University students and city centres – the formation of exclusive geographies
The case of Bristol, UK
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Abstract
This paper draws upon research which analysed the provision of popular culture for university students in Bristol city centre. The research suggests that the provision is aimed at a cohort of ‘traditional’ adolescent, middle- and upper-class students based at the University of Bristol. Popular culture provision for these students is undertaken within an infrastructure of student-focused venues which create ‘pathways’ of activity through the city. This infrastructure is constructed both through symbolic geographies of student life and actual interventions in the landscape, and through processes by which the ‘rules’ of student life are learnt and unlearned. There are a small number of privileged sites of consumption within this infrastructure, the use of which is motivated by a strong desire for association among traditional students. The temporal and spatial framework of this popular culture provision has important consequences for the city, especially at a time of further increases in the number of university students in Britain. In particular, traditional students represent non-exploratory, middle ground cultural actors and are part of a patchwork of groups whose activities are re-imaging city centres. However, in contrast to much recent work which examines city centre consumption by certain groups, I argue that the seasonal migration of adolescent and wealthy university students to many British cities is located within the trend towards the growth of segregated entertainment provision and the emergence of ‘geographies of exclusion’ in city centres. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction
This paper explores the role of university students in the construction of entertainment spaces in city centres. In particular, it focuses upon a cohort of largely white, middle and upper-class, adolescent ‘traditional’ students who are characterised by wealth and fashion. These students, who constitute a large seasonal population in many British cities, have their entertainment needs catered for in a segregated popular culture infrastructure which is composed of a series of venues linked by distinctive ‘pathways’ through certain areas of the city centre.

The paper is divided into four main parts. The first part discusses the lifestyle divide which exists in the British university system between ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ students and the mechanisms which produce, reproduce and segregate traditional student lifestyles. The second part explores one aspect of this structuring and segregation by analysing the existence of a student-focused popular culture infrastructure in the city. There are various processes which contribute to the formation of this infrastructure, such as a process of learning (and subsequent unlearning) and the formal provision of student-focused entertainment by various providers in the city centre. The third part of the paper explores the time–space framework of this infrastructure within the city and draws upon the example of night-clubbing to explore a small number of consumption sites in this infrastructure within which traditional students

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1 This paper draws upon research which examined traditional student life at the University of Bristol between October 1995 and July 1997 as part of a Ph.D. Thesis. The research involved interviews with managers of entertainment venues and students from the University of Bristol and participant observation at sites throughout the city centre.
demonstrate a strong desire for association. The fourth part concludes the paper by presenting a discussion of the implications of these research findings. In particular, it is argued that the effects of this student-focused popular culture infrastructure on city centres are far from neutral. The growth of traditional, migrant student populations within many British cities, and the various corporate strategies which target this group, play a part in the ‘divided city’ and the formation of ‘geographies of exclusion’ (Sibley, 1995).

2. Traditional and non-traditional student lifestyles

The student population within the British higher education sector has rapidly expanded over the last decade. For instance, between the academic years 1988/89 and 1993/94, student numbers increased from 943,000 to 1,441,000 (CVCP, 1995). As a result of this growth, many British cities contain large student numbers. For example, in 1994/95, there were over 34,000 students in Bristol which represented 9% of the total population, over 73,000 students (12%) in Manchester and Salford, nearly 32,000 (12%) in Newcastle, over 40,000 (8%) in Sheffield and over 219,000 (3.3%) in London (HESA, 1995).

As a result of such growth, the British university student population of over 1.5 million is now diverse, and includes groups traditionally under-represented within higher education and increasing numbers studying on non-traditional modes of attendance. For example, in 1994, just over half of all UK-domiciled university students were mature (over 21 for undergraduates and over 25 for postgraduates) and the proportion of women in higher education grew from 25% in 1961–1962 to 49% in 1994–1995 (Silver and Silver, 1997). Moreover, one in eight UK-domiciled undergraduates and one in ten postgraduates were from ethnic minorities while 8% were enrolled on sandwich courses and nearly 30% studied part-time (HESA, 1995).

This growth represents the expansion of ‘non-traditional’, or ‘new’, students who now represent a significant proportion of the overall student population within British universities. However, there remains within many of the ‘old’ universities a large cohort of ‘traditional’ students. To fully understand this dichotomy between traditional and non-traditional students, one needs to appreciate the extent to which ‘class’ is one of the most fundamental bases for identity in British society. Moreover, the ability to access university has always, but more recently less so, played a central role in maintaining the dominant position of the middle- and upper-classes.

In the early part of the twentieth century, ‘traditional’ students represented the majority of university students in Britain. While such students currently represent a much smaller part of the British student population, there still exist large numbers of traditional students who tend to be white, aged between 18 and 21, originate from privileged social and economic backgrounds, have wealthy parents, studied at fee-paying, private schools and travel away from home to university (Fig. 1). These students, then, come from the wealthiest sections of British society (the middle- and upper-classes) and are made more visible in the city by their social and economic privilege, high disposable incomes and pre-occupation with fashion and youth culture.

Traditional and non-traditional students are unequally distributed throughout the British higher education sector, with large numbers of traditional students concentrated within the older and civic universities and non-traditional students concentrated largely in the post1992 universities. Whilst many recent studies have concentrated upon the experiences of these non-traditional students (see Haselgrove, 1994), the rest of this paper seeks to explore the lifestyles of traditional students and the consequences of their use of leisure time in city centres. This cohort is analytically important because of the way in which they still largely determine the overall image of who a student is within British society, their colonisation of certain areas of cities, their role as a source of livelihood for many local businesses, the significant levels of effort which are aimed at meeting the

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2 The current British higher education system has developed incrementally from several successive rounds of growth. These include the ancient universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Scotland, such as St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh; the civic, red-brick universities of the early 19th century based in the major industrial cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Bristol; the technological universities of the 1960s often located on green-field campuses; and, most recently, the former local authority controlled polytechnics which gained university status in 1992. In that year, a unified higher education sector was created in Britain and the number of institutions designated as universities nearly doubled. However, stratification within the system continues with the ‘new’ university sector (the former polytechnics) being outperformed by the ‘old’ university sector (the rest) in recent government teaching and research assessments.

3 Due to the quantitative increase in the number of degree holders in Britain, going to university is now a less effective mechanism through which the middle- and upper-classes can maintain their social, economic and cultural status.
needs of such students, and their role as a mini-community who contribute to the ‘divided city’.

2.1. The formation of traditional student lifestyles

Certain areas within cities acquire a distinctive atmosphere from concentrations of traditional students. The most clearly recognised concentrating mechanism is the unique time-space framework of the university (such as the academic calendar and campus) which spatially regulates and clusters students around the campus. In fact, students only exist as a group because of the concentrating effects of the temporal and spatial framework of the university. However, it is evident that the British university and its associated spaces, such as the hall of residence, the shared student house and the pub, creates much more than a simple co-residence of people.

Traditional student spaces, which are inhabited by an input of new students each year, are the basis for the development of a common set of student dispositions, or something like a ‘student habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). Such spaces allow an identifiable student’s way of life to be developed which is internalised and embodied. The unique residential tradition of the British university, although decreasing in importance, is a framework which nurtures and perpetuates these specific student dispositions. This framework, extending to shared student housing, halls, the library, the laboratory and the lecture theatre creates, a ‘special time and place’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979, p. 29) with its atmosphere of deference and inquiry which, temporarily, sets students apart from the non-student world.

However, the formation of traditional student lifestyles are part of a wider process of socialisation and acculturation into a particular way of life (cf. Bourdieu, 1984) which is embodied earlier, and in a wider framework, than just the university. In particular, student dispositions are also acquired and learnt from friends, siblings and even parents who have experienced, or are still experiencing, student life and pass these experiences onto would-be students. In this sense, there are those who occupy a ‘pre-traditional student’ stage whilst at school or during a ‘year-out’ before university, and those who occupy a ‘post-traditional student’ stage such as recent graduates. Cohorts at different stages of life, then, such as school students, people on gap-years and recent graduates can all be identified as part of a broader process of identity formation associated with being at university, of which being a ‘traditional student’ is only one part. Furthermore, there are numerous media representations of student life which are used as resources in this process of lifestyle formation. In particular, certain sections of the print and broadcast media in Britain are strongly associated with student culture and help to embody ideas of taste, preference and style amongst the student community.

Non-traditional student lifestyles are not ‘framed’ in the same way as traditional students, largely because of other roles which they perform such as ‘parent-student’ or ‘worker-student’ which renders their identity as students less visible. The following quotes, drawn from interviews with students, highlight that non-traditional students are often not involved in the same process of lifestyle formation and ritualised and segregated behaviour which traditional students display:

For me, nothing really changed when I went to university. I live in the same place and it just happens that I travel to Bristol to university every day. I don’t tend to stay in Bristol and get drunk unless I sleep on someone’s floor. It doesn’t happen that often and my part-time work and my girlfriend are not in Bristol so I’ve not got any reason to stay there (1st year, mature, male, Art student).

I don’t want to patronise the First Years just because I’ve done it before. They were friendly and they did invite me to parties but it drove me up the wall. The same things going on, the same search for partners, the same music and puking. I’m sure the teenagers wouldn’t want to do the things I do (2nd year, mature, male, Drama student).

However, the boundary between traditional and non-traditional student lifestyles is not always a clearly demarcated one. Contrasting an adolescent, middle-class, white student who attends an ‘old’ university with a mature, married, student from an ethnic minority group in inner-city London who attends a new university remains a useful exercise in terms highlighting the very real lifestyle differences which exist in the contemporary British higher education sector. Yet, there are also a multitude of other identities which exist between these two lifestyle poles which blur the distinction between traditional and non-traditional student lifestyle.

2.2. The context for the research

Bristol, the focus of this research, is located along Britain’s prosperous ‘M4 corridor’ approximately 150 miles west of London and is unique amongst Britain’s university cities. It is a relatively wealthy city with a good quality of life (Boddy et al., 1986) and the University of Bristol is associated with older and more elite universities in Britain such as Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and Exeter. This economic, cultural and educational vitality in the city is reflected in the students which the University of Bristol attracts, with high proportions of its students coming from fee-paying schools and prosperous social and economic backgrounds. As a result, Bristol is a particular context for student life,
having a large cohort of traditional students from privileged social and educational backgrounds. For example, a survey of University of Bristol students found that 72% had parents in professional and managerial occupations (Chatterton, 1997). Moreover, the university has the fifth highest concentration of Eton school leavers in the British higher education system and one in four students come from non-state schools, the highest proportion outside Oxford and Cambridge (Targett, 1998).

Traditional students are concentrated in certain areas of Bristol, mainly around the prosperous Clifton and Cotham areas adjacent to the university campus (Fig. 3) where nearly three-quarters of all full-time undergraduates in private-rented accommodation reside (Chatterton, 1997). The large numbers of traditional students who live in this area, known locally as the ‘sloanes’, have a distinctive identity which, as discussed earlier, demonstrate some of the extremes of traditional student life such as high levels of economic and social capital, youth, fashion, hedonistic socialising and over-privilege. A student at the university expressed how he felt about these traditional students:

These people are up their backsides. They really think that they are really special and that their mummies and daddies are something in the City. They’ve been spoon-fed all this money and so it all comes naturally; and this is the sort of things they do, they come out to freshers balls, they’re debutantes. I am just not into that rugger bugger and jolly hockey sticks mentality.

This area, and its major thoroughfare, Whiteladies Road, has experienced rapid growth as an exclusive and wealthy retail and entertainment area of the city, much of which is attributable to this large concentration of traditional students. As a result, the area has taken on a distinctive student atmosphere.

The next part of this paper explores the formation of traditional student lifestyles in more detail by exploring their regulated and segregated use of leisure time which creates a student-focused popular culture infrastructure in the city centre.

3. Constructing the student popular culture infrastructure

Traditional student life extends beyond the formal time and space of the university and student accommodation and into the wider city. In particular, students have a significant role to play in urban cultural vitality through a number of passive and dynamic impacts. Passive impacts refer to the sheer number of students who go out into the city and sustain audience levels in pubs, cafes, night-clubs, cinemas, live music venues, galleries and exhibitions. Dynamic impacts refer to the role of students as cultural producers. This cultural production role embraces a variety of activities such as the involvement of art-based students in local exhibitions and galleries, community art work, art education and film productions to involvement in more popular cultural activity such as playing in bands, performing as DJs in local pubs and clubs and being involved in managing and producing night-club, theatrical or musical events.

However, what I want to discuss in the rest of the paper is the framing of much of the leisure time of traditional students within a popular culture infrastructure which consists of pathways of student-focused venues in the city centre. This infrastructure has a distinctive identity, is heavily marketed to the traditional student population, and is constructed through two inter-related processes which form imaginary and actual geographies of student life (Shields, 1991). The first process involves a learning process which enables the informal colonisation of venues by students which are within, or adjacent to, student residential areas. The second process involves the formal provision of student-focused entertainment environments by certain entertainment providers in the city. These issues are discussed in turn.

3.1. Learning the rules of the student game

Following idea of ‘social spatialisation’ the (Shields, 1991, p. 31), spaces associated with traditional students, such as the hall of residence or certain pubs, can be considered as “pre-constructed cultural discourses”. Experience within, and use of, these spaces allows students to embed and reinforce their identity as a student. They act as sites of ‘social centrality’ within student life in which the rituals of studenthood are undertaken and the rules of student life are learnt (Hetherington, 1996, p. 39).

Such ideas build upon analogies of the field as an ‘espace de jeu’ (Bourdieu, 1977, 1993) in which the students learn certain dispositions which enable them to know and recognise the laws of that field through practical experience within it. Learning the rules of this student game within these various spaces is mediated through certain initiation rituals such as Freshers Week and the Freshers Fair, student publications, student radio and student peers. These are arenas where the ‘rules of studenthood’ are learnt and embodied. (However, as highlighted above, introductions to student life occurs much earlier through school, family and the media.) For many traditional students this learning

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4 The term ‘sloane’ is derived from ‘sloane ranger’ which is defined in the English dictionary as a young upper-class person having a home in London and the country, characterised as wearing expensive informal clothes. The term is a pun on ‘Sloane Square’, an affluent part of central London, and ‘Lone Ranger’, a cowboy cartoon character.
process mainly equates to learning about a limited number of spaces which are already established within student life.

The Freshers Fair (Fig. 2) is one of the first and most important introductions to the framework of traditional student life. It is an endeavour by many commercial entities and entertainment venues, such as banks, travel operators, book stores, rental firms, clubs, pubs, cinemas and food outlets in the city to inform students of where to go out, and what to consume. A deluge of freebies is offered to freshers such as mugs, pens and newspapers, food, alcohol and even condoms to entice their customer loyalty. Information acquired at Freshers Fair, then, is one of the most significant components of the learning process.

A number of publications from students’ unions and independent organisations also contribute to this learning process, such as the University of Bristol Students’ Union’s (UBSU) own weekly student newspaper, a weekly ‘What’s On’ guide and an annual Freshers Guide published in October which covers advice, entertainments, night life and welfare throughout the city.

There are also a number of independent publications which exist to educate Bristol students. These include The Bristol Student Guide published by NUS Bristol and aimed at students in all colleges in Bristol; Student Pages which, replicated in most other student cities at the cost of £1, is distributed to students in Bristol and offers information and discounts for a range of entertainments and services in the city; and the annual Student Supplement published in September by Venue, the main entertainment guide for the city which has strong associations with the student population. National publications also contribute to this learning process and target students in Bristol. These include The Big Issue Student Supplement and the NME Student Guide. Such nationally distributed publications also contribute to the construction of a wider national student identity.

These publications are complemented by certain sections of the media who expend much energy courting the student population. These include the broadsheet newspapers in Britain such as The Guardian, The Independent and The Times, who offer substantial subscription discounts to students and BBC Radio One FM who collaboratively run and broadcast a number of dance events at various students’ unions around the country during freshers week. Local radio is also heavily involved with the student population. In particular, Galaxy FM, one of Bristol’s local radio stations, is a joint promoter of student nights at a city night-club, Club IQ. Further, Fresh FM, the student radio station in Bristol, operates during the freshers period to disseminate information to the incoming students.

Events such as Freshers Week and forms of audio and print media equip students with an abundance of information on where to consume, visit and be entertained in Bristol. They are illustrative of attempts to rapidly educate, shape and financially exploit traditional students as consumers and producers within the cultural life of the city. These formal learning mechanisms are complemented through communication with other students. As the promotions manager of one night-club in the city, Club IQ, suggested:

When ‘First Years’ arrive in Bristol they don’t know the area. They know there are two main clubs in Bristol; us [Club IQ] and Odyssey. So when they ask the second years where they go they say ‘Tuesdays at Odyssey’. It’s become part of the student thing and so as a first year you go to Odyssey. Odyssey have always had that student night and so its hard to compete with.

However, there are multiple ways in which students interpret and use such information. As one student commented:

...we used to go to The Showboat [Gloucester Road pub] during the week. They gave us a leaflet in our freshers pack about all the pubs and we read it in
the fifth week and it said, 'The Showboat – NO’, and so we went in on a Saturday to find out – never again (1st year, male, Drama student).

3.2. Unlearning the rules

An important aspect of student life is maturation and development. This often involves a distancing from what is seen as a ‘typical’ student. In this sense, many students, as their university career progresses, experiment with less traditional student places and venues within the city and unlearn the rules of the student game. As Hollands (1995, p. 31) comments:

Initiation rites for students then are an important factor in establishing patterns for going out and in reinforcing the divided city. However, some begin to move away from the confines of the university fairly early on and start to explore city life more in terms of their musical tastes, peer group interests and youth cultural identity.

This comment seems to have some resonance in Bristol. The promotions manager of Odyssey night-club commented:

We concentrate on the freshers because it’s mainly the first years who come here. We know from experience that the older students want to go to smaller more exclusive clubs. They don’t want to be with the freshers; most of these kids have just come from home.

Further, as one Bristol University student commented: “I think next year we will go to totally different places. Most ‘First years’ live in halls and then in the second year they move into Clifton and go to totally different places”. The following conversation with some students reveals some of the ways in which student’s attitudes change over the duration of their university career:

Becky I think the only reason you do it is because it is the only time you get to see people. You do not see your friends for about three weeks ’cos you’re both doing different things and you say right I’ll meet you there and you end up having lunch and getting drunk and going to bed at eight.

Corrina I'm a night-mare for taking my student vouchers to places. It is also quite a good way of finding places and experimenting.

Paul Do you think you’ve changed since last year?

Corrina We used to do silly things like going dry slope skiing in Gloucester. This year I did want to find a lot more places to go to ’cos there’s loads of good pubs and cafes and things.

Becky We have done a lot of, a bit of er... let us go out for lunch. I remember last year thinking ‘lets do lunch’ and I used to rip it out of people that did it and this year I do it and I don’t know why.

(All names have been changed)

Experimentation, then, can be part of student life as the student career matures and a desire to distance oneself from the neophyte freshers increases. This process represents an unlearning of student rites and a distancing from the student infrastructure as the student is acculturated into less ‘typical’ student activities within the city. However, time and money pressures also increase, which impedes this experimentation process.

Clearly, there are also traditional students who are more experimental per se. Such students are prepared to venture into other areas and venues in the city which are not associated with traditional student culture. In particular, there are a number of night-clubs and pubs in the Stokes Croft area of the city centre (Fig. 3) which are associated with more bohemian and alternative groups and are visited by many students. In particular, one night-club in Stokes Croft, Lakota, holds a weekly student-only night. However, this event is more popular with students from Bristol’s ‘new’ university, the University of the West of England. There is little evidence of ‘student’–’non-student’ tension in these areas as the students who travel there are not readily identifiable with the typical student identity. The more traditional students regard this area off-limits as its identity contrasts heavily with traditional student areas.

3.3. Formal provision within the student popular culture infrastructure

Entertainment provision aimed at traditional students is undertaken by university and non-university owned venues. The University of Bristol plays a significant role in popular cultural provision through venues dedicated to drinking, live music, clubbing and concerts. UBSU also plays an important role within the structuring of student leisure time by creating student-only entertainment spaces. Students’ unions are keen to
provide such spaces to create an environment which is safe and generates common codes of communication which will attract students. It also reinforces their parallel commitment to student welfare and education.

However, much provision within this infrastructure is from non-university venues. I want to discuss the ways in which these non-university venues build up an idea of the entertainment needs of traditional students. One successful night-club owner within this infrastructure explained that an understanding of the student market came from an organic approach:

I don’t think the way to attract students is to have a strategy to attract them like some breweries have. I think it should happen naturally through having a mad landlord. Corporate strategies are so finely tuned they think they can capture the whole market. This is what happens with Firkin breweries. Some independents around here attract students with no strategy. Take an example. The Fraternity House is a big place, the same size as the Rat and Parrot. But the Rat and Parrot is crammed with students and the ‘Frat’ is not ‘cos the ‘Frat’ has tried too hard. The Rat and Parrot has gone for the soft lived-in look which appeals to the students.

Further, knowledge of student preferences, it seems, is only established through direct experience. As another night-club owner commented: “[i]f you haven’t been to university you don’t understand the mentality... by being so interactive with the student community you know your audience and how to attract it.”

The main providers of student-based entertainment seem to have a common perception that students have distinctive needs which should be catered for separately. As one night-club manager commented: “[t]he only thing you can do to get students in is to offer them cheap beer and cheap entry on the door or some type of theme night. They’re easily pleased”.

Those who gain financially from students spend much time trying to understand the differences in the student market. As the promotional manager of Odyssey NightClub explained about their student night which attracts the largest number of students compared to any other club in the city: “some staff don’t like working Tuesdays ‘cos the students are so rude; but it’s youthful- it’s the youth and that’s how they are”. Another night-club manager commented:

We don’t mind students being a complete prat. Our doormen are trained. I dislike doormen who see students messing around and misinterpret it as a problem. We know that students can mess about and its just a giggle; that’s what it all about. The student mentality doesn’t leave you for the rest of your life. My student spirit hasn’t gone and as a result I like a good laugh. The great thing about students is that if one pukes on another they turn round and laugh about it. If a student pukes on a townie they end up on the floor with no teeth, generally.

In a similar way, the manager of The Berkeley, the largest pub adjacent to the main University of Bristol campus, explained his preference for students:

I’d rather have the students than the locals. In Bristol, one of the top universities in the country, their home life isn’t directed towards violence. They’d use their lawyers before they’d use their fists. It works in our favour. We can deal with them if they want to argue but you can’t argue with an idiot with a glass.

Further, the manager of the RooBar on Whiteladies Road, the self-proclaimed ‘most popular student pub in Bristol’, commented that:

I’ve got absolutely no problem with the students whatsoever. Most of the staff are students. We love the way this place is, i.e. 80% students. They know (a) how to have a good time (b) they’ve always got money to spend despite the rumours they’ve got no money, and (c) they are never any trouble.

The promotions manager of Club IQ, Bristol’s second largest night-club, suggested that it was necessary to understand that students act differently:
The problem we have with students is they’re intelligent. They get into trouble with the door men who aren’t intelligent and the doorman grabs a student ‘cos they think there’s a problem and the student tries to be rational with them. But when the doorman grabs hold of you and says ‘you are leaving’, you say, ‘certainly sir’ and walk out of the door. You never, ever, try to be intelligent with these people.

Another manager seemed to be aware of the difference between a student and non-student pub:

I wouldn’t say we’re geared to specifically being a student pub. Student pubs tend to be wooden benches and look as though there’s not much money in it and everyone sits in a corner and shares a pint of bitter.

The above quotes seem to indicate that those who provide student-focused entertainment understand ‘studenthood’ as a different type of experience which requires an understanding of their specific needs. They also illustrate that traditional students are a preferred consumer group because they ‘know how to have a good time’, ‘they’ve always got money to spend’, and ‘they’re never any trouble’.

Student entertainment providers can be considered as part of the class of ‘cultural intermediaries’ in cities (Lash and Urry, 1987; Featherstone, 1991; O’Connor and Wynne, 1998) in that they are engaged in the production, classification, circulation and consumption of cultural goods. The activities of these providers highlight the connections between cultural consumption and cultural production as some of them were former university students with embodied knowledge of the student ‘field’. As a result, they are effective agents who perpetuate and modify student spaces within the city. Such “social groups competing for control in particular social fields, use their relative amounts of economic and/or cultural capital accumulated to promote their own symbolic ordering in attempts to control such fields” (O’Connor and Wynne, 1998, p. 844).

However, many venue owners were not university graduates, especially not Bristol university graduates, and their efforts to attract students were less directed by embodied knowledge of their tastes but were largely based upon the corporate strategies of pub and leisure operators eager to gain a market share of city centre student spending.

4. The student popular culture infrastructure and the city

These informal and formal processes create a student-focused popular culture infrastructure within the city which is characterised by a distinctive time and space framework. These temporal and spatial frameworks are considered below.

4.1. The temporal construction of the popular culture infrastructure

Because of the nature of the university calendar, for many students the distinctive aspect of student life is the ability to maintain a more fluid allocation of time between work and leisure. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1979, p. 29) have observed, students “live and mean to live in a special time and space. Their studenthood momentarily frees them from family life and working life”. One student commented on this temporal fluidity:

I think there’s a lot of free time. I’m not very good at getting down to work until somebody is standing over me and making me. So you tend to go out and not think about your work till the pressure is on. But then that’s university (2nd year, female, Geography student).

Students have more freedom than most of the population to flout the distinctions between weekends and weekdays, day and night, work and playtime (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979, p. 29). In this sense, the student infrastructure is characterised by high levels of midweek activity with the most popular ‘student-only’ nightclubs occurring on a Tuesday (Odyssey, Lakota) and Wednesday (Wedgies, Club IQ). One pub manager commented upon the different time patterns for student socialising:

We saw students as a niche because they’re there and they go out and drink more and go out all week compared to other people of that age group. They don’t blitz it on a weekend so its nice for us to be busy midweek. They can fill in that lull before the evening rush. We are going to try and hit that market because students do get off at 4 or 5 pm. If you’re in the liquor game you have to realise that when you’re a student you’ll drink more than you will ever again more regularly. When you’ve got a job you have more money but you have more responsibilities and outgoings.

4.2. The spatial construction of the popular culture infrastructure

The student popular culture infrastructure is also spatially distinctive. As suggested earlier, this infrastructure is constituted through spatial practices which
involve the informal colonisation of venues and formal provision by entertainment providers. It is this regulated movement throughout the popular culture infrastructure which allows traditional students to be identified as a distinctive group within the city. Further, the social space of traditional student culture does not represent "a closed system of social relations but a particular articulation of contacts and influences drawn from a variety of places" (Massey, 1998, p. 124). In this sense, the seasonally resident student brings into the city a variety of styles and tastes from other non-local scales.

The infrastructure is spatially concentrated in Bristol. Fig. 3 represents the main venues within this infrastructure which are heavily clustered around an area from the main student area in Clifton and Whiteladies Road to the city centre. These spaces are often linked together to form routes or pathways through the city which are visually represented in Fig. 4. The first diagram in Fig. 4 represents an extremely popular pathway for traditional fresher students in Bristol which extends between the Stoke Bishop halls of residence to the city centre via Whiteladies Road and Clifton. The second diagram represents a pathway by a mature student from the University who lived in Bedminster and is illustrative of this student's different relationship with the city outside of the main traditional student infrastructure. 5

4.3. Student sites and the desire for association

Within this infrastructure there are a small number of venues which act as privileged sites of consumption for traditional students, the use of which can be understood through a desire for association. Spaces within the popular cultural student infrastructure can be understood through what Shields (1992, p. 8) called 'leisure spaces'. Student leisure spaces, while not liminal or carnivalesque in the classic sense of a complete transition and inversion of social roles, "are open to the liminal chaos which places social arrangements in abeyance and suggests their arbitrary, cultural nature" (Shields, 1992, p. 8). The concept of liminality is useful, then, to suggest how the student's lifecourse is held in abeyance for a number of years during which there are moments of intense desires for association, sporadic carnival and sociality.

This desire for association between traditional students is motivated by hedonistic pleasure seeking, drinking and sex/courtship. This confirms a recent observation by O'Connor and Wynne (1998, p. 857) who commented that the meaning of activities for many groups in cities can be found in patterns of sociability and play rather than strategies of distinction (cf. Bourdieu, 1984). This desire for association and belonging amongst students has been substantiated by conversations with students from the University of Bristol which point to the importance of 'visiting friends', 'having friends round', 'catching up with friends', or 'going to the pub with friends'.

Student-focused environments fulfil this desire for association, not just because of the ease of common codes and the possibility of meeting other students, but also real safety from outsiders. One conversation with a Geography student suggested why certain sites were privileged:

Louise: *I quite like the Steam Rock and Wedgies and all those other typical places.*

Paul: *Why do you like places like Steam Rock and Wedgies?*

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5 These time-space maps were constructed from information extracted from diaries which were compiled by students for the purposes of this fieldwork.
Louise  
Well you know, a lot of people you know are there and everyone goes on certain nights so it’s quite good.

Another conversation reinforced this:

Becky  
A place where we go quite a lot is the Porthouse down by the Thekla on a Tuesday.

Paul  
Why there?

Corrina  
Student night on Tuesdays are packed and it’s got a good atmosphere and four floors and huge leather armchairs.

Ed  
I find that most First Years start off going to Odyssey and then a few do not like it and then started going to the Porthouse. Loads of First Years go there.

(All names have been changed)

There are certain times and places, then, which act as a defining moment of association for many students:

You plan a big night when you know everyone’s going to be there. For example, Steam Rock on a Monday and Wedgies on Wednesday or whatever. I go out to town for a big night but other than that I do not really venture that far (2nd Year, male Geography student).

Such times and spaces seem to occupy a privileged place within the schedule of the traditional students. As one commented: “like, you either sit on your own and watch TV or go where you know all the people you know are going” (2nd year, female Drama student). The following quote suggests that these venues are associated with a relaxed, unpretentious atmosphere:

I think its quite a psychological thing. If you go into town you really have to plan your night. For girls it is a real effort because you know they’re all going to be there in their little numbers whereas Kickers you can roll on there after the pub and still treat it like a pub and you can just relax and have a laugh and not take it too seriously (2nd year, female Geography student).

However, this desire for association does not unify all traditional students. Within the cultural archetype of ‘traditional’ or ‘typical’ student resides several different identities and mini-communities such as ‘the sloanes’, ‘the sporty students’, or ‘the arty students’. Certain venues create an atmosphere which satisfies the common interests and desire for association amongst each of these different traditional student groups. For example, Wedgies night-club and The Square Bar appeals to the ‘Clifton sloanes’ and the ‘sports teams’, whilst the Arnolfini Arts Centre and the Watershed Media Centre appeal to ‘arty students’.

The rest of this part of the paper explores two of these sites in greater detail. Two night-clubs within this infrastructure, Odyssey and Wedgies, play an extremely central role within the framing process of space and time for large numbers of traditional students. Night-clubbing is a particularly popular activity amongst the traditional student population which is a reflection of the growth of clubbing as a youth cultural pastime (Thornton, 1995) and its ability to fulfil the desire for association for traditional students. Four out of five students from the University of Bristol claimed that they visited a night-club over a period of one month. Odyssey, with a capacity of 1800, and Wedgies, with a capacity of 350, were the most frequently visited night-clubs amongst traditional students at the University of Bristol, accounting for 24% and 12% of all night-club visits respectively.

4.4. Odyssey night-club

Odyssey is one of the main sites within the student popular culture infrastructure. In particular, the University of Bristol freshers party, Karanga, is held at Odyssey in the first week of term. During the course of the evening, over 2000 students pass through the doors of the night-club. For many it is the first, and one of the most memorable, experiences of university life. If there was ever a need for affirmation of a moment of association and a display of common dispositions amongst students in Bristol, it exists at Karanga at Odyssey night-club during freshers week.

With a capacity of 1800, Odyssey is the largest night-club in the city. It is the most popular destination for students in Bristol accounting for nearly one-quarter of all night-club visits. Odyssey holds its student only night, Slam (Students Love Alternative Music), on Tuesday, and has a student-oriented night on Thursday. For the last few years, The House of Sutra has been held on a Wednesday at Odyssey which is the largest dance night in the city and has been visited by the biggest names in dance music such as Danny Rampling and Jeremy Healy. Because of its size and resources, Odyssey is particularly effective in attracting students. It conducts a massive advertising campaign to attract as many of the 34,000 students in the city as possible and offers drinks promotions, cheap door entry and free buses to attract the lucrative student clubbing market. As the promotional manager explained:

“Tuesdays is completely geared towards students – price, drink, everything wise – because you realise there
is a huge student population in Bristol. We put coaches on from Whiteladies Road and Clifton to bring customers down from pubs such as the Rat and Parrot and Bohemia. A lot of our research into what students want comes from head office but we get a lot from our staff, many of whom are past students. Our head office has a student committee with people from each area. They throw ideas around. We go to the freshers fair and we know they love free things – t-shirts, mugs. We try to do as much as possible and advertise in all the student papers; that is why we are more successful than others.

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We are the main student club for years – we did lose them temporarily when Club IQ opened – but we know how to do student night and how to target them – knowing they have plenty of money to spend. We go into great detail to find out when they will be around and when they won’t. We get advice from the university such as the entertainments office and our own staff who are students. Students seem to have so much more fun and have more money. I mean everything seems to cater for students in Bristol; they are big money earners but you have to treat them right. The market is getting so tight now for everybody; they see the students and they want them. We’re very lucky to be successful with the students. We treat them with respect and good standards. Some people take the piss out of these students and don’t do so well.

To maintain our student audience, especially in May, we have put on something every week. For example, we have recently had the Wham Tribute and Spice Girls’ night. It is not just getting them here it is putting in added content to keep them here. Tuesdays is very mainstream; stuff they have grown up with but it can be one of the nicest nights here. I do not know what it is but I think we have got it just right now. My least favourite night is a Friday night because there is so much trouble. But Tuesdays and Thursdays, on these nights there’s some beautiful people, especially on Thursday which has some credibility. We keep a tight door every night. We only let people in who fit the image. Club IQ started off very well but didn’t sustain it. Also Lakota do a Tuesday student night but it is a more dedicated 70s night. We are different, we play something for everybody. This is why we survive even though students have different time pressures now’’.
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4.5. Wedgies night-club

“The best and tackiest club in Bristol, Wedgies has a reputation for being packed full of sloanes and turning into a snogfest. Unfortunately, the first part is true and the second is false unless you are a 6’4, mentally retarded thug in a rugby shirt” (UBSU, Student Guide, 1996–1997).

Wedgies, a much smaller club compared with Odyssey, is a site for a more intimate, rather than mass sense of association which works hard at attracting a certain section of the traditional student population – the sloanes and the university sports teams. Wedgies holds a pre-club event at an adjacent bar which creates a mini-pathway in the city centre for this sub-community of the traditional student population. The marketing material for the club shown below depicts the character of Wedgies and the class and gender basis for the forms of socialising which occur there.

Wedgies night-club is a small basement club with a capacity of around 300 located on Park Street adjacent to the main University campus. In the manager’s words, “Wedgies is knackered physically but it has good sound and lighting”. In my survey of student clubbing preferences it was the second most popular student club accounting for nearly 12% of student visits to clubs over a one month period; considering its size, this is quite an achievement. Tuesday and Wednesday nights are student-only and are extremely popular with University students. They offer drinks promotions and door concessions and they also have a pre-club warm up at The Square, a pub adjacent to the main University campus. Wedgies is run by a graduate from a south-west university who is dedicated to attracting a certain section of the University population. The imagery of the night-club’s flyers acts as a very powerful admission device, attracting certain sections of the ‘sloaney’ or ‘sporty’ student community with captions such as ‘GET IT HERE!’, ‘Get Laid’, ‘A College Tradition’, ‘Where the men are fit but the birds are FITTER’. As the manager explained:

“I employ students from the University to promote the club – one from the Chelsea sloane set and one from the Oxford sloane set. Academically they were not bright enough to get into Oxford so they came here.
These are the Clifton students who are not like other students.

“Tuesdays plays uplifting house and commercial chart and a little bit of party but no Brit. pop or Oasis. On Wednesday we play commercial chart and then what I call my sports night party set. It is our own party set – soul limbo the cricketing theme, ‘oh what a night’, ‘summer of 68’, all the girls and blokes strip off their shirts – that is our theme tune. We try to go cult status with our party set. It is taken us about 3 years to build up a reputation. This was by personal PRing, the two guys at the University giving out VIP tickets to the rugger buggers and their friends.

“We had some 1920 style ink cartoons – with amusing comic strips – it had a certain, I do not know, ‘officers mess’ feel to it: pretentious and arrogant. Because it is a small club we can fill it with who we want. I went to all the sports matches at the University to build up the audiences and it spread by word of mouth.

“We have targeted a very specific audience. I know practically every face in there – all the teams and societies. We have a rapport in Epigram (the University student newspaper). Last week it said, ‘manager of Wedgies do you think you’re hard? Sid.’ We have all these silly ditties like we locked a student in the club one night. It’s fun you know; there’s silly press stuff afterwards. I think the key to student nights is rapport with the customers. Some say we are cliquey. It may be a fair comment but it is the way you have to be to do business.

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“Our Wednesday night is untouchable. Other people have tried to copy us but we just up our direct marketing – going up to all the lads with strong arm tactics and saying you would not get your VIP card if you don’t come. Tuesday is the same. There’s so much competition and we can’t compete with the bigger clubs. But I like to be more expensive because I do not like arseholes. If I had to class this right-club I would say it had an ‘eccentric’ personality’.

“Students that come here are not representative. There’s some snobbery and I wouldn’t disagree. There’s all the society dinners at the University at the end of the year and afterwards they all come to Wedgies. If I appealed to a mass crowd I wouldn’t attract these clubs and societies. I get invited to their dinners; so by being so interactive with the student community you know your audience and how to attract it.

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5. Discussion

5.1. The traditional student community and popular cultural innovation

This paper has highlighted the existence of a student popular culture infrastructure in Bristol which is comprised of ‘pathways’ of venues which weave distinctive time–space patterns through certain areas of the city centre. This infrastructure is created by the colonisation of venues by students and the formal construction of student-focused nights by leisure providers and is regulated by a learning process and a desire for association between students. Entertainment providers draw upon perceptions of what a traditional student lifestyle is, and develop entertainment provision to fit these perceptions. This paper has shown that these perceptions seem to capture many of the realities of traditional student life as many businesses thrive from strategies which are based upon them. With the growth of student populations in many British cities, competition to capture this assumedly lucrative market is increasing, especially amongst large pub and leisure operators.

The popular culture student infrastructure regulates the use of time and space by traditional students and contributes to the creation of distinctive student ‘ways of being’. It seems that such students are content with circulating within this infrastructure and visiting the local pub or neighbouring student houses which minimises on travel and increases the opportunity to meet other students. Such student-focused leisure spaces also exist to increase student safety and reduce violence.

Many traditional students, then, display a limited use of the city. This may be attributed to increasing work and financial pressures, or in other cases, laziness or a desire to socialise at home with other students. The following conversation and quotes illustrate some of these trends:

(All names have been changed.)

Paul  What about free time?
Andrew  I don’t really like going to clubs that much anyway...
Caroline  ... and the clubs in Bristol aren’t that good.
Julie  I don’t think there’s that much going on which is that interesting. It’s all one type of thing.
Caroline  I’d rather the pubs were open later ‘cos you can talk. When I go out I like to talk and socialise and when you are in a club it’s noisy and dark unless you like dancing you know...
Julie  I don’t really like the music scene at the moment. I like indie and there’s only one club. I prefer a pub where you could get coffee till late like abroad with open cafes bars. In France they were wonderful.

“More often than not I like to go out for a few beers locally with my mates. There’s ten pubs near where I live in Clifton Village so there is no point in venturing that far. All my mates live up there as well” (2nd Year, male Geography student).

“I like to catch up with people basically. It’s quite hectic at the moment so I like to catch up with people when I’ve got spare time – just go out have a drink” (2nd year, female, Drama student).

The world of traditional students is not only removed from many other less traditional student groups but also the non-student world. In this sense, they are an identifiable group within the city. However, further research is needed to ascertain the degree to which traditional students represent more isolated and removed leisure activity patterns compared to other groups within the city and whether they have genuinely different entertainment needs.
What are the implications of the presence of a large cohort of traditional students in the Bristol in terms of cultural innovation and vitality? This paper has shown that the majority of traditional students sustain business for a small number of pubs and night-clubs within the main student infrastructure. During certain times of the year an area of the city is largely given over to the needs of students and becomes heavily associated with them, especially around the main student residential areas of Clifton and Whiteladies Road and the University. Further, certain venues such as Odyssey and Wedgies night-clubs are more successful than others within this infrastructure which leads to frustration for other entertainment providers. For many students, then, despite displaying higher levels of going-out compared to non-students, especially in activity areas such as drinking and clubbing, much of their cultural time is spent within the realms of student-focused venues and a small number of privileged consumption sites.

The contributions which traditional students make to popular cultural innovation and vitality in the city largely amount to the perpetuation of student-focused environments which are concentrated in certain areas of cultural activity and certain areas of Bristol. Much of their leisure time identifies them as part of the large ‘open-middle’ of consumption who are not particularly high on exploratory cultural practices and may be deterred from certain forms of cultural participation where access is unfamiliar (O’Connor and Wynne, 1998, p. 853). However, as noted earlier, certain students do step outside these traditional student environments as they mature, whilst others are more keen to experiment outside the regulated time-space framework of traditional student life.

Connections can also be made between cultural consumption and production within student leisure spaces in that consumers also have the opportunity to become producers. For example, numerous ex-students remain in the city after graduation and use their knowledge of the city to establish or manage venues or to pursue artistic careers. A growing number of students are involved in the small-scale and underground DJing party and club scene in the city and perform as musicians and DJ’s at local pubs and night-clubs. Student parties, in particular, are a source of much creativity and are often used as an experimental space for students involved in producing or organising musical events. The entertainments officer of the University of Bristol observed: “you’d be amazed at what the student DJ’s do. I know quite a lot of them and some of them are excellent. They spend all their money on records and they make records too”. The Editor of Venue reinforced this cultural producer role:

There are some very good student promoters knocking about going to venues. There are so many students doing marketing degrees now that there’s a lot of students doing warm up nights and they will go to a bar and say, ‘I’ll charge a quid and put some DJ’s on and promote it as hard as I can’. It’s done in a much more professional manner now.

In such a context, a virtuous cycle of growth can occur which, if activity reaches a certain size, attracts new cohorts of students, and also wider non-student and pre/post-student groups. Students, then, can increase audience levels, but also have a more dynamic effect on cultural vitality in cities. However, Bristol is a culturally and ethnically diverse city in which cultural vitality is associated with a very broad group and not simply dependent on the student population.

5.2. Britain’s great teenage transhumance

The smaller-scale, collegiate student experience of the elite system of higher education in Britain, in which students were largely removed from the community, has given way to a mass system of higher education in which student life permeates much more into the city. Many universities, then, offer a much weaker regulatory framework for student life. In particular, greater student debt (at around £1700 per student in 1996; Callender and Kempson, 1996) will increase the number of stay-at-home students and the growth of the learning society agenda will increase part-time and mature students, all of which further weakens this regulatory framework.

However, it is likely that through the rising costs of going to university, the overproduction of academic qualifications and their corresponding devaluation in a system of mass higher education provision, class-based strategies will evolve to maintain the value of a university experience. Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) describe this process as ‘creative redefinition’ in which the middle- and upper-classes are likely to colonise the residential student experience at Britain’s older universities as a strategy to distance themselves from a less socially valuable stay-at-home university experience. In this context, traditional student lifestyles are, to an even greater extent, identified by their physical mobility and will be based upon the ‘finishing school’ model at the old and elite universities compared to the less mobile non-traditional students whose experience of university life is more akin to the ‘service-station’ model at the new universities. The ‘old’ universities, then, will retain the legacy of a collegiate, residential student experience and post-in loco parentis structures which continue to isolate traditional students from the community.

As a result, it is likely that in-migrant, seasonal, traditional student communities will grow in certain British

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6 This phrase is taken from Walker (1997).
cities – or as Wright (1994) suggested, ‘UniverCities’ – in which whole swathes of the city are devoted to residential or entertainment provision for these students. Such areas often become ghettoised, and tension and conflict emerges along the fringes where student and non-student identities come into contact. Clearly, an important aspect of both higher education policy and urban policy and planning would be to recognise the dynamic which is being introduced into certain areas within many British cities because of the segregated growth of a population of middle- and upper-class, adolescent outsiders.

A remaining feature of the British higher education system, therefore, is the state subsidy of an annual migration of middle- and upper-class teenagers to British cities containing old and more prestigious universities. The question to be raised is whether the expense involved in this process can be justified and whether this experience is still edifying considering increasing overcrowding and financial and work pressures (Walker, 1997). There are many reasons for defending this migration and the student experience, if not only because many universities lack sufficient catchment areas to function if it drew solely upon local populations. Furthermore, to experience different contexts and cultures may be considered a positive learning experience. Many students, for example, travel away from home to go to university to sample the cultural life within Britain’s major cities. Moreover, the university is one of the only true public spaces left which offers a time for contemplation, reflection and dialogue with others (Bender, 1998; Kumar, 1997).

But, I would argue, the rules of this migration have to be changed. Leaving home to study is not much of a learning experience if the only people you encounter are people from similar social and economic backgrounds. Many universities in Britain have lost their way in terms of creating an environment which offers what Bender (1998) called ‘dialogue and difference’. Clearly, the only way in which student life could be considered a real learning experience is if the seasonal student population represented an encounter of many different identities.

In this context, the continued expansion of universities in Britain, especially the older ones, should focus upon increasing participation of non-traditional groups. With the lifelong learning agenda gaining momentum in Britain, this is likely to occur and could dilute some of the boundaries and divisions between student and non-student areas. Under such conditions, student residential and entertainment ghettos, although still targeted at students, would be populated with those who have not historically been perceived as students. In particular, participation should be extended to the city’s underprivileged youth who are excluded from local higher education and have an identity which contrasts heavily with traditional in-coming teenage students.

However, it is likely that the older universities in Britain will be able to resist such diversification and remain ghettos for traditional students. Bristol University is a case in point in which many students live, work and socialise with people of similar social, educational and geographic backgrounds. What of the young adult population from ethnic minorities, under-achieving schools and deprived urban areas in cities such as Bristol which traditional students rarely come into contact with whilst at university? “Break them out of their culture and dead expectations by giving them the chance to live away from home. That would really give the 18-year-old transmigration some point” (Walker, 1997).

5.3. The student city, the postmodern city, the divided city

Mis-shapes, mistakes, misfits.
Raised on a diet of broken biscuits,
oh we do not look the same as you,
we do not do the things you do,
but we live round here too Oh really.
Mis-shapes, mistakes, misfits,
we would like to go to town but we cannot risk it,
oh ’cause they just want to keep us out.
You could end up with a smack in the mouth just for standing out,
Oh really.


What are the consequences of traditional student spaces within the city? Many commentators have suggested that city centres have become arenas within which distinct identities, especially at night, are expressed (Featherstone, 1991; Hollands, 1995; O’Connor and Wynne, 1996, 1998). O’Connor and Wynne (1998) have even described the city centre in terms of a ‘stage’ or ‘edge’, where a theatrical presentation of self can be played out in a realm which offers experimentation and negotiation of identity. Further, Hollands (1995, p. 8) has pointed towards the “increasing role the city plays in shaping young adult’s experience of modern life”. The city centre offers various resources such as drinking, drugs and music which create distinct communities:

different forms of social interaction expressed in the night time economy, including group drinking rituals, fashion, music, and dance and drug cultures are, in essence, modern equivalents of community (Hollands, 1995, p. 1).

Such remarks can be located within the body of thought understood as postmodernism, but do they address the real concerns of the contemporary city? Featherstone (1991, p. 99) observes that “commentators
have adopted the rhetoric of postmodernism to understand the changes to the culture of cities and urban lifestyles”. In particular, “postmodern cities have become centres of consumption, play and entertainment, saturated with signs and images to the extent that anything can be represented, thematized and made an object of interest” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 101). Further:

postmodernizing tendencies can be observed in the new urban spaces which point to a greater aestheticisation of the urban fabric and the daily lives of people, the development of new consumption and leisure enclaves... and the drawing back of new middle-class gentrifying populations into the inner-city (Featherstone, 1991, p. 109).

The contemporary, perhaps postmodern, city may be seen as a place for the expression of lifestyles. In other words, there has been:

a shift in attention from lifestyle conceived as a relatively fixed set of dispositions, cultural tastes and leisure practices which demarcate groups from each other to the assumption that in the contemporary city lifestyles are more actively formed. Hence the focus turns away from lifestyle as class- or neighbourhood-based to lifestyle as the active stylisation of life (Featherstone, 1991, p. 101).

Such remarks have a resonance for the creation of a student identity considering that:

there is a tendency on the part of some groups (especially the young, highly educated, sectors of the middle-classes) to take on a more active stance towards lifestyle and pursue the stylisation of life (Featherstone, 1991, p. 97).

Following theories which espouse the playful and the postmodern city, then, the emergence and growth of a regulated popular culture infrastructure aimed at traditional students in many cities can be understood as a central mechanism for the construction and maintenance of a student lifestyle and a student image. Through this infrastructure, a student identity is actively formed – a stylisation of life is enacted.

However, we need to be cautious of celebrating the consumption-oriented postmodern city as a stage for the enactment of lifestyle. As (Featherstone, 1991, p. 110) himself comments: “[a]gainst this seductively oversimplified postmodern story of the end of history we have to point to the persistence of classification, hierarchy and segregation within the city”.

The above quote from Jarvis Cocker highlights some of the experiences of young people in Britain, not least for highlighting the tensions which often exist between groups in cities, especially at night. In this context, traditional student spaces are part of the mosaic of the divided, rather than postmodern, city, which is defined as:

the process whereby different sections of the population inhabit city space and construct lifestyles which both assert their own identity, and which may act to exclude or dissuade other groups from encroaching on their territory and culture (Holland, 1995, p. 21).

Sibley (1995, ix) has observed that: “[p]ower is expressed in the monopolisation of space and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments”. In the context of Bristol, the economic status of traditional students enables them to be spatially selective and to cluster within prosperous and centrally located areas such as Clifton. Students are often a gentrifying force and, through house price inflation in the private-rented accommodation sector, can force out local groups. However, this spatial segregation also reflects their desire to be removed from other groups through a perceived fear of violence and crime against students. Traditional students, then, can be regarded as one of the many mini-communities within the divided city which are generated through ritualised and segregated activity, especially in relation to going-out.

In terms of the student entertainment infrastructure, we need to analyse it as a space which not only allows student lifestyles to be made and enacted, but also as a space which is a source of division and conflict. The existence of student-focused residential and entertainment environments represents the temporal and seasonal monopolisation of certain areas of the city by traditional students which become heavily associated with their lifestyles.

This form of spatialisation has important consequences for city centres. The activities of various groups during the evening and the night have long been a source of division and conflict in cities and the continued regulation and segregation of space for the exclusive residential and entertainment needs of students enhances this aspect of cities. Traditional student spaces can be considered as one of the geographies of exclusion within the city, or more realistically, considering the social composition of this group, an ‘exclusive geography’ (Sibley, 1995). Such environments confirm that, “‘[s]patial purification’ is a key feature in the organisation of social space” (Sibley, 1995, p. 77) and that, “[t]he human landscape can be read as a landscape of exclusion” (Sibley, 1995, ix). The seasonal migration of middle-class adolescent students into many British cities, then, is an additional factor contributing to their spatial division and purification. Moreover, rather than simply playing out their role as cultural intermediaries by generating
new forms of cultural production and consumption, student entertainment providers are also responsible for the formation of exclusive geographies in city centres.

In this paper I hope I have contributed to on-going debates surrounding the contemporary city by drawing back from postmodern interpretations which uncritically explore the city as an arena for lifestyle enactment. In particular, I have discussed the ways in which the activities of, and entertainment provision for, certain groups (such as traditional university students) are enhancing the long-standing processes of regulation and compartmentalisation of city centre space. These spatial trends highlight the increasing commercialisation of city space and, in the context of this paper, the corporate strategies of various leisure operators who are creating purified and exclusive environments to financially gain from distinctive consumption groups. My final concern relates to the lack of mechanisms to arrest such processes, especially in relation to the growing ghettoisation of middle- and upper-class adolescent students within certain areas of British cities, and the unequal nature of access to the residential, away-from-home, experience which still characterises student life at certain British universities.

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