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The Cultural Field of Queer Nightlife: Organizations, Artists, and Curatorial Activism

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ABSTRACT

Queer nightlife is recognized by humanists as an artistic project, while social scientists use it more often as a case to examine deviance and regulatory control, macro-structural inequities, substance use, and sexual violence. In this article, I invite researchers to prioritize culture and creativity in theoretical frameworks of nightlife. Based on 112 interviews about underground parties in London that have arisen as gay bars close, I argue that, more than just an art *form*, queer nightlife is a cultural *field*. The conceptual shift from form to field accents the organizational plurality of nightlife, relational artmaking practices, and the aesthetics of activism. While these themes have been described by others—and they are by no means exhaustive—I use them to explain broad associations between art and event-based nightlife scenes in the context of community-level disruptions.

KEYWORDS

Art; culture; creativity; disruptions; DIY places

Introduction

“It was the best party in L.A. hands down.”

Irrepressible exuberance is unmistakable in how revelers reminisce about Mustache Mondays, a roving queer gathering that moved from venue to venue in downtown Los Angeles. In its 11-year run from 2007 to 2018, the “iconoclastic party” presented an alternative to gay bars in West Hollywood, perceived by many working-class queer people of color as catering to “the hegemonic gay subject” (Ramírez 2011:176) of wealthy, white, gay men. Described as a “DIY worldmaking project” by *Artbound*, an Emmy award-winning public television program about arts and culture (Amelinckx 2021), Mustache Mondays represented a space of collective care created by queer artists. “We wanted to expand nightlife vernacular,” said party co-founder and DJ Josh Peace. Featuring indie, hip-hop, electro, dancehall, soul, house, and cumbia remixes, here was an alternative scene outside the gayborhood and its exclusions (Ghaziani 2014b; Hanhardt 2013; Rosenberg 2021). The creative vibe of the party made it “an incubator space for contemporary art practices beyond the white walls of a gallery”—and the whiteness of dealers and collectors (Hoban 1998).¹

Documented in cities around the world—bright lights in Manila (Benedicto 2014); nightscapes in Shanghai (Farrer and Field 2015); queer parties in Berlin (Andersson

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2023), Chicago (Adeyemi 2022), and Johannesburg (Bhardwaj 2022); performative geographies in Dubai (Centner and Neto 2021); pop-ups in Vancouver (Stillwagon and Ghaziani 2019); underground spaces in Lisbon (Pires et al. 2024); raves (Anderson and Kavanaugh 2007) and club nights in London (Ghaziani 2024); and microscenes in Philadelphia (Grazian 2013)—events like Mustache Mondays combine visual arts, performance, fashion, and unique sonic profiles to create a world that feels tribal (Sylvan 2006), particularly for queer, trans, and BIPOC individuals “forced to the margins who create themselves for themselves” (moore 2018:7). In this way, integrating art into nightlife is a mode of “curatorial activism” (Valencia 2024:10), where queer artists use aesthetics to challenge social hierarchies and power dynamics (Becker 1982; Muñoz 1997). While humanists have grappled with these issues with fortitude (e.g., Garcia-Mispireta 2023; Salkind 2019; Sharma, Hutnyk, and Sharma 1996; Tucker 2022), social scientists have not mined the nexus of nightlife, art, and activism with equal analytic vigor.

Nightlife is an engine of symbolic meaning production (Buckland 2002; Thornton 1996), with places like Trouw in Amsterdam and Berghain in Berlin “operating as arts institutions” (moore 2012:60) and driving the creative economies (Buchholz 2022; Currid 2007; Mears 2020) of many major cities (Andersson 2022; Florida 2005; Grazian 2003). For more than one hundred years, nightlife has served as a primary institution for LGBTQ communities (Andersson 2023; Chauncey 1994; Heap 2009; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Pires et al. 2024), although its significance is heightened in the current “closure epidemic” (Ghaziani 2024:1), a moment when gay bars are closing in large numbers. In the first two decades of the 2000s, the number of venues in London, a global capital of finance and culture, declined by 58% (Campkin and Marshall 2017). Experiencing similar closure rates, residents of Berlin describe the situation as “clubsterben,” which translates grimly as “club death” or “the club that dies” (Garcia 2018). In the United States, forty-one percent of gay bars closed from 2002 to 2019 (Mattson 2019), while an average of 15 venues have closed every year from 2008 to 2021. Morgan (2019) offers a sobering assessment about a global trend: “In 1976, there were 2,500 gay bars in the United States; today, there are fewer than 1,400 worldwide.”²

From *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich to Toulouse-Lautrec’s iconic *Moulin Rouge* in Paris, artists have routinely turned to nightlife in times of crisis (Bergin 2020). How does nightlife influence their artmaking practices during disruptions when community institutions are destabilized? The question requires rescaling the conversation. Rather than seeing nightlife as “a creative home” (moore 2016:51) for individual artists, I argue that it is a cultural field (Bourdieu 1993). With this shift in frame comes into view a clearer picture of queer nightlife as a space of institutional pluralism (Yu 2015) where art is relational (Andersson 2022; Peterson and Anand 2004) and activism is aesthetic (Cornfield 2015).

From Form to Field

Nightlife studies is a vibrant interdisciplinary conversation (Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz 2023). Researchers have documented its particular significance for LGBTQ communities, with drinking establishments at the center of communal life since the 1880s (Escoffier and Mitchel 2017). Often “the only place in town” (Armstrong 2002:34) to socialize, places like gay bars provided reprieve from “crushing isolation” (Kennedy and Davis 1993:29) while fostering a public and collective identity (D’Emilio 1983). Today, bar districts shape

top-down urban planning (Florida 2002) and grassroots placemaking efforts (Garcia-Mispireta 2024), including commemorating historical sites like Stonewall (Armstrong and Cragg 2006; Springate 2016) and supporting subcultures like drag (McCormack and Wignall 2022). The bars themselves are a third place (Putnam 2000) that organize local life (Oldenburg 1989), neighborhoods (Grazian 2009; May 2014), and global party circuits (Benedicto 2014).

In an early treatment, Achilles (1967) proposed an ontological argument about gay bars: “Without such a place to congregate, the group would cease to be a group” (p. 175). The significance of gay bars will fluctuate, as evident with public (Lin 2021) and academic debates today about closures (Ghaziani 2024), yet they have retained “institutional centrality” (Harry 1974:239) over the years (Mattson 2023). Gay bars are “distinctive facilities” (Murray 1979:168) that “anchor” (Ghaziani 2014a:383) LGBTQ communities, providing a place for people to explore group identities (Taylor and Whittier 1992), craft unique cultures (Levine 1979), and cultivate kinship networks (Newton 1993).

The large literature on gay bars features places for hairy (Hennen 2008) and fat gay men (Whitesel 2014), leather bars (Rubin 1998), lesbian (Faderman 1991; Podmore 2013) and dyke bars (Brown-Saracino 2021; Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009; Casey 2004), Black bars (Johnson 2011; Tolliver 2015), drag bars (Rupp and Taylor 2003), sports bars (Brody 2024), small-town bars (Branton 2021), suburban gay bars (Podmore and Bain 2020), digitally mediated bars (Baldor 2020), and post-gay bars (Hartless 2018). While researchers examine *social* life beyond the bar, including at house parties (Kennedy and Davis 1993; Thorpe 1996), bookstores (Liddle 2005), and music festivals (Gamson 1997), scholarly inquiries into life at *night* are by comparison isomorphic (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Mahoney 2000). While a vital part of LGBTQ cultures and histories (Hilderbrand 2023), gay bars receive an outsized emphasis in the literature, analytically reducing nightlife to limited organizational forms. As a result, scholars are ill-equipped to understand the significance of DIY parties like Mustache Mondays.

Queer art created in the context of nightlife responds to everything from gentrification to cultural erasure, imbuing artmaking practices with an activist spirit (Vail and Hollands 2012). After visiting the Parisian disco Le Palace in 1978, Roland Barthes (2010: 145) reimagined nightlife as a “a new art” and, in fact, a “total art” where “scintillation, music, and desire unite.” Similarly, the owners of Berghain, a legendary space in Berlin, have only had one quote ever attributed to them—and that is the motivation to create nightlife spaces and scenes as “a work of art.” Subsuming these particulars into the general, art critic Heiser (2018:177) remarks that nightlife is “a kind of art form in itself—be it a pointed minimalism or a baroque *Gesamtkunstwerk*” (quoted in Andersson 2022:452). These perspectives gesture to a complex relationship between art and nightlife as a creative and curatorial incubator (Hollands and Vail 2015; Peterson 1997; Reed 2019).

In this article, I argue that queer nightlife is a cultural field (Bourdieu 1993), or an expressive space with multiple scenes (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Silver and Clark 2016) and places that offer opportunities for artistic production and consumption. This way of thinking offers three interventions. First, the metaphor implies a vast open space. As a field, nightlife combines people and places in many ways. Irreducible to any one form, nightlife is “a community of organizations” (Scott 1994:207–208) with multiple logics (Friedland and Robert 1991), including gay bars and their particular histories but also other scenes of “specialized knowledge” (moore 2016:61), like DIY parties. By centering commercial

establishments, we miss “the multiplicity of ways that queer nightlife is practiced” (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021:6), such as in non-queer bars or at cafes, festivals, warehouses, parking lots, street corners, and outdoor parks. This “more capacious” (Khubchandani 2020:27) and multicentered framework embraces a “larger landscape” (Grazian 2008:6) of nightlife forms, emphasizing plurality and heterogeneity in the field (Powell 1991).

Examples of event-based scenes are numerous: queer parties at the Adelphi Rooms, a boarding lodge in London, in the 1920s (Houlbrook 2005); drag parties at speakeasies during American prohibition in the 1920s and 1930s (Bullock 2017); rent parties that Black lesbians organized in postwar Detroit (Thornton 1996); disco parties in the 1970s where Black and Latinx revelers blended artistic expressions of masculinity and femininity to communicate sexual authenticity (Gamson 2005); from the 1970s onward, the ballroom scene emerged in the United States, with revellers voguing to house music on the east coast and waacking to disco on the west coast (Bailey 2013); British raves bloomed in the 1980s and 1990s (Gillett 2024); circuit parties diffused around the world in the late 1990s and 2000s (Ghaziani and Cook 2005); queer techno parties in Berlin, like Buttons and Cocktail d'Amore, became popular in the 2010s (Andersson 2023); and today, we see gatherings like Mustache Mondays in LA. Each scene used the episodic format with great success, and each demonstrates that nightlife is greater than the sum of gay bars. It is a field characterized by institutional complexity (Greenwood et al. 2011).

Cultural fields are dynamic and ever-changing. This cautions against overgeneralizing the current spate of bar closures as evidence of the “death” of nightlife, as some public commentators suggest (Huneke 2021), or that it is “endangered,” as implied by academics (Mattson 2023). But what then if not demise? The creative process is always influenced by social institutions (Bourdieu 1996; Peterson and Anand 2004) and interactions (DiMaggio 1987; Wohl 2015). When those are impacted by an elevated magnitude of change, a pathway opens that some will pursue with an artistic spirit, reimagining loss as a convention-defying opportunity to do something different (Gamson 2005). And so, although gay bars are shuttering in cities around the world, those closures do not presage institutional decline; they are tides of change.

Nightlife events reflect how disruptions (Swidler 1986; Zhang 2021), “shocks to the system” (Adeyemi 2022:99), and loss in general can provide an invitation to creativity. Change is constant after all—not a temporal anomaly or aberration—and it is socially patterned (Lieberson 2000). In response to a disruption, some actors in the field, the hegemonic subjects that Bourdieu would describe as core, will defend and reproduce their views, seeking to renew the field by replicating what has been lost. Others, whom Bourdieu describes as peripheral, will challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of dominant groups (Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison 2014). The latter will be motivated to renew the field without replicating traditional or dominant forms, like gay bars (Ghaziani and Abrutyn 2024). While both groups wish to rebuild solidarity in the face of anomie (Abrutyn 2019), their divergent pathways suggest contests over rituals of belonging (Pache and Santos 2010).

Too often overlooking the associations between nightlife, art, and activism, social scientists prefer to use it as a case for theorizing impression management (Grazian 2007), deviance (Becker 1963), racialized power disparities (Hunter 2010b; May 2014), alcohol-related disorders and substance misuse (Measham et al. 2024; Talbot 2009), sexual violence

(Bogren et al. 2024; Quigg et al. 2020), policing, security, and regulatory controls (Hobbs et al. 2003; Wadds 2020). These studies have produced policy recommendations for creating safer and more sustainable scenes—although in exchange for assuming risk-taking, social disorder, and harm as part and parcel of nightlife. Criminology conceals how creativity motivates nightlife. I call to flip the script from deficit to asset by prioritizing art and activism—without denying the darker side of nightlife, like gentrification and global declines of gay bars. These and other places are cultural objects from which people derive and debate the meanings of group membership (Patterson 2016).

From this call comes a second analytic purchase of framing queer nightlife as a cultural field: the accenting of art, especially relational artmaking practices (Cornfield 2015; DiMaggio 1987; Peterson and Anand 2004; Reed 2019; Wohl 2021) that arise in response to heteronormative domination (between-group power) and homonormative discrimination (within-group power). Faced with reality speculation and development strategies that threaten gay bars alongside histories of exclusion at those same places (Caluya 2008; Doan 2007; Hunter 2010a; Johnson and Samdahl 2005), creatives began experimenting with alternative nightlife spaces in the cracks of the capitalist city (Holloway 2010). There, they used art as activism (Reilly 2018) and entrepreneurship (DiMaggio 1982; Jordan 2023) to create spaces of collective refusal to the multidimensionality power and relative worth in the field (McPherson 1983; McPherson and Ranger-Moore 1991). This explains why queer, trans, and BIPOC groups experience parties like Mustache Mondays as a form of resilience relative to the agents of gentrification and an iconoclastic party relative to gay bars.

In places that can support the requisite subcultural diversity (Fischer 1975; Hebdige 1979), underground scenes are percolating where artists and other creatives are fighting redevelopment while ensuring that nightlife remains vibrant, varietal, and more inclusive than the history of licensed venues. Yet with gay bars in the limelight, public commentators overlook these other forms, while academics misattribute them as “sociological epiphenomena” (Wynn 2016:276), or secondary gatherings that orbit the bars rather than sovereign centers of nightlife. I maintain that events are analytically vital. They are a “subject matter in their own right” (Goffman 1967:2) and a “basic unit of sociological investigation” (Becker 1982:270).

As this discussion suggests, a final analytic purchase of conceptualizing nightlife as a field is the attention to forms of capital, both the subcultural capital (Thornton 1996) required to participate in particular scenes (e.g., tastes in fashion, music, and art) and the sexual capital (Green 2008a, 2008b) that makes people feel desired in those places. Because capital, as a resource, is unequally distributed, fields routinely involve contradictions, conflicts, and contests of power (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). That power can take several forms, including economic, social, and symbolic (Bourdieu 1986, 1989), although Bourdieu’s analysis generally focuses on differences between groups.

The cultural field of queer nightlife brings sensitivity to status differentials between groups—us versus them, as expected—but also them-inside (Gamson 1997), revealing how within-group differences motivate additional distinctions in the field. The generative aspects of internal conflicts, while documented for activists (Ghaziani 2008; Ghaziani and Kretschmer 2018), are an under-theorized aspect of cultural fields. LGBTQ people are not always or only the object of minoritizing social processes; they further marginalize and oppress themselves (Valentine and Skelton 2003). For example, Khubchandani (2020:185) uses the Indian accent to theorize “the stranger,” or people “who cannot be, are not

supposed to be, in the ‘present’ of global gay nightlife: feminine men, courtesans, aunties, Dalits, bar dancers, techies, unassimilated migrants, South Indians, transgender people, Bollywood divas, fat hairy brown bodies, queer women, classical dancers, hijras, [and] people who smell like chicken biryani.”

Similarly, Black and Latinx queer people have participated in house (Salkind 2019), vogue (Tucker 2022), and ballroom (Bailey 2013) scenes for more than sixty years, although they have remained “largely underground” since their origins in Harlem (Ibid:5). Popularized by the film *Paris is Burning*, which documents ballroom cultures in New York in the 1980s, the scene is defined by surrogate family structures called “houses” led by “mothers” and “fathers” and dance competitions with ritualized performances called “balls.” Ballroom provides support for queer youth of color, enabling them not just “to survive but also to enhance the quality of their lives” (Arnold and Bailey 2009:16). This makes ballroom disidentifactory (Muñoz 1999) as it uses art to impart tools for resistance, resilience, and renewal. moore (2018:11) makes the point: “The thing I always say about marginalized people is that we are not actually marginal. Social codes, laws, norms, and other pathologies beat up on us and take us out of the center. But even as systems get scared and throw us to the margins, we use imagination as the best revenge.” The use of imagination in performances, aesthetic devices like camp (Babuscio 1977; Cleto 1999), and a “fabulous style” (moore 2018:7) are ways to create “art and beauty” (Ibid.: 29) in a world where some are told that they should not exist (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021; Buckland 2002; Salkind 2019). Artmaking in nightlife settings operates as a curatorial strategy to respond to power with agency and self-determination.

To summarize: the conceptual shift from seeing queer nightlife as an art *form* (Heiser 2018; moore 2016), as championed by humanists, to a cultural *field* (Bourdieu 1993) offers three key sociological insights: 1) the field metaphor gestures to multiple fellowship formats. Gay bars are not the sum total of nightlife which, instead, is a multicentered organizational space (Friedland and Robert 1991; McPherson 1983). This argument cautions against overgeneralizing closures, even in epidemic-like numbers, as evidence of institutional decline; 2) the field metaphor prioritizes culture over criminology, accenting curatorial artmaking practices that arise in response to disruptions; and 3) the field metaphor accommodates a power analysis that sweeps from status differentials between groups to injurious practices within groups. Together, these assertions invite us to rethink how queer artists and other creatives use their work as vehicles for social commentary and change (hooks 2025; Jasper 1997) in the context of urban nightlife.

Data and Analytic Approach

Nightlife has played a central role in subcultural movements like the Mods, Teddy Boys, and Punk Rockers through the mid-20th century. Starting in the 1980s, The Blitz, Mud Club, The Batcave, Taboo, and the New Romantics redefined nightlife from a recreational pastime to an exhibition space (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Rose 2017). Creativity has motivated nightlife scenes ever since, converting dancefloors in Britain and beyond into visual landscapes and thus blurring the lines between art, nightlife, and activism (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021; Gamson 2005; Johnson 2011; moore 2018; Muñoz 2009).

Inspired by this history, my objective is to consider what it means for sociologists to take seriously this nexus and to do so in a way that provides a methodology grounded in the social sciences while leveraging interdisciplinary queer protocols (Ghaziani and Brim 2019). Ways of knowing in creative industries and cultural markets do not always fit standard accounts of knowledge as rational, cognitive, and countable (Entwistle 2010). Studying event-based nightlife scenes requires researchers to “expand definitions” (Ibid.:4) of knowledge beyond a compulsion to quantify (Doan 2016). In other words, a queer response to quantifiable declines of gay bars is not to quantify increases in events. Phenomenological and participatory approaches (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004; Weller 2007) that blend science with art can reveal gatherings that are specific and spatially fluid though also socially shared. If we acknowledge that qualitative data, like art, can convey important truths, then the question becomes not how many parties are there but how artists “tell about” (Becker 2007) their work. Why do queer artists use nightlife to exhibit their pieces, and what messages do they amplify?

I used snowball and sampling for range (Weiss 1994) to collect 112 interviews about underground parties in London called club nights. The sample size exceeds standards of saturation in qualitative research (Small 2009) to redirect evaluative metrics from statistical generalizability to validating inferences (Miles and Huberman 1994; Mitchell 1983). Most respondents were in their 20s and 30s, although ages ranged from 22 to 70 years. Interviews averaged an hour, were recorded, and produced 1,558 pages of transcripts. I analyzed the data in NVivo using an abductive approach, identifying empirical surprises about art, activism, and nightlife relative to expectations (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). A framework for the development of new theoretical ideas, abduction directs researchers to focus on surprises since they sensitize the analysis to occurrences outside existing approaches and assumptions.

I now turn to my results, which I present in three sections that mirror the analytic purchases of framing nightlife as a cultural field: 1) Creatives respond to disruptions by experimenting with formats beyond the bar. This first section validates a baseline argument of institutional plurality in nightlife, despite disproportionate public and academic emphases on gay bars. 2) DIY nightlife forms, like club nights, accent art and the relational work of artists. 3) Creatives use art as curatorial activism, challenging dominant narratives while speaking truth to multiple forms of power.

Results

Nightlife Forms

Bar closures did not signal institutional demise for queer creatives, many of whom reimagined nightlife beyond the bar. Laurie, 28 (White British), organizes The Chateau, a party in an abandoned, religiously themed cocktail bar located in a 130-capacity basement venue with low ceilings and stained-glass windows that make the space look like a church crypt. “I found an empty basement bar underneath a hotel, and the rest is history.” He challenges deficit-based assumptions. “I think queer nightlife is thriving, but things are just changing.” In his explanation for how things are changing, Laurie advises to “look much deeper into the way that queer people are operating now, which is outside of permanent venues. That doesn’t have to be the way

that queer spaces operate.” How do you operate? I ask. “We are a temporary space,” he replies. “We’re a pop-up.”

Several respondents remarked that the greater visibility and popularity of club nights is associated with bars closures. madison, 36 (African American), organizes a techno-fashion party called Opulence. They make the point: “I think that the reason a lot of these parties exist is because clubs are closing.” Laurie agrees, explaining that he created The Chateau “to address the severe lack of queer spaces I wanted to do something to try and change the narrative.” Mvice is 27 and identifies as Black British and Zambian. She sees club nights as an intervention in self-determined nightlife. “DIY is the way forward,” she argues. Mvice is the founder of The Cocoa Butter Club, an award-winning performance company that “gives a voice to Black, Asian, and racially-othered performers with showcases, classes, and professional productions, including cabarets.” For queer creatives, overlaying an art sensibility onto a club night gestures to a more hopeful future without denying material realities. “Artists don’t have money,” Mvice says, but then observes that those economic constraints can become unexpected invitations. “They’re creating nights themselves, whether it’s pay what you can—which is actually what The Cocoa Butter Club is, so that it’s accessible to our guests—because that’s something we acknowledge: Bodies like mine sometimes don’t make as much money, so they don’t have as much to spend on entertainment.”

Sam, 27 (White British), organizes The CAMPerVAN, which provides a vivid example of a DIY art party. He describes it as “a transportable queer performance and LGBTQ community event space that can be deployed anywhere in the world to bring performance art, film screening, panel discussion, and workshops into the public realm.” Organized in and around a caravan, Sam imagines the event as reinventing the look of nightlife. “The desire to build my own queer space was a response to the ominous discourse that London was, and still is, experiencing an epidemic of sweeping closures when it comes to nightlife venues, a phenomenon that particularly affects the LGBTQ community who depend on these spaces for socialization.” He, like others, is working to reframe public conversations from the decline of a single nightlife form to broader field-level changes.

Sam’s party is quintessentially queer. “By appropriating the caravan, with its pejorative connotations, queer space becomes a process of reclamation, transforming what has been abandoned by mainstream culture, utilizing its capabilities to deploy itself anywhere in the city or beyond.” Implementing such a grand idea was not an easy task. Sam wonders out loud, “But how could the modification of a vehicle replicate the clubs where I had danced around in a leotard all night and met some of my closest friends?” After reflecting for a moment, he accents artmaking in club nights. “The most fundamental modification was the provision of entertainment. Equipped with a jigsaw, I cut a large square out of the side of the caravan to install a hinged stage with lighting. Elevated from the audience, this platform facilitates all forms of self-expression, from drag to spoken word, rap to burlesque.”

When revelers, like Charlotte, 43 (White European), remark on how nightlife has changed over the years, they echo the prominence of art spaces. “A new scene is emerging that’s coming out of performance art,” she says. Rosie, 26 (Sephardic Jewish), adds additional details. “There’s no actual model that exists for spaces like this, and that’s why they’re a bit more temporal and a bit more experimental.” Gaby, a 25-year-old genderqueer French Arabic artist, reinforces the observation from the production side. “There’s been a shift to art spaces in response to all these gay bars shutting down.” Gaby organizes Queerdirect,

a curatorial network they founded in response to “the city being under attack” by developers who were demolishing gay bars. Queerdirect hosts parties where queer artists can exhibit their work, providing “a platform of support” in nightlife rather than at a more traditional gallery space.

The DIY form works well for queer artists. “This temporary nature is way more sustainable,” Laurie explains, even if club nights are hard to count (c.f., Ghaziani and Ochoa 2025). “There is no lack of creativity, innovation, and passion within the queer nightlife community, and in many ways the scene thrives—just in a way that can’t necessarily be measured by metrics around permanent queer venues.” The Chateau and other club nights have “caused a change in the nature of queer space, and forced our community to be more creative.” Compared to licensed venues, DIY parties offer a number of advantages. “The fluid model we now inhabit allows more flexibility,” Laurie says, “and the potential to serve the community in new ways.” How so? I ask. “Like through our studio space,” he replies, drawing attention, as did others, to the integration of art in the party format.

Accenting Art

Brooke is 30, nonbinary, and Italian American. They are an antiquarian bookseller, writer, printmaker, and sculptor who experience the plurality of nightlife forms through the medium of art. “You get lots of little café endeavors that open up that are run by local kids who are out of art school, and at night, it can become a bar and a place for a party.” Brooke is the founder of Camp Books, an online shop that features rare books. They use art to ensure that “queer pasts might nourish queer futures.” That future will take a multimedia format. “The queer spaces that I have seen emerge that I have gravitated to myself tend to do a lot of things at once and offer a lot of different ways into a sense of community, be it a show, a screen-printing workshop, instructions on how to publish your perspective, and occasionally a dance party.” Spaces like these may not be unique, but they are uniquely revelatory in moments of disruption. “It’s hard to say if it’s new, or if I’ve just noticed it over the years,” Brooke reflects, but then adds, “I do feel as though there are more places to go that have that kind of elastic identity.”

Nightlife offers unique opportunities for artists. “I think club nights have morphed into things that have a stronger brand,” Lola argues. A 33-year-old who identifies as African British, Lola accentuates art. “Art is definitely a big thing that’s involved.” Bringing art into nightlife spaces is part of a “big new wave of creativity in London,” Sam, a 29-year-old reveler, adds. Simon, 51 (White British), the co-organizer of a party called Duckie, puts these ideas into practice by promoting artmaking at his event. “I do believe in performance and culture, and people making up shows and stories and telling them through songs and dances and lip syncs, and funny art things.” Why are these performances important? I ask. “There’s an authenticity about it,” Simon replies. DIY spaces nurture an activist-inflected style of creativity. “Why have we, as queer people, gone to those things? They’ve come out of drag, and they’ve come out of this kind of pub-y, make-it-up, amateur-ish, grassroots-y thing, not through a traditional drama school. It’s messier. The carpet is stickier. The look is more visceral. The attitude is more—it’s bolder.”

Accenting art in nightlife was a shared ethos among creatives. The closure epidemic compelled Rosie, whom we met earlier, and Hannah (29, White British) to use artmaking practices to preserve the memory of lost places. They produced *U.K. Gay Bar Directory*,

a moving image archive that reacts to “the rapid closure of LGBTQ venues,” Rosie explains. “It captures a moment of change in queer history.” The pair could have focused on any number of themes, from substance use to sexual violence, but after traveling the country for nine months and visiting one hundred gay bars across fourteen cities, they focused on creating “a record of public queer culture.” Filmed using a Go-Pro camera, the four-hour-and-thirty-minute film transformed the artists into “vessels for people’s stories and outpourings of anxiety and grief,” Rosie shares. To magnify “a culture in crisis” when “gay bars were closing weekly,” they filmed “the bars when empty.” The venues are dark and barren, even though strobe lights still flash. The effect illuminates “the wounds of gay culture,” she adds. “The music plays, but the bodies are spectral, as we project our personal memories onto the empty floors. No dancing, no drinking, no glasses on tables. Performance venues with lifeless stages, no fashionistas or first kisses.”

Gemma, 33 (White British), is an independent curator who has produced shows at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco and the National Portrait Gallery in London. They also accent art, particularly in disruptive moments. “I see queer artists responding to those challenges, or those shifts and changes. Something that I really noticed was there were a number of exhibitions that were reflecting on closures, or that dying scene.” When I asked what Gemma was working on, they described video projects that imagine new futures. “A lot of the young artists that I’m working with seem to be making videos about spaces dying, what new landscapes look like, what might be possible, what can be built, where do we exist. There seems to be a lot of this kind of looking at landscapes, whether they’re physical, or imagined, or futuristic.” Gemma produced a video archive that serves as a commemoration and call to action. Entitled *Queertopia*, it “reviews the existence of queer communities and their spaces, both real and mythological, memorializing those lost and building environments and landscapes to nurture new radical possibilities.”

Zax, a 28-year-old artist who identifies as Black and Hungarian, uses art to mourn the loss of community spaces. They curated a project called *This Dancefloor Isn’t Here Anymore*, a performance art piece that portrays “acts of remembrance” that “summon up that history, the disappearance of spaces.” Held on Valentine’s Day, Zax shares the description: “Queers! Is this the end of London? Or is it the beginning? This is a one-night living archive of transient queer spaces and moments, through performance, through intimacy.” In the exhibit, Zax invites the audience to reflect on the significance of nightlife by posing a series of rhetorical questions. “Have you ever fallen in love on the dancefloor? Can you still taste the freedom and fear the first time you kissed another queer person? Do you remember taking your first pill? Have you ever fallen in love with a room full of strangers all at once? Can you imagine, beyond surviving in London, what would it look like for us to thrive, to flourish?” The night featured a performance about the “mourning of queer spaces that we have loved and lost,” Zax reflects. They expressed grief as “a queer remix of the Kaddish,” which is “the Jewish prayer that you would say over someone’s dead body.” Through the ritual, “we say goodbye to spaces that we’ve lost.” Zax, like Rosie, Hanna, Gemma, and other artists, blends commemoration with activism. “We invoke or summon a new queer city,” they say, echoing scholars who prioritize new openings, rather than closings, at night (Khubchandani 2020).

Prem (35, South Asian and Polish mixed race British) is one-third of a collective that produces a party called Anal House Meltdown. The idea for it came “when Soho began to be very boarded up.” Prem saw the closure of gay bars as an invitation to creativity. “Because

I noticed that there was lots of shutter boarding on windows, and signs taken down, and empty venues, I tried to mirror that with the gallery space. I boarded the whole gallery up.” The impact was undeniable once you stepped inside. “I invited people to use the gallery as a meeting space. I just put benches in there, and it became a quite bleak view about the closure of spaces during that time because as you stood inside the gallery, you could only see the wood through the windows. There wasn’t a view outside of it.” Prem’s gallery sounds grim, but from it came the idea to produce a party. “Nightlife is part of our artmaking,” Prem remarks. The two intermingle, in fact. “The party is something that’s also quite related to our art practices, rather than it being something out there as a thing in and of itself.”

Once nightlife and art interlace, it can be hard to imagine one without the other. Katayoun is 22, nonbinary, and Iranian. They organize Femmi-Erect, a party that celebrates “the whole femme spectrum.” Katayoun is a multidisciplinary artist, and their work informs the club night. Femmi-Erect features cabaret, dancers, exhibitions, and video art. Commentators describe the party as a protest, calling it “provocative, terrifying, and wickedly entertaining, channeling the spirit of punk to express frustrations with society.” Katayoun and I talk about the decision to incorporate art into the party. “I love giving people the chance to do their thing and showing their work. And I wanted it to be different types of art. I didn’t want it to be just music.” The context of a party “gives people more confidence, makes people feel better about what they’re doing because there’s a place for their art.” There are also material advantages. “It creates more job opportunities, hopefully. That’s really important to me, making sure that people can take this and use it to get ahead and do other things.”

Cities like London are in a strategic position to nurture relationships between nightlife and art. madison from Opulence explains, “London is a world city. Talk about everybody moving to New York? Everybody moves to London if you’re on this side of the globe.” With population density comes opportunities for creativity (Wirth 1938). “Think about it this way,” madison continues. “Not only is it a huge city, which is one part of the story, but it is also a hotbed of creativity with the fashion industry being there, with creative industries being here.” The concentration of creative and cultural industries in London operates alongside its large number of art schools. “And also, with so many art and fashion schools, with St. Martin’s, London College of Fashion, Royal College of Art, Chelsea College of Art—you have all these schools.” They produce artists eager to make a mark. “Every year, there are 18 and 19-year-olds who roll in there from their small town, and they have an idea. They want to do something.” That drive leads them to nightlife. “I think that has a lot to do with the rise of these party series. A lot of people involved in nightlife are art people, or are or were in art school in some way, or are or were interested in the arts.” This inspires queer artists to create new nightlife forms, which become “incredible places of creativity,” adds Dan, the organizer of a club night called Chapter 10. “Nightlife is an important cultural and economic engine in this country, and I think that’s why people have quite strong affinity toward it.”

Power Differentials

Queer artists exploit new possibilities for fellowship that come from club nights, but this motivation is compounded by confrontations with power in the art world (Becker 1982; Hoban 1998). “Lots of my friends were applying for funding from institutions or galleries, and they were constantly rejected because of the subject matter of their work,” Lewis, 27

(White British), the organizer of a performance art party called Inferno, shares. “I think dealing with their identity and their queerness is a bit of a put-off for a lot of institutions.” Eden, 26 (White and Arabic), the founder of Riposte, experienced this first-hand. Riposte is “part party collective, part art project, and part techno rave.” It began in Orléans, France in 2012 by students at ESAD [School of Art and Design]. The party expanded in 2018, when Eden realized that “there was no artistic place that represented him and his contemporaries in France.” And so, he “move[d] the art collective to London to find new spaces.”

The institution of arts education was partly to blame. “We first started when I was a student in France in the school of fine arts. We had a gallery in the school, and it was one of the good schools in France, which is quite hard to access. Schools in France are free, but you have to access them through an exam that is really hard. They take thirty-to-sixty people per year. There are several thousand who apply.” Earning a spot does not always enable artists to exhibit their work. “We had a gallery, but they only exhibited famous artists. We were not allowed, as students, to exhibit in the school.”

Absent opportunities at school, Eden engaged in a practice of curatorial activism (Reilly 2018), blending DIY nightlife forms with art to challenge power structures, amplify marginalized voices, and promote social justice in the art world. “I started this thing as a protest against the system. I was like, ‘Okay, you’re not letting us exhibit.’ People spend five years in this school without really having the occasion to exhibit, so we have to create our own occasion, our own way to try out how it works to exhibit in galleries, or just to exhibit before going out of school to really have experience.” The name Riposte is apt for this form of protest. “It’s like answering to something,” Eden explains. “It’s like, someone throws you a rock, and you throw another rock back, like a response.” The call-and-response symbolizes a symbiosis between exclusion and creation. “We didn’t feel there was a place for us in artistic institutions Our queer and radical values weren’t reflected in galleries’ capitalist system.” Foreclosure in the art world opened new niches in the field. “There was a feeling of not having a place in the traditional environment of galleries and artistic institutions in 2012, which were very chic, cis-hetero, white In an environment that was very normative, I was a person with a beard wearing skirts.” Lewis agrees. “It’s always been about giving space to under-represented artists who get rejected from institutions We offer space to anybody who’s marginalized, whether they be queer, POC, trans, nonbinary, and just platform them, give them residency, and pay them—pay them decently as well, help them enrich and grow their practice.”

Telling about society (Becker 2007) with stories of policing encouraged creatives to rethink nightlife as a place to test new ideas, where art and grassroots activism intersect (Bielby 2004). Laurie remarks, “It’s really, really important that we give platforms for queer performers because there aren’t enough venues that are providing that, and aren’t enough venues that are paying performers to come and show their art, which is something really crucial that we’re trying to do here.” Laurie, like Eden, Lewis, and others, responded to exclusion with activist-inflected artmaking practices. “I’m a singer, so I come from a performance background. That’s always been my love. I create music. I have solo projects. I released my music, did all that. And in the end, I felt I wanted to do something different, use my creativity in a different way.”

That different way linked art with nightlife, circumventing museums, galleries, and universities. “I work with someone called Tam,” Laurie says, “who’s a venue manager and who used to run a place called Lime Wharf Tam has this theory about the ‘queer third

eye,' which is an idea of a higher being or a higher power for queer people. It's like an energy, and it guides you in what you do." Laurie learned about the queer third eye at exactly the right moment in his life, a time when he was frustrated about accessing traditional art venues. "It was always my dream to be on stage. I wanted to be a singer And I was like, oh my god, I'm not going to make it!" Then, his queer third eye opened. "As soon as I changed that tack of my life and created this space [The Chateau], everything just flowed in such a natural way. This is something that was really needed and wanted." Each step forward has come with affirmations. "To watch performers on the stage from our community in the space that we've created from nothing is such a buzz and such a pleasure every time we open the door, to hear people say how much it means to them."

Art institutions are sometimes exclusive, but not always. In recent years, British museums have invited queer artists and nightlife producers to showcase their work. Take the V&A, which calls itself "the world's leading museum of art, design, and performance." In 2018, the V&A programmed "Club Nights and the Queer Revolution." Glyn, 39 (borderless racial identity), the co-founder of a party called Sink the Pink, spoke at the event. "I'm always trying to push our community forward." Glyn uses storytelling to create change (Polletta 2006). "I love stories. I love storytelling. I love hearing other people tell stories. I think that you can only really continue with our culture, our clubbing culture, if you move past the actual night, and you start allowing people in, and telling stories, and inspiring people." His experience at the V&A taught him that partnerships with art institutions can expand the field. "I think by doing talks, and sharing other people's stories, and doing things outside the club, I think that that's how you—who knows, there might be someone in that crowd that's wanted to start a club night that then had the courage to do it."

Sam from The CAMPerVAN brought his pop-up platform to the Tate Modern, a network of four galleries that house British, international modern, and contemporary art. "The last Friday of every month, they do a Tate Late," Sam says. Tate Lates are free, late-night events that offer an opportunity for visitors to see the latest exhibitions while hearing music from up-and-coming DJs. In 2022, Tate Late showcased a digital display from the *Rebel Dykes Archive* that featured artists Phyllis Christopher, Lola Flash, Jessica Tanzer, Dixie Thomas and Del LaGrace Volcano. The museum has also promoted workshops on pronouns with badge-making activities displaying custom designs from Anshika Khullar, whose work centers intersectional feminism. "Each month is a theme," Sam explains. "We were part of the queer art theme."

Bringing his party and artmaking practice into the Tate was not an easy decision. "Most queer art and experimentation is very exclusive," he says. "It's very much behind closed doors." Going public raises questions "as to whether that's a good thing or not, because I know there's a big conversation at the moment with the rising popularity of drag, of a lot of drag artists doing a lot of corporate gigs, and whether that's ethical." Sam has been exploring these issues with other artists. "I went to this big panel the other week about the ethics of drag, and whether it's paradoxical to be queer and performative and then to do a gig at HSBC—but you've got to pay your rent." Sam found ways of expressing his creativity by being mindful about power and access. "Bringing queer art into a public sphere is really valid, but the way to maintain ethics is that it always has to be free, it's always accessible, and it's always diverse and celebratory."

Tia is part of a collective of seven Black queer artists who produce BBZ, pronounced as "babes," which itself is an acronym for "Bold, Brazen Zamis." The group prioritizes "the

experiences of queer womxn, trans folk, and nonbinary people of color in all aspects of our work.” Tia integrates art into nightlife with interactive installations, poetry, photography, and film. She describes a week-long residency at the Tate, where BBZ featured a multimedia, multi-sensory exhibition examining Black British queer artists. The format “consisted of a co-working space where people could just drop in, work—we had a library full of different queer books and zines—and then we also had a pop-up barber shop that people could just drop into. It had a sound piece talking about different Black queer experiences within the barbers.” The installation featured another area called The Cotch. “If you identify as an LGBTQ person of color, then you could go in, write a letter to yourself or to somebody else, and leave it in the space, and it meant that you can just read other people’s letters and write anonymous letters to other people in the community.” The Cotch was designed to enhance the visibility of queer Black British artists in mainstream art worlds. “The project came about because the Tate approached us, because we’d done a talk there about the fact that there aren’t enough spaces that are celebrating QTIPOC [queer, trans, Indigenous, and people of color] artists.”

Working with the Tate made Tia think about self-determination in the face of racialized exclusion. “It’s quite interesting going into these very white institutions, and claiming space, and disturbing. We’d never been given an opportunity to enter a space like that, which is historically not a space that I would take ownership of.” Why did you accept the invitation? I ask. In response, Tia emphasized the importance of creating new cultural centers. “Part of it was just owning and reclaiming a space that we didn’t feel was ours but also knew that we had every right to be in.”

As it did for Sam, the experience also raised for Tia questions about representation and appropriation. “Obviously, it’s a great platform for us, but it’s far better for the Tate to seem seemingly accessible and on the wave of being diverse.” Is there an alternative? “I’d much prefer for us to create our own platforms.” BBZ integrates art into a club night that makes attendees feel like they are at home. “One of the threads running throughout the installations and spaces that we create is home and using the home as a gallery. So, it’s spaces where we already feel like we’re able to exist.” That installation was designed to contrast with their experience at the Tate. “Walking into a building like the Tate Modern, going through security, seeing all of these white people, it makes you feel a certain type of way already.”

Several respondents shared this point of view. “I think it’s important to challenge those figures [museums],” Gaby echoes, by “bringing marginalized bodies into that space.” Gaby and Tia navigate power differentials by claiming space relative to the exclusions of art institutions. This creates an intersectional understanding of queer art and queer nightlife. Tia elaborates, “There was one part of the installation that we had at the Tate, and we said that it was specifically for queer people of color to participate in. We were very firm with that. That’s something that was really important so that, even though we were in an institution that is historically white, queer people of color still felt like they could claim part of that space because we were giving them ownership over it.”

Erkan, 24 (Middle Eastern British), collaborates with the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), although with caution. “It was a pleasure to curate an event there and a pleasure to curate it with people who I believe are so important within our scene,” Erkan says—and then pivots to concerns that are shared by others about what it means to host an event for queer artists. “But at the end of the day, the ICA is a self-serving institution which legitimized its own narrative by having a CV that says, ‘Oh, look, we had Travis Alabanza, a queer icon, come and speak. We had Lewis Burton, who is one of the co-founders of an up-and-coming queer techno collective

[Inferno] that has taken over London and throwing some of the best parties, we had them come and speak on our stage.”

The potentially exploitative nature of invitations from major museums becomes clearer when queer artists request efforts to ensure the safety of their guests. Erkan describes one situation: “When I asked them [the ICA] to get Lewis a taxi to come to the event, they said that they can get that taxi themselves within the budget which they’re being paid. And I said, ‘Well, you’re asking a genderqueer person who dresses—their aesthetic is very provocative—you’re asking them to basically make their own way to the space and not guaranteeing their safety.’” The oversight had consequences. “What essentially happened is five taxis canceled on Lewis on their way to the space, and when they eventually got there, they had five minutes left for the brief before they went on stage.” Erkan describes moments like these as “micro-aggressive consequences of structural actions,” and in their mind, “they tie into this narrative of how a space is only performatively willing to provide some form of representation or facilitation, but when you ask for more, you’re doing too much.”

Characterizing the nexus of nightlife, art, and activism as intersectional and asserting that the field can support multiple centers was a recurring theme. Mvice asserts, “One of the things I make clear about The Cocoa Butter Club is it centers Black bodies, but everybody is welcome. I have to make that clear because there are always going to be the people who—I mean, it happened, you know, ‘I can’t believe she started an all-Black cabaret. How dare she?’ To which I was like, ‘Actually, it’s not all-Black cabaret. It’s a non-white cabaret. That’s very different.’ The difference exposes power differentials, and if you go to The Cocoa Butter Club, Mvice wants you to understand what that means. The audience ‘all have in common that they value bodies of color, the art that they create, and they believe that they deserve a space.’ Mvice invites attendees to engage with these ideas. ‘I want people to talk about it. I always say to them, don’t leave this saying, ‘Oh, it didn’t matter that they were Black, it didn’t matter that person was Indian, it didn’t matter that person was Chinese.’ No, it did. It mattered that these people all had to start a night themselves, all had to get together and do this in one place. It does matter.’”

Queer artists curate exhibits at club nights with a deliberate focus on challenging exclusions in the art world, as we heard, but they are also sensitive to the within-group fault lines. For example, a racist encounter flared in a gay bar where people of color “were selling zines called *Black Fly*,” Nadine (29, Scottish Pakistani) recounts. “The zine is about sexual freedom between POC people.” At one point, “this white girl had a problem with it, and she started getting angry about it.” The organizers remained calm, replying that “this is a positive magazine,” but the individual grew angrier. “There were no white people in the zine,” Nadine explains. The conflict escalated. “The white girl got so angry, even though they [the zine sellers] weren’t being angry with her.” It was at this point that “she threatened to call the police, even though nothing was going on.” This forced the bar owners to get involved. The venue promoted itself as “inclusive,” Nadine says with an eye roll, “but because it’s white-owned, they sided with the white girl. This is the kind of thing that goes on.”

“Intersectional failures” (Crenshaw 2012:1450) at gay bars, where one form of difference overrides the others, is a major reason why some club nights exist. “There’s not enough Black and Brown-owned spaces in London that cater to us, that are for us,” Nadine emphasizes. In response, they with three friends created the *Pxssy Palace*, a space “centered around women and femmes of color” where they can be “free from discrimination.” *Pxssy*

Palace was “born out of frustration,” Nadine says. “It wasn’t like we decided, ‘Okay, well, let’s do a club night.’” The other “gay places”—their words, shining a light on power-within—“were all controlled by either white men or gay white men. We got really frustrated, we were fed up with it, but we didn’t know how fed up with it we were.” Similar to queer women in other historical moments (Thorpe 1996), the collective started with private house parties. Eventually, those attracted hundreds of people, and today, they have fifty-eight thousand followers on social media. Pxssy Palace is “rooted in intentional nightlife, celebrating Black, Indigenous, and people of color who are women, queer, intersex, trans, or nonbinary. We provide space to dance, connect, and engage, whilst encouraging consent, sexual freedom, pleasure, expression, and exploration of our authentic selves.”

While all gay bars are not exclusive or discriminatory (Hilderbrand 2023), club nights adopt an ethos of intentional inclusion and intersectional queerness. Prem, whom we met earlier, went to a gay bar one night with a friend who identifies as nonbinary. When they arrived, “the guy at the door whispered to me, ‘You’ve got to tell him to take his lipstick off, otherwise he can’t come in.’” Femmephobia, transphobia, and misgendering are common at gay bars whose staff “police their borders,” Prem adds. Gaby, the artist from QueerDirect, shares the concern. “A lot of my friends who are queer don’t like to go to gay bars because they feel like their body, or their race, or their sexuality doesn’t have a place in those spaces.” Club nights represent an activist response to repeated experiences of exclusion. “Queer nights are often put on in reaction to gay bars, to what gay bars don’t offer, which is a safe space for bodies, and genders, and sexualities across a whole spectrum.”

Conclusions: An Invitation to Creativity

All the artists and nightlife producers we met in this article offered insights that converge on a clear theoretical conclusion: more than just an art *form*, or a staged experience (moore 2016) and exhibition space for individual creatives and their outputs (Heiser 2018), queer nightlife is a cultural *field* (Bourdieu 1993). The conceptual shift from form to field accents organizational plurality (Ghaziani 2024) and polycultures (Pires et al. 2024) in nightlife; artmaking as relational (Andersson 2022; Wohl 2021) and stratified by networks (DiMaggio 1982; Peterson and Anand 2004), evident especially during community-level disruptions (Pache and Santos 2010; Swidler 1986; Zhang 2021) like the closure epidemic; overlapping networks of power, from gatekeeping by museums, galleries, and universities to the intersectional failures (Crenshaw 2012) of gay bars; and art as curatorial activism (Reilly 2018; Valencia 2024). More holistically, a cultural field reframes the closure of gay bars away from the imagery of institutional enervation toward an invitation to creativity and thus institutional change.

That a cultural field is composed of artist networks is well established (Becker 1982; Currid 2007; Hoban 1998; Mears 2011), as is an understanding of creativity (Florida 2005) and arts infrastructure (Zukin 1989) as drivers of urban economic development (Brown 2009). In this multidisciplinary literature, the intersections between nightlife and art are seldom examined, although attention is paid to art by humanists (Garcia-Mispirota 2023, moore 2018; Salkind 2019; Sharma, Hutnyk, and Sharma 1996; Tucker 2022) more often than by social scientists, who tend to examine a limited number of places like straight (Grazian 2008; May 2014) and gay bars (Achilles 1967; Mattson 2023) while assuming that those places have broadly shared significance, despite evidence to the contrary (Ghaziani 2024; Khubchandani 2020;

Rosenberg 2021). Yet nightlife has a range of expressions—from bars to club nights and much more—that appeal to different groups and for whom it can have many meanings.

Combining culture, organizations, activism, and urban nightlife into an analytic kaleidoscope, and then looking through it at the empirical patterns in my data, shows that art, activism, and place are closely connected. Club nights shape artistic identities and networks (Crossley 2009), positioning those restructured identities and networks into conversation with community-level disruptions. This observation about “art in hard times” (Hollands and Vail 2015:187) invites sociologists to revise and resubmit our theoretical accounts relative to event-based scenes, like club nights, pop-ups, festivals, unlicensed raves, and private house parties, among others, where creatives use relational artmaking practices as a form of curatorial protest to push back against power, including the economic forces and developer interests that are demolishing gay bars while redressing repeated experiences of exclusion at those same bars. The results are DIY spaces defined by an ethos of intentional inclusion and intersectional queerness. Artmaking at these parties promotes an expansive horizon of meanings in an expanding cultural field, inviting new ways to think, new ways to feel, and new ways to experience nightlife.

Notes

1. The Red Bull Music Academy described the party as “iconoclastic.” Peace quote from the same source. See: <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/10/mustache-mondays>. For a PBS documentary on Mustache Mondays, see <https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/artbound/mustache-mondays-inclusive-nightlife-and-contemporary-art>. The party was profiled by Joseph Daniel Valencia in a master’s thesis, later published (Valencia 2024).
2. The *New York Times* reports on annual declines in the United States: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/24/fashion/how-gay-should-a-gay-bar-be.html>.

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