CHAPTER 7: CLUB LIFE...THE CLASSIC YEARS

Most of us have been lucky enough to experience nights in clubs, at festivals, in the dark rooms of pubs and bars, surrounded by our friends, where the band, the drugs and drinks, the lights and visuals, the promise of sex, the surroundings themselves, conspire and combine to an effect that transcends the mere components. We cherish these fleeting moments, try to reproduce them, and twenty years later they have become our 'good old days', our nights to remember.

Every generation, if they're lucky, gets it's own particular version of this, and we rightly value them, hold them dear, whether it was those special Fridays down at the pub that played killer R&B, or a certain instant at Glastonbury, Burning Man, where it all just came together, and you surrendered to the moment, and nothing else mattered.

Our culture tries to single out some of these moments, frame them in specific times and settings, commodify them, sell them back to us. Black juke joints in '59. The early Sixties beat clubs. The folk scene in Village basements. Woodstock. Outlaw Raves in an abandoned factory. The mega clubs of Ibiza. These, and other such romanticized snapshots of scenes that probably were pretty amazing if you were actually there, are now cool benchmarks, endlessly regurgitated in everything from jeans commercials to the music in Starbucks.

But what happened in New York in the period I describe, was different, was of another order entirely. It can't just be written off as a combination of one's age, substance abuse, getting lucky with a girl or boy. It also was not just a product of hyperbole and savvy marketing by cynical salesmen, the next big thing, all packaged and available. This was something else, a combination of all of that came before, an avalanche of new ideas, and much more.

In the first five years of the Eighties, predominantly in Downtown Manhattan, a revolution in nightclubbing, signaled in the previous decade by Hurrahs, Max's Kansas City, and Studio 54, came of age, and blossomed. Clubs appeared in all shapes and sizes, each with it's own identity and following. They mixed and blended the diverse tribes of New York in ways unimagined just a few years earlier, catering for every taste, every combination of those tastes.

They fearlessly championed and developed entire new genres of what was allowable, desirable, marketable, raising temperatures and expectations. And the best of them, the ones still spoken of, still missed, created templates and paradigms that are still with us today, worldwide.

Live music and video, combined as never before. Hip Hop and Urban culture, out of the ghettos. Exuberant gay society, no longer behind closed doors. Performance Art, accessible, challenging, entertaining, escaped from the galleries. The rise of the turntablists, the DJ as the central attraction of the night. Whole environments specifically designed for music, drugs, sex play, no longer shoe-horned one-night-a-week into generic dancehalls. The concept of literally living in these clubs, your life some kind of art form, took root for the first time.

All these now taken-for-granted ideas and concepts, that underpin current nightlife, attitudes towards live entertainment, were birthed, incubated, and inevitably, corrupted, in this extraordinary burst of creative energy. They were adopted globally, went native wherever they landed, and spawned not just clones and copies, but whole new cultures of clubbing, styles of music, appetites and expectations.

Although there were still worthy and exciting clubs right through till the late Nineties, in it's purest form, before bottle service and third rate club kids, this was really an Eighties phenomenon, and as a designer, operator and owner, working and living in the heart of it all, it afforded me a unique perspective, which I'll try to share.

Although often asked, especially by those that missed the era, which club was the best, it's an

impossible question to answer, as all the clubs worth their salt were so different, which is kind of the point. I don't want to just bang out a list of the where's where, who's who of the period. I naturally favour the places I had a hand in, left my mark, but regardless of this natural bias, here's my take on the Great Club Era, and why it was.

Take Area, for instance. Unlike anything before or since, this was where the art scene collided with nightlife, to spectacular effect. The first club to open up in previously night-shuttered Tribeca, it had a sizable budget to completely transform the identity of the club every 6 weeks. With big-banner themes such as War!, Love!, and Red!, Area attracted a brilliantly diverse crowd, and offered employment to the glittering crowd of new artists flooding New York at the time.

Attendees entered through an arcade of store sized windows, each a twisted diorama or bizarre installation, always shocking, arresting, funny. This led to the main room, which enjoyed major installations in the current theme, everything from a full-on, pumping skatepark (theme: Life!) to a squadron of partying, life-sized, Harley-mounted Hell's Angels, suspended in mid air as they crashed into a facing wall (theme: Death!).

I worked on a multitude of these installations, did background painting for future stars such as Keith Haring, worked on the cunning oversize hanging photomurals pioneered by Geoff Vaughn, and when it closed in “86, oversaw it's conversion to Quick!, another eye-popping destination.

But the art and artifice were only a part of it. As with the other clubs I describe, it was the crowd who made it special. Every scene and sub-scene was represented. Gays, blacks, punks, politicians, up-town movers, down-town groovers, all thrown together and going at it like there was no tomorrow. Unlike later periods, when nightlife became Balkanized, with all the different factions cosy and unchallenged in their own clubs, here the door had strict instructions to grant admission to as many different tribes as possible, as long as they were dressed the part, fabulous, scurrilous, weird, wonderful.

Here's how the patrons were so different from today. I was once in the truly unisex bathrooms of Area, taking a leak in the communal trough. On my left was Billy Idol, trying to find his nob. On the right, Kissinger was zipping up. And from the bathrooms stalls, shouts and screams let the everybody know Margaret Trudeau, wife of the Canadian premier, was gratefully receiving attention from one of the hunky bus boys.

I cannot name a club anywhere in the world today, where the powerful and rich meet with bohemians and the avant garde in such equal circumstances, even the supposedly 'open' mega clubs of Ibiza and the Riviera. Sure, there's moguls and models, and the Eurotrash kids with their faux liberality, but they are there for a blinkered hedonism, a shameless embrace of greed and consumption. There is none of the sense of life-style as art, of a questioning of society's values, all so evident at the very core of Manhattan's new way of clubbing.

Danceteria, by now ensconced in it's W.20 th St. multi-floored premises, was another kettle of fish, and my personal favourite. From it's first floor performance stage to Congo Bill's,the rooftop lounge bar, no other club typified the new exuberance and anything-goes mindset that fueled this explosion of options after dark.

Remember, immediately before this time, your watering-hole choices were either discos (great for dancing, hooking-up), Rock venues (great for head shaking and hooking up), posh clubs (great for old people, not so much for hooking up), and pubs and bars (great for drinking, attempting to hook up while inebriated). These new places featured all of the above, but much, much more.

Bar sales, of course, pay for so much of this, but getting drunk was no longer the only game in town, and drugs of every variety, sexual opportunities previously unimagined, and a sense of belonging to a new social 'caste' were now the draw, filling these venues night after night.

Danceteria boasted the Wednesday night cabaret, Nos Entendies, run by the exquisite Haoui Montag, who I sometimes assisted, a tongue-in-cheek variety show, where new acts of all stripes

debuted and made their bid for notoriety. While this sounds a bit like a midweek amateur hour, it was the literal take off point for the debuts of Madonna, The Beastie Boys, Run DMC, Karen Finlay, Eric Bogossian and many others.

Seymour Stein and other music biz hondlers would come to see the new, spunky, avant garde shit that was on offer, and rumor had it that Madonna blew the right person to get the key 11.30 slot, early enough so that the R&D guys would still be attentive and sober. The success of this cabaret, and it's reception by a hip crowd, was a major factor in my enthusiasm to open the first Burlesque and Vaudeville clubs in the following decade.

On other nights, Danceteria's stages offered a brilliant selection of all that was new, challenging, or straight up weird, from the shocking Claus Nomi to Cabaret Voltaire. I found myself one night in the cramped Danceteria elevator with A Flight of Seagulls, who were headlining that night. Do you remember the ridiculous haircuts they sported? The lead singer nodded to me, and said,

"Like yer hair, man".

This gives you an idea of how wack my hairdo was at this time, mullety, ponytail, no sideboards, shaven neck...and I didn't stand out, there was so much deep-dish weirdness on display.

The club had two honchos, John Argento, who owned the license and worked the finances, and Rudolf Piper, who was the figure head and club director. Rudolf rightfully enjoys the reputation as a one of the great makers and shakers of this time and culture, and his philosophy of inclusion and openness, combined with a witty and subversive eye, led to him heading up several of the era's best venues.

His, and the art team's, approach to the club's graphics are of lasting consequence, a current review of all their flyers and ads en-masse revealing how influential and copied they became. They look like a who's who of the new graphic styles, a catalogue of ironic and knowing images that bridge the gap between the willfully non-commercial style of Punk, and the retro and iconic imagery universally now used in today's slicker, computer generated artwork.

I worked at the club for most of it's lifespan at 20th Street, doing everything from scenic painting to whole installations. As one floor was finished, myself and all the other designers and decorators would move on to another, only to return after a few months to start again

I saw performances and events there that still resonate, still shock me. During an S&M exhibition on one of the mostly unused floors of the building, I saw a willing submissive strangled till he lost consciousness, halted only by the club's security, with an ambulance arriving just in time. In '84, S&M was not the fashion magazine fodder of today...it was one of the 'undergrounds' that had been around forever, but it was in this era, in these clubs, that all these previously hidden demi-mondes saw the light of day. Gay, lesbian, trans, S&M, bondage, fetishism, all got to come out, got to air their dirty laundry along with the rest of us.

For sheer decadence, loucheness and a sense of danger, no club beat The World, precariously situated at 2nd St and Houston, an area now gentrified beyond recognition, but then wild and truly dangerous. A journey there on foot through the untamed far East Village took one past several heroin corners, who were not above handing out a beating if you were not a customer.

I took a visiting party of Brit mates there one night in a Mini, and at the junction of 3rd St and Ave B, some sweetheart just walked up and popped the back windscreen with a baseball bat. I once found a headless Alsatian in a black garbage bag, right on the club's doorstep, and nobody I told was particularly surprised.

Other than an installation for a party, I never worked there, but it was one of my preferred spots to party and hang out, always edgy, full of unknown pleasures.

The premises were a decaying Polish social hall, in a very dodgy state of repair. The core crowd were often stunning in their otherness, their dedication to being not-of-this-society. I saw more casual nakedness here than any other club, more people who only functioned after dark.

Owned by a consortium of period characters, the real macher was Arthur Weinstein, who's

previous adventures, and ownership of several legendary after-hours establishments, made so much of what went on in this, and other clubs, possible. I'll detail later how a series of events centred on him and those clubs led to a fifteen year long period of minimal scrutiny by the NYPD.

My most enduring memory of The World was from December, '85, when Big Audio Dynamite played the Christmas gig. They were flavour-de-jour, and completely rammed the place out, 1500 people minimum. Please understand that the place, while great looking in a skanky way, was falling apart. As the band, and the receptive audience gathered steam, the pace started shaking....and when they got to 'Medicine Show', their big hit, the entire audience picked up on the beat, and as a single entity started jumping in time to it.

I was with a group of club owners and promoters, all marveling at the size of the crowd and happy to see Arthur make a few bucks out of the place, when we noticed that the balcony was rising and falling by at least ten inches as the crowd danced. It was a true dilemma: allow the gig to continue, and risk what could be one of the largest ever club death counts (300/400 by our later calculations) as the balcony collapsed into the crowd beneath, or stop the gig and suffer what would all most certainly devolve into a riot.

Our better judgement prevailed, and after nonchalantly moving away from the possible kill zone, let things proceed. The gig gained a reputation as an all-time, big earning high-spot for the club, one to remember. Had it gone the other way, we'd all be getting out of the slammer round about now.

Limelight, a de-consecrated church on 6th Ave at 21st St, covered new ground, with one-eyed Canadian Peter Gatien fully understanding and developing the possibilities of such a space. The Gothic architecture was ready made for Rock 'n Roll shennanigens, with several different rooms and large spaces, all waiting for low light revellry. I was among the initial group that walked into the building, exploring it's possibilities, and the first words out of my mouth were, 'Shit, this is the perfect Rock gig"

I ended up working on several different areas of the club, including The Library, during all three of it's major renovations. While the place was never my favourite, it certainly had it's moments. I saw many bands there, the sound was perfect and the sight lines great, but for some reason, if you were to ask me a snap question 'What do you most remember about Limelight', my immediate answer would be seeing Dolph Lungren, a former doorman, throw up all-over, and I mean all over, his pretty date on New Year's Eve, 198?.

While it's initial incarnation was notable, the place lasted much longer than most clubs, which have an average life expectancy of three years, after which you sell or re-configure. After the 8o's, it struggled to remain hip, and Gatien allowing the ecstasy-fuelled raves and parties of the Klub Kids to take over, resulting in prosecutions, disaster and a definite end marker for the great club age of the previous decade.

When Palladium opened in late '85, it was huge, fabulous, a tour-de-force for Rubell and Shrager, who had owned Studio 54. Cavernous and great for loosing unwanted girlfriends and hangers-on, it had been a major venue for all kinds of events since it's 1927 opening, and in recent decades a concert hall featuring every big act of the time, from Kiss to the Clash. The last concert there, in '82, was my old mate Lemmy's band Motorhead, who literally brought down the house. The falling plaster closed the place, laying the way for it's reincarnation as the 'club-to-end-all-clubs.'

Palladium was great, particularly the first couple of months, when the door policy was the same as the other clubs...with Haoui Montag on the velvet rope, fabulous got you through the door, not money. But the place could handle upwards of 5000 people, and was pricey to maintain, so inevitably they had to broaden their reach, and Bridge and Tunnel poured in.That said, one of the best party/gigs I can recall was Halloween '87, with Grace Jones and Sigue Sigue Sputnick, a real balls-to-the-wall crazy night, perfectly reflecting the brassy feel of that winter.

I worked extensively there, all kinds of decor and treatments, Keith Haring did the bathrooms,

Kenny Scharf the phonebooths, and the bar wall in The Micheal Todd room boasted a large Basquiat commission, now atop the 'Six Iconic New York Artworks That Were Destroyed' list, trashed when the site was turned into miserable NYC dorms.

That year, '85, also featured a legendary art show 'Warhol vs. Basquiat', advertised as a boxing match, with all the posters and publicity done in that bold, screen print style synonymous with the fights. Indeed, the space became associated with big bucks art and events, corporations liking the massive space, with vehicle access to the stage, and it's other over-sized attributes.

Junior Vasquez pioneered big time DJing here, with his Saturday night gigs ramming the place, setting the template for the mega DJ's that arose in the Nineties, and still dominate the international circuit. He was the first to get a customized DJ booth, which I designed, reflecting the new importance and status of turntablists, and while it was promoted mostly as a gay gig, it was also immensely popular with straight dance lovers, cementing the musical and love-of-dance connections between these groups.

All of these clubs were on a fairly grand scale, accommodating large numbers, and after a while, there was a growing demand for a return to a smaller, more intimate scale. Nell's was the first to respond to this, and opened in a ground floor and basement space on 14th Street, with a capacity of maybe 200 people. With eating upstairs and dancing down, it felt a bit like a well-used men's club, but somehow much hipper. Keith McNally, whose Odeon restaurant in Tribeca was super popular at the time, installed Nell Campbell as the proprietor and figure head, and the venue quickly gained clout with just the right crowd. It was the first to use a trick I have employed to great advantage over the years, turning away celebrities at the door, because they don't 'fit'.

Your regular clientele fucking love it when they see you saying 'No' to celebs, when you have said 'Yes' to them. It's also good business...'A' list people are needy, take up loads of space with their security and hangers on, and mostly don't pay a dime. On the other hand, 'B' list customers spend loads, provide a more responsive audience than blase 'celebrities', and are incredibly loyal, always returning to clubs that realize their value.

Nell's was also the first club to charge a small entrance fee for everyone, regardless of status. It was only $5, and after vetting by Jessica, the door guardian, but a point was made. The sense of entitlement of the existing club crowd was being challenged, even if only in a token way,

There were, of course, hundreds of other venues, all fabulous, ordinary, influential, terrible. Save The Robots on Ave B, late starting, open till midday the next day, was a blast with it's12 inch deep sand floors, decorated as a Chinese street. The Kat Klub, at 13th and 4th went through many incarnations, both good and bad. Older places, hangovers from the past like The Peppermint Lounge, brought in hip promoters and had their second, brief day in the sun. All these mentioned provided me with work at one stage or another, nothing memorable, but solid journeyman labors that kept me busy and in the game.

Classic dive joints like CBGBs on the Bowery, Don Hill's on Spring, Manitoba's on Ave A, and tucked away hidey-holes, such as the 8BC and Tramps, in the East Village, thrived, some surviving into the new century. They offered a timeless continuity with an earlier type of venue, three bands a night, mostly unmemorable, but you never knew, every now and again one would break out and become flavor-de-jour.

The first band I saw in New York, during my first week in town, were The Ramones at The Ritz, now Webster Hall, originally a grand concert hall from the late 1900's. It had hosted bands and concerts from every genre and , and had always been an important venue, especially during the classic Rock era. They were in their classic three songs in five minutes mode, and at one stage someone threw one of the band's t-shirts on stage. It landed on Joey Ramones head, half covering his eyes. It remained

there for three numbers. I like to think he didn't even notice it.

Irving Plaza, a bare bones old concert space just East of Union Square, deserves a mention. While it had minimal attraction physically, it had a great classic sound system, well suited for Rock, Punk, noisy stuff. It also must have had a great team of bookers, as it often featured great bands. I saw Devo, an brilliant early Prince gig, loads of visiting Brits, and a bit later, Rammstein's first NY gig, replete with their eye-popping pyrotechnics.

The Roxy on 18th St, built as a roller rink back in the first 1890's skate craze, saw more than it's fair share of weirdness and glory. Until the advent of the original Tunnel in '89, it, and Crisco Disco on 16th St. were the only attractions in West Chelsea, which is now the designated late nite area. Memorable hip-hop battles, a great Saturday night gay disco fixture, and some brilliant one-offs kept the place open well into the 21st Century, despite real estate values going from next-to-nothing to out-fucking-rageous in less than a decade.

When I moved into the Chelsea, 8th Ave was still pretty rough. There were heroin corners at 17th and 15th, and the Latino projects west of the Avenue were not to be take lightly. What is now the big gallery area, Goggosian et al, was among the most beat-up areas in the city, and prior to becoming the desired address for rich gays and wealthy breeders, the lovely streets from 14th to 23rd were still affordable, low key, full of artists and working people.

Mention must also be made of the new wave of after-hours that strung up at this time. The city was looser then, you could get away with much more, the under-siege cops and city budgets having more pressing matters to deal with. Outstanding, and important in a way I will detail later, were Arthur Weinstein's after-hours joints, such as the Jefferson or The Continental . He succinctly described them as the first after hours “not for scumbags', which illegals had been for the previous few decades.

I was involved, both as a decorator, and minor promoter, with the original Berlin on 20th Str, whose capacity of 500 made it by far the largest no-licence, no-permits joint in Manhattan. The cops knew all about it, and would bust it every now and again, but we'd always reopen by the following week. I was there late one night when for some reason they had a hard-on, and actually smashed the bar with axes, a first in my experience. But mostly the cops would settle for a sacrificial goat to hang a small charge on, and the bus-boys would draw straws. Not such a bad gig, as they were well looked after, and could always count on a job with us.

Corruption, especially in the earlier years of the decade, was rife in all the city departments club operators ahd to deal with. Not just the police, but the firehouses, planning offices, State Liquor Authority. As a designer, who had hands-on with most of the decor and construction, I was often present when the fire marshals made their day-time safety inspections, and actually saw the pay-offs take place, something I seldom witnessed with the police department. The NYFD could close you down on the spot, dead, their powers far reaching, but often arbitory.

Here's how it went down. The fire chief would make sure he was alone with who he knew was going to give him an envelope full of cash. The amount was predicated by how non-compliant you were with the onerous regulations, and after a quick assessment of your transgression, he'd signal the required figure by pointedly tapping his sleeve cuff with his fingers. Two fingers meant two grand, three meant three, though I'm not sure what happened when the amount exceeded five. He'd then lead his team through the premises, ignoring often blatant contraventions.

When they inspected a floor of Danceteria 2, where I had installed a long wall of fake Mayan pyramids, stone gods and bogus hieroglyphics, all made of dodgy styrofoam and non- fireproof materials, the fire chief simply didn't turn the lights on in that room, and his team strolled through in the dark. Nothing to look at here, keep moving.

Dealing with other sections of the city was often a softer kind of corruption, where jobs were given to official's girlfriends, and bills were not presented after expensive nights at the club in question. With the larger clubs, these dealings were much more serious, and clandestine, as considerable amounts of money hinged on the permits being granted, and it was lawyers doing the dirty work. I'v

walked innocently into meetings in the backroom offices of large clubs, where suited minions on both sides of the equation suddenly clam up, all looking as guilty as hell.

The planning department make most of the decisions that affect you during the building and set-up of your venture. A truly arcane labyrinth of rules and regulations determine the narrow difference between opening and prospering, or loosing your shirt on a horse that never leaves the starting gate. Proximity to a house of worship (50ft), schoolhouse (same block), the ever hanging handicap rules, all must be warily navigated, and a small industry of loopholes, blind eyes and well placed hand outs flourished.

Back then, the smartest money you spent when contemplating opening a new venue was right at the beginning, before you spent another dime, was to contact Steve RIP, who charged $2000 cash for a visit. An ex-Planning Department evaluator, he was gamekeeper turned poacher. If he said you could proceed, with sufficient maneuvering and deep enough pockets, then it would come to pass. If he said no, don't waste your time.

While corruption and backhanders will always appear where there are cash heavy businesses, in today's club world it's a very different picture. Credit cards, camera systems and smart cash registers have made it all much more accountable, more difficult to cheat and skim at every level, meaning less unaccounted cash to hand around. Computers and white collar connivery are the forum where dodgy deals and payouts frolic these days, and friends I know who are still in the business say there's nothing resembling the open corruption of the Eighties,

Venues came and went at a brisk pace. La Palaise de Beauty was a shooting star on Union Square, with a flamboyant, transgressive following. Talking of Shooting Stars, my all-knowing gay guide to queer New York, the deeply filthy Tom Tret, took me to a gay gathering of that name. Mayor Koch had closed most of the gay clubs and bathhouses in reaction to the exploding AIDS crisis, so gregarious homos were trying their hand (pun intended), at all kinds of 'no touching' events, and Shooting Stars featured a big circle of blokes, all with their willies out, masturbating until they, well, lived up to the gig's name.

The bath house and gay sex dungeon closures were terrible, leaving a city full of enthusiastic participants not only facing a plague, but with no where to go, to party with their tribe. But it being New York, life moves rapidly along, and as they were shuttered, a fresh group of club suitable premises became available. As in a forest, or any other ecosystem, things age, die, and are replaced by the new, built literally with the bones of the previous, old elements repurposed for new creations.

Small clubs proliferated. My personal favorite was Scotty Taylor's Milk Bar, downtown on Leroy and 6th. Named and styled after the Korova Milkbar, 'A Clockwork Orange's' deviant nitespot, it was tiny, maybe 90 tops. It turned away hundreds nightly, and Scotty really knew how to pull this off, having been the immensely popular bar manager at Studio 54.

He had a great clientele, wired and wonderful, and no douchebags were allowed, a decision only a cool and confident owner can make. Often the people you don't want in your club happen to be the one's with the money, but the size, exclusivity and strength of Scotty's loyal following kept it perfect, our close gang with enough room for the right strangers. Situated next to a city baths, at 3 in the AM, we'd scale the fence surrounding the pool, strip off, and water frolic till dawn.

Comprised of just one long room with a bar area at one end, its walls shifted with indistinct, shifting low lights, covered in milky translucent panels. No VIP room, just Scotty's office upstairs, out of bounds to all but the few. I once was among a concerned group who carried Boy George, then at the height of Culture Club fame, lips turning blue from an overdose, accompanied by his panicking boyfriend and heroin co-traveller, Marylin, to a waiting car, and the presumably on to hospital.

No smart club allowed this kind of affair to reach the notice of the police, or the press. There was an informal system in place, where visits by the cops or medics, for disturbances, OD's, troubles of all kinds, were counted up, and if you exceeded a certain number, then the city fucked with you and

your licensing. Consequently, only really serious shit warranted a phone call to the authorities, death, major fire, actual riot.

When the first wave of ketamine hit the city, around '87, and was enthusiastically embraced by the gay dance scene, there were so many users going into 'K-holes', a catatonic state that drops the user to the ground, that certain clubs had a room set aside to lay out the unconscious victims. They would remain there till 4am, when if still unresponsive, would get the bucket of cold water treatment. Ambulances, with their attendant trouble and black marks, were never summoned, and to my knowledge, no one ever actually died.

Other drugs had arrived in similar surges. When ecstasy first reared it's still -egal grinning head in '83, it was handed out as 'door prizes' by many clubs, promoters and doorpeople, myself included. It did not receive the 'Summer of Love, it's the new LSD' treatment it got when it broke big in Britain five years later, inspiring a neo-hippie wave of blissed out ravers. Rather, it got used as an indulgent party amplifier, a sex enhancer and stimulant, somewhere between qualudes and mushrooms. I'v seen many normally stand-offish, fashion conscious rooms transform into touchy-feely near orgies, caution, cool and clothing thrown to the wind.

Doing a night at a small club door, fleetingly popular due to it's 'door prize 'policy, I looked up and there were two famous Hells Angels, who, given the enduring reach of their organization, I shall refrain from naming. They expected entry, which they got, and asked if they were eligible for the evening's free teats. I slipped them a dose each. Half an hour later, these giant bikers, resplendent in their gang cut sleeves and colors, are back at my door, all over me, telling me they love me, while I, in my new Arman Bassi jacket, am trying hard to avoid their slobbery best intentions.

This may all sound a little mundane, this club here, that celebrity there, and of course it sometimes was. It may seem as if I'm taking a scene where the planets happened to align for me and some mates, and bigging it up, making more of it than it really was, gilding the lily. Even so, this truly was a special time, a ground-zero point in popular culture. As with all such moments, those in the thick of it were only partially aware of it's import at the time, it's just what we were doing, and the rose-tinted glasses of retrospection color any look back.

But if you got it right, your feet needn't touch the ground. This new breed of nightlife would feed you, entertain you, get you laid, make you enough money to pay the rent, and leave you in no doubt that you were no longer in Kansas. Art was tangible, breathable, and as previously mentioned, the notion of lifestyle as art found a foothold.

By the Nineties, the original live-in patrons had degenerated into The Club Kids, lead star Michael Alig, who murdered his ecstasy dealer, chopped him up. There was little interest in art, performance or politics, just me, me, me. What had been a knowing display of otherness became a 24/7 freak show, with outrage and hyper-camp the only currency.

That was the point the original movers and groovers started to disappear, moving to then-frontier Williamsburg, sunnier L.A, retreating to the great outdoors, getting jobs in tech, breeding, traveling to Asia, and opening restaurants.

But for a few years there.....wow, an alternative reality, in New York, the Wonder City, a world of our own making, entrance gained by fabulousness, talent, ability, how you presented. An incubator not just for art, but for entire new genres of art. If I come across as proud, or boastful, about this era, it's because I am proud, with, in retrospect, much to boast of. Great nightlife and clubs came and went after it's demise, everywhere, and all who experienced their special moments in them should be sing their praises, cherish their memories. But as with any original, pioneering scene, to some degree all that follow live in it's shadow.