The Beat of 'Cool Capitalism':

How Slovak Club Cultures Helped Make the New Middle Class

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that no parts of this dissertation have been submitted towards a degree at any other institution other than CEU, nor, to my knowledge, does the dissertation contain unreferenced material or ideas from other authors.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

In this project, I study club cultures as a vehicle of 'cool capitalism' in transition Slovakia. By *club cultures* I mean the all-night-long parties where electronic dance music is played by a DJ and clubbers dance extended hours often stimulated by chemical substances. I argue that clubs were a milieu where clubbers could acquire dispositions of a new 'progressive' middle class. This class fraction corresponds to the global middle class of flexible workers in the creative economy who adapt well to neo-liberal capitalist structures in contemporary democracies.

In the times when 'traditional' countercultures could no longer provide solutions, club cultures were a laboratory where clubbers could conceptualize and practice new (entrepreneurial) approaches to cultural organization and gain knowledge and skills transferable into 'trendy' jobs. Club cultures were also a mighty platform for assembling new consumer imaginary: clubbers were addressed as 'party nation' not just by the niche-specific media but also by, for instance, mobile phone operators or tobacco campaigns. Clubbers thus emerged as a value group of cosmopolitan orientation which imagined itself as 'connected' and harboring 'good taste'. Such taste was perceived in contrast with the 'mainstream' and 'disco-goers' denoting gendered class.

I further propose that gender/sexuality experiments conducted in clubs and conveyed by the imagery of related media were crucial for constituting the new economic subject. In this respect, I suggest the term neo-liberal sexual revolution as the gender/sexuality order promoted in clubs was closely attached to new ways of organizing culture and thinking about art and youth culture as inextricably related to the market.

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Introduction

In this project, I study club cultures as a vehicle of 'cool capitalism' in transition Slovakia. By *club cultures* I mean the all-night-long parties where electronic dance music is played by a DJ and clubbers dance extended hours often stimulated by chemical substances such as Ecstasy or speed. Borrowing Jim McGuigan's (2009) term 'cool capitalism', I have in mind entrepreneurial principles of neo-liberalism conveyed by Bohemian, counter- and youth cultural practices and vocabulary. Frank (1997) called it 'conquest of the cool' while McGuigan expressed it, after Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), as 'capitalism with new spirit' or 'capitalism transmogrified'. Before I elaborate on how I see club cultures and neo-liberalism coming together in the specific post-socialist context, I should say what this project is not doing.

First, this project does not provide a historical account of the club scene in Bratislava, Slovakia and there is very little said about music or dance. Second, it does not map the scene in order to insert the study of regional subculture into a broader picture of global subcultures. The case of Bratislava scene is not especially specific but rather representative. I believe that a similar set of conclusion could be drawn from other Central European countries, from cities like Budapest or Prague. And third, this study does not ponder over the concept of subculture or delimiting of club cultures with high precision. However, I spend a paragraph reviewing the post-subculture debate.

Quite a lot of theoretical work has been done since the concept of subculture re-emerged. In the beginning of the '90s, the massive rise of rave and club cultures was one of the main impulses for reconsideration of applicability of the concept subculture. Scholars coined new,

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more appropriate terms such as scenes (Straw [1991]2005), neo-tribes (Bennet 1999) or post-subcultures (Bennet & Kahn-Harris 2004) only to later reclaim the concept of subculture (Hodkinson 2002; Gelder 2005). From the '80s on in metropolises, subcultural style seemed to be an intrinsic part of the postmodern subject rather than a denotation of a delinquent group or a rebelling marginalized subject. Maffesoli's streets of urban agglomerations were populated with "the amateurs of jogging, punk or retro fashion, preppies and street performers invit[ing] us on a travelling road show" (1996: 76) so that for enthusiasts of postmodernity, such as Jenks, subculture was everywhere (cited in Gelder 2005: 14-15). Rather than joining the debate over the right term and exact definition, or over its impossibility and death of collective concepts (Martin & Chaney in Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004), this study connects to the stream of scholarship and commentary investigating the ways in which rebel style and lifestyle culture became productive of post-industrial versions of capitalism and its subjects (Frank 1997; McGuigan 2009).

I don't just mean the level of ideology but also social and economic structures which integrated and were reshaped to mimic counter- and subcultural structures of organization, their radical language and aesthetic claims (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; McGuigan 2009; Fraser 2009). In Willis' Common Culture (1990), 'symbolic creativity' of youth in everyday cultures was still considered beyond economic relevance; rather Willis advocated its status as a form of work. Against the 'élitist' notion of creativity contained exclusively in the domain of Arts, he proposed "a vibrant symbolic life, everyday activity and expression" of youth (Willis 1990: 1). A decade after, *creativity* became a buzz word of post-industrial economy weaved into the way of life of large sections of population who were constantly pressured and pressuring themselves for efficient imagination or productive creativity (McRobbie 2010). Studying club cultures in the time of transition thus means more than just

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research on subculture in a particular socio-economic context. It has a potential to make a point about the actual constitution of the new socio-economic context and its young subjects.

Club cultures are not even the main focus of this dissertation but rather a vehicle to 1) study how subcultures relate to capitalism on the level of discourse and practice, 2) how transition could be seen differently through the story of a particular youth culture which was predominant in the '90s but its effects on the processes of transition were overviewed, and eventually 3) how narratives and practices of new gender/sexuality order are put to use as potent tools of new middle class construction; the project of class formation can be traced especially well in clubs because a new approach to leisure but also professional persona – including gender-bending and fluid sexuality – found its green house and show case there. Importantly, this transgressive persona is not limited to the space of club. It lies in the heart of new middle-class subjectivity which dominated nightscapes and other spheres where lifestyle is produced such as advertising, marketing, media, entertainment and information/telecommunication.

Finally, this dissertation achieves these main points: 1) it traces the rise of new (neo-liberal) ways of thinking culture in post-socialist Bratislava; 2) it recognizes constellation of the new middle-class fraction through its distinctions from the 'mainstream' as well as from the figure of 'excess' to craft 'meaningful' lifestyle and career scenarios of young Slovaks; 3) it proposes that gender/sexuality 'experiments' were crucial for the new economic subject of transition to emerge from clubs and translate its sense for aesthetic distinction, cosmopolitan consciousness and subcultural 'creativity' into number of professions mainly in the new economic sector of professions dealing with lifestyle. At the same time, as Bourdieu

reminds us about the new petit bourgeoisie he saw emerging in late '70s Western Europe, the new economic subjects are the most enthusiastic practitioners of lifestyle which they also sell (1992[1979]: 354-371).

Earlier narratives of counter- and subcultures under socialism tended to be subsumed under the meta-narrative of democratization. Rock scenes and art scenes were seen as delivering affective freedom which was directly related to political freedoms and rights. Promise of Western prosperity was contained in every item of smuggled goods – from records to household items – fetishized in socialist shadow economies. However, many of the counter-cultural expectations about liberated culture devoid of the Party-State pressure crashed against the wall of market reality (Cushman 1995; Szemere 2001). These expectations mostly proved to be untranslatable into functioning forms under varieties of capitalism in the region. Club cultures emerged as brand new and unburdened by countercultural expectations and dilemmas. Moreover, they were inextricably affiliated to the market and promoted 'fair' entrepreneurial milieu of night-time economy, 'professional' approach to cultural organization and 'quality' service delivered to customers/friends.

In the time span between the early '90s and beginning of the new millennium, club cultures rose from the status of subculture to the firm position of international super-culture (Garrat 1998; Roberts 2005). During the victorious march from clubs in Chicago, New York, London, Manchester, Berlin or Ibiza, club cultures translated leisure for the time of strengthening neo-liberalism as well as inspired new forms of labor and labor relations characteristic of 'creative industries' (McRobbie 1999, 2002, 2010). As McRobbie showed, club cultures offered a formula for cultural organization and topped it with entrepreneurial vocabulary:

> The level of self-generated economic activity that 'dance-party-rave' organizations entailed, served as a model for many of the activities that were a recurrent feature of 'creative Britain' of the 1990s. Find a cheap space, provide music, drinks, video, art installations, charge friends and others on the door, learn how to negotiate with police and local authorities and in the process become a club promoter and cultural entrepreneur.

(McRobbie 2002: 520)

Moreover, club cultures were a brilliant illustration of the shift from the industrial to post-industrial order; a revolution executed while dancing (to invoke Emma Goldman). Club cultures proposed functioning models of urban revitalization and flourishing night-time economy (O'Connor & Wynne 1996; Chatterton & Hollands 2003). Parties were held at unused or underused industrial locations, abandoned cinemas or outdoor. In this way 'creativity' sprung in 'to-be-demolished' spaces or it made use of night-time hours when a place was not serving its 'proper' function. At first often illegal, this setting of parties was soon celebrated as bringing life and fun to the debris of industrial architecture and city areas representing the declined era of heavy industry on both sides of the ex-Curtain.

To a certain extent, this project extends McRobbie's propositions quoted above onto post-socialist territories. Big cities like Berlin, London or New York became meccas of "'cool' jobs in 'hot' industries" (Neff, Wissenger & Zukin 2005) as well as points on the map of 'creative class' (Florida 2004). By 'creative class', scholars denoted 'knowledge workers' (Drucker, Machlup, Bell in Florida 2004: 67), people working with symbols (Reich in Florida 2004: 67) and more narrowly, with lifestyle (Neff, Wissenger & Zukin 2005). In the coordinates of post-socialist Bratislava, this class partly emerged from the subcultural milieu. I believe that clubs were especially crucial. Bratislava partially shared in the boom of lifestyle occupations and aspired to the cosmopolitan status which after 1989 events gained new meanings and immediacy.

Framed by the events of 'Velvet revolution' (1989), 'Velvet divorce' (1993) and transatlantic/European structures accession (2004), for a large section of youth the rise of club cultures translated into actual deeds, images and affective states the idea of 'joining the world'. Club cultures integrated the language of cultural entrepreneurialism into the vocabulary of young trendy people and directed them towards jobs in which they could put to use their knowledge of style as well as business, social and taste skills. While club cultures are declining – there are no more buses full of clubbers crossing Czech republic and Slovakia as in the 'good old days' or people queuing to get into U.club in the Castle Hill of Bratislava – a steady infrastructure of leisure was instituted comprising work places and a completely new vocabulary of thinking culture and 'free time'.

Interestingly enough, while a considerable portion of literature on transition of post-socialist countries discussed the rise of neo-liberalism in the region, they failed noticing the role of youth cultures in providing the allure of 'coolness' as well as a number of strategies of functioning in the field of culture but also beyond. It is important to understand that young people started thinking about culture and leisure differently, about its relation to the market and its relation to work, about ethics of profit and independence. In club cultures, the discourse of 'going against the mainstream' mutated to signify not anti-bourgeois or anti-capitalist independent youth forms of affiliations or lifestyle beyond normativity (as in the Western tradition of Bohemia and counter-cultures) but rather independence from the state and reliance on commercial sponsorship, self-organization and friendship networks. This is, as I argue, a result of creative fusion of the legacy of non-official late socialist cultures of consumption and entrepreneurship with new models captured in the newspeak such as 'quality service' or 'professional approach' to organizing culture.

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It may seem that on the background of precarious conditions of transition, clubs provided a zone for release of tension and temporary oblivion, as some of my interviewees suggested (Eman, Milanko). Another perspective portrays clubs as an extension of the intense work tempo and adrenaline driven lifestyle of big cities. Such view can be found in the novella Brand Party of Michal Hvorecký (2001). The story is set in dystopian coulisses of a post-socialist city where corporations are almighty and individual human life has little value. The heroine works as a crash test dummy for a car company. She switches between short-term jobs with preference for well-paid positions even if health-threatening, illegal or immoral. At night, she parties in clubs. The level of adrenaline that the job provides must be retained, otherwise she physically suffers. So she seeks for equally demanding leisure time activities (including train surfing). Loud music that makes her body vibrate and consumption of stimulants seem to provide a proper match to her day-time occupations. This story, arguably inspired by cyber punk literature, uses modified coulisses of transition Bratislava. While anthropological accounts of transition tend to stress insecurity and precariousness being the life standard of a big part of post-socialist population, this fiction story accentuates threats of 'jungle capitalism' to the dystopian extremes only to make its heroes cynically surf the waves of risk and even find pleasure in it.

Club cultures were a mighty milieu where the 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1992[1961]) of a significant number of young people was remodeled. I adopt Raymond Williams' term by which he aimed to substitute the idealistic 'Zeitgeist' and ground the notion in materialist theory. He describes it "as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities" (Williams 1992: 48). Williams'

'structure of feeling' opens avenues which integrate economic and social structures with fine levels of culture and subjectivity.

Following the tradition of cultural studies, this study aims at investigation of 1) the infrastructure of clubbing, 2) discourses circulated among clubbers, narrative tropes and images, practices and vocabulary, 3) role of media and technologies in constituting the imaginary, 4) gender/sexuality order functioning as a vehicle of 'modernity', style and eventually of class narratives. I try to anchor the speculative moments of the project in the interview material, analysis of media content and literature on club cultures as well as on my direct participatory experience and ethnographic research.

Between Summer of 2008 and Spring 2009, I made 27 interviews. Starting with my ex-co-clubbing friends from Bratislava, I reached out following their recommendations. Further, I conducted more interviews with random active clubbers I selected through the websites where they were registered and 'professionals' whom I contacted through their websites, booking agencies or thanks to other respondents. Most of the respondents live and work in Bratislava even if they are originally from all around Slovakia. Their names or nick names were changed for the purpose of privacy protection. When a longer section of speech is quoted, I add information on respondent's age, gender and current occupation (in the time we conducted the interview). For the list of basic sociological data on the subjects, see the appendix. Most of the interviews were taped in cafés where we met and talked usually for about an hour or more; one was recorded at a participant's home due to her maternal responsibilities. Although I came with a list of preliminary themes, I preferred letting my respondents direct the flow of information in the direction they considered important and relevant. Reading the transcripts for themes, patterns and specific vocabulary informed me

about clubbers' perspectives, experience and priorities in 'reading' club cultures. Upon hearing about my research, an acquaintance sent me a long e-mail in which he described his encounter with the scene first in the city of Banská Bystrica and later elsewhere. Often, my respondents were surprised that club cultures can be an object of the research which is not primarily interested in drugs, the usual focus of media's interest. I was happy to discover that my interviews spiraled back onto the scene as, for example, Michal H. wrote a couple of blog entries remembering his involvement in the scene and Ivo interviewed in depth his friend, DJ and promoter Pico about 'How it all started' (Ninja 2008).

Moreover, I benefited from the interviews with 'professionals' available on the websites specialized on electronic dance music (EDM) and from Michal Hvorecký's blog. Most of images I analyze come from the only EDM magazine issued in Czech Republic (and read also in Slovakia) between years 1995-2005 which is the time span when club scene was the most populated and active. Magazine was renamed several times as Trip, Trip2House, Tripmag, Xmag with respect to the rising popularity of EDM genres (house) or the growing awareness of party drug reference in the title (trip was replaced by more elusive X for Ecstasy). During the most intense research period, I scrolled through number of pictures posted on web galleries, received images from my interviewees, got registered on a couple of sites to view forum discussions.

My actual clubbing experience is partly 'historical': with a group of high school girl-friends, we used to go clubbing from once per month to once per week either to clubs around the city (most of them emerged and disappeared), to events held in abandoned cinema studios, empty theaters, exhibition halls or illegal open-air spots. Sometimes, we hitch-hiked, took a train or bus to remote places. Although I was never a 'core-clubber' and never trusted my

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'coolness-factor' too much, still I spent time browsing through second hand stores looking for clothes to re-adjust, shopped in one of the early chain stores selling Italian fashion which often featured some club-friendly pieces and read 'books about drugs' (the Beats, Leary) and magazines dealing with 'cool' topics (such as Živel). Apart from modest pocket money, I earned to pay for entrance fee and consumption executing student jobs (from cleaning to garbage separation as well as seasonal work abroad) and later, I had a part-time office job which also distracted me from clubbing. I 'moved on' to become interested in films but Trainspotting, Beach and Irvine Welsh's books resonated perfectly with what clubbers tended to perceive as a 'generational experience' (Michal H., Jozef). Michal H. writes about it in his blog (Hvorecký 2010a):

> When the first actual Slovak DJs Dalo & Tibor played singles *Not Forgotten*, *More Than I Know* and later *Release The Pressure* [all by Leftfield], in [their show] Crystal House on radio Ragtime, and also during Friday nights in U.club, for the first time since Depeche Mode, I felt that my generation might have its band, too. Vynil records with hand prints on the cover brought music revolution to sleepy Bratislava – of course, it came from Vienna because [in Bratislava] you could not buy such music yet and downloading was still unheard of. I wish everyone could experience this feeling. It must had been similar when Modernists perceived Apollinaire's poetry and Mahler's *Fifth symphony* or Postmodernists [read] Pynchon's novella *The Crying of Lot 49*. This is how *Sgt. Pepper* of The Beatles felt, the banana of Velvet [Underground] or Mench-machine of Kraftwerk. It is no coincidence that John Lyndon of Sex Pistols featured [on the record of Leftfield]; he always searched for difference and cultural shocks. [my emphasis]

> (Michal H., male, 32, writer)

In 2003, as a part of the course assignment for screenplay-writing seminar, I collected some 'material' from the clubs. This amounted to pages and pages of ambiance description, authentic dialogues, memories, stories and character sketches. The 'field material' was proceeded into a short story which, in 2005, I sent to Poviedka competition organized by the LCA publishing house and was awarded the first price. My interest in club cultures was revived when I entered the MA program at CEU where I subjected the topic to theoretical perspectives. The material and experience I previously assembled served as the basis for my

further research and inquiry into the meaning of clubbing for my generation. Nevertheless, one of the purposes of this project is to go beyond the celebratory discourse of 'generational experience' and to consider the empowering effect of clubbing within the context of transition.

Divided into three chapters, this project is focused first on understanding how the infrastructure of the scene emerged and what other leisure cultures and countercultural ideologies club cultures had to compete with. In **Chapter 1**, I propose to follow the narrative of opportunities, open possibilities as voiced by my interviewees. I frame club cultures as a project by which young middle-class men took hold of the cultural and economic sphere previously occupied by the 'alternative'.

I argue that in the clubs, some of the principles of organizing culture with accent on neo-liberal entrepreneurialism were tested. Entrenched in the imaginary of the bi-polar world, countercultures gradually lost legitimacy and left place for the 'unburdened' subculture. Club cultures promised new imaginaries of 'progress' and 'connection'. Moreover, clubbers assembled and carried away a set of marketable skills and knowledge such as organization of events, new media and web design or soft skills of networking, self-promotion and navigation in the scapes of trends and taste hierarchies. Thus they were advantageously positioned in respect to occupation of 'trendy' jobs selling lifestyle (mostly unprecedented in socialism or differently understood): marketing, advertising, media, (web) design, information-telecommunication etc.

Club cultures also managed to gain legitimacy and advantage over earlier disco cultures. Unlike 'vulgar' and 'dangerous' disco cultures, club parties were articulated as 'events'

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organized by 'promoters' who build 'careers' by providing 'service' to their 'customers' who require 'quality time' in return for relatively high entry fee. In **Chapter 2**, I suggest that club cultures were a milieu where entrepreneurial vocabulary and practices were partially formed and employed as well as reflexive consumer consciousness shaped and practiced.

The project of club cultures went beyond being 'merely (sub)cultural'; clubs functioned as a class-formative milieu. I trace several narratives of distinction: from the 'mainstream' as well as from the 'disco-goers'. Both of them revolved around class dimension. While 'mainstream' denotated 'ordinariness' on several levels (the 'people' or the non-progressive middle class), in the case of disco cultures the discourse of gender/sexuality order was put to use to signify class. 'Vulgar' and 'unsafe' discotheques were contrasted with 'liberated' and 'women- and gay-friendly' clubs.

Although club cultures were promoted as novel and 'progressive', some late socialist cultural practices were rehashed for new uses. In this way, consumer sensibilities of clubbers emerged in continuity with late socialist cultures of consumerism rather than being imposed by forces of cultural globalization. (Or vice-versa, globalization when studied on a subjective level tends to 'feel' at home in a local context.) Sometimes, it is continuity that matters and sometimes, distinction guarantees legitimacy: in Chapter 1, I proposed that early entrepreneurial occupations in clubs were viewed with suspicion inherited from late socialism. Clubbers mocked this tendency and understood themselves as cultural avant-garde.

The line of distinction of club cultures from the world of commerce was much more permeable than in traditional subcultures and countercultures if it was distinguishable at all. It would be problematic if not impossible to argue that subcultural skills and sensibilities

were drained by businesses and corporations. Rather, club cultures were interwoven and also mediated by new technology (mobile phones, internet). The cosmopolitan imaginary and self-awareness of clubbing community was partly orchestrated by telecommunication companies, energy drink producers, cigarette ads or advertising firms providing the newspeak for talking new cultural organization and its values. At the same time, as proposed in Chapter 1, companies often provided material and knowhow for clubbers to run the scene. The flow of material, information and skills was thus bidirectional.

In **Chapter 3**, I outline how the new economic subject was assembled in clubs, endowed with middle-class sensibilities combining both bourgeois and bohemian lifestyle elements. On the one hand, clubbers claimed to be distinct from the 'crowd' designated by their non-discriminative taste or conspicuous consumption with little sense for 'style'. On the other hand, they eschewed 'excessive' clubbers who transgressed the limits of drug use, styling, leisure commitment as well as sexuality. Clubbers were able to translate subcultural activities into sustainable lifestyle practices, bring together hedonism with commitment, anti-mainstream narratives with calls for quality and professional attitude, self-expression with consumption. They can be seen as avant-garde of the new middle class preoccupied with lifestyle as both consumers and producers.

Across all three chapters, I study narratives and practices related to gender/sexuality as powerful tools of constituting ideas and dispositions characteristic of a particular class fraction. This class fraction is in no sense unique to Bratislava or to the post-socialist context. I believe it is a local edition of the class fraction traced and conceptualized in the Western context by Bourdieu (1992[1979]), Featherstone (2007[1991]) as well as Brooks (2000).

The study reflects a growing sensibility among gender studies of the significance of gender and sexuality as central dimensions of class (Skeggs 1997). Although I initiated my research with focus on progressive gender/sexuality order in clubs, I noticed that these categories cannot function independently. In the post-socialist context especially, where class re-emerged as an important category for understanding social processes (Búzik 2008), considering gender/sexuality in isolation would probably lead to uncritical celebration of multiple identities allowed for in clubs, experiments with gender-bending and transgressive sexuality. However, these aspects of shifting gender/sexuality orders seem to fit within a project of specific class formation. The new middle class employs them in order to join the imaginary cosmopolitan youth – mobile, 'liberated', identity-aware, self-scrutinizing, striving for self-expression, flexible with skills, technology-hooked, open to experiments or innovation (regarding technology, style or sexuality).

The subsequent chapters propose a perspective on clubbers as they navigate between the remnants of the previous order, using them selectively to construct new 'cool' identities and move on to occupy 'trendy' jobs which perpetuate the culture of lifestyle. Before I move to unpacking the claims and suggestions I stated here, I provide a broader contextual and conceptual ground.

Contexts and concepts

Asserting the right to consume: emerging post-socialist middle classes

After the disappointment with the ways in which market stifles 'independent' culture, new subcultural structures emerged to accommodate the middle-class youth aspiring to treat culture as a resource for expressive personal style and/or field of expertise. They despised mushrooming discotheques and private radios playing chart pop seeing it as invasive 'Western crap'. Many of them rather joined what seemed as brand new underground movement. This leisure culture was as different from anything they knew before as they could imagine. This is how entering Bratislavian U.club felt in the early '90s: at the end of a tunnel through which one had to pass to reach the bar and the dance floor, there was not just one light pointing at the turntables where DJ was spinning records but rather many laser lights and strobe impulses which provided "urban experience in an Eastern European province, an evasion from the mainstream into the underground and a seemingly never ending ecstasy" (Hvorecký 2010a).

Into this utopian/dystopian space of the new underground pulsating with new opportunities, I situate my study of the emerging consciousness of progressive middle class. Their sense for aesthetic and thus also socio-cultural distinction was crucial for the new economic sector producing lifestyle; the sector which was unprecedented or rather limited within the structures of state socialism. The entire sector attached to consumer culture existed in its black market form where anything Western received symbolic value even without advertising.

Advertising promotes distinction: early spots targeting post-socialist consumer typically featured a product pitched against 'an ordinary version'. This tactic to consider quality rather than just price might be seen as an invitation to the middle-class to assert their visibility through market choices. The desire to equip homes comfortably and create personal style

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has been traced with respect to post-socialist subjects (Fehérváry 2002, 2011) and it runs back to late socialism (Kiossev 2007). As a call for 'normal life', this desire was damasked by a number of scholars who interpreted the changes of 1989 as tied not just to the power of new elites (Szelényi 1998; Eyal 2000) but primarily fed by the desire of latent middle classes to 'do lifestyle', to participate on consumption as their democratic right. In <u>Manufacturing the New Consumerism</u>, Czeglédy proposes: "Both scholarly [Gellner] and popular writing [Drakulić] attests to the 'triumph of the West' [Fukuyama] over state socialism as having had more to do with the heady attractions of consumerism than with the elusive promises of liberal democracy." (2002: 143)

The cynicism of Czeglédy's statement might actually be misleading in its either-or logic. If Featherstone proposed that consumption gradually became an important nexus for defining citizenship in the 'West' (2007: xiii & xv), Drakulić turns this critique on its head by insisting on the consumer-citizen conflation in the late socialist imaginary. In her essay <u>Bathroom Tales</u>, she draws a conceptual chain that leads from the comfort of her fully stocked bathroom to the big concepts of liberal democracy; she associates: "cosmetics, the market, advertising, capitalism, the West, democracy, human rights" (2007: 2). Calls for 'decent life' or rather 'normal life' in late socialist and transitioning societies often betray an imaginary of Western abundance. These fantasies were stimulated also by Western pop cultural products such as popular series and films (Gebicka cited in Grzeszczyk 2008: 148). Despite privileged communist elites and despite existence of black markets, the idea of building status through 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen 1994[1899]) was effectuated only on a limited scale in socialist societies. As a result, majority had little experience with status differences manifested by the use of consumer goods and activities.

Late and post-socialist subjects imagined 'normal' lifestyle as actually upper middle-class standard (Fehérváry 2002; Vasilescu 2007) and the process of transition was meant to make such standard accessible for everybody (Grzeszczyk 2008: 149-150). Thus, late socialist consumer imaginary tended to bring together a hybrid mixture of Western abundance of goods and socialist flat distribution. Based on ethnographies of transition (Oushakine 2000; Rausig 2002) and essays of anti-communist writers such as Slavenka Drakulić, I identified this paradox which springs from fascination with Western prosperity accompanied by wide-spread ignorance of how capitalism functions and disapproval of social inequality. Such logic resulted in the idea that prosperity, reflected in abundance of consumer goods, is 'normal' (Drakulić 2007) and that it will be automatically made available for all thanks to the change of political regime. Resulting disappointment has been captured in the popular term 'bad mood' and mapped by a number of ethnographic works looking at the ways in which people negotiated the changing life standard and learnt to perceive their identity on the grid of a new class system (Oushakine 2000; Schevchenko 2002).

Researchers interpreted consumption as powerful means of identity construction and positioning of others on the social grid in flux (Oushakine 2000). Often, consumption had a ritual meaning of marking one's status in respect to the past and stressing national belonging (Caldwell 2002; Rausig 2002). In the conditions of permanent hardship and insecurity, consumption was ascribed highly symbolic value (Schevchenko 2002). Accent of these studies is on showing that the process of reassessing and reconstructing identities for the new times was demanding and confusing for most of post-socialist subjects. Rather than fulfilling their dreams of prosperity for everyone, majority suffered a decrease in life standard.

Problematically, images of everyday struggle are implicitly raised against 'normality' of Western living. For example, in Schevchenko's account, an interviewee bitterly laughs about the panic that Great Depression provoked in the U.S. He believes that Russians have been living in the state of permanent crisis without acting hysterical over 'someone [going] bankrupted' (Schevchenko 2002: 844). The writing of Drakulić, but also of many scholars researching transition, suffers from what Kiossev (2007) rightly identifies as a performative aspect of East European voice. Anti-communist élites developed habit of turning to the 'Western' audience and this habit remained in popular practice when observers, researchers and tourists appeared in the 'liberated' European East. In popular discourse, landscapes of desire were constantly contrasted with what was perceived as permanent crisis of the present.

As the 'imaginary West' started melting down also the related discourse of 'consumption as a right' necessarily started receiving cracks. It has then slowly been replaced by the set of ideas about and practices of status distinction realized in class fractions with special attention on the role of 'conspicuous consumption'. Beside spectacular 'nouveau riches' who drew on themselves quite some (not only) scholarly attention (Oushakine 2000; Yurchak 2003), concern with post-socialist middle classes emerged (Fehérváry 2002, 2011). For a fraction of the new middle class, consumption became a vehicle for claiming their belonging not to the national collective (Caldwell 2002; Rausig 2002) but rather to the cosmopolitan super-class; an effort which connects post-socialist middle classes with post-colonial contexts.

The coordinating role of youth cultures – as a way of *learning to consume* – was stressed in post-colonial but less in post-socialist contexts. In Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class

Culture in a New Consumer Society, Liechty (2003) suggests that the 'modern' youth has a specific role in constructing middle class in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu. Through cultural practices (such as video viewing, cinema going, shopping and romantic dining) they practice 'doing' middle-classness in a globalized way. In The Children of Liberalization: Youth and Globalization in India, Lukose (2008) studied discourses around fashioning of female bodies which have traditionally been the battlefields of Indian modernity. Lukose notices how young women structure their agency through consumption. Images of success of young democracies and aspiring new strong economies are strategically tied to representations of self-confident middle class youth which Lukose characterized as "media-saturated, highly educated, urban, affluent, and globally oriented consumer[s]" (2008: 133).

When middle class is discussed in relation to post-socialist contexts, it is usually with respect to its materialism (Fehérváry 2002, 2011; Yurchak 2003). In their Bourdieu-nesque study of Polish classes, Gdula and Sadula (2012) essentialized middle-class taste to produce a straw man of eternal bourgeoisie. While it is certainly possible to trace some of the characteristics typically associated with middle class such as "rigor, lawfulness, status uncertainty and the focus on promotion and accumulation" (Gdula & Sadula 2012: 10), middle class has recuperated some of the characteristics that authors ascribe to upper and popular classes. 'Progressive' middle class is stylish, rebellious, hedonistic, friendship/connection-obsessed. However, as I show in Chapter 3, it remains hard-working, law abiding, family and career-oriented. It makes 'professional' consumer choices and aspires for quality work.

We might automatically think of Brooks's concept of 'Bobos' (2000) – Bourgeois Bohemians. Tracing tendencies of the upper fringe of American middle class, he shows how this class fraction succeeded bringing together two ethics previously seen as standing in contradiction:

bourgeois and bohemian.   The 'bobo'-conflation of attributes radically transformed perspectives on middle class and, I believe, inspired a tide of obsession with (middle-class) self-scrutiny which culminated in, for example, Lander's blog and books on 'stuff white people like' (2008; 2010).

However, the marriage of counter-cultural ways of life with bourgeois values has to be traced far beyond Brooks's book. The gradual mainstreaming of Bohemian values – as identified by Frank (1997) and followers – reshaped capitalism and allowed for a class of 'cultural intermediaries' who administer innovation as permanent revolution in consumption. Youth, as a new estate emerging after the WWII, defined itself through the conflict over the 'way of life' which adopted many traits of Bohemian lifestyle and absorbed some aspects of social movements' agendas, too. Leland says: "If radical individualism created the modern consumer, it is also likely that the respect granted the radical consumer has facilitated other liberties [namely of sexual and racial 'minorities']" (2004: 307). The role of gender/sexuality as crucial vectors constituting the new middle-class identity has to be stressed.

I don't wish to paint an image of post-socialist progressive middle class with broad strokes of brush. This project cannot substitute a wider sociological study. Focusing on club cultures in the capital of Slovakia, my scope of analysis is much narrower. However, I believe I picked an efficient vehicle of analysis to show contours of the emerging middle class fraction which was especially well-suited for the rise of neoliberal economy and promoting its values. In this project, I mainly focus on neoliberalization of culture which I understand in accordance with McGuigan as „the reduction of culture to 'enterprise culture', the inculcation of enterprising selfhood and the 'post-industrial' ideology of 'creative industry'" (2009: 132).

Researching how club cultures aided promoting market values in culture, I have in mind particular genealogical line. Already in <u>Distinctions</u>, Bourdieu (1992[1979]) traced the emerging petite bourgeoisie which incorporated into their lifestyle many of the '68 ethical principles. Moreover, as Bourdieu recognized, they constantly lean towards cultural innovation with the grain of transgression or, in his words, 'new petite bourgeoisie' "systematically appl[ies] the cultivated disposition to not-yet-legitimate culture" (1992: 371). Importantly, Bourdieu's 'new petite bourgeoisie' is tied to the occupational sector where symbolic goods and services are provided.

Featherstone (1991) re-employs Bourdieu's line of investigation to propose that characteristics previously ascribed to the universal postmodern identity actually refer to a narrow class segment gaining power over symbolic representation. Featherstone urges us to look into the "pedagogies of these 'new' sensibilities" (1991: 70) which bring together previously opposed cultural forces: modernist aestheticism, countercultural protest and the market logic. How is the set of dispositions of new middle class acquired in the post-socialist context? How can a study of emerging new middle class challenge sediment perspectives on transition?

The beating rhythm or pulsating opportunities: rethinking transition

In the ethnographic perspectives on transformation from state socialist structures to capitalism, a set of notions such as 'bad mood' and 'ostalgia' became to characterize the period. These notions are used as emotional capsules encompassing the way 'common people' felt about the changes (e.g. Svašek 2005). The impact of changes on majority of population was critically framed as 'complete disintegration' and 'uniform impoverishment'

(Golovakha 1996 & Ries 1997 cited in Schevchenko 2002: 843). Schevchenko claims that the disturbance of habitual 'ways of doing' and values was far more present in people's accounts then assessments of opportunities and new chances. She explains:

> Both in the eyes of the local population, and in those of the social scientists and outsider observers, this period presented enormous challenges to the habitual organisation of social life and the constitution of identities and groups in an unstable and risk-ridden setting. Socialised to see and value particular kinds of opportunities, skills and resources, post-socialist actors felt their demise much more sharply than the emergence of new possibilities and trajectories of action.

(Schevchenko 2002: 841-842)

Tracing conflicts, problems and moments of discontent, researchers targeted mostly adults to detect their mood, poll their opinions, map clashes of large scale socio-economic changes with the subjectivities which were structured in and for a different system and therefore socialized for very different conditions of work, private life and values in general (Shevchenko 2002: 846).

Ethnographers of transition were interested in forces of resistance often articulated as attachment to habits or 'old ways of doing'. In this way, anthropologists of transition were able to argue (against mainstream economists, politicians and sociologists) that culture cannot be wiped out by abrupt economic changes, rather it has powerful corrosive effect on large scale plans and predictions insensitive to local specificities (Burowoy & Verdery 1999; Verdery 2003; Verdery & Humphrey 2004; Buyandelgeriyn 2008: 245). Less attention was devoted to studies of the ways in which late socialist cultural practices were *successfully* translated into new cultural formations and how subjectivities were shaped accordingly.

Arguably, young people were in a better position to slip into the new order without perceiving its newness as traumatic, without having to dramatically readjust their habitus for the new conditions surrounding them. In this respect, it is only fair that adult and elderly

subjects were in the spotlight of interest of transitology: they were more prone to become the 'losers' of transition. Even if understudied in the context of transformation, young people provided their bodies and subjectivities for the changes to take tangible, embodied contours. Participating in new cultural forms, such as club cultures, youth was embodying changes and occupying emerging possibilities. As Oushakine puts it, post-socialist youth were the direct product of these changes and that by paying attention to youth, we may learn more about the nature of transition (2000: 992).

'Having more options, possibilities and chances than previous generation' is a discursive thread running across many popular narratives characterizing post-socialist youth. Rather than being the focus of institutional policing and of wider concern about youth morality and changing values from the side of various authorities (as was the case with post-war youth on both sides of the Iron Curtain), post-socialist youth was the object of both hope and jealousy: 'everything is going to be easier for them', 'the world opens up for them', 'the middle generation must go and only the next one will really be able to form a proper democratic society' etc. In other words, youth was not seen as a problem but rather as better disposed towards profiting from the changes. Schevchenko calls it "reconfigurations of opportunity structures for current and future generation" (2002: 843). Through the invocations of 'myriads of possibilities we never had' or 'the world being up for grabs for them', young people became to be seen as domestic 'Westerners'. It was not just age that distanced them from their parents but also the new system which shaped them differently.

Often, it was heard that the revolution, in order to put in place a new order needs new people. Expressions such as 'old structure' ['stará štruktúra'] used as a personal adjective, 'mind sets from the previous regime', 'old people at new places', all testify to the powerful

discourse running across post-socialist societies that habits and habitus cannot be changed overnight and not even in the course of several years. Anthropologists started to formulate this knowledge to stress importance of culture and everyday practices which escape the lenses of economy and sociology (Buyandelgeriyn 2008: 238). At the same time, culture and everyday practices were portrayed as forces of popular resistance to the impositions rather than a pool of adaptable knowledge and skills. Schevchenko (2002) stresses the way her research subjects (mostly working-class Muscovites) were rigid products of the previous regime. Their habitus, including the ways of getting by in life, as well as tastes and values were strongly structured by Soviet socialism and thus irreconcilable with the new order.

Rather than seeing inherited cultural practices as a wall of incommensurable differences against which direct or subtler impositions of new order get smashed, we may want to see how changes smoothly soaked into the matrix of the everyday. Mediating between socialist non-official cultural practices, legacies of the Underground, Western consumer cultures, brand new opportunities and new entrepreneurial ways of running cultural scenes, club cultures have analytically fruitful position. Certainly, the youth portrayal I propose through this project is not representative of a vague category of post-socialist youth. I argue that club cultures provided just one (albeit considerable) stream structuring subjectivities and leisure/work cultures for the new order.

The missing subject interpellations of post-socialism?

Often when investigating youth, researchers project onto them the idea of transformational anxiety. Detecting insecurities and gaps in language, Oushakine (2000) proposed that post-Soviet youth suffer from the lack of subject invitations. He studied essay compositions of

young men and women from Siberian Barnaul who in 1997 were between 15-22 years old (an age cohort partially overlapping with my sample of clubbers). The sample was asked to write about their national and gender identity. Oushakine proposed that young people's inability to locate themselves on a social grid is a result of the failure of post-Soviet field of cultural production to generate symbolic positions. Young people's silences articulate the "culture of symbolic shortages" (Oushakine 2000: 1005). He concludes that "the 'post-Soviet' remains an empty space, a non-existence, devoid of its subjectifying force, its own signifier, and its own meaning effect" (Oushakine 2000: 1010).

To expect that the post-Soviet symbolic vocabulary will be ordered in an easily detectable symbolic system is contradictory to the nature of changes. Of course, transition in post-Soviet Siberian Barnaul and post-socialist Central European Bratislava are different (layered and complex) stories. I agree with Oushakine that language of both young people and adults across post-socialist and post-Soviet contexts can be characterized by insecurity in terms of categorizing. However, I believe that this anxiety is most prominent in official identity categories which Oushakine investigated. The power of institutions to provide names, categories, certainties was arguably weakened.

Oushakine is right in his observation that institutions, which were in turmoil of restructuring and redefining their purpose, were unable to propose a stable register of subject positions. Nevertheless, wasn't this the case already in late socialism as Yurchak's (1999) work on the culture of irony suggests? Unlike in late socialism, there was no official ruling ideology present to be covertly or strikingly resisted. Rather, transition was a time of conflicting and competing discourses which were difficult to arrange according to the resistance-ideology dichotomy (previously available to scholars studying socialism). Nevertheless, the socio-

cultural symbolic space of post-socialism was populated with fragments of inviting discourses.

While in Western societies, consumption was gradually becoming more decisive in terms of defining and marking one's identity (Featherstone 1991), post-socialist societies were only about to adopt taste lines and lifestyles as the main identity markers. Since the adoption of rock'n'roll, youth cultures were an important pioneering discourse for the new way of thinking identity along the lines of consumption and not production or institutional affiliations (family, education, work collective).

Reviewing Coming of Age in Post-Soviet Russia (Markowitz 2000), Oushakine noticed that the work neglected informal spheres of young people's life such as music and leisure cultures, drug scene and sexuality (2001). The trio of proverbial 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll', which played an important role in the counter-cultural zone under socialism, is significantly under-investigated in both studies of identity construction of post-Soviet youth in both Markowitz's (2000) as well as in Oushakine's own work (2000).

According to McRobbie, subcultures provide a space away from the institutional script of youth socialization. They form a zone of their own which empowers youth and, at the same time, weakens attachments to the official institutions such as family and school (McRobbie 1993: 30). To respond to the above-mentioned inadequacies in transitology and post-socialist youth studies, I examine subcultures as a fruitful space where powerful subjectifying forces and subject invitations occurred.

Chapter 1

[setting the scene]

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1.5.0. Conclusion

1.0 Introduction

Clubs proposed not just the new sound and new style but also new ways of organizing and thinking about (sub)culture. As the 'traditional alternative' withdrew from providing a relevant symbolic resource, club cultures attracted the crowd who previously identified with the 'alternative'. In the club milieu, the language of marketing and advertising was employed to re-signify parties as 'events' and 'projects' legitimizing them as 'serious' and making (sub)cultural work fit for a middle-class career portfolio. However, within the new milieu of (sub)cultural organization, women gained only little place; opportunity was captured and structured through male networks. It was mainly young middle-class men who were profiting from this new sphere of opportunities.

I explain what made club cultures a magnet for middle-class youth and how they started thinking through club cultures as the nexus between leisure and career, profit and 'mad time'.

1.1.0. (Sub)cultural production/organization in transition

1.1.1. Competing subcultures

I want to examine the cultural milieu from which (and in opposition to which) club cultures grew locally. Club cultures competed in the field of leisure and culture with disco cultures as well as with traditional counter-cultures. While in the case of discotheques, clubbers used classed, gendered and sexuality-focused narratives to delegitimize disco culture (see section 2.2.0.), the case of alternative rock cultures was a different one.

28

Many early clubbers formerly used to frequent alternative rock and punk concerts (Anna, Ivan, Michal H.). Michal H. remembers he started going to Danubius Rock Fabric where he "discovered the world of the alternative". He was 15-16 then and most of the visitors were senior to him. The place was strongly dedicated to "rock repertoire" such as former Prague and Brno underground bands as well as new local bands building on the legacies of the Czechoslovak Underground. The '90s alternative scene in Bratislava was constelled around a number of places and when most of them vanished (Galéria café, Stoka, Propeler etc.), artists and subcultural enthusiasts talked about the logic of profit which suppressed it.

I look at how this argument fits into the growth of club cultures which partly attracted alternative concerts and pubs attendees. The 'traditional' alternative was anti-communist and the '90s were progressing, the anti-communist rhetoric was not enough to legitimize these cultures for the new condition as their 'natural enemy' was not a vivid threat anymore. During the time of indecision and weakening of counter-cultural narratives, club cultures were able to propose a set of very efficient strategies for the organization of youth culture in the new situation.

Rather than perceiving market as an incommensurable structure oppressing the Artist and the Culture, club cultures proposed practices and language through which subcultural premises of independence and anti-mainstream-ness were pertained while entrepreneurial principles were incorporated. In the subsequent section, I propose an overview of some of the ideological premises which lost their legitimacy during transition and before they were effectively reconfigured for the new conditions, club cultures could rise offering new ways of thinking subculture in respect to market structures.

1.1.2. Beyond the logic of the Underground

Socialist counter-cultures seemed to presuppose that the clause of freedom of expression will automatically allow for their existence without necessity to learn (and accept) the rules of operation under capitalism. The idea of heaviness of socialist state oppressing its citizens was aligned with another idea: that once this burden is lifted, pluralism of cultures will flourish freely nourished by democratic values. The culture of dissidents fostered this idea by images such as Václav Havel's passage from the state of lie to the state of truth (Eyal 2000: 61-62). Such perspectives obscured the necessity to pass under a different contract – that of market relations – and fostered an idea of democratization as a return to the 'natural' state of things.

This portrayal is crucial for the legitimization of changes. At the same time, it explains the disillusionment of those who, under the new conditions, could not do what they wanted to do (such as former underground artists). It is this perspective that conditions the grand surprise and bitterness of artists who discovered that the logic of profit suffocated them in often harsher ways than state socialist censure. However, counter-cultures tend to be framed not as *conditioned by* but suffocated by the regime. Recently, this position was taken anew in the issue of East Central Europe journal dedicated to counter-cultures across the region (Klaniczay & Trenczényi 2011).

A perspective on the situation of youth cultures and art scenes during transition is presented by Slovak flagship alternative rock band Živé kvety. In their song Dni ako komíny[1], the lead singer and writer Lucia Piussi invokes several moments characteristic of the '90s epoch as perceived by the 'alternative' (through the nostalgic prism of 2005):

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[1] The song can be found on the album Sloboda [Freedom] (2005); http://www.zivekvety.sk/hudba.html.

> Do you remember concerts at Hlavné námestie [Main square]?
>
> Bands were emerging like mushrooms after rain!
>
> The sweet summer of '91, Bratislava was still a museum.
>
> Nothing else just acquaintances, no billboards, cracked wall paint,
>
> fresh born mafia… Wasn't it beautiful
>
> when Kosa z Nosa [band's name] played and the locks inside our heads were opening?

The song's imagery paint moments of freedom bounded by the regime and the market: through the cracks of the neglected architecture and before billboards take over, musical scene pushes to breathe the fresh air of liberty. After a short moment of genuine liberation, new obstacles appear to end 'the period of freedom' (as one of my interviewees put it). The song continues:

> Do you remember concerts at Hlavné námestie?
>
> Bands were emerging like mushrooms after rain!
>
> The sweet summer of '91, Bratislava was still a museum.
>
> Nothing else just acquaintances, friends, concerts and bands
>
> consisting of people like you and me!
>
> It is hardly true now, it must have just been a dream!
>
> That was our naïve liberty!
>
> What do you want to tell to those who gave it up?
>
> They threw themselves into the stream,
>
> So let them swim!
>
> Certainly, they had their reasons, no reproaches.
>
> Let them live inside a jelly world…

<div align="right">[my translation]</div>

The lyrics (and Piussi's further work) suggest that the ideals fostered by the underground and further nurtured by the early post-1989 art scene were smashed by the market logic of profit. The life of this discourse was mapped by Szemere (2001). In Up from the

Underground, she studies the impact of transition on the Hungarian underground art and music scene. In the introduction, she retells how she spotted a cult song line on a billboard accompanying an advertisement: "The dissident song's afterlife in an ad for tourism some fifteen years later epitomizes the profound transformation that the counter-culture of state socialism underwent after Central and Eastern Europe's transition to capitalism." The example given by Szemere proposes in a nutshell a widely shared sentiment of selling-out and betrayal of the ideals of counterculturalists.

Szemere elaborates on the critical line of 'transition as commodification' initiated by Merkel, Klíma and Bohlman (in Szemere 2001: 3) and enriches it by the ethnographic sense for complexity, authentic voice and detail. Through the words of her respondents, she proposed that while state socialist censorship was selective about banning, post-socialist structures of power suppressed some art forms completely on the note of their low profitability (Szemere 2001: 5).

In the literature on popular music and art scenes in socialist countries, socialist non-official music cultures were traditionally understood in relation to forces of democratization, expressions of civil society and anti-totalitarian struggles (e.g. Pekacz 1994). Already such words as *counter-culture* or *underground* suggest an idea of power distribution of the pre-Foucaultian nature: there is a bloc of concentrated power and the agents of liberation are pushing against its supremacy. In other words, the state with its repressive tools, such as police or censors, is coded as representations of power while the alternative discourse of non-official cultures is seen as confronting or evading this power in its struggle for freedom.

Often, studies of rock'n'roll culture under socialism tend to calcify the opinion about *ahistorical* pressure of the regime on counter cultures. This is less so in Blažek & Pospíšil

(2010) who deal with a concrete concerted action against the 'youth with long hair' in 1966 Czechoslovakia and more in the case of Vaněk (2010) who, as Pospíšil (2011) argued, effectively deleted differences and nuances in the approach of the Party to counter- and subculturalists. Furthermore Pospíšil notes that Vaněk passionately sides with the opposition and argues as if the conflict was ongoing. Pospíšil explains that such tendency mimics the tone of counterculturalists and uncritically transposes it into a historical study of rock'n'roll in Czechoslovakia. That this tone and approach persists is not Vaněk's sole problem, rather it can be found in the works of early historians of socialist art and music scenes (Ryback 1990; Ramet 1994) as well as in contemporary works of local historians (Klaniczay & Trenczényi et al. 2011). A quote from Ryback's <u>Rock around the Bloc</u> (1990) can stand for this tendency where rock'n'roll is understood as a signifier of freedom and, at the same time, democracy and capitalism are seen as indistinguishable:

> In a very real sense, the triumph of rock and roll in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been the realization of a *democratic process*. Three generations of Soviet-bloc youths have compelled governments to accept outgrowth of *Western capitalism*. In the course of thirty years, rock bands have stormed every bastion of official resistance and forced party and government to accept rock-and-roll music as part of life in the Marxist-Leninist state. [my emphasis]

(Ryback quoted in Ebeling 1990)

Functioning on the principles and ideological premises inherited from late socialist underground art scenes, post-socialist subcultural scenes necessarily had to undergo a crisis. This crisis signified erosion of the pre-Wall model of power on which counter-cultures built their premises and which stopped serving its purpose after the Fall of the Wall. Several studies, having dealt with the transition of counter-cultures and underground scenes from late socialist to post-socialist order, noted a deep loss of orientation points (Cushman 1995; Szemere 2001). Without the binary of two systems – socialism and capitalism, socialist counter-culturalists were left in the terrain where new meaningful culturo-ideological maps

had to be assembled and justified. 'What does counter-culture mean after the Wall?', may have been the over-arching question.

1.1.3. The fear of Western consumerism and popular culture

One discursive strand dealing with adoption of new scenarios of cultural production and consumption was problematizing (possible) identities formed by uncritical adoption of Western-style consumerism patterns.

With the opening of borders, free trade posited a menace that the region will become culturally homogenized, a legal 'no man's land' quickly occupied by Western cultural industries and over-ridden by pervasive 'trash-culture'. As a result, the idea of a clash of popular culture with post-socialist conditions boosted literary fiction across post-socialist contexts (Hvorecký 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007; Masłowska 2004[2002], 2008[2006]; Denežkina 2004[2002]). In these fictional accounts, post-socialist subjects (mainly young people) were seen as dealing with a tsunami of images, trinkets, fast food, flashing advertisement, influx of drugs, rising criminality and pornography as well as corporate abuse of lacunose legality. Their status of human beings – as (properly) cultured – was seen as being at stake. In all of these accounts, Westernization is perceived as an irreversible process of pervasive anti-culture.

The fear of pop culture (identified with Westernization, Americanization or globalization par excellence) has preceded the 'wild '90s'. In his 1984 essay <u>The Tragedy of Central Europe</u>, Milan Kundera laments that in Western Europe, High Culture has long ago lost its status of the bastion of national and European values. For Kundera, globalized West cannot

understand the grieving of intellectuals from Central Europe who witnessed 'cultural barbarism' of Soviet invasions in 1956 and 1968. He concludes with exclamation that "The real tragedy for Central Europe, then, is not Russia but Europe […]. Behind the iron curtain, [Central European intellectuals] did not suspect that the times had changed […]" (Kundera 1984: 11). What he means is that since Central Europe politically left the 'West', profound changes took place: the status of national and European High Culture was eroded and replaced by the globalized media culture and marketplace (1984: 7)[2].

According to the logic of Kundera's essay, the events of 1989 had a chain of precursors in what he calls "the Central European revolts" where Culture, mainly its 'progressive' 'independent' incarnations, played a crucial role. He writes:

> […] the Central European revolts were not nourished by the newspapers, radio, or television—that is, by the "media." They were prepared, shaped, realized by novels, poetry, theater, cinema, historiography, literary reviews, popular comedy and cabaret, philosophical discussions—that is, by culture. The mass media—which, for the French and Americans, are indistinguishable from whatever the West today is meant to be—played no part in these revolts (since the press and television were completely under state control).

(Kundera 1984: 10)

Taking Kundera's argument seriously, the Underground or counter-cultures were seen as inheritors of the Avant-Garde/High Culture message which was in the West corrupted by the market logic while in the East it partly evaded being hijacked by the State ideological control. The line of connection between (independent) culture and oppositional social forces remained in function and culminated with 1989 events.

What Kundera discovered upon his arrival in Paris (right after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968), counter-culturalists were only to realize en masse in the course of

---

[2] The mass culture debate has been ongoing since at least Adorno & Horkeimer's opus <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u> (1992[1944]) and fully elaborated after WWII by such critics as McLuhan, Greenberg or Eco. There is no doubt that division of the world and later Cold War situation play an eminent role in the debate.

the '90s. Ethnographies of post-socialist ex-underground scenes (Cushman 1995; Szemere 2001) revolve around the 'crisis of values' which is explained by the rising influence of pop culture, consumerism and cultural industries, in short: the market-related forms of culture.

Similar point is made by Philip Roth in the interview with Ivan Klíma:

> As Czechoslovakia becomes a free, democratic consumer society, you writers are going to find yourself bedeviled by a number of new adversaries from which, strangely enough, repressive, sterile totalitarianism protected you. I am speaking about trivialize of everything, commercial television.
>
> (Klíma & Roth 1990)

Elaborating on Roth's statement, socialist societies paradoxically provided a milieu for the Romantic idea of Art to flourish – uncorrupted by the market as well as by the establishment (because standing in declared opposition or neutrality to it). In the classical Romantic split, Art and market were incompatible and one could not be involved in both spheres.

In 1990, Václav Havel was closer to Frank Zappa – as a counter-cultural figure, a symbol of the '60s cultural movement and "one of the Gods of Czech underground" (Maštalír 2006) – than to any actual politician of Western countries. Kolaraska-Bobińska (2007) may add that for the anti-communist politicians but also in the wide popular discourse, "democracy was understood as freedom and justice rather than procedural democracy rooted in law, mechanisms and institutions" (2007, p.29). Paradoxically, Zappa as newly appointed Minister of Trade, Culture and Tourism assisted with explaining to Havel the idea of credit card and suggested that castles in Czechoslovakia could be converted into hotels in order to bring in Western tourists (Neve 2003). As Sabrina Ramet (1994) and many others observed, the anti-communist politicians in Czechoslovakia were partly rock musicians, writers and journalists or, at least, looked like countercultural bohemians, the image evoking the Beats and Flower Power generation.

The romanticized idea of Western counter-cultures was nourished especially by dissidents. However, the cultural maps, they imagined to join after the regime change did not exist anymore (if they ever existed). There can be no deeper paradox than Zappa's cynical entrepreneurial idea. While politically Czechoslovakia (or Visegrad countries in general) "returned" to the West (e.g. Kusý 2009), culturally it had nowhere to return. Culture in the West (also in its 'independent' or 'alternative' forms) was firmly attached to and mediated by the market.

The tradition of the Underground stretched into the indie scene mushrooming in Bratislava in the early '90s. However unlike discos emerging around the city, it offered almost no propositions for operationalizing culture for market conditions. Little profit could have been made in popular indie youth venues such as former Propeler [open air concert venue by Danube]. There was a stage and one improvised buffet (literally a hut) serving beer and Kofola [Czechoslovak version of Coca Cola] and selling waffles. People would even bring their own bottles and sit on the grass. While discotheques 'cared only about profit and not about quality music' (to distill a popular narrative among clubbers), the range of subcultures attracting students was gradually seen as not 'progressive', not 'modern' enough.

As one of my interviewees aptly pointed out, club cultures proposed a radically distinct sensibility which was at the core of a new lifestyle project: "Punk and rock concerts were like you wore ripped jeans and so [club cultures] was something cleaner and more modern and mainly more… futuro [sic]. And that really got me like I no longer wanted to be a part of some rock trash (laughter)." (Ivan)

1.1.4. New way of thinking and organizing culture

Club cultures were a way out of the dilemma – a way to the future, as its enthusiast tended to believe – because club cultures were able to accommodate changes in the ways of understanding and organizing culture and connect it to broader economic contexts. The imperative of profitability, techniques of self-promotion and other aspects of culture closely tied to the market were seen by the traditional counter- and subcultures as ethically problematic.

As the orthodox 'alternatives' decline, the 'entrepreneurs' take up their place. For traditional counter-cultural artists, getting involved with the market (and succeeding!) meant excommunication from the artist status. Any structure that would represent bondage – whether censorship or commodification – was seen as oppressive to the counter-culturalist striving for perpetual self-expression and liberation from all ties of normalcy (Marcuse cited in Cushman 1995: 331). The myth of independence was powerful; even researchers adopted it to communicate the disappointment that post-socialism brought to those who used to take part in the underground scenes:

> For those who profit from or find ways to satisfy their material desires within a capitalist order, capitalism is certainly liberating. But artists […] are seldom comfortable with defining freedom and liberation purely in financial and material satisfaction.

> (Cushman 1995: 110-111)

Clubbers were not invited to see themselves as Bohemian dissidents on the run from oppressive norms but rather as an avant-garde reshaping and setting the rules of the game. McRobbie noted about the situation in Britain: "The new relations between art and economics mark a break with past anti-commercial notions of being creative." (2002: 521) Under the neo-liberal regime, narratives of freedom and independence in art, creative

professions and subcultures received new forms. Club cultures were on the pinnacle of introducing these new forms of thinking about and practicing culture.

Local club cultures did not share with countercultures and their heirs the idea of automatic entitlement, of culture flourishing only by the fact of freedom. Just the opposite: it was necessary for them to build an infrastructure from the scratch: not against but within the rules of the market. For party organizers, being able to carve out a space on the market meant a proper form of subcultural creativity. As I show further, they had to become subcultural entrepreneurs.

1.2.0. Towards a 'proper' entrepreneurial environment

1.2.1. Autonomous zones of creativity or proto-entrepreneurial milieu?

In his study <u>Gagarin and the Rave Kids</u>, Yurchak (1999) proposed a perspective on the transition in Russian St. Petersburg by looking at the transformations of the local club scene. Since late '80s, the state power had been in recession while the new institutions of power did not yet settle in place. He proposed that before state socialist regime gave way to new power structures experienced by some artists and young people as oppressive – such as mafia networks and commercial cultural industries – a burst of youthful creative energy could leak through the holes in the tectonic plates of changing systems. Yurchak believes that due to this temporary constellation, independent youth cultures could flourish. He illustrates this idea through the short history of early rave scene. Artists used abandoned flats to experiment with new cultural forms they adopted during their visits abroad. They

mixed legacies of late socialist imagery (Gagarin) together with the pulsating rhythms of the new music.

My interpretation of the field material and interviews partly corresponds with Yurchak's perspective on youth cultures as mixing the old and the new approaches to organizing and understanding culture. However, I depart from Yurchak by suggesting that youthful creativity was not an expression of temporary freedom which is otherwise suppressed by the hegemonic power bloc (whether it is the Party or cultural industries). Rather, what seems as a pure expression of youthful creativity can actually be understood as testing the entrepreneurial culture in the field of nightlife and entertainment. As such, club cultures partly contributed to channeling and building neo-liberal structures; it never existed in some systemic vacuum as Yurchak claimed.

What was formulated as instability and insecurity for many of transition subjects (Introduction), Yurchak formulates as a period of genuine creative freedom for some young artists. For Yurchak's clubbers, as well as for the entrepreneurs in his later work (2003), transition is a time of *opportunity*. Paradoxically, he holds the two – clubbers and entrepreneurs – apart. On the one hand, clubbers are charged with free spirit and bursting with liberated creativity (a portrayal inherited from the way socialist underground artists were previously seen). On the other hand, business persons are portrayed as dressed in suits, riding expensive cars and hurryingly entering the revolving door to reach their office, bank or a restaurant (2003: 72). No intersection between the two worlds – of youthful creativity and yuppie career – is suggested.

The schism between cultures of capitalism and youth cultures has been meticulously deconstructed in the work of Angela McRobbie (1988; 1998; 2002, 2010). She claimed that

subculturalists are also entrepreneurs and that new cultural industries feed themselves of youthful creativity and sense for innovation. For example, McRobbie relates the boom of British fashion industry with the legacy of punk (1998). For Hodkinson (2002), the entrepreneurial aspect actually fortifies a subculture (such as Goth) from within as people buy and sell specialized goods which mark their distinct identity and provides a reason to run shops and meet at events to trade in subcultural items. McRobbie writes (1993: 18): "introducing the practices of selling clothes and records and other items to those involved in the subculture was also to bring to the analysis the reality of an infrastructure in the subculture which involved both production and marketing". However McRobbie's perspective on 'subcultural entrepreneurialism' is more open than that of Hodkinson's: the idea is not to delimit a closed-circuit of highly specialized economy but rather to show how people, practices and ideas circulate between art colleges, street cultures, independent business and cultural industries.

Studying resorts like Ibiza, Goa and Pune, D'Andrea extends the subculturalist/entrepreneur perspective beyond the shores of Britain, even beyond the Euro-American context. However, he remains loyal to the Romantic quest for resistance and thus reads nomadic ravers and neo-hippies as a gesture of refusal of capitalism, not its innovative avant-garde on the march to new territories. He states: "while being continuously co-opted by states of discipline and markets of desire, [global counterculture] also entails the possibility of alternative identities based on metamorphic experimentation" (D'Andrea 2009[2007]: 226).

As ravers started moving across the continent, the idea of escaping the confines of 'the system' was widespread in the literature on club cultures (St John 2009). Sound systems were leaving Britain where raves were penalized and regulated (McKay 1996: 155; Reynolds

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1999: 167, 173-178, 293) and headed among other places to legally lacunose parts of New Europe (Jackson in Smith 2008: […]). Nevertheless, my respondents were not discussing escape from the confines of the system as much as they were calling for *more order*. They wanted to go out, run parties, use and provide leisure infrastructure – business as usual.

Power dynamic in the post-socialist space was in radical flux. As Yurchak (1999) already proposed, traditional agents such as police, law, educators or parents loosened their authority while new 'institutions' emerged such as mafia or consumer culture. As I further argue, clubbers as consumers and producers called for 'fair' conditions in which 'proper' leisure culture could be sustained. This call has to do with advocating for the entrepreneurial environment where customers are also reflexive agents not passive victims of consumption (see section 2.3.4.). The idea was to part with the 'improper' ways – such as mafia involvement in clubs, related aggressive police manners and public suspicion (harmful for luring sponsors and to the safety of customers). In short: functioning legal framework and infrastructure but less state involvement and more private sponsorship.

New subcultures rising after 1989 were already and inextricably part of the market system and attuned to neo-liberalization of culture. This is a point disregarded in Yurchak's discussion of St. Petersburg rave and club scene. For him, the scene was a utopian space of autonomy from the fields of power – first, the fading power of the socialist state and second, the rising power of illegitimate structures such as mafia and of legitimate but problematic commercial structures marginalizing independent non-profitable cultures. However, my material shows that the dynamic inside club cultures was more complex. Yurchak portrays the trajectory of club cultures evolution as follows: initially, club cultures make part of independent cultures closely tied to the alternative rock scene. As mafia and commercial

cultures gain grip over them, previously autonomous youth cultures are turned into new discos.

In Bratislava, rather than being suppressed and transformed under the pressures of illegality and consumerism, club cultures successfully connected to the logic of entrepreneurialism and cultural marketing and crafted (sub)cultural structures fit for the new conditions. To understand how this happened, a different model of power has to be accepted. Instead of being positioned outside of power, a pre-Foucaultian perspective employed by Yurchak (1999), club cultures were situated on the cross-roads, or rather within a web, of different power lines.

Themes such as resistance, deviance and evasion from institutions, authorities and other power structures run through the investigation of subcultures from the very beginning; they are a legacy of a particular take on Birmingham subculture studies, mainly the offspring of Hebdige's earlier work (Hebdige 1993[1976]; 1987[1979]). Moreover, within the tradition of studying socialist contexts, investigations of non-official cultures typically raised questions about freedom of expression and anti-totalitarian cultural forces pushing against the burden of socialist regime. However, we might need to rethink the model of power inherited from the times of 'rock in opposition' for studying subcultures and cultural movements in post-socialist contexts. Even more because clubbers themselves held as crucial to de-link from the traditional counter-cultures. Moreover, as I argue throughout the chapter, entrepreneurialism was integral to the very organization of the scene.

1.2.2. 'Hey, we need your money!': flexible conditions for party organizing

Where many perceived confusion and insecurity, some club culture enthusiasts found a beneficent milieu to pursue their activities. In the following story of Eman, event organizing and Dj-ing became a part-time occupation for him. I especially appreciated his narrative because it symbolically staged the moment when club cultures took over the leisure scene of Bratislava pushing discos and rock concerts on the margin.

Abandoned by a rock band that left the key there, Eman and his friend turned a space ['klubovňa'] into an improvised club. They stole bricks from a closed down disco club to build a counter onto which they put turntables. The rooms were equipped with carpets and couches; Eman and his friend brought a TV set and a video recorder to make a little lounge. They equipped the other room with a steam machine; it was used as a dance hall for about 40-50 people coming every weekend for parties. In this constellation, Eman and his friend were running the club-like place for about two years.

Then, disco club Live! was opened on the top floor of a neighboring shopping mall and the two friends and aspiring DJs decided to relocate their parties there.

> We decided to make an event. We aimed for then largest disco space in Slovakia. No one knew who we were, we only were able to DJ very roughly, we were self-taught, had to do everything on our own, figure out what's possible and what's not, find music… There were CDs already so we were burning them […]. So here we were in Live! club and asked to see the owner.
>
> (Eman, male, 31, catering distributor)

Eman describes the owner using a lot of gesturing: he had a mafia-look of shaved head with strong neck and big shades. This particular type of masculinity – 'entrepreneur' ['podnikateľ'] – gained visibility in the '90s across post-socialist countries. The word itself had a connotation of illegality and 'vulgar' taste: he manifested his strength through a set of

symbols such as robust car, 'tasteless' clothing, massive jewelry, preference for 'solarium blondes', combat dog, specific vocabulary. Eman remembers the owner called them 'boys'.

However, when I met Eman at a friend's house party, he looked to me not far from the image he described: tall, well-built, ultra-short hair, heavy chain and self-confident in knowing everyone, 'having contacts'. The way he described the meeting with the club owner had film-like qualities and Eman was aware of putting it that way. "The two of us, we were like out of a movie", he said. I was reminded of Tarantino movies. It was a moment of shift of power: old entrepreneurial type was to be replaced by the 'boys'. Although there were still some overlaps in style of doing business, language used and status symbols, the shift was already there. Eman and his friend confronted the club owner suggesting that the music which played in Live! "fairly sucked" and that they would like to get a date in the calendar to organize a party. He started laughing and offered they could pick any date.

Eman and his partner hired a group of go-go dancers they knew from a club attached to the student housing 'Béčko'. Regarding sponsoring, Eman tells another adventurous story. Walking home from the club, they noticed a car featuring American Bull logos. It was a regular Škoda 120 car with stickers on the doors. The driver was on the phone when Eman and his friend knocked on the car window. Surprised, he rolled it down. "Hey, we need your money ['lóve'[3]]!", Eman laughs as he recalls the way in which they addressed the guy in a company car. They explained the plan with holding a party in Live! and asked whether American Bull would sponsor it. The man in the sticker car was interested as well as people

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[3] In the original version, Eman uses a Roma word for money. It signifies affiliation to illegal business circles, whether actual or pretended. Its use became popular among young people mainly with the rise of local hip-hop scene when Roma identity borrowed from the message of black American ghetto youth. In the '90s, the use of the word goes well with chains and purple suits wore by early 'businessmen'. On the legacy of unfavorable image of people involved in trading, see section 1.4.2.

in the radio (Fun radio was the first private radio station in Slovakia, since 1990 (Fun radio [no date])) who initially laughed when asked to provide air time for free.

"We were nervous, sweating", Eman continues. At 10pm on the day when party was held, the club was still empty, no trace of crowds coming to the party. "We were like, holy shit, they'll shoot us, kill us!" Eman and his friend were not informed that something actually happened in front of the shopping mall and people were held queuing to enter. When the doors finally opened, the line of people was so long, they immediately filled the club which usually catered from 500 to 1.000 people. Eman and his friend received only a fragment of the money earned. Later, they organized more parties with unstable result. The owners of the club where one of their parties was a tremendous loss asked them to make another party to earn the money back. However, the club owners never contacted Eman and his partner again.

He moved from club to club, in between business partners who often were friends, too. He settled in Duna club for a time. His friend/business partner received information that the club was for sale and bought it. It was there Eman could finally practice using professional high quality equipment. He used to come right after work to "practice, make new stuff, buy records on the internet…". When we met in 2008, Eman was a resident DJ and promoter in Metro club in Šaľa, a town 85 km from Bratislava (one of the earliest techno places in Slovakia which functions continuously to these days). Aside from event work – or vice versa – Eman runs a catering company distributing food to offices.

In the next section, I show that while in Yurchak's account, club cultures trajectory went from the independent artist scene to mafia disco clubs, the story I assembled on the basis of

my interviewees' narratives goes vice-versa: the emancipation of club cultures from mafia-controlled discos and gradual introduction of the 'rules of the game'.

1.2.3. The story of U.club: subculture-mafia-police interface

The beginnings of club cultures in Bratislava tend to be narrated in connection to the history of U.club. Converted into club space, it is actually a functioning atomic shelter. It owes its original name to the U-shaped ground plan. One part of the place is still used for shooting trainings for special police troops and some prominent men holding arm passport. According to Skank who worked on several positions in the club, this additional clientele was the main reason why U.club managed to avoid ransoms from mafia members and thus kept a stabile place ran by enthusiasts and insiders on a relatively independent basis with long-term affordable prices. This backstage story of U.club's functioning is an amusing example of the police and politicians indirectly protecting the heart of club cultures in Bratislava. With their physical presence, they guaranteed legal framework for the enterprise to flourish. Such situation is ironically illustrous of Harvey's definition of neoliberalism where power of the state only guarantees the conditions, serves as a framework, of free market competition (2005: 2).

Other places struggled with problems like complaints about the noise level, the lack of affluent regular clients or mafia related issues. Therefore, U.club remains the place that has been writing and testifying history of club cultures in Bratislava since the very beginning. Of course, U.club did not completely escape attention of mafia members and police raids. However, as resident DJs and ex-employees Milosh and Skank jointly claim, mafia members quickly lost interest in the place upon realizing it is 'protected' by the users of the shooting

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station. Also several visits from mafia members (as guests) were kept under control by the club staff (although, sometimes only upon calling the police). Police is represented by Skank and Milosh as both partners (against mafia) and trouble makers (raids).

Milosh and Skank remember that in the earlier days of club cultures, also police practices were more unregulated and brutal. They described a story which portrays state bureaucracy as lacking competence and eventually manifesting uneconomic behavior. Both recalled an instance when all club visitors were searched and about 50 people were taken to the police station where memos were written down with each of them. However, when service changed in the morning, the new shift was barely informed about what was happening and let everyone go. If there is now a raid in Subclub (former U.club), Skank adds, police are more careful not to address young people as law offenders a priori. If people are searched for drugs, there is always a policewoman to search women and a psychologist to assist, too. According to Skank, long term U.club/Subclub employee, the police moved to the rather neutral role of order guarantors as other subcultures became sites of threat.

Apart from simply concluding that police became fairer in its approaches to club cultures, another possible explanation could be that the kernel of 'trouble' was shifted elsewhere: to new subcultures. Younger people started congregating at hip-hop events to reproduce rough ghetto aesthetics. Skank says they had to remove hip hop parties from U.club's dramaturgy due to the high damages suffered each and every time there was such party: smashed toilettes and lavatories as well as fights and an overall climate of aggression.

Thornton proposes that the denouncement of raves by British media was a 'blessing' for them because it validated underground-ness of these cultures and so their participants could converge subcultural capital on themselves (1996: 120-121). Police raids played a similar role

in the perception of clubbers. The verge of illegality was a validation that clubs are not 'mainstream' (distinctions discussed in sections 2.1.0. and 2.2.0.), that they are a (sub)cultural avant-garde. At the same time, clubbers perceived that illegal status threatened quality of the parties: as producers, they could not attract and keep sponsors for bigger events or run clubs on a consistent basis (Eman, Peťo); as consumers, they could not feel safe and comfortable, priorities which were often raised in clubbers' speech (Mária, Eva, Zita, Jozef).

"Raids are incredibly expensive. They cost hundreds of thousand korunas[4] of state money!", Milosh concludes suggesting that police used to act non-economically and without a clear idea how clubbers should be treated and what actual danger they proposed. Also the acts of police betrayed a level of disorganization on the part of state institutions characterizing the transition years. It is important to notice that long-term (sub)cultural producers Skank and Milosh perceive themselves as entrepreneurs who strive for a well functioning system; they criticize the lack of professional attitude and stress responsibility towards their customers.

1.3.0. Gendered opportunity

1.3.1. "Sorry, boys!": men's world of opportunity?

"It was a rule that when you were active, knew a foreign language and were bold enough to ask, it was possible to get things arranged."

(Aleš Bleha in Ondra 2006)

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[4] Slovak crowns were used from 1993 to 2008. In January 2009, Slovakia, the new member of European Union (since 2004), entered monetary union and accepted euro as its new official currency.

Eman's story ([section above]) celebrates the times of insecurity which, for some people, meant that many incredible things were possible, easy to organize and open to improvised solutions. Boundaries between mafia, subculturalists and entrepreneurs were porous. Sometimes all of these met in one person as in the case of Fero who was consecutively a special squad member, go-go dancer and one of the owners of a go-go dancer company and later on, a real estate agent; last time I heard about him, he imported wine and ran a wine cellar/pub. I presented Eman's account in length because it gives a good idea about the way some clubbers thought about transition times as a time of many possibilities. Eman converted his interest into a part time occupation while navigating between friends/business partners, semi-mafia partners and/or new entrepreneurs.

There is no doubt that such environment was to great extend a 'men's world'. As Adkins (1999) suggested, progressive social constellations may also mean re-traditionalization of gender. Feminist critique of club cultures revolves around the dilemma: are clubs actually an emancipatory milieu advancing feminist agenda or rather they foster forms of sexism and gendered hierarchies? Below, I will come back to this question and will illustrate it with a literature review. In this section, I suggest that the new entrepreneurial milieu – worlds of leisure and labor intersecting in clubs – was conditioned by the narratives of risk, danger and male expertise and thus women were kept in complementary or marginal position in respect to these new opportunities. As clubbers strived for quality, professionalism and safety, little was changed in regard to the male dominated sphere of cultural production. Rather, the rise of club cultures in Bratislava was a struggle of *classed* masculinities: tough-looking club owners vs. event organizers/project managers (In section 2.2.0., I elaborate on the distinction between clubs and discos).

Women took part in the new possibilities open for clubbers but their space of navigation was constricted or differently conditioned. Often attached to men as friends, helpers, fans and girlfriends, they had access to new technologies, were building networks of acquaintances and gaining skills. Zita had many connections from parties and also through her two previous boyfriends who were DJs. Therefore, it was her who helped her other boyfriend Jozef compose program of a club/lounge where he started doing dramaturgy for his friend, the club owner. "He basically didn't know anyone. I put him through to DJs," she says. Mayla learnt DJ-ing when she was dating Skank; she could practice in U.club where he worked as manager and DJ. "All of our ex-girlfriends became DJs, right?", Milosh laughs in dialogue with Skank, his DJ-partner and friend. Peťo explains how he and some other friends wanted to 'fabricate' female DJs which 'were in demand':

> In the old times at [the name of a place where parties were held], what we once did was like I especially pulled out three young chicks, aspiring DJs, saying 'You're good looking, you can play a bit, come, we'll make a theme evening!'. Today, none of these girls play. I mean, they tried getting started but… […] [In Czech republic], one such product is Miša Salačová. You know, she's totally 'made', right? She used to be a beauty pageant ['miss'] before two guys from Ostrava taught her DJ-ing […]. The guys do the technical side: sound and sound machines. […] These days, anyone can do the mixing.

(Peťo, male, 32, entrepreneur)

Female DJs tend to be seen as a hoax or a Pygmalion-esque creation of male producers, while the 'the real skills' remain a male domain.

In the literature on club cultures, there are two contradicting views under which feminist commentaries could be subsumed. On the one hand, Bradby (1993) raises a set of critical points that male technological primacy is used to 'sample femininity': female bodies and their parts are detached, commodified and as a sexualized package attached to de-personified electronic music. In other words, the actual female bodies are reduced to their symbolic qualities and exploited (Kepplova 2009). While male producers, DJs and sound/light

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engineers operate electronic event, female dancers provide (replaceable) bodies to the music which 'lacks' a live aspect of rock concerts or female voices are sampled for a track.

On the other hand, McRobbie (1993) proposed that raves and clubs are spaces where 'changing modes of femininity' are negotiated (1993: 14). This point provoked fantasy of researchers applying postmodern and poststructuralist theories to interpret clubbers as identity nomads and actual cyborgs (Pini 2001). Moreover, clubbers were seen as avant-garde practitioners of post-human, post-gender and post-sexuality constellations (Landau 2004; Lambevski 2005). We may understand this split as divided around the axes of consumption and production with the field of consumption open for renegotiations of the gender order while the sphere of production remains hierarchized and male-controlled. (I will develop this point in Ch3 where I discuss the opening of the field of consumption for femininity to travel onto male bodies.)

While the milieu changed in 20 years of club scene's existence, the video report On Slovak Electronic Scene (Voices 2011) provides an overview of the brand new and veteran talents which are all men. Tibor Holoda, one of the earliest DJs and founder of Wilsonic festival puts it aptly even if not consciously: as he lists the names on the scene, he concludes hoping he did not forgot anyone significant and if so then "Sorry, boys!" ["Sorry, chalani!"]. In 20 years, none of women clubbers active on the scene as producers or DJs made it into Holoda's list. In the next section, I offer a possible explanation: I look at the character of labor in clubs which, as I argue, is gendered and structured strictly around male networks.

1.3.2. Gendered informal work in club cultures

Quite a lot was written about the way rave and EDMC revolutionized music. Just like punk earlier (buy cheap instruments, rent a garage, learn couple of accords and shout a message), rave allowed young people to 'just do it' (get sound equipment, find a spot, call your friends and stage a party). With DiY[5] system of party organizing and use of electronic samples, music seemed to be even more democratized (Brown 1997). Nevertheless, feminist commentators quickly noticed that the old way of gendered policing of subcultural knowledge remained at place. Paradoxically, while rock partly let girls in, EDMC[6] can be seen as a return to crudely male control over music production and cultural organization.

The trend-setting and risk-ridden milieu was densely men-populated and significantly structured around male networks. Ivo narrated his clubcultural career trajectory: previously, he used to be the editor of a computer magazine where he was responsible for the music section. After the magazine stopped being issued, he moved to private business (importing car tires) but also paid attention to his hobby – trance music. He started writing meticulous reports from parties and thus built up many connections. Having established his name as a party critic and gaining the knowhow of party organizing, his ambition is to launch a party of his own. While Ivo started writing reports and PR news for free, exchanging his volunteer work for entries to more parties, there was always a perspective of gradual recognition of his work. He was able to climb the ladder of contacts and finally do things his way and make his name. However, not every committed work leads to recognition and it is significantly gender which structures which work counts and which does not.

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[5] DiY is a commonly used abbreviation standing for Do-it-Yourself. It was mainly popularized through punk culture which insisted on avoidance of cultural industries. Punk showed that a whole scene and related infrastructure can be assembled collectively by young people; no business or star system was necessary to put together bands and play music.
[6] EDMC is an abbreviation used in the literature on club cultures to designate electronic dance music culture.

Women clubbers are nonetheless committed but the work that is assigned to them is seen as petty, auxiliary and often labeled as 'just helping'. Eva who did her high school in the U.S. used to work as hostess at parties. She got a VIP pass in return for guiding and entertaining foreign DJs. Mária used her language and grammar skills to edit news and articles for websites specialized on EDMC. Petra used to dance in the go-go group of her boyfriend. Anna interviewed DJs and wrote articles for an EDMC site. Despites all these examples of commitment and participation, none of them subsumed their participation under a project of their own. The work they did was exchanged for benefits and favors such as free entry, VIP zone pass, pocket money (even considerable amounts such as in the case of Petra). This work was not a means to get the knowhow and move on; rather it had the social purpose of making a part of a bigger whole of the scene (see also Christenson & Peterson cited in Thornton 1996: 104).

Skank tells a story of how he connected to the scene, joined the networks of professionals and started his career of U.club resident DJ. Auxiliary work he did is subsumed to a larger teleological line, a project or a career.

> I started frequenting U.club in '94 […] I was 15 and 18 was the legal age of entry. I started appearing more and more often not on the dance floor […] but rather in the backstage at the DJ room. I was very interested and tempted. Like from the very beginning, I knew it was something very close to me. Here's a story: one day, I helped a friend in front of U.club, he was feeling very sick and no one cared. He was such a funny character… DJ Toky noticed it [Skank helping the guy]; he knew the guy and said he's giving me extra points for what I did. He suggested I could work in his record store if I wanted to. He employed me and that's where I started buying first records, I borrowed gramophones and learnt mixing. Due to my job in the store, I got a chance to play too quickly. I wasn't even any good. Of course, I improved soon. I had gigs immediately: Boomerangs, U.club… it went very fast.

> (Skank, male, 32, DJ)

Skank presents a narrative of solidarity with happy ending as he was rewarded by the guru of the scene. Being a community tends to be stressed as an over-arching ethical imperative.

In the narratives of my interviewees, the idea of *networks* resonates strongly. The networks are understood broadly on the scale from idealistic solidarity to practical contacts. Petra, Iveta or Krista often alluded on 'knowing people'. They were sometimes able to translate these networks from subcultural social capital to extra-club social capital as in the case of Iveta who explicitly evoked her shift of interest: from potentially romantic encounters and friends to friends-with-purpose. She acknowledged she thinks of people networks she builds in clubs as potential sport partners, clients, business contacts or practical contacts ('someone to make a sofa for her') (further elaborated in section 3.1.3.).

Despite their abilities to build contacts, women tend to remain auxiliary. If they connect to male networks and occupy the same jobs, narratives are circulated which discredit their position. They tend to be seen as rarities which confirm that the places they occupy don't rightfully belong to them; they are exceptions. Mayla 'got there as a girlfriend of Skank' (Skank) as well as DJ Nifra who is an internationally renowned producer 'but only due to her attachment to Marcus Schulz and it might not even be her production' (Ivo) and further Míša Salačová 'is a complete product of 2 DJs behind her' (Peťo, Mayla).

'Everyone can be a DJ now' is a common attitude in late club cultures. What would otherwise be seen as democratization of music production and distribution is actually assessed by established DJs as highly problematic and harmful to the trade. Skank and Milosh agreed that earlier, records were expensive and one needed to have the skill for machines and the nerve to spend time practicing. Symptomatically, influx of women and 'kids' into DJ-ing is seen as the sign of decline of the craft and the scene per se.

> Nowadays, it's much easier, daddy buys a turntable, one says to oneself 'I'll have girls, I'll be famous, I'll deal with [riešiť] masses…' but before, becoming a DJ was the most complicated thing in the world. In the first place, you had to have money, you had to have contacts, many things at the same time just in order to start. Now, everyone's a DJ: all our friends […], all our

ex-girlfriends became DJs (Milosh laughs) but when we were starting, we were about 15-20 DJs in Slovakia. Now, there's 300 DJs, 500 DJs. [...] I've been working for a very long time in record shops [...] I see it regularly: [he] buys a turntable and in half-a-year realizes that it's not amusing anymore and sells the stuff, you know. (Milosh interferes) I used to play for myself. I was able [to play] 8 hours in a row[7] ... .

(Skank & Milosh, DJs)

When he worked for the computer magazine, ivo_ninja used to run a track competition – the idea was that anyone could send an original track and the selected items would form a CD compilation added to the magazine. Regarding the work of track production, he states:

It used to be much more difficult than it is now. Nowadays, you have software and samples which can be put to use. Moreover, there are mixing programs which are able to coordinate the bpm [beat per minute] and so anyone can mix. It is no pain to learn it, technology takes care of it completely and that's why there's so many chic so-called 'DJs' [kvázi].

(Ivo, male, 29, entrepreneur)

As Thornton (1996) proposed, presence of women in subcultures tends to signify mainstreamization and vice-versa, mainstream is a feminized trope (1996: 98-105). Thornton focused on taste statements. Her women interviewees found it easier to acknowledge their affinity to 'bad taste'. 'It's crap but I like it', they would state apologetically to confirm that they posses less subcultural capital or that they often remain beyond the domain of expertise (Thornton 1996: 13). They rarely have encyclopedic knowledge about DJs, possess an impressive record collection, know how to spin records or set the lights.

My interviewee Eva confirmed a similar feeling that she did not qualified. She said it took her time to get enough courage to join the discussion forum on websound.eu where she is a registered member. She preferred just following the discussions but doubted she could contribute herself. She rather joined the threads about party assessment where one could express feelings, narrate events or give a piece of advice. Whenever music or technology was discussed, Eva would be reluctant to join. It took her time to persuade herself that she

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[7] It is significant that Milosh speaks about 8 hours of practicing which is the standard working time.

can also express her views on music or on skills of a particular DJ. Discussions about equipment, technology or programs remain strongly a male domain. This situation of gendered nature of expertise and professional networks also shapes the way in which careers are thought of and crafted in the field of club cultures.

1.4.0. Subcultures as projects towards careers

Michal H. explains his immediate attachment to electronic music and clubbing saying that "[this music] perfectly corresponded to my world: hard work… repetition, monotonous even beating rhythm… When it played, I felt that this is my world/my thing". While many of his peers, who were more into punk and rock, called electronic dance music "some sort of vacuum cleaner music, no music at all", Michal H. says he "was into it from the very beginning". He sensed a potential. For him, electronic music was the most appropriate expression of the spirit of the time.

However, club cultures are not simply a metaphor of the new lifestyle; they are deeply involved in producing it. At the time Michal H. started clubbing, he was a high school student. The world of hard work, overtime and globalized consumption he described for me was most probably not a daily reality for him. Rather, he saw it emerging and aspired to an involvement with it both in his fiction and the later career (of a writer). He proposed a connection between the world of hard work and that of the beating nocturnal rhythm of a techno party. I understand Michal H.'s statement as an instance of identification with an emerging professional culture and consumer sensibility.

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Certainly, club cultures served as mediators of the new entrepreneurial vocabulary and practices. Rather than providing a 'soundtrack' to the lifestyle and sensibility of clubbers, it was an arena of potentialities. Clubs were a meeting place of trendsetters. Michal H., who left 'alternative' rock scene behind to join club cultures, was able to meet these people and got involved, too. As a result of his contacts established in clubs, he joined a world of up-tempo work in the new economic sector of 'trendy' jobs trading in symbolic capital: as copywriter, festival organizer, and writer.

I build on McRobbie's (2002; 2010) proposition to study club cultures in close connection to entrepreneurial and professional opportunities they opened not just in clubs but also beyond. Apart from generating occupations related directly to running a party, organizing events or playing music, club cultures were a milieu for assembling new skills and contributing to reshaping of work cultures in the sector of economy which had no precedent in socialism. Mainly advertising, marketing and design was heavily drawing on subcultural capital, the knowledge of 'hip' and 'cool' (Frank 1997), people networks, designing and consumption of lifestyle.

McRobbie's notion of *transferable skills* allows us to do away with number of rigid divisions which previously used to characterize studies of youth cultures. These tended to be seen as isolated from adults' worlds of work and in opposition to them (section 3.1.0.). However, careers in clubs or skills and knowledge taken there and back between work and leisure spheres manifest that the lines between unproductive leisure time of youth and productive work of adults has become porous if not completely unstable. Moreover, 'transferable skills' as reworked by Jackson (2004: 115-170), include also subtle social skills and dispositions. As a result, we have to think of youth cultures as firmly making part of post-industrial

economies as well as shaping subjects for specific occupations mostly in the so-called 'creative sector'.

1.4.1. Subcultures and the new economic sector: transferable skills and bricolage of knowledge and skills

Even if clubbers claim they tend to leave their work or school issues behind and dissolved them on the dance floor with the use of ecstasy (Milanko), one cannot think of clubs as isolated islands of non-work. How to account for the skills and knowledge that clubbers bring with them and put to use when they engage in the scene? And how about the skills and knowledge transferred from club cultures to the worlds of work?

My interviewee Anna remembers she and her friends used to take pictures using a classic analogue camera. There was no way to check a taken picture. Moreover, the process toward the actual picture was rather laborious (seen from the perspective of a digital camera user): one had to bring film to a specialist and then wait several hours or days to pick up paper pictures. This procedure was incredibly shortened and simplified when first digital cameras appeared. Anna's boyfriend Marek was one of the first people in the city who had access to digital camera. He worked for a big telecommunication company and previously worked in a couple of IT-companies, one of them founded by a friend of his. As a result, he could use company's digital camera as well as call from an unlimited phone card. While he borrowed the camera which was the company's property to take pictures at parties, post them and thus receive a regular guest list placement, the phone card was a completely illegal activity popular among the people who worked in early telecoms.

Taking pictures and making phone calls were crucial activities related to clubbing. According to Anna, party pictures were in great demand. Marek started taking many pictures and posted them on a server. The server was a source from which websites specialized on the club scene downloaded pictures. Some clubbers had access to internet at home; others used school or work computers, visited friends or net cafés to view web galleries. Party photographer became a status occupation. While Marek did not make any money or very little money, he saved on entries and got in touch with party organizers, web masters as well as clubbers posing for the pictures.

Digital images conveniently responded to the demand on promptness. While analogue pictures "were sometimes ready in a week or two and thus no more current" (Anna), digital pictures were rapidly downloaded and posted, mediation and waiting excluded. Just like mobile phones and web sites, digital cameras were essential for not just responding to the needs of the clubbing community but also for *formulating* and *coordinating* this community – meaning not just practically but also in terms of 'imagined community' (see sections 2.3.5. and 2.3.6.).

Earlier in this chapter, I formulated the idea that club cultures provided a platform of opportunities for young people. These opportunities were embedded in risk and transgression, legality and illegality were permeable, meeting and breeding business. Clubbers were invited to experiment on multiple levels – from styling, stimulant taking, selection of music and location, to organization of parties and starting their own projects and companies.

Petra's boyfriend Fero was supposedly a special squad member as well as had contacts with mafia. With a friend, they started a go-go dancer agency and opened courses. Petra laughs

when she recalls that it all started with a simple idea: no one was doing it so they took an opportunity. One of them was an actual electric boogie dancer, Petra's boyfriend just improvised. He supposed that no one really knew how club dance should look like. They hired several friends to dance with them including Fero's girlfriend Petra and formed a go-go agency. Soon, the interest was so big that they realized they could run (pricy) courses. They rented a space in a dormitory gym where occasional courses or events were held. They motivated people by promising to select the best participants to become dancers for the agency. Go-go dancers were hired by clubs and events. During the peak popularity of clubbing, Petra travelled every weekend to various locations mainly around Slovakia. While at physical education classes, she was one of the least gifted, thanks to her boyfriend she became a professional dancer. In comparison to the modest income of students, she was making very good money (around 2.000 SKK per event[8]). After the most intense summer, she stopped dancing and took up a job of a sales assistant in a perfume store in a shopping centre not far from her house. This place allowed her to receive complimentary make-up which she used for parties and borrowed or gave to friends. Another respondent used to borrow or steal clothes from a brand store in the same shopping palace where both she and Petra worked. Some of the clothes she wore for parties.

I listed a couple of examples to show that the notion of bricolage[9] could easily encompass not just stylistic creativity (Hebdige 1979; Willis 1990) but also improvisatory ways in which

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[8] Cca 66 EUR. Several go-gos danced in 20 minute blocs the entire night. They received tailored costumes which they could keep, entry fee was for free and often drugs too. One dancer, Ivuška, travelled to Ibiza and Iceland where she was hired as a go-go dancer and settled there for several years.

[9] The notion of bricolage is tightly connected to the 'classic' concept of subculture. The term, as used in cultural studies and theory, was introduced by Dick Hebdige (1987([1979]). He adapted Lévi-Strauss's (1990[1966]: 16-36) anthropological meaning of the term for the purposes of the study of urban youth sign systems. Bricolage refers to a creative use of objects for purposes for which they were not destined resulting in sheer practicality but also in surreal or ironic meanings. According to structuralist and post-structuralist readings, such distortion

material, knowledge and skills flow from and to club cultures. Pico narrated how he emerged as a professional DJ ironically thanks to the family background rooted in the socialist official culture. His grandfather was an acknowledged composer and possessed musical apparatuses which Pico could borrow and rehash for new uses. His friend had a rental shop so Pico designed posters for him in exchange for cassettes. As a student of applied arts school, he secretly used the school equipment to produce these posters. The DJ equipment was semi-home-made out of older sound machines. Pico started playing at cottage parties and school discotheques (Mexa 2010).

Later, when Pico started playing in Ibiza club, he used to meet his friend Igor on the dancefloor. Igor worked in Fun radio and would let Pico burn CDs from the radio archive. Further, Pico introduced dance music to the ensemble of another new private radio station – Okey radio. His advertising agency made a successful campaign for radio Okey. He was hired to make a party for the radio management. Booking DJs instead of pop bands was an experiment. However, radio people were excited. After the director of Okey radio left her position, she joined Pico founding event agency Cosmopolit events (ibid.).

Further, Pico moved to working in an advertising agency which, according to Ivo, allowed him to use his contacts and resources to promote his trademark parties (Beautiful Things) on large billboards. This was seen very rarely around Bratislava. Usually, events were advertised on smaller posters and often posted illegally. Michal H. was able to make some extra money posting flyers for a club. However, as Oto commented, in smaller cities posting them was even made problematic because police could quickly trace people and fine them. Advertising parties using official billboard spaces was a shift to the mainstream for some but also a

of meanings has a potential to challenge the habitual order of symbolic systems and is thus relevant for the agenda of radical social change.

showcase of the new entrepreneurial skills of subcultural producers such as Pico. Pico's career is a good example of the bridge created between economy of favors, informal exchanges, and friendship services on the one hand and rising entrepreneurial cultures on the other hand. It is via this bridge that information flew in both directions between club cultures and new professions.

The dynamic of early club cultural work is not unlike the economy of favors characterizing socialist legacies in post-socialist societies (Ledeneva's 1998). The entire sector of shadow economy under socialism was characterized by the flow of material for private purposes or as a part of a broader chain of services. Similarly, copy machines were used for making flyers, cameras were 'borrowed', phone cards hacked etc. to run club cultures. However, also the knowledge of design tested when making posters and sites, ways of setting events, practice with media etc. were then transferred back onto market as highly appreciated skills.

However, the set of dispositions for entrepreneurial work did not have a clean register. The new occupations related to entertainment industry and night scapes were initially seen with suspicion. Before club cultures emerged from the zone of semi-legality – and persuaded police, customers, sponsors as well as 'ordinary people' that they were not disco mafiosos – they had to reclaim enterprising activities as legitimate occupations. Not jobs taking place in elusive nocturnal scapes populated by 'guys with chains' but suitable for middle-class men who could otherwise take up an office place.

1.4.2. New occupations – legacies of late socialism and new DiY cultures

During transition, among other profound changes, the register of occupations was altered as new jobs, professions, types of labor emerged. Typically, this change was signified by English designations of particular professions. While state socialism was characterized by stable long-term occupations, temporary and precarious occupations were marginalized and pushed into the shady zone of semi- and illegality. These occupations mostly connected to private entrepreneurship and (illegal) profit making. The allure of mistrust was transferred to post-'89 times and some of the emerging professions were looked upon with suspicion (Mandel & Humphrey 2002: 1).

With respect to the cultural context of low moral credibility of profit making activities, Buyandelgeriyn writes:

> For example, trading goods in the market—a straightforward activity in the Euro-American world—provokes ambivalent reactions in the postsocialist world. Throughout socialism, trade has been considered an immoral activity, a way of making profit without labor.

(2008: 238)

The occupations that emerged in connection to club cultures inherited some of this shadiness and mistrust even more because they connoted night and took place in the settings where alcohol was served and drugs were sold and consumed. Writer and commentator Michal H. remembers that when he and his friend Tibor Holoda started organizing Wilsonic festival, the occupation 'promoter' was perceived as "something between 'vekslák'[10] and taxi driver" (Hvorecký 2009). Using such comparison, he refers to the notorious illegal and semi-legal professions of late socialism: both masculine figures executed their trade in the night among shadows of street corners, hotels inhabited by

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[10] Foreign money exchange person; derived from German word *wechsel* meaning to change, exchange money.

mistrusted foreigners and lights of the nightlife that traditionally signified proximity of immorality.

In the early '90s, being a DJ also meant getting access to records (from abroad) and being able to work with technology (not just software but also hardware). Pico and Milosh both evoked their passion for technology, not just in the 'clean' sense of working with music programs. Rather they accentuated they came in contact with actual tinkering, adjusting of machines. The stress on technics is also meant to differentiate them from the new generation of DJs who, according to Skank, simply buy mixing technology from a store with the money of their parents, download tracks online and use DJ programs to mix and produce music. The element of investment, risk, manipulation and thrill is subtracted from such an account.

Pico (DJ and promoter) mentioned the times in Klub 39 which one of the directors of Fun radio used to frequent. Live sessions from the club were transmitted by this radio. At the same time, Pico was allowed to burn CDs from the radio's archive: "It was a thievery... Yes, it was... However, then it used to take about three quarters of a year till the ordered records arrived. Unlike today, it was incredibly difficult to lay hold of new tracks. I used to listen to British radios and felt like crying! (laughter)" DJs Toky and Loderer used to bring records in person from the U.K. and Italy.

Out of semi-legal activities, tinkering and CD-copying, a set of occupations emerged which attracted young, trendy crowd who further profited from nightlife not just in terms of their pleasure records but also professionally. Late socialist practices thus smoothly locked into the logic of entrepreneurialism without leaving traumatic scars of imposition of the neo-liberal order which would be somehow unsuitable for "the population's moral landscape"

(Buyandelgeriyn 2008: 240). Rather, club cultures provided an environment in which neo-liberal work cultures and entrepreneurial logic emanated 'spontaneously' from cultural practices – old and new – and were embraced as channeling agency of youth.

1.4.3. Subculturalists or (sub)cultural workers?

Even if clubs seem disconnected from the world outside – by thick walls, loud music, entry fee, festive dresses, altered states of consciousness etc. – there are important lines of connection to work cultures which should not be disregarded. Accumulation of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1996) in clubs seems to relate to the growth of urban population employed in 'trendy' jobs. By 'trendy' jobs, I mean occupations in information-telecommunication sector, design, advertising, marketing and media. The common denominator of these occupations is lifestyle. In this section, I organize the narrative of subcultures/youth culture/leisure in a way to stress ties to changing work scapes.

Previously, subcultures and youth culture in general were defined in opposition to work cultures of adults; as pre-work or anti-work cultures of leisure with strong connections to consumer cultures. Frith writes about the post-WWII phenomenon of youth culture: "This culture was defined in terms of leisure and leisure goods – coffee and milk bars, fashion clothes and hair styles, cosmetics, rock 'n' roll, films and magazines, scooters and motorbikes, dancing and dance halls" (Frith cited in Muggleton 2005: 206). The 'doing nothing' aspect was wedded to the 'spending a lot' aspect. This was a culture of excess undermining the sobriety ethos of the war generation of parents.

However, the history of changing youth cultures ties closely to changes in organization of work. Even before the boom of youth culture – and the related boom in its studies – the notorious Kracauer's ([1925]) figure of a 'little shop girl going to the cinema' was seen as an intersection of work and leisure regimes, as interpellation of young working-class women into leisure structures of capitalism represented by cultural industries. Leisure was portrayed as a prolongation of the work process: the crowd entering and exiting cinemas and other palaces of entertainment were assimilated to the factory crowd (Adorno 1993). The iconic figure of a 'little shop girl going to the cinema' was investigated in relation to the phenomenon of single female urban office workers and sales assistants who were targeted and catered by the booming cultural industry and consumer culture (Sanders 2006).

In its 'sheepish' obedience, the crowd lacked will and was apt for being infected by totalitarianisms. Thus comes the 'mass culture' critique which influenced the way counter-culturalists but also business people started thinking about consumption. The crowd was often feminized in its irrationality and spill of emotion. 'Girls with crudely painted faces' as Hoggart (1992[1957]) observed young working-class women while young men were portrayed as spending time throwing coins into juke box. Culture was democratized but, according to mass culture critiques it was also vulgarized.

There is no doubt that cultural critique helped educating cultural producers. For example, the ads are rarely as offensively shallow as in the times of McLuhan's The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man (1951). Nowadays, (sub)cultural experts go to see ads at specialized festivals and often also work for ad-making companies; the schema of permeable education/subculture/job that McRobbie proposed gives a better idea about the cycle of

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production/distribution/consumption of culture than the early binary of cultural capitalists vs. duped or resisting youth.

While the emergence of 'mass culture' ties to young urban population in manual and service jobs, post-WWII situation was again marked by changes on many levels. Against the optimistic visions of Youth Culture beyond class divisions, authors of <u>Resistance through Rituals</u> (Hall & Jefferson 2002[1976]) came up with analysis of class as it plays out though different approaches to Youth Culture. However, as I noted earlier, their broad perspective on the living conditions of youth – including housing situation, labor and schooling – was reduced to interest in symbolic games on the level of style. Willis's <u>Learning to Labor</u> (1981[1977]) is an example of the best tradition of Birmingham studying how 'cool' behavior of working-class male youth is also reproducing their class situation and directing them towards particular jobs assigned to them.

The iconic figure of post-WWII youth, the British Mod, might be read in relation to the influx of working-class men and women into the service sector. New (not always desirable) occupations are reflected in Mods' insistence on status and leisurely life: smart dress, urban trinkets such as glossy magazines and mopeds, time spend around coffee tables and dancing. The tough guy in the film Quadrophonia (1979), capturing the legendary clash between Mods and Rockers in English summer resorts, works as a bell boy in a hotel. The occupation in service seen as emasculating is balanced by the insistence on style, status through leisure. Work culture thus conditions the rising importance of consumption for defining identity.

The most notorious anti-work subculture – punk – can be associated with the rise of cultural entrepreneurialism of young people expulsed by the system of traditional occupations in the '80s Britain. McRobbie (1989; 1998) studied punk impulses for the booming British fashion

industry where many young people found opportunities for self-employment, mostly young women. She extends the line of inquiry to discuss new jobs in the '90s music industry including club cultures (McRobbie 1999; 2002). After punk and rave, it becomes clear that not just cultural industry 'steals' ideas from the street (Hebdige 2002[1976]) but subculturalists move to the fashion industry and run clubs as companies.

Attention to the economic impact of subcultures strengthened with the rise of interest in the role of (sub)cultural infrastructure in urban post-industrial development (O'Connor & Wynne 1996). A fraction of this literature inspired by Bourdieu (1992), Zukin (1989) and Featherstone (1991) studied the intersection between "urban economies of hedonism" and working bohemians employed in the field of night-time economy and creative industry (Milestone 1996; Lloyd 2010).

Symbolic entrepreneurs or 'cultural intermediaries', as Bourdieu (1992) called them, were not strictly tied by a class but rather by a specific set of dispositions: "they were fascinated by identity, presentation, appearance, lifestyle, and the endless quest for new experiences" (Featherstone 1991: 44). Binkley (2007) traced the genealogy of popularization of the bohemian sensibility back to '60s counter-cultures. Apart from shaping the modern subject as such, this sensibility is concentrated in the habitus of a rising class which Bourdieu perceives as new petit bourgeoisie. This class fraction thus emerges out of counter-cultural legacies, transforms them into employment opportunities and fully manifests itself through the booming discourse on creative economy (Howkins 2001; Florida 2004).

There might be an intuitive invitation to attach the entrepreneurial aspect of club cultures to big Western metropolises, to Florida's 'creative cities'. However, even 'take away' club cultures (the offspring of raves and even of hippies), transport the seeds of (sub)cultural

industry with them. D'Andrea (2007) traced techno nomads in classic locations such as Ibiza or Goa. There, these supposed exiles from the West trade in jewelers and ethnic clothes, open yoga studios, run spiritual sessions... or clubs.

While the discourse of the creative class can be traced back through Bourdieu's 'cultural intermediaries' to counter-culturalists and earlier bohemians, how does this particular class fraction come about in the post-socialist context? Workers in symbolic economy – trading in lifestyle – do not emerge out of nowhere; they build on (or distance themselves from) previous socialist cultural practices as well as from classes and class fractions. In the next chapter, I trace a manifold logic of distinction present in club cultures.

1.5.0. Conclusion

In this chapter, I proposed that traditional countercultural discourses gradually lost their appeal and young people started migrating to clubs which proposed an alternative. Club cultures had no register from before 1989, or rather they distanced from previous debates and were promoted as forward-looking and strictly 'progressive'.

Organizers of parties did not perceive official authorities – police or local politicians – as enemies but rather expected them to guarantee the 'order', a safe framework for them to run the scene without the constant threat of criminal cultures. They wanted to be seen as serious cultural entrepreneurs and often also as artists but without insisting on art separate from commerce; the idea typical for traditional countercultures. They had nothing against profit; rather, it had a safe place in their vocabulary.

Building the scene necessitated courage but also a new vocabulary and skills. Club cultures used language and practices of entrepreneurial cultures. These approaches to the organization of Bratislava club scene cannot be explained by pointing at the '80s conservative rise or yuppie cultures as it is the case of Western scenes. Maria Pini writes:

> To many on the Left, early Acid House can have looked like little more than an uncritical embrace of 1980s' conservatism. It appears, as McRobbie suggests, to lack anything of the angry political character which made punk so interesting to youth scholars. In many respects, it bore all the markings of an unquestioning acceptance of individualist enterprise culture at its most extreme.

(Pini 2001: 26)

The entrepreneurial disposition fostered in club cultures was neither straightforward legacy of '80s conservativism nor was it a result of neo-liberal impositions on the region. If club cultures adopted entrepreneurialism, it was by selectively connecting and disconnecting from previous (sub)cultural traditions as well as adopting and adapting new language and practices. De-linking strategically from traditional counter-cultures that kept art/youth cultures and business strictly separate and incommensurable, club cultures re-signified the meaning of (sub)culture in compliance with market conditions.

However, access to new opportunities of crafting subcultural careers was crudely gendered. Despite their active participation, women clubbers had little chances of infiltration into male networks and subsequent occupation of places of status and profit. The new opportunities were mainly open for young middle-class men.

In the following chapter, I say more about gender/sexuality playing crucial role in guiding the vector of class distinction. Employing the discourse of 'progress', it was relatively easy to attract youth from rock concerts to clubs. However, clubbers also had to struggle for space with disco cultures. In this case, the class ridicule conveyed by tropes of gender and sexuality

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was effective. Further, the entrepreneurial newspeak will be discussed as well as the imaginary shaped and propagated in clubs and providing 'connection'; the promise of joining the world which traditional countercultures failed to satisfy.

Chapter 2

[crafting the style]

2.0. Introduction

2.1.0. Distinction from the 'mainstream'

    2.1.1. Invocations of the mainstream in post-socialist tastescapes: a paradox?

    2.1.2. Improvising distinction, constructing difference

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2.4.0. Conclusion

2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that club cultures attracted mainly young middle-class youth proposing more 'meaningful' scenarios of (sub)cultural organization and possibility of careers.

Typically middle-class youth treats (sub)culture as an asset to put together their personal style and/or cultivate an area of expertise. They do so in distinction from other groups - in this case disco-goers, market shoppers and mall frequenters. Clubbers claim to look for more than 'just' togetherness, abandon and sensual stimulation of popular culture but aspire to an actual identity co-shaped by leisure cultures. They wanted to be seen as stylish individuals, committed experts, mobile, cosmopolitan, savvy and open minded. I will trace how these characteristics emerge by negative distinctions from the 'mainstream'. The trope of mainstream is crucial exactly because it is so slippery. In the discourse of clubbers, it traveled from group to group as taste scapes changed and became diversified.

In Chapter 1, I was more concerned about the question of cultural organization and discourses of profit, skills and career. Here, I focus on examination of the sphere of consumption. Far from being just 'dupes' of subcultural consumerism, clubbers wanted to perceive themselves as reflexive and critical. Their participation as consumers allowed for the cultivation of consumer ethic which ties to the questions of being a citizen in a market-driven society as well as returns citizenship onto consumption.

Furthermore, I propose that the new imaginary fostered in clubs ties to commodities such as mobile phones or cigarettes. These commodities helped co-producing the idea of unity of consumers-citizens united by shared taste: the 'party nation'.

2.1.0. Distinction from the 'mainstream'

2.1.1. Invocations of the mainstream in post-socialist tastescapes: a paradox?

For my interviewees, participating in club cultures was legitimized by the idea of evading the mainstream. I look at the way this category emerges through the words of interviewed clubbers not to outline what mainstream means objectively but to see how it is used strategically as a backbone for formulating a classed sensibility in the scapes of shifting taste cultures.

Mainstream cannot be understood without grasping the context in which claims to 'mainstream taste' or 'lack of taste' or similar are raised. Grossberg critically approached fuzziness and unreliability of the term and suggested we rather look for 'situated judgments' than objective groups or categories (1984: 147-8 cited in Thornton 1996: 97). However, he neglected seeing how 'groups are made with words', a point that Thornton raised following Bourdieu's (1992) analysis of the significance of taste claims. As Thornton (1996: 92-105) proposed, complex social maps are packed within the loaded term of the mainstream. She looks at how these 'situated judgments' work in a particular subcultural milieu – urban British 'alternative' clubs – and what work of cultural/social distinction they execute. By examining not only who is excluded by the claims of 'bad taste' or 'lack of taste' but also what project these claims serve, we may go a step further in the suggested line of mainstream analysis. In other words, we may ask what is formed or, in Foucaultian terms, what is the effect of this discourse on shaping social reality?

Thornton raised a critical point regarding the sloppy scholarly approach to the category of mainstream (1996: 92-8). This inconsistency is coded already in the use of the term by subculturalist. The term's very flexibility and ambiguous moralistic power makes it a popular figure of speech. In the discourse of my clubber respondents and acquaintances, the role of mainstream changes according to the needs of the speaking subject or the taste community he/she identifies with. However, I believe their words can be unpacked in order to "mak[e] a clear comparison, weigh[…] the social and economic factors, and confront[…] the ethical and political problems involved in celebrating the culture of one group over another" (Thornton 1996: 93). Through the words of my respondents, the trope of the mainstream – named directly or implied – emerges as a crucial platform for formulating their group consciousness against negative background.

One of my interviewees, Iveta proposes:

> I used to be under the impression that [electronic dance music] parties are something very novel, like [signifying] the 3rd millennium already […], something that only a small group of people had access to, something these people created and others didn't have the chance to experience… And it was like so freaky when you could wear anything and everybody turned around to check you out and in a taxi you got looks and in the public transport [MHD] everyone stared at you but you just didn't care because it was them, the outsiders, who were not getting it… And that we were simply offered a very novel experience. Like something that neither our parents nor our peers could have had experienced.

(Iveta, female, 27, marketing)

In Iveta's narrative, the mainstream is coded as 'outsiders', the non-distinct crowd outside of the clubs. The crowd is represented as travelling in public transportation or personified by the taxi driver throwing investigative looks on the clubber. The flow of affective exchange between subculturalists and mainstream takes the form of gazes, smirks, gestures, little comments. Access to the new experience, to the possibility of immersion into the novelty and making part of it, provides Iveta with sense of control. Clubbers see themselves as

privileged, as an experiential avant-garde. In opposition, mainstream is imagined through the idea of mundane life chores constricting individuality, lacking fantasy. The crowd staring in public transportation stands for a broader image of a mass on their daily route to and from work.

Such discursive traces of animosity towards people embodying normality and conformity seem not to follow the pattern of anti-bourgeois stances inherited from the Bohemians, the Modernists and the Beats among other classic counter-cultural figures. Rather than attacking bourgeoisie, Iveta's depiction of the mainstream invites a contextualized reading with reference to socialist uniformity.

Clubbers dressed in lively neon colors, silver top, nylon fiber skirt and sporting boa or S&M inspired collar attracted attention of modestly dressed people on the street. Their taste was constricted by the still narrow selection of goods, rather than implying the uptight morality or ethics of self-denial, suppression of individuality, conformism and respectability – referring to the classic characteristics of bourgeoisie (Grzeszczyk 2008: 150-3[11]). Therefore, what clubbers really manifested was their ability to acquire goods, to navigate in the landscapes of fashion and assemble styles which made them indistinguishable from their Western peers. Clubbers' exposed their connections, skills and financial resources. They gestured their readiness to obtain more from life than their parents, than their less fortunate peers: in terms of material but mainly in experiential consumption. The effect of

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[11] In American Models of Consumption and their Presence in Poland, Grzeszczyk (2008) contrasts three phases of consumer culture in the U.S. – Weberian puritan model, Veblenesque 'conspicuous consumer' and 'modern hedonist' (a blend of various post-modern/post-industrial consumer practices) – with Polish consumer habits. Importantly, she notes that in the Polish context, the puritanical phase is substituted by early post-socialist scarcity which is quickly juxtaposed with 'shopping for status' culture of mostly middle-class Poles. The latest phase is sketched only tentatively; it contains traces of 'impulse shopping' and counter-cultural consumption but this last line needs more examination and analysis which this study is introducing by tracing a link between subcultures and 'progressive' middle-class lifestyles.

clubbers' striking appearance in post-socialist tastescapes is (hierarchical) distinction rather than transgression of oppressive limits of the 'dominant culture'.

Symptomatically, transgression or resistance did not make a part of clubbers' vocabulary. If there was a word which characterized the agenda of clubbers internationally, then it was *progression*. Reynolds characterized the obsession with pace as 'going nowhere fast' (1998: 86). The spiral of events which are announced as always bigger and better certainly leads nowhere with respect to the traditional quest for the counter-cultural agenda à la '60s. Early commentators noticed the 'evacuation of meaning' (Rietveld 1993) but they were quickly corrected not to look for the '60s form of protest culture[12] within the radically new context of Thatcherian Britain and the rise of neo-liberalism in the world. Pini writes about the early disillusionment with the political potential of club cultures:

> Against a traditional academic Left backdrop which demanded that in order to be culturally 'significant', youth movements and musics had to conform to very particular notions about both 'resistance' and 'authenticity', 1980s Acid House [rave/early club cultures] looks as empty, conservative and de-politicising as did Disco in the 1970s. As a youth culture, it seemed to embody everything about dance-music that cultural critics as diverse as Adorno and Baudrillard have scorned the 'mindless', 'obedient' masses for.

(Pini 2001: 26)

However, Pini subscribes to the redemptive line of study which relocates transgression and resistance, as the kernel of oppositional politics, onto the level of identity with focus on gender, sexuality, body (McRobbie 1993; Pini 2001; Lambevski 2005).

Within the context of post-socialist transformations, the discursive insistence on *progress/progressing* received new potent connotations and meanings (Pilkington 2002:

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[12] An insistence to include club cultures into the family line of counter-cultures is evident in, for example, McKay's (1996) Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties. This line of analysis persists in St John's enthusiastic studies of trans-national rave scene Technomad: Global Raving Countercultures (2009) where it is tellingly packed in expressions such as 'rave-olution', 'tekno-anarchy', 'rebel sounds', 'dance activism' or 'the carnival of protest'.

187-190). In her study of Russian youth taste scapes, Pilkington suggested to understand the self-proclaimed progressive cultures – club cultures – in relation to the overall movements of transformation. On the one hand, the trope of progress has been pervasive in club cultures globally (one of the genres of house is called progressive). Clubbing contains movement in its DNA: dancers move on the dancefloor, clubbers move between thematic floors to listen to different musical styles, they travel for 'always bigger and better parties' (Mária), events change location… stability of the same old disco club or local pub is perfectly contradicted in the dynamic impermanence of the party culture.

On the other hand, the drive for progressing, moving, innovating invites for double interpretation: the rhizomatic structure of the scene can be analyzed as either anarchic (St John 2009) or in line with the global rise of neo-liberalism (McRobbie 2002)[13]. Pilkington's analysis stops before elaborating what sensibilities, cultures of work, class fractions clubbers join and cultivate through their use of the trope. If they perceive themselves as progressing, what or who remains static and why?

While clubbers' invocations and practices of mobility (whether actual or symbolic) may be seen as radical in the context of post-socialist societies, mobility is not unprecedented in the field of late socialist culture. Typically, late socialist cultural imaginary was closely attached to the idea of the West. The routes of connections kept feeding and stimulating this imaginary by the flow of items: packs of clothes from émigré family members, records from Bulgaria or Yugoslavia, electronics from DDR (East Germany), TV commercials watched on

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[13] Anarchic or neo-liberal? In Organs Without Bodies, Žižek (2004: 183-213) would probably suggest that these two lines of analysis perfectly correspond and support each other. Similarly in Empire, Hardt & Negri (2000) deconstruct the difference between pluralities of difference and forces of capitalism. In The Conquest of Cool, Thomas Frank (1997) explains how cultures of business and counter-cultures share the vocabulary and sign system to construct the idea of resisting consumer. As Fraser (2009) noted among others, the oppositional cultures of 1968 seem to paradoxically converge with and feed late capitalism.

Austrian channels etc. In the early '90s, these routes and practices were still partially alive and those, who were in the know, were privileged in becoming entrepreneurs and dealers with goods and services (Yurchak 2006: 238-281).

In extension of the culture of black market and 'getting by', early clubbers had to be very active and dedicate a significant portion of their leisure time to acquire goods out of which 'proper' styles could have been assembled. The movement of clubbers was twofold: to the places which sold 'cool' stuff and away from the 'ordinary' places. This movement involved both material space and social space.

Clubbers deployed subcultural labor to practice distinction – for example, by shopping 'elsewhere'. In the discourse of Bratislavian clubbers, 'elsewhere' refers to the evasion of places like the main shopping street Obchodná or the open-air market place Miletičova. The so-called 'bad taste crowd', the 'mass' harboring indiscriminant taste, was thus mapped onto specific places – often literally crowded – with trams passing in between pedestrians and sweaty bodies pushing each other to closely observe food or examine fake-brand clothes.

The taste category evaded and ridiculed by clubbers connotes 'common people' who came to these places to shop for cheap consumer items with no added value of 'trendiness' or edgy 'hipness' as in the case of subcultural goods. The demographic group shopping at Obchodná and Miletičova was often of modest income, lacked information where to better shop or resources to get there. In the case of the open-air market, it is a place of rural aesthetic where rough Western Slovak dialects mix with Southern Slovak Hungarian and

basic Slovak-for-shoppers pronounced by Vietnamese sellers of clothes, shoes and electronics[14].

Counter- and subcultures tend to invite young people to connect to their 'real selves', to resist impositions from their family, school or work and descend to supposedly more authentic layers of their identities. Typically, youth expressive cultures recruit their subjects as resisting, exceptional in their taste and non-conforming to the mainstream. The notion of aesthetic shock is thus central for the way subculturalists understand their difference. The target of this shock, or the one who is expected to be shocked, is the mainstream audience who thus verifies subcultures as different, provoking, progressive, etc.

Oto, one of the interviewees, directs me to a You Tube video which gives an apt visual representation of the mainstream. During an event staged as 'moveable feast', he was responsible for organizing go-go dancers. Dancers were supposed to perform on the deck of a truck equipped with sound systems. As a video shows, the truck ran through villages around the town Nitra, it passed Škoda 206 cars as well as people on bicycles while the go-go dancers wearing miniskirts, bras, bell-bottom trousers, sunglasses and hats were moving frenetically to the pumping sound. The eye of the amateur camera takes pleasure in stressing the contrast of the rural background through which the party bus slides as a kind of a space ship.

Oto further built up on this contrast telling a story related to the same event. As the bus stopped on the parking in front of Tesco and dancers retreated into shade, Oto encouraged them to go on and dance "to show these laics, mere mortals what this music [was really

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[14] This situation changed when the 'hip' crowd claimed vegetable shopping, bicycle routes and art markets rebranded with the adjectives of local and organic, repacked into design coverage and introduced into the cycle of lifestyles.

about]". When no one moved, he started dancing with his eyes closed, feeling sun burnt but keeping on. After he opened the eyes, he could see the audience that assembled observing him. According to his words, there was a crowd of people in front of the hypermarket as well as in the distance looking from the windows of panel houses. The sites he chose to stress – hypermarket and panel housing – are again signifiers of the mainstream. Oto seems to underline poverty of mainstreamers' experiential lives: the crowd exits Tesco and leans out of the windows of their standardized flats. He said he closed the eyes again and danced more.

Clubbers like Oto gained a very concrete bodily perception of being outside of the mainstream through getting an exclusive experience, as Iveta formulates it, confirmed by the contact zone of looks and gestures of 'those who are not getting it' (Iveta). Both of the interviewees pride themselves in acting as apostles of the new style which brings profound experience of uniqueness.

After a refashioned version of the mainstream appeared, shopping malls were invoked as palaces of homogeneous taste, not lack of taste in the sense above, but unified, predigested and lacking individuality and the skill of informed and reflexive choice. With this more institutionalized version of the mainstream, the classic critique of 'mass culture' and consumption starts making more sense. The 'mass culture' critique implies that something we may refer to as 'mainstream taste' cannot exist as an abstraction. It has to be performed through consumer acts (for example, going to the movies as in the classic text by Kracauer ([1927]) and therefore an infrastructure is needed which allows for the 'sheep-minded' consumerism to take place.

The classic critique of 'mass culture' was tailored for the conditions of capitalist massification[15] of culture in Western Europe and the U.S. before WWII (e.g. Kracauer [1927]; Adorno & Horkheimer 1992[1944]) and it culminated with the hegemony of 'American culture' after WWII (e.g. McLuhan 1951; Hoggart 1992[1957]; Eco 2006[1964]). After the rise of Youth Culture in the '50s and the subsequent counter-cultural critique in the '60s and '70s, 'mass culture' dissolved into diversified lifestyles. As such, 'mass culture' could have been thrown across the Wall to actually characterize socialist societies represented by the uniform grayness of prefab buildings, by the 'blue shorts for boys and red shorts for girls' clothing regime, by the orchestrated movement of young bodies exercising at Spartakiad or the uncontestable voice of the state media. Nevertheless, uniformity and massification in the socialist context were not connected to consumerism but rather to its opposite – scarcity of goods. Consumption and simulation of diversified lifestyles was thus taking place in the grey zone of 'do-it-yourself' culture or the cultural sphere of 'getting by' which, by the end of the '80s, was rather pervasive.

As the economy was switching from centralized to free market model, nodes of infrastructure anchoring the new consumer culture were not yet at place or only beginning to rise. For example, the first shopping center of mall format – Polus City Center – was opened in Bratislava in 2000 (Polus City Center [no date]). Its space harbored chain brands and allowed for the standardized shopping culture to emerge, ordering middle-class taste within the confines of Western consumer culture. Therefore, if early clubbers refer to the mainstream, these claims have to be situated into the context of disappearing late socialist uniformity, pervasiveness of 'ways of getting by' and the rise of the new mainstream

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15 Meaning democratization but also commodification of culture.

infrastructure – shopping malls, chart music, discos etc. – from which clubbers were striving to differentiate.

Early clubbers thus functioned in a cultural landscape which was being profoundly re-arranged before it settled down into a form underpinned by market rules and institutions of law and order recognized as close enough to the models of Western democracy. This process also concerned the gradual introduction of business culture and marketing ideas which can be seen as channeling taste into more governable formats; these formats tend to be legitimized as 'following people's will'[16]. As an illustration of the 'mainstream under construction', here is a commentary on the situation in the radio milieu. Roman Juhás, who worked for several private radio stations based in Bratislava said:

> Those were fantastic times [early '90s] but these particular radios did not last exactly because they were directed intuitively. No one ever did [market] research, there was no business plan, no target group [of listeners] was defined. People often used their own records to play. Nowadays, even if I am a music fan, I know this is a way leading nowhere. It is impossible to make a financial profit by playing a music based on one's own taste, it is impossible.

(Gális 2010)

Clubbers deployed the discourse of being anti-mainstream even before the actual infrastructure (giving a recognizable shape to 'mainstream choices') was set in place. They were non-mainstream before shopping malls, tabloids or reality TV. They could only claim and express their difference by assembling subcultural styles out of the limited selection of goods or travel to acquire the 'right' items. To do that, paradoxically, they had to build on the consumer practices of late socialism.

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[16] This is a paraphrase on the title of the source article from which the quote above is taken: Slovak radios: We play following your wishes. Such rhetoric is rooted in the logic of 'market populism' which Frank ironically characterized: "Markets conferred democratic legitimacy; markets were friend of the little guy; markets brought down the pompous and the snooty; markets gave us what we wanted; markets looked out for our interests" (Frank 2001: 15 cited in McGuigan 2009: 137).

2.1.2. Improvising distinction, constructing difference

For the Bratislavian clubbing youth to be in step with trends, it meant having access to a car that would take them shopping to Parndorf (an outlet close to Vienna selling brand and designer clothes) or to places in Vienna. There were very few shops in Bratislava selling the 'right' clothing, as the choice was still limited in general. If the items seen as cool or trendy by clubbers were available, they were often expensive (Ivan, Milanko). Many clubbers thus shopped when travelling, whether for parties or not (Magda, Ivo). Magda remembers that her friend, who brought platform shoes from Germany, stood out in U.club – the main underground hub – and attracted attention. Magda used to visit better equipped shops in Brno and Prague (Czech Republic) to purchase bags, shoes or hair dye.

Style labor meant also creatively adjusting the current market offer (or the lack of it). Some of my interviewees assembled their style using emerging second-hand stores offering vintage pieces within range of student pocket money (Tina, Magda, Iveta). Some girls even pulled out their mom's sewing machines (Krista) or made their own designs and had clothes assembled by professionals (Petra, Miša). According to Yurchak, styliagy[17] used to put stress on the creative techniques of assembling the style out of available goods in second-hand stores and rehashing them. Often, a small detail such as a patch attached or foreign letters knitted into a sweater was enough to signify Westerness (Yurchak 2006: 170-171, 204). Similarly, one of my interviewees says "it was less important what you wore than how you combined it" (Iveta).

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[17] First used as a derogatory term, styliagi designated Russian fashionistas of the '40s up to the '60s.

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Just like clothes manipulation, travelling in order to acquire goods may be related to the cultural pattern inherited from the late socialism. This practice tends to be evoked by the parent generation of clubbers: shopping trips to goulash-communist Budapest, bringing records back home from holidays in Yugoslavia or occasional visits to Western countries. In the '90s, the hybrid market of late socialism was still fresh in memory. Early clubbers remembered buying their first records from open-air markets ('burza') or circulating and copying tapes. The generation of today's 30-something-year-old clubbers recollects the manners in which 'alternative' music was imported and distributed in late socialist Slovakia. Peťo gives an example of a Dead Can Dance CD that someone from his surroundings brought from Germany: "we carried it like a golden calf and everyone borrowed it and copied it on a cassette".

In the course of transition, taste scapes started to be anchored in a more solid subcultural infrastructure (for example, early music shops specialized on 'alternative' music). Béla recalls how he was introduced into electronic dance music together with his friends in the last year of elementary school in 1994:

> We used to order CDs and tapes in a tiny music shop on the [main] square in Banská Bystrica [the capital of Central Slovakia]. I bought them using money I had been tactically stealing from my parents. This shop ordered CDs from Germany, I guess. I started with it [ordering and buying] accidentally when having heard about it from my friend and that was it. From that moment on, ordering at large started as well as the street circulation of tapes and CDs.
>
> (Béla, male, 27, GIS administrator)

Early DJs Tibor Holoda and Dalibor Kŕč – who ran a record store associated to the cult meeting place UW café (Bratislava) that was one of the first places to offer mainly mixed drinks and play exclusively electronic music – used to go record shopping and trend checking to Vienna (Michal H.). DJ Mayla recalled that she and her boyfriend DJ Skank used to stay

over at friends' place in Vienna; the Viennese friends were then guest-DJs at U.club where Skank worked as a DJ and promoter.

Proximity to Vienna was crucial not just for buying goods and getting inspired but also for labor opportunities: some clubbers could afford buying things because they worked as waiters in restaurants in the Austrian capital (discussed in section 3.1.1.). DJ and promoter Pico mentions he spent one summer washing windshields at the Austrian border to save up enough money to buy the necessary DJ equipment (Ninja 2008).

Furthermore, there was no scene-specialized print media and the radio space was limited, too[18]. Therefore, music journals in German were a source of information for early DJs and clubbers[19]. The habit to go Vienna-clubbing as well as to concerts – mainly in the time when big names avoided Bratislava – remained (Jozef, Peťo, Michal H.)[20]. The Bratislava – Vienna connection was crucial for the early scene in Bratislava; however, event promoter Pico also accentuates the impact of Italian house music to which he used to be exposed during his holidays in Slovenia (Ninja 2008). Other clubbers travelled to the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Great Britain and elsewhere, often in search for the legendary clubbing spots.

Moving and travelling for subcultural resources and experience was a way to augment one's own leisure record (Eva) but also a way of becoming a critical and demanding consumer/producer: clubbers were able to compare and discuss 'quality' while party

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[18] Crystal House on Radio Ragtime and another early show on RMC radio. Fun radio joined with Clublab. The author used to record DJ sets directly from the radio to a tape.

[19] The generation of 30-somethings witnessed the abrupt switch from obligatory Russian language courses to the language offer of mostly English, German and French courses. While German had its tradition in Bratislava (due to the emission of radio and TV signal across Austrian border), English soon became the number one language disseminated widely but mostly in bits and pieces of 'fashionable speak'. For leisure scapes – including club cultures – English was essential.

[20] In return, Vienna pensioners used to come for cheap opera and concerts of classical music – thus profiting from the legacy of socialist cultural politics of affordable high culture.

producers gathered knowhow to implement in their own party projects (further elaborated in section 2.3.0.).

2.1.3. Becoming experts

As several interviewees agreed, the early scene was hungry for resources and less discriminative. Together with the process of taste splintering, club infrastructure became diversified. Nowadays, Pico's choice of music for events represents a stream of happy ecstatic tunes of house and trance suitable for large club spaces, city bars or beaches by the river Danube – a 'mainstream line' within the scene – while other DJs prefer to think of their selection of music as 'less commercial' – spanning from the minimal techno scene in U.club, through the festival Wilsonic oriented on 'reflecting future' (as its slogan goes), to obscure parties where hardstyle is played.

More than just playful surfing between styles (Polhemus 1997), being 'in the know' is a form of capital, as Thornton (1996) proposed, and it presupposed exclusions and distinctions, failed attempts and botched identities. The dynamic model of the mainstream is important for my discussion as it shows how subcultural capital is attached to the idea of exclusive knowledge, innovation. Collectivities of shared taste are not equal to each other: rather they compete and use the label of mainstream to discredit each other's legitimacy. The label of mainstream circulates not just to protect the border of a coherent subcultural membership but also within the community itself; it guards the privilege of information as well as entrepreneurial opportunities. For example, Pico labels minimal techno scene 'mainstream of Slovak electronic dance music' (Ninja 2008) while others see his production as mainstreaming EDMC through cheesy tunes and quasi-luxurious décor.

When Pico recounts the story, he speaks about the 'techno mainstream' which made it difficult for the 'trance community' to emerge (Ninja 2008). He presents the early trance scene around Ibiza club – related to the first Bratislavian gay club Apolon – as a place where differences did not matter and music brought together "gays, common people, celebrities, models, miss girls, actors, singers, moderators" (ibid.). Obviously, inside the actual subcultural discourse, the trope of mainstream became a tool for discrediting the competition when battling for audiences, space in clubs and media as well as for sponsoring. Rather than drawing a distinction from the 'street mass' of indiscriminating consumers, as in the earlier phase, or from the 'shopping mall crowd', as a bit later, the mainstream narrative was internalized within the scene to produce novelty ad infinitum, always on the run from the specter of mediocrity, always *progressing*.

This latest phase of mainstream discourse was only possible when the scene was big enough to cater to the variety of aspiring audiences. At the same time, club cultures aided producing these audiences, clusters of taste groups. There is no one musical or stylistic stream which is objectively more valuable than the other. It was the process of recognizing and then moving on which characterized those clubbers who were 'truly in the know'. The idea was not to find a style of one's own and remain faithful to the community but rather to always redefine one's taste.

For clubbers, constant redefinition of taste is in line with growing (sub)cultural capital. For producers, it is also a way to carve a niche for their activities. Roman recalls how he heard a DJ play a particular style in a club in Prague and decided to bring him to the party he was organizing in Bratislava because "such music was lacking". While early clubbers were preoccupied with 'improvising distinction' – travelling to acquire goods – later on, they

rather traveled for the experience and knowhow acquisition in order to improve and diversify their taste and/or the scene.

This shift is twofold. On the one hand, by laboriously bricolaging their style, clubbers challenged the 'anything (Western) goes' attitude of the market place crowd. The preference for affordable jeans or fake brands of these shoppers was called into question by clubbers' spectacular attires. Aleš Bleha, Czech party promoter, suggested people did not make big difference between Western items, they did not 'understand the nuances' (Mexa 2010). Hvorecký (2006) notes that in late socialism, fetishization of consumer items related to popular music culminated. On Bratislavian black market, "any trashy item from behind the Austrian border" multiplied its value astronomically. In this respect he claims that the era of the '80s in Czechoslovakia was strangely capitalistic in the way it ultra-commodified everything Western often without too much discrimination.

This attitude is transformed into non-discriminative preference for popular trends represented by the mall culture. Therefore, subcultural consumerism in clubs can be understood as 'emancipation' from the non-discriminative consumption of everything Western or everything popular, as critical cultural awareness and cultivation of taste. Unlike followers of pop – either 'disco goers' or 'mall shoppers', clubbers put stress on the amount of labor that (sub)cultural expertise requires.

Mainstream is therefore invoked in order to cultivate a consciousness of 'valuable' consumer choices, fostering of culture of experts who can navigate in the taste scapes, who are reflexive consumers unlike the 'crowd' at the market or in a shopping mall. The trope of distinction from the mainstream reappears across various contexts, in response to differing socio-cultural situations (socialist uniformity, rising 'mall culture'). Fixing its precise meaning

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and mapping it onto social reality is not the actual task of understanding the function of the trope. What does it do for the actual group (connected by the use of the narrative) in dialogue with other groups (real or imaginary)?, is the real question.

The evasion and mockery of popular places for shopping may be seen as clubbers' gesture of aspiration on the progressive middle-class status expressed through the refusal of the lowbrow shopping culture of the 'market crowd' as well as the rising middle class shopping in malls. Clubbers rather make claims to edgy expert taste. The narrative of mainstream – which at first served as a means of differentiation from the crowd of indiscriminative consumers of open air markets and shopping streets as well as later from the rising mass consumer culture represented by the shopping mall – was subsequently internalized and became a tool of fragmentation and taste diversification. By the labor clubbers invest into 'being in the know', they legitimize higher value of their choices as well as cultivate marketable skills and knowledge. They acquire a disposition for becoming reflexive or 'professional consumers' (Grzeszczyk 2008: 147), literally professional in some cases as they translate their knowhow of the economy of taste and style into professions.

In this way, clubbers' narratives and practices of being 'anti-mainstream' function as a move towards privilege rather than a critique. More precisely, it is a perfect example of aesthetic critique dissociated from social critique. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) as well as Fraser (2009) remind us that most of qualities characterizing the latest version of capitalism derive from May 1968 agenda including feminist critique(s). However, they are carefully stripped of the social aspect. Or, as Rojek (2007) proposed, some revolutionary ethical aspects are selected and weaved into entrepreneurial strategies resulting in 'neat capitalism'.

While the notion of mainstream (in its various forms) was employed by Bohemia, Modernists and counter-culturalists to criticize bourgeois values (in their various historical and local editions), for clubbers in the post-socialist context, some elements of critique are employed and other rejected. The mainstream is not progressive or modern enough. It is stuck, mediocre, and uninformed. Typically, such characteristics are devoid of any investigation of social situation of the 'mainstreamers'.

This is partly due to poor definition of mainstream by clubbers and the slippery use of the term: it may actually connote the 'people' who shop for fake brands in open air markets and other 'uncool' shopping areas. Mainstream is the new middle class shopping in mushrooming malls but without sense for edgy style one step ahead of popular trends. Finally, mainstream circulates as a shaming label within the clubbing community to discredit competition, to attract 'connoisseurs'. Gestures of differentiation from the mainstream coded in style are attached to the formation of lifestyle elite.

In the next section, I point to another important distinction arising through the words of clubbers. To seize the nightscapes, they had to compete with earlier discotheques. Again, class plays an important role in delegitimizing discos. Moreover, class is phrased in gendered/sexualized terms to distinguish between 'vulgar' and 'unsafe' discotheques and clubs where professional attitude and safe gender regime can flourish.

2.2.0. Struggle for the dance floor

2.2.1. Classed safety: middle-class youth in night time economy

As portrayed by the clubbers, discotheques were related to mafia circles and as such, clubbers avoided them. Božena evoked a traumatic story of a shooting at a local disco she visited. Similar stories were narrated by more respondents who portrayed discos as places where not just 'good taste suffered' but also safety was threatened.

Understandably, the issue of safety was brought up more ostensibly by women-clubbers. Eva and Anna both appreciated presence of guards/bouncers. As regular attendees to the club (U.club and Dopler), they knew the security workers personally. Clubbers voiced an idea that clubs should provide a safe environment for them as customers and/or as producers. Eman said that the image of a 'drug hole' that places like U.club used to have was incommensurable with gaining sponsors and quality DJs. Eva as well as others proposed and accentuated that clubbers were ready to pay more for 'getting more'. According to them, higher price was a strategy to turn away people who look for a type of entertainment found in discotheques from which clubbers were striving to distance themselves.

The distinction between clubs and discos was accompanied by discourse about gender relations and sexual dynamics experienced in both spaces. The unsafe milieu of discotheques tended to be associated with polarized gender relations where men are 'mafoši' and women are 'pipenky'. These derogatory terms indicated their lack of knowhow about style (as clubbers perceived it) but also the gender ideology of muscular affluent men and hypersexualized women 'exchanging their company for drinks or designer handbags'. According to clubbers, discotheques function as places facilitating this exchange and music and dance are only additional to the game of sexual luring. Both male and female clubbers saw 'aggressive types' and 'chicks on heels' as incompatible with a genuine commitment to music and dance characterizing 'real' clubbers. 'Bad taste' of these figures is thus attached to

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and expressed through gender/sexuality regimes disapproved by clubbers. These regimes are significantly mediated through discourses of safety (and its lack). Many commentators welcomed the way clubs liberated the dance floor from the primacy of male gaze and polarized sexual dynamics and made them a 'safer space' for women and gay men (e.g. Gilbert & Pearson 1999). However, what does the 'progressive' gender regime means in terms of class dynamics?

The way discotheques were criticized for the issues of safety and gender relations actually ties to the influx of middle-class youth into the sphere of nightscapes and subsequent struggle to change the rules of the game. In '90s Bratislava, discos were seen as dangerous spaces. Shady owners, gambling and skinheads, mafia clientele, cases of shooting and rape were aspects which discouraged high school and university students as well as their parents from considering discos as suitable spaces of leisure as well as suitable occupational milieu.

Previously, staying out the entire night and switching between clubs or bars would be seen as a dangerous flirtation with the 'street'. However, club cultures translated many elements of disco culture for the middle-class youth. Petra's parents repeatedly asked 'what Petra and her friends did entire night out and how come they managed to stay up without drinking alcohol'. Her parents stopped worrying when she explained that they danced, chilled in special rooms dedicated to rest and sipped energy drinks and water (of course, she kept silent about drug use because, as she explains, her parents would not get the distinction between 'junkies' and party drug users). Eva stressed that she always remained in the company of friends who picked her up and accompanied her home. Oto's parents used to give him money to take a taxi home even though he lived close to the club he frequented. The notion of safety and 'standard' in the space of clubs extended beyond the walls to

encompass the entire infrastructure of the city from eating places open around the clock to regular night buses and taxis.

Club cultures introduced a scenario of entertainment considered previously as 'bohemian' or 'low-brow' and adjusted it for the needs of urban middle-class youth en masse. New language and values emerged attracting the middle-class youth as both consumers and producers. Going out was repackaged anew and marketized to broader clientele. 'Staying in Friday or Saturday' became a new taboo as several of my interviewees suggested (Emil, Nika). Clubs and discos remained in dialogue though: for clubbers, discos signified low taste or bad taste. If clubbers wanted to express their dissatisfaction with a party or a venue, they would formulate it saying 'it was like a regular disco'.

2.2.2. Club cultures as cultures of 'doing nothing' or projects?

My interviewees put stress on the shared vibe of commitment to "the new culture, language" (Michal H.). Magda proposed that many of her friends were interested in "the spiritual side of clubbing". They bought books, "studied" Leary and Castaneda (Magda), followed alternative magazines such as Czech Živel. Both Michal H. and Magda were consistent in drawing a distinction between people who were 'serious' or 'committed', who treated clubbing as "a rather important thing" (Michal H.), and those who simply joined and surfed the wave of popularity of club cultures.

Different sensibility is ascribed to discos and parties denounced as 'mainstream'. These events are characterized by words as 'reset', 'relax', 'a complete Friday refresh' with "no further ambition" (Michal H.). This line of club cultures adopted the star system and fan

culture similar to pop culture industry. Its music was characterized as too expressive and emotional with cheesy tunes, vocals and accompanied by abundance of effects such as costumed go-go dancers, laser shows, live instruments and so. Eva describes the atmosphere at an event where Paul van Dyk DJ-ed featuring vocalists: "when they started singing, I felt such a thrill inside, absolute euphoria; it was so beautiful as if angels were singing, for real (…). Standing in the front and seeing them close and also watching people experiencing it was totally great". Rather than perceiving clubbing as a project of the work on the self (as Magda or Michal H. proposed), Eva prefers its emotional value: "we come there to feel the same, we don't have to discuss it," she says. In these narratives, a classic distinction between pop and underground re-emerges. The sensibility traditionally attributed to popular culture (cheap, emotional, shallow, inauthentic etc.) is ridiculed and positioned hierarchically lower.

The two sensibilities I traced do not exist perfectly separated: one which ties to self-education, gathering of information and committed interest and the other which is more prone to feelings, amusement and 'no further ambition'. Moreover, the two sensibilities cannot be clearly mapped onto classed subjects as economic categories – one working-class and the other middle-class – but they betray class-based values and ethics as well as different perspectives on the role of leisure culture. This discursive struggle reproduces the High culture vs. Low culture tension: the dichotomy of the 'alternative' which aspires on intellectual engagement, expert knowledge, individuality and self-improvement against 'popular culture' which addresses emotions, sensibility and stimulated collective abandon and relax.

Both of these sensibilities run through club cultures. It is important to notice how they allowed for crafting of new vocabularies of leisure. Using the language of marketing,

advertising and business, club cultures are represented as *projects*. As such, nightlife- and entertainment-related job opportunities are legitimized for middle-class youth. They can be seen as respectable cultural workers (in contrast to club owners and disc jokeys in classic discotheques who tend to be perceived as semi-mafia entertainers who are 'profit interested' not 'culture committed').

Often, British club cultures were portrayed in connection to earlier working-class weekender cultures where work and leisure were conceptually sealed away from each other and kept in tension. Weekend was 'reset', 'relax' and 'refresh' even if it actually meant discharge of energy, spending of money and subsequent exhaustion. Reynolds describes the dynamic of clubbing with obvious reference to working-class subculturalists' unruly energy: "all that rage and frustration is vented through going mental […], helped along by a capsule or three of instant euphoria [meaning Ecstasy pill]" (1999, p.239).

The model of a working-class weekender clearly does not explain the kind of sensibilities of performance and work ethic conveyed on some of club cultures' subjects. I rather propose a genealogical connection to the class-based sensibility sketched by the Birmingham school. There is a helpful distinction running through Resistance through Rituals (Hall & Jefferson 1993[1976]) which remained underdeveloped in further scholarship on youth cultures.

According to the schema introduced in the theoretical chapter of Resistance through Rituals (1993: 57-75), working-class youth organized in subcultures while middle-class youth in counter-cultures. Counter-cultures were seen as cultural alternatives derived from the bourgeois parent culture but in no substantial opposition to them due to class-solidarity. Birmingham scholars preferred investing analytically into working-class youth subcultures

onto which they projected a revolutionary potential. In this way, the line of research dealing with the rise and mainstreaming of counter-cultures remained understudied.

This line can be restored through the work of Bourdieu (1992[1979]), Zukin (1989), Featherstone (1991), Frank (1997) and Binkley (2007). Attempts to pin down the progressive urban middle class can be observed also in the recent obsession of new bourgeoisie with self-scrutiny (Lander 2008, 2010) and in the efforts to coin a 'sexier' name for this class fraction such as 'Bobos' (Brooks 2001) or 'creative class' (Florida 2004).

Birmingham school did not have a subtle vocabulary for dealing with taste and subjectivity that the conceptual and methodological tools of Bourdieu and Foucault allowed for. The important distinction – working-class subcultures vs. middle-class counter-cultures –that was raised was dismissed on the basis of crude class distinction. However, even if we disregard class as structural economic basis for objective group distinction, it remains effective on the discursive level (how people 'create groups with words' to quote Bourdieu) and on the level of habitus (what sensibilities, attitudes, dispositions people adopt to again invoke Bourdieu).

Birmingham scholars recognized the classed dynamic fragmenting the Youth Culture as a supposedly non-classed generational structure of post-WWII youth. Corrigan observed that working-class subcultures were often seen as cultures of 'doing nothing' (1993[1976]: 103-105). Middle-class counter-cultures were portrayed as alternatives to the status quo but, as the authors of <u>Resistance through Rituals</u> noted, with no potential to erode and replace this order radically due to class solidarity principle. Counter-cultures are characterized by their distinct project, subcultures are seen (from the middle-class perspective) as a non-project, or

a project of disorder [21]. Scholars worked to deconstruct this perspective. They overemphasized resistance but neglected paying attention to the ways in which counter-cultures were introduced into the everyday life and became undistinguishable from the 'dominant culture', changed and shaped it significantly.

Re-drawing this abandoned distinction between discourses of 'doing nothing' (of no commitment and sheer fun) and those of project-focused, self-fostering commitment, the idea is to show what discursive tools clubbers and event organizers employed to legitimate the rising leisure structure as *serious business* and *real culture* while discos were denounced as essentially lacking culture, organized through mafia-networks and harboring 'vulgar' sexuality, 'bad taste' and purely profit-oriented.

Organization of electronic dance music events brought new people into the entertainment business who 'were doing it for the music rather than profit' as most of them claimed. Just like in many other cities, EDMC events importantly changed the scenery of nightscapes as well as the range of occupations available to middle-class young people. Rather than talking profit, they preferred framing their endeavors in the language of new professions such as marketing, advertising or design. Putting accent on expertise and professional approach, they were organizing 'events' rather than just launching regular dance nights and running them as 'projects' instead of keeping a place which offers music and drinks and social vibe. The sophisticated language and committed approach replaced the supposedly unreflexive method of disco organizers. For someone of middle-class background, moving to independent business as DJ or event organizer was a legitimate and respectable career option.

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[21] Similarly, working-class (parent) culture tends to be comprehended as the essential lack of culture (Lawler 2008: 122-142).

Using the new organizational language, event organizers and clubbers won the respect of authorities (police, local government, sponsors, parents). McKay (1996: 124) as well as McRobbie (2002: 520) noticed that event organizers quickly learnt how to set up parties with the blessing of authorities. While in the late '80s in Britain, raves were still seen as enemy of the order, soon the discourse changed on both sides: party promoters showed willingness to cooperate with the structures of order to secure safe business environment and authorities started perceiving club cultures as economy-boosting infrastructures rather than cultures of nocturnal disorder (or at least tolerated them). Rather than proposing an explanation in line with the theory of subculture cooptation (Hebdige 1993[1976]), we may notice that credibility of the night-time economy sector rises with the flow of middle-class men into it.

The competition between discos and clubs can also be seen as a tale of shifting masculinities. At least, this seems to be the case in the context of Bratislava night-time leisure scene. Eman, whose story of setting a party in a 'dream club' I described in section 1.2.2. or Toky, the early legend of Slovak techno scene, represent the kind of rough rave masculinities. Eman's DJ friend used to play in a strip bar where he could experiment with electronic music few hours before the club closed. Eman likes stressing he had to deal with sketchy milieu: for him, it is important to accentuate the connection not a distinction from 'the street'. In contrast, Skank and Milosh or Michal Hvorecký and Tibor Holoda (see 2.3.1.) embody a very different type of masculinity. Not in a complete unison but still a common thread can be traced: they dissociated themselves from the leisure infrastructure of discos and stressed a new approach. They tend to be perceived as friendly, sophisticated, humble experts as well as confident self-promoters. Young cultural entrepreneurs in T-shirts with smart design, sporting tasteful watch and 'cool' trainers, skilled with technology and using new media to advertise their activities.

In the sphere of (sub)cultural production, the testosterone-driven image of a club owner or a disc jockey is thus replaced by new masculinity images. What happened is that the entire domain started to be perceived differently. As I suggested previously, part of the audience which identified with working-class sensibilities migrated to hip hop or to trance 'discos' as well as to the rather marginal hard style scene (Edo). Characteristics related to working-class masculinities such as aggressiveness, unruly behavior, machismo were harbored by these subcultures. Working-class femininities tend to be read through sexual terms, too – they are seen as 'vulgar', badly dressed, loud. These women were to be found mainly at trance events where 'tacky' and 'cheesy' tunes can be heard.

Certainly, club cultures contain effective mechanisms to reproduce class narratives and 'purge' places from the 'wrong' crowd. As a result, part of the domain of night time economy dominated by middle-class men was legitimated as the harbor of new culture while the jobs attached to it became to be seen as credible, even prestigious.

2.3.0. New (sub)cultural producer and consumer

2.3.1. Professionalizing vs. commercializing

To launch his second book of short stories, Michal H. used two formats he knew well: dance party and innovative advertising strategies. The result was a mock party which advertised the book. The campaign attracted attention of local marketing communities as well as of international magazines focused on advertising. Moreover, it introduced Michal H. as the most prominent young Slovak writer skilled in self-promotion while using other channels of visibility than those provided by cultural patterns inherited from socialism.

8th October 2001, the dance party 'of a brand new type' was to take place in Bratislava, Slovakia, however the actual location was undisclosed. Expected impatiently by many clubbers, some of them already possessed transportation tickets from distant places in Slovakia and the Czech republic, the very place of the event was only to be revealed on the day of the event. On 6th October 2001, the following information was released on the party web: *Brand Party is taking place… on the pages of Michal Hvorecky's book Hunters & Gatherers*[22] (Hvorecký 2006).

The Brand party project was initiated and curated by the author of the book and his friend Tibor Holoda. In the summer of 2001, they were flat mates, colleagues, co-conspirators in many projects, fans of advertising, new media and pop culture. Tibor was primarily a graphic designer and DJ while Michal H. worked as a copywriter, was writing his second collection of short stories and was an avid clubber in the night. Michal H. became one of the leading personas of the new generation of cultural figures. He strictly distanced himself from the traditional writer community, state structures as well as dissidents and related cultural practices. Rather, his writing was embedded in the framework of marketing, self-presentation and cultural reform.

Michal H. used to cooperate with Holoda on a site music5D.sk focused on the electronic dance music scene. Anna joined the team as a student of journalism and a clubber. She claimed that the team producing the site "was much more professional than any other web site [team]". Just like Anna, many clubbers formulated club cultures as a type of service which should be characterized by quality and professional approach which does not completely overlap with commercialization or mainstreaming as one might expect.

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[22] [„Brand Party sa koná… v knihe Michala Hvoreckého Lovci & zberači"].

For the interviewees, the idea of profit-making or the language of marketing in club cultures is not problematic per se. It is the lack of commitment, of true passion and respect for the community including the work of others that signify intervention of the 'money-making machine' into previously 'purely underground' club cultures. Party promoter/DJ Pico explains the breakthrough of 'vulgar commerce' into the club cultures:

> Nowadays, there are people who have money and take advantage of the work previously done by Milan Buček, Dano Čečetka, Bolek or myself and they bring [for parties to play] the same old names because all they care about is money. They invite Tiesto, Buuren, rent a hall, charge the fee and go away! Promoter has to be ready to lose, bring unknown names who are quality musicians, know how to sell these names to people. The music does not start and end with Tiesto. There are many other DJs who are better than him but do not have the support of a strong marketing. Being able to sell them is an art. These names get invited only by the people who understand music [the scene] not the ones who's got money.

> (Pico in Mexa 2010)

The idea of being a professional is thus organically related to subcultural commitment and expertise. Risk and innovation are a part of being a respected cultural entrepreneur. The definition of entrepreneur says that s/he "is a person who has possession of a *new* enterprise, venture or idea and assumes significant accountability for the inherent risks and the outcome" [my emphasis] (Sullivan & Sheffrin 2003: 6). Jozef, Eman and Pico, who organized parties, never failed to stress moments of loss, tension and risk. Pico:

> With the former director of radio Okey, we founded a company Cosmopolit events and started producing events. After a chain of never ending presentation writing and meetings with potential sponsors, some fruits of our labor emerged. For the time of two years, we received a little grant from Sony Ericsson, Carat Distillery and from the Slovak importer of BMW. Later, I organized events only by myself. We both realized it is not a profit-making activity but rather a risk-ridden and tiresome work. We parted in good; Tina is today a chief of the marketing department in STV [Slovak television].

> (Pico in Mexa 2010)

Here, party organization is situated in the field of other work in the culture sector – radio and television marketing. While it is charged with a higher level of risk than the work in media (both private and state-owned), this risk is complemented with the narratives of

dedication and commitment. Success is usually framed as 'dream fulfillment', as 'doing something for the community' or as 'a result of hard work'. Pico continues:

> In 2006, I organized the first big event. It looked exactly the way I always wanted it to look: good machinery, lights, girls, foreign DJ. I wanted to see all the DJs I used to hear in the radio playing live. I never ever dreamt I would be the one to call them to play in a club at a party I organized. I fulfilled my dream.

> (Pico in Mexa 2010)

The narrative which connects successful entrepreneurial career in the field of culture with childhood or adolescent dreams is especially powerful in the post-socialist territory. Bratislavian youth was concerned about the peripheral position of the capital triangulated by the neighboring capitals. Western stars of popular music tended to skip the capital of Slovakia to play in Vienna, Prague or Budapest. Apart from Bratislava's geographico-historical location, scarcity of Western cultural goods under socialism is another factor legitimizing cultural entrepreneurialism in the eyes of clubbers as mission for the community as well as individual fulfillment.

The narratives of entrepreneurialism in club cultures thus stress committed work that is not focused on profit but rather on innovation, creativity and community sustainment. If profit in some form occurs, it is interpreted through invocations of childhood dreams and related to the wider community of people sharing these dreams. Entrepreneurial activities in the field of culture are thus interpreted as 'now, we can fulfill our dreams, we are free to materialize our dreams which were illegitimate and suppressed under the previous systemic arrangement'. It may be understood as dream-come-true ethic of entrepreneurialism.

Borders of independent/committed and solely commercially interest culture are constantly negotiated and policed. The label of mainstream functions as a shaming characteristic which pushes clubs, clubbers, producer, DJs or event organizers beyond the walls of the imaginary

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community. Ideas and information are guarded. Building up the knowhow, accumulating people networks and relevant skills need time and effort. Pico's friend and colleague Ivo explains his trajectory from being an amateur report writer to becoming an aspiring party promoter. For a long time, Ivo used to do PR work for parties in exchange for entries and only sometimes he was paid. Among other things such as extensive party reports enriched with video and tracks, he wrote PR articles for Pico's events. This work can be seen as amateur fan journalism. He assessed the related tasks as

> rather unpleasant because you had to dig for information […] about DJs: where they played, their complete biography (…) translate all the materials and above all check facts to make sure it is true because if there is anyone who is a complete fan of the DJ and follows him from the beginning and so if I write a bullshit, it's an embarrassment. So I wrote for him [Pico] about Ferry Corsten and also John Gillian… I was especially pedantic with the later one as he is my favorite and it was the only interpret who sold out the entire Dopler [club where Pico organizes most of his events], 1.600 people were there by midnight, still more people were on the gate so they had to close and stop letting them in.

> (Ivo, male, 29, entrepreneur)

Talking about his unpaid work for the scene (mostly for Pico), he was sensitive to pointing at the outcomes: number of people at a party, web traffic or the fact that after he started writing reports, many other people withdrew. Obviously, Ivo was certain that part of the success of the entire 'business' was earned by his work. In return, thanks to this work he gained a considerable knowhow.

When Ivo got into conflict with Pico over not getting a free entry in exchange for his PR work, he decided to organize his own event with the knowhow he gained over the years of unpaid or barely paid work in clubs:

> You have to know how to call a quality DJ, set an adequate entry fee and mainly make a good promo… then people come. Plus, the date should not collide with another big party. Sometimes, this tends to be a trouble that you book DJs about half a year ahead and there is no guarantee there won't be something similar happening the same date.

> (Ivo, male, 29, entrepreneur)

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At the same time, he uses the mainstream narrative to draw distinction from his previous employer: a powerful tool for building subcultural capital by delegitimizing the professional competition. Pico's well established party brand Beautiful Things attracts people unrelated to who plays which Ivo perceives as a problem. The crowd which is looking for new names and new genre splinters is already elsewhere and he wants to target it. Ivo relocated the marker of independence, avant-gardeness onto himself when he assessed Pico's recent events: "the passion isn't there anymore; the priority is to make money" (Ivo).

As a long term critic of parties, he believes he built a background, networks and trust of people so they rightfully expect a lot from him. He wants to put to use his experience with events in the Netherlands, such as Trance Mission, he visits regularly: "There, the organization of parties is always flawless! Every little detail is premeditated; there's all you can think of from A to Z." (Ivo) Part of the thrill for him is attached to the quality of service provided and its innovative aspects: "It's like every time I come there, I feel like…: goose bumps, thrill and I look around Wow, what is it this time they prepared for us!" (Ivo) His ambition is to import this quality, to pay attention to every little detail – such as camera screening and showing when a DJ uses keyboard because he believes these details give flavor to a party.

While the community around U.club perceives Dopler parties as mainstream, Ivo claims the events there (in U.club) are more like private parties for a bunch of junkies while Dopler parties offer quality service which is also reflected in the stress on detail, effects and zoning (VIP entry fee for an event featuring DJ Tiesto was 2.700 SKK [almost 90 EUR]). According to Ivo, there was no special service at the VIP zone at that specific party. The DJs were "not even brought to talk with people" (Ivo). The only difference was more space and better view.

The accent on luxury and exclusivity is perceived by the U.club community as a sign of mainstreamness while Dopler people prefer talking about raising the bench of quality, getting more care and better service (Eva). According to some of my interviewees, the imaginary privileges sold with the VIP ticket give trance parties a kitschy flavor of pretentiousness (Jozef, Peťo).

The idea here is not to compare numerous discourses affiliated to fractions of the scene in Bratislava. Rather, the focus is on showing how different consumer communities emerged out of the discussions about *quality*, *professionalism* and *party-as-service*. Even if there are differing views on how party should be organized, what proper atmosphere should look and feel like, how large a party should be to still count as underground or how much to charge – the bottom line is an agreement across differences that parties are a sort of service and that it's quality can be assessed and raised. Party organizers are aware of competition, they try to differentiate themselves and their customers but they seem to strive for common ideals and values.

Unlike for more 'traditional' subcultures such as punk or rock scenes, profit-making is not a problem per se. Club cultures' entrepreneurialism is embedded in ethical narratives of good work, involvement in the community, pursuit of dreams, personal courage, eagerness to innovate. Audacity to be avant-garde thus perfectly meets imperatives of post-industrial entrepreneurialism as outlined by Frank (1997). In the post-socialist context, the narratives of career in (sub)culture are enriched with sentimental flavor as Michal H., Peťo, Pico or Jozef narrate how they listened to Austrian radio or brother's smuggled records and never even dreamt about standing behind a DJ listening to him as he plays at a party of one's own.

2.3.2. The language for success

The story of club cultures is also a story of the changing entrepreneurial milieu. Investigation of changing discourses in clubs is just one layer of transition characterized also by a shift from proto-capitalism or 'jungle capitalism' (represented by early discos) to more regulated or Western type of market economy (at least when (Czecho)Slovak transition story is considered). Understandably, the position of culture and especially independent or counter-culture changed: some people including clubbers started thinking and talking about it differently. The newspeak of marketing and advertising has been organically weaved into the narratives of subculturalists and (sub)cultural producers.

Thinking about the scene overlaps with conceptualizing business success. The language of project managing, career trajectory and gradual progress are densely present in the interviews with party promoters. Aleš Bleha became one of the most respected promoters in Czech republic mostly renown for the project Summer of Love (the biggest festival specialized on electronic dance music in Czech republic and Slovakia). This is how he characterized the festival:

> Summer of Love is a long-term concept characterized by the basic tendency to progress, to grow together with its attendees, ripen and create trends, to bring new names but also real legends and thus put together something unprecedented in Czech republic. […] When I look 10 years back, I see an interesting curve which obviously heads towards a proper goal which is introducing Summer of Love among the most important European festivals and we're being successful [in this mission].

> (Aleš Bleha in Ondra 2006)

The commitment and passion, expertise and dedication thus align with the language of cultural management, marketing and entrepreneurial logic.

Used in party organizing, the new language gains popularity and approval. Instead of big corporations which are portrayed as invasive and exploitative, club cultures promote

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creative cultures of work organized as friendship networks. And vice-versa, informal contacts, non- official work and atmosphere of community provide new structures for business cultures. The purposefully permeable line between friendship and professional contacts makes a basis for new work relations. In <u>Clubs to Companies</u>, McRobbie argued that the specific club sociality was transferred into the work sphere (2002: 519). She writes: "The intoxicating pleasure of leisure culture have now, […], provided a template for managing an identity in the work world."

'Thank you for being so professional', wrote one of Pico-orginized party attendees on his Facebook wall. She acknowledged 'what [Pico] had been doing for the community'. This language personalizes producer/consumer relations. Clubbers relate to each other as producers and consumers but they accentuate direct connection even if this connection remains only virtual (web-mediated, Facebook or so). The language used by both producers and consumers demonstrated an unprecedented vocabulary that could be found in marketing and advertising agencies, international corporations and information/telecommunication firms. It accentuated performance, productivity, perfection which flows from work sphere to leisure and back; the producers as well as customers merge with the product, make a part of it. Pico speaks about launching of a new website promoting his work:

> Together with Jany Kalafut, I agreed to take up the domain trance.sk. Recently, I have been dealing with the programming side. Unfortunately, I don't see the act of launching the website happening in the near future; the portal is very demanding and already three programmers resigned saying they cannot prepare it according to my wish. It already became a habit that I always try to add special value to everything I do and never get satisfied with mediocrity and so I prefer allowing myself some extra time to make [the website] superb.

> (Pico in Ninja 2008)

Working full time in advertising, it is no wonder Pico and others take the language with them and conceptualize their leisure activities as another project. Moreover, such project is invested with the allure of passion and commitment which is transferred back to the work sphere. The key word project tends to bridge both work and leisure activities. Projects chain-up to make a career, an individual professional trajectory which subsumes even leisure under the teleological drive of productivity.

Authenticity, commitment, risk-taking and innovation are characteristics shared by subcultures and progressive business cultures. Support of festivals and events playing EDM by telecommunication companies is thus a logical outcome of affiliation of values. For example, Electronic Beats is a grand project of Deutsche Telekom. It consists of live events, radio, lifestyle magazine as well as online version Your Digital Daily featuring music news, videos, compilations to download etc. This project subscribes to liberal urban cosmopolitan and progressive value set – for example through supporting feminist music groups or stressing that 'they are young and they are gay' (a song title of a Canadian band which played at Electronic Beats Festival 2012 in Cologne). Moreover, 'racialized' or 'hybrid' identities gain visibility on the website such as Mykki Blanco. The New York-based artist can be characterized as post-race, post-gender post-rapper.

The network targets "European major cities" (Your Digital Daily [no date]) and runs local branches in language mutations. Such project means that there are enough people knowledgeable about cultural entrepreneurialism who can pour their skills into running regional branches of the project. Moreover, it is a clear sign that there is a large potential audience for the syncretism of 'progressive' music with 'progressive' technologies. "Committed to the cause of contemporary music" (Your Digital Daily [no date]), the project

makes use of the language of activism transposing it for the use of 'passionate enterprising'. The project targets international 'community' offering a symbolic platform for the networked class fraction (elaborated in section 2.3.5.).

Together with professionalized organizers, consumers changed, too. Their vocabulary, sense of agency and of community spirit exposed that clubbers were not just expected to dance and consume but actively participate making themselves part of the service provided and monitoring it, too. In the next section I focus on how clubbers gained skills as critical consumers directly involved in shaping the quality of a provided service.

2.3.3. Quality time

With club cultures, a new perspective on leisure arises. The notion of *quality time* captures it well. Clubbers discussed the ways of profiting the most from the time they spent partying. Rather than relaxation or abandonment, the idea of performance seems to preoccupy them the most. An unprecedented language emerged which would not had been used to describe a night out at a rock concert or a disco. The night can be decomposed into elements which are subjected to control (Malbon 1999: 70-133; Pini 2011: 173-187). The experience can be qualified and commodified and drugs are great helpers in this (sub)mission. As Milanko explains, party drugs are seen as the most efficient way to tune oneself into the correct leisure regime:

> If you want to have quality entertainment time, you have to leave work behind, cut yourself off from some relationship issues […]. And E[cstasy] is a good tool for that. […] It's like so convenient to take it, you talk a bit and in the course of half-an-hour, you get into [the state is described by a sound expression] and there you go having fun. Entertainment guaranteed, almost always.

> (Milanko, male, 32, event photographer)

Party drugs were seen not just as most efficient in achieving a state 'apart from the ordinary' but also a more active way of entertainment (in contrast with alcohol or heroin). They are meant to activate senses and energize the body, provoke speedy discussions, meeting of strangers and dancing which is not about luring a potential sexual partner but about joy from dancing as such, exploring the self.

Even if clubbers tend to interpret clubbing as a way to balance work or school, I rather propose there is a shared logic of performance connecting the two.

> I know people who really go there [to parties] to *get smashed* because their week at work was seriously hard, they have to like function 12 hours per day and then Friday, they come and take anything just to stop thinking, stop thinking! I was once asking a friend of mine why he needs to take 3 pills and have a couple of drinks with it when I go nuts and just feel good with only half a pill and he said, listen Roman, I work like a dog 10-12 hours daily, like I count even as sitting in a car and passing street lamps (…) so I need to *get absolutely smashed* not to think anymore. [my emphasis]
>
> (Milanko, male, 32, event photographer)

Inside clubs, a particular slang emerged and was popularized: a set of neologisms which gave a picturesque idea about clubbing. A notorious term *to get smashed* ['rozbiť sa'] loosely refers to excess of activity. One can *get smashed* by working too much or by doing sports but mostly the term is used to describe clubbing or a night out when alcohol or drugs are used excessively. By this and other discursive means, leisure and work are positioned on a continuum of performance rather than being opposites. Quality time designates an active time, a time spent working hard or partying hard.

In The Overworked American, Schor (1991) looked at the American middle-class 'squirrel cage' of working and spending and suggested the reclamation of leisure. However later on, leisure has been redefined as a part of the productive circle, too. Rojek (2010) argues that under the neo-liberal regime, subjects are expected to govern their free time as a productive resource, to be competent and relevant with others, to incessantly work on one's knowledge

and skills. With clubbers' insistence on quality time, leisure is made measurable: it is the portion of time when contacts are accumulated or sustained, 'culture' is soaked in and thus stocks of (sub)cultural capital are built, one works on the personal image and markets his/her activities. *Getting smashed* is a proof of hyper-activity contrasted to a lazy, inactive time named 'kaprovať' [verb: derived of carp, a slow lake fish].

2.3.4. The new language and practices aiming for quality

While alternative rock, punk or grunge concerts were usually rather low key and in the range of student pocket money, parties taught their participants 'to pay for quality' as well as earn money to afford this quality.

For Eva, who is a passionate trance and house music fan, club entry fee is a guarantee of exclusive crowd. She recognizes that higher price (often up to several thousands of Slovak crowns[23]) for an event where the music she likes is played protects her from the risks ascribed to the discotheque crowd. "I feel safer when going to this kind of a party," she explains. Those events where entry is from 400 to 1.000 SKK[24] (and more for 'star DJs' or big festivals) attract only committed clubbers (although the crowd can grow up to several thousands of people).

One such event could potentially suck the entire pocket money, student temporary job salary or a part-time salary. Eva lists her usual expense items: ticket plus train/bus/car ride and accommodation if one comes from a distant city or travels for a party elsewhere. She reasons that the money is well spent because of proclaimed safety of events but also

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[23] 1.000 SKK is approx. 33 EUR.
[24] From 13 to 33 EUR.

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exclusivity of the crowd in terms of seriousness or commitment: "In case I'm going to a hundred crown[25] party, I know I can expect all kinds of people but if I pay 400-500 crowns[26], I can be sure there won't be kids, for example, because they cannot afford it, rather there will be people who seriously listen to this kind of music… or the kind of people who just want to be seen (laughter)." Adding the last comment, she underscores exclusivity of the crowd and its potential for gaining social capital.

One might be tempted to attribute the high entry fees to the gradual mainstream-ization of club cultures when focus on profit outweighs the drive for originality, risk and innovation (see earlier section 2.1.3.). This might be true to a certain extent. However, club events were financially relatively demanding already in the early times. Some clubbers worked aside or got involved in the scene to negotiate the costs by putting up posters (Michal H.), writing party reports (Ivo, Anna), making photos (Marek, Milanko), go-go dancing (Petra) or hostessing (Eva). Clubbers had strategies in order to pay less ranging from drinking only tab water the entire night (Tina) to copying the entry stamp on the gate with a marker or even producing one's own stamps out of a potato (Anna).

Producers often invoked the term 'educating their audience'. Often, staging an event where a new branch of EDM was played was legitimized as raising the level of taste, 'teaching people to appreciate good music' (Edo). At the same time, clubbers stressed their influence on how parties are run. Ivo said that thanks to his criticism of treatment of customers in Dopler club, service was improved. In the party report, he criticized club owners for switching off cold water in toilettes (a usual club practice to augment consumption on the bar). Clubbers who consume drugs avoid drinking alcohol. Club owners sometimes offer

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[25] Approx. 3 EUR.
[26] 13-17 EUR.

space to party organizers for free and charge only the profit on the bars. If clubbers don't consume alcohol and there is no connection between drug dealers and club owners, club owners lose profit. The way to partly gain this profit 'back' is to switch off drinking water – clubbers tend to fill bottles and drink a lot of water to prevent dehydration – and charge for mineral water on bars.   Supposedly after Ivo's critique and a thread of reactions, this practice stopped being used in that particular club. Thus producers are 'educated back'. Some party organizers closely follow discussion forums where clubbers post their feedbacks (Pico in Mexa 2010); they also read reports and use sites for advertising events (Ivo). In this way, a closed circuit of consumer consciousness raising is created and fostered.

In forums and other discussion boards, quality is scrutinized. Clubbers share their views on service such as lines for toilettes, friendliness of coat check staff, behavior of security staff, sound and light quality etc. Raising awareness of consumer rights is an important issue in the post-socialist contexts where service is seen as neglected (or at least when it comes to the official service sector not the informal networks and connections (Ledeneva 1998)). Clubbers practice the language of responsible consumers who are 'in control'. This phenomena is more evident in later club cultures than in the initial movement and it was boosted with internet use, mainly in the form of forums where under theme-oriented threads, comments of registered users were posted and in return monitored by party organizers.

Moreover, clubbers became aware of the way their bodies, moods and clothes as making an important part of how a party is perceived. I remember my co-clubbing friends complaining about a 'bad vibe' when there was not enough people smiling, when the crowd was not enthusiastic or at least friendly. Clubbers observed crowd dynamics as one of the aspects that made a good party – together with quality DJs, good sound and lights or services such as

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coat check or toilettes. Smiles, waves, friendly attitude is expected to enhance communal vibe and boost reports of 'great party', 'quality time'. Thus, clubbers themselves became a part of the service provided. Picture galleries and forums were framed as tools for shaping the crowd, disciplining even through comments underneath the pictures and cultivating an awareness of the way their participation matters.

Club cultures promoted a formation of consumer culture – not just in terms of shopping and styling but also by shaping awareness of quality and standard of services. No longer are improvised conditions seen as markers of the underground. Clubbers – both producers and consumers – seem to aspire to well functioning entrepreneurial milieu and quality service. Pico says:

> I get angry [about sloppy promoters] because I know the hard work behind [organizing a party]. For example, I respect Bolek very much; he was one of the first. When he quit, I was trying to persuade him to keep on organizing events. Thanks to him, techno [scene] reached the level it is on today. He was able to bring ideas successfully to the end. He always aspired to bringing something new. He looked for new spaces. I appreciated the graphic style he used [in posters and PR materials]. No one was able to make a poster like him. Together with Dano Čečetka, they used to make parties as they should be. [To contrast], I remember Paradog […] where I played with [DJ] Anténa. We repeatedly got electric shocks: there were cables coming out of a wall […].

(Pico in Ninja 2008)

According to Pico, DiY culture should not be conflated with low level of service and bad organization. Gradually, parties framed as projects were inserted in clubbers' experiential portfolios and producers' career files.

I showed how clubbers started using the language which appeared together with multinational corporations, advertising agencies or early freelancers. In the post-socialist context, new subcultural infrastructure is tightly connected to the rise of entrepreneurial culture; the two don't grow in opposition but in mutual support. How did the 'community' of clubbers – or broadly of EDM enthusiasts identified by sponsors and companies – come

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about? I proceed to showing importance of new technologies and sponsors for creating the imagined community of *partynation*.

2.3.5. Globe, Tripmag, Alcatel and L&M: networked consumers

In 2002, dance parties called Globe clubbing were staged in several Slovak cities. Each of the parties was named after a different city characteristic by its cosmopolitan vibe such as L.A., Paris, Tokyo or Cape Town. The aesthetic of parties communicated a cosmopolitan imaginary: go-go dancers and hostesses were accordingly costumed, maps of the world were displayed, food was sampled, and the nationality of DJ headliners was matched. By juxtaposing the names of big metropolises with towns around Slovakia, the map of clubbers' imaginary as 'consumer-citizens' (Featherstone 1991) was redrawn. *Frankfurt clubbing* in Bratislava, *L.A. clubbing* in Považská Bystrica, *London clubbing* in Nové Zámky and *Paris clubbing* in Prievidza, *Cape Town clubbing* in Nitra, *Stockholm clubbing* in Košice and *Tokyo clubbing* in Poprad.

Globe parties took place just a couple of years before Slovakia joined NATO and the E.U. (2004) and five years before it joined the Eurozone (2009). I believe that these tangible political shifts of 'joining the world' reverberated in a set of subtle shifts in the way young people started thinking through culture about their global position as consumers/producers.

Thematic decorations used at Globe parties evoked the idea of *elsewhere* but this *elsewhere* was radically different from that of the unattainable and partly fantasized West of late socialism (Verdery 2003; Yurchak 2006). Socialist non-official consumer culture was a vehicle for perpetuating the idea of Western abundance and liberty, a magic construction of socialist

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desire indirectly supported by socialist economy, politics and official culture as well as fostered by the West (Verdery 2003: 364). The 'elsewhere' of Globe clubbing was happening here and now, it connected rather than divided and it could have been consumed (literally in the form of food samples with flags attached on toothpicks). This new imaginary, aided by the club cultures, discarded the late socialist consumer trauma of the unattainable West and reconfigured the position of clubbing youth on the map of consumer citizenship. Events such as Globe clubbing aided mapping the 'Imaginary West' onto the post-socialist territory in a tangible, reproducible and consumable way.

Tracing the new imaginary, I turn to reading the available media. In studies of subcultures and youth cultures, analysis of media – whether issued by subculturalists themselves or national media portraying subculturalists – has been crucial for the way subculture studies were constituted and the concept of subculture understood. While early Hebdige (1993[1976]) considered mass dissemination of subcultural knowledge being a death of it, Thornton argued that subcultures never existed in a state of pre-media innocence. Just contrary to this presupposition, the authoritative voice of media helped producing the idea of coherent groups of youth (e.g. Cohen 2002[1972]). These groups were then often charged with resisting power and inscribed with political potential as emerging social movements or, at least, symbolic guerilla reshuffling signs against the systemic patterns.

Thornton (1996) noticed that the media issued by subculturalists have often been neglected in the prevalent portrayal of subcultures as cultures resisting cultural industries with their invitation to commodify every aspect of culture and life. Thornton points at subcultures' vitality when it comes to production of their own media, their dissemination and, what is more important, the centripetal force by which media bring together the crowd identified by

shared taste. Just like Anderson-ian (1991[1983]) nation-wide newspapers, also flyers and magazines (Thornton 1996: 137-160) as well as items such as clothes and accessories (Hodkinson 2002: 109-152) have an effect of subcultural community reification; its sense of togetherness.

The only magazine dedicated to the electronic dance music scene in Czech Republic and Slovakia was Tripmag (since 1996). While early Tripmag was issued in the zine-like B&W quality, the later issues were in color literally filled with advertising. In the editorial, Tripmag readers are greeted as *partynation* (in English). This 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991[1983]) is brought together by a variety of new media and new technologies which are advertised on the pages of the magazine. Such as mobile phones.

Shortly after 2000, the regional electronic dance music scene and Tripmag, which was mapping it, were on the tip of their popularity. In the time when mobile phones were still rather rare, clubbers were encouraged to share their states of mind in the form of a text message which is then posted on a page of the magazine. Clubbers were invited to share any sentiments, ideally from the dance floor. The best text message was rewarded twice in a month by a device: a discrete form of advertising Alcatel. Mobile phone devices were only starting to be used en masse. People going to parties in groups, lost in the crowd or contacting a dealer were a great product target. As individuals, they were potatoes in a bag but connected by the tautological notion of connection for its own sake, they were a collective: the partynation wirelessly tied together. Unlike in the counter-cultural

narratives[27], technology is not perceived as a threat. Just the reverse, it is celebrated and seen as a crucial factor formulating the clubbing community[28].

Technology had important place in constelling the new imaginary: apart from mobile phones, internet virtually accommodated the partynation: party pictures were posted, events were advertised but also feedback was provided on forums and monitored by event organizers. During parties, video transmissions from clubs at distant places were screened. Again, such screenings were efficient in communicating the idea of connectedness, the world up for grabs and of no limits or borders.

A year after the campaign for L&M cigarettes was launched (2001), Globe clubbing toured Slovakia employing thematically related imagery. Billboards placed at parties showed a map where metropolises were connected by lines (with the Ministry of Health warning on the margin of billboards pointing at the sponsor of Globe parties). Moreover, the advertisement was featured in multiple issues of Tripmag. In different linguistic mutations, the slogan goes: *Your connection to the taste of world*, *The aroma unites you with the world!*, *Singapore is on the line [connected] with you!*. It was the world which could be tasted, sampled: the world of shared consumer fantasy. It can be packed into a box of cigarettes and unpacked anywhere. Ideally: *here and now* ['tu a teraz'] as the slogan goes. Just like dance parties can be assembled and experienced anywhere irrespective of the place.

On the imagery of L&M campaign, race is dissociated from the place (Trimpag 07/2001): a young black woman wearing ethnic-inspired blouse and jewelry is accompanied by the name

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[27] Anti-technology narratives (as legacies of the '60s) were cultivated also by the dissidents (see Patočka in Eyal 200: 64-65).

[28] Douglas Rushkoff, digital age visionary formulated club cultures as a part of the cybernetic revolution. His book Cyberia (1994) was an influential reading for early Bratislavian clubbers. As a result, its name was used to designate Kyberia.sk, one of the earliest online forums where several of my interviewees were members.

of a city – Moscow. In another issue of the same magazine, clubbers are invited to join the editors for a visit to Singapore: in the form of a club guide. "You will be smitten by Singapore's supermodernity, cleanliness and luxury. The same can be said about its clubs." (Tripmag 07/2002: 53). The miniguide is tagged with the logo of L&M project Global Connection. In these examples, the popular postmodern idea of global village took a form of symbols: the world is wide open for clubbers, the old boundaries dissolved. An idea of happy equality is simulated.

Globe clubbing imagery re-stages the theme of global village but rather tries to evoke authenticity of the location with the use of souvenir symbols such as red booths for London or airport signs for Frankfurt as well as by matching the 'racial' type of hostesses or at least evoking the 'exotica' with the help of costuming and make-up. Unlike in the cigarette campaign billboards which shuffle the ideas of belonging, originality or roots, in Globe clubbing imagery, geography, 'race' or ethnicity, were overstressed in order to evoke the 'flavor of the world' which now can be savored.

The new cosmopolitan chic was an instance of dream-come-true marketing which played on the legacy of the desire for the West. However, rather than stressing the distance and impossibility, it accentuated the possibility of connection, virtual closeness. Unlike the 'Western' items which used to signify the divided world, the cigarette ad proposes an idea of commodities bringing the world together. Just like Andersonian newspaper, novels and other nation-wide media, commodities addressed and created (trans-national) communities of consumers who were called into existence as *partynation*.

The partynation can also be understood as a trope for the class fraction which cuts across traditional social categories of distinction such as race, ethnicity and nationality to introduce

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new distinctions which are generative of playful identities. In section 3.2.0., I elaborate on the central role gender and sexuality receive in the constitution of this new 'progressive' subjectivity forming the body of partynation.

2.3.6. The magic 'elsewhere' of late socialism and 'anywhere' of partynation

The promise of *here and now* or *here, too* is important for restructuring the post-socialist consumer imaginary which was based on the model of divided world. Yurchak (2006) proposes that the late socialist non-official culture was attached to the symbolic 'elsewhere'. This 'elsewhere' "was not necessarily about any real place. [The West] was produced locally and existed only at the time when the real West could not be encountered." (Yurchak 2006: 159)

The 'Imaginary West' was seen as a source emanating style, music, film and other items of popular and alternative culture. It was kept alive by 'caravan routes' through which consumer goods (turned into cultural fetish items) were delivered. From the perspective on the 'Imaginary West' (Yurchak 1999) cultivated under socialism, capitalism was affiliated to 'style' and 'cool' long before McGuigan (2009) coined the term – 'cool capitalism' – to designate the fusion of countercultural 'chic' with pervasive entrepreneurial principles of neo-liberalism.

Late socialist consumers had notoriously little sense of distinction between 'mainstream' (popular/mass culture) and many fragmented styles which were to be perceived as alternatives and subgenres. Little sense of diversification was present. In the '80s, young people in Czechoslovakia were either Depeche Mode fans ['depešáci'] or into metal music

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['metalisti']. With full seriousness of ideological or religious confession, they would have said one or the other. The concert of Depeche Mode in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest, Stevie Wonder's concert in Bratislava or attempts to set a tradition of independent rock festivals; all these events were experienced with utmost seriousness to live a 'normal' (sub)cultural life in 'normalized' Czechoslovakia .

When the Iron Curtain fell down, new subcultural identities emerged but, for some time, there was also a significant continuity of styles. According to several studies of the '90s post-socialist youthscapes (Pilkington 1994, 2002; Yurchak 1999; Markowitz 2000), these were populated by multiple groups which were echoing late socialist subcultural styles as well as adopted new styles like grunge. Importantly, only modest market niches seem to have grown around these subcultures. Discotheques were emerging and playing, for example local mutation of dance floor, but they gained little respect from the middle-class youth as I explained earlier (section 2.2.0.).

Globe clubbing were the kind of parties which took place in a club or any large disposable space: it could have been an exhibition hall or a defunct movie atelier. Here, DJs play from records for a crowd of young people who derive pleasure from a dancing marathon often fuelled by stimulants but also from hyperactive socializing and imaginative costuming. The idea is that such party can be staged with relatively little resources anywhere. One can actually just let a car stereo play to the top of its capacities, open the car doors and dance in the middle of nowhere with just couple of friends. The level of easiness to run a party was crucial for viral spreading of electronic dance music.

The new model of entertainment infrastructure was incredibly flexible and fluid: people moved from party to party, events circulated, DJs migrated, technology travelled just like

music or ideas. We may think of the electronic dance music scene in terms of Appaduraian (1996) schema as a particular form of interlocking scapes. Such fluidity, flexibility and openness translated the neo-liberal world order into tangible forms readily available to youth.

The new imaginary fostered in club cultures abandoned the binary model of the world before the Fall of the Wall. It moved away from the idea of the divide where the West emanated and the East received cultural impulses. No more structured around the referential point of the West, the new imaginary subsumed post-socialist clubbers under the idea of a cosmopolitan partynation. Rather than a uniform coherent collective, this community was in the process of constant fragmentation and divisions around taste claims and sliding boundaries of mainstream.

Despite constant renegotiation of boundaries of taste subgroups, the collective of consumer-citizens was brought together by the shared imaginary which shaped them as mobile, cosmopolitan, innovation-oriented subjects, a target of global campaigns. They were recognized as such by car producers, alcohol distilleries, telecommunication operators and tobacco concerns (but also cultural institutes such as British Councils). These sponsors were addressed by party organizers who quickly adopted the marketing language through which they were able to present clubbers as potential consumers as well as a sophisticated crowd.

From improvisational techniques of setting parties (presented by Eman in section 1.2.2.), party organizers moved to clearer organizational structures and strategies. Simultaneously, their audience is easier to define; for both organizers and potential sponsors, it can be seen as a group bounded by specific adjectives. On the website of Wilsonic (Wilsonic 2012),

Bratislava-based festival 'reflecting future', the festival audience is introduced as urban, cosmopolitan, forward-looking, open-minded and 'good taste' crowd:

> It was fantastic meeting you there and hearing expressions of joy, debating music, meeting old friends and making new friends. We met Poles, Austrians, Englishmen and Frenchmen as well. Everyone had great fun. Slovakia is supposedly a country of sincere and spontaneous people. We add to this that they also have great taste.[29] [my translation]

Apart from reviewing the festival atmosphere, these lines introduce clubbers as an avant-garde actively shaping the future of the country also by the way they amuse themselves. Festivals such as Wilsonic (and especially Wilsonic which relies on grants from cultural institutes and telecommunication corporations) are promoted as places of meetings, connections where young people transgress national and other differences and form one cosmopolitan body: the *partynation*.

Wilsonic's constant fight for survival is also a struggle to prove that Bratislava disposes of an audience of partynation-type. That it can join cities like Berlin or Vienna; that there is sufficient number of young people of 'cosmopolitan-orientation' who can make the festival survive and who can be presented to sponsors. The rhetoric of the party-review above demonstrates what du Gay called the „struggle for the *imagination of the consumer*" (1996: 116 cited in McGuigan 2009: 145 [emphasis in the original]). Party crowd is not addressed solely as consumers but rather as citizens of the partynation, a community of shared ('good') taste. Nationalities are invoked only to be erased by acts of friendly come-together of a party scenario which does not substantially change whether one is in London or in Bratislava.

The story of Wilsonic proves that organizing the partynation of Bratislava is not a victorious march. When 2010 edition had to be called off due to financial reasons, Michal H. supported

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[29] [Bolo úžasné stretávať vás v areáli a počúvať prejavy radosti, debatovať o hudbe, stretávať starých priateľov a robiť si nových. Stretli sme Poliakov, Rakúšanov, Angličanov aj Francúzov. Všetci sa výborne bavili. Slovensko je vraj krajina plná úprimných a spontánnych ľudí. My dodávame, že s vynikajúcim vkusom.]

the festival on his blog: "I keep my fingers crossed and hope that our common child [he was one of the founders] which has been for a long time under auspices of [Tibor Holoda] will come back in a year time healthy, strong and stylish![30]" (Hvorecký 2010b)

Club cultures could offer the clearest path to join cosmopolitan youthscapes, to 'join the world'. Could club cultures present a broader and more inclusive agenda than the PLUR (peace, love, unity and respect) slogan? The overlap of 1988/1989 so-called Second Summer of Love and the subsequent Fall of the Wall was never considered an important fact shaping the partynation's imaginary. And still, for example, Love Parade – which became the largest open air party – was initially conceived as a peace demonstration in the divided city of Berlin (just a few months before the Wall was torn down).

Club culture proposed a vision of a utopian shared 'non-place' (Augé 1995) which spread virally. It corresponded perfectly to cyber-fantasies (Rushkoff 1994) as well as to neo-liberal utopias of networked people beyond race, class, gender, sexuality, moving freely to follow pleasure routes, all working in jobs that feel like leisure while these jobs require no more than self-expression.

To introduce her book on club culture, Garrat (1998) proposes several introductory snippets: 1. Paris, 2. Hong Kong, 3.Ibiza, 4. New York to tell "the definitive account of contemporary dance culture" (cover). However, Adventures in Wonderland is rather a tale of the 'British sound' touring and conquering the world from haute couture of Parisian salons through celebrations of the withdrawal of Britain from Hong Kong, to running of mega clubs in Ibiza and dominating the cradle of EDM, New York.

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[30] ["[Tibor zverejnil smutnú správu.] Držím mu palce a verím, že naše spoločné dieťa, o ktoré sa už dlho dobre stará, sa o rok vráti zdravé, silné a štýlové!"]

The account of a party staged before Hong Kong passed under the Chinese rule is reminiscent of the first Love Parade. Expats running the events under labels such as *Unity* or *One Nation* believe in the strong appeal of a euphoric gathering pumped up by the rhythm of EDMC: 'It's nice to think that we might have left a time-bomb ticking on the edge of Communist China,' says one of the party promoters (Garrat 1998: xiii). The author comments on the expansion of British clubbing: "Like Russia, which is also showing a keen interest in events organised by British promoters, China could soon be a massive new market for such music and merchandise." (Garrat 1998: xiii) Redhead wrote some time ago that "British youth styles were exported around the globe as once the country's manufactured goods had been" (1993: 1). We may thus think of the story of club cultures as a medium of *one market* par excellence.

2.4.0. Conclusion

Crafting a 'meaningful' trajectory or value orientation, clubbers moved between two extremities. On the one hand, they differed from the 'mainstream' which also legitimized their avant-garde position as taste leaders and lifestyle producers. On the other hand, they employed distinction from the 'extreme' of Bohemian lifestyle which threatened values of hard work, professionalism, career trajectory, family life. As such, clubbers represented local form of the global new middle class characterized by the way they brought together values of Bohemia with bourgeois aspects.

Clubbers used late socialist practices and strategies of consumption to craft their style in the conditions of transition. While clubbers' style was rooted in late socialist consumer practices, it was also an exercise in differentiation: not everything Western goes, not everything is

'cool'. Instead of the 'Imaginary West', clubbers are invited to join the cosmopolitan youth, the community of 'good taste' and 'special experience' who are always on the run to progress, to evade a haunting vision of the mainstream which is emptied of its critical meaning to serve competition.

Chapter 3

[constructing transgressive middle-class subject]

3.0. Introduction

3.1.0. The carnival effect of clubbing?

    3.1.1. The central figure of 'smažka': a limit to excess

    3.1.2. From transgressive to comfortable: consolidation of middle-class lifestyles

    3.1.3. Responsibility, comfort, networking

    3.1.4. Translation of subcultural activities into lifestyle-related activities

    3.1.5. Transgression, youth cultures and middle-class constructions of subject

3.2.0. Sexing the new middle class

    3.2.1. New gender and sexuality imagery: striking a pose

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    3.2.3. 'Bedroom culture': the feminine leaves the house

    3.2.4. The neo-liberal sexual revolution

3.3.0. Conclusion

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I refute a widely-diffused idea that clubs provide a space for carnival effect of reversed hierarchies and excess threatening the social order. Instead, transgression is in the heart of the project of new middle class consolidation.

Rather than 'revealed' through spontaneous entertainment, the subjectivity crafted in clubs is learned, managed and regulated, stretched between two polarities: the 'mainstream crowd' and the 'excessive figure'. Excess – in fashion, drugs, dance, sexuality – is relegated onto a figure of 'smažka' while practices related to clubbing are processed into sustainable lifestyle patterns. By distinction from the figure of excess, 'normality' of the middle-class life trajectory is achieved and legitimized while self-exploration through experience and consumption remains central.

In this chapter, I examine the kind of subjectivity, assembled in clubs and sustained further, that can be assigned to the progressive middle class and specifically to its 'creative' section. Further, I argue that gender-bending and 'expressive' sexuality are central to the articulation of the new subjectivity. Unlike 'vulgar' sexuality and strict gender role division that can be observed in discotheques, clubs promote disinterested aesthetic perspective on gender/sexuality experimenting.

3.1.0. The carnival effect of clubbing?

Thornton (1996) claims that in clubs, people disregard their professions. This is because they are too young to have one or because they want to buffer what Bourdieu (1992: 110-11) called 'social ageing' by talking leisure only. All that really matters is a subcultural persona

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and an affiliation to the crowd of like-minded co-clubbers on the road to self-discovery (Dorn & South in Thornton 1996: 111). Jackson (2004) insists even more on the idea of clubs as havens of transgression by mocking Thornton's actual attempts to discuss occupation with people in club toilettes (2004: 100-101). He advocates the sensual shift taking place as people leave their Apollonian working bodies and inhabit Dionysian festive bodies which are organized differently (see also Gaillot 1999).

One might be thus tempted to believe that clubs provide space for the carnival effect – people who are disadvantaged according to the ruling standards may be rich, famous and fabulous according to alternative hierarchies. We may think of vogueing (a practice akin to drag) as a way to temporarily embody celebrities. Club cultures, as well as earlier disco (Dyer 1995; Thomas 1995; Lawrence 2003), are partly rooted in cultural practices of gays of color in American agglomerations (Rietveld 1997; Garrat 1998). One would suppose they carry on the empowering message for marginal identities across different contexts. However, while alternative values and transgressive practices may be fostered in clubs, it does not automatically mean that one is invited to step outside of 'normativity'.

As clubbers circulated stories of risk, danger and failure – for example, Michal H. spoke about his best friend from clubbing times who has been in psychiatric care – they distanced themselves from the 'excess' and the best way of distancing was to think in terms of career, future prospects and sense of control over one's life.

When Anna, Peťo or Michal H. spoke about the demography of parties, they underscored that attendees were students and professionals who learnt from each other. Magda called clubbers "fantastically creative people". Anna mentioned 'ad-makers' ('reklamkári') – people working then in advertising/marketing/event agencies; Anna remembered one group coming

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to the parties, standing at the bar, drinking borovička and shouting when DJ played something they liked. They were 8-10 years older than Anna (when she started attending parties, she was 23); she says she follows them because some of them are still in the business.

Michal H. described the clubbing crowd as "university students but also IT-people, programmers…". Meeting people active on the scene meant for him a start up impulse for his career of a writer (of short stories, novels but also copy texts). Michal H. remembered that thanks to his girlfriend whom he met in a club, he met many people around Braňo Kŕč (who was a promoter, booked DJs for events and ran a record store attached to the cult bar UW Café). Later, he became close friend with Tibor Holoda who was one of the first evangelists of electronic music: Holoda started playing in U.club once a month and ran a radio show Crystal House in 1992, the first show dedicated to electronica. People at the scene helped promoting Michal H.'s first book of short stories which became an unprecedented success (in section 2.3.1., I described the strategy for launching his second book).

The idea of a profession, even of a career, thus wasn't absent in clubs of Bratislava, just the opposite. My interviewees were well aware of professional groups and university affiliations. As students, they often identified each other by university, department or dormitory (Peťo). They were able to assess the background and position one on the grid of social belonging. While the atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, social maps were still at work.

3.1.1. The central figure of 'smažka': a limit to excess

There is a recurrent figure or a group emerging in the discourse of clubbers. Sometimes, this group is addressed by different names, sometimes it is a singled out figure standing for a group characteristic – 'smažka'[31]. While most of the interviewees used 'smažka' as a common point of reference, accompanied by a gesture of winking 'You know, what I mean' or a benevolent smile, Anna characterized this figure/group in most detail.

Anna speaks about a distinct group she and her friends used to meet at parties: "everyone knew them", she claims. Anna describes why they were excessively remarkable: dressed in extravagant clothes, "we used to call them 'Turks' because they got their clothes from a Vienna shop (the brand supposedly contains the word Turkish but Anna could not recall the precise name)". They wore jewelry and some of them had solarium tainted complexion. Most of them were men but the clothing style worn in clubs made it difficult to be sure. Magda remembers how she was 'deceived' several times as she tried to point out a good looking guy to a friend but, upon a closer look, the object of desire was a woman. According to Anna, the 'Turks' were mostly men. However, because of their accent on style, grooming and body maintenance, she believed they must have been "homosexuals or what" (Anna). As I discuss later in this chapter (section 3.2.3.), experiments with gender-bending expressive styles opened a possibility for men to invest into their looks with heightened care, to "be metrosexuals", as Magda phrased it.

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[31] The practice of singling out a figure representing the style of entire group in its essence is not new. Often, subcultural members were singularized by names such as Mod, rude boy, punk, rasta etc. Stylistically most daring members tended to capture the eye of onlooker so that nuances within subcultures disappeared. Blažek & Pospíšil (2010) documented and discussed two figures of the '60s in socialist Czechoslovakia. 'Mánička' was a long-haired young man parading his supposed nihilism towards the values of majority society wearing 'neglected' clothes and causing public commotion by heavy drinking and provocative behavior. 'Pásek' was rather inspired by Elvis Presley with shorter hair fixed up with the help of sugar water or beer. Both definitions are derived from ÚV KSČ [Central Committee of the Communist Party] documentation which accompanied the action 'Vlasatci' ['Hair' or 'People with long hair'] during which in 1966 more than four thousand young men and women around Czechoslovakia were prosecuted.

Anna adds that the 'Turks' probably worked in Vienna on positions like waiters, cooks and so (the implication is that these jobs, which would otherwise be badly paid in Slovakia, became a source of disposable cash due to considerable salary differences between Vienna and Bratislava). Due to the relatively high income, they could shop in Vienna boutiques, explore trends and niche styles, and eventually gain a lot of attention at the parties in Bratislava where most of the clubbers still had to negotiate a narrow selection in shops.

Other interviewees invoked 'queers' or 'Áčko people' (Magda) and 'kožušinkári' (meaning clubbers wearing fluffy materials) or 'smažky'. Rather than referencing a concrete group of people, they served as repositories of distinction, othering. What connects these terms is an idea of excess. From my own experience, by their visible presence (as Anna said "everyone knew them"), people like Anna's 'Turks' used to heavily contribute to the atmosphere of parties. They formed a core of how clubbers were perceived (by the outsiders): like magnets, they attracted attention and lent their characteristics to the whole group of party goers. However, for most of my interviewees, it was important to distance themselves from smažka. Bundle of categories intersect in their characterization: fashion-oriented, sexually ambiguous, 'junkie', 'not a student' (meaning not university or high school students but students of vocational schools or holding jobs like sales assistant or waiter).

According to Anna, the 'Turks' consumed party drugs in high quantities. She added that also some groups from Petržalka[32] frequented parties: she characterized them as "not students" and avid drug consumers, too. By pointing at the 'Turks' and the 'Petržalka crowd' – as the Other of clubbers like her – Anna accentuated that early club cultures were "mainly about students […], there were smart people, educated and informed…"; she remembers them

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[32] Petržalka is a residential part of Bratislava known for its vast areas of pre-fab housing. Petržalka supposedly produced and concentrated youth groups hanging around and making trouble.

coming in groups according to particular student dormitory, university or department and interacting with people in new trendy professions but less with the 'Turks' or the 'Petržalka crowd': "what for?", she reasoned.

Such situation marked by class tension is reminiscent of Yurchak's discussion of stilyagi in mid-'50s Leningrad (Petersburg). Stilyagi were young men and women listening and dancing to American jazz and later to rock'n'roll, they wore Western clothes acquired from black market and attended dance events, restaurants and clubs; the name derives from the importance they ascribed to style (stil). Yurchak's respondent defends himself and his friends who similarly followed jazz, danced in clubs and wore Western clothes from a conflation with stilyagi (Yurchak 2006: 175). While the Soviet press tended to portray stilyagi as uneducated, him and his friends were keen on culture, avid students and career-oriented. They shared style, music and leisure patterns with stilyagi but perceived themselves rather as the new Soviet youth. Could it be that clubbers like A. actually understood themselves by distinction from the figure of 'excessive' clubber who was also central for articulating how clubbers were perceived?

My interviewees distanced themselves from 'smažka' as a sign of excess on multiple and intersecting levels. They resist being confused with figures who 'let go' up to the point that their bodies and life trajectories lose any contours of will and direction. Saturated by the energy discharged from party drugs, the body of 'smažka' is difficult to control. Mostly associated with taking too much drugs or not being able to control their effects on the body, this person above gender is identified by excessive bodily movements, facial twitches and cramps, sweating, with almost mechanical urge to dance or talk (depending on the substance taken or its chemical constitution). The figure is a threat to the idea of body

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ownership or of the body controlled by the will power. 'Smažka' is controlled by his/her body occupied by chemical substances (with some exaggeration, the body occupied by drugs may stand for 'natural urges' of 19th century lower classes). It is a figure of inability to be in control of the ways of having fun, an ultimate parody-embodiment of the countercultural dream of exploded subjectivity.

To some extent, one may read 'excessive' clubbers as marked by class but often also by non-normative sexuality: a group similar to the 'Turks' is identified by Magda as "that queer group" or "Áčko-people" (named according to the gay bar Apollon, abbreviated A or Áčko). Maybe symptomatically to the partial origins of club cultures in dance music cultures of black and Hispanic gay men, 'excessive' clubbers are scripted as lower class and homosexual. Subject position was made available and it was occupied by individuals with similar characteristics but in a different context (similarly, young Roma men identify with Afro American rappers).

To explain how I understand 'smažka', discursive figures and subject positions are two notions I see functioning in a productive dialogue. On the one hand, as people talk and produce texts, they create Bourdieu's 'groups made with words' as well as Foucaultian figures produced in legal, governmental, medical or other texts and practices. On the other hand, subject position can be understood as a place created in the discourse; this place can be taken up, inhabited, embodied. Club cultures offer such places with partly predetermined qualities but assembled in local contexts. As a result of the circular identification, labeling and reproduction, clubs seem to both house 'excessive' clubbers and generate more of them.

Gradually, the subject position is emptied, shifts and fades away and one only has to wonder where all the 'kožušinkári' went (Petra). Magda speculated that after dissolution of club cultures, the individuals who identified themselves with the created subject position migrated to different subcultural streams and lifestyle brands. They left behind a trace of sensibility as clubbers moved to lifestyles.

3.1.2. From transgressive to comfortable: consolidation of middle-class lifestyles

Anna explains that "everyone got out of it (meaning the use of dancing drugs), like every university student or every slightly intelligent person got out of it, managed to make sense of it". Experimenting with risks was not seen as a problem but "getting stuck" was. "One has to move on," Petra explains when talking about a friend who failed finishing university, did not settle down in a relationship, deals drugs and makes party pictures in exchange for entry to every possible event in Bratislava.

Clubbers don't remain in the repetitive structure of week-work/weekend-leisure. Clubbing rather sets them on the road of ambitious quest for new experience. Eva characterizes clubbers as always on the go for a new experience. They move from party to party, between floors and crowds, styles and fractions of styles (Redhead 1993: 3-4; Bennett 2001: 124-30). When they are tired of clubbing, they move to other lifestyle activities: Iveta suggested she did not want to spend her life doing one thing but rather preferred trying out new things: from music hall, through water skiing to exotic resorts travelling. Jozef, Ivo, Peťo claim they move to follow quality, to raise their expectations and experience good service.

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Clubbers don't frequent the same old disco; they don't dance to a favorite chart song. Their leisure life is as ambitious as their prospective professional careers. Ambiguity, uncertainty and constant stimulation made clubs attractive for trend seekers and lifestyle builders, as well as produced them. Clubbers are never 'stuck' with one style. For clubbers, style is a process of exploration and experimenting; it is an attitude of 'seriousness' towards leisure.

Below, I present two narratives in which two respondents – Ivan (26, male, 26, financial lawyer) and Anna (female, 34, on maternity leave) – make sense of their experience of 'digesting' transgression and 'moving on'. I understand them as examples of crafting middle-class scenarios of life trajectory out of subcultural experience of risk and intensity.

Story of Ivan

Ivan studied at a high school but used to hang out with a group from vocational school. He verbalized a desire for normality when he realized he had a drug problem: "guys in my age play football and go to the gym and for trips […] I became envious of these normal people." Further, he describes his effort to become 'normal' again:

> I started living like normal people do. It took about a year to… I mean out of all my friends I ended up with just one girlfriend who had a similar development like me. Others got somehow mad like they were into [Hare] Krishna or… left [for prostitution] to Hamburg and stuff like that. And so the two of us… we started going to the gym, we started going to cinema and… as the head, the organism got cleaner, I started enjoying normal things.
>
> (Ivan, male, 26, financial lawyer)

Stories like that of Ivan feed other clubbers' sense of confirmation that "it all ended up well, we all ended up well", as Anna said. These stories of risk and unhappy ending provided scenery of danger that was crucial for attractiveness of club cultures (Iveta, Krista, Michal H.). They served as an imaginary line delimiting club cultures from the 'mere mortals' (Oto) who 'did not have access to this kind of experience' (Iveta). Clubbers learnt to incorporate

sensory intensity, experiment and risk into their habitus – as Jackson (2004) would see it – but they also managed and regulated these elements into 'meaningful' scenarios. One such trajectory is presented by Anna.

Story of Anna

Anna started going to clubs and parties in 1997. After her first encounter with electronic music at Hurytan festival, she started frequenting weekly techno nights in U.club. I met her for an interview upon a recommendation from a friend who never attended parties but 'knew someone I would be interested in, a passionate clubber and former colleague'. I received her e-mail address and exchanged a couple of messages in which we discussed details of our meeting. I was supposed to meet her husband in the office building where he worked. He then drove me to their house in Svätý Jur. Anna has been on maternity leave with two children.

Svätý Jur is a village in the close proximity to Bratislava situated on the slopes of Malé Karpaty. Anna said that when they finally moved into the renovated house, they were one of few non-locals and were looked upon as intruders. Locals were probably afraid that new families moving to the outskirts of Bratislava will change the spirit of the village into a suburban model. New house colonies started to appear in the surroundings of the city following the style of Western suburban dwellings. These were typified houses with a garden, sometimes behind a thick wall: one of the most explicit expressions of the post-socialist class distinctions. Most of the houses in Svätý Jur belong to families who inherited them from their relatives and these people prefer the communal spirit of the place rather than seeing Svätý Jur becoming settled by newcomers who can afford acquiring a house in the proximity of the capital.

Just like many other post-socialist cities (e.g. Fehérváry 2011), Bratislava developed new suburbia but also surrounding villages started to be inhabited by younger people who did not 'belong' to the place but moved in due to the relative economic advantage. Often, they were either seen as the 'new rich' or as holding a job which can guarantee income high and stable enough to afford paying mortgage ('gentrifiers'). It was this discursive background that stigmatized Anna and her husband Marek when they moved to Svätý Jur.

During the ride from the city to their home, Marek told me about his involvement in the scene. Initially, he worked as a technician at a university club in Eastern Slovakia. He found a job announce and responded to it. This was his first contact with the electronic scene but also an opportunity to earn some pocket money as a student of Technical University. He made friends in the club and worked for one of them for 3 years in an IT company his friend and a colleague founded. I met him in front of Slovanet, a large telecommunication company which once outsourced some work to the company Marek worked for. He said he no longer worked for Slovanet but had his office in the same building and worked in a related area.

During her university studies in Bratislava, Anna used to commute to Brno to meet her Czech boyfriend whom she also met at a party. It was again at a party that she and Marek met. For a time, she was involved in the scene as an amateur journalist. She used to write party reports for bajkonur.sk, a website specialized on electronic music and the related scene, but later she met Michal H. and started writing for music5D project, another website dedicated to electronic music for which she mainly interviewed DJs from home and abroad. She studied journalism and political science with focus on foreign politics. For a period of time, she worked as a spokesperson for the minority rights advocate's office at the Office of the Government. Later, Anna was employed in Slovak Telecom where she dealt with external

communication. She prioritized spending time with her family although at the same time, she formulated her motivation to go back to work after her maternity leave. She concludes: "It's also because of the mortgage. Just like everyone, you know… we are such a mortgage generation!" (Anna)

During the period when her husband was preoccupied with house refurbishments, she stayed in her home town in Eastern Slovakia where her mother could assist her with child care. At one time when she came to arrange something in the capital, she decided to attend the 10th anniversary of U.club. She was pleasantly surprised to meet again many "old faces": "With some of them, I am still in touch but mostly, we grew up of this [clubbing]… everyone's got a family or… at least a partner." (Anna) Further, she elaborates on the trajectories of 'normalization' after the clubbing period by recalling a meeting with a former roommate with whom she used to go to weekly U.club sessions:

> We used to be so free, like we had no boyfriends [in Slovak, the words free and single are synonymous and by using so free and then talking about having no partners, A. plays on both meanings]. […] However, from time to time we also were depressed by the fact… like we always just went partying… […] I mean we were depressed due to not having a boyfriend, like 'what is this lifestyle' we used to ask… Recently, I was travelling East with this friend of mine; it was a long ride, we had enough time to discuss and assess that it actually was a great time, we were happy we had experienced it and there is nothing at all to regret because I am married now, have two children, she is married with one child, like everything is normal, all functions well.
>
> (Anna, female, 34, on maternity leave)

Anna contrasted her position with that of her peers who are single: "Presently, I am absolutely contained, saturated. I have two kids and I am contained. It just proceeds naturally, right? First, we enjoyed, like we enjoyed ourselves brutally and then what… it started to be boring." (Anna) She suggested that her thirty-something friends who "have no family, no kids and too much free time tend to speculate excessively about how unhappy they are" (Anna).

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On the 10th anniversary party at U.club, she remembers, she was very nervous at the beginning. From the previous experience, she considered U.club to be a very safe space where even the bouncers were caring and friendly. One of them was supposedly a teacher at an elementary school by day and Anna used to discuss with him, complain when she felt like she overdid it with drugs and he would say 'You see! Again, you will be regretting Monday, my dear!' (Anna) Both bouncers were careful not to let in people who seemed like 'trouble'. Before going to the U.club anniversary party, Anna read some messages on kyberia.sk web forum about skinheads being let into the club. Therefore, she was very nervous that they may come in and beat people up under the usual pretext that they are 'junkies'. She kept thinking that she had two children and should not put herself to risk: "I have to be responsible, I cannot afford this!," she thought but stayed at the party.

3.1.3. Responsibility, comfort, networking

The theme of responsibility is supplemented by the idea of comfort. While Anna still goes to clubs, although quite seldom, she expects quality, smoothness, and safety materialized in the interior design. Both she and Jozef recalled Soniclab as an ideal example of the way a club should look like to accommodate their expectations. Both described it as a space of 'carpet and couch'. Space reminiscent of a living room: "clean as a living room", Anna said. "Decent place with quality sound and a carpet", said Jozef. Both used diminutives as if to evoke coziness of the place (they actually said little sofa and little carpet; the use of diminutives is also evocative of the club cultures slang). After Soniclab was closed down due to its low profitability, Jozef preferred travelling to Vienna to have access to similar places.

Milosh and Skank, resident DJs U.club/Subclub and radio_FM talk about changing their strategy of club going. They became more demanding, more selective. Skank insist on the requirement of quality and comfort:

> I go [to U.club] once or twice per month when there is an event which I like, an interesting guest… however, I prefer more comfortable places. I lack… in Slovakia, not even in Bratislava there would be a club fulfilling my expectations. I used to like Spojka ['Connection']… I mean in terms of dramaturgy and overall comfort: it is warmer; the bar is more pleasant, just better… […] The only alternative for me may be Radosť ['Happiness'], I give it a chance again after the renovation, and then also Subclub.

<div align="right">(Skank, male, 32, DJ)</div>

Club cultures built and educated a clientele who craved spaces of quality. In sections 2.3.3. and 2.3.4., I proposed that within the milieu of clubs, reflexive consumer consciousness was formed with accent on quality of service and mutual feedback from organizers and participants; there was a call for 'professional' attitude to organization of entertainment. (Sub)cultural organizers and their clients advocated for 'proper' entrepreneurial conditions for holding leisure events (section 1.2.0.). The vocabulary of comfort and safety shows that leisure spaces were understood as extensions of clubbers' homes and jobs.

Having these points in mind, the narratives of Ivan and Anna should not be understood merely as stories of 'growing up' but also of lifestyle formation, framing of values. One is not invited to withdraw from clubbing due to age but rather to integrate it 'wisely' under the productive time imperative. Such insistence on practicality emerges in Iveta's perspective on people she meets at parties:

> I used to like meeting people, I guess I was interested in them; I wanted to know as many people as possible. […] Previously, when I was a teenager, I used to go there [to parties] to meet boys, I was hoping to meet there a Prince, Mr. Right, because I was a young chick and was single. However, now I know that we don't go there to meet someone special but rather as we get older, we go there to meet new people, the kind you could go to do sports with (laughter), […], or someone to do professional networking with, I mean using the contact in the future not just work related but also other things in life… don't know, like the person makes sofas and you might need one (laughter).

Iveta changed the purpose of going to clubs from pursuing romance to building semi-professional connections with people. Party attendees might actually be very different but still can be relevant to one's network of friends or useful connections. In this way, people could strategically assemble contacts from a variety of fields.

Some respondents like Jozef got disappointed with club sociality and formulated an idea that conversations fuelled by methamphetamine and empathogene – increasing sensory transmissions and breaking down feelings of insecurity – are ultimately fake. "I would not meet people I meet in clubs for a coffee during the day," Jozef concludes. Nevertheless, the ability to meet anyone and discuss any topic is a skill to cultivate. In the urban milieu where most people are anonymous, one is expected to be friendly with strangers. Upon entering a club, one could impress by endless greeting and hugging of acquaintances. Moreover, the skill of small talk or of establishing connection efficiently can be appreciated across variety of jobs.

However, the 'proper' subjectivity for club socializing cannot be taken for granted. Breaking down inhibitions and stimulation of random meetings also shape one's dispositions. Ivan proposed that he "never was an extrovert kind of a person… […] [he] used to find it difficult to establish contacts with people and therefore, [party drugs] aided [him] to contact people briskly, [he] lost inhibitions, it boosted [him] with great energy… with self-confidence... he could dance better…" (Ivan). Interestingly enough, Ivan articulates party drugs not as a part of the entertainment scenario, a vehicle of joy, or a shortcut to affective states of freedom but as a tool of self-management in respect to fitting in the social milieu of clubs where one

is expected to exhibit a flamboyant persona. Ecstasy helps him to inhabit – and by repetition also learn – the required habitus which Jackson (2004) sees as the Dionysian self of all of us.

For Ivan, drugs are not a part of self-discovery experience of clubbing but rather a regulatory tool. He used them to gain self-confidence, energy and eloquence which boosted his capacity to meet people as well as dance confidently. Thanks to meeting people in clubs, Krista admitted she learnt to be more open, to socialize easier, approach people without obstacles. While for Krista, club sociality fosters a skill which can be taken in embodied form outside of clubs, Iveta thinks of club connections as a virtual diary of people she can potentially contact when needed: she gives an example of lifestyle activities such as doing sports or furnishing a flat.

3.1.4. Translation of subcultural activities into lifestyle-related activities

Youth cultures are a mighty platform on which middle class, mainly its globalized incarnation, is formulated. In his study of the formation of middle class in Kathmandu, Mark Liechty proposes that: "Cultures of consumerism, media, and youth are not side effects or consequences of middle-class formation. Rather, they are among the most important cultural processes through which an emerging middle class actually creates itself as a sociocultural entity[33]." (Liechty 2003: 7)

Distinction from lower classes and emulation of higher classes are central to the formation of middle class as classically formulated by Veblen (1994[1899]. However, it would be

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[33] The idea of cultural practice articulating classed sensibility was discussed in the musicological/historical work Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture. Through the comparison of Leipzig and Birmingham, Pieper (2008) proposes a perspective on the middle class as a project formulated also through the means of 19th century music. In the words of Pieper, "music was imbued with norms and values which furthered and assured its association with didactic or edifying purposes, thus playing a role in education and refinement of the bourgeoisie." (2008: xii)

imprecise in this context to speak about the middle class en bloc. I rather think of it in Bourdieu-an terms as fragmented, continuous projects. As a result, the new middle class does not necessarily look 'up' for inspiration and identification. In order to differentiate itself from the dominant form of 'doing' middle class, emulation of 'stylish' marginal identities is put to use by this fraction.

Youth cultures – containing elements of transgression – have a crucial role in constructing lines which are then (or simultaneously) translated into new middle-class lifestyles. For example, drugged club dancing is smoothly complemented with or substituted by jogging or fitness. Anna compares her experience of clubbing with fitness practice. As a married mother of two, she replaced regular club going with exercising:

> I go exercising to a fitness centre and there, I listen to techno sets I downloaded from the internet and I am like so happy about it, I mean running on a treadmill… it is the best party ever, I close my eyes and feel like I am somewhere at a party, in U.club or so which would not happen easily now. What I want to say is that it is still worth it, I still can appreciate techno [music]… I still like it. It's not like I listen to techno at home, it's not a kind of music for that kind of listening but rather for treadmill running (laughter)… it's awesome, fantastic energy!

> (Anna, female, 34, on maternity leave)

Magda compared the states into which club dancing throws her to yoga-related states. After she started working full-time, she also delved into yoga as both exercise and spiritual practice. Milanko went the other way round: for him club dancing is "an issue of primary importance" which substitutes sport courses he used to attend such as taekwondo, karate or gymnastics. Iveta suggested she did not want to limit herself to club going only. Rather, she accentuated that she wanted to "live her life" with all the "extremes" it offered such as sport or travelling. She now prefers drinking a couple of glasses of wine (rather than consuming party drugs) to get herself into an "out-of-ordinary mood", to "have endorphins released" (Iveta). At the same time, she admits that sauna or sport work the same and sometimes she

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prefers them due to responsibility: "like I don't eat potatoes and chocolate anymore and I go jogging so I wouldn't put some additives into my body [she plays on the double meaning of the word 'éčka' which refers both to food additives and Ecstasy]" (Iveta).

The utilitarian understanding of mood-modification and self-control is usual in clubbers' discourse. While Adorno (in Thornton 1996: 1) and Baudrillard (ibid.) perceived dancing crowds as an expression of mechanical obedience and resignation on any meaning, clubbers considered manipulation of states of body and mind to be the central aspect of clubbing technology. DJ controls the mood on the dance floor by music. However, again crowd 'educates' the DJ back. Mayla recounts her experience of playing. Sometimes, she was faced with whistling and shouts when the music "could not keep up the tempo of [dancers on fast drugs]" or when people had their expectations preset by resident DJs. DJ cannot be seen as a hypnotizer of the crowd. Dancers in a club also express their expectations. They try to be in control of their 'quality time'.

Transgressive states of out-of-ordinariness are carefully dosed and managed. Balance between 'madness' and calculation of risks is aptly captured in Feathersone's term 'calculating hedonism' (Featherstone 1991: 86). However, Featherstone's concept does not explain how the Bohemian element of pleasure life meets cold rationality of Bourgeoisie. And further, how transgression becomes 'domesticated' into lifestyle.

In the case of clubbers, I suggested that the figure of 'smažka' served as a repository of excessive features. Clubbing could thus be translated into a more sustainable version. The process of borrowing from marginalized identities can be seen as the *economy of 'hip'* described already in Brown's (1985) Gypsies and Other Bohemians. The Gypsy figure is a guarantee of authenticity emulated by the impoverished artists as well as downward

aspiring middle-class youth. It is not higher class which is emulated but rather spectacular figures – drawn from the margins – who lend their color, drive and craziness to the rest of the crowd.

While Brown does not speak about the *economy of 'hip'*, she proposes that "the bohemian myth involved a dialogue between social dissidence and cultural absorption" (1985: 5). Her suggestion resembles Hebdige's (1993[1979]) hypothesis of subcultural incorporation by youth culture industry and it similarly underestimates importance of marginal identities not just for the lifestyle innovation but for boosting the 'creative' sector as such. Redhead offers a more critical reading of the Bohemia-Bourgeoisie blending process. He frames this process into a larger socio-economic and cultural context:

> The joint effects of the spread of education and academia, of the growth of cultural industries, and the expansion of consumption have rendered less evident and less pertinent all that which separated the hedonist world of bohemia from the bourgeois world. The ideal of making oneself visible, of being yourself and doing it yourself, is no longer the privilege of a minority.
>
> (Redhead 1993: 191)

For Redhead, club cultures signify 'the end of bohemia' (ibid.), the peak of convergence of both discourses. In the next section, I explore in more detail the role of transgression in reformulation of middle class and how youth cultures effectively mediated this reformulation.

3.1.5. Transgression, youth cultures and middle-class constructions of subject

When interpreting club cultures, researchers tend to reproduce an idea of a strict distinction between transgression in clubs and normativity outside of clubs. Through theoretical tools, they stage utopias which are in accordance with utopias advertised by event organizers and

experienced by clubbers themselves. Parties are delimited both spatially and temporally (in the way festivals, carnivals or holidays) from working days and filled with ritual practice. Some club events underscore the extraordinary experience by special decorations or elaborate scenarios while other events take place in rough coulisses. The intention is to take participants elsewhere from their geographical, social, and cultural standing: either upward through glossy décor and spectacularity or downward to authentic 'holes in the wall'. For post-socialist audiences, such staging of plurality and mobility was especially important as they strived to make part of cosmopolitan youth cultures.

Jackson studied British clubs across a wide variety of styles and in a long-term perspective. Usually, little attention is paid to the way in which new dispositions acquired in clubs are channeled into the social matrix outside of clubs. Jackson's study makes an attempt to trace the knowledge gained in clubs: "Through clubbing, people create and socialize through novel bodies that underpin new social practices, which eventually become embodied and taken beyond the club space." (2004: 2). Jackson perceives clubs as sources of embodied and inter-personal knowledge which have a potential to shape new ethics.

Yet, it is no longer enough to contrast "the sensual extreme" found in club cultures with "traditional […] morality" of the mainstream society (Jackson 2004: 3). Since late '50s, expressive youth cultures have been shaping modernities and moralities in the West. In the '50s and '60s in the Western context, expressive youth cultures voiced an insistent call for a more liberated self. In the course of '70s, the alternative knowledge derived from countercultures and subcultures started being dissipated widely and it profoundly shaped the idea of an accomplished subject in relation to the world (Binkley 2007). Making a Foucaultian study of documents released by counterculturalists – print materials but also

interior decoration, diet and clothing style – Binkley (2007) traces the new culture of care of the self and other. The new progressive moralities were disseminated in self-help books and other materials actively shaping lifestyle as a new central value. Binkley formulates the American counterculture as a set of regulatory practices codified in a plurality of texts. The relaxed, expressive self is thus a result of a meticulous work of formulation across variety of contexts.

Importantly for this project, the modern self emerges as middle-class youth emulates the others of the 'mainstream'. The 'hip middle class' moves away from their parents in physical as well as social space to look for alternatives elsewhere. Binkley writes:

> Eagerly comparing themselves to 'niggers', middle-class youth drew new lines between their forward-looking social imaginaries and those of their parents, choosing to throw their lot in with a range of oppressed groups as common victims of their parents' twisted and ultimately destructive view of progress.

(2007: 30)

The figure of 'smažka' serves a similar purpose – it is a resource of otherness signifying transgression of numerous borderlines. It is a promise of permanent excitement, of sensual experiment stretched to maximum and often even beyond. It permanently threatens of destruction or at least compromising or shame.

However, it is the other which is fabricated inside the narrative of club cultures rather than taken from the 'street'. Club cultures offered a subject position to be filled and reproduced. This position was filled by people within the specific context of Bratislava clubbing: waiters working in Vienna, with disposable cash and preference to invest it into grooming and clubbing. The subculture proposed an identity for them which dissolved with their withdrawal from club cultures and shift elsewhere. They did not disappear just moved with the flow of discourse, maybe highlighting different parts of their identity. Or, as Anna

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suggested, they adopted more sustainable subject positions made available by the label 'metrosexual'.

For Binkley (2007), the shift from radical madness to sustainable loosening characterized the '70s in the U.S. After the radical turmoil and questioning of everything in the '60s, there was a will to order liquidity of constant changes into patterns, trajectories, lifestyles. The counter-cultural bodies of knowledge were transformed to new common sense 'normalities' and partly formed new mainstreams.

With this genealogically informed perspective in mind, there is no easy way to erect the sharp contrast of transgressive clubs and normative worlds beyond. In spite of that, I agree with Jackson (2004) that it is crucial to see how alternative or subcultural knowledge connects to these seeming 'outer' worlds and what modifications it proposes. Such invitation receives heightened relevance in the context of my study situated in transitioning Slovakia as subjectivities were being rebuilt and new lifestyles emerged. Regarding club cultures, the negotiation of 'smažka' by clubbers and their narratives of 'normal life' manifest a condensed version of explosion of the self in the '60s and its re-regulation in the course of the '70s.

Certainly, this is not to propose that the (Western form of) work on the self and lifestyle was arrested during state socialism. On the bookshelves of many living rooms, cookbooks for vegetarians or books on stretching or yoga, fashion and style, macramé and dieting printed before 1989 can be found. Rather than arguing that previously, there was no experimentation on the self and lifestyle – because that would simply be far from true – I see club cultures as opening way to the new self fit for the neo-liberal conditions. It is the self shaped for the situation of relative insecurity where fluidity is translated into the art of style.

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Constantly emerging competition – on the side of producers – and shifting styles – on the side of consumers – are articulated with the use of subcultural 'cool' language of evading the mainstream. Countercultural language thus gives legitimacy to the pervasive logic of (self-) entrepreneurialism.

The Janus-faced nature of modernity was characterized by Bell as well as, among others, by Berman. While Bell (1976) scorns the rising insistence on hedonism in the lifestyle deployed around consumption, Berman (1982) takes into notices that the tension between hedonistic and protestant principle is characteristic of modernity as such. He writes about the resulting discontent of the modern condition: "it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it throws us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish" (Berman 1982: 15 cited in Binkley 2007: 32-33).

Nevertheless, it may be slippery to attribute this contradiction to modernity as such without taking into consideration other formations, other modernities whether driven by religion or secular ideology. It is *particular* modernity that is discussed in Bell's, Berman's as well as Binkley's account. Importantly, this tradition of modernity – a dialectic struggle between two formative principles: of Protestant ethics notoriously described by Weber (2002[1905]) and of Romantic ethics ambitiously depicted by Campbell (1987) – characterizes the internal contradiction, split but also a motor of capitalism. Subject of this particular modernity is produced within this split. This proposition does not derive from the postmodern accent on the consuming hedonist but rather from Marx's comments on the nature of capitalism (see Howes 2003). Of course, there is no one 'recipe' for the production of capitalist subject. And it may be that the subject struggling between career ambition and drive for ecstatic

experiments is, as Featherstone (1991) warns us, a narrow class segment masking itself as universal using the term postmodern subjectivity.

Clubber occupied a privileged position in respect to subject formation combining the two discourses: Bohemian and Bourgeois. S/he learned within a play environment about this contradiction. Again, Binkley's characteristic of a 'hip' self is helpful for the formulation of the process in which ecstatic promises of 'smažka' are curbed to become 'progressive' middle-class lifestyles: "The hip self was an impulsive self, to be sure, but it was also a chosen self, one that explored the adaptability of reflexive narratives of the self for more durable states of being." (2007: 64) It is this durability or sustainability, as different names for normativity, which bring middle-classness into the picture.

Middle-class approach to construction of subjectivity and lifestyle has been characterized by such terms as regulation, management, emulation. At the same time, distinction and othering are important forces of class formulation. As Beverley Skeggs (1997) pointed out, middle class consolidates itself through discursive strategies of othering, classing. Sarah Thornton (1996) traced discriminatory tendencies inside clubs. These were strategies of clubbers' distancing from specific classed/gendered figures who were simply seen as 'uncool' (poor in (sub)cultural capital). In Thornton's otherwise brilliant account, the aspect of emulation is not discussed. Yes, clubbers mock and move away from the figures of low subcultural capital but at the same time, they mimic the 'hip' of other figures.

This dynamic was captured by Hebdige's (1987[1979]) notorious <u>Subculture: The Meaning of Style</u> as he traced the borrowings of the 'cool' – slang, way of walking, spaces attended, music, hair cut etc. – from other groups. For example, white skinheads borrowed from black Western Indian 'rude boys'. For Hebdige, this is mainly a strategy of re-staging working-class

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communities in the times of erosion of 'tradition' and rising immigration. When subcultural styles reach middle-class audiences (through mass media dissemination and manufacturing of goods), Hebdige tends to speak about the evaporation of style's authenticity. However, the story of borrowing and rehashing does not end when it reaches the middle-class youth.

Youth cultures were an important catalyst of changing middle-class values in the West (Schildt & Siegfried 2005). Binkley's (2007) study picks up the line abandoned by cultural studies: the line connecting the middle-class youth with countercultures (see section 2.2.2.). Proponents of cultural studies inspired by Birmingham scholars were significantly more interested in subversive practices and spectacular styles of subculturalists than in alternative value systems cultivated by middle-class drop-outs. Binkley's work is an exploration of material and spiritual culture forming discourses and subjects rather than an interpretation of possible openings to radical change that a subculture proposes (a perspective often found in cultural studies). Importantly, Binkley treats counter-cultures as bodies of knowledge which reformulated the ways of thinking about the self, nature and society (and their relation); they offered a new set of maps for imagining and reinventing middle-class values. He suggests a dominant trope of 'loosening up' characterizing the shift from the 'organization man' of the '50s to the '60s swinger, a shift famously depicted also in The Graduate (1967). He writes

> Among the hip middle class (a group far larger than the hippies themselves), to loosen was to disavow the repressive strictures of the old middle class and to immerse oneself in the expressiveness and sensuality presumed to belong to groups on the margins, from Sufis and jazz musicians to street peddlers and Vietnamese children.

(Binkley 2007: 30)

In the course of the '70s, these invitations are not just 'tamed', as Binkley proposes, but rather translated, processed into patterned orderly lifestyles, 'normalized'. Supposed

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freedoms of 'expressiveness and sensuality' are disciplined into "intentional acts of freedom" (Binkley 2007: 65). Such as treadmill jogging into techno tracks played from an i-Pod.

Binkley further traced the career of calls for self-realization and self-expression into its '80s yuppie form and beyond. In conversion with my findings, the discourses and practices of transgression are shaped into smooth lifestyle formats and career paths. The difference is that while he traces a gradual process of reformulation and privatization of countercultural values for the profit of a narrow class section legitimizing neo-liberalism, '90s clubbers immerse themselves into the new subculture which is inextricably formative of an entrepreneurial self.

To exaplain how middle-class lifestyles are crafted of subcultural practices and styles, I identified the 'smažka' figure used in clubbers' speech. With the help of this figure, clubbers drew distinction between their 'normality' and excessive ways of 'smažka'. 'Smažka' is a composite of various modes of excess; it embodies the limit which clubbers erected to draw contours of a 'meaningful' lifestyle. On the one hand, clubbers aspire on the distinction from the 'crowd' seen as a mass of consumers of fake brands and radio pop or later as conspicuous shoppers in a mall. On the other hand, they disapprove excess of style ascribed to 'smažka' who spends too much time in clubs, invests too much money into entertainment, endangers his/her health, and takes experiments with sexuality 'too far'.

While 'smažka' is the limit, how to describe the desired subjectivity produced in clubs? Combing my respondents' narratives for characteristics, I assembled a list: commitment, expertise, sociability, 'madness', ability to take risks, sense for changing trends. Further: energetic, eloquent, spectacularly dressed, knowledgeable about niche music and fluent in

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dancing styles and slang… The kind of subjectivity molded in clubs does not emerge with the sound of beat and get dissolved with the first sun beam. Rather, it is a construct of club sociality translatable into a number of professions; itself a professional asset as McRobbie (2002) noticed.

Another important rubric is the new approach to gender and sexuality. It comes in the same package with the listed qualities as another item on the shopping list of brand new subjectivity. I argue that the new gender/sexuality regime is crucial for constituting the desired subjectivity. Gender/sexuality regime characteristic for clubs is not just an efficient vehicle of classed narratives (section 2.2.0.) but it also provides lived experience of the new order of open possibilities and no borders.

3.2.0. Sexing the new middle class

In the introduction to Club Cultures and Female Subjectivity, Maria Pini sets the stage for subsequent defense of club cultures as harboring potentialities for new femininities and feminist politics of identity. It would be a mistake to understand entrepreneurial subjectivities fostered in clubs in disconnection from progressive gender and sexuality constellations. McRobbie (1998; 1999; 2002; 2010) systematically elaborated on the phenomenon of entrepreneurial subjectivities related to youth cultures and the changing forms of labor engaging the 'creative' element of subcultures. However, she did not draw connection between 1) more liberal gender relations ('safety' in clubs) and open possibilities for gender-bending and transgressive sexualities and 2) entrepreneurial values fostered in clubs.

In this section, I explore a set of images offered for consumption in magazines and events and complement their reading with words of my interviewees. The point is to read the clubcultural imaginary and understand its implications with respect to the neo-liberal structure of cultural organization and self-enterprising 'expressive' subjectivity.

3.2.1. New gender and sexuality imagery: striking a pose

On the back cover of Tripmag (12/2000), Quick mail by Czech telecom is advertised. Readers/customers are encouraged to open or relocate their mail account to Quick.cz by Czech Telekom. The main strength of this service – its promptness – is represented by a male figure of a superhero: he is wearing a tight blue overall, Q sign on his chest, shiny blue liner highlighting his eyebrows and a blue pompadour hairstyle. There is something uncanny about the type of masculinity Q presents: his costume can be read as a comic culture reference. We are invited to think of figures such as Superman or Batman and Mr. Quick seems to accentuate the slight gay tones intuited in these superheroes.

By this example, I want to show that queer sensibility became a tacit but omnipresent part of articulating the consumer-citizen experience communicated in club cultures. Tripmag readers (and clubbers in general) were invited into the discourse which presented new approaches to gender and sexuality as well as stressed these vectors of identity. Mr. Quick presents a connection between the latest technology, pop cultural imagery and elements of club style (glitter, make up). Speed, quality and trendiness are attached to flexibility of desire and weaved into one discursive thread. Nevertheless, a specific register of queerness is promoted: expressive male gayness as well and sensual feminine lesbianism both seem to be privileged while tomboyism or drag kings are present very little or not at all.

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The same issue of Tripmag (12/2000) features a cover illustration of a lesbian inter-racial couple stripped down to Brazilian panties dancing; one of them holds a bottle of champagne: the accompanying slogan says WIN YOUR OWN PARTY! Still the same issue: a full-page program of Prague club Radosť FX is illustrated by a French-kissing lesbian couple.

Party pictures canonized their own genre of representation. Going through piles of images, I was able to distinguish a pattern which photographers intuitively followed. A silent treaty was passed between picture hunters and their objects. Together, they cultivated style articulated in gesture, pose, smile. Sexuality was integral to posing. The kind of sexuality which can be represented – in vivid colors, sensual kisses, friendly hugs, extravagant pieces of clothing – became emblematic of clubbing. It is the Ecstasy-fuelled sexuality interested with surface, touching, extensive chatting and intensive dancing which gains representative primacy. It is slippery and fluid as if gesturing 'I could be gay or not… I am open to whatever comes… I like new experience… I always want more'. It is a cumulative trajectory: that means always being open to new stimulation.

Going through the pages of Tripmag (12/2000), a mini-article presents the account of a party photographer. This is his story in a nutshell: „In '98 […] I was a webmaster at a computer company and first time I had access to digital camera, I had no better idea than taking this 35-thousand[34] [CZ crowns] toy with me to a party and take pictures of smiley people." (Mellow in Tripmag 12/2000: 24). He started posting party pictures on techno.cz but soon relocated to his own domain mellow.techno.cz. Advising on how to become an object of his camera, he proposed he preferred people who were dressed in an attractive way and who moved energetically.

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[34] 1.389 EUR.

Four pictures illustrating Mellow's article: DJ playing, two pictures of costumed couples of friends hugging each other of which one is same-sex but not manifestedly gay (they could as well be friends or two strangers who came in contact just for the picture, the slippery line is part of the thrill), and finally a close-to-naked costumed female go-go dancer wearing tight mini shorts, her breasts are wrapped in folia and nipples taped, one hand placed on her crotch in the notorious Jackson/Madonna gesture, one hand up à la Saturday Night Fever. Expertise of the DJ is juxtaposed with clubbers working on their pose and style. Bea comments that being on a picture means that among all the people (sometimes up to several thousand), a photographer "noticed *you*"; the work on style is thus appreciated.

Often, the presence of 'male gaze' was understood as an indicator that the site had become mainstream as it leaned towards the gender/sexuality regime of discotheques (section 2.2.0) while transgressive gender/sexuality representations signified underground-ness. Ivan explains the difference using an example of a party crowd at Ibiza and a local crowd. While he lived in Berlin, he visited Ibiza with his German friends.

> Like at Ibiza you casually spot a guy at a party dressed half as man and half as woman. Like high heels, leggings while at the same time he's wearing leather straps and a leather cap. Like people have more fun with clothes. (…) I mean they also have different opportunities, they grew up with different… [sentence unfinished] (…) That's what makes a party good fun for me. Here, it's like people go to a party to be cool but they're not (laughter). (…) When I lived in Germany, we were doing all kind of things. Like we would come to a party dressed as sailors and stuff like that (laughter). It was more like… people were sexy but not vulgar.

> (Ivan, male, 26, financial lawyer)

Ivan elaborates on the distinction between *sexy* and *vulgar* which is ultimately a distinction of sophistication in taste, 'cosmopolitan' taste against 'peripheral/territorialized' taste, easiness with playful sexuality against 'vulgar' lust.

> For example, the party called Troja was a rather explicit party, the promo was matched with the theme [troja meaning slut in Spanish, as Palo explains]. So if there were some Slovaks around, they would go crazy ['slintali']… or they would spend an evening standing beside a

naked dancer… but the point is that she was there to support the ambiance and people were not really noticing her, you know. You got the difference? I mean it was not like coming to Harley [a notorious disco place in Bratislava where striptease nights are held] to clap and stare. (…) I perceived it as a part of the party, part of the program and a part of the brand of that party. (…) There was another party where go-gos were boxers. It's like a theater for people. (…) Often, there are gymnasts who make a professional promo at a party (…), they spin on ropes and so. It's a great experience to see it. (…) It's also a visual experience not just musical (…) it provides mood for the participants.

(Ivan, male, 26, financial lawyer)

Part of 'being in the know', as Ivan explains, is understanding gender/sexuality experiments as driving the style and serving as a technology of modifying mood at a party. Another important aspect is the way he integrates the language of marketing into the description of a party. The words like *promo* or *brand* coexist in perfect harmony with images of liberated sexuality: leather straps, nude dancers, sexy costumes. Similar symbiosis of two vocabularies – of sexual liberation and of entrepreneurial creativity – appears in the profile of one of the most successful entrepreneurs that rose from the club scene in Bratislava.

According to Tripmag (12/2000), "the most important dance party promoter" Dano Čečetka appeared at a party he organized dressed as Batman. When asked about club fashion, he answers 'I am fashion'. Here are some of his costumes captured by the magazine photographer: 1) red tight and shiny sleeveless top, elongated gloves and an ethnic hat, 2) striking yellow top printed with orange flowers, cowboy hat and a bottle of export Corona. His flamboyant costumes, 'crazy' statements and successful career in the new economic sector of entertainment (event agencies) make him a perfect example of the subjectivity promoted in clubs.

Taking Čečetka's playful statement 'I am fashion' seriously, I propose that he inhabits the fashionable 'I' or that the 'I' is fashioned in clubs. I pick some more excerpts of the magazine

to illustrate how the expressive subjectivity is fostered and what role sexuality plays in the constellation of this subjectivity. The magazine further asks Čečetka (Tripmag 12/2000):

> 'What's in your pocket?'
>
> 'Nothing, I'm not wearing pants right now', [he says alluding to either being naked or wearing a skirt, a popular club attire.]
>
> 'Have you ever had a heterosexual intercourse?'
>
> 'I think I have heard this expression somewhere before.'
>
> 'Would you like to die on the dance floor?'
>
> 'I already have, several times.'
>
> [my translation]

As I suggested before, it is a particular kind of subjectivity which club cultures put into spot light. The metaphor of the spot light is not accidental – as strobe and laser lights streak the dance floor, photographers mingle with the crowd and take pictures which can be typified according to couple of categories: 1) ecstatic dancing bodies, 2) DJs raising hands to cheer the crowd or with their head down frowning with concentration while mixing, 3) sea of moving bodies and last but not least, 4) clubbers posing directly for the camera. Both women and men take their place of object for the camera, object of looks of their peers as they scroll through images at online galleries.

The economy of looks demands that clubbers are feminized; that they become 'beautiful people' for the camera as the symbolic eye of the club scene. Further, I ask: What is the economy of the feminine in clubs? How does circulation of the feminine allow for the constellation of a new subjectivity?

3.2.2. Beautiful people': is fluid desire a feminist thing?

Clubbers used to refer to themselves as 'beautiful people'. In the stylescapes of post-socialist Bratislava, they stood out in a striking way. Typically, Friday and Saturday evening when most of the parties took place, club-going youth used to walk in groups across the city to gather in favorite bars, 'get started' with a couple of mixed drinks and wait for the right time to go to the event where they remained dancing the whole night sometimes followed by an after party or a chill out session at someone's place. As groups of styled youth walked by, people watched and sometimes also commented. Often clubbers were identified by exclamations like 'what a circus!', 'maškary' (a costumed person or a monster) or as queers.

The references to S&M culture or gay male culture encoded in the style usually passed unnoticed by clubbers. Rather the pieces of clothing or accessories were understood as a kind of clubber uniform and the reactions to their attire were perceived as clashes with the mainstream (section 2.1.1.). However, traces of queer sensibility were present in the actual style, in the experience of clubbing and the clubbing scenario. Even if no explicit statement or organized agenda came out of local club cultures to address, for example, sexual minority rights, discoursing about new gender/sexuality regimes did take place. Rather than through political discourse, gender-bending and/or sexual experimentation were lived as a part of the experience of clubbing. Discourse on gender and sexuality was relegated on the affective level of, for example, relating differently to same-sex peers or to one's own body.

The body was very central from the moment clubbers met to get styled together, swap clothes and apply make-up through the moments of parade as they walked the streets to meet the eyes of 'common mortals', as Oto phrased it, to dancing to the bass line which made bowels and bones vibrate. Club environment was seen as a safe space for displaying homoerotic desires included in the general inclination to touching of friends and empathy

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with strangers stimulated by the use of Ecstasy. On the one hand, these desires were accepted as a part of 'doing the style'. On the other hand, club cultures sensitized the participants towards gender/sexuality as arenas which can be open for investigation and rearrangement (even if this new sensitivity meant reassuring me – as in the case of Anna – that her male friends who got styled were 'really' heterosexual).

When interviewed, Magda discussed with passion the role of style and the way she and her friends used to prepare for parties. When I suggested we should go to U.club together, she exclaimed: "But I really don't have anything to wear anymore!" (Magda) Many clubbers would agree that extravagant, provocative or transgressive looks were invested with pleasure. Getting together for mutual styling was a part of the ritual. Both Anna and Magda stressed that not just female friends used to meet to fit on clothes and experiment with make-up and hair. Also their male friends would use an eye liner, wear a boa or just spend extensive time styling the hair. Magda's friend "took as much time as a bride" and let everyone wait for him at a bus stop in front of the student housing. Sometimes, when he could not find a gel, he would use shaving foam to fix his hair and style it (Magda). Anna expresses it saying that "boys [meaning her male co-clubbing friends] used to be into styling for a period of time but they weren't like... they were normal heterosexuals, no metrosexuals, you wouldn't even use the word those days (laughter)".

Male clubbers' investments into party looks often ended up as a short flirt with an eye liner borrowed from a girl friend. However, more sustainable new masculinities emerged, too – as is the case of adoption of the term metrosexual[35]. A place was provided which could then be filled and invested with short term interest in experimenting or more continuous desires.

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[35] The term is an intersection of sexual and consumer discourse. The actual neologism metrosexual was coined as a combination of words metropolitan and heterosexual (Simpson 2011).

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None of available subcultures allowed for so much attention to the body and corporeal pleasure. For some clubbers, it was a carnivalesque reversal when they could slip away from what was allowed for men as appropriate. For others, possibilities for a sustainable identity were created and transferred into daily looks.

As Anna suggested in her remark, the line of style codes, which used to distinguish homo- and hetero- men, was shaken. Club practices – such as the use of makeup, wearing of traditionally feminine pieces of clothing or just accentuated care for one's image – did not have a catch term yet when Anna used to go clubbing actively. Soon, there was a label or a brand adopted which could subsume some of the characteristics, practices, looks and gestures and congeal under the term – metrosexual. It is an identity which could hardly function in the absence of the fully stocked shelves, shopping palaces harboring brands as well as occupations which provide men with a disposable income and in which self-care is a professional asset. Moreover, a media platform of lifestyle magazines was necessary to make the term circulated and popularized.

The invoked figure of a metrosexual is significant because it stereotypically links to a number of professions to which some of the clubbers moved – (web)design, media, marketing and advertising where personal image is a part of the professional image. Some of the 'beautiful people' were actually waiters, sales assistants in boutiques or hairdressers rather than professionals in new economic sectors related to information, communication and entertainment however, they can also be subsumed under the term 'lifestyle producers'.

The narratives and practices of 'beautiful people' invite also men to experiment with looks, to transgress gendered lines of style. Following the impulse of 'expressive' gay male cultures traditionally affiliated to disco and clubbing, femininity travels onto male bodies inviting men

to participate more intensely in the field of consumption. However, the hierarchy of who dominates cultural production – who tunes the crowd for the night from behind the DJ table, makes music, sets the lights, sells drugs – remains undisturbed. While the field of consumption allows for femininity to travel, production remains tied by male networks. Gender relations in the sphere of production did not change as drastically as the domain of consumption; rather the opposite. Female clubbers remain in the position of subordination, often excluded from male networks and positioned as fans and helpers (section 1.3.0.).

In club cultures, the feminine is not lacking or suppressed (c.f. Thornton 1996: 104-5; Pini 2001); rather it is everywhere, made available for consumption as styling, body care, emphatic feelings on party drugs… Nevertheless, the omnipresence of the feminine, that Baudrillard (1990) earlier formulated as another characteristic of the postmodern condition, does not necessarily guarantee presence of women on positions of power and prestige (as I showed in the section 1.3.0.).

3.2.3. 'Bedroom culture': the feminine leaves the house

Getting styled before going to clubs, shopping for clothes and deriving pleasure from both looks on the street as well as from posing for pictures, all these practices installed the economy of the feminine firmly into the core of clubcultural practices. In preparation for clubbing, male clubbers used to join in the 'bedroom cultures', traditionally feminine domains of youth cultural consumption. In other words, 'bedroom cultures' invaded street cultures.

'Bedroom cultures' is a concept proposed by McRobbie and Garber (1993[1976]) challenging and complementing early Birmingham subculture theory which preferred public sphere of

street cultures and negated the private sphere of home. In the main theoretical framework proposed by the authors of <u>Resistance through Rituals,</u> women-dominated spaces and practices were ignored. Women were to be found in private, seemingly non-political spaces and if they participated in street cultures they earned derogatory sexual labels (McRobbie & Garber 1993). Rather, young women organized their leisure activities around private spaces such as bedroom where they could listen to music with friends, try on different looks, decorate the space, put up posters of male stars and dream about a romantic relationship with a celebrity.

Lincoln (2004) noticed that the initial interest in subcultural feminine spaces was abandoned by feminist researchers who preferred tracing the ways in which women joined in male-dominated spaces and practices[36]. For example, McRobbie read and discussed teenage magazines focused on 'girl' audiences to find strategies of empowerment in these texts: young women were invited to participate on "boozing, partying and 'shagging'" (Pini 2001: 93).

Cultural studies scholars and youth sociologists adopted the concept of 'bedroom cultures' as an apt intersection of youth identity with consumer cultures within private space (Frith 1978; Steele and Brown 1995). For Steele and Brown, "the bedroom is a safe, private space in which experimentation with possible selves can be conducted" (cited in Bovil and Livingstone 2001: 3).

These experiments are also gender- and sexually-transgressive, mainly in the case of boys trying on make up or female clothes. Within the context of club cultures, these practices

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[36] While in subculture studies, feminist researchers preferred tracing participation of young women in male dominated cultural practices and spaces (e.g. graffiti or skate subculture), in the field of popular culture studies, feminist researchers discussed typically feminized spheres of 'low culture' such as romances, Gothic novel or soap opera (e.g. Modleski 1988[1982]; Radway 1984; Brundson 1995).

leave the limitations of private space and become legitimized through scenarios of socializing and style. However, as I already suggested in the previous section, in club cultures, femininity comes to the forefront not through women but mediated by male bodies. Thus club cultures make an important role in stretching possibilities for masculine subjectivities, allowing for femininity to enrich these identities as a part of the subcultural 'cool'. This point seems to have evaded feminist attention in their discussion – both critical and celebratory – of club cultures.

Feminist commentaries interpreting the meaning of club cultures focused their critique mainly in two directions: 1) the male hegemony in the sphere of production (from subcultural expertise through technical skill to occupation of key positions in night time economy) (Bradby 1993; McRobbie 1993) and 2) opening of radical possibilities of new identities for women (McRobbie 1993; Pini 2001).

However, little attention was directed to the critical assessment of 'travelling' femininity. While mostly femininity traveled onto male bodies, female bodies became also confusing, points of uncertainty. Magda tells her experience with being confused about her object of desire during dance parties: "It happened several times that we got conned with a friend of mine, like 'Check the guy, looking good!' and we came closer and saw a girl". Same styles were often worn by both men and women: for example, baggy pants or black bellbottom pants, tight T-shirt, tight top and jewelry inspired by S&M as collars with sharp pins and piercing. Thus on the surface, club cultures were post-gender and post-homo/hetero divide: it let femininity travel to produce expressive styles.

Even if styling for parties was elaborate and decorative, the bottom line was its practicality. Clubbers insisted they get styled to enjoy the night, to dance, to contribute to the vibe of the

event. Anna and Eva describe that typically they would wear clothing in layers and remove top layers to be able to dance in a space with many other clubbers. Clothing was thus adjusted to extended hours of dancing. Oto describes the way he prepares for parties:

> I developed a ritual, like I put everything into a rucksack, spare underwear, spear undershirt, spare shirt, tissues, a comb, some food, something to drink and some other small stuff and I am ready to go. […] My only sort of costume is wrist bands [to dry his forehead], I remove undershirt, like you naturally cannot dance in it and here I go. I buy something to drink, throw the rucksack into a corner, my jacket to, I usually take an old jacket, you don't wear your best clothes for a party, I mean I had a good winter jacket and it got burnt by a cigarette tip […], now I have an old one I inherited from my cousin, so that's what I would wear not to worry that it gets stolen or what and aaa [he makes a sound to suggest he delves into dancing].

(Oto, male, 23, university student)

The seriousness with which he prepares was confirmed by many other interviewees. Eva stresses that although she likes wearing costumes or sexy clothes, it has to be practical for dancing as well as it is part of the entire feeling of a party. Clubbers thus formulate 'the cause' of clubbing which distinguishes them from the way they perceive the culture of discotheques where music is just a pretext for moving the body and to lure a sexual partner. Clubbers refer to the traditional gender dynamics in discos evoking girls in high heels and men buying drinks (Eva, Ivo). For them, this is very unlike club dynamics where sexuality is framed as *self-exploration* or *self-investment*, a journey within the music and, as Ivan explain, an important part of doing the style.

Plasticity of gender/sexuality is not open to everyone. It is attached to a classed gender regime and further to 'expressive subjectivity'. Attention to style thus gains crucial importance for claiming the belonging to the 'progressive' middle class; specifically, to its 'creative' core. The economy of the feminine is a coordinating force: it is not 'vulgar' male gaze that gains primacy but rather a disinterested aesthetic look that Ivan formulated in his narrative on Ibiza clubs.

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In clubs, one experiences that everything can be changed and modified and modulated. DJs manipulate mood, drugs manipulate feelings of pleasure and self-confidence, energy can be extracted and made circulate in the body, clothes and accessories can make one look ambiguously gendered, friends can be kissed and touched… everything can be open for renegotiation and subsequently re-regulated. Everything is open to innovation even aspects of identity which seem to be 'fixed by nature' as gender and sexuality. Gender-bending and sexual experimentation provide a crucial experience; it is the visceral experience of radical changes. However, these are not the changes that Freudo-Marxists Reich (1971[1936]) and Marcuse (1987[1955]) had in mind when he discussed libidinal re-constellation of the subject leading to revolutionary change. How to understand the revolutionary nature the gender/sexuality regime proposed in clubs? What is its socio-economic context and consequence?

3.2.4. The neo-liberal sexual revolution

When the beat poet Allen Ginsberg[37] visited Czechoslovakia in 1965, his speeches addressing the political situation were applauded but his program of sexual liberation was not accepted even among the revolting youth. The life-on-the-road as "existence in the immediate present, without fixed points" (Reich 1970: 364 cited in Binkley 2007: 65) accompanied by sexual experimentation and consciousness expanding was a point of scandal in socialist Czechoslovakia.

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[37] To reconstruct the story of Ginsberg's visit, I use the Final Report on Allen Ginsberg's Deportation available at: http://www.scribd.com/doc/53963034/Final-Report-on-Allen-Ginsberg-s-Deportation.

Wearing sneakers, sporting long hair and mystical beard, consuming alcohol and drugs, he talked about having no preferences in gender and no inhibitions at all. His program was presented as two-fold: 1) the level of the political – as he criticized the 'lack of freedom' in Czechoslovakia and 2) the level of 'psycho-sexuological philosophy'. While the first level addresses the system, the political arrangement of things – Ginsberg visited Czechoslovakia after his stay in Cuba and the Soviet Union – the second level connects to the notion of 'way of life', ethics of living and its meaning. According to the report, students who identified themselves in opposition to the official state youth organization [ČSM], when listening to Ginsberg reacted mostly to the first level of appeal and rather disregarded the second.

In the report on deportation of Allen Ginsberg from Czechoslovakia, parental and medical authorities are quoted to testify on behalf of Ginsberg's bad influence on youth "providing them with an example of wrong conduct in the ways of life". This concern is illustrated by stories of young people whose 'wrong conduct in the ways of life' necessitated interventions from the part of institutions (arresting, hospitalization, treatment etc.).

On one occasion, Ginsberg presided over a party where he commented on people's sexappeal. The report suggests Ginsberg treated young people, aspiring Bohemians and literati figures as a resource for his sexual adventures. The idea of Ginsberg's politico-sexual conquest of the country received a perfect culmination – named the King of Majáles, Ginsberg was paraded with a cardboard crown on the head while sitting on a throne placed on a deck of a truck moving in a crowd celebrating Majáles, a carnival-like student festival. Ginsberg approved of the form of celebration "as connecting of political resolve to maximum of eroticism of the environment". For Ginsberg, Majáles was probably reminiscent of a

tradition of bacchanalia or carnival where misrule and excess are seen as challenging the order of things, the system as such.

The link between libidinal liberation and political advancement was forged in Western Marxism (for example in the work of Reich and Marcuse) and was popularized by the the Beatniks and Hippies. For the Frankfurt scholars, fusion of Freudian psychoanalysis with Marxism served to diagnose what went wrong with the revolution in Western countries (Weeks 1985: 160). The bourgeois morals were seen as breeding fascist tendencies. In the countercultural version, 'dropping out' became a notorious strategy of divorce from the dominant values of the 'organization man'. One was invited to "carve ontological insecurities into reassuring and meaningful narratives of identity" (Binkley 2007: 65). Embracing the insecurities was in line with opening up of hegemonic identity categories, life scenarios and values attacked by students, racial and ethnic minorities, feminists and gay rights activists. In the middle-class translation it meant that one had to become an 'active chooser' and reflexive constructor of his/her own biography (Beck 1994).

The same invitation made by club cultures had a slightly different meaning. On the background of 'ontological insecurities' (Binkley 2007: 65) of transition, one was invited to immerse into insecurity and feel good and to adopt change as a strategy for building career and lifestyle. This lesson of living (and succeeding) in neo-liberalism was learnt through 'play' in the leisure environment of clubs. Moreover, there was no delay between subcultural styles and practices and their adoption by the sphere of marketing, advertising or telecommunication corporations. Rather, they shared philosophy and language from the very start. Clubs can be seen as green houses for the entrepreneurial subjectivity where new gender/sexuality regimes were probably *the* point of articulation.

Feminist researchers systematically addressed the changes in gender order, identities and sexualities under transition. For feminist researchers, 'transition' could be conceived as a period which perfectly exemplified how gender/sexuality was reconfigured in dependence from new socio-political situation and what new risks and challenges emerged for feminist agendas. The concept of 'transition' was criticized extensively as "consonant with Marxism-Leninism as with American modernization theory because it assumes evolutionary progress from one well-known 'stage' of history to another" (Gal & Kligman 2000: 10). For social construction theories, 'transition' might be a useful trope as it shows how 'deeply rooted'/'natural' elements are reconfigured under changed circumstances. Nevertheless, we may think of the act of opening gender/sexuality regimes for renegotiation as a powerful gesture of the new order. Lived (and liberating) instability becomes a metaphor of the new regime, namely neo-liberalism.

Concerning feminist scholarship on transition, initially it was mainly concerned with the deterioration of living conditions for women. They addressed issues of unemployment, trafficking, domestic violence, abusive representation etc. portraying post-socialist women as victims to be educated and saved (Castle-Kanerová 1992; Wolchik 1998a, 1998b). Subsequently, the notion of women's experience became central and thus local feminists participated on theorizing position of women in post-socialist countries. Not only experience of 'real' socialism came to be treated through the eyes of women but feminism(s) appeared in these feminist discussions as a certain meta-level of reflection (Kiczková & Farkašová 1993; Šiklová, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). If we accept the narrative of feminist 'transitology' in this tentative mapping, there can be detected another shift: towards topics of cultural studies (in a very broad sense of study of culture with focus on popular forms such as advertising or fashion). 'Globalization' and 'consumer culture' became key terms for this line

of investigation accompanied by the rising interest in Soviet or socialist culture (Azhgikina & Goscilo 1996; Green 1995; Omelchenko 1999; Stitel 2005; Vainstein 1996; True 2003).

Scholarship on sexuality – or rather LGBT identities – proved to be even more problematic then talking about and on behalf of East European women. First researchers came with an agenda of studying as well as affecting/coordinating LGBT communities. On the one hand, their attempts are a quest for traces of queerness in a new territory (Renne 1997). On the other hand, they also act to institute and convey LGBT identities as a part of civil society in Western democracies (Long 1999). Some of the problems of researchers' presuppositions, imaginaries and activities are addressed by Essig (1999), Bunzl (2000) or Woodcock (2004).

Club cultures in '90s Slovakia evolved independently from feminist and LGBT identity politics as introduced mostly through the NGOs and with the ideological help of gender studies programs (Zimmerman 2007; Cerwonka 2008). Put on trial in the leisure sphere, the domain of gender/sexuality became the kernel of new subjectivity constitution. One could not be a proper clubber without 'trying on' new styles, sensibilities, experience. Doing this, the clubber necessarily discoursed about gender/sexuality norms and borderlines through practice and styles.

Unlike in the 'cultural studies fraction' of transition literature, globalized identities and consumption were not invasive impositions. In clubs, they were embedded in the notions of youth agency, empowerment (Chapter 1), distinction from the mainstream (Chapter 2) and grew 'organically' from the invitations to transgress, open up, get mad, experiment, express oneself (Chapter 3). Club cultures did not offer a program, a manifesto or an agenda but rather a visceral experience of rethinking gender/sexuality regimes in line with instituting 'progressive' middle-class values spinning the post-industrial 'creative' economy.

3.3.0. Conclusion

Club cultures provided a site of articulation of both bourgeois and bohemian values. I argued that clubbers navigated between the 'mainstream' and 'extreme' to construct 'meaningful' patterns of lifestyle. The central aspect of clubbers' differentiation is the figure of 'smažka' which is a kernel of transgression. 'Smažka' represents a blend of points of excess or failure: lower education, accent on pure leisure (devoid of interrelation with work), big amounts spent on style, slippery gender identity, transgressive sexuality, unrestrained drug consumption, little care for future and health. Interestingly enough, this figure of distinction is not retained on the gate of clubs. The Bohemian flavor that 'smažka' provides is reworked into more conventional and sustainable scenarios of middle-class youth. Figures of 'extreme' are sources of innovation but their threatening aspects are obfuscated, prevented.

Moreover, I proposed that the liberal regime of gender/sexuality allowing for experimentation is central to the constitution of the new middle-class subject. The ideal expressive subjectivity is presented as creative and this creativity is extended to the sphere of business. Style and pose are not deployed to balance one's exclusion from the sphere of commercial success as it was with the case with Bohemians, counter- and subculturalists. Rather, transgressive style is wedded with profit. Transgression mainly concerns femininity traveling onto male middle-class bodies in the form of style. I suggested we may speak of neo-liberal sexual revolution taking place in clubs. However, unlike gender/sexuality liberation on the agenda of Marx-Freudian revolutionaries, a new sexuo-economic subjectivity is called into being to embody neo-liberal ideals.

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Concluding points

On 'cool capitalism' conveyed by subcultures

Previous decade registered rising scholarly interest in the convergence of supposedly opposed values – Bohemian or countercultural and Bourgeois. This mixing was especially tangible in the calls to creativity and innovation in every aspect of life, the Modernist invitation employed by entrepreneurial incentives. This synergy was aptly captured by McGuigan (2009) as 'cool capitalism'. Since Frank's (1997) The Conquest of Cool, the incorporation of counter-cultural discourse was studied as a motor of business cultures. Where rebellious creativity merges with entrepreneurial principles, capitalism is boosted with 'the new spirit' (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). Post-industrial capitalism thus emerges rejuvenated by incorporation of selected streams of critique (McGuigan 2009; Fraser 2009).

The dissertation partly built on this line of research. However, the project presents a twist: it suggests that depending on context, the logic of incorporation may be reversed. Not youth cultures and countercultures were 'drained' for inspiration that sells but rather club cultures disseminated forms of entrepreneurial modes of thinking and equipped clubbers with marketable knowhow and skills. In the form of subcultural participation and commitment, clubbers in post-socialist Bratislava absorbed neo-liberal concepts of cultural organization, values of professionalism and quality service. Subsequently, they were able to reproduce work and lifestyle patterns tested in clubs beyond the clubbing milieu. Club cultures were always in close proximity, if not interrelated, with the sector of 'trendy' jobs dealing with lifestyle. Information, material, people flew across the lines delimiting youth culture and the

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world of work. Clubbers were active on both sides (in case we decide to retain the classic subcultural division of resistant youth and complicit cultures of commerce): they were committed subculturalists as well as workers in new economic sectors and lifestyle consumers.

The thesis of incorporation or selling out was originally introduced by Dick Hebdige (1993[1976]). He suggested that knowledge and style of subculturalists is captured and disseminated by mass media and youth cultural industries. Subsequently, subculture loses its potential to serve as coded resistance. Deconstructing this hegemony/subculture division, Thornton (1996) argued that club cultures were actually never to be found in the state of media-innocence. She showed that mass media were rather crucial for shaping club cultures – and by extension other subcultures (see also Cohen 2002). Portraying them as a threat to the orderly majority, club cultures were charged with resistant potential and clubbers could think of themselves as rebels and deviants with social power to protest.

This dissertation has taken her argument further. There were other forces of commercial culture participating on the formation of club cultures in Bratislava. Advertisements of cigarettes, energy drinks or mobile phones were shaping the notion of clubbing community; communicating the idea of 'party nation'. Business sector served as a source of language, ideas or material (borrowed digital cameras, IT or marketing knowhow) which helped clubbers to articulate the 'progressive' character of club cultures.

If club cultures were unthinkable without the market, they also reproduced its structures efficiently. They proposed templates for neo-liberalization of culture as well as served as a subcultural training field for the 'real business'.

On re-framing transition through 'youthful creativity'

Furthermore, this project proposes an innovative perspective on post-socialist transition. Most anthropologists of transition argued that neo-liberal reforms were detrimental to the wide population and unsuitable for the post-socialist 'mentality'. In her overview of anthropological critiques of transition, Buyandelgeriyn states:

> As the ethnographic accounts suggest, the neoliberal policies failed because of the assumption that market rules worked the same everywhere. That assumption was not based on ignorance, however, but on a contemptuous belief that cultural identities, values, and systems are obstacles to progress and that they need to be swept away by the transnational forces of modernization (Tökés 2000). It became clear to me, however, that the cultural differences that the transitologists had dismissed eventually engulfed the transition.

(Buyandelgeriyn 2008: 236)

The approach of anthropologists to the populations affected by transition – as summarized above in Buyandelgeriyn's account – was to a great extent caused by the biases of the discipline. Authors of <u>The Global Middle Classes</u> provide an insight proposing that:

> [anthropology] rests upon a commitment to the holistic study of non-Western and small-scale societies, with sociologists and political scientists having traditionally focused primarily on industrialized, class-based societies, anthropology's engagement with class analysis has mainly taken the peasant, the lower classes, and the oppressed as its central protagonists.
> (Heiman & Liechty & Freeman 2012: 5)

As a result, 'winners of transition' are not addressed in classed terms; they disappear from the analysis and so transition is portrayed in exclusive terms. Those who profit and who identify themselves with the changes may not just be the spectacular figures of 'new riches' or narrow spectrum of politicians but a class (or at least a class fraction) which support changes and embody them.

The case of clubbers shows a different line of introduction of neo-liberal discourse and practice. This time, it emerges from 'below' shaped by subcultural 'cool' allure. Away from the power of the state (but using the legal framework guarantee) and dissociated from

traditional subcultures entrenched in the 'old fashioned' dilemma of art vs. commerce, clubbers built their space in the close proximity of the new economic sector (IT, new media, entertainment, marketing/advertising). In this form, neo-liberal cultural patterns were undistinguishable from 'youthful creativity'.

It seems that 'cultural differences' invoked by Buyandelgeriyn are much more flexible and negotiable than we may think. In club cultures, fragments of late socialist practices – such as 'commodity hunting' – were rehashed for new uses while other discourses – such as suspiciousness towards entrepreneurs – were opposed. Late socialist cultural legacies served as second-hand shops: some pieces had potential for being reshaped à la bricolage while other pieces were rejected in the name of 'progress' and 'modernity'. Clubbers were apt bricoleurs rather than victims of changes. Moreover, entrepreneurial vocabulary proposed tools and strategies for mostly young middle-class men to dominate the field of night entertainment as well as reach out to occupy a whole new economy sector producing lifestyle.

On the limits of neo-liberal sexual revolution

Throughout the project, I was sensitive to the category of gender/sexuality on several levels.

In **Chapter 1**, I stated that in 20 years of club cultures in Bratislava, women gained extremely little space as (sub)cultural producers. While they participated and invested work, their contribution mostly remained auxiliary. This was caused mainly by the way male networks were structured. They functioned in a way to recognize only some kinds of work as deserving financial reward and/or symbolic capital. Moreover, the places of recognition and profit

were rarely occupied by women clubbers. In this way, the sphere of production remained mostly sealed off from women; a point in contradiction with proclaimed 'liberalism' and 'progressiveness' of club cultures but in line with 'gender retraditionalization' (Adkins 1999) in particular sectors including subcultures and music industry (Bradby 1993).

Nevertheless, the structural and discursive exclusion of women's full subcultural participation does not mean they were not able to profit from 'contacts' or gain transferable skills (and work, for example, in event agencies organizing music festivals or in marketing departments of telecommunication companies where they can participate on deciding whether to support events of EDM). Still, subcultural scouting for innovation remains a zone of influence of middle-class young men.

In **Chapter 2**, gender/sexuality order was studied as a set of narratives articulating class distinction. Invocations of 'vulgar' and 'unsafe' discotheques and labeling of 'disco-goers' were held against characteristics of club cultures and its clientele. This was not just to retain the 'wrong crowd' behind the gate. 'Uncool' characteristics circulated also within the scene to discredit internal competition. When a party is 'more like a disco', the 'trendy crowd' is discouraged and moves elsewhere. Such hide-and-seek with the 'mainstream' is integral to the calls for innovation and progress typical for the 'creative economy'.

This is not to lament the speeding wheel of capitalism. The perspective of 'everything solid melting into air' has been there already since Marx. Rather, the vocabulary and practices changed as Frank (1997) and Binkley (2007) notified us. The modernist and countercultural spirit of non-conformism perfectly fits the needs of post-industrial market catering to ever-tinier niches. Moreover, the language and practices of 'avoiding the mainstream' seem to convey class connotations. I traced the emerging new middle class whose members were

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active carriers of the value set of 'cool capitalism': they were transgressive in respect to the 'mainstream' but not 'excessive' as to threaten a 'meaningful' life trajectory.

In **Chapter 3**, I proposed that style functioned as a vehicle of new gender/sexuality order which, in a tautological circle, was perceived as stylish, progressive. Fragments of gay male culture and manicured lesbianism found expression in clubs. They became components of liberal, educated and cosmopolitan-oriented subjectivity drawing distinction from the crude gender/sexuality order presented in discotheques. I argued that the '90s club milieu could be understood as staging the neo-liberal sexual revolution. It is a revolution in the sphere of consumption – femininity is detached from female bodies to inspire 'liberated' masculine identities deployed around style. However, when it comes to the sphere of production – privilege redistribution in the sphere of work – stricter gender order applies. Thus, it is a gendered and classed revolution 'liberating' only some subjects.

Let me finalize this section by returning to the ideas at the beginning of this conclusion. The consumption/production differentiation is in line with the thoughts of critics of the 'new spirit of capitalism'. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) argued that only some aspects of the critique of capitalism were incorporated for the purpose of its rejuvenation. Mainly the aesthetic dimension of Modernist, Bohemian and counter-cultural critique was accepted (being anti-mainstream whatever it means) while most of the social aspects dropped out. In this respect, Fraser (2009) brings back the notorious recognition/redistribution debate she waged with Butler (1997) and reshapes it for the post-2008 crisis time when the period of neo-liberal optimism can be assessed and deconstructed with renewed persuasiveness. She claims:

> After all, this capitalism would much prefer to confront claims for recognition over claims for redistribution, as it builds a new regime of accumulation on the cornerstone of women's waged labour, and seeks to disembed markets from social regulation in order to operate all the more freely on a global scale.

> (Fraser 2009: 113)

Certainly, connecting the outcomes of this project with Fraser's position on "a new regime of accumulation of women's waged labor" and market deregulation would be a bold overstatement. My focus is different. I aimed to show a split between the liberal ambiance in clubs which allowed for participation of women and gay clubbers and 'experiments' in masculine styles, while the sphere of production showed marks of 'gender re-traditionalization' (Adkins 1999). The purpose of invoking Fraser is to point at the seeds of injustice engrained in forms of 'cool capitalism'. While clubs may had been productive of identities that were 'progressive' in terms of gender/sexuality emancipation and pluralism (Pini 2001; Jackson 2004; Lambevski 2005), these identities were also embedded in class narratives and reproduced neo-liberal cultural and economic structures, at least in the examined context.

'Cut yourself away from the mass!': invitations for global middle classes

(ideas for further research)

It is only very recently that transnational middle classes took central stage in theories of global economic, social and cultural changes. These are some of the theoretical moments identified by the authors of <u>The Global Middle Classes</u>:

> Starting in the late 1980s and the 1990s, the middle classes began to emerge as a critical site for considering the implications of globalization, particularly the rise and spread of neoliberal logics, with the end of the Cold War, economic crises in Latin America and Asia, the movement of white-collar jobs from the United States and Western Europe to India and China, and now the current global economic crisis.

More moments can be added such as, for instance, the "escalating concern about the cultural, political, and economic implications of the fragility of the middle classes in the United States and Western Europe", "the shrinking middle in Latin America", "the configuration of postsocialist middle classes loom[ing] large" and "the revolutionary potential and religious orientation of middle classes in North Africa [taking] center stage" (Heiman, Liechty & Freeman, 2012: 3). This broad enumeration proposed by the authors of The Global Middle Classes suggests that global restructuring of middle classes is central to some of the changes shaping the latest outlook of capitalism.

Bringing together this new concern about the global middle classes with questions about 'cool capitalism', we may ask how the notion of (and practice of) 'cool' is figuring in the restructuring of middle classes world-wide. Late socialism in Central and Eastern Europe has shown that the 'cool' of Western culture was probably the most successful aspect of Western democracy. This hard-to-grasp 'aura' of products, people and lifestyles emerged as a central motor of consumer-centered capitalism and identity-building narratives integral to modern Western subjectivity so eagerly emulated worldwide. It is the appeal to youth and 'culturati' (urban professionals) to be the other of the 'mass' which is in the core of 'cool seduction' (McGuigan 2009: 108-116), the reflexive other of mass consumption.

If the 'party nation' is a '90s and millennial feature, where are the clubbers now? I outlined a move from clubs to occupations perpetuating lifestyle which of course is an approximation, a tendency, a discursive trajectory. I showed that subcultures are not a class dissolvent. Rather, they may function as laboratories of new class cultures. In the case of Bratislavian club cultures, it was a milieu of middle class reconfiguration; a new class fraction could

emerge imbued with new capacities and mind sets, the class that saturated culture with business and every aspect of life with culture. The invitation to be unique – Cut yourself away from the mass![38] – is a call of interpellation which does not mean unintelligibility or inadaptability of social margins. It is rather the vital buzz of the economy of the 'hip' perpetuated by 'progressive' middle-class fractions.

In Zukin's (1989) and Florida's (2004) accounts, new 'creative' classes turn neighborhoods into highly demanded areas for living and increasingly help spinning the economy impressing their values of diversity and tolerance onto societies. In Bratislava and Slovakia, the 'progressive' middle class would probably tell a story of constant struggle with the 'mass' which would be differently charged with characteristics of 'old regime' and/or of 'mafia capitalism'. After paying attention to the impoverished populations of transitions, anthropologists and theorists of culture and society might want to refocus onto the agents of changes: the new middle classes. This attention might help us understand the appeals of neo-liberalism and 'cool capitalism', their achievements and problems.

Another set of questions opens for scholars of gender/sexuality. Fraser (2009) partially pointed the direction of inquiry looking at the neo-liberal reformulations of the '68 agenda. Further we could ask: to what extent may the project of emancipation/liberation/diversity coincide with the project of expanding global middle classes and mainly their 'creative' subsection? This invitation to examination does not want to reinstate the discourse of cultural globalization with its 'threat' of homogenization and cultural hegemony. As this project showed, cultural 'tradition' and regional 'mentality' are much malleable than anthropological accounts of transition had shown. This is even more the case when it comes

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[38] ['Vykroj sa z masy!'] is a line taken from a campaign – posters seen in the streets of Bratislava.

to discussing formation of global middle classes characteristic by selective emulation. We may conclude asking: How to rethink the process of emulation typical for middle-class lifestyles and what is the role of youth cultures in this process?

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Appendix

Sociological data on the interviewees:

Name (all names were changed except of those interviewees whose identity can be traced due to their publications [Ivo and Michal H.] or musical career [Milosh, Skank, Mayla]), **gender**, **age** (in 2008/9 when interviews were conducted), **occupation** (I pick the major occupation in the time of the interview).

Anna (female, 34, on maternity leave)

Béla (male, 27, GIS administrator)

Božena (female, 33, painter)

Edo (male, 22, university student)

Eman (male, 31, catering distributor)

Emil (male, 25, university student)

Eva (female, 22, university student)

Fero (male, 34, entrepreneur)

Iveta (female, 27, marketing agent)

Ivan (male, 27, financial lawyer)

Ivo (male, 29, entrepreneur)

Jozef (male, 32, freelance editor)

Krista (female, 27, PhD. student)

Magda (female, 32, works for Azet.sk)

Marek (male, 34, IT company employee)

Mária (female, 23, university student)

Mayla (female, 32, student & telecommunication company employee)

Michal H. (male, 32, writer)

Milanko (male, 32, event photographer)

Milena (female, 27, architect)

Milosh (male, 32, works for IKEA distribution dept.)

Miša (female, 28, sales assistant)

Nika (female, 32, assistant professor)

Oto (male, 23, university student)

Petra (female, 27, on maternity leave)

Peťo (male, 32, entrepreneur)

Skank (male, 32, sales assistant in a record store & resident DJ)

Štefan (male, 28, financial company employee)

Tina (female, 27, architect)

Zita (female, 26, marketing agent)