in the construction of networks, identities and histories, connecting people and enabling us to locate and anchor ourselves, individually and collectively, within the social world. Changing perspective, the same theme will also help to show how the symbolic power of stories has been harnessed and deployed by capital, most notably through branding, and how the penetration of market logic into urban administration can lead to the severing of important historical and cultural ties between venues, cities and local populations. Finally, the story of The Cooperage will also be shown to represent the role of music in the spatialisation of (urban) social relations.

A brief (hi)story of The Cooperage

On the edge of Newcastle's Quayside, rather than in the city centre, The Cooperage closed in 2009, towards the end of the Party City years, reopening on a very sporadic basis between 2011 and 2013, and has been unused since then. It had been a traditional pub since 1974, but also functioned as a music venue and was a hub for a range of musical networks. The Cooperage, like many other famous music venues, closed due to certain gentrifying aspects

of the regeneration process, a familiar story in cities all over the country.¹ Now covered by Grade I Listed Building status,² The Cooperage is one of the oldest buildings in Newcastle, and is 'the most complete example of a timber-framed, brick-panelled building of the later Middle Ages.'³ A building has stood in the spot since at least 1430, however according to Heslop and Truman, evidence suggests that 'the building in its present form dates from the mid-16th century. The timbers used in its construction are said to have come from a Dutch merchant ship that sank in the River Tyne.'⁴ The building's age is immediately apparent, its bowed frontage sagging heavily over the street, as though straining to support its own weight. Initially built as a house, early records of ownership are scarce. In 1531, the house was granted to the founder of Newcastle Grammar School, Thomas Horsley. Heslop and Truman explain that 'for over two hundred years from 1531-2, the building was owned by prominent [and inter-related] merchant families, changing hands roughly every generation'.⁵ They go on to state that 'these families stood in the second rank of "merchant lords" of the town...and this building was usually owned by lesser representatives of those families...and seems to have been passed around as a minor asset'.⁶ By the 18th century, having been extended every hundred years or so, the building had been downgraded from a house to a commercial storage facility. At some point between 1876 and 1880, it was acquired by a local cooper, John Arthur, and became 'a landmark in the street for nearly a century';⁷ it was at this point that it became known as The Cooperage. Arthur's family business moved to the rather more affluent Newcastle suburb of Ponteland in 1974, at which time the building was converted into a pub. The building's interior makes The Cooperage one of the most interesting spaces in Newcastle to hold music events. The doorways are too low for most to walk through without stooping, the ancient timber beams lending a sense of homely warmth to the interior spaces. Sadly, though, lack of investment coupled with the complications of working on a listed building meant that it had fallen into quite a state of disrepair.

¹ Adam Behr, Simon Frith & Martin Cloonan, 'The cultural value of live music from pub to stadium', Arts and Humanities Research Council in conjunction with University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow (2013), 5.

² Grade I status was only awarded after the venue's closure; prior to this it had been Grade II, probably due to its function as a pub and the fact that licensed premises often undergo regular refurbishment.

³ Heslop & Truman, *The Cooperage*, 1.

⁴ 'History of the Cooperage', *The Journal*, 19/09/2005 (<http://www.thejournal.co.uk/news/north-east-news/history-of-the-cooperage-4603953>).

⁵ Heslop & Truman, *The Cooperage*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

The walls had become so fragile that, according to Costello, 'you could push the bricks and the bricks would come out of the wall...if I had enough people pushing with enough force we could bring the entire building down'.⁸ At least one online commentator has also suggested that 'the whole building is sliding downhill and it will require millions of pounds to save it particularly as it is a listed building made largely of wood and [Newcastle City Council] simply don't have the cash (at the moment?) to do this.'⁹ The subsidence to which this person refers would not be surprising, given 'the present Close had become established from land reclaimed from the Tyne';¹⁰ also, the bank behind The Cooperage is very steep, and several other developments stand further up it that could arguably have contributed to possible destabilisation.

Less easily accessible than either of the two venues featured in the previous case studies, The Cooperage stands at the western end of the Quayside, 'in the angle of two prominent medieval thoroughfares'.¹¹ The Close (now known as simply Close), is the street that runs along the Quayside, and Long Stairs, is, as the name suggests, a long staircase that runs steeply up the east side of The Cooperage, linking Close with the Castle Garth. Houses formerly lined Long Stairs; the bank of the Tyne Gorge into which the stairs are cut is so steep that The Cooperage had to be extended upwards rather than outwards, due to its position at the bank's foot. On the eastern side of Long Stairs, the supports of the High Level Bridge overshadow two neighbouring buildings, a merchant's house and a warehouse, both derelict until very recently. Slightly further along begins Sandhill, a street lined by a terrace of tall and well-preserved merchants' houses that lend the Quayside a unique character. Many of these were converted into mainstream bars and pubs at street level, and as explained in chapter one, this part of the Quayside became popular in the early part of the Party City period as one of the city's upmarket drinking areas,¹² but began to decline in the mid-2000s as the Diamond Strip drew the more affluent consumers away.

⁸ Heslop & Truman, *The Cooperage*, 4.

⁹ John Holland, in 'The Cooperage Newcastle closes!', CAMRA forums, July 2009 (<http://camraforum.org.uk/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=506>).

¹⁰ Heslop & Truman, *The Cooperage*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing our 'Toon': Youth, nightlife and urban change in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Newcastle University Press, 2001), 79.



Fig. 7: The Cooperage, September 2016. Long Stairs and Merchant's Quay apartments are both visible.¹³

To the west of The Cooperage, Close was formerly occupied by a row of large warehouses (the fronts of which faced onto Hanover Street), but these began to attract the attention of developers towards the end of the 1990s. Herein lies the reason for The Cooperage's closure—warehouses have of course figured prominently in the gentrification of former industrial areas across the country, providing convenient shells for conversion into blocks of luxury apartments (or for 'accidental' fires and subsequent demolition); the story will be

¹³ My own photograph, September 2016.

elaborated shortly. Opposite The Cooperage, the Wetherspoon pub chain opened a branch of its upmarket Lloyd's No.1 pub, now called the Quayside Bar, in a Grade II listed building that was previously known as Dove's Warehouse; this is the only example in the city of a late sixteenth-century merchant's house with its own wharf.¹⁴ Some way to the west of this building, fronting the river while 'turn[ing] its back on the road, presenting an understated entrance and an overstated carpark'¹⁵ a 156-room, 4-star Copthorne hotel was built in 1992, marking the beginning of the gentrification process on Newcastle Quayside. The last entertainment venue of any sort to the west of The Cooperage was a bar called Pravda, which occupied a detached former warehouse, however this closed in the mid-2000s and the building has stood empty ever since.

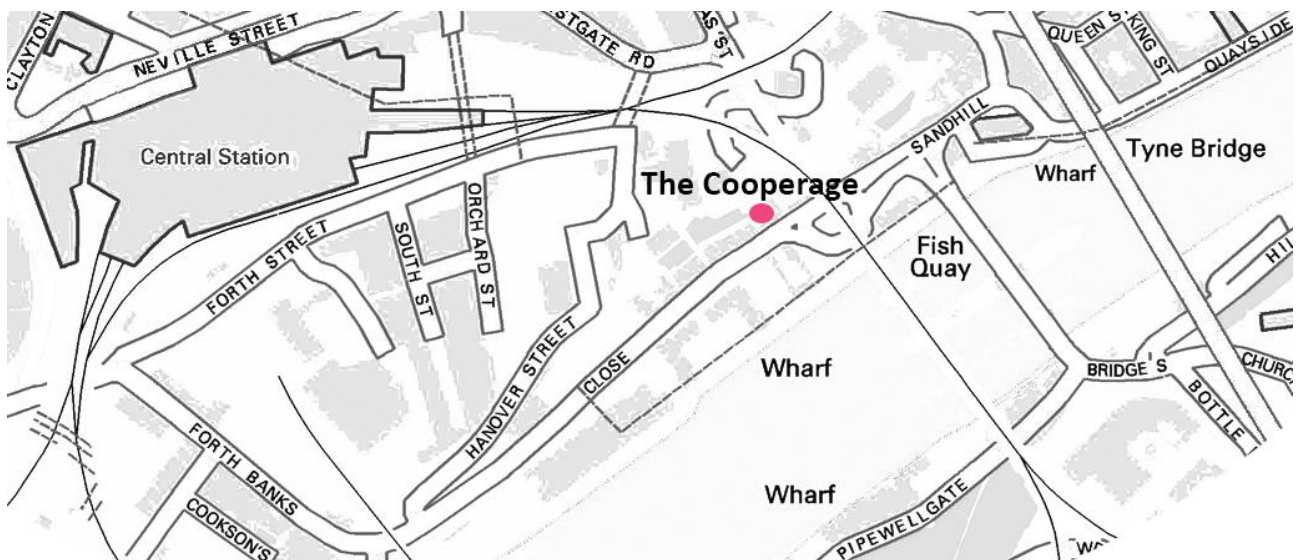


Fig. 8: The Cooperage, location on Newcastle Quayside.

By the time of its closure, then, The Cooperage (literally) stood alone as the Quayside's only non-mainstream venue, 'basically the tip of the Newcastle nightlife',¹⁶ as Costello put it; 'there's nothing there, you know'.¹⁷ The Quayside in general, as consultants Yellow Book observe, is 'a remarkable and atmospheric piece of townscape, but obscure routes to the river (and the steep climb back) discourage casual...visits, and contribute to a sense of

¹⁴ Simon Cotterill, 'Close, no. 35 (Quayside Bar)', *Co-curate*, n.d. (<https://co-curate.ncl.ac.uk/close-no-35-quayside-bar/>).

¹⁵ Colm O'Brien, 'Form, function & sign: Signifying the past in urban waterfront regeneration', *Journal of Urban Design* 2/2 (1997), 163-178, 170.

¹⁶ Costello, personal interview.

¹⁷ Ibid.

isolation from the life of the city.¹⁸ Transport links to the area have always been poor, with no bus or metro service, and from the city centre, as Costello points out, 'it's a fucking long walk'.¹⁹ The Cooperage, then, required some effort to reach, and even when the Quayside was popular, it could still feel quite isolated, in both physical and cultural senses (though this was not necessarily a negative thing). Having hosted live music since becoming a pub in the 1970s, venue closures around Newcastle led to The Cooperage becoming something of a haven for displaced music scenes. As such, it began to host an increasingly diverse range of musical activity. By the late 2000s, events held there included performances by live bands playing everything from death metal to indie to reggae; club nights and other electronic music events; salsa dancing classes; and folk music sessions. Many others chose simply to drink in there, as the ground floor was also a pleasant pub.

The Cooperage became especially renowned within the Newcastle club scene. Having several rooms on three levels and an attic space meant that it offered a relatively quirky and exciting clubbing space compared with many other venues in the city. Dance events would often see the entire venue packed, in particular the drum and bass night Grenade, which was 'always...a knockout',²⁰ and an equally popular techno night called Cause and Effect, which ran from the early 2000s until 2009.²¹ However, in terms of income, according to Costello 'the best nights there was a Tuesday night, because there was no dance nights on...[sic]'.²² These were the weekly folk sessions at which, he explains, 'thirty, forty people would show up and just all start playing together...the upstairs was all shut down, we stocked up and sold more drink on the bottom bar than we would on a busy Friday night...they would drink us dry of real ale'.²³

It could be argued that the folk sessions were also a more appropriate type of event to be held in such a fragile building. Popular as the dance events were, they also caused the most problems. One unfortunate side effect, Costello notes, was damage to the building, as 'people [would] take a bunch of MDMA and ketamine and trash it, which is what would happen every single night we had the hard [dance events]'.²⁴ Visits from the police were

¹⁸ yellow book (no author), 'Newcastle Quayside scoping study', www.yellowbookltd.com, 2010), 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Costello, personal interview.

²¹ Jonathan Miles, personal interview.

²² Costello, personal interview.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

frequent and personal experience suggests that they could be quite heavy handed. Costello points out, though, that ‘the whole point of [underground dance culture] is that it’s underground, so...don’t put it in a pub like the Coop, don’t put it in a listed building’.²⁵ Even more unfortunate for the scenes that used The Cooperage (and those that worked there), was the fact that the club nights provoked regular noise complaints from residents of the recently built luxury apartments next door; it was this aspect that brought about the venue’s eventual closure.

Methodology

This chapter will draw on the theory of Michel de Certeau and Adam Krims. De Certeau likens the spatial practices that constitute everyday life, or ‘walking in the city’,²⁶ to the construction of linguistic formations, or ‘spatial stories’.²⁷ The definition of culture used in this thesis has been that of ‘a way of life’, or lived experience—everyday life—so de Certeau’s theory of ‘pedestrian movements’²⁸ as the spatialisation of stories, or the writing and continual re-writing of urban ‘texts’,²⁹ fits well here. De Certeau also invites us to ‘[admit] that spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life’,³⁰ and here his ideas link to those of Krims, whose work on music and urban geography will augment that of de Certeau. Krims argues that while ‘not all social relations are fundamentally spatial...just about all of them are somehow *spatialised*’.³¹ This, Krims suggests, ‘offers the possibility to see music as part of the spatialisation of social relations and also as a consequence of that spatialisation’.³² The role of The Cooperage in Newcastle’s musical life and the lives of its regulars, and the circumstances surrounding its closure, aptly demonstrate this theory, as well as the role of music (and the spaces that it connects), in writing the ‘manifold story’³³ that makes up the city.

Another perspective on the role of stories has already appeared in the first half of this thesis, in that stories are also central to the functioning of marketing and branding. The imposition of market logic and the resulting territorial competitiveness engendered by regimes of

²⁵ Costello, personal interview.

²⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 91.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

³¹ Adam Krims, *Music & urban geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 31.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ De Certeau, *Practice*, 93.

flexible accumulation means that, like any other product, cities must attract investment and consumers, and central to this process is the creation of 'compelling narratives',³⁴ or stories, about the place. Some academics from within the fields of place marketing and branding have therefore recently begun to draw on cultural geography and cultural theory to gain a better understanding, for the purposes of marketing, of how notions of place are articulated. These studies critique conventional methods of place marketing and city branding,³⁵ calling for more subtle and dynamic approaches (which arguably would be more effective in bringing about the successful regeneration of cities). However, these incursions into cultural theory by scholars of marketing and business could also be seen to represent further developments in (urban) strategies of accumulation. Krims describes the process as 'the merging of space and place',³⁶ which amounts largely to the harnessing of place (and identity) by capital, as the latter part of this case study will make clear.

Information about The Cooperage is even scarcer than either of the previous two case studies and, except for a single archaeological booklet,³⁷ all available texts are web-based. Stories about the venue appear in various forms, namely articles in the local press, blog posts, forum discussions and comments in groups on social media sites such as *Facebook*; as an archive for stories, the internet is arguably unparalleled. The internet's ability to function as a forum for engagement between agents of local authority and the public was also explicitly pursued by Newcastle City Council, which produced some useful material.

Clearly, the conflicting nature of many accounts presents one of the more serious problems with online sources. The web is of course as 'messy'³⁸ as offline social reality, meaning conjecture and rumour can sometimes be difficult to identify and, conversely, *bona fide* information can appear dubious; this was why I contacted Costello for a face-to-face interview (the practice of ethnography could of course be seen as an exercise in storytelling). On the other hand, the variations apparent in internet accounts provide some interesting insights into peoples' perceptions of issues such as (in this case) history and heritage, gentrification and conservation, local government policy, corporate and business practices,

³⁴ Gary Warnaby & Dominic Medway, 'What about the "place" in place marketing?', *Marketing Theory*, 13/3 (2013), 345-363, 346.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Krims, *Music*, 35.

³⁷ David Heslop & Laurence Truman, *The Cooperage: A timber framed building in Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Newcastle: Athenaeum Press, 1993).

³⁸ John Postill & Sarah Pink, 'Social media ethnography: the digital researcher in a messy web', *Media International Australia*, No. 145 (2012), 123-134, 125.

and the cultural life of the city. Of particular interest is the online crowdfunding campaign started by a former member of staff in an attempt to buy The Cooperage after its owners decided to put it on the market,³⁹ which attracted over ten thousand supporters.

Perhaps the most important question raised by the idea of stories and how they relate to the construction and contestation of the city, and the role of music and music venues within that process, is that asked by Mhairi Lennon in her assessment of city (re)branding in Glasgow: 'Whose story is it anyway?'⁴⁰ Interrogating the narratives and intentions of city branding, she asks, 'who owns these stories, and who is silent?'⁴¹ If the city is to be seen as a text, as de Certeau says, composed of a myriad of 'moving, intersecting writings',⁴² the 'spatial stories'⁴³ of the population linking places and creating spaces, then whose stories are heard, and whose are ignored or forgotten? Before elaborating these ideas further, it is worth sketching out the story of The Cooperage as a building, its role in Newcastle's musical life, and the reasons for its closure.

Closing The Cooperage: Conflicting stories and speculation

The closure of The Cooperage resulted largely from the regeneration and gentrification of Newcastle Quayside. The process of the venue's closure, however, was the subject of a whole raft of stories and rumours: stories about council and big business, about gentrification and change, about territory, sociality and place. Online speculation and hyperbole were rife, making it difficult to ascertain exactly what had happened. Costello had set up the *Facebook* group 'Save the Coop'⁴⁴ after the decision to close the venue had been confirmed, in an attempt to raise enough support to form a co-operative and buy the venue; at one point the group had over 11,000 members, demonstrating the venue's popularity. He had also been in direct contact over the issue with the council, so I deemed him a reliable source. The other main source drawn on here is a blog post written by the former council employee that met with Costello, communication advisor Alastair Smith, setting out the

³⁹ Smith, 'Case study on Facebook engagement'.

⁴⁰ Mhairi Lennon, 'Glasgow the brand: whose story is it anyway?' in T. Brabazon (Ed.), *City Imaging* (Dordrecht: Springer (eBook)), 2014, 13-29, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² De Certeau, *Practice*, 93.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁴ This group represents one of the many problems with doing internet-based research: it was publicly accessible when I began writing this thesis, but Facebook has recently changed its privacy policy so that such pages require a login to view comments. However, it is still a public group, meaning anyone with a Facebook account can view it once logged in. It is also assumed here that due to the comments being posted while the group was still in the public domain, authors were happy for the public to read them.

council's position; the online group and the crowdfunding campaign were Smith's suggestions. Due to its officially sanctioned status, this story is assumed to be accurate,⁴⁵ although the position of 'communication advisor' arguably suggests an element of public relations. Smith's own story of how he 'got involved with an anti-council *Facebook* group and turned around some of the negative sentiment'⁴⁶ implies that this was at least partially his role. This thesis has also shown that council publications do not necessarily reflect their true positions.

The early 2000s saw a series of developments in the Quayside area, some of which provoked controversy. Bonded Warehouse, a large Victorian listed building at the western end of Close, was sufficiently damaged by fire in 2006 (not for the first time) that, after a protracted stand-off between the council and the building's owners, it was eventually demolished and an apartment block built in its place. The developers who owned it, Zirca, appeared to be doing nothing to make the building safe; the fire had caused serious instability and the stretch of road beneath it was closed for several months, with road traffic chaos ensuing. A Dangerous Building Order was eventually issued, at which point the company claimed that it was only weeks from starting what had been a long-delayed project. This led many participants in online discussions to question the company's motives; one local observer retorted, '[c]all me Mr Cynical, but lo and behold, a dangerous building order is issued and all of a sudden Zirca are about to do something—co-incidence? I don't think so somehow...My bet is on nothing being done by Zirca in the next 28 days and the building being demolished'.⁴⁷

The author of this comment was proved correct, and other Quayside developments were viewed with similar suspicion. The neighbouring warehouse was renovated where possible and turned into apartments, while further along, next door to The Cooperage, another large block of luxury apartments was built, with several roof terraces directly overlooking the ancient pub's roof. Many online commentators were again suspicious that a block of modern luxury apartments had been allowed to be built next door to what they considered 'an

⁴⁵ Alastair Smith, 'Case study on Facebook engagement', *Medium*, 04/11/2014 (https://medium.com/@al_osaur/case-study-on-facebook-engagement-6f8b35d98e93#.662skj89g); it should be pointed out that this is an updated, reposted version of the original, and due to the constantly changing nature of the internet, some quotes on this version no longer exist on the page from which they were taken.

⁴⁶ Smith, 'Case study'.

⁴⁷ Posted by Steve Ellwood, 'Bonded Warehouses – latest developments', *Narkive*, 20/09/2006 (<http://uk.local.geordie.narkive.com/IQ2JF4ge/bonded-warehouses-latest-development>).

important landmark of the Toon⁴⁸ and a part of the city's musical heritage. Newcastle City Council very soon began to receive noise complaints from some of the new residents, a widespread and well-documented problem for small music venues in areas of regeneration across the UK.⁴⁹ Based on noise level readings obtained by the police,⁵⁰ the council (which was under the control of the Liberal Democrat party between 2004 and 2011), issued a Noise Abatement Order, as they were legally obliged to do. Much speculation again circulated online, the only consistent line being that the council had stipulated that the building would require soundproofing if it were to continue to operate as a music venue. The outcome was that having discussed the situation with the council, the venue's corporate owners Enterprise Inns Ltd decided to close it rather than pay for soundproofing. According to Smith, '[t]he council took the view that this had been a commercial decision.'⁵¹ As stated earlier, the listing status of The Cooperage was upgraded after its closure. Costello suggests that 'they could have done a lot with it, but they couldn't have done...what they wanted, and then it got bumped up to the point where they can't do anything with it'.⁵² It may seem surprising that such an old and relatively well-preserved building had not been Grade I listed in the first place, but it is most likely that the Grade II status was in place to facilitate the use of the premises as a drinking establishment. The initial conversion of The Cooperage from a barrel-making warehouse into a licensed venue, and its subsequent refurbishments, would have been extremely difficult and expensive under the strict regulations governing alterations to a Grade I listed building; a project as extensive as soundproofing would not only be very costly but also very complicated, for the same reasons.

Numerous angry outbursts appeared on various internet sites, particularly the group 'Save the Coop' set up by Costello. These were directed not only at the decision to close The Cooperage, but also more generally at a legal system in which 'a single resident moving in a few weeks ago can close a venue that's been there any amount of time'.⁵³ Even more vitriol

⁴⁸ Neil Marsh, in 'Save the Coop', *Facebook*, 07/2009

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/117628077360/?fref=ts>).

⁴⁹ See for example Behr *et al*, 'The cultural value of live music'; there are also numerous press articles available on sites such as *The Guardian*, as well as posts on internet forums related to urban development, such as *SkyscraperCity*.

⁵⁰ Costello, personal interview.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

⁵² *Ibid*.

⁵³ BigTom, in 'Save The Cooperage', *Urban75*, 19/07/2009 (<http://www.urban75.net/forums/threads/save-the-cooperage.222667/>).

was directed at 'the yuppie neighbours',⁵⁴ one user asking '[w]hy do idiots move into flats by a bar anyway?';⁵⁵ many others were much less polite. A number of people also questioned the 'commercial decision', one reader of the Chronicle making the point in a letter that 'The Cooperage is an historic building and is part of Newcastle's history...Having to close due to the owners, who are a big company, being too mean to pay for soundproofing beggars belief.'⁵⁶ Interestingly, Costello, seemingly against the grain of public opinion, suggests that 'all those [bars] down there shutting down was so organic and natural with the gentrification of the city, like...it makes sense, like, you put all the bars in the city centre, rather than on the Quayside'.⁵⁷

Most problematic from the council's point of view, though, were claims suggesting that the whole affair was 'yet another ploy for someone to buy up or take over premises on the quayside',⁵⁸ this particular commenter also wondering 'how many palms [had] been greased this time?'.⁵⁹ Many also alluded to 'the fires [that destroyed] the lovely old places which could have been renovated'.⁶⁰ Stories hinting at corruption became more frequent as people began to speculate, and it was comments such as these that prompted Smith, the aforementioned council communication advisor,⁶¹ to engage (with his employers' permission) with the *Facebook* group. As he explains in his blog post, Smith wished to clarify and defend the council's position, but first read the comments to gauge the group's sentiments. He found that,

there were a few points which needed addressing, which were: The council closed The Cooperage down; The council took it upon themselves to investigate noise at the venue; Other venues on the quayside make more noise and the council lets them off; Council officials were open to bribery by breweries and/or property developers; The council did not care that The Cooperage had closed.⁶²

Smith spoke to the council's Director of Communications and it was agreed that a response to these allegations should be made. Smith then joined the group and introduced himself in a post that invited people to comment and discuss the issue. He went on to explain that the council had in fact hoped that the owners of The Cooperage would soundproof the building

⁵⁴ Neil Marsh, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

⁵⁵ Son Robin, *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Peter Bestford, 'Disgraceful closure of historic pub', *ChronicleLive*, 27/07/2009 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/disgraceful-closure-of-historic-pub-1457821>).

⁵⁷ Costello, personal interview.

⁵⁸ Deborah Airey, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Smith, 'Case study'.

⁶² *Ibid.*

and keep it open, and after an initially hostile reception it appeared that some members began to accept his explanations.

This is the only example of such public engagement by the council regarding venue closures, and represents a possible strategy that could be adopted more frequently in similar circumstances. The potential for social media to facilitate meaningful dialogue is clear, however in this case the intentions behind the process seem to be undermined by Smith's admission that he was a fan of The Cooperage, and was alerted to the group's 'anti-council sentiment' by a friend who knew this.⁶³ These facts arguably suggest that the initial motivation for his actions was personal, rather than reflecting a more general desire on the part of the council to enter into such a dialogue. The idea that this was more of a public relations exercise designed to preserve the council's reputation, rather than to involve the public in discussions about their city, would appear to be reinforced by the fact that it took place only after potentially damaging allegations had appeared in the public domain. The question arises of whether such an intervention would have occurred if the speculative stories that began to appear in online comments had been restricted to harmless nostalgia.

The conflict to which the closure of The Cooperage gave rise was to an extent inevitable. As Costello and others observed, 'there's no entertainment district in Newcastle'.⁶⁴ The problems caused by regeneration, specifically the construction of residential developments, near long-running music venues and other nightlife areas are, as stated earlier, widespread and well-documented.⁶⁵ Costello, echoing the sentiments of club proprietor Tom Caulker and many others, suggested that 'when the Quayside was big that should have been, ok, that's an entertainment district, either you live there and you put up with the noise, or you don't live there'.⁶⁶ There are several factors to consider regarding this idea, though. The apartment block next door to The Cooperage was finished in the early 2000s, by which time the Quayside was already a very popular nightlife location. The possibility must have existed, then, that the relevant members of the council were aware that problems would arise but granted the developers permission anyway. Interestingly, one council officer cited by Chatterton and Hollands in 2000 admitted that they '[knew] there [were] problems...in the

⁶³ Smith, 'Case study'.

⁶⁴ Costello, personal interview.

⁶⁵ See for example Behr *et al*, 'The cultural value'.

⁶⁶ Costello, personal interview.

Quayside,⁶⁷ and mentioned that ‘there is a Quayside residents’ association who are speaking out against the problems’.⁶⁸ However, they also remarked that while ‘[they had] some sympathy with them...at the same time they were people who moved to the Quayside knowing that it was primarily an entertainment and drinking zone.’⁶⁹ As stated earlier, this sentiment was echoed vociferously by many members of the public on various online discussion boards, but without the sympathy.

Similarly, regarding the trajectory of development in the night-time economy at the time, Chatterton and Hollands were told by another (or perhaps the same) council officer that ‘the effort...[was] with large scale [corporate] development proposals’.⁷⁰ The officer went on to explain to them that ‘the energy and the input is not with the public sector, it is with the private sector...I do not say that is a bad thing but it does lead to a certain kind of approach and the kind of diversification which I think is necessary is not ever achieved through that approach’.⁷¹ Such comments, and those in the preceding paragraph, reveal much about private sector influence on planning and licensing processes, and also the status of both commercial and cultural minority interests within those processes.

The idea of entertainment districts is something that would seem to be worth considering in Newcastle. Melissa Mean and Charlie Tims, in a report on local music commissioned by the NewcastleGateshead Initiative in 2005, refer to the necessity of planning that accommodates ‘(creative) industrial waste’,⁷² for example noise and flyering (seen as causing a mess). They point out that ‘[c]ities like NewcastleGateshead need to strike a balance between the liveability agenda as narrowly defined as clean streets, and a broader liveability that plans for and permits some space for the life-blood of music’.⁷³

Going on to draw a parallel with Brisbane, Australia, they suggest that ‘if noise fails to be planned for, NewcastleGateshead could experience the same collapse in its music scene as Brisbane did.’⁷⁴ Brisbane’s experience was that its music district, ‘the Valley, was effectively closed down by residents’ complaints about noise,⁷⁵ and that ‘[o]nly the closure of the

⁶⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Mean & Tims, ‘In Concert: Growing NewcastleGateshead as a music city’, NGI/DEMOS (2005), 16.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

legendary Empire Hotel spurred Brisbane City Council into action'⁷⁶ Within six months of the area being declared an entertainment zone, venues began to reopen.⁷⁷ However, as we have seen, music venues in Newcastle—the Mayfair being the most obvious example—no matter how legendary, the consequences of their closures and the voices of those affected have been largely disregarded in the story of the city's regeneration and gentrification. From this point of view, the closure of The Cooperage was arguably only a matter of time; as Costello points out, 'the second they built that hotel there [in 1992], they were knackered'.⁷⁸

Cooperage stories: Associations and networks

The importance of stories in the form of associations is that they are the blocks from which networks are built. In their report, Mean and Tims tell a brief story that neatly sums up this idea; in this case, it is worth citing the whole paragraph:

Paul is a promoter and jazz enthusiast. He's standing at the bar in an arts club talking to a friend about the next gig he's putting on. He says in passing that he wants to stay true to the jazz ethic of experimentation and improvisation and is thinking about putting on a night with a famous avant-garde electronica artist. At the mention of his name the barman pricks up his ears. They talk. It turns out the barman is a promoter too and though he isn't into jazz he is into putting on interesting acts. Three months on they've formed NOFI, an initiative to promote links between experimental performers and jazz music and have just put on their first sell out gig in Newcastle.⁷⁹

This is a good example of the role of storytelling in the building of musical networks: one person's story is overheard by another, who joins in and becomes part of a new story, which inevitably leads to new connections being made, and so on. It also highlights the role of venues in this process as social hubs where stories can be written, rewritten and exchanged. Of course, such meetings can happen almost anywhere, but small venues like The Cooperage are important because they tend to attract certain types of people and music. Such venues are both, to coin some well-worn but nonetheless appropriate clichés, simultaneously the temples of urban music (sub)cultures, and the vessels in which 'the primordial soup of cultural evolution' simmers.⁸⁰ Costello describes how The Cooperage 'served as one the most popular and essential nights out in the city, a haven for the most innovative and ground breaking DJ's, bands, breaks, beats, fashions, styles and stories'.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 16.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Costello, personal interview.

⁷⁹ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 15.

⁸⁰ Kate Shaw, 'Independent subcultures and why they matter', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19/3 (2013), 333-352, 333.

⁸¹ Costello, 'Save the Coop' group description, 07/2009.

Phrases such as 'most innovative' and 'ground breaking' are used glibly, and often spuriously, by music marketers to promote the 'next big thing'. However, it is nonetheless the case that it is generally smaller venues such as The Cooperage that host the real innovators and breakers of musical ground, for the simple reason that they are the only venues that will entertain genuinely innovative music. If the phrase 'innovative' is taken to mean musical forms still in their infancy, which is arguably the implication, such forms by their nature tend not to be sufficiently popular for larger spaces. It is unlikely that many of the world's most 'ground breaking' bands played their first gig to more than a handful of people; equally, few of the distinctive sounds that are now commonplace (such as the distorted electric guitar) found immediate mass popularity.

On the other side of the stage, hosting a more diverse range of music than that which can be relied on to sell the most tickets means that such venues enable audiences to see more obscure, 'innovative' artists. The fact that audiences may be small surely does not mean that they should be denied the opportunity. Yet, left to the market, this is what would (and often does) transpire. In Newcastle's case, as a provincial city with relatively few venues, The Cooperage hosted many gigs by artists that might otherwise have bypassed the city. While there are other small venues in the city, The Cooperage was one of a very small number that had no restrictions in its music policy and could be booked for late night events at weekends, a point that, added to the building's unique character, made it a particularly important space. Illustrating the process described above, Costello describes an event in 2009, when 'there was one gabber night for a guy called Mochipet, and like hardly anyone turned up, and I remember him saying it was by far the most interesting night of his tour'.⁸²

⁸² Costello, personal interview.



Fig. 9: Poster for Mochipet, The Cooperage, May 2009. ⁸³

To give this anecdote some context, Mochipet, who is Taiwanese American, is now a globally acclaimed artist and a highly respected innovator in several genres of electronic music including alternative hip hop, dubstep and breakcore, and performs at some of the world’s largest festivals. Costello’s quote perhaps hints that the artist recognised the uniqueness of the venue; it is also interesting that the Newcastle date was the only one outside of London on the UK leg of his European tour that Mochipet has archived on his website. Personal experience testifies that poor attendance does not necessarily mean that a gig is less enjoyable or less important to those that witness it, or indeed to the development of (local) music. Several local artists supported the Mochipet event, and while they may not have received much ‘exposure’ from that gig, they arguably gained valuable performing experience. They may well also have gone away with new ideas inspired by the international headliner, or the other local support artists. This is how new collaborations are hatched, networks are built, cemented and maintained, and new stories written, which in turn may lead to future work, and so on.

⁸³ Mochipet, ‘Archives’, www.mochipet.com, 11/05/2009 (<http://www.mochipet.com/tag/mochipet/page/24/>).

For an artist or promoter, to have worked with well-known figures is an asset, because the association carries an amount of '(sub)cultural capital'—it has symbolic value.⁸⁴ The ability to say 'I was there', 'I played with him / her', or 'I know that (important / famous / powerful) person' is one of the ways in which this capital is displayed, but in certain situations, it can also be exchanged. Thornton, who developed the idea of subcultural capital from Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in order to analyse the club cultures of the 1990s,⁸⁵ points out that '[s]ubcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder.'⁸⁶ This system applies to everybody, whether we consider ourselves part of a scene or not—all of us are part of one 'scene' or another, inasmuch as scenes are simply a way of describing social networks, music-orientated or otherwise. For members of music scenes whose involvement may not go beyond attending gigs, the ability to tell stories of being at a 'legendary' gig or festival (for example Woodstock), or being part of a famous scene (for example 'Madchester'), is a way to look cool among friends.

However, as alluded to in the description of the Mochipet gig, such a story may also spark a conversation that leads to a relationship, a business deal, a creative collaboration, etc. In this way, stories effectively function as currency in the 'symbolic economy', which structures hierarchies in all social formations through idiosyncratic, rather than universal, markers of value. The idea of stories-as-associations having an exchange value is perhaps demonstrated more clearly in instances of performers or producers securing work by being able to 'name drop' previous work with famous venues or artists. Another example might be the practice of using associations to attract an audience, such as printing credentials and other information after DJs' names on club night flyers—other club nights, record labels, music types, and so on—the visual equivalent to 'name dropping'.

Thus, the importance of The Cooperage was that it offered a space in Newcastle where local musicians of all types could play alongside, and meet, artists from outside of the North East that they perhaps could not have encountered anywhere else in the city. It was a hub not only for local musical activity, but also for the establishment and growth of broader cultural networks. It could be seen, to an extent, to have filled the void left by the closure of Riverside, although it was not as big. While there were other venues around the city that

⁸⁴ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

might have accommodated some of the music events, various issues (such as music policy, 'in-house' club nights, relations with management and factors of cost, location and suitability for certain music types) meant that none of these would have hosted the full range of styles and events found at The Cooperage.

Scenes at The Cooperage: A discordant anthology

It is worth noting that this broad range of music did not necessarily mean that The Cooperage was a bustling, or profitable, cultural centre. The diverse nature of the programming meant that the venue was part of several different networks, and as such stories proliferated and it was generally spoken of affectionately. However, unlike the previous two case studies, the Mayfair and Riverside, a cohesive scene never formed around The Cooperage. The monthly club nights and weekly folk sessions were relatively busy, but these were the only times that those particular sets of people would visit the venue, and other events were far less successful. Many local band gigs, for example, would draw only a handful of people (as is the case with the majority of such gigs in Newcastle), and some of the regular week nights, as Costello admits, could be 'really quiet'.⁸⁷ One of the obvious difficulties with running a venue like The Cooperage, especially in such a marginal location, is that 'even in a week...where you [know] it [is] busy [in terms of numbers of events], you've no guarantees that people are going to show up.'⁸⁸

While The Cooperage was, from one point of view, a venue that 'catered for everyone',⁸⁹ this multi-genre policy could also have been the cause of some tension between the groups that used it. One internet commenter, for example, exhibits what seems to be a common attitude towards the venue, complaining that 'monday nights there [were] SHIT', before going on to state that 'it's a really nice bar and it would be a shame to see it go'.⁹⁰ Many others similarly expressed affection for the building, but also an aversion to aspects of musical programming that were not to their taste. One reason for this could have been, as Costello suggests, that the management team in charge for the last few years of its operation 'were good lads but they didn't have enough experience with running a bar to fix the problems they had'⁹¹ From a programming point of view, then, what could be seen as

⁸⁷ Costello, personal interview

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Gemma Rose Monnelly, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

⁹⁰ Chris Alsop, Ibid.

⁹¹ Costello, personal interview.

healthy diversity could, on the other hand, be seen as a somewhat haphazard approach, or at least a lack of focus. Although online representation suggests a degree of cohesion, the groups that used The Cooperage seem to have remained disparate, even oppositional, united only in their nostalgia for the venue. As one member of 'Save the Coop' points out, '[e]veryone is going on and on about it if everyone still went there because it was so good they could of afforded to sound proof the bar'.⁹² By the time of its well-publicised closure in 2009, The Cooperage was in severe financial difficulty.

This lack of cohesion among the groups that frequented The Cooperage was arguably demonstrated by the failure of a campaign started by Costello to form a co-operative to buy and run the venue. As stated earlier, after The Cooperage was closed by Enterprise, and council employee Smith became aware of the discourse circulating online, a meeting was arranged between Costello and Smith to discuss, 'off the record',⁹³ the possibility of forming a co-operative to buy and run the venue. The council, who had '...received the cold shoulder from Enterprise for the past 18 months...' were, according to Costello, '...behind [the] cause 100 percent'.⁹⁴ In this meeting, Smith suggested '...basically doing what we'd now call crowdfunding...the concept was very new and what they wanted to do was they wanted it to be public owned...',⁹⁵ but could not be directly involved, due to a perceived conflict of interest.⁹⁶ However, if the campaign was successful and the money for soundproofing was raised, Costello told the *Facebook* group, '...the problems with nearby flats [would] disappear.'⁹⁷ He added that he had been '...reassured by the council about this.'⁹⁸

Smith cited the phenomenon of *MyFootballClub* as one successful example of such a campaign;⁹⁹ this was before internet crowdfunding sites such as *Kickstarter* and *Indiegogo* had become commonplace. *MyFootballClub* was started in 2007, and in 2008 became the first online community to fully (and democratically) run a professional sports team, the team in question being Ebbsfleet United.¹⁰⁰ Many members of 'Save the Coop' greeted this idea enthusiastically. With such a large number (close to eleven thousand at one point), it seemed

⁹² Cheryl Ann Bullock, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

⁹³ Costello, personal interview.

⁹⁴ Costello, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

⁹⁵ Smith, 'Case study'.

⁹⁶ Costello, in 'Save the Coop'.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Smith, 'Case study'.

¹⁰⁰ Max Colchester, 'One team gets 26,000 owners—all with a vote on who plays', *The Wall Street Journal*, 02/01/2008 (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119922623784960703>).

as though the goal was achievable; however, it was clearly an enormous task and would require a huge amount of organisation. The building was listed as a freehold sale, meaning that whoever bought it would own the building and the land it stood on. However, soon after the initial announcement of the idea, the subject appeared to fade from online discussions. Costello admitted that 'the second I could jump off that, I did...as soon as they talked about buying it, I was like, fuck this, I don't know what's going on here...I wouldn't have known what to do'.¹⁰¹ Certainly the management of such a project would have taken a great deal of confidence, experience and time, none of which the former bartender felt he could offer. By December 2009, it was announced that The Cooperage had been bought by Newcastle-based chain the Apartment Group, and talk of co-operatives and public ownership had faded. It seems unfortunate that the council had found themselves unable to intervene, especially considering their claims to be in support of the project. It is also interesting that the reason cited for this was a conflict of interest. Throughout the regeneration of the Quayside, some three decades during which the area was 'transformed from a shabby, post-industrial waterfront into a mixed-use urban quarter...and a symbol of the city's renaissance',¹⁰² substantial public money was required to 'unlock private investment';¹⁰³ this has, of course, been the case with all urban development since the late 1980s. Yet, no way could be found to cover the cost of soundproofing a single pub with an undeniably important cultural role and over half a millennium of history. This seems especially parsimonious considering that the council had arguably caused the problem in the first place by allowing the apartment block to be built (which, ironically, was one of the developments that required 'public intervention').¹⁰⁴ Whatever the case, it was clear that public support for The Cooperage, while vociferous on the internet, was perhaps not as committed as it may have appeared. As one member observes, '[i]t is easy enough for the rest of us to fling rocks at every and anyone we can point at as possible bad-guys in this situation but quite another thing to get behind the good-guys and make a difference'.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Costello, personal interview.

¹⁰² yellow book, 'Newcastle Quayside', 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Liz Panton, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

Stories as memory, nostalgia and legend

There is arguably a sense of unity in the shared (online) nostalgia that transcends the differences between the groups that used The Cooperage. It could be said that The Cooperage scene, such that one existed, was retrospective, given a sense of cohesion only after the venue closed, through the capacity of the internet as an archive for stories. It is worth noting also, though, that this apparent cohesion was transient, created by a sudden influx of expressions of anger, disappointment and nostalgia over a short period, for which the *Facebook* group 'Save the Coop' was the main receptacle. Indeed, the group was specifically created 'in response to the closure, to bring people together and share stories, nostalgia or perhaps even ideas as to how to find the investment needed for the Cooperage to open its doors again.'¹⁰⁶ As we have seen, the campaign to buy the venue failed, and within a matter of months the group had become inactive. A handful of posts were added in 2011 but nothing has happened since, although it is still open (a *Facebook* account is now required to view it, however, following a change in privacy policy since this thesis was begun).

Music venues, being sites of collective signifying practice,¹⁰⁷ story writing and memory creation, are some of the most romanticised and mythologised social spaces. The possibilities that venues offer for the exploration and construction of collective and individual identities, for expression, celebration and transgression, mean that the stories written in such spaces, and the memories carried away from them, can be some of the most vivid and formative of all; music events are also, of course, (hopefully) enjoyable occasions. In turn, strong feelings of attachment develop among people who experience such spaces; as de Certeau says, 'memories tie us to that place'.¹⁰⁸ In the case of The Cooperage, the role that the building itself played in the perception of music events has already been noted. This is worth elaborating here, as being both one of the city's most eclectic venues as well as one of its oldest structures, it seemed to occupy a special place in Newcastle's cultural life and history, as well as in the minds of those who visited. Referring to the more successful dance events, Costello thinks that 'there was some kind of sense in their minds that the Coop had made it, that the Coop made the nights'.¹⁰⁹ Online comments and stories indicate that for

¹⁰⁶ Costello, 'Save the Coop' group description.

¹⁰⁷ Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 118.

¹⁰⁸ De Certeau, *Practice*, 108.

¹⁰⁹ Costello, personal interview.

many, this was indeed the case, at least in spatial and architectural terms, but also possibly in more subconscious and abstract ways, an idea that will be explored shortly.

The interior of The Cooperage, as described earlier, was a fascinating space to experience. Different rooms on several levels, joined by narrow corridors and steep, narrow staircases made it 'a great venue for parties...you could have 3 or 4 different types of music playing at once and just wander round the different rooms, or go downstairs to the pub bit for a pint to chill out'.¹¹⁰ This environment though, while exciting for clubbers, was perhaps less so for the venue's staff. Costello explains how 'everyone got tinnitus from working [dance events] because you're just constantly surrounded [by loud music]...the acoustics of the building are surprisingly good, but it wasn't built for that kind of thing, it was just bouncing off every wall, it was a constant headfuck'.¹¹¹ Such events, then, could be perceived very differently, depending on which side of the bar one was stood. While former clubbers vented their anger and dismay at the closure of one of their favourite party venues, Costello doubts that 'any of the staff there would turn round and say, oh I miss the hard dance nights.'¹¹²

At the other end of the spectrum were the folk sessions. Paying respect to the venue and its staff, one regular remarks, 'Tuesdays are never going to be the same without you guys and the Cooperage. You really helped supporting the local trad. scene. Don't underestimate how important the Cooperage became to us.'¹¹³ As the quote implies, these sessions had become something of an institution in the local folk scene. Describing these events with nostalgic enthusiasm, Costello suggests that, in contrast to the dance nights, the folk sessions

worked with the building...The building made that night great because of the size of the downstairs, because...you could put people in this room here [indicates] where they were all playing music, and then the bar here with the seating area...is where all the people would come just for a quiet drink...and they'd got this background music that they're loving, and they're all just hammering the fuck out of it...and it just worked really well, and...that's when the Cooperage worked at its best, was when the venue suited the nights, like, in a listed building, where you have to duck down, and have wooden booths and barrel tables, like, it's not built for hard dance nights.¹¹⁴

In this case, Costello explicitly attributes the success of the music events to the building's characteristics, giving an impression of intimacy and homely warmth. Obviously, the description above is further enhanced if one also knows the sound of the music being

¹¹⁰ isitme, 'Save the Cooperage', *Urban75*, 21/07/2009 (<http://www.urban75.net/forums/threads/save-the-cooperage.222667/>).

¹¹¹ Costello, personal interview.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Kieran Smoother-Manouevres Szifris, 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

¹¹⁴ Costello, personal interview.

described, and in many ways Costello is correct that folk music suited The Cooperage; it certainly would not have disturbed the neighbours in the way that dance nights did.

Returning to the dance nights, Costello's own opinion of whether the building 'made the nights' was that 'it didn't—the nights were just good. That's why they're still going'.¹¹⁵ He is again correct in a sense—a building does not somehow generate 'atmosphere' by itself. However, subjectivity is fundamental here, and regarding dance music, Costello admits that 'as the kids would say, it's not my jam, I don't follow it at all'.¹¹⁶ As the comment quoted earlier shows, for some, the building was indeed central to their enjoyment of dance nights, but for very different reasons that the folk sessions were so successful. After his description of the somewhat chaotic scene of a busy dance night, Costello also admits that this '...was part of the intensity of it'.¹¹⁷ This statement is interesting, as it highlights the way in which the structure of The Cooperage, whether it 'made the nights', did give rise to a specific dynamic between people, music and space. The age of the building is clear from its physical appearance, and it could be argued that this constant, visible reminder of age is transmuted by perception into a presence of history—or, perhaps, of stories.

De Certeau notes that 'what can be seen designates what is no longer there',¹¹⁸ and that 'it is striking...that the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences'.¹¹⁹ Costello also makes the point that 'there [are] so many stories about the place that people don't know'.¹²⁰ This is of course true of all places, and we are (or can be) aware in any place both that such unknown stories must exist, and that we do not know them; it is this idea that we acknowledge when we ask ourselves, "I wonder what happened here?". For some (including myself), this sense of history, of simultaneous presence and absence in The Cooperage, was palpable. Combined with architectural interest and acoustic properties, this aspect of the venue seemed to add something to the experience of a music event that was not present in most other venues. It is not impossible, therefore, to see how some might attribute the creation of atmosphere to the building itself.

¹¹⁵ Costello, personal interview.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ De Certeau, *Practice*, 108.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Costello, personal interview.

Perhaps the most obvious form of 'present absences' is the notion of ghosts, and numerous online comments refer to The Cooperage being haunted by a number of these, all with their own stories;¹²¹ probably the most famous is Henry Hardwick, a local man killed while attempting to escape a pressgang.¹²² As if to confirm the point made above, Darren Ritson, author of *Haunted Newcastle*, says of The Cooperage that 'when I step inside I cannot help but feel the atmosphere change; not for the worse, I hasten to add, but there is a palpable change in the atmosphere nonetheless.'¹²³ This effect, I would suggest, is more likely due to the damp in the place, and the sense of history, that 'presence of absence' referred to in the preceding paragraph is not intended to suggest any kind of fortean habitation. It is interesting, though, that de Certeau points out that 'there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits that one can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in'.¹²⁴ Indeed, it could be said that all of us 'haunt' every place we have ever been in, and while we carry our stories around with us, the places in which they were written retain their own parts in those stories. This is why, when we return to places in which we used to live, we might visit past residences, wander streets we once walked regularly, perhaps visit venues we have performed at, or scowl at the apartment blocks occupying the spaces where they once stood: to reunite, for a time, the two halves of the story, to relive memories. Conversely, we might avoid sites connected to negative experience and unpleasant memory; some stories are best left unrepeatd.

De Certeau observes that 'memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not localisable. Fragments of it come out in legends.' "Here, there used to be a bakery." "That's where old lady Dupuis used to live".¹²⁵ Putting these quotes into the context of The Cooperage, Costello explains that 'Sting used to drink there all the time, it was one of Sting's favourite hangouts'.¹²⁶ As if to publicly inaugurate their own hauntings of the venue, claiming their own corners within its ancient structure, contributors to the *Facebook* group tell us that they 'loved it there, met my partner there nearly 9 years ago';¹²⁷ that 'my debut as a DJ was...on the top floor of this

¹²¹ Merleb, 'Haunted, Paranormal and Unexplained North East - Stories, Photos, Books, Questions/Research, etc', SkyscraperCity, (<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1529481>).

¹²² See for example 'The Cooperage, Newcastle-upon-Tyne', Ghost Pubs (<http://ghostpubs.com/haunted-pub/the-cooperage-newcastle-upon-tyne>).

¹²³ Darren Ritson, *Haunted Newcastle* (ebook: The History Press, 2013), 68.

¹²⁴ De Certeau, *Practice*, 108.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Alison Cooper, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

great old building’;¹²⁸ or simply that ‘some of the best years of my life were spent in the place’;¹²⁹ there are hundreds of others. Costello adds that his own ‘best memories of it are...the lock-ins after, where...we probably drank our wages, but who gave a shit, in the end? That’s what made it good’.¹³⁰

The individual stories that comprise the collective memory of The Cooperage, then, those fragments of memory that surface in the making of its legend, are, to reconfigure de Certeau, ‘personal...not interesting to anyone else, but after all that’s what gives a [venue] its character’.¹³¹ In recording these stories on the internet, a scene that did not exist at the time they were written was effectively formed in retrospect. Reflecting on the place of The Cooperage in the history of Newcastle’s nightlife, Costello said that

I don’t think it had history in the way the Mayfair did...I don’t think it has history in the way the Long Bar does, or...to an extent World Headquarters, but...I really think that...there’s a romantic attachment to it, I think if you turned around tomorrow and said we’re opening the Coop for one night, you’d be so drenched in people, you’d be dying.¹³²

Whether he was correct about the last point remains to be seen, but the sense of romantic attachment is clearly evident in online discourse. Perhaps The Cooperage was especially conducive to this romanticising and attachment because people either understood, or somehow sensed, that more so than almost every building in the city, and almost certainly more than every other music venue, it was full of stories. Another reason, of course, could be that it was ‘was one of the last true places in Newcastle where you could see unique and new things’.¹³³ Many other venues have closed, but not so many generate such widespread, albeit brief, outpourings of emotion and memory. As one member of ‘Save the Coop’ points out, though, ‘at least it’s a listed building, so the spirit will still be there’.¹³⁴

Stories as identity, history and heritage

Probably the most obvious way in which stories function as a means of locating and anchoring ourselves in the social world is the construction of identity, history, culture and heritage. Indeed, once upon a time the word *history* referred to stories in general. It could in fact be said that stories are the principal way in which we navigate social relations; this idea

¹²⁸ Debi James, in ‘Save the Coop’, 07/2009.

¹²⁹ Nicola Cowan, *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Costello, personal interview.

¹³¹ De Certeau, *Practice*, 108.

¹³² Costello, personal interview.

¹³³ Tom Lewick, in ‘Save the Coop’, 07/2009.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

invokes de Certeau, for whom spatial practices, or spatial stories, structure everyday life. If one considers also that recorded history could be seen (if somewhat simplistically) as collections of stories—more importantly, collections of the selected stories of particular groups—then the teaching of ‘history’, one of the purposes of which is to establish who ‘we’ are, becomes an exercise in storytelling (but with a fundamentally ideological purpose: for a start, who is ‘we’?). Regarding the function of stories-as-history in the construction of identity, Harvey cites Hewison’s argument that ‘[t]he impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self. Without knowing where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are going. The past is the foundation of individual and collective identity; objects from the past are the source of significance as cultural symbols’.¹³⁵

I want to argue here that stories constitute ‘objects from the past’. O’Brien, citing Lowenthal, articulates the same argument as Harvey in a way that may help to clarify this idea, pointing out that ‘[t]he urge to conserve...arises from the presumptions that the past was unlike the present and that its relics, which are a finite and diminishing commodity, are necessary to our self-identity.’¹³⁶ Stories arguably function as a way to combat the diminishing of (material) relics, acting as discursive substitutes for them, simultaneously preserving and transmitting the past as its physical remains crumble. With the passing of time, memory fades, threatening to take with it identity and culture, which are kept alive through the passing down of stories from generation to generation. The ways in which stories morph slowly over time, though, are very different to those that affect physical remains. Chapter two discussed the origins of Geordie identity and how this identity was reinterpreted and lived out in a post-industrial, consumption-based setting by the descendants of former industrial workers. The strength of the connection between Geordies and the city of Newcastle was also discussed, represented by the number of Geordies that ‘placed regional identity over national identity’.¹³⁷

But how does this relate to The Cooperage? In his discussion of how the past is represented (and re-presented) in the regeneration of Newcastle’s Quayside, O’Brien raises ‘[t]he idea that the abstraction which is the past may be embedded in the material domain’.¹³⁸ Drawing

¹³⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 86.

¹³⁶ O’Brien, ‘Form’, 177.

¹³⁷ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 9.

¹³⁸ O’Brien, ‘Form’, 172.

on Lewis Mumford, he goes on to explain that '[t]he past, held in the urban fabric, is transmitted through time and made accessible to the individual through the experience of the sense of place...in the physical arrangement of the townscape.'¹³⁹ This idea can clearly be seen in discussions about The Cooperage, particularly in the group 'Save the Coop'. The group description, eulogising the venue as 'one of the cornerstones of the heritage and culture of Newcastle',¹⁴⁰ sets the nostalgic tone and implants the idea, and the building's place in local history is subsequently referred to very often. In some cases, this point is used as justification to keep the venue open, or at least to bolster the case against closure.

One contributor, suggesting that 'we could share what history we know about The Cooperage...[s]haring some history on the place could help to keep it open',¹⁴¹ prompted several replies, demonstrating both the preservation and transmission of culture and identity through stories, and also through the 'arrangement of the townscape'. It is also worth noting here the role of music in connecting all these aspects, a point that will be elaborated shortly. Of particular interest among the responses to the above invitation to share history is one in which the author hopes that 'the council will see that history is just as important as the present and as the cooperage was improved every hundred years it should be allowed to continue to do so in the future. If London values its ancient buildings, and is still a progressive city then why can't Newcastle?'.¹⁴² This response is interesting, as it seems to conflate the closure of The Cooperage, which represents a lack of concern for an ancient building, with an equal lack of concern for local history and identity, but also implies that Newcastle is not a 'progressive city' because of this. The idea of the past being embedded in the material realm could not be clearer. Perhaps most interesting of all, though, is that as well as its part in Newcastle's history more generally, the history of The Cooperage itself is invoked to suggest that the past should inform aspects of the future, that some form of continuity is desirable that has perhaps been (further) eroded by the venue's closure.

Several comments made the link between identity, culture, history and the townscape even more explicit. One, clearly incensed by the closure of The Cooperage, complains that it

has stood for over a centurie and it is haunted why loose a peace ov real maratime and socail history i am sick ov seeing the old move for the new it is about time we saved whats is most valuble to us as geordies and the cooperage is just that ARE HISTORY.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ O'Brien, 'Form', 172.

¹⁴⁰ Costello, 'Save the Coop' group description.

¹⁴¹ Amanda Knox, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

¹⁴² Katy Brydon, *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Colin M Mc, *Ibid.*

Indeed, this contributor appears to be suggesting that they consider it more important to preserve the past than to make way for the future, a point that may be subtler than it appears, and will be returned to later. More pertinent at this point, though, is the reference to 'what is most valuable to us as Geordies', which highlights again the idea of the city 'as an instrument for the transmission of culture',¹⁴⁴ but also, importantly, reveals the totalising nature of the Geordie stereotype projected by 'the Newcastle brand'.

Another commenter's post is worth citing in full, as it echoes this point even more strongly:

When i was a student i used to live in there, having watched Lindisfarne and had a drink with them in the bar, also Junco partners, many other but i was in a haze most of the time, i would love a list of bands that have played there.

They cant knock it down, if i win the lottery i will get it sound proofed, please somebody help this fantastic building, first the Mayfair then this, come on keep Newcastle and its heritage alive, remember it was a geordie, Chas Chandler who gave us the greatest guitarist Jimi Hendrix, they knocked the Mayfair down, would they knock the Roman wall down!, sad, sad news another kick in the teeth for the geordies.¹⁴⁵

Although the author is mistaken about The Cooperage being demolished (a common misconception in the period immediately following its closure), this comment draws more attention to aspects of culture. As with the previous post, it clearly attributes significance to The Cooperage as a piece of architectural history, and illustrates the notion that the townscape somehow articulates local identity and represents heritage. However, this comment also explicitly recognises and highlights the role of music as a connecting agent between identity and culture, history and heritage, and the built environment. In their report on music-making in Newcastle and Gateshead (but mostly Newcastle), which will be drawn on extensively in the conclusions of this thesis, Mean and Tims point out that 'music offers a simple yet beguiling everyday way for people to participate in and feel connected to the public life of their city'.¹⁴⁶ But it is the spaces in which music is made in which those connections are created and developed, and so it is through the union of those spaces, the music and the stories of previous unions, that connections are perceived.

The point was made earlier that a collective, expressive signifying practice like music can give rise to some of the most vivid and memorable stories, and strong feelings of attachment can grow between people and the spaces in which they make and / or experience music. When music-making and experiencing takes place in a building such as The Cooperage, with its

¹⁴⁴ O'Brien, 'Form', 172.

¹⁴⁵ John Dean Heckley, in 'Save the Coop', 07/2009.

¹⁴⁶ Mean and Tims, 'In Concert', 9.

immense age and its unique character, it is easy to see why the sense of attachment to that building might be so keenly felt. Returning to Krims, it is also possible to see in the case of The Cooperage, 'music's part in the spatialisation of social relations'.¹⁴⁷ The venue's closure was seen by many of those for whom music and stories had made it a special place, to represent a statement of priorities regarding who and what the city is for, amounting to a social value judgement, and thus a denial of their identity, history and culture (and those of the city as they perceived it). For those that visited and participated in music and socialising at The Cooperage, the building came to embody (aspects of) who they were, and partly signified their location in culture and society. Its closure, like the loss of a home, represented a traumatic break with the past, the consigning to memory of a relic that must now be conserved through stories.

Stories versus rumours: The (corporate) construction of place

The final sections of this case study will focus on the other side of the story: the use of stories by place marketing and city branding. As stated in the opening passages, these processes, sometimes referred to as 'place-making', have become standard as cities have been forced into competition with one another through the reconstitution of state / market relations by neoliberalism. As described in chapter two, place branding relies on the creation of compelling stories, or narratives, to generate 'unique selling points' about a city, and thus a sense of 'place attachment',¹⁴⁸ in the hope of gaining 'some form of place competitive advantage'.¹⁴⁹ From within the discipline of marketing theory, Warnaby and Medway observe that 'the recent emphasis on place *branding* (and also the extensive literature on place image) places a more explicit emphasis on the realm of meaning, through a focus on place representation...associations, and...connotations created in the minds of target audiences'.¹⁵⁰ This highlights the ideological function of stories as branding devices, a point that will be returned to shortly. In terms of city branding specifically, it seems that after nearly four decades of 'urban entrepreneurialism' and territorial competitiveness, the obvious flaws of the top-down, or 'off-the-shelf'¹⁵¹ approach to city branding (and arguably the whole idea of attempting to conceive of place as product), have become impossible to ignore. Echoing (several decades later) Harvey's critique of monotony in urban

¹⁴⁷ Krims, *Music*, 31.

¹⁴⁸ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 346.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 347.

development,¹⁵² Warnaby and Medway point out that 'place marketing activities inevitably channel places into a competitive zero-sum game, where the formula(e) for success are similar if not identical.'¹⁵³

Remarking on the relative newness of place branding as a discipline, they state that '[f]rom its inception as a topic of research, place marketing/branding has been subject to an extensive critique, especially within the geography literature, which has served to provide a richer and deeper insight'.¹⁵⁴ Seeking to 'contextualise a discussion of the nature of the 'product' being marketed',¹⁵⁵ a number of studies are cited which highlight in particular the notions that identity and place are both constructed and contested, skeins of interwoven and continuously shifting narratives, or stories. Having observed that 'the key point to emphasise...is that the place emerges as a text constantly rewritten by human actions',¹⁵⁶ they go on to argue that 'the place product should be regarded as a dynamic concept, composed as much from changing and competing narratives in and over time, as it is from its tangible and material elements'.¹⁵⁷ However, the key point as far as this case study is concerned is that 'this also relates to the activities through which the place is represented for marketing and branding purposes.'¹⁵⁸ The marketing literature will be returned to shortly, after a brief analysis of the implications of this incursion into disciplines generally critical of such commodifying processes.

Krims argues that there has been a tendency in analyses informed by cultural theory to position 'place' ('the local', liberatory, expressive) as somehow oppositional or resistant to 'space' ('the global', constraining, homogenising).¹⁵⁹ Referring more specifically to certain works within popular music studies¹⁶⁰ that posit the expression of locality through music (i.e. a 'local sound') as a strategy deployed in order to 'reclaim their own identities and that of their surroundings' in the face of a totalising globalisation, Krims argues instead that 'place' is in fact integral to global strategies of accumulation. Space and place are more accurately seen, he says, as 'different faces of a single, overarching hegemonic process',¹⁶¹ and have

¹⁵² Harvey, *Condition*.

¹⁵³ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 347.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 358.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹⁵⁹ Krims, *Music*, 32.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

merged increasingly as the process has evolved. Indeed, local strategies of accumulation have come to rely on the articulation of place, a process that could hardly be better exemplified than by city branding. As Krims points out, 'place has acquired a value-added function that is quite specific to our present socio-economic life.'¹⁶² Newcastle is perhaps one of the most overt examples in the UK of a narrative of place articulated through branding. Chatterton and Hollands refer to the focus on developing the city's 'soft infrastructure (its people and their character)',¹⁶³ which amounts to the commodification of (local) identity, as described in chapter two; there are arguably few such instances anywhere else in the country. The Party City image was rooted in a distinctive local culture, elements of which were detached from its industrial, working class past and moulded by marketing to reflect the desires of capital, namely the alcohol industry and leisure chains. The city's built environment contains a significant proportion of locally distinctive architecture, which was conserved and regenerated as Grainger Town, where local history 'added value' to the city's otherwise unremarkable (and ubiquitous) shopping facilities.

While Warnaby and Medway's critique suggests a concern to acknowledge the voices of all 'stakeholders' in the locality being branded, particularly as they recommend 'a bottom-up rather than the usual top-down approach...in which the product emerges as a consequence of co-created processes',¹⁶⁴ it is worth bearing in mind that both are professors of marketing, and therefore agents of capital. It can reasonably be taken, then, that their critique does not stem from a concern to improve the lives of those groups that may be marginalised by insensitive branding (an inevitable consequence that they acknowledge), but to improve the effectiveness of the place brand and thus the city's position in the 'zero-sum game' to attract capital. Warnaby and Medway finally suggest that the 'bottom-up' approach they propose as a more effective way to brand a 'place product' 'may take many place marketers out of their comfort zone, but the potential benefits arising from such a course of action may richly repay the effort',¹⁶⁵ appearing to confirm this. The distribution of any 'potential benefits' is left unaddressed, presumably outside the scope of the paper.

It could of course be argued that a successful branding campaign that attracted more capital would improve the lives of everyone in the locality, but there are numerous examples that

¹⁶² Krims, *Music*, 37.

¹⁶³ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 358

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

this argument is flawed. The relative success of the Party City clearly benefited only certain (private sector) 'stakeholders', namely those in leisure, tourism and hospitality. Some jobs were inevitably created, to much fanfare, and some local businesses undoubtedly enjoyed increased profits. However, despite the long-standing tendency of the local press to position a boost in 'tourism spend'¹⁶⁶ as a boost for everyone, it is difficult to see where the benefits lay for the city's many impoverished districts, and those of the wider North East region. Krims, drawing on Harvey and others, notes the 'winners and losers'¹⁶⁷ of the turn towards tourism by many cities in the developed world, ¹⁶⁸ finds that 'perhaps not surprisingly...larger investors and corporations [reap] most of the benefits while the labour force increasingly tends towards low-paid, part-time service sector work'. Warnaby and Medway's use of theory and thought from disciplines that are largely critical of their own arguably represents not only a degree of intellectual appropriation (which is to be expected from marketing), but, more broadly, the ever firmer harnessing of place by capital, or as Krims puts it, the 'merging of space and place'.¹⁶⁹

To bring this discussion back to stories, an interesting connection comes from the Oxford Dictionaries' definition of the word 'transmute'. The example given for the word's use is: 'the raw material of his experience was transmuted into stories'.¹⁷⁰ This idea can arguably be applied at any scale, from the experience of an individual to that of a group, or a society. Using this model, it could be said that the experiences of certain (dominant) groups are transmuted into stories, go on to be recorded and are then designated as 'history'. At this point, these stories enter a domain in which they acquire a veneer of objectivity, and become accepted as 'facts'. For every story recorded, though, there is always a multitude of others that are ignored, marginalised or forgotten, stories that contest, disturb and refute those that come to be accepted as history. To relate this idea to place branding, Warnaby and Medway note that the use and imposition of certain stories about a city over others leads to the creation of 'dominant and obscured identities'.¹⁷¹ This highlights the very

¹⁶⁶ Barbara Hodgson, 'North East economy receives multimillion boost from national tourism project', *ChronicleLive*, 03/02/2016 (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/north-east-economy-receives-multimillion-10828040>).

¹⁶⁷ Krims, *Music*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁷⁰ 'Transmute', Oxford Dictionaries, (Oxford University Press, 2016), (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/transmute>).

¹⁷¹ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 347.

problematic, and of course 'inherently political' nature of treating cities as products to be commodified,¹⁷² branded and marketed, as the neoliberal *modus operandi* requires.

If the key to the efficient functioning of a brand is consistency, then these 'obscured identities' could be seen to represent the marginalised or ignored stories about a place that contest, disturb and refute the brand; indeed, this disruptive tendency is the reason for their marginalisation. De Certeau observes that

It is a symptomatic tendency of functionalist totalitarianism (including its programming of games and celebrations) that it seeks precisely to eliminate these [stories or discourses], because they compromise the univocity of the system.¹⁷³

The reference to games and celebrations here is interesting. Referring to Newcastle's period of culture-led regeneration and the bid for European Capital of Culture, Wharton *et al.* comment that it was a 'spectacle of culture' as 'a product of urban branding',¹⁷⁴ rather than the genuine involvement of citizens and communities, that 'came to define the region's cultural discourse'.¹⁷⁵ This spectacle of culture is, they state, 'an assembly of manufactured cultural events that demand participation and rely upon the masses for their effect';¹⁷⁶ they go on to describe Newcastle's hosting of the Tall Ships Race in 2005, and one needs only to think of urban music festivals or sporting events such as city centre motor racing to see their point.

Considered alongside the totalising nature of place branding and the increasing corporate dominance of urban space more broadly, the parallels with de Certeau's description of 'functionalist totalitarianism' are clear. Totalitarianism, de Certeau states, 'attacks what it quite correctly calls *superstitions*',¹⁷⁷ another way of referring to those disruptive contestations. Again, one only needs to consider the 'designing out' of certain undesirable groups from city centres and the shift towards private control of urban management, or the suppression and subsequent assimilation of music forms and cultures designated as 'subversive', for example punk and rave, to see the parallels. To describe neoliberalisation and the oppressive tendencies of market logic in terms of totalitarianism is not as far-

¹⁷² Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the "place"?', 347.

¹⁷³ De Certeau, *Practice*, 106.

¹⁷⁴ Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public Policy in the Party City: The Spectacle of Culture, Gender, and Locality', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33/14 (2010), 779-789, 781.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ De Certeau, *Practice*, 106.

fetched as it may at first seem, and over the last decade especially, this aspect of the process has become distinctly obvious.

De Certeau makes a poetic but incisive distinction between the stories of people, which as spatial practices constitute everyday life, or culture, and the stories of media and marketing, which he describes as 'rumours'. Rumours, he says, differ from stories, in that they 'are always injunctions, initiators and results of a levelling of space',¹⁷⁸ an eloquent way to describe the flattening of culture that the subjection of social life to market logic, as seen in city branding and other such exercises, necessarily entails. Rumours, says de Certeau, 'reinforce an order by adding an activity of making people believe things to that of making people do things.'¹⁷⁹ It could be said, then, that city branding, rather than dealing in stories, or narratives, would be more accurately described as the propagation of rumours. De Certeau confirms this idea, stating that 'stories diversify, rumours totalise'.¹⁸⁰ He continues,

If there is still a certain oscillation between them, it seems that today there is rather a stratification: stories are becoming private and sink into the secluded places in neighbourhoods, families or individuals, while the rumours propagated by the media cover everything, and, gathered under the figure of the City...they wipe out or combat any superstitions guilty of still resisting the figure.¹⁸¹

Perhaps one reason for the failure of place branding to successfully bring about long-term socio-economic regeneration in cities like Newcastle is that the stories circulated by marketing are 'rumours': they are not derived from experience as a 'raw material', and this is the source of their unavoidable inauthenticity. As Robinson observes, city branding campaigns are 'partial, insincere and largely ineffective'.¹⁸² They are fake from the start, appropriated and / or constructed deliberately in the same speculative way that new products are introduced to the market. This can be linked to the sense of (place) identity, or the lack thereof, articulated through the built environment. The extent of anti-corporate sentiment in online discussions about The Cooperage, and the derision with which new developments are often met, suggests that many people are aware, consciously or otherwise, that the corporate developments replacing historic buildings around the city, do not articulate stories of place, or identity. Constructed according to criteria of profit rather than people, such developments in fact articulate their own inauthenticity and the totalising

¹⁷⁸ De Certeau, *Practice*, 107.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸² Fred Robinson, 'The North East: A journey through time', *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 6:3, 317-334 (2002), 321.

intentions of global capital. Additionally, in the same way that branded corporate nightlife venues are continually rebranded in order to maintain demand as novelty wears off, Warnaby and Medway note that 'much place marketing activity is motivated by the need to promote *new* narratives or narratives counter to the commonly held place stereotypes that might exist among some target audiences.'¹⁸³ The number of branding slogans that have been used in Newcastle since the 1990s¹⁸⁴ attests to the inability of place marketing to fully achieve its proclaimed goals, and more broadly the fundamental flaws in the concept of place as product. To combine Krims and de Certeau, it could be said that stories are authentic, diverse and represent 'place', while 'space' is inauthentic, totalising and represented by rumours.

It is these totalising tendencies that relate this part of the analysis to The Cooperage. The decision to close the venue, as stated earlier, was a 'commercial decision', informed by rational market logic. To its corporate owners, the continued operation of a single small pub in a provincial city like Newcastle would be of little concern. Chatterton and Hollands, confirming this, quote 'a representative of a large operator',¹⁸⁵ who explained that 'as far as the City of London [stock market] is concerned half a dozen pubs in Newcastle mean nothing to the city whether they make you know good money or not it is not something. I mean the city loves brands [sic]'.¹⁸⁶ Costello states that the closure of The Cooperage 'was just portfolio stuff',¹⁸⁷ and when the venue's lack of profitability is also considered, it is not hard to imagine that little time was wasted in making the decision to close it. However, while those pubs may not mean anything to the City, or to the corporation that owns them, they often mean a great deal to the groups that use them. The Cooperage certainly did, and this is the core of the problem with the concentration of ownership into corporate hands brought about by deregulation: commercial decisions, taken by distant figures with no commitment to a city, its venues or its people, can instantly sever long-established cultural ties between venues and music scenes, and more broadly between cities and their populations.

¹⁸³ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the place?', 351; emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁴ See for example Akkar, 'The changing "publicness" of contemporary public spaces: A case study of the Grey's Monument area, Newcastle-upon-Tyne', *Urban design International*, 10 (2005), 95-113.

¹⁸⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 104.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Costello, personal interview.

Conclusion: why we need stories

Corporate or market logic, then, necessarily cannot leave room for stories. The rumours of branding level space and flatten culture, while the stories of people's lived experience are a sentimental disruption, an 'annex[ing] to a past or poetic realm a part of the land the promoters of technical rationalities and financial profitabilities had reserved for themselves.'¹⁸⁸ As de Certeau observes, 'since proper names are already... "superstitions", they are replaced by numbers...the same is true of the stories and legends that haunt urban space like superfluous or additional inhabitants. They are the object of a witch-hunt, by the very logic of the techno-structure.'¹⁸⁹ As the preceding pages have shown, branding and the treatment of place as product can never achieve the creation of place identity or attachment. Like reputation and cultural capital, such ties can only occur over time and through lived experience, the writing and telling of stories; one would also imagine that a city with more stories to tell would be a more interesting, diverse and vibrant city.

Warnaby and Medway, again drawing on authors critical of their own position as place marketers, cite Iain Sinclair, who points out that 'culture is what happens between museums, on the street, in markets and pubs'.¹⁹⁰ Tom Caulker, proprietor of Newcastle nightclub World Headquarters, echoes this sentiment, remarking that 'what culture is, is what the people who live in the place do. That is what breeds culture, culture comes from the ground up, it doesn't come down from the fucking skies, and I think that in Newcastle, that's something which we've missed'.¹⁹¹ Having been a club operator in the city for over thirty years, and an advisor on the board of the ECOC bid, Caulker has witnessed the council's attitude towards culture first hand, and his opinion arguably carries some weight.

The vision for Newcastle, though, does not seem to have been conceived with room for such stories. The story of The Cooperage, with some negotiation and compromise, could have had a happy ending, in which a faceless corporation and an unpopular city council kept alive a much-loved and important cultural institution, gaining respect and perhaps even turning the tide of mistrust away from them. Ultimately, though, as with so much else in the neoliberal era, centuries of stories were cut short, determined by short-term profitability. The Cooperage has now, like the Mayfair and Riverside before it, entered the realm of nostalgia,

¹⁸⁸ De Certeau, *Practice*, 106.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Warnaby & Medway, 'What about the place?', 357.

¹⁹¹ Tom Caulker, personal interview.

existing only in memory as a relic given shape through stories (at least, for the foreseeable future). Perhaps not mythologised to quite the same degree as those two legendary venues, as the building is at least still standing and able to communicate its past and those of many others, and also because less than a decade has elapsed since its closure. The closure of The Cooperage is nevertheless still mourned by many as a traumatic loss to the city. It has passed from being a living, breathing part of Newcastle's cultural life, an important node in the networks through which culture grows and evolves, to being part of its history. Another collection of stories will thus be handed down through generations that will only be able to wonder what it might have been like to party in a building that saw more than half a millennium of human change.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Impacts of the Party City years on Newcastle music scenes

This thesis has examined some of the socio-spatial aspects of musical life in Newcastle, in the context of neoliberalised urban development and city branding. In doing so, it has provided a much needed assessment of some of the ways in which the process of neoliberalisation has steered urban development and regeneration in Newcastle. More specifically, it has analysed the role of music in the physical and ideological reshaping of the city, and how this has been expressed in spatial terms. In conclusion, a brief recap of the main themes will be followed by a synopsis of the changes brought about in pursuit of the Party City image, namely the impacts of that brand image and associated spatial changes on local music-making. Discussion will then move on to some of the ways in which local music scenes have been fragmented and displaced from the city centre, but also how their resilience has enabled them to adapt to transformations in the urban environment. Some suggestions will then be made as to how music-making could be more constructively incorporated into Newcastle's cultural life.

It is worth reiterating the point that this assessment is not intended to be an overview of Newcastle's musical milieu. Also, it is intended to consider the perspective of musicians as much as audiences; the key point is that it refers to music less likely to achieve commercial success. A quick glance at any of the local culture magazines such as *The Crack* will reveal music events happening on most nights of the week. These magazines and their online counterparts create a strong impression that the city is alive with music, which of course is their job, and if one's taste falls within a certain range of the musical and affective spectrum, then there is admittedly every chance that Newcastle will have something to offer. However, it is also fair to say that any scenes that could be called 'underground' (despite the inherent contradiction in the idea of an 'underground scene'), especially in the world of dance music and clubbing, continue to struggle for space and exposure. Events do occur that might fall under that banner, but connections in the city are weak and these can be very difficult to find out about, resulting in more of a collection of cliques than a scene, in the sense that the term has been used in this thesis. Spaces that might host such events are few and thus subject to intense pressure, while events often fail to draw large enough audiences. The last

decade in particular has seen numerous new venues and other spaces open and close within a very short time.

Regarding the musicians and audiences in and around Newcastle, it appears that with the right conditions (spaces, money, social relations), the city would have a thriving and diverse music scene, underground or otherwise. As the first of the three case studies showed, though, even local fans of rock—hardly an ‘underground’ form—can no longer sustain a coherent scene of any significant size, except perhaps online. In the re-rebranded, upmarket Newcastle, there seem to be few possibilities for transgression or disruption, spontaneity, appropriation or subversion, such as (certain forms of) music and musical experience may have offered in the past. This relatively controlled musical environment produces negative effects on the vibrancy of local music-making as certain music forms are less able to find spaces that will accommodate them, often due to profitability. Possibilities for musical innovation and creativity are reduced, as are opportunities for local performers to reach live audiences and develop as musicians. The provision of musical experiences available in Newcastle, although seemingly on the rise after the Party City years, is now much more sanitised, predictable and ‘safe’. In this sense, the use of the term ‘provision’ would seem an appropriately lifeless description of the consumer / market dynamic that appears to have come to characterise much of Newcastle’s musical environment.

That being said, there is also an undeniable resilience among Newcastle’s music scenes. Despite several decades of adversity in both the spatial and regulatory environments, local music-makers continue to exploit chinks in the armour of neoliberalisation, however small. It is easy to focus, for example, on the fact that so many of the new spaces that open in the city close within a year or two, but perhaps the more important point is that they opened, and for each one that closes, another soon opens. Music scenes, as explained throughout this thesis, are inextricably linked to the broader politico-economic environment, which in Newcastle (and Gateshead) continues to present the biggest obstacle to the success of music venues and the reproduction of local scenes. Unemployment remains among the highest in the country, the rise in the cost of living has far outstripped that of wages, and the level of disposable income necessary to participate in regular music-making and gig- or party-going is a distant prospect for many, including those in lower-paid work. Yet, gigs and parties of all sorts continue to occur, less frequently perhaps than ten years ago, but the point is that they do still happen. This raises the question of how vibrant Newcastle’s (and Gateshead’s) music

ecology could be with some relatively minor but judicious changes in policy and better access to space.

Culture and regeneration in Newcastle: a brief recap

From the 1980s onwards, Newcastle has been increasingly reconfigured and reimagined according to the requirements of global (corporate) capital, at the expense of a more locally embedded, culturally sensitive approach. In particular, development throughout the years 1995—2010 proceeded largely in contradiction to the cultural strategy set out by Newcastle and Gateshead Councils,¹ resulting in the visibly overwhelming domination of local nightlife and city centre space by mainstream corporate chains, effectively creating a monoculture.² This process ran counter to the proclaimed goals of the cultural strategy, which were to create a diverse, vibrant and inclusive city that took all cultures into account.³ Serious negative impacts on some aspects of local music-making resulted from the closing off of spaces previously frequented by many music-related groups, in particular music venues. This led to a noticeable decline in the diversity of the city's nightlife and cultural provision.⁴

The economic determinism of market logic, and its somewhat authoritarian imposition on formerly public institutions, has also resulted in much democratic accountability being sidestepped or removed altogether from processes of urban development. In short, increasing power has been handed to the private sector, while at the same time the powers and resources of local authorities have been systematically curtailed and undermined. Legislative changes introduced over the last three decades have functioned as mechanisms by which neoliberal central governments have been able to force municipal authorities to become 'entrepreneurial',⁵ to compete as underdogs in a marketplace skewed heavily in favour of the private sector. As Hadfield states, referring to the rapid rise of the contemporary night-time economy in the late 1990s, once deregulation had removed many of the constraints on private sector activity (most pertinently to this thesis, in the sectors of planning and development, and leisure and licensing), '[m]arket forces shaped communal

¹ Newcastle & Gateshead Councils, 'Building Bridges: A strategy for culture in NewcastleGateshead 2002-2012'.

² Anna Minton, *Northern Soul: Culture, creativity and quality of place in Newcastle and Gateshead* (London: RICS/DEMOS, 2003), 36.

³ Newcastle & Gateshead Councils, 'Building Bridges'.

⁴ See Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Changing our 'Toon': Youth, nightlife and urban change in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Newcastle University Press, 2001).

⁵ David Harvey, 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism', *Geografisker Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, volume 71 No. 1 (1989), 3-17.

spaces accordingly'.⁶ This process was particularly visible in Newcastle, largely due to the small, compact nature of the city's geography. Agents of local authority sought to find ways to promote Newcastle through 'city branding', a process that has seemingly become the only way for urban centres, especially in former industrial areas, to attract inward investment. As this thesis has shown, though, the treatment of cities as 'products' clearly exhibits numerous flaws in terms of access, diversity and equality.⁷

Newcastle, like many other UK cities, turned to culture-led regeneration in the late 1990s, following the growing global popularity of this trend in urban development. However, in practice the changes to the city represented a slew of contradictions to a cultural strategy that claimed to define and foreground culture as a way of life. Instead, a consumption-orientated display of culture-as-spectacle was pursued, which overlooked or ignored many already existing regional cultures.⁸ Music-making, a traditionally prominent aspect of Newcastle's nightlife, became marginalised, both culturally and geographically. The closures of several important music venues, a UK-wide issue but again having particular impact in Newcastle due to the city's geography and size, left various local music scenes fragmented and displaced. Other elements of the local music ecology, such as music shops, also closed as regeneration led to city centre rents becoming prohibitively expensive for many independent local businesses.⁹ This was coupled with the introduction of restrictive policies, such as the banning and prosecution of posters and flyering around the city,¹⁰ further weakening the city's musical connections and networks.

At the same time, mainstream consumption and entertainment gained presence and space, bolstered by a market- and media-friendly brand image—the Party City—derived from an appropriated, reinterpreted and commodified version of the Geordie identity. This image provoked much local indignation, as many considered it to represent the promotion of a negative stereotype that glossed over the richness of local culture. On the other hand, culture as represented by the 'iconic' architecture that appeared on the Gateshead bank of the River Tyne — the Sage Gateshead music centre and concert hall, and the BALTIC Centre

⁶ Phil Hadfield, *Bar Wars: Contesting the night in contemporary British cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 260.

⁷ Numerous commentators in marketing theory have expressed reservations about the most commonly employed methods of city branding; see chapter two for more detailed discussion.

⁸ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy in the party city', 780.

⁹ Tom Caulker, personal interview.

¹⁰ Melissa Mean & Charlie Tims, 'In Concert: Growing NewcastleGateshead as a music city', (NGI/DEMOS, 2005), 16.

for Contemporary Art—was seen by many locals as catering to a predominantly middle-class audience and as such, was not for them.¹¹ Indeed, one of the reasons ‘NewcastleGateshead’ failed to be selected for European Capital of Culture 2008 was that the cities’ bid ‘...appeared to be celebrating a consumption culture rather than fostering cultural production from the communities that make up the city’.¹² As Wharton *et al* state, ‘[c]ulture, as conceived within Newcastle-Gateshead’s bid to be Capital of Culture, was essentially a policy product generated by local public and private sector agencies and business organizations’,¹³ which was delivered in exactly the type of top-down way that has attracted criticism from many areas; a particularly high-profile example of this is Glasgow’s year as the European Capital of Culture in 1990.¹⁴

Party City to Trendy Toon: How Newcastle ‘went upmarket’¹⁵

Wharton *et al* describe Newcastle’s time as a ‘culture city’ as a period during which a ‘limited and limiting [definition of culture], constrained by the political and economic agenda driving the bid’,¹⁶ was mobilised by local elites as a strategy to bring about market-based economic growth, rather than representing local culture as ‘dynamic lived experience’.¹⁷ Their position on this largely aligns with the findings of this thesis. In order to legitimise the joint bid with Gateshead for European Capital of Culture 2008, a ten-year cultural strategy was published in 2002¹⁸ that made some admirable claims regarding the value of all cultural activity to urban life. However, as this thesis has shown, in practice the diversity that the strategy promised was not forthcoming; diversity in fact diminished throughout the period. In 2007, Bailey *et al* published a paper assessing the impact of culture-led regeneration in the North East. In a distinctly optimistic appraisal of the situation, they concluded that ‘it may not be

¹¹ Christopher Middleton & Philip Freestone, 'The impact of culture-led regeneration on regional identity in North East England', Paper for Regional Studies Association International Conference, 2008.

¹² Chris Wharton, John Fenwick & Hilary Fawcett, 'Public Policy in the Party City: The Spectacle of Culture, Gender, and Locality', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33/14 (2010), 779-789, 785.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See for example Mhairi Lennon, 'Glasgow the brand: Whose story is it anyway?', *City Imaging: Regeneration, renewal and decay*, Tara Brabazon (Ed.) (London: Springer, 2014); there are numerous papers that discuss Glasgow.

¹⁵ Kate Proctor, 'Party city to Trendy Toon – How Newcastle went upmarket', *ChronicleLive*, 13/12/2014 (<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/party-city-trendy-toon---8280468>).

¹⁶ Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett, 'Public policy', 786.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 785.

¹⁸ Newcastle & Gateshead Councils, 'Building Bridges'. As this thesis has shown, the culture city narrative had been circulating since before the Millennium, some seven years before the strategy was finally published. It was arguably only due to the joint bid for ECOC 2008 that the document came about.

the case that culture-led regeneration simply articulates the interests and tastes of the postmodern professional at the expense of the socially excluded'.¹⁹

This interpretation, published before the hype surrounding the Party City and culture-led regeneration had died down, was based on evidence that many locals appreciated the profile-boosting nature of the cultural icons and the Party City image, and enjoyed the abundance of mainstream nightlife (which was self-evidently the case). In the longer term, though, this thesis has also shown that contrary to their findings, the articulation of 'the interests and tastes of the postmodern professional' is exactly what regeneration in Newcastle has accomplished. More to the point, local regeneration projects appear to have been specifically designed and executed with that aim in mind. The inevitable rationalising process of the 'gentrification'²⁰ and proliferation of mainstream entertainment, and the concomitant squeezing out of less profitable / more problematic activities such as certain aspects of music-making, and the drinking culture of the local working-class population, has been at play in Newcastle throughout the whole post-industrial period. What is more, this process has clearly gathered pace since 2010.

Indeed, the council have been explicit about this. A recent article explained, 'a string of high-end new bars opening in the city [has provided] welcome relief for the city council who have spent years trying to engineer the traditional 'Toon' night out into an altogether more trendy affair.'²¹ Additionally, the ranks of 'the socially excluded' have now swelled to include those whose identity and culture arguably spawned the Party City image in the first place: working class locals, whose 'residual'²² drinking culture was embodied by the notorious Bigg Market—now Newcastle's 'next "ambition street"'.²³ The 'traditional Toon night out' may have appeared distasteful to some, but it was a culture that for a time appeared to offer Newcastle a way out of economic atrophy, not to mention a brand image that generated substantial short term profits for leisure chains and the alcohol industry. In light of this, the

¹⁹ Christopher Bailey, Steven Miles & Peter Stark, 'Culture-led urban regeneration and the revitalisation of identities in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East of England', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10:1 (2004), 47-65, 64.

²⁰ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.

²¹ Proctor, 'Party city'.

²² Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscapes* 84.

²³ Proctor, 'Party city'.

subsequent economic exclusion of the city's indigenous population appears more than a little poignant.

This gentrification of mainstream nightlife was a concern raised by Chatterton and Hollands in 2001, who warned then that a move towards more 'upmarket' provision could potentially lead to a less diverse, more socially exclusive city centre.²⁴ They appear to have been proved correct, as, we are told, 'better quality venues'²⁵ have now 'given the city a more sophisticated feel'.²⁶ Again, the distinctly neoliberal language used here is revealing as to the way that working class cultures (or more precisely, less affluent markets) have come to be viewed, and ideas about whom the city is for. Regarding music-making, as mentioned earlier some aspects seem to be enjoying increased presence, but those elements marginalised by the Party City project have yet to re-establish themselves, especially as scenes.

That the City Council had 'spent years trying to engineer' local cultural dynamics seems not only to corroborate many of the arguments put forward in this thesis, but also raises the question, if this was their aim, then why did it take so long for anything to be done about it? A full decade after the original coining of the term in 1995, the council still appeared to be openly pursuing the Party City image, at the expense of diversity and access to space (although there were objections from some).²⁷ One possible answer to this can be found in the courts, a key site in the urban development process whose workings remain largely hidden from public view, and which are rarely considered in studies of urban music-making. As Hadfield points out, '[w]hen a nightlife brand is being rolled out across the country, the captains of industry—together with their carefully selected legal entourage—go on tour, descending on any town where resistance to their applications is met.'²⁸

Large corporations, unsurprisingly, have access to far greater funds and resources than most local authorities, especially those of provincial cities such as Newcastle. This means that even if a city council or local police force does not want a new bar or club to open in their city, they may well have to accept it, and quite possibly incur the outrage of the local public at the same time. Court battles are essentially acting performances, the winner being the most convincing (and quite often the most devious). Hadfield's observation that '[t]he

²⁴ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 3.

²⁵ Proctor, 'Party city'.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*.

²⁸ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 253.

repeated rehearsal of evidence in courts nationwide allows these “away teams” to present especially consummate performance...[w]hen the corporations come to town, effective opposition is rare²⁹ highlights one of the key mechanisms used to expand the Party City. While the City Council may well have objected, ultimately it was the neoliberal ‘New Labour’ government elected in 1997 that handed power to the leisure chains, enabling them to shape urban space to a disproportionate degree. The economic power of large corporations, then, not only enables them to spatially displace local independent operators, which numerous studies have shown are crucial elements in the development of vibrant urban culture,³⁰ but also to obtain licenses and planning permission where their much smaller rivals would arguably fail, effectively overruling city councils. As local club proprietor Tom Caulker explained,

It’s like a high stakes table, you have to have a big pile of chips before you can get in the game you know...people always [say] there should be more independents... but the reason why there aren’t more independents is because independents are walled out. [U]nless you win the lottery, you can’t get to the table to play. ³¹

The financial obstacles faced by independent operators in Newcastle are then compounded by extensive bureaucratic ones. Caulker complained that ‘if you find a venue and you want to do it up, and you want to fucking license it...the amount of red tape you’ve got to go through, you might as well not bother...it’s just a waste of fucking time, because it’s so difficult’.³² In much the same way that out-of-town superstores were disastrous for small local shops and city centre retailers across the country, the ‘economy of scale’ approach that only the largest companies can exercise also applies, then, to urban space and, seemingly, legal and political power. The council, and to an extent the local police, ultimately have to be seen as complicit in the changes that have affected Newcastle’s urban fabric and cultural life so profoundly over the last few decades, perhaps more so in the post-Party City years. It is nevertheless the case, though, that their room for manoeuvre has been severely limited, both in financial and political terms, by successive waves of legislation designed to empower the private sector in matters of urban governance; indeed, this is one of the hallmarks of neoliberalism.

²⁹ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 253.

³⁰ See for example Kate Shaw, ‘Independent creative subcultures and why they matter’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19/3 (2013), 333-352.

³¹ Caulker, personal interview.

³² *Ibid.*

In pursuit of this reconfiguration of state-market relations, local authority budgets in the UK have been steadily cut since the 1980s. In Newcastle, this culminated in the council's 2012 announcement, after the coalition government came to power, that the entire arts and culture budget was to be axed, which of course provoked outrage among many. Needless to say, the 'culture city' narrative was quickly and unceremoniously dropped at that time, arguably revealing the suggestion that the project was driven by money, rather than people, to be correct.³³ Coupled with the removal of a range of powers (those regarding planning and land use especially), a situation has arisen where the private sector can now, through various means, all but dictate the pace and direction of urban change. The idea that state power in general has under neoliberalism been reduced or curtailed to make way for market forces, while this may seem to be the case in terms of everyday life, is misleading. As Brenner and Theodore point out, what the neoliberal project has in fact generated is '...a complex reconstitution of state-economy relations in which state institutions are actively mobilized to promote market-based regulatory arrangements.'³⁴ This is what is meant by the 'creeping' authoritarianism of neoliberal governments; to openly and explicitly force local authorities to submit to the demands of business would arguably undermine the (purely rhetorical) 'small state' ideology of neoliberalism—though examples of this in the UK have nevertheless become more frequent, over the past five years in particular. Instead, the frameworks within which urban administrations must operate have been altered in such ways that questioning or contravening the methods by which 'governance' is to be carried out is no longer possible.

This point is neatly summed up by De Magalhães's comment on critiques of BIDs by authors such as Minton, in which he states, 'whether or not 'collaborative' (or 'privatised') forms of public realm management are to be desired, those arrangements are now widespread'.³⁵ To suggest that he is wrong would obviously be incorrect, but the implication that it is pointless to question such 'arrangements' is clear. The process has also been effectively masked by the rhetoric of urban entrepreneurialism, in which local authorities congratulate themselves on the development of strategies to attract private sector investment, while deprivation continues to blight the lives of the local urban and suburban poor (a problem particularly

³³ See Wharton, Fenwick & Fawcett; also Middleton & Freestone.

³⁴ Neil Brenner & Nik Theodore, 'Neoliberalism and the urban condition', *City* 9/1 (2005), 101-107, 102.

³⁵ Claudio de Magalhães, 'Business Improvement Districts and the recession: Implications for public realm governance and management in England', *Progress in Planning* 77 (2012), 143-177, 144.

acute in Newcastle and Gateshead).³⁶ All of this exemplifies the role of governments in the shift towards what Harvey and others have called 'flexible accumulation',³⁷ where new ways to generate surplus value are continually devised and old ones modified, a process for which the city has proven to be a particularly effective tool; it also represents the hegemony of neoliberal ideology in British politico-economic thought.

Gentrification in the sights and sounds of Newcastle's nightlife is now abundantly clear. The social problems and negative image brought about by the leisure chains' pursuit of profit eventually became too big to ignore, and the council, with their vision for a more upmarket Newcastle, now seem to be gaining traction. Perhaps more likely, though, is that the demands of leisure-based capital have moved away from mass volume vertical drinking as the disposable income of young people has diminished over the last ten years. The days of 'roving' groups of mostly local Bigg Market drinkers and a packed night-time city centre are clearly gone. The pursuit of diversity, meanwhile, appears to have been abandoned altogether. Higher prices mean that drinkers are now more likely to be students, who still have the money to spend on going out (although fewer seem to be choosing to do so than ten years ago, at least with respect to clubbing).³⁸

Interestingly, an internet television show called *Bigg Market Banter*, produced for several years now by students of Newcastle University,³⁹ does not feature a single Geordie in any of its six seasons of episodes. While it may be obvious that this is a case of students catering to their own crowd, to exclude completely the locals to whose culture the area was central, some of whom still frequent it, perhaps seems a slightly insensitive gesture; one would not imagine from watching the show that there are any locals at all 'out on the Toon'. The Bigg Market is now little more than a small handful of pubs slated for 'regeneration'. Admittedly it was not to everyone's taste, and brought its own set of problems. Nonetheless, the area represented a distinctive local culture rooted in the region's past, albeit distorted over time by leisure chains and the alcohol industry. If diversity was truly something to which the city

³⁶ Caulker, personal interview.

³⁷ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 141.

³⁸ Sarah Marsh, 'I'd rather just chill in and relax': Why Millennials don't go clubbing, *The Guardian*, 24/03/2016 (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/24/id-rather-chill-in-and-relax-why-millennials-dont-go-clubbing>).

³⁹ *Bigg Market Banter, Ep.1*, dir. Bethany Sissons, uploaded by TCTV, 22/10/2010, *YouTube* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNKGNuwNRb4>).

aspired, then it would seem to make sense to preserve at least something of this ‘residual’⁴⁰ culture.

Newcastle by night is now noticeably quieter, populated predominantly by the type of restaurants and mainstream bars that, as explained above, cater to a more affluent clientèle; the Quayside is a prime example. Having been dormant for several years with the majority of its venues closed, the area recently experienced something of a rebirth. Nearly all those venues reopened as more ‘respectable’ establishments—mostly ‘eateries’ of one sort or another—within the same few months of 2014, with the notable exception of The Cooperage. The groups of younger drinkers that formerly frequented this part of Newcastle are conspicuous by their absence, and personal observation attests that there has been an equally conspicuous rise in the average age of those who have taken their place.

It is worth noting at this point that alcohol prices in some Newcastle venues have become prohibitively expensive for many locals. Unemployment in the North East continues to be the highest in the country and, as with everywhere else, the incomes of those in work have not kept pace with rising prices. This relatively subtle but important dynamic in Newcastle’s nightlife means that a large proportion of the local population (other than the perceived ‘troublemakers’ such pricing policies are ostensibly designed to filter out)⁴¹ has effectively been priced out of the city centre. This of course also applies to other areas such as housing, with the bulk of new residential developments (such as those currently nearing completion alongside the music venues of the Ouseburn Valley) being out of reach for many, especially younger buyers; such points once again raise questions about what, and whom, the city is supposed to be for. Considered alongside the notion that city space by day and night is now subject largely to ‘commercially-imposed, rather than democratically constituted’⁴² social control, as Hadfield and others have described—the adoption of BIDs in UK city centres exemplifies this shift—these questions become even more urgent.⁴³

All of this is the result of strategies that many commentators have identified as characteristic of neoliberal economic orthodoxy,⁴⁴ particularly the ‘flexible accumulation’ referred to earlier, and more importantly the legally binding primacy of the maximisation of profits and

⁴⁰ Chatterton & Hollands, *Nightscares*, 88.

⁴¹ Hadfield, *Bar Wars*, 112.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴³ See for example Minton; also Sklair.

⁴⁴ See for example Brenner & Theodore, ‘Neoliberalism’; also Harvey, *Brief*.

share values. The maximisation of profits by definition leaves no room for long-term planning. Profits not made today are lost forever; even if a longer-term strategy appears to guarantee far higher profits in the future, the uncertainty necessarily bound up with any notion of the future means that the risk of those profits failing to materialise is too great. It is one thing for corporations to operate in this way, but the 'territorial competitiveness'⁴⁵ enforced as one of the core priorities of neoliberalism⁴⁶ means that this short-term approach also becomes unavoidable for cities, with impacts on local populations. City councils, especially those that have suffered such deep cuts to their budgets as Newcastle, require the maximum income from investment as quickly as possible to deliver public services. Everything possible is done to attract private sector investment, as the necessary funds no longer come from central government, a point exemplified by legislation such as Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

As explained in chapter one, although this clause means that agreements '...entail a financial contribution [from developers] to the local authority, intended to be spent on offsetting the effects of [a new] scheme on the local area...';⁴⁷ it has been increasingly exploited by developers to both get what they want, and to avoid fulfilling any social contract. As Wainwright points out, '[v]astly inflated density and a few extra storeys on a tower can be politically justified as being in the public interest, if it means a handful of trees will be planted on the street.'⁴⁸ Ostensibly a 'negotiable levy on new development',⁴⁹ Section 106, has 'in practice...become a primary means of funding essential public services, from social housing to public parks, health centres to highways, schools to play areas',⁵⁰ with the proverbial ball firmly in the developers' court.

This process could be seen in action during the Party City years, during which there appeared to be a drive to devote as much of Newcastle's nightlife capacity as possible to corporatised entertainment. This reliance on a precariously narrow economic base, as explained earlier in the thesis, is something of a tradition in the North East, most obviously illustrated by coal

⁴⁵ Neil Brenner & Nik Theodore, 'Cities and the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism"', *Antipode*, 34/3 (2002), 349-379, 361.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Oliver Wainwright, 'The truth about property developers: how they are exploiting planning authorities and ruining our cities', *The Guardian*, 17/09/2014 (<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/sep/17/truth-property-developers-builders-exploit-planning-cities>).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

and heavy industry. As described in chapter two, Hudson points out that there remains for various reasons a state of ‘cognitive lock-in’⁵¹ in the region, among both policy-making circles and the broader population. Coupled with the seeming lack of physical space in Newcastle to accommodate as wide a range of activities as a larger city (although with more sensitive planning this could be achieved relatively easily), this has led to the perpetuation of a weak economic structure. However, the existence of legislation such as Section 106 might go some way towards explaining this tendency, as Newcastle has consistently been among the worst hit by cuts to local council budgets over the past two decades. Having dropped ‘culture’ as the primary lure for capital, then, the most recent strategy seems to be the construction of luxury ‘PBSA’ (purpose-built student accommodation), and seemingly the ascendance of the city’s universities as Newcastle’s new brand image.

This shift in both the prominence and function of universities now appears to be as broad a trend in UK urban development as culture was in the 2000s, particularly among so-called ‘second-tier’ cities, and is intrinsically linked to the marketisation of higher education that has accelerated over the last decade or so. Cities (or more precisely, developers) across the country are now rushing to provide as many of these luxury developments as possible, particularly to international students, whose tuition fees are more than triple those that UK nationals now must pay. Indeed, it has been said that ‘universities are starting to resemble property developers’⁵² by concentrating on the ‘high-end’ market, while city councils are unable to address local housing needs due to the rate of development. In Newcastle, this situation has become unavoidable due to the sheer amount of space that has now been, or is shortly to be, occupied. However, while Newcastle is not unique in following this trend, there are again certain idiosyncrasies that set it apart, and also suggest that the strategy is as doomed to long-term failure as the Party City (the same applies to any other city branding strategy as long as the neoliberal framework is in place). It is worth providing here a summary of the city’s latest bid to attract investment.

To begin with, the student accommodation investment market, like any other property market, is global. This means that anyone, anywhere in the world, could own one or more properties (usually flats), in any number of cities. Newcastle has yet to catch up with the rest

⁵¹ Ray Hudson, ‘Rethinking change in old industrial regions: reflecting on the experiences of North East England’, *Environment and Planning A* 37 (2005), 581-596, 586.

⁵² Adam Forrest, ‘En-suite education: The unstoppable rise of luxury student housing’, *The Guardian*, 16/03/2016.

of the UK in terms of property prices, but the university is relatively highly-ranked in global terms, making it popular not only among student-consumers, but also with property investors from around the world. As an example, on the website of Select Property Group, one of many companies advertising investment properties in the city,⁵³ the Newcastle page displays a large banner that reads, 'Newcastle, UK: The city with 70% PBSA returns'.⁵⁴ The following quote is taken from that page, and is especially revealing not only in terms of how the city is viewed as a 'product' and the degree to which the demands of global capital affect local economies, but also how well the image of Newcastle as a 'leisure brand', formed in the 1990s, has stuck:

One of the UK's key investment cities. Newcastle is famous for its nightlife, its football and, among the global investor community, it's fast becoming renowned for its returns, too. Two universities and 50,000 students, yet Newcastle has less than 10,000 dedicated student beds to accommodate them. The result is a PBSA market with the second highest rental premiums in the country. And with a fast accelerating international student population, Newcastle's investment potential shows few signs of declining anytime soon.⁵⁵

Student property in Newcastle, then, has become globally popular as a 'high demand, high yield'⁵⁶ investment. The arrangement would appear to be as good for buyers as it is bad for Newcastle: the buildings are owned by the developers, the letting process and day-to-day management is dealt with by an agency, and in between these tiers are the investors, who have to do nothing after making the initial (usually borrowed), sit back and watch their returns roll in. As the Select website states,

Today's increasingly international student population wants PBSA, but in Newcastle, supply tops out at 10,000 purpose-built student beds. That's a 5:1 demand to supply ratio. It means that Newcastle PBSA commands a rental premium of 70%—the joint highest in the UK. Given the strong supply-demand criteria, rents are only going to increase—at a rate of 6%, which is almost twice the wider UK residential average.⁵⁷

In fact, the system is much more complex, with standard mortgage lenders often unwilling to lend against PBSA investments, the money coming instead from Student Accommodation Funds, most of which are based outside of UK jurisdiction.⁵⁸ These are essentially very risky investments that can result in big problems for those who take the risk. There is not the space here, neither is it within the remit of this thesis, to explain in detail the workings of the

⁵³ It is interesting that nearly all of these companies are based in London and Dubai.

⁵⁴ 'Newcastle, UK', *Select Property Group Ltd*, 2016 (<http://www.selectproperty.com/locations/uk-property/newcastle/>).

⁵⁵ 'Newcastle, UK', *Select Property Group Ltd*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Merryn Somerset Webb, 'Don't get suckered by student accommodation', *Moneyweek*, 21/10/2013 (<http://moneyweek.com/dont-get-suckered-investing-student-accommodation/>).

PBSA market, but there are numerous articles explaining the complex financial webs and high risks surrounding this area of property investment.⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, it is the financial sector that stands to gain the most from this move in urban property development, and local populations that lose out. While the City Council receives income from development, the effect ‘on the ground’ has been that there now seems to be barely any space left in Newcastle for anything else. Derelict or under-occupied buildings are being converted or demolished, while car parks and former demolition sites are being sold as building plots.

The impression is again that the city has been handed over wholesale to the private sector, with property developers taking the place of leisure chains, and again appearing to wield undue influence over the process. Needless to say, this recent change in the trajectory of Newcastle’s development has not met with universal praise from locals, many of whom are only too aware of the reasons behind the apparent rush to build. As one commenter on the local news site *ChronicleLive*, Marion57, states in response to an article announcing a number of planned high-rise developments (an uncharacteristic but increasingly common style for Newcastle), ‘[t]he council needs to provide another 3,750 homes in Tyneside’s urban core...and yet all the proposals shown are for student accommodation’.⁶⁰ She goes on to point out that ‘the only investment available is for students [sic] accommodation and cheap hotels, [when] what we need is affordable homes’.⁶¹ Questioning the council’s motives, she writes

Will we let the market decide? Our councillors need to have a long hard think before allowing Newcastle to be destroyed by this cheap and nasty architecture that fills the pockets of absent investors and fails to meet the needs of the people who live here.⁶²

Marion57’s sentiments, and those of numerous other commenters, echo those expressed by many supporters of The Cooperage and other closed music venues, namely open cynicism and suspicion. Comments such as these can be found on many articles about development in Newcastle, as well as in discussions on related urban forums such as *SkyscraperCity*, and social media groups. The council, though, have defended their planning decisions regarding PBSA in much the same way that they defended the construction of The Gate after the Mayfair was demolished. Referring to a particularly dense agglomeration of PBSA in and

⁵⁹ See for example the *Financial Times* and other such business publications.

⁶⁰ Simon Meechan, ‘Newcastle’s changing skyline: We map the skyscraper blocks that could spring up in the city centre’, *ChronicleLive* (comments section), 31/03/2016 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/newcastles-changing-skyline-map-skyscraper-11116897>).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*; user comments.

around the Ouseburn area that has recently caused controversy, a council spokesperson stated that, 'all planning applications must be considered on purely planning grounds and cannot be refused simply because they are another student development'.⁶³ Questions must be raised, though, about what has gone on behind the scenes—it is surely doubtful that the court battles described by Hadfield are limited to the leisure sector, and the effects of saturation have already been witnessed. Is the long-term future of the student market in Newcastle really so guaranteed that such a large proportion of the city can be developed to accommodate it? And what if there is a downturn in the number of students? PBSA is useful for very little else; the answers to these questions remain to be seen.

As this thesis has shown, many locals are clearly aware of the processes driving neoliberalised urban development, not least the way that councils repeatedly capitulate, whether by choice or otherwise, to the demands of capital. In the summer of 2014, I volunteered to help at an exhibition called *Newcastle City Futures*, organised by Newcastle University's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. Guiding visitors round the displays, the question of whether the city really needed yet more hotels and shopping facilities frequently arose, prompted in particular by the model of the proposed new hotel development at the Stephenson Quarter, where the famous *Rocket* locomotive was built. Numerous comments were also left pinned to a large board erected for the purpose, many of which suggested that the closure of music venues and other cultural facilities was considered to be a big mistake, both in terms of attracting people to live in the city, and of acknowledging the diversity of those that already do. However, it has also been clearly shown that the needs and opinions of the local population are of little consequence in the development process.⁶⁴ The student accommodation phenomenon in particular exemplifies the neoliberal commodification of urban space and the treatment of the city as a product, and also reveals the accompanying shift in ideas about whom the city is supposed to be for, and in whose interests it is being developed.⁶⁵

⁶³ Marsh, Michael, 'Ouseburn artists hit out at student monoculture imposed on city's Crown jewel', *ChronicleLive*, 14/11/2014 (<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/ouseburn-artists-hit-out-student-8113404>).

⁶⁴ See for example Harvey; also Peck & Tickell.

⁶⁵ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 3.

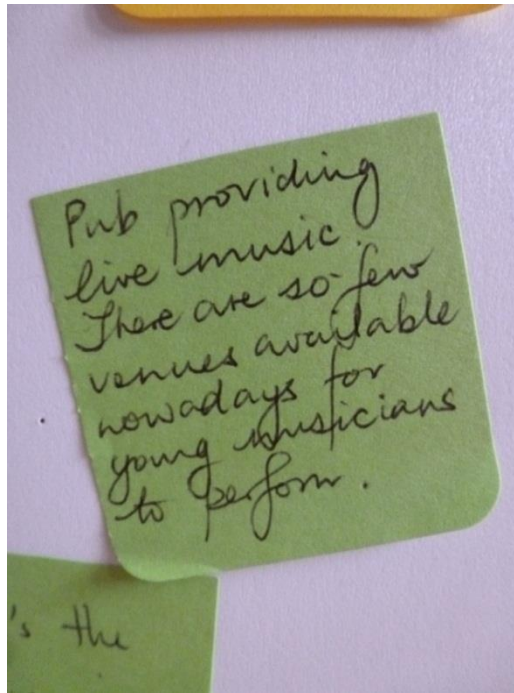


Fig. 10: Visitor's comment at Newcastle City Futures exhibition, June 2014 ⁶⁶

Newcastle music scenes: impacts of regeneration

In 2005, the think tank DEMOS published a report, commissioned by the head of the NewcastleGateshead Initiative,⁶⁷ Paul Collard,⁶⁸ into the state of music-making in the two cities—or to be more precise, in Newcastle and on the Gateshead bank of the River Tyne; the wider Gateshead area, as with all other assessments of culture-led regeneration in the North East, does not figure at all. The report, written by Melissa Mean and Charlie Tims, was entitled 'In Concert: Growing NewcastleGateshead as a Music City', and provided an overview of the local music ecology, including venues, record labels, bands and events. It also offered some suggestions as to how 'NewcastleGateshead' could '...avoid an ignominious slide from music city to musical almost-made-it',⁶⁹ namely by 'work[ing] with the grain of passion for music in the city'.⁷⁰ Presaging the work currently being undertaken by the Live Music Exchange⁷¹ project, Mean and Tims pointed out that this would involve 'creating and maintaining the environmental conditions for the enthusiasm for making and

⁶⁶ My own photograph, June 2014.

⁶⁷ Hereafter referred to as NGI.

⁶⁸ Charlie Tims, personal communication, 27/01/2014.

⁶⁹ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See www.livemusicexchange.org.

listening to music to thrive—starting from the bottom up.⁷² Unfortunately Collard left the organisation before the report was completed,⁷³ and the report never made it to print.

At the time, Newcastle was reported to be experiencing a resurgence of interest in live music, as was the UK in general. It is interesting to read Mean and Tims's report in light of the findings of this thesis - the optimism expressed within its pages is admirable, and at the time perhaps not misplaced. Although they exhibit the common tendency of conflating musical success with commercial success, the authors are also careful to observe both the local enthusiasm for music at grass-roots level, and the fragility and vulnerability of Newcastle's music ecology. They point, for example, to a growing concern over pressure on venues in the Ouseburn Valley from residential developments, which, ten years on, are now almost complete. The area is the closest thing Newcastle has to a cultural quarter, and has long been thought of as 'a jewel in the crown of the city',⁷⁴ with music a major reason for the area's popularity.⁷⁵

Artist Kathryn Hodgkinson, who runs a small venue and a complex of artists' studios in the area and has been active in negotiations with council over development, states that 'there is an increasing tension between the noise that well-loved music venues and rehearsal spaces create and the residential accommodation'.⁷⁶ Concerned that the Ouseburn's unique character and cultural value will be lost, she also points out that, 'despite the fact that each application attracts a fairly high level of objection all planning applications seem to get the go-ahead.'⁷⁷ This appears to typify the current trajectory of development in Newcastle; one of the Ouseburn's most valued venues, the Star and Shadow cinema, has already been forced to relocate. Hodgkinson draws attention to the North East's 'potential for really creative regeneration',⁷⁸ but suggests that 'the council has not fully evaluated the longer term impact of creating a student monoculture in one of the most creative areas of the city'.⁷⁹ Echoing the views of many locals, such as the commenters on the previous pages,

⁷² Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 2.

⁷³ Tims, personal communication.

⁷⁴ Marsh 'Ouseburn artists'.

⁷⁵ See for example Minton, *Northern Soul*.

⁷⁶ Marsh, 'Ouseburn artists'.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Hodgkinson says she is 'endlessly disappointed in the lack of foresight that our council shows with respect to urban planning and strategic development'.⁸⁰

On the other hand, though, as pointed out in the opening passages of this chapter, music events of all kinds continue to occur in and around the city, despite the decreasing space. North East artists are using the internet to reach audiences around the world as well as to maintain local networks. Some local scenes are turning to alternative spaces such the traditional social clubs, or 'working mens' clubs', to put on gigs and club nights. It is significantly more difficult to organise free parties, but people still manage to do so, perhaps not on a weekly basis, but at least several times a year. For every new venue that closes after a year, another one opens, maintaining precious space for local musicians and audiences. So, is Newcastle's musical glass half empty, or half full? The final sections of this thesis will consider the position of music scenes in post-Party City Newcastle in terms of both fragmentation and resilience, and the ongoing relevance of some of the ideas put forward in Mean and Tims's report.

Fragmentation and displacement

Before moving on to the scenes, it is worth briefly discussing the broader processes of fragmentation and displacement that have taken place in Newcastle as a result of regeneration. As stated earlier in the thesis, land use and ownership of property are two of the most effective ways to control flows of people in urban centres. Jacobs observed the negative impacts of the fragmentation of formerly vibrant and diverse communities in American cities during the 1950s,⁸¹ while the slum clearances that took place in the UK throughout the 1960s had similarly destructive effects on what had been close-knit neighbourhoods. There are also much more recent examples of this process. One of Newcastle City Council's own housing programmes of the early 2000s, 'Going for Growth', was ostensibly 'designed to reverse population loss'.⁸² Instead, the policy played a large part in the Labour council's defeat in the 2004 local elections, after thirty-one years in power. It attracted strong criticism and large protests due to plans to demolish thousands of homes in the city's West End, mainly in the Scotswood area.

⁸⁰ Marsh, 'Ouseburn artists'.

⁸¹ Jane Jacobs, 'The death and life of great American cities' (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1984).

⁸² Minton, *Ground Control*, 98.

Going for Growth's planned (re)construction of 'urban villages' was designed to attract wealthier middle-class residents and encourage them to remain in the city,⁸³ fragmenting long-established communities in the process; it is worth noting that the so-called 'inner core' that was to be redeveloped 'also happened to have stunning riverside views'.⁸⁴ The residents were never consulted about the plans to bulldoze their homes, only becoming aware of the project when a journalist with a local newspaper contacted a Scotswood resident to ask their thoughts.⁸⁵ The incoming Liberal Democrat council hastily abandoned the project, exploiting its unpopularity for political capital.⁸⁶ While the Scotswood communities were not entirely lost, severe damage was done as a result of the half-completed Going for Growth. Many residents left the area in anticipation of the loss of their houses, and for over a decade there were 'huge swathes of green areas where hundreds of homes once were'.⁸⁷ Construction has recommenced in the last few years with a small estate of 'starter homes', but the social damage was irreparable.

The rebranding of Newcastle throughout the period examined in this thesis can be seen to have had the same effect on local music scenes. As the Mayfair case study illustrated, the pathways available to some music scenes, in that case the rock scene, were variously diverted away from the city centre, cut off or eliminated completely. Once the indoor entertainment complex of The Gate had been completed, there was no longer any musical reason for anyone who was part of that scene to visit that part of the city. Indeed, for the first few years after The Gate opened, a group as aesthetically conspicuous as the rock scene would arguably have experienced open hostility from mainstream drinkers, who had effectively been gifted access to a whole new portion of the city centre. This process continues today, as the drive to construct as much 'PBSA' as possible in the shortest time has swallowed up space at an incredible rate. The result is continuing fragmentation and displacement for many local music scenes (though not all, a point which will be raised shortly).

An example of the ways that some venues in Newcastle have been lost in this way can be drawn from personal experience. Until 2011 there was a small pub called King's Manor on

⁸³ Minton, *Ground Control*, 98.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

the outskirts of the city. It was some fifteen minutes' walk from the very centre - not too far, but at the same time not so close that there was a risk of 'gatecrashing' by mainstream drinkers.⁸⁸ It had a small, low-ceilinged basement which was available free of charge, including a P.A. system, to anyone who wanted to put on a music event. Unsurprisingly, King's Manor became popular with various underground music scenes. The basement could hold approximately seventy people, which when full would make for a healthily packed event, but also put successful promotion within the reach of amateurs like myself. I booked the venue for a techno night and managed to fill it, and the manager was very happy that she had almost sold out of drink by the end of the evening. It had cost me nothing except the taxi fare to transport the small amount of equipment I needed, and provided an ideal space for the event. Following the success of that event, six months later I attempted to book the venue again, however I discovered that it had been taken over. I had noticed previous to this that a blackboard had appeared outside advertising 'FOOTBALL: NOW SHOWING HERE!', and that a large screen had been installed at one end of the ground floor bar, a change in direction for the pub.

After several weeks of visiting the venue and leaving my number, but receiving no call back, I finally obtained a number for the new manager from a friend. He sounded surprised that I had been able to reach him and was somewhat curt with me on the phone. Nevertheless, we arranged a day for me to go in and book the space, which he claimed was being refurbished. He showed me the 'refurbished' room, but it looked exactly as it had done when I last used it, including the P.A. system, which now mysteriously cost £40 to hire—it was the same P.A. that the previous manager had allowed me to use free of charge. Regardless, I agreed to run a door charge to cover this cost, booked the venue and duly proceeded to design and print posters for the event. I booked an artist from Manchester to play, informed friends in Manchester and Leeds about the night, and two weeks before the event, began to put posters in some of Newcastle's late night takeaways (the only places in the city where posters are permitted—this point will also be raised shortly). My last port of call was King's Manor itself, but when I walked in, the manager immediately called me over for a word. I was informed that there had been a mistake and that I could no longer use the venue on that night, as 'the other guy' had already booked a band, 'without telling him'. He showed

⁸⁸ Andy Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 90.

me the diary, which was empty for several weeks either side of the night in question, on which my name had been crossed out and replaced with that of the band.

This, and several other incidents during the weeks preceding the event led me to suspect that the new manager was not being entirely truthful with me. I had to cancel the event, as the shortage of venues in Newcastle meant that two weeks was insufficient time for me to find a suitable alternative. This of course involved explaining to the artist I had booked, and everyone that had arranged transport from Manchester and Leeds (and Newcastle), that the night was no longer happening. Several weeks after the night had passed, a friend told me that he had been in conversation at a house party with no less than 'the other guy'. It transpired that the manager did not want any more dance events in the venue, but rather than be explicit about this, which would have enabled people to find alternative spaces, he would simply double book them, or ignore calls altogether. He had tried to turn King's Manor, which had started to gain a reputation as a good venue for small-scale underground events, into yet another football pub, of which Newcastle famously has a large and well-established number. Sure enough, his efforts did not pay off, and within six months the venue had closed; it is now a letting agent for student accommodation. Perhaps the biggest irony is that when I first heard about the planned hall of residence opposite, I became excited as I thought it would mean that future events would stand a chance of attracting passing student trade, where previously there had been very little due to the venue's location. Instead, a wearily distinct lack of vision on the part of the new manager meant that another pathway was wiped from the map for Newcastle's small-scale promoters and music-makers. The incident demonstrates again that the agency of local music-makers is often constrained by forces beyond their control, in this case a venue owner whose tastes were at variance with those whom the venue had previously served.

The closing off of these musical pathways is not limited to venues. At the turn of the Millennium, there were numerous music-related shops in Newcastle, with certain record shops functioning as hubs for various scenes such as hip hop.⁸⁹ Most of these shops, especially the smaller and more specialist ones, such as a tiny DJ equipment and spares shop near the Bigg Market, have since closed, or been taken over by large national chains. Although there have been one or two recent additions to the city's music-related retail capacity, mainly record shops, it is still only a fraction of what it was recently as ten years ago,

⁸⁹ Bennett, *'Popular'*, 154.

when 'In Concert' was written. Aside from venues, shops, along with rehearsal facilities and recording studios, are important nodes among the connections and pathways that healthy urban music ecologies require; as Mean and Tims point out, 'a music city is as strong as its networks; the flows of music talent, resources, ideas and people around it. Venues, studios, websites, street corners and bedrooms and garages provide hubs and destinations for these flows'.⁹⁰ However, these networks can be fragile and are easily broken, as has been shown in this thesis. Projects designed to improve the urban environment (but improve it for whom?), such as the regeneration of Grainger Town, often lead to the destruction of those ecologies, for example through increasing city centre rents. Ironically, though, this is the 'measure of success' of such projects.

It is easy enough to see, then, for which groups the city has been reconfigured, in the same way that it can clearly be seen how music-making has been squeezed out. But the closure of venues and the cutting off of musical pathways does not only mean that existing scenes disintegrate. Without the possibility of accidental encounter or chance introduction, music-making will always struggle to survive. This is exemplified by another personal experience, that of the first techno night I put on in Newcastle. This was at a pub behind Central Station called The Telegraph, another small venue with a reputation for hosting good underground nights until new management raised bar prices and clamped down on volume. The night was advertised on several local forums, which resulted in a larger crowd than anticipated. At the end of the night I was approached by a group of first year students, who exclaimed that they had enjoyed one of the best nights since they arrived in the city. Perhaps more poignant, though, was that they had had no idea what techno sounded like, and had been expecting 'some kind of charver music'.⁹¹ I pointed out to them that the term 'techno' has been applied to so many variations of the music that this was not surprising, and that the particular type of techno I had been playing had not been fashionable in the UK since the late 1990s. They assured me that they would be at the next event and would keep their eyes open for any posters; the story of what happened with that night has been related in the preceding pages. Shank points out that encounters such as these are essential if music scenes are to be able to reproduce and grow,⁹² but it is important to realise that once this possibility is removed, the

⁹⁰ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 23.

⁹¹ 'Charver' is a local pejorative slang word for a particular element of working-class youth culture.

⁹² Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 120.

result is not simply that scenes do not grow. The effect seems to be inverse, and scenes begin to shrink. Events become less frequent as the combination of venue closures and new groups or promoters intensifies competition for space. Fewer events means fewer opportunities for artists to perform and for audiences to experience music. From a promoter's perspective it also means more competition for crowds as events are more likely to be on significant weekends (the one after payday, or bank holidays, for example). Crowds are therefore spread more thinly and it is more difficult to break even on an event, let alone make any money, discouraging further events. For crowds, choosing to go to one event is more likely to mean missing another, while the option of missing a regular event in the knowledge that there will be another one in a week, or a month, no longer exists. Other factors that contribute to this process are increased drink prices, childcare, and transport issues, all of which can have the effect of deterring people from going out. Above all, though, the relatively bleak economic climate in the North East means that many people simply cannot afford to go out frequently enough to sustain regular events. In keeping with the theme of this thesis, the connections between local music-making and the broader politico-economic environment cannot be ignored here; if the fortunes of the North East begin to improve, it will be no mystery that local music scenes also start to grow again.

Clearly, it is difficult to maintain a coherent scene when opportunities to gather are sparse. As an example, the underground dance scene in Newcastle has reached the point where several different nights have begun to collaborate to attract a crowd big enough to fill the only venue that will accommodate them, and these now happen only two or three times a year; this will be discussed shortly. Conversely, another night has recently been forced to stop running due to the lack of mid-sized venues in Newcastle. This event, a consistently popular drum and bass night that provided an effective vehicle for local DJs, had outgrown the smaller venues, but might not fill, and therefore could not afford to risk hiring, the larger ones.

It could also be argued that the fragmentation of genres that has occurred since the 1990s is another contributory factor to the intensified competition over space. Every subgenre, and sub-subgenre,⁹³ has its own dedicated following, and these are continually fragmenting further. This would surely mean that if there were enough venues (and enough people),

⁹³ Kembrew McLeod, 'Genres, Subgenres, Sub-subgenres and More: Music and Social Differentiation in Electronic/Dance Music Communities', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 13 (2001), 59-75.

there would be a corresponding increase in the amount of music-making in any given city. But as more venues close, and are not replaced, the result is exactly the opposite. Newcastle's local listings magazine, *The Crack*, may have pages of gigs to choose from, but those are just the people that were lucky (or well-organised) enough to get the venue on the night they wanted it. For every gig, there are many more that could not find a space and are forced to either wait until they are successful, or abandon the idea altogether; gigs are a logistical nightmare, especially for amateur musicians, requiring not only a venue to be available on a particular date, but also each member of each band, and every member of the audience. In Newcastle this problem is exacerbated by the combination of a small (and relatively poor) population and a tiny number of venues. This, in turn, has led to the adoption of a very risk-averse approach on the part of venue owners, who are often reluctant to allow some of the more obscure forms, or those perceived to attract a certain type of crowd, techno and hip hop being two examples.

But perhaps one of the biggest issues that has affected the ability of some music scenes to reproduce in Newcastle, aside from the loss of space, is the gradual erosion of the perceived necessity of contemporary social formations to be grounded in physical space, particularly among younger generations.⁹⁴ This of course refers to the rise of the internet, so-called 'smart' phones, and what Alexis Petridis describes as the 'straightforward, prosaic theory...that, as with virtually every area of popular culture, [the construction of youth culture has] been radically altered by the advent of the internet'.⁹⁵ Petridis, among others, contends that 'we now live in a world where teenagers are more interested in constructing an identity online than they are in making an outward show of their allegiances and interests.'⁹⁶ This argument that contemporary youth subcultures are largely formed and reproduced online has gained traction over the last few years, with increasing numbers of articles appearing in the press that discuss an apparent decline in music-related social activities such as clubbing or gig-going. This is an interesting phenomenon in terms of sociological research, particularly where the literature on youth culture that proliferated in the late 1990s and early 2000s is concerned. It would appear that the youth cultures

⁹⁴ See for example Sarah Marsh, 'I'd rather chill in and relax: Why Millennials don't go clubbing', *The Guardian*, 24/03/2016.

⁹⁵ Alexis Petridis, 'Youth subcultures: What are they now?', *The Guardian*, 24/03/2014.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

described by scholars such as Thornton, Bennett, Chatterton and Hollands are now perhaps more accurately described as 'early middle-age cultures'.

The sensibilities of 1990s and early 2000s club cultures seem to have remained with that generation, a point exemplified by the now relatively infrequent dance events in Newcastle. The average age of Newcastle's underground clubbers is now in the mid-30s, and one is probably more likely to overhear conversations about the cost of childcare as the next visit by a well-known artist, or a particularly good recent release.⁹⁷ Interestingly, views about the function of clubs and DJs also appear to have changed, and not just among the younger generation—one statement in Marsh's article is particularly revealing, where a 33-year old complains that 'DJs usually play what they want and not what people want to listen to'.⁹⁸ This is a curious shift, considering that club cultures at the time Thornton was writing were predicated around the idea that one would know what music to expect from a certain DJ, indeed one would visit a club *because* a particular DJ was playing; this is of course how the 'superstar DJ' rose to prominence. One has to wonder, then, why the complainant was in the club at all, if they didn't like the music.

An interesting point about contemporary youth culture is made by Ruth Adams, who links these apparently fleeting patterns of (online) cultural expression to 'the speed at which "the cycle of production and consumption" now moves'.⁹⁹ Observing the financial investment required to position oneself within a given subculture in pre-'smart' phone years, she states 'you had to make more commitment to music and fashion...Now, it's all a bit more blurry, the semiotic signs are not quite as hard-edged as they used to be'.¹⁰⁰ One of the most obvious contributing factors to the financial side of contemporary youth cultures must be the cost of mobile phone contracts. Many young people prioritise having the latest model, with contracts that can cost up to fifty pounds a month for those with sufficiently generous internet allowance, a cost that would not have figured in the lives of most young people in the 1990s. It is worth considering this alongside the fact that under neoliberalism, it is the younger generations that have borne the brunt of the economic punishment meted out by governments in the name of 'austerity'—a fragile and precarious labour market, leading to destabilising financial insecurity and severe socio-economic consequences, perhaps the most

⁹⁷ These are some of the markers of subcultural capital identified by Thornton.

⁹⁸ Marsh, 'I'd rather chill'.

⁹⁹ Petridis, 'Youth subcultures'.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

obvious being the inability of all but the wealthiest or most fortunate to get onto the 'housing ladder'.

Chatterton and Hollands identified the early stages of this process of the impoverishment of youth in their book *Changing our 'Toon'*, where they point out that "'growing up" in many Western cities has been significantly extended due to dissatisfaction or exclusion from the labour market'.¹⁰¹ They describe a state of "'extended" or "post" adolescence, in which an array of youthful lifestyles and identities are visible much longer'.¹⁰² This relates to Shank's idea that 'adolescence', far from being 'a biological stage of individual development',¹⁰³ is in fact a state of mind resulting from 'an awareness of extended cultural possibilities combined with insufficient power to act on these possibilities'.¹⁰⁴ At this stage in the development of neoliberalism, 'insufficient power' could hardly be less true of the situation in which contemporary youth find themselves.

It would seem difficult to argue that this move away from social interaction in the material world, combined with diminishing space for music-making, a small local population and a compact city centre in which facilities are increasingly geared towards the tastes of tourists and the growing (and largely transient) student population, has not had a negative impact on the ability of music scenes in Newcastle to form and reproduce. The atomisation of society under neoliberalism seems to possess an almost unstoppable momentum, as Webster points out. Referring to the tone of a recent article in *The Times* that appeared to celebrate the decline in the popularity of clubbing, she states that '[t]he glee at the demise of a social institution such as the nightclub and the push towards online marketing tools—sorry, dating and music apps—are just further examples of neoliberal individualisation'.¹⁰⁵ Webster sees these developments as 'perfect illustrations of what could be described as "the efforts of the financial elite and their marketing machines to atomize people so they will be complicit in the destruction of the commons"'.¹⁰⁶ This does not apply only to music scenes, of course— one only has to walk around Newcastle city centre on a Friday night to see that participation in nightlife of all types is at a much lower level than ten years ago. Perhaps a good indication

¹⁰¹ Chatterton & Hollands, *Changing*, 3.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Shank, *Dissonant*, 133.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 134.

¹⁰⁵ Emma Webster, 'Bye bye nightclubs in the Big Stay-At-Home Society?', *Live Music Exchange Blog*, 14/04/2016, (<http://livemusicexchange.org/blog/bye-bye-nightclubs-in-the-big-stay-at-home-society-emma-webster/>).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

of this is the conversation of local taxi drivers and doormen, who will often now bemoan the scarcity of business, whereas several years ago they would talk about how busy they were. The gentrification of nightlife may have priced out perceived 'troublemakers', but it has also priced out a large proportion of people who would otherwise be spending money in the city's venues, mainstream or otherwise.

Resilience and adaptation

While much space for music scenes has been lost in Newcastle, however, this is not to say that the people who would comprise those scenes have gone anywhere. Indeed, there is a huge number of music-makers and music lovers in the city and its surrounding area; it is this observation that provided the initial spark for the research behind this thesis. The Geordie instinct for survival is strong, as is the antagonism towards outside control and influence. This may have its negative aspects, for example the somewhat insular and conservative attitudes of local elites referred to in previous chapters. However, while the stereotypical heavy drinking football fan may have occluded to some extent the diversity of cultural alignments that fall under the Geordie banner, those to whom music is central will not let their passions be easily quenched.

Perhaps the single most important development since 1995 as far as local scenes in Newcastle are concerned must be the explosion in online resources, particularly social media but also the numerous platforms specifically for music-related activities. As discussed in the preceding pages, web-based networking has played an important role in changing the ways that contemporary youth cultures are constructed, and to an extent undermining the cohesion of those constructed by previous generations. But the internet has not, of course, been a solely negative force in the reproduction of urban music scenes. For those scenes fragmented and displaced in Newcastle by the loss of physical space, the internet has provided a virtual space for them to regroup and reorganise, namely through social media. It has also, importantly, offered a relatively easily accessible outlet for creative endeavours, meaning local musicians can reach global audiences and build networks without the need to perform regular unpaid gigs—the time, effort and financial cost often incurred by that process can do more harm than good, often having severe negative impacts on aspects such as creativity and performance. Indeed, it is now possible for musicians to build their networks and reputations online before they have performed a single gig, a route which increasing numbers are taking.

One example comes from the techno scene, that of Newcastle record label Hypnohouse Records, established by a local artist in 2012. Despite the lack of space and, perhaps more importantly, tolerance for such events in Newcastle, Hypnohouse now has numerous international artists on its roster. The label is regularly among the top ten of its genre on several download sites, such as *Juno Download*, for tracks downloaded by DJs around the world. Due to the label's online popularity, its founder, DJ and producer John Rowe, has been increasingly booked by clubs and festivals around the UK, as well as being able to provide other artists with similar opportunities. Even a decade ago this process would have been far more long-winded and more heavily reliant on personal connections; the DJ world is notoriously territorial, largely because the vast majority of DJs are solo artists, and those from provincial cities have always had to either work harder to achieve success or, more commonly, leave their hometowns. Rowe has been producing music for over a decade, but only with the creation of his own label has he been able to sufficiently raise his profile outside of Newcastle. This, then, can be seen as one way in which the internet has been a positive force for local artists, despite the continuing shortage of space for music events in Newcastle.

Social media have also provided an ideal platform for the organisation of underground parties, although these are now much less frequent. As Cait Read points out, 'there might be an occasional beach party but, I'm certainly not really aware of any illegal warehouse parties in the centre any more'.¹⁰⁷ Where the original 'raves' would rely on a telephone number being passed around, which could take weeks to reach the required number of people, social media, especially *Facebook*, are perfect for organising such events, which are usually last-minute assemblages of people and equipment. Many of the spaces, though, in which such underground events used to occur have been developed into the type of 'safe' nightlife space that has arguably come to characterise the bulk of Newcastle's entertainment options. Read observes that 'things like Boiler Shop and Hoult's Yard...places that had had raves are now actually, 10 years on, being used as kind of commercial venues'.¹⁰⁸ Newcastle does still have a small number of spaces that are suitable for free parties, however, such as wartime tunnels and little-used underpasses on the edges of the city. Many of these events are closed down by the police after a few hours but the small scale means that encounters are

¹⁰⁷ Cait Read, personal interview, 27/05/2015.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

usually peaceful. Any that have resulted in friction, or are deemed to be damaging the possibility of future events (such as littering, which marred the collective memory of a recent party) have incurred the wrath of the rest of Newcastle's party scene, with admonitions quick to appear on social media the following day; news travels fast in such a small city, and the older members are well aware that the scene has a bad enough reputation as it is.

Another way that the dance scene in particular has managed to overcome the lack of both space and audience is to collaborate in promoting events. One relatively large club in the city agreed several months ago to allow dance events, but it quickly transpired that one style or scene on its own could not fill the venue. It was decided that the logical solution was for the promoters to pool their resources. As the venue consists of three large rooms, there is plenty of space for what is in effect three events in one. This has the added advantage that people can drift between rooms (much like the events at The Cooperage) and experience music in which they may not otherwise have expressed an interest. It seems that one larger event is currently a more effective strategy in Newcastle than several smaller ones, but the trade-off is that ticket prices are higher to cover the extra costs. Whether this approach continues or fades from popularity remains to be seen; the location of the club on Grey Street, mentioned earlier as Newcastle's most upmarket street, is one factor that could prevent it from developing into a regular fixture.

Moving on from the dance scene, one of the most interesting recent developments is a turn towards the use of traditional social clubs, or 'working mens' clubs', for music events. These spaces have an important part in local cultural history and were a major circuit for local bands and musicians until heavy industry left the North East. However, they have for some time been in danger of dying out, due to their ageing clientele and perceived inability to 'move with the times'. As music venues have diminished in number and competition for them has intensified, particularly at weekends, local musicians have begun to realise that social clubs, of which there are still a number in and around the city, represent a hitherto unnoticed set of musical pathways and spaces, and present a viable option for the reproduction of their scenes. The Newcastle noise scene, currently one of the most prominent in the country, is a good example, now promoting regular gigs in social clubs both in the city centre and in nearby suburbs such as Heaton, some three miles to the east and a popular area with students. The clubs, while such events may not be something they had

previously considered hosting, are only too happy to allow the use of their function rooms, as many are struggling financially and in danger of closing.

Another example is that of a long-standing local promoter of dance events, who having started a podcast¹⁰⁹ in the last year which very quickly gained a large and diverse audience, has begun to hire social clubs as venues for ‘podcast socials’, where listeners ‘who are into things other than the rave’¹¹⁰ can meet and enjoy much cheaper drinks than those on offer in the city’s pubs and bars. The description of the first of these events states that ‘[o]ur focus is to provide a good quality night out without it costing the earth and is a response to us going out in the City Centre, having a good time, but waking up the next day and feeling like we must have been robbed’.¹¹¹ It is also explicit about the group’s view that ‘drinks prices are getting well out of hand in our opinion’, and considers that ‘it’s time to do something about that and sort out an alternative’.¹¹² Continuing the long-standing tradition of ‘D.I.Y.’ culture in the city, of which Riverside was a catalyst in the early 1980s, and which during the mid-2000s experienced an ultimately short-lived resurgence (‘people aren’t waiting around—they are just doing it themselves’),¹¹³ the group states that it wishes to ‘make a contribution to regenerating social clubs in the North East, they are a part of our culture, [and] many people don’t know they exist’.¹¹⁴ As Mean and Tims observed in 2005, ‘one of the city region’s core assets is the enthusiasm and passion for music at a grass-roots level’,¹¹⁵ but they also found that, for many, “‘doing music” provided a strong sense of civic contribution. People saw themselves as making the city better for people’.¹¹⁶

These mutually beneficial arrangements between one of Newcastle’s oldest remaining types of social space, the social club, and one of the most recent forms of social formation, the music scene, could signal the beginning of the regeneration of some of Newcastle’s musical networks. It will be interesting to see how this relationship develops, as not all clubs are as open to hosting events that ‘the regulars’ might not like. Likewise, not all music audiences

¹⁰⁹ These multi-genre dance events are called Milk the Cow and have been running in Newcastle for over a decade; the podcast run by the night’s promoters goes by the same name and gained over 10,000 listeners from all over the world within its first year.

¹¹⁰ Event description, ‘Soulcoo: A night of Northern Soul, laughter and good people’, *Facebook*, 2016 (<https://www.facebook.com/events/1573947139584473/>).

¹¹¹ Event description, ‘Soulcoo’.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Mean & Tims, ‘In Concert’, 5.

¹¹⁴ Event description: ‘Soulcoo’.

¹¹⁵ Mean & Tims, ‘In Concert’, 24.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

are entirely comfortable with the idea of attending a social club for gigs or club nights. There are certain stereotypes and stigmas attached to both parties, for example a perception on the part of some older club regulars that groups of younger drinkers are prone to rowdy or disrespectful behaviour, and perhaps more importantly that this will be induced by the music that they listen to. Conversely, younger people often see social clubs as the haunts of geriatric alcoholics, possessing very little in the way of 'coolness', from the décor and lighting to the drinks that they sell. In fact, as with stereotypes in general, these preconceptions are often untrue, and as space for non-mainstream music-making continues to diminish—a scenario that appears to be more rather than less likely given the current pace and trajectory of development—perhaps these recently cleared musical pathways will again become well-trodden.

Assessments of the situation faced by Newcastle's music scenes have so far been concerned with those that have experienced the worst of the negative effects of spatial configuration. There are other music interests in the city, though, that arguably did not fare so badly, yet are still finding it difficult to grow their respective scenes. Newcastle is renowned across the country for its folk music scene. The strength of folk music tradition in the city has led to the development of the only undergraduate folk music degree in the UK, a collaborative venture between Folkworks, at Sage Gateshead, and Newcastle University. The Folkworks project, established in 1985 and now housed at the Sage, is itself also a nationally significant institution for education and performance in the folk world. The local folk scene continues to thrive, with a new intake of student musicians arriving in the city each year, and a number of prominent professional musicians based in the region performing and teaching around the city and the wider UK. A long-running weekly folk session, mentioned in the chapter about The Cooperage, sadly came to an end recently, but like the opening and closing of venues, others have started up and will hopefully be able to establish themselves.

The local jazz scene also continues to provide regular gigs at venues around the city, and produce top-flight players. The Pink Lane Jazz Co-op, set up in 2012 in memory of Keith Crombie, the late proprietor of the famous Jazz Café on Pink Lane, recently took over the ownership and operation of The Globe pub. One of the most positive developments in Newcastle's musical networks in recent years, it represents the first example in the country of a co-operative owning a music venue and education centre.¹¹⁷ The Sage also features

¹¹⁷ Jazz.coop, 2016 (jazz.coop).

numerous jazz gigs, educational courses and hosts the annual Gateshead International Jazz Festival, while Jazz North East organises an annual festival involving a number of city centre venues that hosts performances by world class local, national and international artists. Regular jam sessions also happen in both the Jazz Café and the Globe.

Neither the jazz or folk worlds has experienced the same loss of space as the rock or dance scenes, neither have they grown or shrunk to any great degree in the last two decades, maintaining a more consistent, if small-scale, presence in the city. The important difference between these scenes and those that are now experiencing difficulties is the fact that jazz and folk are far easier to accommodate in terms of noise and, therefore, space. Options for jazz and folk venues significantly outnumber those available to the rock or dance scenes, as neither the music nor, importantly, the audience are perceived to be as likely to cause disturbance. Both jazz and folk are popular, for example, with the older clientele that appear to have become the city's priority market over the last few years, as well as occupying a 'higher' tier of culture (in the eyes of some) than rock bands or dance DJs. Also, some of the more negative associations attached to other scenes, especially drug use, are less applicable. Thus, many pubs and some hotels in the city host regular folk and jazz sessions, but would not consider allowing their space to be used for a rock gig or dance event.

Added to this greater ease of accommodation is the relatively small size of the folk and jazz scenes, which can be put into perspective by examining the listings advertised on the website of local magazine *The Crack*. Mean and Tims, whose research in Newcastle was conducted during a 'national upsurge in enthusiasm for live music',¹¹⁸ state that, 'at the time of writing, of 541 concerts currently listed on *The Crack* magazine's website, 2% are pop events; 7% world, folk and roots music; 69% rock and roll; 3% classical; 11% blues and 7% latin and jazz.'¹¹⁹ A similar search (albeit for a shorter period), conducted on the same website for the week beginning 24th April 2016, lists 83 concerts and gigs. Of these, 5% are blues; 5% classical; 2% dance; 61% indie (formerly classed as rock and roll); 13% latin and jazz; 7% pop; and 6% world, folk and roots.¹²⁰ The second set of results clearly shows that little has changed in terms of the types of music event happening in the Newcastle and Gateshead area, the number of 'indie' events (this category also includes reggae, ska, punk

¹¹⁸ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.; citation from *The Crack Magazine*, 23/04/2005.

¹²⁰ 'What's On: Music', *The Crack Magazine*, 27/04/2016 (http://www.thecrackmagazine.com/music/whats_on); searched by music type.

and tribute / covers bands, among others) vastly outweighing the others. There are several factors that contribute to this situation, the most significant being the fact that more young people tend to form bands playing rock, indie or punk.

Although *The Crack* does not list every music event, it is not difficult to see that when coupled with the wider range of venues prepared to accommodate what are usually smaller-scale, quieter events, competition for space is likely to be far less of an issue for jazz or folk as it is for rock or dance. Yet, despite the encouraging number of young players coming through, audiences for both genres remain small and consist largely of older members.¹²¹ This is clearly linked, as are the issues faced by all of Newcastle's other music scenes, to the broader politico-environment. As stated earlier, young people have been economically marginalised by neoliberalism, with job security and wages both in a far more fragile state than they were only ten years ago. Just as the activities of thriving music scenes can feed and enrich into the broader economic life of a city, the process also works in reverse. An unhealthy economy will stifle cultural activity, as people stop spending money, a process that the financial crisis of 2008 restarted after the relatively prosperous years of the early 2000s.

Perhaps the most important information conveyed by the figures in *The Crack*, though, is not the comparative ease with which jazz or folk can maintain local scenes, or the relative sizes of different scenes. Looking beyond the breakdown of music types, the listings show more than anything else that people continue to commit the necessary time, money and effort to create, rehearse, perform and promote music in the area.¹²² Also, those events that appear in the magazine represent only a small proportion of the total number happening on any given night. From this perspective, the resilience of local musicians and enthusiasts in and around Newcastle, must be acknowledged. It would be easy for all but the most well-established to simply give up in such adverse conditions—indeed, I personally know of a number that have done over the past few years.

Given the scale of the North East's socio-economic problems, not least the level of unemployment, one might imagine that this commitment to music would be seen by local councils as a constructive and worthwhile way for young people to extricate themselves

¹²¹ Paul Bream (Jazz North East), panel discussion: 'Live music in the North East', *Live Music Exchange Newcastle: Valuing Live Music*, 02/06/2016.

¹²² The figures quoted are for the Newcastle and Gateshead area only, whereas the magazine's listings cover the whole of the North East.

from the cycle of poverty that continues to affect so many. As the Riverside case study showed, this is a very real possibility. Many members of staff at that venue used the skills and experience they had acquired during their time there to forge successful careers in various aspects of music. Likewise, the Makina scene's use of local community centres across the North East and the community outreach program operated by Sage Gateshead has also proved that there are many local youths who, given the opportunity and the facilities, will commit significant time and effort to music;¹²³ it is unfortunate in the case of the Sage programme that once they reach the upper age limit of 19, there is no way for them to develop their skills without the money to do so, and most cannot afford to continue.

Along with the figures cited above, one has only to walk past rehearsal facilities in any part of Newcastle or Gateshead, for example the Off Quay Building in Ouseburn, First Avenue Studios in Heaton, or Sound Inc. Studios in Blaydon, to realise the continuing popularity of forming, and performing with, bands. Street cites the Association of District Councils' assertion that, '[a]lthough rock music is frequently regarded as commercial entertainment rather than as an art form which requires subsidy, the creative energy expended by young people in this field is deserving of support and encouragement'.¹²⁴ Despite the resilience shown by music-makers and enthusiasts in and around Newcastle, though, the actions of the council (whatever the motivations behind them), can only be seen to suggest that they disagree with, or disregard, such a viewpoint. It could be argued that council resources have diminished so much since 2010 that the option of supporting music no longer exists, yet spatial change in the city, which can only be deliberate, has effectively curtailed musical activity since at least the 1980s.

Suggestions and final thoughts

Having discussed some of the impacts of the Party City years on local music-making, some of the major challenges for the music ecology of Newcastle will now be considered, as well as suggestions for courses of action that might facilitate constructive ways of (re)incorporating music-making into Newcastle's cultural milieu. As well as suggestions for policies that could reinvigorate the city's music ecology, the reasons why such policies might be desirable will be reiterated. It is worth referring again to Mean and Tims's 2005 report as a marker of

¹²³ See for example Mark Rimmer, 'Listening to the monkey: Class, youth and the formation of a musical habitus', *Ethnography*, 11/2 (2010), 255-283; also Paul Gibbins 'I grew up with Makina – the Geordie youth culture phenomenon that's been slept on for a decade', *Vice*, 01/06/2015.

¹²⁴ John Street, 'Local differences? Popular music and the local state', *Popular Music*, 12/1 (1993), 43-55, 50.

progress (or the lack thereof), and the ongoing relevance of some of their assessments of music-making in Newcastle. There are several points made within that publication that remain relevant a decade later, and several suggestions that the council, among others, would do well to observe if the city is to maintain a healthy music ecology.

It should firstly be made clear that there will not be any suggestion of direct financial support made here, which would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the council to justify,¹²⁵ especially in the current climate of neoliberal austerity. Also, as Mean and Tims point out, direct funding is not what music-makers in the city would necessarily want. Their observation that, for musicians, venue owners and small entrepreneurs, ‘simply being “allowed” to be creative is often more important than...explicitly needing funding’¹²⁶ is perhaps even more pertinent in Newcastle now than it was ten years ago, with arguably the most urgent matter being that of retaining some space for music. This relates to both access to physical accommodation and also what Mean and Tims describe as ‘(creative) industrial waste’.¹²⁷ They make the important point that ‘just as factories created soot, grime and carbon monoxide, music needs space for flyers, posters and noise’.¹²⁸ A decade on from their report, this issue has become even more acute.

Despite the impacts of the Party City years on local spatial and cultural dynamics, Newcastle has yet to designate an area or zone for entertainment, a move that many other cities have adopted in recognition of the problems created by the construction of residential developments near music venues.¹²⁹ This point was raised by Callum Costello, former barman at The Cooperage, who pointed out that ‘when the Quayside was big, that should have been [designated] an entertainment district, either you live there and you put up with the noise, or you don’t live there’.¹³⁰ Numerous other commentators and members of the public have echoed this opinion, but if anything the residential developments have increased. Official designation of an entertainment district, with explicit planning for noise and adequate soundproofing, would go a long way towards enabling local music-making and

¹²⁵ The Star and Shadow Cinema was recently granted some £15,000 by the City Council, a welcome move but one that nonetheless attracted criticism from some members of the public, despite the relatively small amount.

¹²⁶ Mean & Tims, ‘In Concert’, 21.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Brisbane is one high-profile example; see Mean & Tims.

¹³⁰ Callum Costello, personal interview.

related areas to develop, but this of course will only be possible if some land and buildings are retained.

As the city has become one of the most attractive in the UK for investors in student accommodation, opportunities to put both land and buildings to creative use are disappearing at an alarming rate. The university's centrally located campus means that sites within walking distance are the most desirable for developers, which has resulted in what can only be described as a glut of building work taking place in and around the city centre. There are now few locations in the city that do not have residential developments of one sort or another nearby. As many cities around the world have discovered to their detriment, the spread of residential use throughout city space can quickly result in the displacement of local cultural activity and the economic contributions that come from such activity.¹³¹ Increased rental values, the measure of success for neoliberalised urban regeneration, are as good as eviction orders for musicians, artists and other creative entrepreneurs, who are by definition small, independent operations.

Retaining space, though, is only half the battle, if a slightly larger half. The other aspects of creative industrial waste referred to by Mean and Tims, flyering and posterling, are essential to the continued survival of music ecologies. With the arrival of BIDs in the UK under the Blair government came the 'clean and safe' policy.¹³² As Minton explains, the BID's 'hierarchy of needs' pyramid is 'geared towards creating the optimum trading environment'.¹³³ She goes on, 'the first layer on which the whole structure depends is the creation of a clean and safe environment'.¹³⁴ Flyposting legislation refers frequently to the 'defacement' of buildings or other surfaces, and is prosecutable under several Acts of Parliament. A government-issued publication on the control of flyposting states that it 'can be unsightly and is often seen as symptomatic of [urban] decay'.¹³⁵ I would argue that the layers of posters that have built up over time are to be seen not simply as (illegal) advertisements for gigs, but also as signs of life and archives of cultural history.¹³⁶ To the

¹³¹ K.Shaw, 'Independent subcultures'.

¹³² Minton, *Ground Control*, 40.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'The control of flyposting: A good practice guide', www.communities.gov.uk, November 2000 (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7788/156909.pdf).

¹³⁶ On my first visit to Newcastle city centre in 2003, I saw on the wall of one building a poster for a gig by the band Dave, Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich, which had been there since the 1960s, surrounded by others

owners of private property and urban administrators, though, they are nothing more than wall-mounted litter. Newcastle City Council, perhaps unsurprisingly, are particularly intolerant of flyposters and flyering, as Mean and Tims observed,¹³⁷ and are quick to prosecute any who contravene the regulations. All remains of flyposters have been removed from around the city centre, a solitary spot underneath the Redheugh Bridge joining Newcastle with Gateshead being the last reminder that such activities once went on in the city; it, too, will probably be gone before long.¹³⁸

The only places in Newcastle where posters are now permitted are some late-night takeaways, most of which one must enter to see the posters properly. This is obviously not good for the purposes of publicising music events. To make matters worse, several of these takeaways have closed in the last few years and have yet to be replaced. Due to Newcastle's new upmarket image and the downturn in late-night demand for such comestibles, it is unlikely that these will be replaced by similar premises, and it is doubtful that the more upmarket restaurants now appearing in the city will permit gig posters. Also, some popular venues have recently stopped allowing posters to put up in their premises. One of these is the Head of Steam pub, which used to allow posters on the walls of its staircase. Recently been taken over, it has undergone a refurbishment and now displays framed photographs instead; the announcement of music events is now confined to a small chalkboard in the entrance which displays only the current evening's entertainment. This problem with publicity was identified by Mean and Tims as a serious issue in Newcastle eleven years ago. Pointing out that by 2005, Newcastle had gained a reputation for 'ground-breaking public art',¹³⁹ they suggested 'reframing poster drums as public art' as a way to publicise music events while containing the perceived mess created by flyposters.¹⁴⁰

spanning the subsequent decades; the building was demolished several years later and its site has been derelict ever since.

¹³⁷ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 16.

¹³⁸ The poster remnants at this spot were removed shortly after the first submission of this thesis in September 2016.

¹³⁹ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 22.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*



Fig. 11: Remains of old music posters beneath Redheugh Bridge, Newcastle, June 2016.¹⁴¹

There are numerous pieces of public art in and around Newcastle city centre, some of which are quite large, and all of which are situated in the middle of pedestrian footways, which would seem to undermine any argument that poster drums are obstructive.¹⁴² Allowing poster drums to be placed around the city would contribute enormously to the ability of local music-makers to publicise their events, as well as demonstrating that the city does indeed have a vibrant cultural scene. Mean and Tims even went as far as to suggest that ‘a competition could be run for local artists, creative enterprises, schools and universities to design advertising drums for the city centres that enhance the public environment rather than detract from it’,¹⁴³ and that ‘an annual competition could be held for the best concert-poster with competition winners being exhibited on hoardings in the city centre’.¹⁴⁴ This could also, they proposed, ‘encourage relationships between graphic designers and the

¹⁴¹ My own photograph.

¹⁴² Mean & Tims, ‘In Concert’, 22.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

visual arts community and the music fraternity.¹⁴⁵ These seem to be constructive ideas well worth considering, particularly the idea of strengthening the city's creative networks.

As stated earlier, the internet has provided many musicians in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East with a space to connect with audiences and other musicians, and to publicise, distribute and sell the music they create. Nevertheless, it remains the case that music is a social activity that requires networks of people and spaces to organise, perform and experience it, and which in doing so contributes to the enhancement of civic life. As Mean and Tims state, 'music offers a simple yet beguiling way for people to participate in and feel connected to the public life of their city'.¹⁴⁶ Yet their assessment of Newcastle's music ecology, even though it appeared to be in ascendancy at the time, was that it was characterised by weak and limited connections, a lack of communication and 'competition rather than collaboration',¹⁴⁷ particularly regarding the relationships between venues. The Party City image, which to an extent continues to endure whether the council like it or not, also contributed heavily to the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of venues other than the mainstream establishments that came to dominate the city centre during that period.¹⁴⁸ This weakness of connectivity contradicts Brabazon's assertion that 'when cities are compact, they are connected'.¹⁴⁹ Newcastle is a good example of compact cities also being easy to monopolise by cliques if the necessary decisions to prevent such a scenario are not taken.

In short, all the problems identified in Mean and Tims's report have worsened, and new ones have developed, mainly due to loss of space and lack of investment—or more precisely, active disinvestment—in music. While local musicians continue to work hard to maintain the city's music ecology, the tide appears to be against them. Each new development results in more loss of space, whether directly as buildings and sites are put to other uses, or indirectly as those uses impact on music-making through, for example, problems with noise. While some aspects of music-making are admittedly faring relatively well, it would be misleading to suggest that the city has a healthy music ecology. As Behr *et al* point out,

Practising musicians make their way from the smallest rooms to the largest open spaces, and this variety of venues is crucial not only to their own career development but to the cultural

¹⁴⁵ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert', 22.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Tara Brabazon, 'Introduction: Sliced Cities', in T. Brabazon (Ed.), *City Imaging: Regeneration, renewal and decay* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014; eBook), 1-12, 2.

lives of audiences across the country. The relationships between these spaces, and their civic and social milieu, go beyond the financial. Interdependence and mutual support exist in ways that are often hidden, as are the obstacles and aids to live music provision.¹⁵⁰

It seems that in Newcastle, both the public and private sectors have now all but abandoned music-making as an aspect of civic and cultural life worthy of support. Again, it could be argued that the resources do not exist to support it, but some aspects of music do seem to be on the increase: aspects that arguably reflect the way that those in control of the city's space now desire it to be seen. The city seems to be developing a musical environment that is inoffensive and more mature, less noisy, less disruptive; predictable, safe and controlled, music clearly still has a role in 'shaping the discourse of place' in Newcastle.¹⁵¹ As Krims observes, 'the very notion of culture-based regeneration assumes, in the first place, either a sufficient local capital accumulation to support continuous, expensive leisure pursuits, or the ability to attract moneyed consumers on a large scale from far-flung locations'.¹⁵² If this is the case, then in Newcastle it was always doomed to fail, as the city certainly did not have the former, and propagating the Party City image for over a decade arguably destroyed its own chances of succeeding at the latter. That image may be slowly dissipating, but the narrative of culture is distinctly absent from the current 'Newcastle brand'.

Having lived in the area for thirteen years, a lack of venues is the single most frequent complaint I have heard from fellow musicians, from dance DJs to folk singers, reggae bassists to hip hop MCs. As this thesis has shown, arguably the biggest problems faced by music-makers in Newcastle are related to space and policy, rather than being financial. These issues have existed more or less since the beginning of the post-industrial period, and have steadily worsened as the city has been reshaped and reimagined. Hollands noted in 1995 that the erosion of diversity in local nightlife seemed to be gathering momentum,¹⁵³ as the Party City was taking form. This process was traced by the same research team into the early 2000s, by which time it had coalesced into a globally recognised city brand, and the appropriation of urban space by corporate chains was in full effect. In 2005, as interest in live music experienced a brief surge, Mean and Tims identified that the future of Newcastle's

¹⁵⁰ Adam Behr, Matt Brennan & Martin Cloonan, 'The cultural value of live music from pub to stadium: Getting beyond the numbers', Arts and Humanities Research Council in conjunction with University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, 2013, 1.

¹⁵¹ Adam Krims, *Music & urban geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 29.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Robert Hollands, *Friday Night, Saturday Night: Youth cultural identification in the post-industrial city* (Newcastle: CURDS, 1995).

music ecology was hanging in the balance, and suggested a number of ways to address the challenges that it faced.

However, it seems that it was either not possible or not desirable (or both) to 'grow NewcastleGateshead as a music city'.¹⁵⁴ In 2012, the cultural strategy published a decade earlier entered its final year and, far from having created a diverse and vibrant city with space for all forms of culture, the City Council were instead preparing to withdraw the entire arts and culture budget as a result of devastating cuts by central government. Now, in 2016, any remaining space in Newcastle's urban environment is being swallowed up by accommodation for a transient student population, driven by the financial sector at the expense of local culture and the everyday needs of local people. While music events appear to be on the increase in the city again, as stated in the opening pages of this chapter, the bulk of musical experiences available in Newcastle are now noticeably predictable, safe, and controlled. They also represent only a tiny proportion of local music-making in terms of the number of musicians and audiences that remain unseen and unheard. Every year, a host of new bands forms, and new attempts are made to revive ailing scenes, but the spatial effects of the Party City years make for an arduous task in terms of access to space and people. Mean and Tims state that the public climate for music can be gauged by 'the ease with which people are able to perform music, run venues, promote bands, start a night at a club, find a rehearsal place or speak to people in public institutions'.¹⁵⁵ The public climate in Newcastle, then, is not currently conducive to broadening the musical life of the city, but geared more towards creating more of the same. To support music does not necessarily mean the ploughing of money into the sector, but can be implicit in, for example, planning decisions that affect access to space. Space, tolerance and diversity in music arguably remain the most important issues, rather than the continuing, and seemingly relentless, focus on profitability, predictability and image.

If Newcastle is ever to become a truly vibrant urban centre that attracts and retains people and enables them to engage with, and contribute to, the life of the city, then some serious evaluations of urban development strategy need to be made. As this thesis has shown, the profound urban reconfiguration executed in pursuit of the Party City image and driven by neoliberal values, had an equally profound effect on musical activity and possibilities in

¹⁵⁴ Mean & Tims, 'In Concert'

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 22

Newcastle. Pathways once trodden by a range of music-related groups, and some of the major spaces connected by them, were wiped from the map, never to be replaced. However resilient local music scenes may be, if spaces do not exist there is little that can be done to recover from such serious blows. As city space continues to dwindle, becoming ever more precious in the process, so do opportunities for making and experiencing music, and the contributions to civic life that those opportunities represent. Given the space, and perhaps also a favourable change in economic circumstances, Newcastle's music-makers and music lovers could, I would argue, achieve more in terms of creating a vibrant, diverse and flourishing urban culture than any 'top-down' regeneration strategy or branding campaign. Recent developments in local music scenes show that there is (as there has always been) an appetite for a greater range of musical options, but questions of course remain. Can space be found, or made, for the multitude of musical voices that make up Newcastle? Can local decision-makers find the will to break the 'cognitive lock-in' that has stifled so many aspects of local culture? If so, whose idea of culture is to inform future developments? Whose party is it anyway?

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