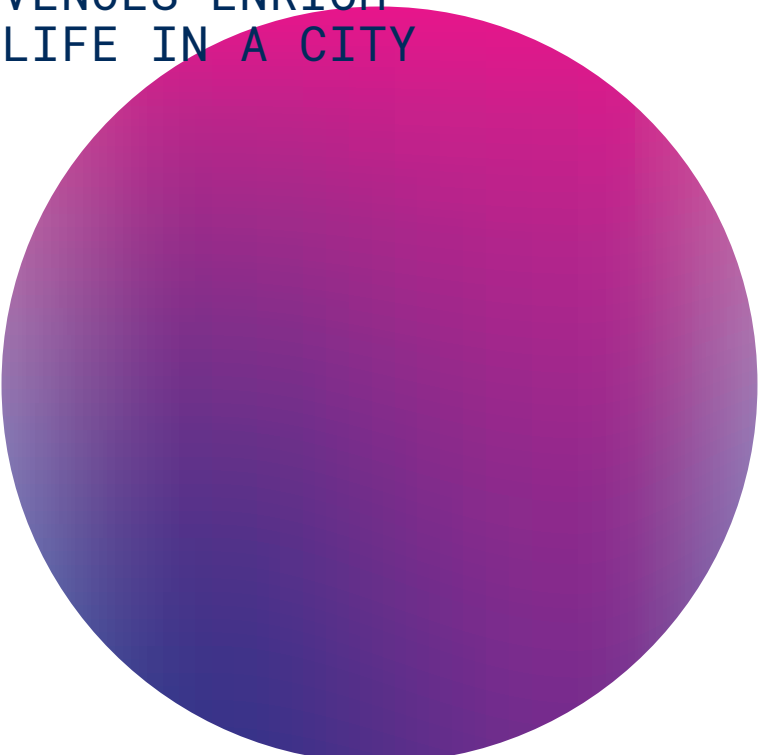


MY HOUSE IS
YOUR HOUSE...
HOW MUSIC
VENUES ENRICH
LIFE IN A CITY



DAVE
HASLAM
Manchester

My House Is Your House...

How music venues enrich life in a city

Text by Dave Haslam

I have an older sister and a younger brother, but for some of my childhood my parents fostered, too. This was mostly when I was between about seven and twelve years old. Social services would phone and a child (or two siblings) would arrive at our door a few hours or a day later.

In the space of five or six years, around thirty-five foster kids came into our home, and our lives, for anything between a few days and several months. The children were from a number of different religions and races, although not quite all ages. My parents had a policy of only accepting children younger than my younger brother. This was so we didn't feel displaced, but it also had the effect of casting us all in caring roles.

The children would be temporarily fostered with us for a variety of reasons; sometimes the mother was trying to escape domestic abuse, or the mother was in hospital or in jail. Often, we'd host a pair of siblings – usually an older sister with a younger brother – and they'd be glued together from the moment they came through the front door. We'd treat them just like younger brothers and sisters. We would care for and look out for them, but we'd also bicker sometimes. They would play football or hide-and-seek with us, watch *Wacky Races* on TV after school, and they'd come on family holidays.

This was the late 1970s, in Birmingham. In 1980, I moved to Manchester and since then I've made a career as a DJ and journalist. The latest of my five books is my memoir, *Sonic Youth Slept on my Floor*. In the book, I documented meeting people who made an impression on me, and inspired me; like John Peel, Nile Rodgers, Tony Wilson, and Tracey Thorn.

I also considered those years fostering, and realise now that I have drawn many lessons from the experience of knowing those kids, not least to value my stable family life, but also to appreciate the heavy loads some people have to carry. I reckon those encounters were among the most significant in my life. Not that I understood that at the time: I was young, at an age when you experience life at face value.

Fostering gave me an insight into the lives of other children: their precarious home life; their distressing stories. Once or twice a parent visited. I remember a father arriving on a Sunday afternoon, and I could tell it was killing him that whatever nightmare the family was going through, he was unable to care for his child. Seeing a grown-up sobbing outside your family home is something a nine-year-old never forgets.

I doubt many of my foster brothers and sisters recall their short times with us, although two of them have subsequently taken jobs that have given them access to their Social Services file and made contact. One of the two recalled just a fleeting image; a memory of a day in the countryside, when cows ran across a field to watch us eat a picnic.

The experience of fostering exposed me to the struggles of some families but also helped give birth to a sense of idealism. We would arrive home from school, a newly arrived youngster would be introduced to us and we'd grab them by the hand, show them their room, go find the dressing-up box, or run into the garden. It was that quick, that simple, that amazing. In thirty seconds, the person standing in front of us transformed from a stranger to a sister or a brother.

Writing my book, especially the chapters about DJing in clubs like the Hacienda in the 1980s and 1990s, I became aware how utopian my attitudes to discotheques and dancefloors are. I realised that the encounters with my newly arrived foster brothers and sisters acted like a precedent, a model for the best kind of interaction with a stranger; immediate acceptance and connection. Granted, it was a temporary

attachment, but lots of important things in our lives are temporary: love, anger, heartache, a day trip to the countryside. It doesn't mean they're not real.

I remember in packed clubs playing a record in 1990 by the Break Boys called *My House is your House (And your House is Mine)*. I was in the midst of a music scene that was communal and accepting, where people from various neighbourhoods and backgrounds had come together to party.

The Haçienda had a key role in shaping music history; it was a blueprint for rave culture and the spiritual home of the Madchester bands, such as the Stone Roses and Happy Mondays. In what follows, I describe and explain the personal, communal, cultural value not only of the Haçienda, but other nightclubs and music venues too: how they have the potential to transform culture, lives, communities, and cities.

My interest in music venues and other sites of cultural activity started in my early teenage years when I became fascinated by the idea of what was off the radar. I'd be sitting watching TV shows *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*, thinking there must be more to life than this. Thanks to my big sister and her friends, I had heard enough music to understand *Top of the Pops* wasn't the whole story and the world wasn't all *Showaddywaddy*. By extension, I decided that not all the realities and ideas out there were reflected on news programmes like *News at Ten* or *Nationwide*.

I guess I was beginning to covet the notion of a counterculture, and I began to look for clues, and follow rumours of where and what the counterculture might be. It wasn't on TV or in the daily newspapers. I found it at venues. Venues of all kinds.

When you grow up in a city, or move to a city, the biggest adventure and the most valuable reward is to find your tribe. We search for a place where we find people we share interests with, or feel comfortable with, or attracted to, or inspired by. For example, Tim Burgess of the Charlatans in his book about hunting for vinyl in record shops, says a great record shop

is like “a refuge”. The same can be true of a club, an arthouse cinema, a particular pub, a café bar, a boutique, a bookshop, a hairdressing salon, a nightclub. Music venues are not buildings or sites of activity or cultural catalysts that exist in isolation. They’re part of a network of sites that serve various scenes and tribes.

I didn’t see myself as a creative person, but I was a little unsettled, a little adventurous, not very engaged with the mainstream, and very curious. I was curious about everything, from understanding social inequality, to finding music that thrilled me more than Showaddywaddy did. In Birmingham in my teen years, I discovered an arthouse cinema in Aston called the Arts Lab, which gave me a chance to see films the mainstream cinemas and TV channels were not showing: the likes of *Lenny*, *Ashes & Diamonds*, and *Les Quatre Cents Coups*. I discovered an alternative bookshop, Prometheus, and a couple of record shops where music away from the charts was available: the Diskery, Reddington’s Rare Records, and Inferno.

There were a couple of what were called ‘greasy spoon cafes’, including one at the back of New Street Station, and another on Broad Street. Daytime, I’d meet friends in those sorts of places, to compare our vinyl record purchases and eat cheese on toast. Then, when I was old enough to venture out after dark, I started frequenting venues like Barbarella’s and the Fighting Cocks, seeing live acts like Iggy Pop, the Au Pairs, and Magazine.

After I’d arrived in Manchester, it was almost as if I replicated the network I’d enjoyed in my mid-teens in Birmingham. The pull of the local alternative bookshop was still strong; Grass Roots on Newton Street replaced Prometheus in my affections. My teenage passion for art house films stimulated by visits to the Arts Lab found an outlet at the Aaben in Hulme, where I saw *Stalker*, and *Repo Man*. In addition, my friends and I took to frequenting a handful of city-centre greasy spoon cafes, including one on John Dalton Street, and the Alesia on Newton Street. I also found night-time music venues featuring great new bands, like the Beach Club, and the Cyprus Tavern, and then, from 1982, the Hacienda.

Music venues and other places of night-time entertainment have had a central place in cities for centuries. In the early 1840s, the demand for music venues was so great that new legislation was passed: the Theatres Act of 1843 relaxed the rules governing places of entertainment, especially entertainment on licensed premises. Some informal campaigning for more music venues had taken place, including, in 1840, a march through Shoreditch, East London, which had rallied around the slogan 'Freedom for the people's amusements'.

Among clubs and venues with a central role in their cities, Nottingham's Rock City and the Barrowland ballroom in Glasgow are two examples. They have become embedded in the cultural and social life of the community in the same way that, traditionally, a university, cathedral or a factory might have done. Liam Gallagher recently explained the attraction of the Hacienda: "For people who went there it was their church".

As well as being sites of personal and communal importance, clubs and venues have had a significant role to play in shaping music history. Two rarely mentioned (but certainly worth celebrating) are the Scene, a pioneering, amphetamine-filled, mod hangout in Ham Yard, Soho, in the first years of the 1960s (Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton were among the regulars) and the Dug Out in Bristol in the mid-1980s (integral to the roots of Massive Attack, Portishead and others through the 1990s).

Britain's standing in the world has taken a few knocks over the last years, but its ability to produce an exciting, creative, and influential youth culture is as big as ever. The country's small venues are central to this; they have always been crucial in the development of the country's international reputation for innovative music and fashions. Almost all major acts and DJs fashioned the foundations for their careers performing at grassroots venues.

The country's venues and clubs not only give Britain soft power, but contribute hugely to the economy, too. The night-time economy is the UK's fifth biggest industry, annually generating £70 billion (6 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product). One of the virtues is the ease of entry. Customers become musicians. Barstaff become DJs become club promoters become venue owners.

Music venues and nightclubs invariably have close connections with record shops (for the music), boutiques (for the outfits), and neighbouring bars (for the pre-show meet-up). Music scenes also motivate, employ, and inspire work of musicians and designers, both graphic designers like Peter Saville, and clothes designers like the late Alexander McQueen.

Music venues help shape a city; the best, most significant and influential of them nurture and showcase radical, alternative music and ideas, and appeal to those seeking maverick lifestyles, the weirdos with the network of alternative hangouts, the young people disenfranchised from the prevailing culture of the city. It is a role that benefits the psychological health of a city, its sense of diversity, and its creative strength.

In recent decades, as cities have been moving towards homogeneity – becoming dominated by chain hotels, retail malls filled by the big commercial names, and coffee shops run by the major brands – the founding and survival of alternative and independent activity has never been more important.

Arguably the most significant Newport venue of recent decades was TJ's, a live music venue run by the late John Sicolo, which created and nurtured an alternative scene in the 1980s, a compelling example of the value of venues that kick against musical and cultural homogeneity. When John Sicolo died in 2010, one contributor to a BBC radio show in his honour said that TJ's was invaluable to teenagers in the Welsh valleys who weren't at home in either the "strait-jacket masculinity" of rugby clubs or the high-street discotheques.

The Hacienda played a particularly valuable role, by providing a sense of an alternative. The club is now celebrated by Manchester City Council, a tool in various tourist campaigns, and has become an obsession in the local media, but in the first few years it was open, it was barely written about in the evening newspaper, the *Manchester Evening News*.

Founded by Factory Records and New Order, the Hacienda was radical and underground, on the edge of town, often featuring music you could not hear on the radio. In the early 1980s, it was the biggest by far of several venues in the city that nurtured ad hoc communities away from the commercial mainstream. People in Manchester at the time discovered other half-hidden spaces, dancing to hi-energy in close-knit, hardcore gay clubs like the Archway, perhaps, or being immersed in the intensity and solidarity of soul nights at the Reno in Moss Side.

These small venues were something of a second home to the people who found and frequented them. They were places of acceptance and connection. Gay clubs were a haven for a community that would often face hostility elsewhere, as well as sites for positive self-expression, and adventure. Members of the black community found they were not welcome in high-street discotheques. Many clubs had a 'colour bar' (a polite phrase for 'racist door policy'), even after racial discrimination legislation outlawed such practices. In 1978, the Commission for Racial Equality took Pollyanna's in Birmingham to court, after collecting evidence that the club was routinely turning away black customers.

Mainstream nightclubs in that era were frequented by pissed-up guys desperate to fight weirdos like me. Plenty of cities were – and still are – like this. I remember talking to James Barton, who went on to be a co-founder of Cream: he said his earliest memory of nightclubbing in Liverpool was the desperate search for places where the night didn't end with a fight and someone having a pint glass pushed in their face.

I was already aware that the off-the-radar venues had the potential to be more interesting than those that were more conspicuous, and that they could be places I'd meet like-minded folk and fall in love with the music.

That is how I found myself at a club called the Man Alive, on a midweek night, among twenty-five people dancing to the outrageously uncommercial sound of 23 Skidoo. It was here that I began my DJing career, a year before I got a job at the Hacienda.

Fifteen years or so after his attempts to avoid random violence in the clubs of Liverpool, James Barton established Cream as the era-defining super-club of the 1990s. Alongside the Cavern and Eric's, Cream is one of a trio of Liverpool clubs that have made music history in the city over the last sixty years. The Cavern played host to 292 shows by the Beatles; there is no bigger or more influential band in music history. Eric's was opened by Roger Eagle in the post-punk period, during a boom in bands forming, gig-going, and small venues around the country inspiring and nurturing emerging talent. Eric's was somewhere the Clash, the Cure, and Joy Division would play, and tickets for the show would be £1.10.

The Cavern, Eric's and Cream were all part of a world of dozens of unheralded venues and a host of related activity, but without these three venues in particular, modern Liverpool would be unimaginable. From the enduring story of the Beatles and the Cavern, through the inspiration that Eric's generated in its regulars, to the energising influence of Cream, these venues have given the city its status as a music capital.

Manchester has a similar status, mostly garnered in the 1980s, although the roots were laid in the late 1970s, especially thanks to bands including Ludus, Buzzcocks, and the Fall. Factory Records are key to the Manchester story, growing from an organisation set up to host live music to become a record label, releasing music by Joy Division, A Certain Ratio, and then New Order.

As the label became more successful, New Order and the Factory clan made visits to New York venues such as Hurrah and the Danceteria. In that era, New York was falling apart and financially bankrupt, but creatively so strong. The Danceteria wasn't just a venue sparking and surfing the era's musical zeitgeist, but was also a place where culture, art, and music collided. One night the punk pioneer Richard Hell,

might perform his tough, angular guitar music. Another night, the club might feature electro breakdancing, and street art. The Beastie Boys would hang out there (before they were the Beastie Boys). Artists, including Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat were part of the Danceteria scene, and Madonna was a constant presence on the dancefloor. She bugged the talent booker at Danceteria, Ruth Polsky, for a chance to perform on the Danceteria stage. Eventually, she got to make her live debut there, warming-up for A Certain Ratio.

Taking Danceteria as a role model was part of the phenomenal ambition of the Haçienda's founders in 1982, demonstrated also by the intention laid out in the first flyer the Haçienda issued: the flyer declared the aim of the club, "To restore a sense of place". Imagine opening a club with that headlining your manifesto? That was where they were coming from. They believed in all this, and neglected to look after some of the more mundane things they could have been doing, like formulating a watertight business plan.

In the early years, the club was under-populated, but an inclusive door policy and a mix of live music, DJs, and cut-up videos on the big screens drew all manner of creative people to the space. Fashion shows were another feature of what went on at the Haçienda. I remember working on the music for one in 1986, alongside Jeff Noon who later went on to write some powerful and successful novels (including *Vurt*). Of all the achievements of the Haçienda, there is none more valuable than the way the club provided a space that creative types from all backgrounds gravitated towards.

In addition, people who gravitated towards the Haçienda, graduated from there inspired. A number of big names were motivated to take up a career in music by what they experienced at the Haçienda in the late 1980s; they went from being consumers of music, to becoming a producer, to participating in the culture. I'm thinking particularly of the French DJ Laurent Garnier, and Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands from the Chemical Brothers. Those names exemplify how important clubs and venues are as catalysts for activity outside of their wonderwalls: bands, DJs, a legacy, a mythology.

It was the same ten years earlier, at the end of the 1970s, when Eric's in Liverpool was central to the beginning of so many careers, including those of the bands Echo & the Bunnymen, and Teardrop Explodes. For Pete Dinklage, seeing the Clash play at Eric's galvanised him into becoming a singer and musician (his band, Wah Heat, went on to feature on several music press front covers and in a handful of episodes of *Top of the Pops*). Bill Drummond – later of the KLF – was another person whose career was kickstarted at Eric's; he was in a band with one of the ace faces at the venue, Jayne Casey, who, as well as being a musician, later took up a key role at Cream and then piloted Liverpool's year as Capital of Culture.

Ideas that challenge the prevailing culture can one day change it, or, at least, enrich it. Most of the venues I've mentioned began, and sometimes remained, unheralded, but ideas and inspiration they gave birth to nevertheless percolated through the world of ideas, via their graduates, most often. The story of a great venue doesn't end when the last customer leaves.

Billy's is another example. Billy's was the name given to weekly club night opened in Soho, London in the autumn of 1978, at a venue then called Gossips in the basement of 69 Dean Street. Billy's was hosted and promoted by Steve Strange, alongside his flatmate Rusty Egan who became the club's DJ. The people who organised and frequented Billy's (along with graduates of similar clubs of the era, including the Rum Runner in Birmingham, and Blitz – Strange and Egan's next venture) went on to define and disseminate a sound and a flamboyant look that became known as 'New Romantic'. The scene, which had worldwide influence had its genesis in two or three small, left-field clubs.

Perhaps it is worth pausing here, in order to underline that the significance of venues is usually only measurable in retrospect, when the seeds sown have bloomed. Many music venues and nightclubs that could lay claim to most importance in the life of cities or in the world of ideas don't look like very much.

In a dilapidated area threatened with demolition or the construction of apartments or retail developments, there could well be, down some deserted street, a pub function room or a cheaply converted warehouse basement that, to a small cell of music lovers, is their idea of the perfect venue. Maybe there, something amazing is happening that in retrospect will be historic.

In recent years I've become intrigued by the history of nightlife in the areas around Pigalle and Montmartre in Paris, especially two tiny cabaret clubs in operation over a hundred years ago: the Chat Noir, in Pigalle – frequented by painter Toulouse Lautrec, musicians Claude Debussy and Erik Satie, and poets Paul Verlaine and Jules Laforgue – and the Lapin Agile. The Lapin Agile, on the north side of Montmartre, was owned by the singer and comedian Aristide Bruant.

When Picasso arrived in Paris, at the very beginning of the 20th century he went in search of thrills and comrades, and found both at the Lapin Agile. The venue had existed for a number of decades; the haunt of artists, poets, and ne'er do wells of various sorts. For a while, also, it had been nicknamed the 'Cabaret des Assassins', after a crew of gangsters had killed the owner's son during an attempted robbery.

One of Picasso's most glorious works, *Au Lapin Agile* (1905), which features the artist himself in the venue, together with a representation of his lover Germaine Pichot, a young woman who had broken the hearts of a number of men who hung out in the bohemian cabaret clubs of Montmartre and Pigalle.

From the Chat Noir and the Lapin Agile, to Billy's and the Hacienda, many of the night-time venues that have turned out to have the most significance are what might be called 'dives', although few have ever been as grotty as the Cavern in Liverpool, which stank of sweat, mould, disinfectant, and stale onions. Paul McCartney's father offered a ton of encouragement to his son, but he was never fan of the Cavern. "You should be paid danger money to go down there," he told Paul.

The cheap, out-of-the-way, undercapitalised venues are the ones that attract risk-takers and pioneers – those with the mad ideas and ludicrous ambitions, who have nothing to lose. That is when cultural activity is at its most exciting and effervescent, creating new scenes and future possibilities, with inspired and maverick pioneers ignoring or pushing against the mainstream – even if, as with the New Romantics, for example, they become the new mainstream. But that is fascinating, too: how misfit kids and talented rebels gathered under a mirror-ball between four walls of a venue can knock culture into a new phase.

I would not denigrate or wish away any art galleries, or other major cultural institutions, in any cities around the world. Indeed, the positive impact of places like the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the Sage in Gateshead are undeniable. But a healthy, participatory culture needs more than the kind of high-profile cultural emporia that public policy and City Council initiatives have fixated on in the past.

In 2015, Manchester's council leader Sir Richard Leese listed the good news about various major cultural institutions in the city, describing all these sparkly buildings as the city's "cultural provision" which, he said, "draws in tourism and attracts wider inward investment by positioning the city as an international centre for culture and the arts". The assumption is that culture in the city is whatever is contained in these buildings. And the language is instructive: "cultural provision". Something provided for us? Something we have an entirely passive relationship to? That art and culture is solely something we can consume? That culture in the city is just a pawn in a city's relentless civic boosterism.

But so much that is great about culture in Manchester exists outside the cultural institutions; in the dodgy venues, the rehearsal rooms, the uncontrolled spaces, artists' studios, the basements and the streets. The fact is, great ideas come from the margins. The Hacienda was as glitzy as you would expect an old warehouse opposite huge rusting gas holders on Whitworth Street West to be. Hip hop was born in the Bronx. Picasso spent more time in cabaret clubs like the Lapin Agile than he did in the Louvre.

It intrigues me about how we find our tribe, our places to hang out in cities – as I did when I was a Birmingham teen, as Wylie did in Liverpool, as Picasso did in Paris, and we all do, consciously or not; I curated my own urban networks.

In many cases, if we don't find somewhere, we make our own space, maybe collaborate, maybe create a little cell of like minds, as Roger Eagle did at Eric's, and Steve Strange and Rusty Egan did at Billy's. They were resourceful and passionate enough to begin their own projects, animate a space their way, and make their own culture. This for-love-not-money and do-it-yourself process has underpinned so much activity after dark.

At night, there's a transformation on the streets; encounters and interactions have a different quality from those in the daytime. Many in the LGBT+ community will know this: how daytimes closeted at work and night-times out and empowered, are very different.

Life after dark in music venues and nightclubs in towns and cities can be chaotic and perilous, something of a secret time, a lost time, when in our actions what is normal doesn't apply, a chance for some casual flirting or sexual encounter, to seek pleasures, to look different, to be different, to be lost in music, to indulge in some daft craziness.

Life after dark is often hidden, and more than occasionally, it's on the edge of the law or in defiance of it: it has a history of dark corners, gangland protection rackets, errant doormen, moral panics, ecstasy deaths. But it also has so much potential – to be exciting, creative, an adventure, and an escape.

Night-time venues have the potential to be sacred spaces in cities, which is why so often news of the closure of venues by inept council planners, or rapacious property developers is often greeted like a dagger in the heart of the city, with shock and mourning.

In London, an unholy alliance of property developers, planners and councils have attempted to monetise every acre of the city, prioritising retail and apartments and bulldozing music venues. New protests at this cultural vandalism have been triggered, with people back on the streets, once again demanding freedom for the people's amusements.

If councils and planners had the imagination to turn away from the cavalier approach to clubs and venues, there are a number of things that I could suggest they do in order to nurture and defend nightlife.

First, to understand the value of clubs and venues and their key role in creating an attractive, healthy town or city. After all, no-one has ever moved away from somewhere because there are too many exciting things to do. Planners will need to appreciate how music venues and other underground, off-the-radar cultural spaces can be precious communities, offering escape and alternatives, and that the risk-takers and pioneers setting up in insalubrious surroundings are giving life to a city. Picasso falling out of a cabaret bar, half mad with absinthe, and with the wrong girl on his arm: in all things – art, music, retail, architecture – the margins, not the mainstream, give a city its authenticity, its quirks and its soul.

Second, if they wish to take into consideration what conditions need to be in place to nurture a thriving local art and music scene, then my advice is: don't get obsessed with funded, sponsored, box-ticking activity; and don't measure cultural success by footfall, or BBC Radio Four coverage. Cultural activity can be underground, challenging, oppositional, and uncomfortable, and not always PR-friendly. Art is not obliged to make us feel comfortable. Life is untidy, and art can be too. Stephen Sondheim says, "Art, in itself, is an attempt to bring order out of chaos". I respectfully but totally disagree. That's not art, that's cutting a hedge. Art reflects what it's like to be human, flawed, on the cusp of falling apart.

In short: resist the spread of corporatized, commercialised and controlled spaces. Try not to control things too much. Don't kill all the chaos.

Third, we should address an issue that could justify active intervention: the provision of cheap space. Thirty and forty years ago, in the post-industrial era, businesses and people were deserting city centres. This provided cheap ad hoc space galore for music venues and clubs, in or among the semi-derelict warehouses, factories, basements, office buildings, and old cinemas in New York, London, Manchester, Liverpool and other cities. Perhaps it is time for the authorities to take on more of an enabling role. Now, post-gentrification, it is far harder to access those cheap, informal spaces that the marginal creative world needs in order to exist.

The availability of cheap space is vital. Perhaps ways can be found to help creative businesses run by individuals or co-ops own the land, the footprint of their businesses, as a defence against the whims or plans of a big business developer: property ownership by the sector, for the sector. Other, related, actions are possible, including demarcating areas as cultural quarters, offering rent and rates discounts, and, of course, pursuing a considerate planning policy.

Fourth, anyone with a hand on levers of power or influence – including educators – should do whatever is necessary to encourage participation in culture; it's the only way to keep ideas alive. Music is such a great vehicle for this, with so many roles to play, and so few barriers: a career playing maracas, carrying sound equipment, making Facebook videos, designing the sleeves for limited edition vinyl releases. The healthiest towns and cities are not built only on consumption but creative invention, too.

A local music scene has personal, cultural and economic impacts, but giving people a stake in local culture also intensifies the collective experience. We witnessed this in the aftermath of the terror attack at the Manchester Arena in May 2017, when music and the local music scene played such an important role in articulating the city's pride and togetherness. A block of apartments could never have the positive impact on a city that a music venue can.

Unfortunately, without a shift in thinking, gentrification will continue, and the narrative familiar in many cities around the world will continue to be repeated. In a forgotten part of town, a bright spark finds cheap space, their activity repopulates it, brings some buildings back into use, and creates activity which transforms the area, but then making the area attractive draws the attention of planners and developers, who sweep away the venues to replace them with buildings considered more lucrative.

It is key that such cultural spaces should not be considered to be servants of some bigger plan, but a positive result in their own right. They are not tilling the soil until big business can come along and cash in.

An example of this is the story of an area in Liverpool that has become known as the Baltic Triangle. The Baltic is now a Northern hotspot of culture, creativity and night-time excitement, but it wasn't like this twenty years ago. It was a rundown, deserted part of Liverpool. In the first decades of the 20th century, the area was once packed with warehouses and terraced housing. Recession in the 1970s finished the process that wartime bombing and post-war clearances had begun; businesses and people were replaced by derelict warehouses and just a few small industries, such as MOT garages, set up in tin sheds and makeshift workshops.

The Baltic has move into a new era in the last 20 years thanks to the creatives who took advantage of the cheap space and saw the potential, and the venues that followed. Now, though, all this activity has attracted developers wishing to build residential apartments for those attracted to the nightlife and culture. Some of the pioneers are already being pushed out, and one landmark venue – Constellations – has recently announced that its lease is up, and that as a venue it is not part of the developer's plan after 2019.

In those grim days, at the very beginning of the new millennium, the Council decided to intervene. Their idea was to create two "managed prostitution zones" in the Baltic Triangle around Newhall Street and

Crump Street, near what is now Constellations. The plan was never delivered, after the Home Office ruled out the use of such zones in 2005.

By this time, however, if you knew where to look, things were happening, including regular gigs at the New Picket music venue in New Bird Street. In addition, Jayne Casey – graduate of Eric’s, and ex-member of the Cream team – had co-created an arts venue, the A Foundation, in the area, attracting artists and creatives to the derelict streets and beginning the revival of the area in earnest.

A not-for-profit company, Baltic Creative, began to refurbish the warehouses and sheds. A large red-brick warehouse in Parliament Street was occupied by Elevator Studios (it now hosts dozens of digital and creative businesses). Music venues like Camp & Furnace and Constellations are part of what makes Liverpool an attractive place to live, or come to study in. According to Baltic Triangle Area CIC figures, more than three million visits were made to the area over the course of just one year. Baltic Triangle Area CIC board member Liam Kelly has rightly described the area as, “a clear example of what culture and creativity can do to change the face and spirit of a place”.

Liverpool has had more than its fair share of venue closures. Eric’s has long gone, and in 2015, Nation (the home of Cream) and The Kazimier, which had brought life to Wolstenholme Square, became victims of the success they had made re-energising the area, and were closed in order to make room for new city centre developments.

Constellations, and venues like the Duoivision art gallery on Stanhope Street, face an uncertain future. In interviews, Liam Kelly is adamant the narrative needs to be changed: “It should shift the conversation not to ‘how do we build over this?’ but to ‘how do we build on this?’”

The search among unsettled types for alternatives to a world suffocated by homogeneity and a predictable mainstream, and the hunger for excitement and the appeal of life after dark, are undimmed.

However unconvinced we could be that councils and big business will ever change the narrative, we can always be assured that there will be passionate malcontents, artists, and music lovers who are going to be resourceful enough to find new spaces for like-minded people to gather, find self-expression and an identity.

DJing, I still occasionally play *My House is your House (And your House is Mine)* nearly thirty years after it was released. And why not? The music still resonates, and the spirit of life after dark is as strong as ever. It is still a joy for me, witnessing it happen; people gather, the music plays, and thirty seconds later strangers are brothers and sisters.



Dave Haslam

In the 1980s, Dave Haslam booked bands into small venues throughout Manchester, hosting shows early in the careers of bands including Primal Scream, and Sonic Youth. He then DJ'd more than 450 times at the legendary Hacienda club in Manchester, mostly in the late 1980s. He has DJ'd worldwide, including Paris, Detroit, Berlin, Ibiza, New York, Lima, and Geneva, and at afterparties for New Order, Gorillaz, and Depeche Mode.

He has written for *NME*, *The Face*, *The Guardian*, and elsewhere, and written five books, including *Life After Dark*, the definitive history of British nightclubs and music venues.

In his latest book, *Sonic Youth Slept on My Floor* – his memoirs published in May 2018 – he documents encounters with inspiring characters including David Byrne, Nile Rodgers, Tracey Thorn, John Peel, Mark E Smith, and John Lydon. Gilles Peterson of BBC 6 Music declared *Sonic Youth Slept on My Floor* the 'Book of the Year'.



Claire Doherty (Editor)

Claire Doherty is an arts director, producer and writer.

Previously, Claire Doherty was Director at Arnolfini (2017-19) and was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering arts producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed MBE for Services to the Arts in the New Year's Honours List 2016.

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Where Strangers Meet

An international collection of essays on arts in the public realm.

The urbanist Richard Sennett has written that ‘the public realm can simply be defined as a place where strangers meet’. As the number of us living in cities rises, the pressures on the shared spaces of a city will increase; the places in which our future relationships to one another are negotiated. This is particularly resonant for the British Council, an international organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents through arts, education, science and the English language. Building on its multifocal work in cities, the British Council commissioned a collection of essays to explore different perspectives on how artistic and cultural experiences affect individual and collective participation and action in the public realm.

For 80 years the British Council has worked in cities in over 100 countries worldwide. The British Council is now responding through research and programmes to the changing urban dynamics affecting citizens and institutions globally, including the impact of globalisation and technological and political change. Work in cities also forms part of our response to some of the world’s current challenges including migration and security. This collection is intended to strengthen our global offer to collaborators and audiences by demonstrating how the power of the arts and creative exchange can be harnessed to make cities more open, dynamic, inclusive and fit for the future.

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