



Elmgreen and
Dragset's *Elmgreen
& Dragset | Too
Late*, Victoria Miro,
London, 2008.
Photo: Alex Atwater.
Courtesy of the artists
and Victoria Miro

MADISON MOORE

NIGHTLIFE AS FORM

I. TOO LATE

Nobody wants to arrive on time to a party. You always want to be a little bit late—not *too* late, *fashionably* late, just as long as you're not the first one to arrive. The room hasn't had time to warm up. People haven't had enough to drink. Besides, you've got to make an entrance. "If you're going to appear you might as well *appear*."¹ *Too Late*, a 2008 installation by the Berlin-based creative duo Elmgreen and Dragset, explores the ephemeral nature of nightlife in a series of familiar social sculptures about the club experience. Held at the Victoria Miro gallery in London, the 2008 installation transformed the gallery space into a full-scale nightclub complete with all the trimmings: a dimly lit coat check room, a DJ booth outfitted with working Technics turntables and mixer, a separate lounge area, and a bathroom stall with two "people" inside who are doing who knows what.

For the artists, *Too Late* is about "a party that's already over: lights are still blinking and the disco ball sadly spinning, but there's no-one on the dance floor, and the last round has been served long ago."² In "(Un)Lucky Strike," for instance—the lounge area of the installation—we see a giant disco ball sitting on the ground, empty glasses on the dance floor and tables nearby, and finished cigarettes. The overall mood of the piece is that you've just missed a blowout. In some ways the work highlights the power of nightlife as the desire not to "miss out" on an unnamed or unknown something—a new friend, a sex or romantic partner, a funny story, a mishap. How does the saying go? You just *had* to be there, and if you weren't, well, you missed out.

The idea of "missing out" on something is about the exponential potential of an event, or what the philosopher Brian Massumi has called the "just-beginning-to-stir."³ As Massumi sees it, the just-beginning-to-stir is a theory that explains how space holds anticipatory energy *before* an event, an energy that will eventually transform our experience and bring us to a new state of emotions. Staying in, or being too late, means potentially missing out on a range of possible emotional stimuli.



Elmgreen & Dragset
| *Too Late*, London,
2008. Photo: Thierry
Bal. Courtesy of the
artists and
Victoria Miro

Aside from notions of night/time temporality and lateness, as an installation *Too Late* also highlights an undertheorized aspect of the nightlife economy: that nightlife is a staged experience. Scholars of nightlife, taking a red-hot approach to culture, have focused primarily on nightlife as a political economy, as media or youth culture, or as queer space, but have not always pointed to club culture's theatrical elements.⁴ In an ethnography of the way University of Pennsylvania students experience nightlife in Philadelphia, sociologist David Grazian paints an exciting portrait of nightlife as reliant on "strategies of stagecraft and theatrical excess."⁵ Art theorist Pascal Gielen has pointed out how "the social scene," distinct from "subculture," is still an untouched area of research.⁶ And as I have written elsewhere, nightlife doesn't just happen. We show up at the bar or club and expect the club experience to already be laid out for us. But clubs need to be staged, lit, and set designed in much the same way as a piece of theater or performance work to properly set the tone for the social scene of the evening.⁷

In addition to being a staged experience, nightlife is also a creative space, a laboratory for experimental new ideas in self-presentation, art, performance culture, music, fashion, and design. It is my view that nightclubs work simultaneously as spaces of entertainment, where we go to have fun and to distract ourselves from the pressures

of contemporary capitalism; spaces of performance, where we go to experiment with identity and put on what Grazian has called a “nocturnal self,”⁸ or that special body we become at nighttime; and spaces of creativity, which foster the incubation of brand-new developments across the media and visual arts. If it’s new and exciting, it’s probably happening in a nightclub.

Despite the inherent creative energy of club culture in cities around the world, mayors have cracked down on the local club scene, making it the subject of moral but more often real estate constraints and restrictions. Today, nightlife is a multibillion-dollar industry that consists of niche markets vying for a targeted clientele. One 2014 report valued the global electronic dance music industry at \$6.2 billion, a figure that includes clubs, music festivals, the purchase of DJ equipment and software, DJ earnings, and club tourism.⁹ In New York City some figures show the nightlife industry generating over \$1 billion in revenue and nearly \$10 billion in economic activity for the region. Nightlife industries in New York account for more than 95,000 jobs, and more than 65 million people go out in the city every year.¹⁰

At the same time a number of clubs and bars suffer from the reality or serious threat of closure. Community ordinances and noise violations, conservative political leaders, real estate developers, mayors, and other governmental entities are cracking down on club culture all around the world, making it more challenging than ever for clubs to stay open or to open at all. In December 2014 Fabric, one of the best-known venues for electronic music in London, choked under the threat of closure due to drug-related deaths.¹¹ Only a few weeks later Plastic People, the tiny, much-loved basement venue that was home to dubstep and experimental electronic music, closed suddenly.¹² Since then a number of legendary gay bars and clubs in London’s Soho have also shut, typically because of gentrification and real estate interest, the irony being of course that nightlife is one of the ingredients that makes undesirable urban areas hot in the first place.

What nightlife antagonists fail to understand, and the point I would like to underscore here, is that without nightlife, without clubs and tiny bars, we lose one of the most crucial sites for the production of selves, as well as a primary incubator and source of popular culture. Narratives of and references to nightlife pop up throughout the history of modern art and contemporary art and visual culture, from Manet’s 1882 *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* and Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s 1991 *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, incomplete without the live go-go dancer on top, to a contemporary New York gallery’s recent reimagining of AREA, one of the most iconic New York nightclubs of the 1980s. AREA pioneered the concept of the nightclub as art and was a creative home to artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, and Julian Schnabel.¹³ If the nightclub is art, then we need club spaces not to drink in or meet people to hook up with, as if these are bad things, but to help foster new artistic energy. A nightclub is a space of exhibition, perhaps even exhibitionism, but also of innovation. Clubs afford

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amateur, new, and up-and-coming artists in many genres the opportunity to hone their craft, a place to bring new ideas to test in front of a live studio audience, often for the very first time.

But what is it about the club experience, in all of its interdisciplinarity, that can give birth to a new style of music, an art style, a fashion or hair trend, or a new sense of self? What makes nightlife so exciting?

II. UNDER THE CLOAK OF DARKNESS

In 1915 Eugenia Kelly, a wealthy, young, and party-going New York socialite, found herself in deep, highly publicized trouble. As soon as she returned to New York City from a quick weekend getaway Eugenia was arrested, right in the middle of Pennsylvania Station, not because she stole or committed any crimes but because her mother thought she partied too much. Eugenia was out of control. Mrs. Kelly said her daughter frequented “cabarets nightly with *evil* companions.”¹⁴ Frustrated by her daughter’s drinking habits and party-hopping ways, Mrs. Kelly was determined to save Eugenia by having her institutionalized. And so, knowing it was unlikely Eugenia would seek help herself, Mrs. Kelly arranged a surprise arrest right at the train station, and the young Miss Kelly was apprehended by both a private officer and a police detective and served with the arrest warrant her mother instigated.¹⁵

According to testimony, Mrs. Kelly was worried because her daughter regularly returned home between 3 and 4 a.m. from nights of partying.¹⁶ When questioned about why she went out so late and so frequently, Eugenia, who did not understand the problem with her going-out habits, responded blankly: “Why, if I didn’t go to at least six cabarets a night I would lose my social standing.”¹⁷ Being able to stay out as late as she wanted, enjoying as many cabarets as possible, shows how for Eugenia Kelly nightlife was a space for her to develop herself for herself, to flirt with a culture outside of the high-minded, wealthy circles she grew up in.

In 1920s New York the term *nightlife* referred specifically to elaborate spaces for dining, drinking, and socializing.¹⁸ The capital of fabulous nightlife at the time was Harlem, also the center of black cultural production. White New Yorkers flocked to Harlem hot spots like the Cotton Club and Connie’s Inn to witness the spectacle of blackness firsthand while black Harlemites held secret, invite-only rent parties in private apartments.¹⁹ In *Nightclubs*, a 1931 book about the cultural impact of the nightclub in American culture, the comedian, actor, and nightclub promoter Jimmy Durante described the feel of Harlem this way: “Harlem! Fifteen minutes on the subway and you were right in the middle of Broadway, where all the big shots played the bazoo . . . Yes, sir, on my way! There were cabarets and cafes down there that were the talk of the world. That’s where I wanted to go.”²⁰ Novelists like Carl Van Vechten, a patron of the Harlem Renaissance, fictionalized and further promoted the Harlem party scene in his



works *Nigger Heaven* (1926) and *Parties* (1930). Van Vechten once even held a “gossip party” where attendees sauntered around the room and repeated the worst things about each other.²¹

How can we account for the endless allure of nightlife and club culture? To start, nightlife is a time for storytelling, a place tucked away from the spotlight, and where fantasies and unknown desires come to fruition.²² In the early twentieth century, nightlife created brand-new opportunities for people like Eugenia Kelly to explore and express their sexuality and personhood away from the tight confines of domesticity and the stuffy veils of aristocracy. But as the historian Lewis Erenberg has shown, it also allowed revelers to distance themselves from the grind of daily life to pursue hidden desires and fantasies, all while cloaked in the deep end of anonymity. Through darkness, audiences transition out of their domestic, private selves and go in search of a “wider life.”²³ For Erenberg, the first forty years of the long twentieth century demonstrate how nightlife institutions installed broad social changes in American culture, the most important of these changes being challenging staid Victorian ideals of family and domesticity.

Matthew Day's
Untitled (Things That Matter), Day for
Night, Performance
Space, Sydney,
2015. Photo: Alex
Davies. Courtesy of
Performance Space

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Meeus van Dis's
Remarks on Colour,
Trouw, Amsterdam,
2014. Photo: Abel
Minée. Courtesy of
TrouwAmsterdam

All told, what really attracted Eugenia Kelly to nightlife and to the creativity of the club scene—and, actually, the rest of us, too—is darkness and the enormous possibilities that it allows. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw darkness emerge as a potent source of creative inspiration for writers, photographers, composers, and painters from John Sloan to Georgia O'Keeffe and Berenice Abbott. Night-themed art, for instance, was a result of the increasing objectification of nightness and the uncertainty of darkness, particularly in the age of electrification.²⁴ In Abbott's 1932 *Night View (New York at Night, Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Avenue, West Side, 34th and 33rd Streets)* we see an aerial image of a glowing New York City, with its wide avenues and shimmering buildings. There's no sky in the photograph, only tall buildings absolutely bursting with electricity, the image itself fascinated by the visual intercourse between darkness and electricity.

Darkness is where the creative potential of nightlife lurks. If daytime is marked by surveillance, then nighttime is noticeable for its freedoms. As Bryan Palmer observes in *Cultures of Darkness*, a broad history of how darkness facilitates cultural disobedience, the night differs from daylight because it is defined by secrets. And with darkness comes the dual threat of danger and potential. Darkness, broadly speaking, is an event,

a “just-beginning-to-stir,” to revisit the term, one that “offers escape from the drudgeries of the day, the routines that define humanity in specific duties, obligations, and tasks.”²⁵ For Palmer, nighttime has always been the adopted home of a group of cultural fugitives he calls “the deviant, the dissident, the different,”²⁶ those social outcasts who often find acceptance and freedom from the constraints of life and under the cloak of darkness.

But darkness does more than produce clandestine histories: it is the only time of day when “human expression was not as easily subjected to the surveillance of high noon or blinded by the light of day.”²⁷ The freedom from surveillance that darkness affords leads to acts of liberation, for sure, but also to heightened creativity and human expression. It allows the deviant, the dissident, and the different to test limitations and to break free of restrictions and social constraints. Because nightlife is experienced as a kind of Bakhtinian time frame bracketed off from the typical work day, shrouded in darkness, danger, and the pursuit of exciting pleasures, it is always already an ideal site for acts of transgression, possibility, and innovation.

A detour. Walk into a club or bar at prime time, when the place is booming, and notice how dark the space looks. There will be lighting, though very little, and some of the best clubs do have fascinating lighting design, as we will see, but in general the lighting in club spaces is always meant to manage impressions. Clubs are lit to create an illusion, a visual spectacle, not to state the facts. The only time all the house lights come on in a club during the course of an evening is when the party is over, when the curtains are drawn on the illusion, when it is *too late*. Nightclubs are dimly lit on purpose because, as theatrical spaces, clubs use creative lighting to help hide imperfections in the clientele and in the space itself, as well as contributing visually to the fantasy of nightlife.²⁸

Lighting is one area where Elmgreen and Dragset’s *Too Late* succeeds in conveying the allure of nightlife. In the autobiographically titled “All Those Parties I Was Never Invited To,” a vignette from the installation, we see a dimly lit DJ booth where the only sources of light seem to be coming from the turntables themselves, a dim white wall with cut-up photographs of naked bodies, and a back wall decorated with purple and blue neon bottles. Even the cloak room, “Last Guest,” is a fairly dim neon red. Dark lighting in club settings lends the room a sense of energetic potential.

Curious about the staging of nightlife in a real club setting, I approached Gregory Alexander, a Los Angeles-based artist and producer of the high-sensory-impact party A Club Called Rhonda, and asked him why dimly or creatively lit nightclub spaces produce strong emotions in partygoers. For Alexander, it all has to do with creating a sense of freedom.

If you could do anything you wanted, what would you do? “You’re not in broad daylight and you can feel a little bit more free to express yourself without the judgment and preexisting roles that daytime can force on us. You’re not at your job, you’re not

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with your biological family necessarily.”²⁹ Here, Alexander’s theory of darkness joins similar ideas by other socialites and partygoers before him, but he also describes an important difference. Darkness is not just about secrecy or doing outrageous things on the down low: it’s about testing the limits of what you can get away with creatively, socially, and artistically.

“Someone doing drag for the first time doesn’t just go out and suddenly start shooting flawless pictures,” he joked. “He might wear a little bit of face one weekend, then the next weekend he might go out in a wig, and the weekend after that he might be in a full look. I don’t know where people would congregate or try out new ideas without nightlife.”³⁰ For Alexander, as for Eugenia Kelly before him, nightlife is the space where people can safely step aside from their daytime personalities to fully experiment and play with their nocturnal selves. Freedom, anonymity, and darkness make nightlife a creative space to test out new ideas or personas. Think about the queen who wears a men’s suit every day and who works as an investment banker, for whom Saturday night is the one day of the week he gets to put on a pair of pumps, a little bit of face, and feel fabulous.

III. NIGHTLIFE AS FORM; OR, THE CLUB AESTHETIC

I’m in Amsterdam specifically to go to Trouw, a nightclub, restaurant, and art space located a few metro stops away from the Amsterdam Central Station. Though the club stayed open for five years it was always meant to be temporary. “It’s the only way,” Trouw owner Olaf Boswijk told me when I asked about his interest in temporary spaces, “because all the energy is going to that focal point on our side as the people running it. So suddenly we’re doing all our most crazy ideas like doing a book or crazy exhibitions or amazing nights because we know we’re going to end.”³¹ This is the club as a pop-up, a five-year happening.

My phone died a while ago, so I don’t know what time it is, but I do know I’ve already been in the club several hours dancing, meeting people, hanging out. It’s dark, smoky. At some point I get tired of dancing so I stand still and look out, watch the crowd. I watch them flirt, dance, drink, kiss, sit, smoke, talk, mingle, take drugs, but I’m doing too much watching apparently because a girl next to me asks why I’m not dancing. “It’s such good music!” she shouts in my ear, so I start moving again.

As a scholar of nightlife and a lover of clubs I’ve been to all kinds of venues in cities around the world. But Trouw feels really unique. Unlike most other nightlife venues in Amsterdam, which are located in close proximity to youth hostels and fast-food joints right in the city center, Trouw is a bit more of a destination. You go to Trouw if you know about Trouw—not that it’s exclusive or really a secret, it’s just off the beaten path, so you have to work harder to get there. You didn’t go to Trouw because it was convenient or near a ton of other clubs you didn’t like or couldn’t get into. You went because you wanted to be in Trouw.

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I first learned about Trouw months before going for the first time, because I saw an image of the venue's iconic lighting design on a music blog. I was fascinated. Held in a former newspaper factory where a paper also called Trouw was printed (it still exists), the main club room was a long rectangle, an effect that creates an immediate point of visual interest. In the image I saw on the Internet the room was full of people, dark but flooded by a stream of twelve fluorescent yellow lights. Produced by Dutch light artist Meeus van Dis, the fluorescent light tubes dangled from the ceiling and traveled at a diagonal down the center of the room. What I didn't know until I arrived in the club itself was that there were even more strobes and light tubes hidden on the stage, behind the DJ booth, in the ceiling, and along the massive concrete walls. They boomed on and off with different colors, patterns, and rhythms to punctuate emotional highs brought on by the music. I'd never seen anything like it.

To get to Trouw, a nightclub in an old factory that had essentially remained untouched, you took the 51/53/54 metro from Amsterdam Central Station and got out

Emma Maye Gibson (AKA Betty Grumble)'s *Betty Grumble: Witchy Woman*, Day for Night, Sydney, 2015. Photo: Alex Davies. Courtesy of Performance Space

at Wibautstraat, an unremarkable area that felt a lot farther away from a big city than just two metro stops. As you approached the venue you weren't sure if it was a nightclub or an office building, but because of the way the bass rattled through the building and outside of it, creating a sense of something "just-beginning-to-stir," or actually a pot that has been brewing, you knew you were in the right place. You made your way into the club, past the security guards, down two sets of metal stairs, and suddenly you fell onto the booming, gritty edge of art, music, fashion, and performance.

"One of the philosophies behind this place," Trouw owner Olaf Boswijk told me when I asked about what makes Trouw unique, "is to be a little city within the city. And that's why we have a restaurant, we have an arts program. It's a club, there's concerts, it's a twenty-four-hour license, so there really shouldn't be any need to leave. That's the whole idea: there's always another experience around the corner in another room."³²

What I loved most about Trouw, and which has since influenced my thinking about nightlife as a creative space, is how the club straddled a line between fashion, creativity, contemporary art, and cutting-edge dance music.³³ Or, put differently, the red-hot nightclub doubled as an arts institution. Nearly everyone behind the now-closed Trouw was an artist and used the club space to explore and test out new aesthetic ideas. As music producer and Trouw resident DJ William Kouam Djoko told me, "Trouw was *the place* for new ideas for me over the last five years." Knowing he'd been a resident DJ at Trouw and that he'd produced his own parties in the venue, I was curious about whether he felt that nightclubs, and Trouw specifically, were spaces where new ideas were born. "Clubs are there for new insights," he would eventually admit. "What I always say is that it's weird for me to be an artist at my job doing my work (as a DJ) while everyone is over there at the same time celebrating they're off from work. That's always a weird paradox."³⁴

As a multibillion-dollar cultural industry, nightlife offers a number of scenes for whatever you're into. If you want a gay sex club experience, you might feel at home in Pittsburgh or in Berlin. If you're well-heeled, have a lot of money to burn, and want to see quirky performance art while you enjoy an expensive bottle of champagne, then you can go to The Box in London—if you can manage to get in. Or if it's summertime and you feel like raving on an island with thousands of people you don't know, head to Ibiza. The point is that every scene, every niche market, and every musical style has a nighttime economy built around it.

Though nightlife does always require elaborate staging and the illusory possibilities of stage production—anything done to a space to set the mood—not all nightlife is inherently artistic in nature. Some clubs offer a purely commercial, fast-food-style experience based on high cover charges and minimal return on the investment. The drinks are expensive, the music just ok, and the whole experience is so-so. What I'm trying to point to is the importance of other, more interdisciplinary venues run by artists who

take the total integration of art, music, fashion, and performance in the nightlife experience seriously. In contrast to the fast-food style of nightlife, at Trouw there was always a person in an interesting look, or an interesting design element you overlooked, or a lighting effect on the dance floor you didn't expect. The entire experience felt curated.

Boswijk told me his venue was there to support local artists, particularly the club's light artists Meeus van Dis and Children of the Light. "We've basically given them a space and a playground. They've never had a really big budget, but they always got complete artistic freedom. Clubs are the place where a lot of creatives and a lot of artistic ideas are born. [Meeus van Dis and Children of the Light] are all being picked up now by major arts institutions."³⁵ But in addition to providing an experimental playground for creatives, Boswijk described how, during the last two years of the club's existence, Trouw brought contemporary art to the club space and the Saturday night experience itself: "We try to do more experience art, installations, or video art or lights. . . . People like you, normal clubbers who might be interested in music, might be interested in art, stumble upon it. . . . They don't buy a ticket to a museum or to a white cube gallery. Suddenly there's a door open and you walk in and it's there, but it's high quality from a major institution just brought out of its context."³⁶

Of course, Trouw is not the only contemporary nightclub or arts institution to directly engage with the connection between art and nightlife. Berghain, a Berlin-based gay techno club with a mixed clientele, recently held an exhibition in an unused portion of the club showcasing the work of the many visual artists who work for the venue.³⁷ This is aside from the images by the German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans that dot the club's spaces, or its adventurous musical programming. As an arts institution Berghain has featured a ballet, as well as performances by up-and-coming electronic musicians, in addition to its marathon Saturday-to-Monday weekenders. In New York, the Warm Up summer series produced by PSI, the contemporary art wing of MOMA, regularly features interactive or cross-disciplinary performance works at the gallery in tandem with cutting-edge electronic music and outdoor sculptures.

Jeff Khan, the artistic director of Performance Space in Sydney, Australia, a leading center for performance art, believes in the power of nightlife as a special type of creative expression. This philosophy of nightlife was on display in a special 2015 exhibition curated by Khan called *Day for Night*, where the boundaries between club spaces, queer performance, and art were strictly blurred. "At their best," Khan told me, "nightclubs are experimental spaces. They're spaces of play, of permissiveness, and they are spaces of performance as well. And I think beyond the idea that you might go to a club and see a performance by a DJ or a drag queen, there's such a performativity to nightclubbing as an act. They are interesting spaces of really heightened performativity, particularly from a queer perspective. It's through costume and clothing and dancing and a different kind of socializing than you are permitted in everyday life."³⁸

The idea of the party as an exhibition or multidisciplinary creative space could stretch back in popular culture to Andy Warhol's Factory, but even his first ever solo exhibition, held at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in 1965, was a party. Into the '70s, during the disco era, popular culture saw the increased glamorization of nightlife due to the sensational visual spectacles of clubs like Studio 54. By the '80s entire magazines dedicated to nightlife had emerged, and these magazines created narratives of nightlife as art form for popular consumption.

One of the best-known publications was *Details*, the hip, downtown New York magazine that launched in June 1982 and includes many of the first creative contributions by contemporary legends André Leon Talley, Patrick McMullen, Michael Musto, and Bill Cunningham. Currently published by Condé Nast, which also publishes all nineteen editions of *Vogue*, today *Details* is a men's magazine with a primary focus on making style accessible for a metrosexual male audience. Yet in its original incarnation *Details* was the diary of cultural happenings and observations of the New York downtown creative scene and its nightlife.

Downtown is a term that generally refers to the area below 14th Street in Manhattan.³⁹ But according to New York City historian Marvin Taylor, "downtown" is conceptual as much as it is geographical. Downtown is a subversive aesthetic sensibility that emerged in the mid-1970s, one that, as Taylor describes, "is synonymous with experimentation. Experimentation with art, sex, drugs, rock and roll."⁴⁰ As former *Village Voice* columnist Michael Musto describes, downtown presented an exercise in sensory stimulation, "a state of mind so fabulous that, unless there's a guest list for public transportation too, all it needs to travel is a token."⁴¹ This downtown state-of-mind was about a new attitude toward aesthetic production that unhinged the stern boundaries that separated different kinds of art making. For Marvin Taylor, downtown "was not a new aesthetic, not a new style, and not a unified movement, but rather an attitude toward the possibilities and production of art."⁴² While I agree with Taylor's definition of *downtown* and its New York specificity, I want to call this aesthetic what it really is: not so much a downtown aesthetic but a *club* aesthetic, or the nightlife as art form, where creative experiments taking place in nightclubs operating as arts institutions reveal the possibilities for the production of art, fashion, music, and popular culture.

As seen in Trouw, Berghain, and "downtown," just to cite these few venues, the club aesthetic is exciting because it already understands how to tear down meaningless boundaries between the arts. It knows how to be interdisciplinary. The club aesthetic understands that the dark club environment offers promises of experimentation and fantasy next to dimly lit corners of freedom. Nightclubs, then, are spaces of exhibition, where new artworks, musical styles, fashions, and other creative endeavors are played with and perfected.

IV. SCENES

Nightlife as art form is primarily about the production of scenes, alternative spaces removed from the “appropriateness” of the mainstream. As the art theorist Pascal Gielen has observed, “We do not refer to ‘the scene’ in relation to civil servants, bankers, the police, or heterosexuals; but we do refer to the art scene, the theater scene, the gay scene, and, not to be forgotten, the drug or criminal scene.”⁴³ For Gielen, the characteristic that links the art scene with the theater scene or the criminal scene with the gay scene is innovation and creativity. Because scenes are public, scene makers need to constantly come up with new ways to go against what is socially acceptable in order to keep up and to keep their activities unknowable.⁴⁴

Scenes typically refer to a kind of specialized knowledge about musical styles, art trends, venues, hot spots, designers, or other headlines related to a particular scene’s area of interest. This specialized social knowledge creates a sense of community, but even beyond that the scene also shares much with the promises of darkness I explored above. As media theorist Alan Blum notes, scenes are typically oriented around the night, though not necessarily nightclubs. That’s because scenes are about secrecy, or “differential access to what it celebrates.” As Blum sees it, “there is an esoteric aura connected with any scene which often makes knowledge of its whereabouts a problem for outsiders or for those new to the city.”⁴⁵

Darkness, as I described above, does nothing if not make what’s happening within its purview difficult to pin down, see, narrate. But if people are hiding under the cloak of darkness with you, who are also in search of freedom, then darkness is also a space for community building. When it’s pitch black, it turns out, you’re free to experiment, but you do so in the company of others who want to try it out, too. At the same time that darkness affords freedom from the pressures of everyday life it also creates a small community of like-minded individuals—a scene—who might also be cultural fugitives. In nightlife cultural fugitives may want to experiment creatively with their bodies or other artistic endeavors, and they look to the night as a promised space, maybe even the only space, to have such freedom.

NOTES

1. Chuck Wein to Edie Sedgwick in Andy Warhol’s film *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965).
2. “Elmgreen and Dragset: Too Late,” Victoria Miro gallery, www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/388/ (accessed June 4, 2015).
3. Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 2–3.
4. For more on recent approaches to nightlife culture, see Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan

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- University Press, 2002); David Grazian, *On the Make: The Hustle of Urban Nightlife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Benny Benedicto, *Under Bright Lights: Gay Manila and the Global Scene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); and Ramon Rivera Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).
5. Grazian, *On the Make*, 227.
 6. Pascal Gielen, "The Art Scene: An Ideal Production Unit for Economic Exploitation?," *Open 17* (2009): 9.
 7. For more on the staging of nightlife, see Madison Moore, "Looks: Studio 54 and the Production of Fabulous Nightlife," *Dancecult* 5, no. 1 (2013), dj.dancecult.net/index.php/dancecult/article/view/355. See also Grazian, *On the Make*, for an in-depth discussion of the staging of nightlife in clubs and bars in Philadelphia.
 8. See David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 63.
 9. Andrew Hampp, "EDM Biz Worth \$6.2bn (Report)," *Billboard*, May 14, 2014, www.billboard.com/biz/articles/6092242/edm-biz-worth-62bn-report.
 10. Anita Elberse, Ryan Barlow, and Sheldon Wong, "Marquee: The Business of Nightlife," Harvard Business School Case Study N2-509-019, February 25, 2009.
 11. Ben Morgan, "Fabric Nightclub Saved from Closure—but Sniffer Dogs Will Be Put on Patrol," *London Evening Standard*, December 19, 2014, www.standard.co.uk/news/london/legendary-nightclub-fabric-saved-from-closure-but-sniffer-dogs-will-be-put-on-the-door-9934967.html.
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 14. "Miss Kelly in Court on Mother's Charge," *New York Times*, May 23, 1915; my emphasis.
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 17. Ibid.
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 20. Jimmy Durante and Jack Kofoed, *Nightclubs* (New York: Knopf, 1931), 107.
 21. Hughes, *Big Sea*, 253.
 22. Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), xiv.

23. Ibid., xi–xii.
24. For more on the aesthetics of the New York night, see William Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City after Dark in Literature, Painting, and Photography, 1850–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). On the rise and implementation of electricity, see David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).
25. Bryan Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the History of Transgression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 13.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 19.
28. David Grazian explores this in detail in *On the Make*, esp. at 31.
29. Gregory Alexander (nightlife producer), in discussion with the author, April 2015.
30. Ibid.
31. Olaf Boswijk (Trouw owner), in discussion with the author, December 2014.
32. Ibid.
33. I first explored this idea in January 2015 in a profile of Trouw I was invited to write for *Thought Catalog*. See Madison Moore, “A Love Letter to Club Trouw Amsterdam,” *Thought Catalog*, January 21, 2015, thoughtcatalog.com/madison-moore/2015/01/a-love-letter-to-club-trouw-amsterdam/.
34. Ibid.
35. Boswijk, discussion.
36. Moore, “Love Letter.”
37. For more on Berghain, see Luis-Manuel Garcia, “‘Can You Feel It, Too?’: Intimacy and Affect at Electronic Dance Music Events in Paris, Chicago, and Berlin” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011). To fully grasp Berghain’s role as an arts institution, see, in particular, the club’s exhibition catalog: Jens Balzer, Dorothée Brill, Stefan Goldmann, et al., *Berghain: Art in the Club* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2015).
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39. Marvin Taylor, *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974–1984* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 17.
40. Ibid., 17.
41. Michael Musto, *Downtown* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 7.
42. Taylor, *Downtown Book*, 20.
43. Gielen, “Art Scene,” 13.
44. Ibid.
45. Alan Blum, “Scenes,” in “Cities/Scenes,” edited by Janine Marchessault and Will Straw, special issue, *Public*, no. 22/23 (November 2001): 9.