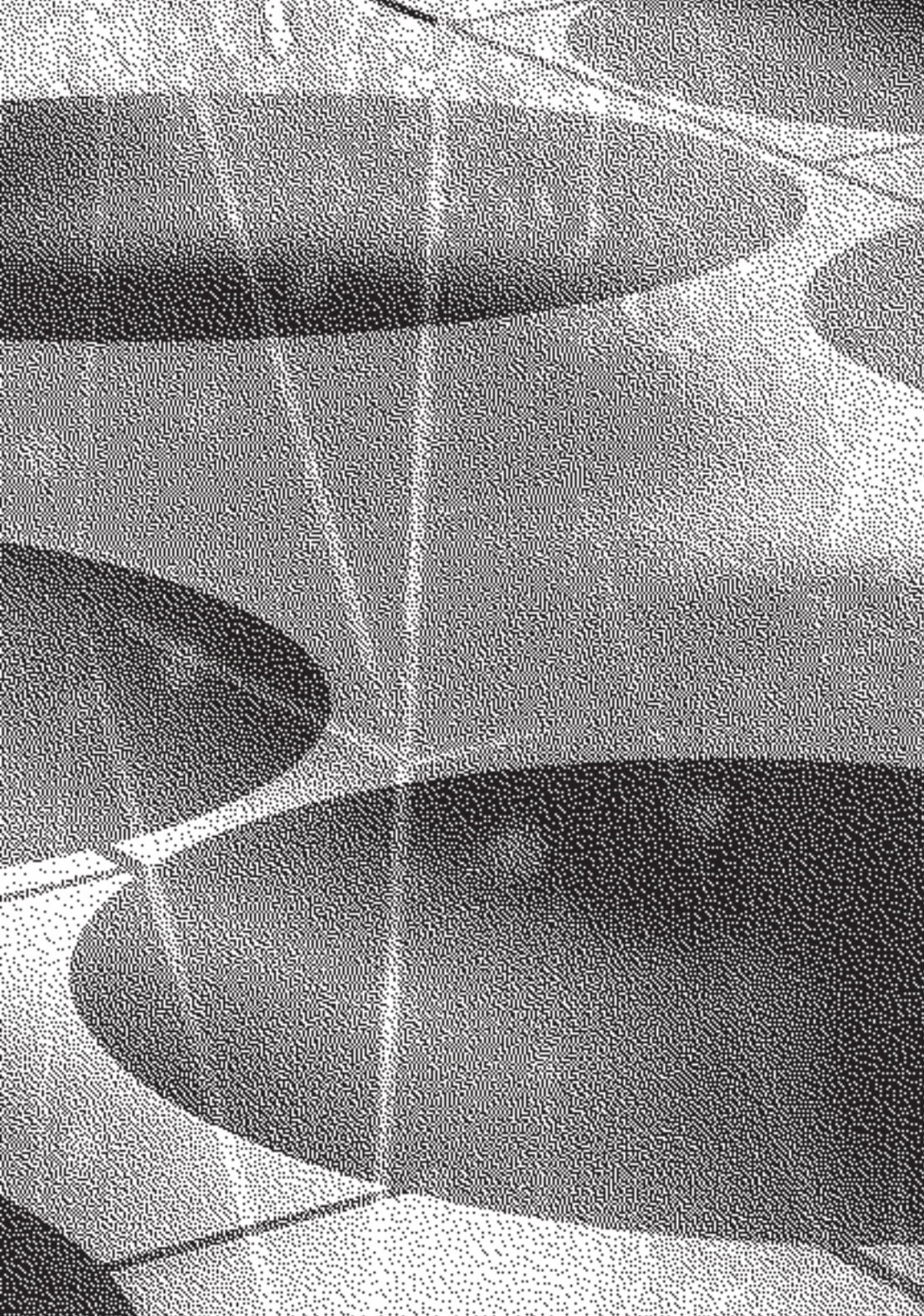




**New Nightclub for
Courtenay Place**

**Interviews with
Laura Duffy &
Dilohana Lekamge
Alison Laurie
Jennifer Shennan
Suzanne Tamaki
Sally Thomson**



Nightclub for Courtenay Place

New Nightclub for Courtenay Place is an architectural proposition for Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington Central. Lightreading has considered the nightclub in a series of recent art works initiated out an interest in the social and material aspects of darkness. The project was prompted by an online article which documented the history of Wellington's nightlife and implied that the people responsible for shaping it were nearly all men. This led us to wonder whether this history was accurate, and whether it reflected the current industry. We reflected on *who* then merits representation in these historical documents?

Nightclub spaces augment, heighten, and challenge experience—the club-goer is transported through the manipulation of surface and space, the audible and visual. Using these techniques and technologies, nightclubs exert power in the same way as many other urban structures and spaces. The occupations that lead the design process and build the structures that precede and shape these escapist experiences are also overwhelmingly male dominated—the architects and construction workers, but also the DJs, lighting designers, security guards and sound engineers.¹ Perhaps this gender weighting places biases and limitations on the type of experience produced.

As a counter to this lightreading undertook interviews with women who are, or have been, instrumental in shaping Wellington's nightlife over the past 50 years. The interviews were a way to research, document and engage with lesser-known histories in a direct way. This publication collates the five transcripts used to develop the nightclub design. It includes conversations with Sally Thomson, a nightclub manager; Alison Laurie, the co-founder of a lesbian organisation; Jennifer Shennan, dancer and dance historian; Suzanne Tamaki, clothing designer and events coordinator; and Laura Duffy and Dilohana Lekamge, visual artists and relative newcomers to the industry. The *New Nightclub* project incorporates many styles of oral material, reflecting different personalities, perspectives and generations. Many more interviews relating to the project continue to be published online at night-speak.tumblr.com

lightreading then gave the interviews to architects Raphaela Rose and Susana Torre, who used them to inspire a fictitious, new, and socially progressive nightclub complex for Courtenay Place. The conversations have informed the various rooms, atmospheres, colours, and lighting. Rose and Torre have proposed a structure which is moving and fluid, where the nightclub is re-imagined as a malleable and multi-faceted and can be twisted and reconfigured. This structure has the capabilities for each floor level to shift sideways, sliding into the nearby buildings as an intervention or inclusion, and then when necessary, retract. The external glass paneling protects the occupants from the elements, but allows visibility. Curtains are used throughout the space to create privacy and soft walls.²

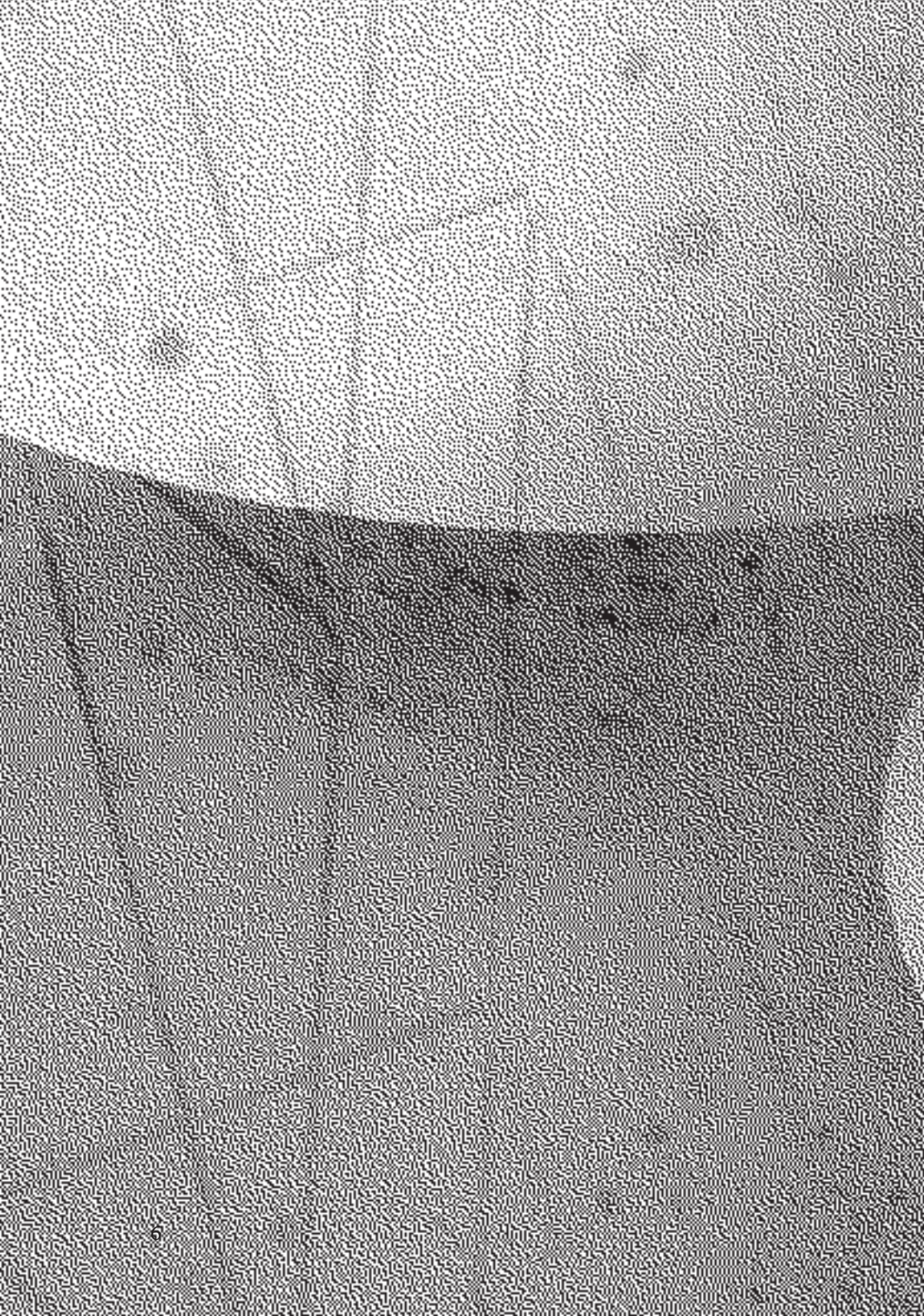
With the belief that nightlife has the potential to champion counter-cultural movements and social change, *New Nightclub for Courtenay Place* asks, ‘what kind of world are we building?’. This project believes that by deliberately working with women we might produce a new way of building space. This is not to say that *New Nightclub* is exclusively for women. For this project we look toward feminisms that include all people, of all identifications, and there is an understanding that the clubgoers are entering willingly into the space on these terms as well. The proposition for a future architecture which is based on recollections of the past offers us a way to think about space as a kind of time travel forward and backward. This is to build an intergenerational solidarity and perhaps also make an eerie point about how similar concerns remain regarding the homogeneity of the people shaping our built environment. The project wants to look at the work of different generations as recognition of what has survived as well as what has been overcome.

While the final design remains fictional, the Courtenay Place light box commission offered the opportunity to propose an architecture that is itself liberated and visionary—as a hyper-artificial construction and ideal, beyond the physical and economic constraints of a built realisation. By embracing the potential of speculative design, the light boxes then ask viewers to reflect on the existing structures they take for

granted and consider how these structures act upon social dynamics. Collaboratively, lightreading, Rose and Torre developed this architectural folly for another reality and under a different set of conditions. We hope that if it is possible to conceive of a world in which *New Nightclub* does belong, then in some way, the space does become real.³

The scene is set at 7am as the night draws to a close; the lights are still on and the music still plays.

1. Our interviews with women who have participated in Wellington's nightlife reinforce our early research.
2. Prior to working on *New Nightclub*, Torre and Rose collaborated on a proposal for a new Women's History Museum for Washington D.C. They sought to create an alternative to a conventional 19th Century history museum based on collections of artefacts rather than on narratives challenging the inherited history of women.
3. After all, the history of feminism and queer activism has long argued that another reality is possible and only too slowly this is being realised in the world we live.





Interviews

Suzanne Tamaki

Suzanne Tamaki (Tuhoe, Te Arawa, Maniapoto) is a costume designer and the Events and Festivals Coordinator for Wellington City Council. She has a long personal and professional involvement in Wellington nightlife.

lightreading (lr): How would you describe your involvement with Wellington's nightlife?

Suzanne Tamaki (ST): At the moment I work in the City Arts and Events Team, I mainly do events and festivals. But I'm also a designer so I do a lot of fashion/costume stuff. So I spend a lot of time either in clubs, watching, dancing, inhabiting...Or I spend a lot of time in there working...So I'll be backstage or I'll have a show on, and it's either work-related [for the Council] or fashion-related... Which is when I'll be back stage dressing models, either in my own garments or I do a lot of work to promote Māori designers. My main emphasis is Māori fashion. So it could be a bunch of different designers' work as well, not just mine. Which is really, really, exciting! The only thing I hate about it is that I'm so busy working I never get to see the shows! That's why it's so good these days that everyone carries cameras...The way I get to experience the show is when they tag me in social media.

lr: Where would you put one of these events on?

ST: Most of the time it comes down to facilities that are available in the clubs...You need to have decent back space area...Especially for the number of models we tend to work with. Although, in saying that, we've also done shows in places where all we've had is a toilet to get changed in which can be really trying and sort of hilarious. The main thing we look for is a really nice green room space that has mirrors, water, power for hairdryers etc., good lighting. I've been in places where we've had one light bulb swinging on a rope...You don't want that. We don't work under those conditions anymore—ha! Those were the old days. A really good stage, good lighting, good sound is a must. One of the best shows I remember doing was—I called it *Anti-fashion*. I did a residency at Unitech and put on a show in a club that coincided with Auckland Fashion Week. The whole back

wall was covered in monitors. I had a video artist come in and he worked with my images and put together this big multimedia thing on the monitors behind the live show. It looked really spectacular. A double hit of art.

Ir: How long have you lived in Wellington?

ST: I was born here and brought up here. Then I moved to Auckland in the eighties for about 10 years and then I came back.

Ir: Over the time you've been involved in the Wellington scene in this professional capacity or just partying do you think that there's a distinctive way to characterise the nightlife down here?

ST: Wellington's always had a grungy feel about it. It's always quite gritty. The Southern Cross had a public bar where all the gangs used to drink—you don't have that any more, you don't really have public bars and lounge bars. You could wear patches and jandals and bare feet in the public bar and that was acceptable, but you couldn't get away with that in the lounge bar. Now it's just blended into this one big room. It was great, bars would have a really rough room and a posh room, and I'd always end up in the rough room because that's where all the fun was. It was loud and partying. There were always loads of Māoris in there. And good music and really cheap drinks. And there'd always be a fight, but you'd just stay out of the way.

And I guess that grungy, gritty thing has permeated into lounge culture, like if you look again at Southern Cross, it's kind of hippy, almost...Still earthy, grounded...We don't get too elitist, I guess. Even the Matterhorn is still a little bit real. It's like glamping...You might have a fancy caravan but you're still in the motor camp!

Ir: What's been the most memorable thing for you about Wellington's nightlife?

ST: One of the most memorable things for me was **Chips**, a nightclub back in the eighties. You used to get issued chips and that's what you'd use to exchange for drinks. And that was Frankie Stevens who managed that place. It was up the top of Plimmer Steps, I think. You'd get your

chips and he was such a smooth guy. It was like walking onto a cruise ship...He was like the guy who meets you at the door. He was always in a suit and very suave. And in his deep voice he'd say something like, "hello Suzanne, good to see you tonight". You'd get this personal welcome from the owner of the bar and you'd feel like a VIP. And he'd give you your handful of chips.

Ir: So you would pay for the chips? Did he do it for the novelty?

ST: You'd pay for the chips. Yeah, partly for the novelty but hey, probably also to get around liquor licensing rules too. You'd buy chips so you didn't put any money across the bar. I didn't care, I just liked that I got my chips and I liked the personal approach. And always really good music and people dancing—I miss that. People don't dance any more. A few do at **Laundry** but all the other clubs will be playing really great music but people won't dance until they're really drunk. So I find myself dancing alone a lot.

Ir: What's your favourite music to dance to?

ST: Still disco. It'll always be disco.

Ir: You mentioned Frankie Stevens, who were the other big names in the scene (from any time you remember)?

ST: In Auckland I loved bars like **The Staircase** that had loads of drag queens there. And I loved the glamour. They always dressed up, always made an effort, and looked absolutely stunning and spectacular, above and beyond... The clubs would play a lot of disco and they had a disco ball. When disco is playing people seem happier, it's quite uplifting. Maybe it's because the songs have words, and everyone knows the words. I just remember the glamour and the glitz. It was like magic, especially when the mirror balls were going and the light was bouncing off the drag queens' sequins. They became big mirror balls.

Two other personalities in Wellington are Scotty and Mel from **S&M's**. They remind me of Frankie Stevens in the way they always welcome people in, they enjoy their job, they will join in. It makes such a big difference. And I love

their bar. Red velvet ropes and curtains, chandeliers...
But it's like an alley. It's just a tiny alley that gets
absolutely packed.

Ir: Is this how you became interested in fashion?

ST: I was already in fashion. I used to dress a lot of the drag performers. I got into fashion because my mum was a seamstress and used to make all my clothes as a girl. But then I got away from the mainstream, and started making my own stuff, which is more militant and political, talking about the landscape here in New Zealand. But I still love glamour, so I do a lot of styling too. I do a lot of theatre, I dress a lot of bands. I loved the drag queens because they're so fantastic, surreal. It's almost like you could be anything you wanted to be. Nothing was forbidden, it's like Alice In Wonderland, but if you go down into the rabbit hole and underneath it's all sequins, glitter, make up and big hair. Surreal.

So in terms of personalities it was Bertha and Buckwheat who used to host at **Staircase**. Bust'Op, she used to do a little bit of hostessing. Another one of the standout drag queens in Auckland was Pussy Galore. Those are really Auckland memories. Wellington-wise I don't really remember many of the personalities. I remember we used to go clubbing at **Claire's** nightclub and I used to go with my hairdresser. I always remember we'd spend hours and hours getting ready. So once again it comes back to glamour and fashion. We all lived in Upper Hutt and it was such a hole, and we'd go into Wellington—the big city! As soon as you came along the harbour toward Wellington and you'd see the lights...We'd squeal when we saw the lights because we knew we'd made it. It always looked like magic, like Christmas. The city lights bounced off the water and you're transported into this other world. And we weren't in Upper Hutt any more, we were these glamorous creatures coming to Wellington to ponce around in a club and pretend we were somebody for—two hours—then back to reality.

Ir: Was there any specific night that sticks in your mind as a time when you might have met someone who was particularly influential or interesting, or had a conversation that has shifted your thinking somehow?

ST: In truth nearly every time I go out it's like that. You get into a club and there'll be someone I'm looking for or some idea that I'm trying to get and you always meet someone interesting, who's doing something that aligns with what you're doing or is just doing something really exciting. I don't know if that's just the alcohol. I carry around a notebook and so the next day I'll look at my notebook to see what I wrote but half the time I can't read my writing. But I know at the time I had this fantastic idea, a brilliant light bulb moment and the next day it's terrible because I can't read my writing. I think that people are relaxed in clubs and they don't have their guard up, and because they've had a few drinks the ideas flow and they're less cautious about sharing information. I can't think of any particular moment but almost every week I have an 'a-ha' moment with somebody in a club.

Ir: So you're still out every week?

ST: It's my job and I'm always looking for what's going on—who's the band, what's the show, who's around. So you need to get out and about. You can follow it on Facebook or read about it but it's not the same as experiencing it.

Ir: How do you think the scene here has come about, how did it form? Maybe the grittiness you mentioned?

ST: I reckon it was that 'number eight wire' mentality; they wanted to make it happen so they just had to do it. And it wasn't that they were breaking rules but they were making them up as they went along. Wellingtonians were so keen to get out and do something that it didn't matter about the weather. If there was a band playing they went out to see them. I was listening to the news this morning and there's going to be 100km winds today...And I was like, "Oh, it's just another Monday. Maybe I'll wear my gloves. I'm ready, bring it Wellington!". We're hardy, so the elements don't

put us off at all. We just wrap up and under all those layers of hats and scarves there'll be a glamorous outfit waiting to emerge. We just want to party.

Ir: The project we are working on addresses the way architecture helps or hinders the atmosphere in social situations, so I was wondering if you have any thoughts about how the built environment can impact on social dynamics?

ST: I think that on lots of levels we like to watch. We like watching people. Say for example at **The Staircase** there was a mezzanine floor where you could have your drink and lean on the rail and watch everybody below and you could see people coming and going. I always liked the clubs that had chairs and tables upstairs too. So you could be removed from it. You're not in the middle of the tank but you could see what the social interactions were... Who had come into the room, what everyone was wearing, who was dancing with who...

St John's bar here, on the waterfront, used to have one too, and there's also that sleazy thing where the people upstairs were also the ones maybe doing drugs or having a sneaky joint. But you were still above the maddening crowd. So I like the ideas of stairs, and even the queues of people up the stairs made it seem like a fashion thing, where everyone was lined up and was looking.

Ir: I'm interested in the idea of the queue—it doesn't seem simply that the club is too full...

ST: They do it for the people driving past so they think they need to get into that club. It's all about the hype.

Ir: Do you think it builds a sense of anticipation for the people who are in the queue as well—or just frustration?

ST: It's a social thing, because I can remember when we had to queue, and it'd just be like, oh well we had to queue, so we'd just enjoy it and talk to each other and wait until we got in. Maybe things have changed now...We're not as socially kind anymore, it's just 'I want it now'. Maybe I was obnoxious too when I was young, I don't remember.

I think I just had interesting friends around me so we'd still have a good time being in the queue. Maybe [in your nightclub design] you could have people in queues but the queues are like a series of cubicles, so it's also like a window display.

Ir: I was talking to some others yesterday about Ivy and the car park/smoking cage. We were thinking about the politics of having a smoking area tucked out of sight like that...And we were speculating that it might be because it's still not entirely safe to be dressed in drag out on the street. Maybe it's kinder to provide people a way to have a cigarette—

ST:—while still being sheltered. I really like it that they do that. I don't smoke but it annoys me that the smokers have to brave the elements. I think it's unfair. I think the same owners had the **Garden Bar** on Courtenay Place and there was a balcony and there was one bar upstairs and you could still smoke in it even after the legislation changed. I like that renegade thing.

Ir: A couple of bars down that area have been in legal trouble over the past two years over letting people smoke in covered areas...

ST: Yeah, and it's still in an outside area but covered on too many sides...I think it's just going to get worse. It's going to wreck the clubs.

Ir: Is there any other way the architecture or built environment might reflect what's happening politically or socially?

ST: You might think about socio-economic groups, like people who, for example, vote National, aren't likely to be going to an underground warehouse party.

Ir: So would you say that having an underground warehouse party is implicitly excluding certain groups of people?

ST: Definitely. Like over the weekend there was a punk gig at the **Newtown Bowling Club**. One, who's going to go to a punk gig. But two, who even knows where **Newtown Bowling Club** is! I loved the idea that these guys would do it in a bowling club. I'm actually a member of the

Newtown Bowling Club and I laughed because I went along to the gig and there were all the old Koro who were all members, and they're there because it's where they always go, and it's cheap beer and what else would they do? And all of a sudden they've got this wall of noise with these punks playing. And they're not going to leave, they've got nowhere else to go. And their faces were absolutely stunned, listening to this wall of sound but they still stayed there. I don't know, maybe if you force people into those positions where they have to listen to music or interact with a whole other crowd what could happen? Probably nothing.

Ir: Are there any other memorable interiors that you haven't already mentioned?

ST: The other thing I pay attention to is the toilets. I've been into some toilets and they are plush. **Bangalore Polo Club** has good toilets. The other thing that **Bangalore** has that I adore is a red carpet that runs from the front door right through to the back, up some stairs. And I love the idea of having a show in there and lining people up on the side of the carpet, with a band at the top, and having the models parade in and back out onto Courtenay Place. So the street turns into part of the catwalk. That'd be a dream come true to do that. You might have picked it up that I like the idea of glamour, fashion and performance... Surrealism. Taking people on a journey.

Ir: Other than Courtenay place, are there any other areas where there was a lot of nightlife activity?

ST: I really loved Eddie's. It was down an alleyway and up some stairs. The alley and the stairs always smelled like piss, but Eddie's was just a big pool hall. The interior was all graffiti, tags, whatever, it didn't matter. It looked really underground even though it was upstairs. And you could smoke in there. I like the idea of that, it's like you're breaking the rules, it's like a garage party but you're in a bar. All the people who would go there were edgy and arty. I think he closed last year, it was a shame. He'd be open until really late and you'd get locked in. I like the idea of a

lock-in. That was a great space. And S&M's again... the lounge, boudoir feel.

Ivy's Garden Bar, I think it was where **Calendar Girls** is now. There were four different bars so you could go to different levels—I love the idea of that, that you could be downstairs in the dance room, go upstairs to the smoking area, out the back to the gay room. I didn't go there, it's just another closet. I loved **Electric Avenue** with the cheesy eighties music and they played music videos from my youth that I'd never had the chance to see and we had really limited access to them. And upstairs was just a private room, a mezzanine floor.

Ir: I was looking at a documentary about the punk scene on the terrace in the eighties, which revolved around two flats... Was that before your time?

ST: I'd left Wellington and moved to Auckland by then so I missed a lot of that scene. But I remember coming down and going to a party there and also on Cuba Street on Tonks Avenue. Up on Tonks there used to be a lot of musos and artists. They used to have a lot of parties down there—live jams. The houses weren't condemned but no one was supposed to be living in them, people were squatting, but they were all really good artists. Lots of drugs actually. You asked what Wellington was built on, I think Cuba street was built on those Tonk Street tenants. A lot of them had shops down Cuba Street or they were supporting the shops, it was a really supportive community, they all looked after each other and they all knew each other. A lot of the artists who lived on Tonks were supplying the shops with their clothes...They were selling things through Misdemeanor [a shop] etc. It was edgy and quirky but very uniquely Wellington. As soon as they pulled down all of those buildings Cuba lost its artiness and became mainstream. And now the punk scene has moved to **Valhalla** and the **Newtown Bowling Club**. Maybe that's because they needed to find an affordable venue.

Ir: Nightclubs are said to have the ability to contribute to counter-cultural movements. Do you think this could be said of Wellington's nightlife?

ST: Not as much now as it used to be. We've turned into a real nanny-state. You can't even smoke cigarettes, never mind anything else. But I do remember some of the clubs used to have rooms that the managers would take you to do coke or speed or smoke pot. And I'm sure that those rooms still exist. But I like the idea that there are these areas hidden away. Nearly every club that I go there is another room to be honest...And they'll take you there if you want to go or they know you well enough, or if you're into it. But I don't know if it contributes to counter-culture behavior because it is so secretive, you wouldn't want everyone knowing that's what you were getting up to...A lot of the people who can afford to do drugs have good jobs as well. So it's not the same grungy "let's go into the backroom and do needles" anymore. It's "let's go into the backroom and do coke". Stuff that will cost you lots of money. So I don't know it is about counter-culture. It's maybe more elitist. It doesn't contribute to a scene because it's so secretive... You'd have to be careful who sees the activity. But the other thing I think has come about, since people have to go outside to smoke cigarettes...In the old days your whole table would leave to go have a joint...Now everyone just thinks you're going out to smoke a cigarette...So, thanks! At least they've made that easier.

And it's so expensive to drink, and that's why they talk about 'pre-loading'. But that's driven people like the punks to Newtown. Arlo Edwards was living in a warehouse in Newtown with a bunch of other guys and they used to organise bands to come down from Auckland. It was \$5 on the door, BYO alcohol and there was a bar. I'm sure they didn't have a licence. But it was such a great crowd, really young and the bands were really good but it was just someone's grungy old warehouse. So much more life and excitement than the clubs who'd spent millions of dollars doing them up...People would go to them and be bored. They'd sit there and wait for something to happen but no one would want to make it happen.

**Ir: Do you think these clubs and venues are/were safe for you?
Did you ever feel unsafe?**

ST: I think that a lot of those public bars that I went to were really unsafe. But I guess that was part of the appeal, the risk was part of the excitement. You know like, “oooh I’m hanging out with the rough crowd”. Nobody liked me doing it, they’d all ask me “Suzanne, what are you doing hanging out with that lot?”. But it was interesting! Different and exciting. It’s not the same as everything else. But generally you’re pretty safe in the clubs now. They have good security, the bar staff are really mindful. But then I read recently that someone’s been going around spiking drinks again, so that’s not a good thing for people, especially females who go out alone, which I do a lot but I have never had my drink spiked. I’ve saved a few girls who have had their drinks spiked. One time I found a girl who was passed out in a car park in the pouring rain, lying in the gutter. I managed to get out of her where she lived, and took her home, poor thing. It’s quite commonplace. I see girls passed out all the time. We’re talking about safety, maybe I’m safe because I’m really mindful, maybe I’ve been around so long I know how to take care of myself. But I see girls half-dressed and vomiting or passed out. Maybe it’s not safe. Maybe they’re not well looked after...They get themselves into a state and then the bars will kick them out and leave them. Just desert them, and maybe they’ve become separated from their friends somehow.



Sally Thomson

Sally Thomson (b.1969) was one of the owners and managers of Mighty Mighty a popular club/venue/ bar on Cuba St, Wellington that ran from 2006–2014. She currently lives in Melbourne.

Ir: So, what was your experience of running Mighty Mighty?

ST: I'll give you a real brief history. I was working at **Bar Bodega**. You know that place?

I was working at **Bodega** when, the guys who owned **Matterhorn** decided to open up **Mighty Mighty** next door... [this] was their fun bar, 'baby child', compared to the serious restaurant. So then some of those guys came and approached me at **Bodega**. So I started working as a bar manager [at **Mighty Mighty**] and pretty much the rest is history. I stayed for the whole time **Mighty** was open and it was a huge part of my life. Over the years as the different owners experienced change in their lives, moved to different cities, opened new businesses and their journeys took them in different directions, I ended up being the last person involved actually living in the city. Amazingly, and very joyously, at the very end for the final two weeks of the greatest parties EVER, everyone came back from wherever they were living and we finished together.

Ir: So how long were you running it for? I remember going to Mighty Mighty myself so...

ST: It started 2006/2007. I think 2006 anyway. So I remember walking upstairs when it was still a building site, and you had to be careful you didn't die on the stairs. There was no bar, there was nothing! There was just an empty space with masking tape on the floor, where the bar maybe would be. And you kind of had to use your mega-imagination and...Yeah we closed it about seven and a half years after we had opened it.

Ir: People were pretty sad when it closed down.

ST: Yeah. I was pretty sad you know...I did it, and I was pretty sad. I think that it was a pinnacle. You know how some things just kind of happen at a time and come

together. And for me it was amazingly free and creative and an awesome place. And it took lots of work but we had so much fun. All the staff who worked there—you know there is an intense [sense of]: ‘We’re a Mighty family’. And that stayed together and no matter where you meet up with anyone, you are like AAHHHHH! [laughs]. You know, it was a pretty incredible place—and the music that was happening at the time...and the energy. It was a perfect confluence, like a perfect storm. It became really important to a lot of people, and even though it doesn’t exist anymore you are able to think about it and just realise how good it was. There were so many good things about it.

Ir: Good vibes?!

ST: Well, like good vibes—welcoming, a creative free space.

You know, so now I am living in Melbourne and...Looking back to Mighty...Comparing it...You could come and sit at the bar. Whether you would be female or male. You know now if I go to Melbourne places by myself, it’s not so. Maybe I haven’t broken the scene...Maybe it’s harder to feel [pauses]—you can feel very alienated in a large group. Mighty tried to make people feel welcome and part of the ‘big ol’ show’, and fun.

Ir: That’s how I remember it. I lived in Auckland but I used to visit friends and go to gigs there. What did you think Mighty did to make it feel so welcoming?

ST: Well, I don’t know [pause]. I think the space itself was interesting. I hired some really amazing people...A very awesome group of eclectic characters who got what the place was about. Essentially it’s like a school hall where everyone’s gone on a big crazy party, like having a party in your own house, except there is a band there and there are people serving drinks...That’s what we were aiming for, you know? It wasn’t about who you were or whether you were really cool or if you had—“you know but I’m like, so rich!” or whatever. It was genuinely how you present as a person. If you come in and you have an open attitude and you were genuinely respectful to the staff and if you

just want to have fun, like basically—“No dicks allowed!” No one was allowed to be [a dick] actually, now I think of it. Very rarely, occasionally, there were some fights. It wasn't Pollyanna-land. But the main thing was that people should be able to enjoy themselves regardless of how they dressed, what their agenda was and what they were doing. And if you didn't like it, then you'd need to take that attitude somewhere else because everyone at Mighty was just having a good time. Dudes weren't allowed to hit on women. And women weren't allowed to hit on guys and make them feel uncomfortable...It's two-way. Just leave everyone else alone and have some fun, maybe chat, meet some new friends, go for a dance, eat a toasted sandwich, have a good time.

Ir: When you were setting up Mighty Mighty, did you have these kinds of ideas in mind...When you were left running this 'baby child', what were you hoping to create and why?

ST: Well I think Sam Chapman, Richard Neame and Christian McCabe were the ones who designed the idea of it. I came on much later. Sam and Christian wanted to create a special sort of safe space...Sam now is involved in *Golden Dawn*, in Auckland with another business partner... And the *Sherwood* in Queenstown. He is a pretty interesting, smart, crazy, human. And I still work with Christian, here in Melbourne. They are really incredible people. They didn't just leave me with the 'baby child'. It was definitely a few years into it. So [Sally had influence on]...The type of gigs that played. It just grew on itself, and the people. Another thing that was really amazing were the people who went there, they took ownership of it as their place. That was what that we wanted, people have to come and feel, “Yeah, this is my kind of place to hang out.” This kinda clubhouse. People would go there regularly, and their friends would come [from] out of town. And they'd show people around [the club] and say, “and then there is this, and then there is this”. That was really good because you knew people felt part of it...I think it was in February that we announced we were going to be closing with the date, the end of May [to close was] set in stone.

...Some hard-core regulars who became like staff. You know they would be there and you [became] such good friends with people. And they felt a massive sense of ownership. And there were all [the] people that would come intermittently, and they would have a connection with the place. Kind of as if it started out with intent and then it grew organically.

Ir: So why did Mighty Mighty end?

ST: Well it ended for lots of reasons. There had been the earthquake, and [building] strengthening came into [the decision]. There was also the question of; do we want to keep doing this...With enough time to get a lease? Or do we actually want to just do something daring and go—okay, that is it for us—rather than keep it. So it is always going to be this special thing and everyone gets to move on and do something different. Some people just keep going on and on. It felt like a good time. We made the decision far enough in advance that it enabled us to plan an amazing last few months with really good gigs and a countdown. And it felt different to close a business...rather than lose interest and be tired. I never wanted to turn into the grumpy, ‘Oh gawd, another day...!’ I did sort of a self-check quite often. Do I really enjoy looking after people? Do I enjoy curating, being part of enabling their fun and having a good time?

Ir: And you are continuing to do that in Melbourne? Did you move to Melbourne after Mighty Mighty closed?

ST: I still work in hospitality...I am now working for my friend, as his personal assistant, well, my boss, one of the other owners of **Mighty Mighty** who owns two restaurants here in Melbourne. Yeah, so we are working together again. He started a wine distribution company so I am working for that and I am sort of doing some assistant work for Patrick Sullivan [inaudible]. But sometimes I miss talking to people!

It’s weird doing a day job for the first time in my life at my rather extreme age. It’s strange to get used to. I’m really

glad it's also in hospitality because I have always been able to say, yes! I do enjoy facilitating a good time for people. It makes me happy. Even when I was working in restaurants, you would get a table and it made me smile, makes me happy to see them have a good time and when they leave they are happy. I guess that is what it is all about.

Ir: So you now work in the daytime after working nights at Mighty Mighty—what is it about the nighttime that allows a space that is different from in the day?

ST: This is a massive generalisation but I think most people work or they study during the day, or whatever. I think that for most people that going out somewhere social, it is a relaxing time or a wind-down after their day. So if you are dealing with people in a lunch shift, it is different from dealing with people at nighttime. During the day people are more business-focused and 'hurry-scurry' and at night it is...“Oh, sweet, I don't have to be there till tomorrow, now I can listen to some music, which makes me relax, and it feels good inside me, and I can go and talk to people, 'shoot-shit' with people or tell jokes or play the pinball, or just generally chill out.” I think that people are generally freer at nighttime just because they don't have to be so many places.

Ir: Yes, time is different?

ST: Yeah, we had music every night we and also had DJs every night, after the live music had happened. I think people feel music. It sort of makes you move, or makes you either, like sad or happy, or makes you laugh. Or I suppose if you are really into like RAWWWGH [laughs], you know it's all of those feelings.

Ir: It heightens your feelings?

ST: The music is the one thing that I sooo miss. I have always been pretty good at appreciating what I've got when I have it. I knew that there might not be another time in my life where people are doing sound check and you're getting a private little performance. Quite a few times it was wow!

I appreciate live music. I really miss having live music in my day, every day, of my life. That's one thing that I have identified as OWWWW!

Ir: With the live music you didn't know what it was going to be like every night because people are performing and those things are so in the moment—

ST: Yes! Sometimes there was music that I loved and other times that I was like nah, not really my thing. However they are sooo good. You know you can really appreciate different styles of music, the skill of the people playing it, the honesty and intensity and that whole time there was a really good feel at the time. There was—but maybe not at the moment? I don't know though as I haven't been back for a while—there was a really good community. Honestly the thing that really made **Mighty** was the performance and the staff. The staff were incredible.

Ir: Were there any staff that were particularly important to Mighty Mighty?

ST: Oh, look there were lots of them. Everyone added their own thing, and there were some real standouts for me. It's really hard to answer this question!

Ir: Yes, that's fine! You don't need to answer it! That's an answer in itself. It makes sense that you can't single anyone out after hearing you speak about the sense of family and that close network. I'm interested to know, how were people trained? One thing that I picked up in my own experience is that there are different energies created by combinations of staff members.

ST: Yes, energy is a really good way to think of it. You can't expect a place to stay static. People would say, "It's not like it used to be!" No shit, Sherlock! It's not! You know everything that happens is there at that time and everything can roll and grow and change.

The staff we started with was not the staff we ended with. Over the time we were open we had 120 staff members! Because I used to make their staff user number each time someone new started. Some people stay, some people made

indelible marks on the place and as a group of people, people's lives change. You know people might move to another city, or they might get a partner or they might have children, or just all those sort of things influence those things. There are pockets of absolute awesomeness, and then you would get a new group of energy, just ebbs and flows. And it was the same with the customers: you can't expect the same people to be coming to a place with the same frequency six years later. I thought it was really important to accept. Their priorities change. They move, change jobs, they buy houses. Da. Da. Da. Da. Da. I always thought it was really important with new customers not to be, "Oh my god, you are not like one of our customers!" But to be welcoming, teach them how to 'be' while they are there...Just teach people the culture so you know how you expect to be treated. So that keeps going. Otherwise it grinds to a halt.

I always hired people on the basis of who they are, or who they appear to be and on the basis of a gut feeling...And I always had a feeling. You know Sally Rees was a sound tech the whole time when we were open and she is one of the few female working sound techs.

And she's amazing and I think she faced [pause]... That whole thing of being a woman and being in charge of what you are doing. A lot of people, consciously or unconsciously, don't expect it. And it's like "while I'm doing this, you have to listen to me", and that was the way we did it there.

I would get in electricians and plumbers there and if I had one of my male co-workers with me then they would instantly defer to the dude. The duuude didn't call you, I called you! And I'm the one that is going to be making the decision about how we fix what's broken, and what we are going to pay for it. It's real good if you are going to talk to me! [laughs]. And I had lots of great female duty managers who 'got' the place and ran it really well when I wasn't there or when I was there. I found that **Mighty** was, well because I wanted it to be, a place that where you were you, rather than your gender. So if you were doing a really

good job, and you got the place, and you followed up on details, and you were interested on taking on responsibility then—Because you know there are a lot of women in hospitality and they don't necessarily...I think this is changing a lot. However they don't necessarily get the jobs of responsibility.

Ir: I remember the walls from Mighty Mighty were bright blue?

ST: It's green! Green babe. So the end of the room which had the bar, it was bright green. Japanese Laurel actually! [Laughs] Bright green paint with side notes of watermelon. And then there was the hot pink velvet curtains in the front part of the room where the walls were bare wood.

Ir: That's right! How could I forget them! So colourful.

ST: All the stuff on the walls was amazing. The lights, the sign for the toilet, all those sorts of the things, that became so iconic. We had the wheel of death...So much fun happening in one place. I miss it a lot...

Ir: Oh! I'm making you sad! I am wondering how you can hold onto that energy of a place?

ST: Totally on your page in terms of—also when things are really special and require particular types of energy, you have got to have the energy for them.

Ir: Did you have a bouncer?

ST: We had some great bouncers! We didn't call them bouncers though, they were doormen. I know that sounds sort of 'hair-splitting' however we had a great community of doormen. They weren't bouncers. They were there if you needed them to be but they were the first people that people saw when they came to **Mighty**. So that was how we set the tone by having really lovely, awesome guys that we had chatting to people, rather than someone that was "Err, I.D., rah rah, you're too drunk", or whatever. They were the first part of the family you got to meet. We had such an amazing crew of doormen. And if I was in charge of the shift, with full confidence I could go over to whatever

was happening and say, no, you're leaving now, you can come back tomorrow night however today is over for you, you can't do that, that is not acceptable. And walk them down the stairs with full confidence that 'my brother's right beside me!' And that was amazing. They had our backs, they looked out for us, and if anything did go down then they just sorted it out. And then again they also kept an eye on Cuba St, because that can get pretty raucous from time to time. We had lots of different door people. The main—super amazing one—was Poppy. She did the door for years...that was where you paid your money to get in. And everyone was very good and colourful and interesting, drunk, crazy, bar dancing...

Ir: Were there times, that you kept going after the bar was closed? Were there lock-ins?

ST: NO! Never, haha. That would be against the licencing laws. No we would shut the bar and do cash-up but that didn't mean people wouldn't sit around after work and drink and sometimes some of the regulars would stay, but you know in order to get closed and finished, the lights really did have to come on. And just about everyone removed from the premises so that we could actually clean the bar. So you know finishing at three, by the time you got people out of there...By the time you have cleaned up it can get pretty late. But no crazy lock-ins. Some crazy mornings sometimes, as every group of people who works that hard should do.

Ir: How did you make the decision about the colour?

ST: That was again, Sam, Christian, Alistair Cox, the architect [their ideas were] crazy, circus, carnival—just fun. You know I'm sure there is some kind of science behind it; you walk in and it feels different. Your perceptions are like, "What the fuck!" Crazy perceptions, posters, the big pink curtains, palm trees in the middle of the floor and gold table cloths. And I think it was visually whoa! You knew this was a cue for—this is somewhere different! And whooa! This is whooa! This is exciting.

Ir: Yes, it is different. It is different from the black cube! Thank you so much for recounting all your experiences. It's been great hearing about the amazing thing you created.

ST: I just feel so lucky. My life is not over, okay?! But I'm sure that more amazing things are going to happen to me. However I think I will always look back and feel blessed to have been a part of **Mighty Mighty** and all that it was. There were some crazy times, incredible memories. A lot of people ask, "Are you going to open a **Mighty Mighty** here?" [On the one hand] I think I would like to be involved with things, but then I think nah. I don't think you should try and recreate the past because it was special—incredible artists, all the people that worked there, everything that made it what it was—and I feel incredibly lucky to have had that in my life. Some people never have that much fun in their life, sweet Jesus! That much fun I had in seven years, they don't even have in 70 years.

Ir: Even if you had the chance, even if you wanted to recreate it...You maybe wouldn't be able to anyway. The dynamics are different.

ST: Yeah totally, that's one of the things that I tried to understand. **Mighty** is not the same as it was. No, of course it's not. The world changes. How we communicate has changed in five years, the kind of news we are able to access [changes]. Life is changing at a relatively fast pace these days. And you have to go with it and embrace things.

I definitely don't want to make **Mighty Mighty** here. And lots of people have done, maybe I'm not part of the gang. However sometimes you find places where I'm not cool enough for school. And that's hopefully, something we tried really hard in **Mighty** [to not create the sense of]. Everyone [felt they] were always welcome. When a bunch of people have been coming for a long time, then it must seem cliquy. But that can't be helped because people have different relationships, different communities. What do you do with the new people? Do you just leave them wandering around the outside? Do you know how you can make them feel part of it?

Oh my God. I'm getting Sunday morning inspirational!
[laughs] "What did you do this morning?", "I had a
deep-and-meaningful with a person in Glasgow. It was
incredible man!"

Ir: [laughs] I think we can leave it there as I am going to go
to bed—it is 1:30am!

ST: You can have lots of colourful dreams!

Alison Laurie

Dr. Alison Laurie (b. 1941) Alison J. Laurie has mixed Māori and Pākehā ancestry. She was born in Wellington and grew up in Island Bay. She went to the many coffee bars in Wellington from the late 1950s, but otherwise didn't really participate in Wellington's nightlife before leaving for overseas in 1964. On her return in 1973 she was pleased to find that after the extension of licensing hours in 1967, that there were now a few pubs where women could go. However, lesbians felt the need for a club where they could dance together without onlookers and harassment. Alison was one of the founders of SHE, the Sisters for Homophile Equality, NZ's first lesbian organisation. Through SHE, the first lesbian club in Wellington, Club 41, was started by a group of four lesbians. This was the forerunner of many later clubs.

lightreading (lr): I have some general questions about Wellington and its nightlife and it'd be good to get your personal point of view about the histories.

Alison Laurie (AL): I don't know a lot about the nightlife these days.

lr: Why is that?

AL: Well I don't go running about at night anymore, no.

lr: When did you feel connected to nightlife, and what was memorable about Wellington's nightlife, in your experience?

AL: Well things change considerably, and when I was interested in nightlife, there wasn't really a great deal in Wellington. Certainly not for women. You have to remember that the licensing laws were very restrictive. So pubs closed at 6pm. They weren't open on Sundays and most pubs had no facilities where women could drink, or be there. Public bars were for men only, and a few hotels had a smaller bar, which was often called the 'cats' bar—the ladies' and escorts' bar. And in many of those places women couldn't even go into the ladies and escorts' bar on their own. This was supposedly to prevent prostitution—so it was highly restrictive. Also the drinks that you could buy in the ladies' and escorts' bar cost twice as much as

they cost in the public bar. I never had the experience of having to sit outside a bar in the car, but many of my friends did, because they would go for a drive with their mother and father on a Saturday, and their father would stop outside the pub, and he would go in, and he might come out with a shandy for the mother and some soft drinks for the children and they'd just all wait outside in the car. So New Zealand was very different in those times. The licensing laws changed in 1967 and opening hours were extended, and that meant that other kinds of pubs opened up with other kinds of lounge bars where women could come. Everything changed rapidly after that.

Coffee bars were very important. Many of them were started—I'm thinking in particular of the **Ca' d'Oro** coffee bar in Auckland, the **Harry Seresin Coffee House**, **Suzy's** in Wellington and other coffee bars around the country—they were started by European refugees fleeing from Europe, especially in the post World War II years. So New Zealand had the advantage of having coffee bars set up by people who came from places like Vienna, with extraordinarily good coffee and facilities to play chess... And the kind of things that came straight out of a highly cultured Europe. I think people forget that, the kind of culture that came into New Zealand after World War II. So the coffee bars were where we went. Both men and women could go, they were more congenial than the pubs, but the pubs shut a six o'clock anyway, so there was nothing else really. Some of the coffee bars did offer a bit of a secret drop of spirits in the coffee. That did happen.

Ir: I've read about people taking their own alcohol because women often weren't allowed to buy it.

AL: Well cabarets like **The Majestic Cabaret** didn't sell alcohol but held dances and events. I didn't go to any of those cabarets but it was known that some ladies would smuggle in a little flask in their stocking because the ladies were never searched. So that was how people could top up their glasses with something else. And in Auckland especially there were beer houses, which were illegal. Especially in Ponsonby and places like that there were

famous beer houses. And that would be someone who set up a beer house within her home and people could either buy alcohol there or they could bring it to drink there, and pay to get in. So it was like an illegal but informal pub.

Ir: You were saying that things changed when the licencing act changed?

AL: Yes that was in 1967. Some of the breweries were running challenges [to the existing act] from the early 1960s. And the challenge was based on the fact that if people had a meal at a hotel, they could buy alcohol to go with their meal. So hotels had dining rooms but the meals were quite expensive and not many people went there. That wouldn't be a place that people congregated. But a couple of the hotels—in particular the **Royal Oak** in Wellington, started a bistro and the bistro sold a meal, a very cheap meal, usually just a bit of rice with some sauce on it. And if people bought the meal then they could also buy alcohol, and this was a challenge to the licencing laws. So it was semi-legal and the brewery argued it in court and that was all part of what changed the licensing laws... Breweries were trying to extend the hours.

Ir: I've read a little about the formation of women-only clubs, like Club 41.

AL: Yes this comes later. The first such lesbian club [in New Zealand] started in Auckland and that was the **KG Club**. The K stood for Karangahape Road, which is where the club was, and also for Kamp Girls because remember that that was the term we used for ourselves, Kamp with a K. And in Australia as well. We didn't use the word gay until it was imported from America in the 1970s, so a lot of the culture in New Zealand was rather different. So the **KG Club** had started in Auckland in 1972 and there were kamp men's clubs...The **Dorian Society** had started in Wellington in the early 1960s but didn't allow women to go there. That wasn't unusual. There were a lot of men-only clubs, the **Wellington Club** etc. were men-only, and all the public bars were men-only, so gay men were no different from other men [in this respect]...People are a product of

their society, so the idea that you might have a mixed club and that women could come—oh no! The **Dorian**, through some years of its existence did allow women to come now and then, but they'd usually quickly ban them again and say, "Oh those lesbians, they all get drunk, we don't want them here." So it wasn't a mixed club. In Wellington the first women-only club starts in the beginning of 1974, and it was because we started the first lesbian organisation, which was called SHE (Sisters for Homophile Equality). It was very similar to what happened elsewhere. Lesbians in the women's movement began to feel that there was heterosexism in the women's movement. For example—you'd be having a demonstration to protest against the abortion laws—and lesbians would be holding signs that said something like 'Lesbians Support Abortion.' We would be asked, "Please don't have signs like that, everyone will think we're all lesbians!" So the women's movement was rather uneasy about open lesbianism, so lesbians didn't feel that comfortable, and that was true everywhere. And then gay liberation, although that was started by a lesbian, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, nonetheless as it began to attract more kamp men, it started to become uncomfortable for lesbians, because lesbians were expected to make the coffee, lick the stamps, do the typing. [They would say] "You're our women, you can help us." So lesbians in gay liberation began to feel that it'd be good to have something for women. Then there were the old kamp crowds who hadn't been involved in gay liberation or feminism, and they were around as well, wanting something else. So SHE started with all these elements.

Ir: Who were the members of SHE? Do you know them?

AL: Yes I was a founding member! It actually started in Christchurch, with a group of women there. And women came from the women's movement, some from gay liberation, and a lot of kamp women from the old networks. And to give Women's Refuge credit, they've never denied this...The first Women's Refuge in the country was started in Christchurch by SHE. So it wasn't only started by lesbians, it was started by a lesbian organisation. And originally started by women who thought, of course these

women will be leaving their marriages and they'll come out as lesbians!" So SHE was in Christchurch and we had contact with those women and we started a branch in Wellington. And some of our first objectives were, well, we needed a lesbian magazine, and the inspiration for that was a woman in Auckland who couldn't do it herself because she was a teacher and if people had found out that she was a lesbian she was frightened of losing her job, but she thought there should be a magazine, so she was the inspiration for that. So we met in my partner Edel's flat in Berhampore...And started the magazine, which was called *Circle*. And that name was suggested by our first cartoonist, Viv Jones. Her main cartoon character was Super Dyke. So we started the magazine and the idea was that it was a circle and it'd go around the earth and all these women together and that sort of thing. And soon we began to feel that we needed a meeting place. We held meetings at some rooms we borrowed in Hill Street but we wanted something of our own. And we'd been thinking about a club, and Auckland had the *KG*, so we thought it'd be good to have a club too.

So we had a SHE meeting and Diana Sands and I said we'd look for some premises. So we phoned Carmen Rupe and went to see her on a wet Sunday afternoon, and Carmen said that she owned some empty premises at 41 Vivian Street but the lease had to be purchased with all the chattels. \$4000—that was a lot of money at the time. We went back to the meeting and four of the women said they'd each put up \$1000, so there was the money. Shirley Smith did the legal work for free. She was a wonderful feminist lawyer and left-winger in Wellington. The premises were purchased. Those four women were Marilyn Johnson, Liz Hutton, Jan MacFarlane and Porleen Simmons. They were the four founders, and ran the club through to the late 1970s. Well the club—like many clubs—you couldn't get a liquor license, so there was a semi-legal way that people ran these things...People purchased tickets so then you're not selling alcohol you're selling a ticket, and you could exchange your ticket for alcohol. And it ran perfectly well for some years like that.

The club was initially women-only but of course there were always men trying to hang around. Once the licencing laws changed there were other pubs you could meet at, the **Royal Oak**, in the bars there, and there were other pubs too where lesbians met. That'd been going on since women could meet at pubs, and even earlier than that. There were a few of these ladies' and escorts' bars where women and lesbians did try to meet. But there was always the question with these places, there would be straight men hanging around who were deeply fascinated by lesbians. And the interesting thing about that—people who have studied pornography like the Office of the Classification of Film and Literature, will tell you that a lot of heterosexual pornography has an obligatory lesbian scene in it. So there are a lot of men who are extremely fascinated by lesbianism. So there were always men hanging around saying, "I'd like you to come home and meet my wife", or "my wife wants to try it". Probably absolute lies. [They would say] "Won't you come and have a threesome with my wife and I?" It was always very annoying to have that kind of thing happen. And the club was [eventually] named lesbian-only. I think because there were women who had boyfriends waiting outside in cars...Women who identified as bisexual. And I think that women found the idea that there were men waiting outside in cars very uncomfortable. So after a while it did become lesbian-only.

lr: Did you see that as part of a wider women's separatist movement?

AL: When we talk about separatism what one has to understand is that men had been extremely separatist—right from the beginning of European colonisation! It's interesting that in some parts of the country, first-wave feminists and also coming into the early 20th Century, women's clubs began in country areas, so Nelson had the **Nelson Women's Club**, Wellington had the **Pioneer Women's Club**...So they were places where women could go and meet. And that's because those other types of clubs were men-only. In fact I think the **Wellington Club** [which was men-only at the time] had a bit of a problem... And that's what changed things. Coming right into quite

recent history when suddenly the Governor General was a woman, so of course she'd have to become a member! It was based on all of those exclusive Men's Clubs in England, the same kind of model. The whole idea of men-only bars...Even after the extension of licencing, actions needed to be taken to liberate the public bars. [This was achieved] by women going there [en masse]—these were big events! Highly opposed by men, who said they needed to be somewhere without all those women.

Ir: In terms of the way that Club 41 ran, were there rules set up? You've said that it went from being women-only to lesbian-only... How else would you characterise the venue?

AL: There were always worries about violence breaking out. Because New Zealanders generally, especially in those early years—when people were drinking there could be arguments. Porleen Simmons, in particular, was very good at quelling any arguments that she noticed starting...If she heard raised voices, people having a disagreement, she was very good at settling everybody down. So it really was a nice place, there was dancing, a little bit of food...

Ir: Was the club used for any other events? Meetings, book launches...

AL: No, but SHE continued meeting there.

Ir: Why did SHE end?

AL: It went on for a few years and then the energy faded... But *Circle* magazine continued for a long time, until the mid-80s...And then lots more lesbian newsletters began all around the country, and the explosion of women's publishing...New Women's Press started in Auckland, and in Wellington Herstory Press, were very important in women's publishing. For a while they published *Circle* magazine and in time then began to do other kinds of publications. So that explosion of magazines, newsletters... They were very important in terms of having information... And soon bookshops. And again we see Porleen Simmons, who runs one of the first women's bookshops.

And there was a Lesbian Centre that began later in the 1970s, in Boulcott Street. Once **Club 41** folded there were many other clubs that came. There were clubs for a number of years successively with different women running them.

Ir: Why did Club 41 close?

AL: Those running it had come to an end of wanting to do that. And then there were clubs run by collectives, in Wigan Street, there was a club there, and there was another club on a different part of Vivian Street. The last one was on Cuba Street. **Our Place**, it was called.

Ir: And do you think the nightclub was important to the creation of that community?

AL: Having safe meeting places was important. It helped women identify themselves as lesbian, be prepared to be out as lesbian, be prepared to be open about their relationships...Developing a lesbian community was very important. Lesbians were more able to simply live our lives. And then eventually with things like the civil union legislation and marriage legislation, so that relationships were recognised and respected. All that is all part of a whole, that—instead of just having compulsory heterosexuality, lesbians were actually able to live as lesbians. Having a lesbian affair is different from being able to live as a lesbian, to live with your partner, to set up a home together. Those sort of things require you firstly to be able to be economically independent of men, and also that you have the confidence to do that in a society that isn't going to persecute you or treat you badly. So everything fits together. It's all important.

The Women's Place bookshop [that came along also became very important. There was a hugely developing lesbian music scene with singers like Alix Dobkin. So that all starts happening, and the Amazons' Softball Team, which Porleen Simmons co-founded. She turns up everywhere, starting so many things! And we need to remember, too, that *Circle* magazine, in the beginning we sold it to everybody, because we wanted to get it into the hands of women who might come out as lesbians. Porleen

in particular, would even be selling to men, she'd be going along the street saying "Do you live with a woman? Buy this for her.". The magazine was openly sold.

Ir: Can you remember what the interior of Club 41 looked like... The actual space?

AL: It was quite nicely decorated because the chattels had been part of what was purchased, so it had sort of goldy, dark red decor. There was a jukebox, which was very popular. The jukebox was important, and the music...

Ir: Were there tables, a bar, people working behind the bar...?

AL: There were lesbians behind the bar. It was small, there were tables and a dance floor. It felt like a very very safe space. There would have been some sofas, tables and chairs. I think there's a collective memory...I think there are other people who'd be better at describing the space than I can. But I think everybody would remember.

Ir: Did you hold the meetings in the evenings or during the daytime?

AL: We held the meetings in the evenings—we would've been at work!

Ir: In the feminist circles that I exist [in the UK] , we are looking back at the 1970s, reading about how consciousness-raising groups were formed, for example. I'm interested in your perspective on the current state of feminism in New Zealand—it is a very different political situation but there are still issues.

AL: Yes. Well, I think what's happened...Third-wave feminism has developed as a kind of 'fun feminism', based on individuality, and in that it has a lot in common with neoliberal economics. We get right away from community and into the clutches of Margaret Thatcher who said 'there's no such thing as society'. So solutions are individual, there's a very weird identity politics and the belief that solutions are individual. So [following this line of thought], economically, people choose to be poor, and if they'd made different decisions they could be rich, and

other nonsense. So in 'fun feminism' you could make any kind of individual decision and that'll liberate you. And it moves away from an understanding of institutional racism or institutional sexism...And these are things in society, they're not just individual little bits of discrimination. Third wave feminists emphasise hate speech and this sort of thing without actually looking at structures which prevent equality. The structures in society which prevent women being equal, or which prevent lesbians and gay men from achieving equality within that society. So I think third wave feminism is a kind of liberal feminism and those are liberal solutions, which are very much to the right wing, and they are neoliberal individualism. It's the same as the Employment Contracts Act..."Oh you don't need a trade union, you can have an individual contract with your employer."...Well can't you just!? So everything goes backward. It's exactly what the right wing and what Chomsky calls the 'opulent minority' have always wished. To actually stop people organising in mass movements. Break them up into being little individuals and they'll all have an individual solution and then the opulent powers can control them.

That's why the development of lesbian communities was very important. And an understanding of heterosexism as being an institutionalised dynamic—not simple discrimination or that someone said something nasty to you, but actual societal discrimination which prevents things like access to employment, housing, goods and services. Some of the most important work that has been done was through human rights legislation...Establishing human rights to prevent the worst excesses.

lr: We're not doing very well keeping up with that...

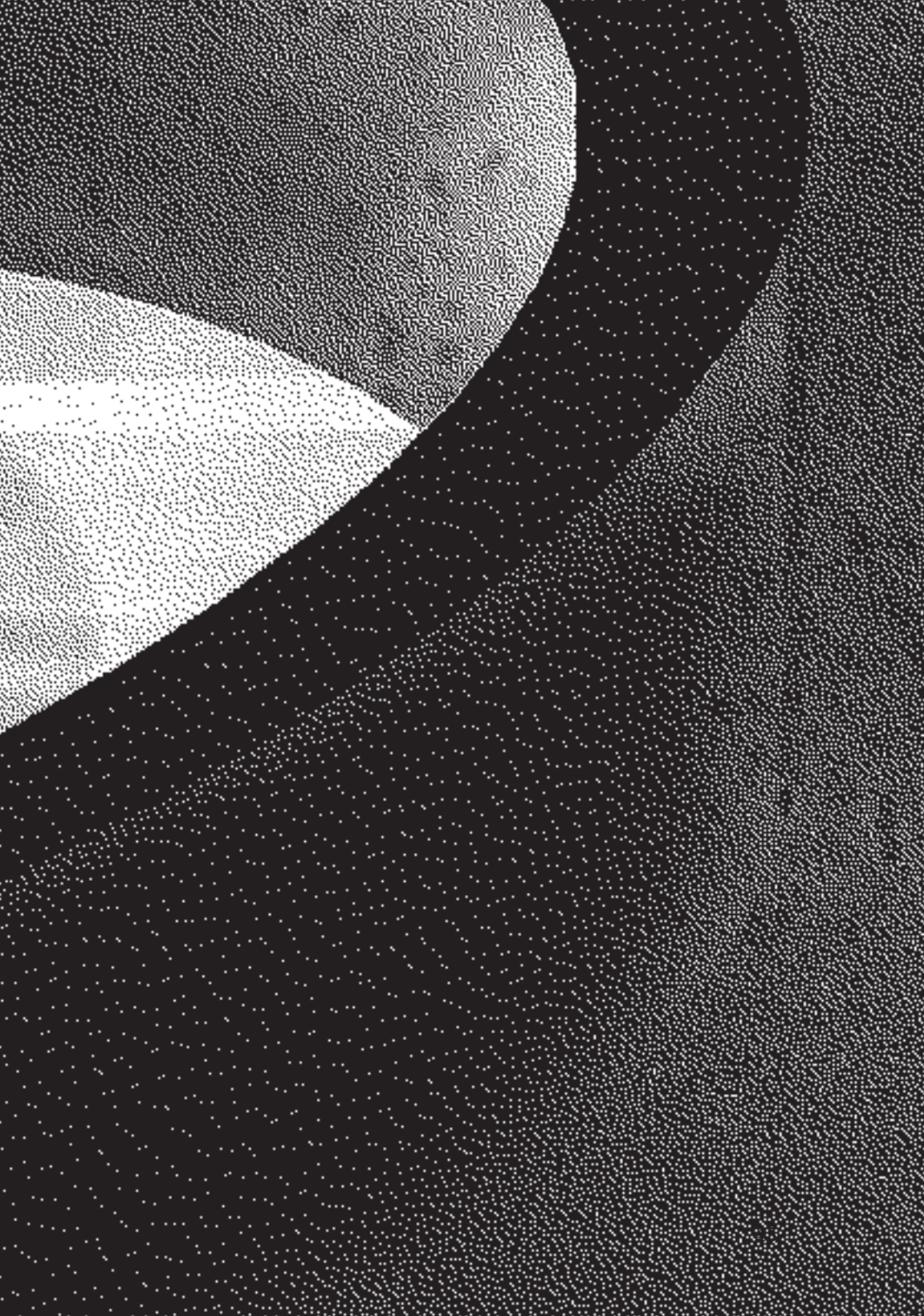
AL: I think we're losing, because part of second wave feminism was an understanding that the personal is political. So consciousness-raising was important for women to understand that 'my' experiences are not only individual. So a straight woman, or any woman would sit and talk about her abortion experience, and a whole lot of other women would talk about their abortion experience

and it could be understood that access to abortion is really important for all women. Even if you don't personally want one it's important in terms of women being in control of our own bodies. So the campaigns to change the abortion laws came from those understandings. Access to education, access to employment came out of similar things...Women sitting around saying "I was made to leave school when I was 15", "Oh yeah I was too", and women realising they hadn't had access to the kind of education that would give them better employment opportunities. So all that 'the personal is political'; third wave feminism has changed all that around and you might even think it was deliberate—"How can we get rid of this pesky feminist movement? Oh let's make it all individual."—because now it is that the *political is personal*. And if the political is personal it goes nowhere. And I think it's interesting that people have talked about the environmental movement has gone in a similar direction..."You don't have to organise, just sit at home and recycle your little bits and pieces, you're really changing the world, doing that...Use less water when you're cleaning your teeth...Oh, you've changed the world!" Instead of thousands of people getting out there and demanding that governments pass legislation and make real social change. Clean up the environment, ban the incredible use of oil... So sitting at home, OK you can do that too but it's not the main course of action. So making the political personal... It's hopeless. There won't be change.

Ir: In New Zealand we have a strong history that includes some milestones, passing the women's vote, civil union legislation... But my experience is that there is still a long way to go. I'm interested in hearing how you think New Zealand sees itself in terms of these wider equality issues?

AL: I think New Zealand likes to think of itself as progressive. The vote is interesting...We used to teach women's suffrage as part of the Women's Studies courses. And I think a lot of that came out of the fact that Māori women were equal to Māori men on every level of the hierarchy. Māori society was hierarchical, we shouldn't turn it into a Garden of Eden, but women were equal to

men on each level, and women could own property, which is very different from British women coming into this place where they were the property of their husbands and they couldn't own anything and they were exposed to this very different society where it wasn't like that. Māori women were not the property of their husbands and if a woman left their husband they could return to their own people and take her property with her, any property she'd brought to the marriage. And the Europeans who came to NZ were young, progressive people, they wanted to do something different, they were open to new ideas. If you sail for months on a sailing ship you are someone with a lot of enterprise. They were enterprising young people open to new ideas. So it's not surprising that New Zealand women win the vote, and that the Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1885 so women could own property. And that had to be passed because it meant that women got a legal identity, and you had to have that before you can have the vote. Someone who doesn't exist can't vote. So that was important for women to get the vote in 1893. So things build upon other things that have already happened. It's true for all of us that we stand on the shoulders of those who've gone before us. We need to remember the past. Those who don't know the past and understand it will have to repeat it. So those who think 'oh we're all free now, it's all good now'...One has to be wary, things can happen. Some of the most chilling things to think about are how open and liberated lesbians and gay men were in Weimar Germany after World War II, through the 1920s and into the 1930s until the Nazi party came to power—legally, through votes. And nobody really thought it would happen but it did... You can't sit back and say it could never happen here. You have to be alert, and also be able to notice things and what they might mean. Always ask the question, who benefits? And then it starts to become obvious.



Jennifer Shennan

Jennifer Shennan (b.1945) is a dancer, choreographer, dance critic, historian for the Royal New Zealand Ballet. She has a history of performing on Courtenay Place.

Jennifer Shennan (JS): Can I say this? I'm not a party girl. I'm too busy with books and such. But I've been on Courtenay Place many nights and there are two buildings I can talk about, **The Opera House** and the **St. James Theatre**.

Ir: And you performed in both of them?

JS: I've both performed in them and I've watched and reviewed what I've seen. I've been to thousands of performances in those two buildings.

Let me say, I saw a performance in **The Opera House** before I was born. What on earth do I mean? In 1926 Anna Pavlova toured with her own company to NZ. Little woman, wore size one shoes. This tiny little person took a company on a ship all around the world...India...Survived all that. In the 1920s. She escaped from Russia, escaped from Diaghilev. Apparently she believed in only the beautiful and the good to lift people up. But if you danced the seedy, sexy, dirty, dangerous, murders and such—well, she just didn't want to know about the dark side. She would have known about it—I mean Russia, Diaghilev, Nijinsky...That was the boiling pot of things. And she opted out and ran her own company. Diaghilev was frightened of the water so he wouldn't get in a boat to go anywhere and there were no planes. He was a big, extraordinary man, and a bully and a coward. Pavlova was none of those things.

So she toured the world and came here to New Zealand. And by bus—I suppose—they went up and down the country. She sent her dancers to Ngāti Pōneke Māori Culture Club. They learnt haka. Incredible.

My father paid sixpence to see Pavlova in 1926. I said "Dad! What was it like? What was it like?", and he said "I don't remember anything about it but I know I paid sixpence."

My dad didn't go to any ballet really but she was billed as the greatest dancer in the world and so everybody went.

I mention this because it's something I know happened there, in **The Opera House**. I also know—and this is going to break your heart—that a young dancer burned to death in that theatre. Because it was the gaslight era and the stage is lit by a fire—a live flame in the wings. And the dancers wore tulle skirts, just below the knee, very fluffy and full. And you run off stage after dancing and you get too close to the light and—whoosh!—and her skirt was on fire. And she ran so as not to enflame the other dancers she was with...Outside into the alleyway, and it fed the flames, and she was a ball of fire. So they grabbed her the best they could and bundled her up in blankets and she was terribly burnt. And they take a slow ambulance to the hospital [in 1923, all forms of transport would have taken a long time to get from one place to another]. And the hospital has a mile of yellow stripe on the floor to lead you to the children's ward.

Ir: She was a child?

JS: Well the ambulance medics thought she was. She was so tiny. And they took her all the way along this yellow road to the children's ward. It was a long, long way...Don't ask me how long, but I do remember it, only just. You didn't know where you were going, no windows, you just follow this yellow path...And they got her there and unwrapped her, saw that she wasn't a child, she was a little woman. So they bundled her back up and took her to the adult's ward, and she lingered in agony for two or three days and then she died.

There should be a statue to that dancer, right outside the theatre. There is one in Paris for Emma Livry—exactly the same thing happened to her. Burnt, miserably, then died. And there's a statue, and a headstone and pilgrims go there from all over the ballet world to see Emma Livry. Well they could come here. It's beautifully written up in an early issue of *Music New Zealand* [written by Peter Averi]. Peter Averi the broadcaster? The dancer

was his Aunt or Great Aunt. And I know her name but I can't bear to remember it [The dancer's name was Phyllis Porter.]. It's unfinished business for Courtenay Place. We need to get a photo of her or tell her story or something.

I mean people go on about there being a ghost in **The Opera House... The Opera House** turned 100 two years ago. The authorities did absolutely nothing to mark it...Sometimes you can do a guided tour, go out the back and look at the ropes and pulleys, the stage door...And they tell you "ooo there's a ghost". You know, it's the old *Phantom of the Opera* thing. Well get off, get away. You've got a real live dancer who died in this theatre. I don't think we should make a shrine for sentimental reasons but for proper historical reasons. The architectural, social, artistic. history of this town. So there's that lovely little woman who died.

I've seen performances galore, I've performed as an extra with the Royal New Zealand Ballet (before it was Royal). I performed in *Air for the G String*, Bach...Doris Humphrey's choreographer, New York, one of the most important of the 20th Century. Exquisite work. It's a piece you might dance at a funeral, to remind people that spirits live longer than bodies. It's an extraordinary work, a dance so well set for that building, you'll never see a better example.

I've danced in the **St. James Theatre**...Well never mind dancing...Even being in there...Yes, in 1983, I suppose, when the company turned 30. It'd had extraordinary beginnings with Poul Gnatt. He was my first teacher, who was the artistic director. He formed that company. When the company turned 30 the artistic director at the time held a gala...I danced in that production.

Ir: You mentioned the blue silk garment [earlier]. Was that when you wore it?

JS: No that was in **The Opera House**, and that was actually *The Dance of Blue Silk*. It's just five women, all wearing blue, saari-like garments. But the train (when you walk), the train, you leave behind you is longer than you by a long way. And your train crosses the other dancers' trains. And you turn and it's a whole pattern of the silk tails.

[Jennifer discusses planning a public memorial after the death of Poul Gnatt...]

JS: I wasn't going to take no for an answer. We were going to keep talking until we got it right. There's got to be a public farewell for Poul Gnatt. Where—and when? So a week later...The **St. James Theatre**—it was black for many, many years. It was crumbly and had to be restored and people would say, 'Demolish! Build a 96 bed boutique hotel!' or all this crap they go on about. But it was black in the meantime, no shows could play in there. Douglas Wright persuaded the powers to let him have the key and he put on a work in there when nothing else was going on. They'd Cellotaped up the gargoyles to stop them falling down and hitting you on the head.

Anyway I knew the man who had the key, Peter Frater, and I said, "Peter, could we use the **St. James** for a farewell to Poul Gnatt, it would be most appropriate wouldn't it?"—"Couldn't agree more."—got the key so in we went. And we danced *Air for the G String* that day too. I wasn't—it wasn't the older women, it was the current students at the school of dance. And I'll never forget, you get the taller one in the centre and then two that match, and then another two that match. And as she came walking slowly down the stage (at the very forefront of the stage) and then turned, she starts to walk back her long train dripped down over the edge of the stage and into the orchestra pit.

And I thought Mother of God, don't let there be a rusty nail down there in case it catches, pulls, rips and she's exposed...I prayed...Didn't know to whom but I prayed. And the silk came back up as slowly as it had gone down. Perfect. It looked like God had choreographed this work.

For decades I have seen performances in these venues and reviewed for the *Dominion Post*. To do that you don't even wait for the curtain calls—you run out of the theatre and you run to your car and you rush home, and you hope the lights are green because if they're red you're wasting time. And you have about 40 minutes to get your review in before the deadline at the newspaper. In the early days of the *Evening Post*, I could write all night. Something like,

five or six in the morning was the cut off point. And if it's a challenging thing to review, it could take all night to write. The courier came to pick it up as the sun was rising and then I would go to bed or not if I was teaching.

[Jennifer goes on to discuss dance writing].

JS: You've got to look up this reference: *New Yorker*, January 16, 2017. Simon Farley says, "Classical ballet is this elevating form. You have to rise to meet it, whether you are the dancer or the audience...The thing is, the audience possesses the same instrument. The audience members have the same body—it's like a cello playing for an audience of cellos." What a thing to say! A cello playing for an audience of cellos. Not a cellist playing for an audience of cellists, but a cello. And that's the most profound truth of how you know if it's good or not. Does it allow the audience in?



**Laura Duffy &
Dilohana Lekamge**

Laura Duffy (b. 1993) and Dilohana Lekamge (b. 1994) are Wellington-based artists who recently collaborated on visuals for a rave.

lightreading (lr): How would you describe your involvement with Wellington's nightlife?

Laura Duffy (LD): I go out quite a lot...The event we did for the 121 event was the first time I was involved with the organisational side of nightlife—potentially I'd like to do more but [under different circumstances]. The way that event unfolded and the way we were treated just wasn't so nice.

Dilohana Lekamge (DL): Yeah I agree. That work was made through JPEG2000 [a collective of Wellington artists who have exhibited together recently] so with Maddy Plimmer and Sean Burn and a few of our other mates, but I think that's the first time we've ever been part of the organisation of Wellington's nightlife.

LD: It's a super exciting avenue for my work, I'm really interested in it.

DL: Our general interaction with Wellington nightlife is varied, I guess. It's mainly just us on the piss.

LD: Do you want to hear about us on the piss? In our circles of friends, there are basically two things that we do (or used to do); go to town or to parties. When we go to town we usually split off into two groups; Ivy or Betty's. I haven't been to town in ages I guess that I'm speaking of experiences that mainly happened last year. Like you're straight so you go to Betty's or you're not so you go to Ivy. Betty's is where you go if you want to take someone home and you're straight. I don't like to go there because I don't really identify with that straight thing. I don't like to go there because I'm touched a lot and it's very—I want to use the word violent but that's too much of a violent word. It's a lot of an experience like you really do need to be pretty fucked up to be able to bare it. I haven't been there for about a year. We also do a lot of drinking for free at openings and usually end up at Little Beer Quarter (LBQ).

DL: Yeah the last time I went in **Betty's** was with Laura. We used to go there quite a bit when we were at university because that's where most of our mates were. I feel safer at **Ivy** in comparison to **Betty's**, but I would rather be at **LBQ** most of the time because it's the place I'm most comfortable and most familiar with.

LD: I think it's different now because my friends are becoming more queer as time goes on—I don't know why—but whatever, it seems to be happening. But when I'd just come out I'd want to go to **Ivy** but no one would want to go with me. There were multiple times when I went by myself, or me and my friend snuck off and were kinda weird about it. I'd go to **Ivy** by myself and feel safer. For me being in **Betty's** is just an awful experience.

DL: I also feel better being at **Ivy** because I can dance the way I want to dance. I don't get to dance the way I want to at **Betty's** because I get the most unwanted attention there—and in most clubs on Courtenay Place. People just don't fucking leave you alone and that pisses me off. It's also so condensed at **Betty's** so your bodies are up against each other and people take advantage of that. But at **Ivy** I can dance like a wee freak and that's fine.

LD: At **Ivy** sometimes you're really close as well but it's different...you assume people's values are more aligned in that kind of space than in that of a more of a 'public' space. I don't know why I think of it like that...like **Betty's** is somehow a more 'public' space.

DL: Gay bars have that history of being safer spaces for people who are queer to go out and not feel threatened.

LD: It's not always like that.

DL: Yeah there have been times when I've had terrible experiences in **Ivy**—but I think when things do happen at **Ivy** I have more control over how I respond and how I can navigate the situation. When things do happen I'm allowed to lose it. And people won't think I'm shit, or harass me more after I lose it. Because I've lost it plenty of times at **Ivy** when I don't like the things that

are happening, and I feel that I'm allowed to react that way. Whereas if something happened at Betty's I'd just walk away. I do yell, but I feel more comfortable being assertive at a gay bar.

The other thing we do when we go out is we spend a lot of time at LBQ. LBQ is where we've been going for ages and ages and ages. Excessively though, like on average, 2-3 nights a week over the span of a year. And that's a very different environment. We're usually there with a group of mates and yeah things can happen but there's safety in numbers.

LD: It's also a different environment because you're physically sitting down so people do sometimes approach us and say things but it's not like you're standing up so that people can 'accidentally' touch you. It's way more civilised and formalised because you're seated. It's also older people, when you look outside of us it's just a lot of old dudes, sitting there after work. And you kind of forget about that because they're just like grey characters that I don't even see. But when you replicate that situation in a different bar with a group of mates (we tend to socialise with mainly girls or feminine identifying people... we have guy friends but typically it's mainly girls), if you hang out with all girls at a different bar the situation is quite different because people will approach you, especially if you're there in smaller numbers, I guess.

DL: But I guess that's the nature of clubs and bars, for instance Siglo, like most places on Courtenay Place have a younger group of people going there. And most of the time it is like a meet market. People assume that a girl is there to be picked up.

LD: Yeah but if you were two girls sitting and having a beer at LBQ usually you'd be left alone, but if you're doing that anywhere else people just assume that it's just a huge fucking invitation. Oh please. I beg you, dude, ask me for a lighter.

DL: Most of our social interactions do revolve around alcohol.

LD: Hugely.

DL: Hugely.

LD: Outside of our scene, when I think of Wellington's nightlife, I think of 18-year-olds—which is like me when I was 18—getting fucked up and looking for someone to kiss. Very sexualised space. Very hetero.

DL: Very hetero, very sexualised, and if you were to make out with a girl it's weirdly fetishised.

LD: I wouldn't even do that. I would not do that. Unless I was with someone but I wouldn't ever pick up someone or do any kind of kissy shit with a girl in straight town, because it would feel performative and because I know there would be people looking in a way that's really disgusting to me.

DL: The only time I've made out with a girl on a night out was at Ivy, and that's the only place I think I would. Otherwise I would kinda feel alright kissing a dude.

LD: Oh yeah I'd kiss a—I mean I don't like to kiss a dude, but I'd kiss a dude no fucking worries in straight town because sure people would look but it's not the same kind of look. It's not the same combination of hunger and disgust.

DL: I would describe it as hugely sexualised and that's the reason we went out, especially when I was 18–19. I enjoyed it at the time. Now I think the reasons we go out are very different, and it's largely just socialising. There are very few times we can get all of our mates together for anything other than drinking.

DL: One of the best ways to describe the Wellington nightclub scene, especially around Courtenay Place, is that it is sexualised. And messy.

LD: It's rare for me to be sober in situations like that but when you accidentally are it's so shockingly repulsive that you're like, "I need to leave the planet". It's horrific. And the realisation that what I'm looking at is me, it's all reflecting myself so much that it's vile.

DL: Even if you don't chat with someone or hook up with someone, all your movements as a cis woman who is seemingly single is sexualised by the people around you and even the way you conduct yourself is sexualised—you have to be really wary of it because you know that's the context.

LD: It's always so hugely sexualised. There's always someone who's like, "I want to take someone home or do something". It's spoken, it's explicit, it's super explicit.

LD: I think for me the hyper-sexualisation of 'town' was so uncomfortable for so long a time, because I was queer, but pretending I wasn't, so there was this extreme pressure for me to uphold this version of myself. There were lots of strategic things—things I felt I had to say and do to uphold that. Super uncomfortable. And then when I did come out and I went to Ivy around that time and again I felt this intense pressure of "you should do that, you should sleep with someone, you should hook up with someone, who do you like, who do you like?". And I found that uncomfortable too because, firstly it's just too much and I don't like looking around the room and being like, "YOU". That's horrible, I'm not interested in that.

lr: who would you say are the key people involved in the Wellington 'scene'?

DL: There are the '121 boys' who hosted the event that we were involved with, they host a lot of parties at houses or clubs. GAG [the people involved with Good as Gold, a clothing store] and Shark Week [fashion label, etc.] have a lot of stuff on. They're making their own music and involved with fashion and so on, but that's not really our scene. There's also the gig scene, a lot of which used to stem from Eyegum [music collective], but now it's a lot of mainly Wellington bands either having their gigs or opening for other bands at local places like Caroline, Meow, Moon and San Fran.

lr: Can you tell me about a particularly memorable experience, or interaction? For example, an exceptionally good or bad night out, a memorable conversation or meeting someone who shifted things for you?

DL: The best nights that I've had have been the nights where we've done multiple things in one night. The best times are when we run around.

LD: In terms of good conversations I do a lot of learning at **LBQ**. Just from having conversations after exhibitions, or talking about films or music or whatever the fuck. Or just stuff that's happened in people's lives. That's been beneficial for me to learn from people. And because **LBQ** is not a flat, so people can come and go. And it's not too loud. It's comfortable like a house but people can come. **LBQ** is really comfortable for us. I have the wifi code, I charge my phone there.

DL: We're such bad boozers we built that space into one that was comfortable for us.

LD: It feels like a much better circumstance to meet people, rather than a club or party. At a house party you need to be introduced or find a good reason to go and talk to someone, and everyone's standing up so it's easy to walk away. But at **LBQ** if you're just sitting near someone it's easy to just start engaging them in conversation.

DL: In terms of memorable shitty nights it had to be that 121 party.

LD: We were asked to do the visuals for the 121 new year's gig. Initially we were really attracted to it because at previous parties they had pulled together a bunch of different people from different fields. Everyone was nice, there was no door charge and it ended at 10pm, that's what I liked about it. It was a day thing, it didn't end with vomit and piss everywhere.

DL: There was also the one in the car park beneath Ivy. It was a fucking gross space but it was really great because they had multiple DJ sets, video and installation art...And it was really cool but we were just enjoying it as attendees instead of seeing all the

organisation. So Sean from JPEG was approached after we all did the Angel Wave show at Playstation [art gallery] to contribute to a show that would hopefully be like that—gross and trippy and cool...

DL: ...But it was also high tech. That install took a team of people three full days. It was tech as fuck. So the show title for the 121 party was ANGELRAVE. But 121 only gave us six hours to install...The installation just broke. Everything broke. There were supposed to be three big projections of our work, plus a water feature...I'd installed all these condoms hanging from the ceiling, and we wanted security cameras on the party that live-projected the crowd into the space...It all turned sour. I got so drunk that night I was literally crying in the Uber on the way there. Because I was happy though...What a mess.

LD: Also because you took drugs.

DL: Oh yeah.

DL: So we got to the top of Plimmer steps, and I was a huge mess and on the second step I rolled my ankle and Laura had to carry me all the way down the steps and into the bar. And they wouldn't let us in the fucking door—to be fair I *was* yelling at the guy, but we had spent the whole day there setting that place up so it pissed me off...But I think in the end we had a good night.

LD: Average. You can't really let loose when you own the two laptops suspended in the space that you're worrying about. So when we made that work—we made our works separately filming and editing our own work, and the idea was just to put them one after the other in the same file, but I just had the idea to smash it together and see what happens, and it worked really well. My filming and editing took about eight hours in total which is really short for me. But I wanted to make it as yuck as possible and to infect this really masculine space. And we know what the 121 dudes like, so just wanted to fuck that. Trying to be visually really loud in the space.

DL: It was our opportunity as females to intersect a space, where, let's be fair, males have the most power and control. Because as people they do have a lot of power and control in those situations. But also because they're the ones organising it, they're the ones getting paid for it, they're the ones who have the opportunity to do what they want with those spaces. So we had this opportunity to intersect with that and also to make some gross and freaky female video work. And also the reason I liked it so much was because my art practice is research, research, research...And everything is there for a reason...Everything is deliberate. But here was a context that we didn't have to worry about any conceptual shit. I just wanted to do some freaky shit!

And it was very apparent that the work was made by females as well, that the people in the images were also in charge of making the images and filming themselves. Laura's work didn't have her in it but was very gross, pink, and abject in other ways.

LD: That's the grossest shit I've ever made. I scared myself quite a lot in the filming process actually. We were very aware of the context that it was being shown in, that it was a male-dominated space and also that people would be fucked up. It's new year's so they're more likely to be on drugs, and they're more likely to get wasted. And so the idea of people seeing these really gross, weird, abject, fast-paced images was the intent.

lr: So were you trying to give people a good night or a bad night?

LD+DL: Don't really care!

DL: I just wanted to make some trippy-as shit.

LD: I'm not really being respectful to them, I don't really give a fuck.

DL: It's not as if, in those spaces, we are ever respected—or even respected enough to be asked to give content! This invitation had originally been made to the only (assumed to be presenting) male in the JPEG group. The people making video work in Wellington are mostly

female-identifying you know, it's so weird that they'd never before asked a woman to provide work for that context. So when we were given this opportunity we thought, I don't think I care whether you're having a good time, I care whether my work is trippy enough. Whether it's fast-paced and gross enough. I was laughing to myself the whole time I was editing the video. There was a bit where I sat on a banana and was the most embarrassing thing I've ever done to my body. It was the first opportunity we'd had to have any control over what we visually consume in that kind of space. I wanted to fuck that shit up.

lr: What kind of words would you use to describe the built environment wherever you spend your nights socialising? You mentioned three bars where you go most often...

DL: The 121 gig was above **Hideaway Bar** on Plimmer steps. Inside was all graffiti by street art boys. It was dark, with low ceilings

LD: Also it was actually dangerous! The floor was really weak so you weren't supposed to have more than four people standing in that part of the space, and we were like, "what the fuck, we're having a rave here tonight?"

DL: But it was also weirdly like a smoky crooner bar, it's red and plush with a low ceiling and nooks.

LD: Nooks can be good and can be dangerous. Depends on lighting.

DL: I don't like being in a space where my back's against a wall or I'm stuck in a corner because people take advantage of me being in that space, where I can't easily get away.

LD: That's what it feels like in the **Ivy** smoking cage though [Ivy rents a single parking space caged off in an underground car park which provides a space for smokers]. Ivy is on lower Cuba Street and you walk down some stairs. So you feel very far away from the upper world, and at that time of the night it's not near many places—compared to the strip on Courtenay Place where the bars are so close

to each other you can talk to the people next door. But at *Ivy* you have to go down, which is nice, but also annoying because there's no phone service down there. The smoking area is strange because it's underground, and usually when you go out for a cigarette, you want a cigarette but you're also wanting to get outside of the club, but instead you're in this disgusting car park with all these people, the lighting is also kinda yuck, it doesn't feel nice.

DL: And because the club's underground there's no airflow and it gets super hot and sweaty. There's one fan in the corner. That's the ideal spot to stand.

LD: *Ivy* has low lighting, a dance floor and there's a small area where you can go and sit but I don't really go in there.

DL: They also put their drag shows in that little nook.

LD: They play terrible gay bar music. Lots of Gaga. You can request songs, but they get kinda pissed.

lr: Does the architecture or built environment impact on the atmosphere?

DL: *Ivy* is narrow, no space to dance in the entrance or bar area, or in the space to sit down. So the architecture restricts or guides the activity that takes place in that part of the bar and the quantity of people in each space.

LD: The main thing about that space is that it's underground away from everything. You can go there if you're—whatever—and people don't know you're there. They can't see you from outside.

lr: So is that liberating?

LD: I think kinda both liberating and not. It was good for me when I first came out because I needed somewhere to go to hide. But on the other hand you're downstairs with no phone coverage and you have to smoke in a caged car park.

lr: Do you think it's because it's a gay bar that it is downstairs? You mention that it is unsafe on the street for some of the patrons, is the bar intentionally providing cover and offering protection?

DL: Yeah I'd say so. I imagine that would have been part of the reason why they chose that location.

LD: Ivy is safe for people who want to go out in drag. Drag can be dangerous, it's much safer to be away from the public eye. Even just if they're going out for a cigarette, [the underground car park smoking area means that people can also smoke out of sight, legally, rather than needing to go out on the street.] At Ivy, drag is not just accepted but celebrated, but I've walked outside onto the street with two friends dressed in drag and been very worried for their safety. Like, "Quick, get in a taxi, hide again." It's not the same once you leave your perceived safe place and enter back into the scary public.

DL: University boys who have just left home seem to have a pack mentality. They feel like they have power.

DL: At Betty's you walk in through this narrow walkway bit, then the bar, then the dance floor is a step up. But there are also seats around and mostly girls stand up on them and dance, on an elevated level, and mostly guys just look at them. But there are also stages, like the outside queue is the lowest, the smokers platform is one higher, inside the dance floor is higher than the general floor area, the girls on the chairs are higher and the DJ booth is the highest of them all. It's a literal hierarchy. Very different to Ivy.

LD: The other thing about Ivy that made me think, was when the Orlando PULSE shootings happened it made me feel very weird about that space. It's irrational but it goes through your head that if something like that did happen in New Zealand, Ivy is not an easy space to leave. Because if you're hidden you're also stuck, which is very scary.

lr: What do you think of the concept of a nightclub?

LD: I think it's important, especially queer spaces that are

public-ish. Ivy is one of the only spaces where people from that community come together regularly. And just be. And we're not just discussing heavy shit. And it's normal and nice and safe. I think they're important...They're potentially less dangerous than a house party because there's a security guard and bar staff, there are people there and you're in the CBD. They're more accountable. In theory people shouldn't get so drunk they die. At house parties (when I was younger) there were so many times I had to look after my friends when they got so drunk they couldn't stand. That doesn't happen much when you're at a club. There's someone at the bar who has to physically take your eftpos card out of your hand so you can pay for the drink. It's also expensive! People do get fucking wasted but I see it less.



Biographies

lightreading is the collaborative identity of artists Sarah Rose and Sonya Lacey. We are interested in how material production is influenced by digitisation; speed, lightness, and immateriality. These tensions between what is visible and invisible, material and immaterial form the basis of our practice. In representing a built environment, we intend to imagine a physical proximity for those accustomed to interactions that are distanced and mediated through digital networks and social media.

Raphaella Rose is an architectural designer based in Auckland, New Zealand. She has just returned from a period of practice in New York. Her interest in architecture lies in the social implications of space specifically in relation to gender and politics. Her work ranges from speculative academic proposals through to design & build projects and more traditional built forms of architecture. Her work has been exhibited in both New Zealand and internationally at The Lighthouse: Scotland's Centre for Architecture and Design. She has been published in a range of architectural journals including Architecture NZ, Urbis and Interior Magazine.

Susana Torre is an Argentine-born American architect, critic and educator based in New York and Carboneras, Spain (since 2009). Torre has developed a career that combined "theoretical concerns with the actual practice of building". She was the first woman invited to design a building in Columbus, Indiana, "a town internationally known for its collection of buildings designed by prominent architects". In 1977 Torre curated *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, a major exhibition and book that pioneered work in the field. She has taught at Columbia and Yale Universities in the U.S. and at the University of Sydney, among many others.