

# **‘Civilising’ Urban Life: Governmentality, Alcohol, and Sydney’s Public Spaces 2005-2022**

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### **Statement of originality**

*This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.  
This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.*

*I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all  
the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.*

*Daniel Laurence.*

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## Contents

Abstract .....	5
Introduction .....	6
Chapter 1: Discourses of Alcohol-Related Violence .....	18
Chapter 2: Civilised Drinking .....	32
Chapter 3: Alcohol-Free Zoning .....	48
Chapter 4: An ' <i>Alfresco Revolution</i> '? .....	68
Conclusion .....	88
Bibliography.....	90

## Abstract

Over the last two decades Sydney experienced seismic shifts in nightlife regulation, driven by a moral and expert panic over alcohol-related violence and local drinking 'culture' which culminated in the 2014 'lockout laws' that significantly diminished aspects of the city's cultural life. At the same time, public spaces within the city have been subject to intensifying processes of privatisation, commercialisation and enclosure.

My thesis asserts the critical role that alcohol governance has played in attempts to 'civilise' urban life and re-articulate public space within the post-industrial context. Locating my research at the interstices of cultural studies and critical drug and alcohol studies, critical policy studies, urban studies, and cultural history, I draw on a range of sources including media discourses of drinking, televised dramatisations, and government strategy papers in order to explore when the recent drift toward enclosure of public space began, the discourses that undergirded it, and what the implications have been for public life in Sydney.

I interrogate the linear-causal framing of state-government and media discourses on 'alcohol-related violence', as well as the City of Sydney's classist pushback to this panic through the urbanist discourse of 'civilised drinking'. I reveal the ways in which invocations of 'drinking cultures' tend to obscure histories of technical interventions, and highlight alcohol-free zoning as a key technology in the privatisation of public space through the mechanism of the liquor license.

Recent attempts to re-activate public space in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic are haunted by memories of convivial publics, and remain characterised by a lack of attention to forms of governmentality that serve to impede publicness. I conclude that these interventions are premised on class and other forms of social segregation and that they threaten a more interesting and expanded sense of public space, envisioned as one less dominated by government-curated forms of leisure, with a greater diversity of public cultures and possibilities for public conviviality, sociability and encounter.

## Introduction

In 2010 after returning to Sydney from a period living overseas, I can recall a moment during a day-time jam session with friends on the grassed area back from Bondi Beach, witnessing their elaborate efforts to hide alcohol from roaming police. There were other new restrictions in the city too: entering pubs and nightclubs often required submitting to an ID and fingerprint scan and having your photograph taken. In those days I regularly attended a free music festival in Tumbalong Park in Darling Harbour: one year patrons could walk around the entire site with a drink, whilst the next they were restricted to drinking in a fenced-off licensed zone away from the stage with security guarding the entrance. Similarly, at an annual event at the Portuguese Club in Marrickville, where previously you could walk across the entire outdoor area with a drink, a year later all drinks were to be consumed at the indoor bar.

This was a particularly jarring experience for me, having just returned from living in Rio de Janeiro, where I had many experiences of open public drinking, at Carnaval, on the beach, at street markets and fairs, outdoor samba sessions and elsewhere. Indeed, living and travelling in various countries I can recall purchasing or consuming alcohol in a variety of situations: from a vendor on the beach, at a beachside bar on the sand as the tide came in, in a town square in the evening, at outdoor and indoor markets, in a petrol station, from a vending machine, on the grounds of a church during a concert, on a street outside a nightclub on Saturday night, in a rural café at 8am watching a band, on a beach on New Year's Eve, and on city streets at various urban festivities.

In the Sydney of the early 2000s I had my own experiences at festivals and events where you could bring your own drinks; I can remember taking an esky down to Black Wattle Bay Park in Glebe on New Year's Eve, and another year drinking a work colleague's tequila walking down George Street to The Rocks for the start of the fireworks.

Public drinking was a part of many relaxed, fun, convivial and outdoor experiences I was familiar with in Australia and overseas. The sudden shift that I experienced in Sydney in 2010 was one of *enclosure* of public space through privatisation, commodification and regulation, with parks and streets zoned alcohol-free, licensed and securitised **drinking pens** at formerly bring-your-own alcohol (BYO) festivals and cultural events, and total outdoor alcohol

prohibitions on New Year's Eve. These changes prompted me to question how this had come to be sometime during the first decade of the new millennium. When exactly did the shift begin? What were the justifications provided? And what were the implications for public life?

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Whilst conducting initial research for this thesis in early 2020, I came across the work of the late Australian social photographer Rennie Ellis, who catalogued urban public sociability across the last three decades of the twentieth century with his camera. His work contains surprising and at times provocative images, a glimpse through a photographer's lens into lives in which drinking features in public space amongst different kinds of people. His 1984 book *Life's a Beer* sought to document the 'marked changes' that Ellis noticed in the drinking habits of Australians, namely that 'drinkers of today prefer to take their beer with them rather than drink it at the pub' (R. Ellis 1984, 75-76). The book is striking to the present-day viewer in its portrayal of the prevalence of outdoor drinking and for the heterogeneity of drinking practices depicted, with the way alcohol features in outdoor spaces revealing a different public sociability to the one Sydneysiders of today experience. Ellis' *Life's a Beer* (1984) and *Decadent* (2014) contain photographs taken in Australia from the 1970s to the 1990s, including images of a New Year's Eve with people drinking on the street, a woman kissing a police officer, and others sitting on their eskies drinking next to their car. In a park, a Greek family dancing with an Orthodox priest sitting at a picnic table. At the beach, a woman with a cigarette drinking a plastic glass of wine, a group of friends drinking on the shoreline in banana chairs, and a man carrying a case of beer across the rocks to watch a surf carnival. At street festivals, two women sitting on the footpath drinking wine at the Lygon Street Fiesta, people on top of a car sipping champagne at the Brunswick Street Festival, and a 1990s Mardi Gras 'recovery day' photo with partying crowds in Darlinghurst's Flinders Lane. In a shift that is both revealing and symbolic, that Mardi Gras laneway party is today a ticketed, licensed and fenced event run by two adjacent hotels.

In many ways, the local histories of public street drinking depicted in Ellis' work have been forgotten, and if people stumble across Ellis' images today a common reaction may be *thank god we're not like that anymore!* One thing that stands out to me, however, is the depiction of a *diversity* of people from a time which we tend to think of as not particularly diverse, the

images challenging what Faro and Wotherspoon term 'our received conception of the Australian past of an unambiguously Anglo-Celtic social world' (2000, 6). Further, there is an interesting contrast between Ellis' few images of the mostly white male domain of pubs, and other settings which evoke an expansive conception of the relation between public space and drinking, depicting interclass contact and ethnically, gender and sexually diverse forms of participation in public culture.

The forewords to Ellis' *Decadent* collection feature a rather laboured comparison of 1970s and 1980s urban life in Australia to the 'eroticism of Pompeii', and claims by fellow photographer Robert McFarlane of a contemporary 'moral Armageddon' and retreat 'to a more modest, conservative Australia since these pictures were made' are hard to quantify and open to debate, particularly regarding overt discrimination in previous decades (R. Ellis 2014, 14). Nonetheless if, as Richard Waterhouse (1995) points out, there is a long history in Australia of upper-class disapproval of *culture-in-public*, then we can draw some conclusions from Ellis's work, that the 1970s and 1980s entailed a democratisation of drinking culture which saw a move away from the male domain of pubs — a move that McFarlane claims to have been quashed or contained in the contemporary context of a conservative societal turn. The main value of Ellis' body of work is that it enables the contemporary reader to imagine a different arrangement of public drinking than one centred around the pub and illustrates how drinking can feature in people's social practices in heterogenous ways.<sup>1</sup>

### **Alcohol, urban life and public space**

Efforts to control and regulate drinking were central to the bourgeois modernising project of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Jayne et al. 2006), including attempts to eliminate working-class drinking from urban life and public space as societies industrialised. In the UK an early example of this was the moral panic over the working-class 'gin craze' and perceived drunkenness, immorality and rowdy behaviour that went with it, which was contrasted with supposedly refined and healthier middle-class beer drinking in the mid-1700s (P. Kelly 2011, 10). The conception of alcohol as a 'social problem' began to underpin much urban planning

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<sup>1</sup> In favour of a forward-looking rather than nostalgic politics, Delany reminds us that the past can be useful 'for grounding future possibilities' (2019, xxvi).

in the Anglosphere and parts of northern Europe and facilitated the growth of the Christian Temperance movement with ideals of sober citizenship and transformed public space (Kneale 2001). As public space came to be constructed around bourgeois values of sobriety and sanitary culture, the regulation of alcohol became a key element in imposing social control and the 'productivity' priorities of industrialists, and generated tensions between 'carnavalesque' working-class drinking practices and the desires of middle and upper-class families to 'civilise' the city (Monkkenon qtd. in Jayne et al. 2006, 455).

Other scholarship has contended that the interaction of public space and drinking cultures in urban life is complexly connected and articulated within particular locales. For example, the UK's 'Mass Observation' social research project which aimed to document everyday life in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was driven in large part by a dissatisfaction with the way drinking was reported in official statistics, and the way regulatory measures failed to grasp the varied experiences and contexts of drinking (Jayne et al. 2006).

Breaking with the industrial vision of the 'sober city', urban life in Western post-industrial cities over the last half century has been reconstructed as a site of consumption that foregrounds various forms of leisure via the food, entertainment, 'drinkertainment' (Bell qtd. in Jayne et al. 2006) and cultural industries. This has generated new imaginings of public life that contain possibilities for interclass contact and social mixing in which cities can become 'ongoing experiments into how people of different backgrounds, incomes, wealth and values can live together' (Latham 2003, 1719). While this can produce divisions it can also produce new connections, hybridities and unexpected meanings. In this context, a new conception of public life and urban space becomes imaginable, one that is potentially more expansive, inclusive, and emphasises the possibilities of relaxed sociability, forms of reciprocity and encounter organised around degrees of disinhibition. In advocating for a more nuanced understanding of drinking, Jayne et al. (2006, 464) emphasise the role that drinking can play in fostering such diverse forms of sociality, commensality, and reciprocity, and contend that urban drinking can further connections and belonging in public spaces, grounded in pleasure and the mixing of heterogeneous groups of people.

In Australia public drinking has long been a part of public sociability (at festivals, parades, picnics, sport, concerts etc.), and this expanded in the 1970s and 1980s following the end of

Temperance-inspired alcohol regulations such as early pub closing. This conception of drinking as a part of everyday life is one of urban space as *public* space and whilst this idea of public space as a site of heterogenous social mixing, leisure and consumption can certainly produce tensions and problems (including alcohol-related violence), it can also generate new experiences of solidarity, collectivity, and connectivity across difference (Jayne et al. 2006; Latham 2003).

Over the last fifty years urban space in industrialised countries has, to varying degrees, become subject to regeneration initiatives which both enable consumption and leisure (for example in the development of the night-time economy) but also contain inherent tensions. In the Anglosphere one of the main concerns of alcohol and public health policy has been alcohol-related violence and disorder (Jayne and Valentine 2016; Lee 2020), and in recent years these ‘harm minimisation’ areas of policy came into conflict (but also overlapped) with urbanist policies that sought to boost night-time economies in post-industrial cities, as a way of managing the transition from manufacturing economies. As I explore (and interrogate) throughout this thesis, these debates intersect with and *are informed by* the notion that Australia has a ‘national’ ‘binge’ drinking culture of drinking ‘to excess’, in contrast to perceived ‘sophisticated’ modes of consumption that can be found elsewhere in the world.

Exploring these tensions as they manifest in Sydney is the central focus of this thesis and, as I will argue, they are grounded in attempts to re-articulate public space and to ‘civilise’ urban life that are premised on class and other forms of social segregation, that threaten a more interesting and expanded sense of public space of relaxed socialising, less inhibitions and interclass mixing. What is at stake here is Berlant and Warner’s conception of a publicly and counter-publicly accessible culture, one supportive of different forms of living that are ‘public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity’ (1998, 560-562).

Taking Ferguson’s characterisation of neoliberal redevelopment as one in which city planners have attempted to gain power over ‘inhabitants to shape the ‘character’ of urban space’ (2018, 108), what may appear as the mundane governance of alcohol in public is, I argue, critically important for thinking through broader transformations of urban everyday life, and the privatisation and commodification of public space (Low and Iveson 2016, 13). Through

processes of stigmatisation, privatisation and commodification, the regulating out of non-licensed forms of public drinking gentrifies social mixing, excludes people from accessible public cultures, and ultimately encloses public space.

### **This thesis: the governance of drinking in Sydney from 2005-2022**

In their study of public drinking in urban spaces, Australian alcohol researchers Pennay and Room (2012) point to a long tradition of street-drinking in Western societies, at beaches, parks and public celebrations. Indeed, on the eve of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, geographers Connell and Thom predicted that as a 'healthy city' with epidemics unknown to contemporary residents and a conducive climate, 'tourist and leisure markets' in Sydney would increasingly move outdoors (2000, 340). Whilst they were not alone in this kind of commentary at the time, what instead transpired was the shutdown of Sydney's nightlife rationalised through appeals to safety and order, and the increasing yet overlooked *privatisation* of public space through alcohol-free zone legislation in an effort to 'civilise' urban life.

Both the 'institutional habits' of alcohol governance (Valverde 1998, 146-148) and the regulation of alcohol in public places are undertheorised (Pennay and Room 2012), and many accounts of drinking in the post-industrial context are abstract and highly generalised (Jayne et al. 2006). In light of this, my thesis takes Sydney from 2005-2022 as its central case study and a revealing example of how the possibilities and tensions of post-industrial contexts described above have manifested at a local level.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Sydney experienced significant expansion of its night-time economy until the early 2000s when media and governmental problematisations of alcohol-related violence and disorder came to the fore through a moral and expert panic (Wadds 2020). Restrictions on venues were gradually tightened from around 2005 onwards and culminated in the 2014 introduction of the 'lockout laws' by the NSW state government, rushed through following the second of two 'one-punch' deaths of 18-year-olds in 2012 and 2013 (Tan 2014). The 'lockout laws' enforced a raft of regulations, including banning entry to

venues after 1:30am and ceasing sales of alcohol after 3am (Tan 2014). Sydney had featured a genuinely 24-hour nightlife since the 1980s, and the 'lockout laws' decimated night- and street- life in the city as they led to the closure of over 270 entertainment and hospitality venues ('NSW Police to increase patrols' 2020). At the same time, as I argue in chapters 2 and 3, in a classist pushback to this panic at the local level of government, the City of Sydney council attempted to promote small bars and a discourse of 'civilised drinking' (Wolifson 2018) whilst essentially eliminating non-venue *public* drinking by exponentially increasing alcohol-free zoning across the city. In a move that commodifies public culture, and privatises and impedes access to public space, over the last twenty years authorities have zoned vast tracts of the city 'alcohol-free' (banning alcohol in streets, parks and so on), *at the same time* as establishing fenced off and securitised **drinking pens** with chosen boutique alcohol vendors at ticketed events in those same spaces. I term this process **governing with and against alcohol** in order to highlight the inherent paradoxes and tensions in this approach which, intriguingly, does not seek to entirely *prohibit* drinking, but rather to incite and propose certain kinds of drinking practices and populations over others via the mechanism of the liquor license.

From 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic acted as something of a circuit breaker in which both state and local levels of government sought to encourage outdoor licensed socialising through the '*Alfresco Revolution*', now as part of attempts to revive the urban economy. All of these aforementioned clusters of intervention have taken place in one post-industrial city over a fifteen-year period and represent efforts to 'civilise' and remodel Sydney's public culture around commercial and privatised interests as part of efforts to fashion Sydney as a globally attractive 'creative city'. This highlights contradictions within the post-industrial context where the city centre is offered up as a 'fun' 'playground' but where, I aim to show, the governmentalities that 'overprogram' space (McNeill 2011, 163) through policing, noise regulation, fencing-off and securitisation reflect an inability to tolerate publicness. In this thesis I emphasise the relationship between drinking and urban life as an important topic in its own right and investigate, as Jayne et al. put it (2006) the 'interpenetration of practices and processes related to production, consumption, regulation, representation and identity' (452).

Following Race and Brown's call for Cultural Studies to make a more substantial contribution 'to the analysis of social contexts around drug and alcohol practices, their discursive classification and the regulatory effects of these processes' (2016, 101), I locate my own research within this tradition, at the interstices of cultural studies and critical drug and alcohol studies, critical and cultural policy studies, urban studies, and cultural history. Throughout my thesis I seek to unsettle dominant discourses attached to drinking, including the notion of an 'uncivilised' national Australian drinking culture (and the class implications attached to it), and make the case that invocations of 'drinking cultures' tend to both *obscure* histories of technical interventions and rationalise new interventions.

In regards to method, throughout this thesis I draw upon and analyse a range of sources from the last two decades, including media representations and discourses of drinking, a televised dramatisation of the Kings Cross precinct (a beacon of Sydney's night-time economy and a key target of alcohol-related moral panics and regulatory interventions), state and local government strategy papers, and documents on alcohol-free zoning in order to investigate interventions into spaces and practices of public socialising around alcohol and the discourses that animate them, assess the extent to which these have changed over time, and uncover the presumptions they make about risk, urban culture and public life.<sup>2</sup>

My thesis is limited by the length of a Master of Research thesis, and there is insufficient space to elaborate on or prescribe alternative policy agendas. Rather, my analysis seeks to *question* the assumptions of punitive policy that purports to 'civilise' urban life through the promotion of certain kinds of commodification, in order to generate a greater reflexivity over what they entail and demonstrate that enactments of 'civilised' urbanity are not as straightforward and unproblematic as they may appear.

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As Australia's largest city, Sydney has a long history as a site of public socialising, popularly depicted as an 'Emerald City' of sun, beaches and hedonistic pleasures, with hallmark

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<sup>2</sup> In my approach to policy, I have kept forefront of mind the idea outlined by *The International Journal of Cultural Policy* that 'cultural policy is understood as the promotion or prohibition of cultural practices and values by governments, corporations, other institutions and individuals' (2023).

outdoor events such as New Year's Eve and the Mardi Gras parade taking advantage of a subtropical climate. The inner-city localities of Kings Cross, Oxford Street, the CBD and Darling Harbour have been nightlife and entertainment precincts for decades, attracting both locals and tourists in large numbers.

The 1980s and 1990s saw Sydney shift from an industrial to a post-industrial 'global city' of consumption, finance, property, cultural industries and tourism (Connell 2000). Butler highlights the import that 'global city' governance has placed on the 'human agents' of financial and business services being in 'close spatial and social contact', with gentrification an outcome of this middle-class spatial differentiation (2003, 191). Since the 'Sydney 2000' Olympics, state and local governments have become increasingly entrepreneurialist, driven by discourses of 'urban branding' organised around tourism, economics and international investment. Governments have facilitated the developer-led transformation of formerly industrial and working-class inner-ring suburbs such as Ultimo, Pyrmont, Chippendale and Redfern, doubling the population of the Sydney local government area during the 1990s (Connell 2000, 6) by rapidly expanding private multi-unit dwellings and forcibly dislocating public housing residents (Badcock 1995; Bounds and Morris 2001). In comparison to the USA and Canada, the 'decisive factor' in Australian inner-city housing markets has been concerted government action 'to prime the core-area property market for residential project development', exemplified by the Sydney City Council (as it was known then) granting planning approval for the construction of 18,000 residential units in the local government area in 1994 (Badcock 1995, 72, 83). This history of intervention highlights the inordinate influence governments have had on processes of gentrification in inner-Sydney, and is important to keep front of mind when considering other 'civilising' governmentalities.

Following Clover Moore's election as mayor in the early 2000s, City of Sydney Council action plans aimed at these new wealthier residents (Moore's voter base) intervened strongly in the physical and social fabric of the inner-city, refashioning it as a 'City of Villages' (McNeill 2011). These demographic changes have led to tensions as residents are privileged by governments in localities that remain popular nightlife and entertainment precincts (mainly the CBD, Oxford Street and Kings Cross), leading to what Wadds (2020) terms a re-emergence of a politics of class leisure. At the same time as they have promoted certain

kinds of leisure (in particular, a supposedly 'sophisticated' bar and dining scene), city authorities have increasingly privatised, commercialised and enclosed public spaces in inner-Sydney.

Chapter 1 explores the discourse of alcohol-related violence and the construction of the area of Kings Cross as exciting and criminogenic within media, police, and governmental discourses. Drawing on notions of 'emergent causality' from the field of critical drug studies, as well as local histories and televised representations of this nightlife precinct, I problematise the causal linking of alcohol and violence that was operationalised in much of the 'lockout law' discourse, and highlight how fears of 'lower' class leisure interpenetrate with, and inform, ideas of 'risk' around alcohol-related violence.

The second chapter analyses how local government resisted these attributions of linear causality on the basis of 'global city' discourses and practices of entrepreneurial governance. Rather than *prohibiting* drinking, governments proposed new forms and spaces of 'civilised drinking' largely mediated through licensing provisions in a process I have called ***governing with and against alcohol***. I seek to unsettle the class-based presumptions associated with discourses of 'civilised drinking' and, through a study of the past, make the case that invocations of 'drinking cultures' tend to both obscure histories of technical interventions and are deployed to rationalise new interventions.

The third chapter explores alcohol-free zoning as a significant element in the re-privatisation of drinking and public space in Sydney. Over the last two decades the City of Sydney council has persistently proscribed non-licensed and accessible spaces for drinking through zoning vast tracts of the city alcohol-free. Though it may once have been a useful way of ensuring responsible service of alcohol, it has become a practice of enclosure that not only gentrifies social mixing but makes uninhibited social mixing an activity afforded only to the privileged, stigmatising the non-affluent and ultimately pushing people out of public space. Pennay and Room (2012) have shown how alcohol-free zoning policies impact marginalised populations, a concern I share, but I am also interested in how the private license is posed as a solution to the problems of alcohol-related violence and disorder in the post-industrial context, and functions to commodify and enclose public space. Whilst containing resonances of the 'modernising' bourgeois project that sought to institute sober public space, I argue that

drinking is central to 'global city' discourse in the post-industrial consumer context, but in a purportedly sanitised and classist mode of privatised 'civilised drinking'.

The fourth chapter examines the present conjuncture of the '*Alfresco Revolution*'. Here, attempts to foster economically lucrative COVID-safe outdoor socialising circulate alongside a haunting-nostalgia for convivial publics of pre-lockout Sydney which governments and urbanists strategically and (some might say cynically) reactivate. I argue that this precludes the effective realisation of this objective through lack of attention to (or follow-through on disassembling) the 'civilising' forms of governmentality that actually serve to impede publicness.

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A key commitment of my thesis is reflected in Delany's observation that 'given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will' (2019, 111). I am concerned with principles of democratisation and access (including cost), and the notion of different people coming together in unscripted and unsanctioned ways, without mandating a social conformity. As Delany observes '*contact is often an outdoor sport*' (2019, 129), and public spaces *should be* accessible, yet contemporary 'global city' and 'creative class'-inspired governmentalities work to foreclose access.

Due to limitations of space in this master's thesis I have not been able to explore non-drinking populations, and interestingly they do not appear in the governmental literature, perhaps indicative of the centrality of *class* to the way governments seek to ***govern with and against alcohol***. As Jayne and Valentine have noted, planning and regulation should recognise the 'diverse ways that alcohol is absent and present in the city and the diverse nature of hospitality spaces that exist within different community spaces' ('Alcohol-related Violence and Disorder', 2016, 85). This need not mean, however, that 'more regulation' automatically follows: Brazil, for example, has a higher proportion of non-drinkers than Australia, yet is significantly less regulated in terms of where alcohol is sold, how it is advertised and where it can be consumed.

In summary, my thesis is concerned with the ways in which public life is rearticulated and regulated in a post-industrial, entrepreneurial global city, by focusing on developments in alcohol policy and discourse in Sydney between 2005 and 2022. Sydney is taken as a case study that offers new insights into the management of tensions and possibilities associated with drinking, urban life, and public space in the present, grounded in an understanding of the city as urban assemblage, 'enacted into being in networks of bodies, materialities, technologies, objects, natures and humans' (Farias 2010, 13). One of my key aims is to move beyond pathologising narratives of alcohol consumption in order to demonstrate that the regulation of drinking has become a key mechanism in opening up public life or shutting it down. I argue the 'civilised drinking' project that has taken hold in Sydney threatens an expanded sense of heterogenous, convivial publics.<sup>3</sup> In thinking through the heterogeneity of the city, policy makers need to recognise existing and historical habitations of the city, and to value and build on the 'situated multiplicity' of public spaces (Amin qtd. in Noble 2013, 165) in creative ways, rather than implementing top-down policy that razes and re-designs with an ideal citizen in mind.

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<sup>3</sup> By 'conviviality' I am thinking broadly of processes of cohabitation and interaction a la Gilroy, Delany and others. As Noble and Wise assert, 'much of the stuff of conviviality is accomplished on an improvised basis', in its situated and temporal dimensions (2016, 426).

## Chapter 1: Discourses of Alcohol-Related Violence

For a period of ten years from the mid-2000s and culminating in the introduction of the 2014 'lockout laws', media and police in NSW pursued a concerted campaign against drinking, which associated alcohol with social disorder, unruliness and violence. This occurred within a legislative context that gradually curbed public drinking through alcohol-free zoning whilst, at the same time, increasingly granted licensed premises permission to trade in public space (Fisher et al. 2018; Pennay and Room 2012). Though ostensibly seeking to address public concern on alcohol-related issues, many of these strategies (the 'lockout laws' in particular) drew sharp public criticism for lacking evidence to support their implementation (Fisher et al. 2018, 95), and for their role in the shutdown of the city's nightlife and a broader diminution of public culture.

In order to understand these shifts in the regulation of alcohol in Sydney since the turn of the new millennium, we need to investigate discourses of 'alcohol-fuelled' violence, their (re)production in statistics and media, and the way these converged around the Sydney suburb of Kings Cross. In this first chapter, I aim to interrogate the causal linking of alcohol and violence, its centrality to policies relating to alcohol, and the way explanations that rely on *linear causalities* tend to overlook other variables. Firstly, I show how alcohol is enacted in discourse and reproduced in statistics by governments, police and the media. Secondly, I look at attempts to complexify or navigate the alcohol-violence relation through critical discourses of gender and the night-time economy thesis. Finally, as a way of explaining 'alcohol-related violence' as a complex assemblage, I undertake a case-study of the Sydney area of Kings Cross.

### Alcohol imaginaries

Jayne and Valentine (2016, 68) critique the 'alcohol-related imaginaries' that dominate alcohol research and public commentary, including the perception of alcohol-related violence and disorder as ubiquitous, which they argue is underpinned by the 'uncritical view of violence as a fetishized natural consequence of alcohol consumption'. 'Alcohol-related imaginaries' and broader traditions of pathologisation (see also Valverde 1998) are central

to my understanding of ideas about ‘drinking cultures’, and discourses around drinking and violence in Sydney. My interpretation of ‘alcohol-related imaginaries’ is *not* that they are completely fictional or ‘imaginary’, I see them rather as a set of concepts around alcohol that inform how it is understood by various publics, including policy publics.

Over recent decades, ‘alcohol-related’ or ‘alcohol-fuelled’ violence has been a focal point for policy, government, the media and police. Causal explanations that posit alcohol as *the cause* of violence are generally grounded in simplistic models of linear causality and ‘common-sense’ understandings of drug and alcohol pharmacology (Race 2014). These ‘common-sense’ understandings both shape and *are shaped by* drug and alcohol research and policy, thus research itself contributes to the construction of alcohol ‘problematizations’ (Jayne and Valentine 2016; Moore et al. 2017; Bacchi 2015). In their study of alcohol-related research, Savic and Room (2014) argue that higher research outputs (or quantity of research) on this topic can be seen as a manifestation of societal concern in societies that have historically ‘worried’ about alcohol, pointing to a correlation between higher research outputs and countries that had significant ‘Temperance’ movements (such as Australia). The authors suggest that researchers and policy makers *inherit* these legacies of concern, pointing to the sheer volume of research output from the Anglosphere and Northern Europe that dominates alcohol debate internationally.

The field of critical drug studies has challenged attributions of linear causality, demonstrating that the effects of drugs and alcohol *emerge* from various forces, elements and contingencies of, for example, alcohol and social practices, hierarchies, forms of cultural capital and disadvantage, gender, the organisation of spaces of consumption, public discourses, laws and policies etc. (Moore et al. 2017; Jayne and Valentine 2016; Race 2014). By following Connolly’s conception of causality as ‘emergent’ (Race 2014), I aim to avoid replicating weaknesses of alcohol research that hinge on notions of linear causality.

### **The re-regulation of nightlife**

Over the last fifteen years successive Labor and Liberal state governments in New South Wales have implemented policies restricting night-time activities, centring on strategies of limiting access to alcohol and increasing punishments to both venues and individuals. A

variety of methods were deployed by the state and police to shut down inner-city partying practices, including a 'three strikes' policy for venues with incidences of violence, a liquor license 'freeze', and police operations targeting 'anti-social behaviour'. 2008 stands out as a pivotal year, with the federal Labor government implementing a 'binge-drinking strategy', and the NSW state Labor government declaring 'war' on alcohol-related violence, trialling 'lockout laws' in the regional city of Newcastle, implementing the 'three strikes' policy across the state and a liquor licensing freeze in areas of high venue density including the entire Sydney CBD and a number of surrounding suburbs. The most drastic reform, however, has been the 2014 'Lockout Laws' introduced by the state Liberal government with great speed and a lack of public consultation or evidence, amounting to a seismic shift in nightlife regulation that affected over 1300 licensed venues. For a number of years, the 'lockout laws' prevented city venues admitting patrons past 1:30am, or serving alcohol after 3am, ultimately leading to the closure of over 270 Sydney venues, and significantly curtailing nightlife in the city (Wadds 2020; Wolifson 2018; Lee et al. 2020). Additionally, an increase in aggressive policing strategies of drug detection ('sniffer') dogs and strip-searches have effectively ended partying practices such as 'day clubs', which began on Oxford Street and by the mid-2000s could be found at a number of locations across the city (Race 2016). Contrary to popular understanding, the 'lockout laws' have not been entirely rescinded, for example, at the time of writing the 3:30am 'last drinks' rule appears to still be place in the CBD, Kings Cross and Oxford Street. This contrasts, for instance, with the southern city of Melbourne where multiple venues have 24-hour licenses.

The justification for implementing the 'lockout laws' followed a number of highly-publicised homicides in nightlife areas of Sydney, dubbed 'king hits' or later 'coward punches' in the media. Licensing hours were portrayed as a key lever to reduce alcohol-related violence, informed by criminological research on violence and disorder in night-time economies (Hobbs 2003), but also by older concerns: sociologist Mariana Valverde (1998, 146-147) highlights an enduring 'obsession' with licensing hours in Australia.

In drug and alcohol research and discourse, statistics have a generative role in the causal linking of alcohol and violence, regularly deployed by governments, researchers, journalists and police as justification for changing policy settings. Recent decades have seen increasingly systematic attempts to analyse phenomena around crime (including links with

alcohol) within the social sciences, medical profession and media, yet it is questionable to what extent crime rates are *actually* knowable, given factors such as uneven reporting and changing police recording practices (Wadds 2020, 60). Nonetheless, as explored below, a considerable quantity of research and commentary at the start of the twenty-first century portrayed the night-time economy as ‘out of control’, positing alcohol as the linear *cause* of violence and overstating the extent of alcohol-related disorder, with little appreciation of diversity in drinking practices and experiences. Rather than unpicking specific configurations of alcohol and social practices that can contribute to violence, linear causal explanations have led to blanket population-level responses from authorities such as the 2014 ‘lockout laws’. Such governmental responses have hinged on the reductive use of statistics that do not consider aspects such as gender, increases in nightlife patronage and hyper-focus policing. To begin with, any statistical upsurges in violence in Sydney around the turn of the millennium need to be considered in the context of expanded nightlife participation and greater police and governmental attention (Wadds 2020, 108-113). The picture is complicated further when we consider that what is constituted statistically as an ‘alcohol-related incident’ is very much open to interpretation: for example, when recording violence in night-life settings police often automatically categorise incidents as ‘alcohol-related’ based on the *victims’* alcohol consumption level (Moore et al. 2017; Jayne and Valentine 2016).

Through the process of *mediatisation*, the media is a significant driver of discourses around drugs and alcohol. This often takes the form of a ‘moral panic’, a social process whereby the media focuses on an identified group - often ‘youth’ - as ‘troublesome’ and requiring public and governmental attention (Barker 2004, 126).<sup>4</sup> In 1998 the death of teenager Anna Wood from ecstasy in a Sydney CBD nightclub occurred at the time of already-existing anxieties around Sydney’s nightlife, in particular ‘raves’ and drug use (Homan 2003). An ensuing moral panic over drug use contributed to the introduction of sniffer dogs in 2001 by the state Labor government. Their use continues to the present day, rendering NSW an outlier amongst Australian states, and despite significant and well-documented issues concerning inaccuracy, bias and the harmful effects of their deployment (Race 2023).

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<sup>4</sup> As McRobbie notes, ‘Youth is not a stable undifferentiated category; it is cut across by ethnic, gender, class and other differences’ (1994, 167).

Belying the inordinate focus on nightlife risk, research from the NSW government's own Bureau of Crime Statistics showed *'no statistically significant'* trends in alcohol-related assault between 1996 and 2012, and in fact assaults had decreased in Kings Cross since 2002 (Wadds 2020, 103). Concurrently, violence in nightlife settings became increasingly politicised, with media reportage on the issue growing steadily during the late 1990s and peaking in 2008 following the NSW government's declaration of 'war' on alcohol-related violence (Wadds 2020, 101-102, 191). Many accounts of Sydney's nightlife at this time presented a 'dystopian vision' of a violent and out-of-control social life, said to be driven by deregulated licensing practices aimed at maximising profit at the behest of industry, with revellers 'reduced to comprising a socially narrow and often threatening group of dishevelled and drunk young people' (Tomsen 2014, 38). Vivid headlines depicting a culture of disorder followed: *Just Another Drunken Night on the Streets – OUR DRUNKEN NIGHTLIFE*, *Never-Ending Violent Season Thrust Upon Us*, *Police Chief Calls for War on Drunks*, *We are Living in Fear of Drunken Violence* and *Booze-fuelled Crime the Biggest Problem – COPS ON THE BRINK* (Wadds 2020, 102). Demonstrating the synergistic relationship between the police and media, police carried out highly symbolic, media-oriented spectacles like *Operation Unite*, blitzing nightlife zones with journalists and television cameras in tow, documenting examples of extreme behaviour, but significantly cracking down on 'low-level offences' whilst presenting 'positive public images of police control' (Wadds 2015, 103; see also Race 2016). Even some police officers conceded that contemporary policy appeared to be based more on law-and-order politics and the marketisation of insecurity by the media, rather than genuine concerns over crime (Wadds 2020, 180).

How, then, are we to understand this juxtaposition between stable (or even decreasing) alcohol-related assault levels, increasing public and media concern and subsequent regulation? One way is through Fishman's 'crimewaves as ideology' thesis (qtd. in Wadds 2015, 96), which holds that over-reporting of crime influences both fear of crime and 'law and order' approaches by governments which present a permanent state of emergency, set political agendas and permeate police culture. As Stuart Hall explored in relation to 'mugging' in 1970s Britain, moral panics and the accompanying use of statistics have an ideological role, soliciting public support to 'police (the way out of) the crisis' (Hall 1978). In New South Wales, flow-on effects from the moral panic over nightlife have led to an

increasing professionalisation and arguably a paramilitarisation of police forces, discernible in the uniforms and weapons of the NSW Public Order and Riot Squad and their (over-)deployment in both protest and night-time settings (Wadds 2020; Race 2016). At the same time responsibility for nightlife regulation, once solely the domain of police, is increasingly dispersed amongst a range of actors including Liquor Accords (groupings of businesses, government and other bodies), local councils, private security, and non-governmental organisations, highlighting the complex permutations of neoliberal strategies of governance.

Statistics also interplay with institutional and popular memory in complex ways. At a broader cultural level, Wadds' (2020) interviews with serving police officers reveal questionable assertions about present-day Sydney being more violent than in the past. As Wadds (2020) shows, these claims of a more violent present are often attributable to police grievances over perceived under-resourcing (and the desire for more funding), the fact that police now have less latitude to mete out 'natural justice' due to changing public opinion and CCTV technology, and high workforce turnover which has the effect of further destabilising institutional memory regarding how violent cities were or were not in the past. At the time of the introduction of the 'lockout laws' these nostalgic perceptions about lesser violence in earlier decades were also articulated by Sydney emergency room doctors in joint media engagements with senior police (Lee et al. 2020, 194).

It is important to situate these developments within broader social and cultural shifts towards discourses of fear, insecurity, cultures of control and a preoccupation with disorderly cultures (Garland qtd. in Talbot 2016, 140).<sup>5</sup> As with the death of Anna Wood fifteen years earlier, the 2012 and 2014 homicides of Thomas Kelly and Daniel Christie in Kings Cross from 'one-punch' assaults were catalysts for the introduction of the 'lockout laws', yet a seven-fold increase in media reportage between 1996 and 2012 overdramatised the issue occurring, as discussed above, in the context of no significant trends in alcohol-related crime statistics over the same period.<sup>6</sup> This enlargement of 'risk' ran alongside a 'common-sense' rhetoric driven by social commentary and opinion pieces that

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<sup>5</sup> See also Ericson's formulation of a 'trend across Western countries of treating every imaginable source of harm as a crime' (qtd. in Wadds 2020, 60).

<sup>6</sup> Azar et al. (2014) revealed that major metropolitan newspapers in Australia became 'more disapproving in their presentation of alcohol-related stories' between 2000 and 2011.

centred on the idea of a problematic local 'binge' drinking culture amongst hedonistic young people (Wadds 2020, 105).

### **Problematising the causal link: Gender**

Alcohol researchers have discussed how different hetero-masculinities at times seek to violently assert themselves in night-time spaces. Dennis Altman (2012) points to a prevalence in Protestant Anglo-Saxon and other 'frontier' societies of 'extreme postures of aggression' and 'mateship' as a way of sublimating homosexual desire, noting that violence in gay bars is rare in contrast to the 'suppressed violence' that hovers over straight bars. A 2006 study of nightlife in Melbourne found that 'commercial venues' were 'strongly heterosexual spaces', though increasingly 'feminised' as dance floors replaced live bands and different alcoholic drinks were marketed to an increasingly mixed-gendered clientele (Lindsay 2006).

Despite the dearth of qualitative information on the 'acts of rage and desire that perpetrators of nighttime violence experience' (Race 2016, 107), a review of Australian alcohol research and policy has shown that whilst violent incidents in the overwhelming majority involve males, the contribution of *masculinities* to this violence has received little attention, with research often utilising 'gender-neutral' language and foregrounding alcohol as the causal factor, remaining largely silent on the factor of (violent) 'youthful masculinities' (Moore et al. 2017) and other possible factors including inter-ethnic tensions or racism, for example. The omission of gender in predominant linear causal accounts of alcohol-related violence (alcohol *causes* violence) obscures the complex assemblages of alcohol-related violence, and the way in which performativities of 'masculinity and femininity and classed, racist, homophobic, embodied and subcultural abuse can underpin alcohol-related violence and disorder' (Jayne and Valentine 2016, 73).<sup>7</sup>

In an insightful portrayal of contemporary Sydney, Wadds (2020, 198) argues that in certain contemporary performative masculinities, such as revellers' 'stylish clothing and gym bodies', burly security guards, and the heavy boots, cargo pants and work-belts of police,

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<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, these are 'social problems to be socially solved' (Delany 2019, 32).

there are resonances with the factory and dock workers of an earlier time, and a re-working of older masculinities eroded through 'regulation and reform in a city built on finance and capital'. To this image we can add the performativity of mediatised policing spectacles like the aforementioned 'Operation Unite', which are as much about 'image-work' as the containment of crime, highlighting the way masculinities are produced alongside and in tension with 'official forms of masculinity inscribed in policing and criminal justice systems' (Messerschmidt and Tomsen 2018, 91).

Below, I seek to trouble notions of inevitable bio-, cultural or socio-logical outcomes, through foregrounding instead the contingencies of 'assemblages of forces and relations, including research and policy' (Hearn and McKie qtd. in Moore et al. 2017, 312), and in the next chapter I will explore (and question) the pervasive characterisation of Australian drinking practices as innately or uniquely 'masculine', 'excessive' or 'violent'.

### **Problematising the causal link: the Night-time Economy thesis**

A second way the alcohol-violence link has been problematised is through the 'night-time economy' thesis. The term 'night-time economy' refers to the development of entertainment precincts and the rapid expansion of venues such as pubs and clubs in inner cities of advanced economies in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, as governments sought to revitalise formerly industrial areas and cater to expanded foreign and domestic tourism whilst offsetting the loss of manufacturing profits in changing economies. In scholarship on post-industrial cities and urban entrepreneurialism, contemporary nightlife is often understood as 'neoliberalised': for instance in the influential work of Dick Hobbs the night-time economy represents a 'commodification of space' catering to youth and centred on alcohol consumption (2003, 46). The 'night-time economy' thesis problematises the causal link between alcohol and violence through proposing a range of mediating elements, including over-crowding, the 'privatisation' of control via the elevation of private security over traditional policing, discounted drink promotions, drug consumption, inadequate levels of staffing, a decline in cross-generational spaces, and extended venue opening hours (Wadds 2020; Hae 2012; Talbot 2016; Hobbs 2003). 'Space' in the night-time economy is considered especially difficult for the contemporary state to

govern, and venues are often reorganised via methods of ‘responsibilisation’ such as reducing alcohol availability, altering venue layout, increasing private security and CCTV, reducing venue density through individualised penalties and increased monitoring by both governmental and non-governmental actors. The ambit measures of the NSW government’s ‘lockout laws’ are a severe example of this strategy of reorganisation, one grounded in an understanding of ‘the market’ as having failed and existing responsibilisation strategies as incapable of sufficiently governing nightlife risk (Lee et al. 2020, 202).

Hobbs (2003, 28) sees disorder in the night-time economy as a product of the marketisation of city centres, through the expansion and clustering of cultural-entertainment venues, which he claims generated ‘an unregulated zone of quasi-liminality awash on a sea of alcohol’. For Hobbs, this extends to life in post-industrial societies in general, characterised by ‘consumption without norms’ and a citizenry ‘seduced by the excess of commodities, signs and services’ (2003, 269, 14).<sup>8</sup>

Further scholarship on the contemporary night-time economy suggests that nightlife has become ‘commodified’, ‘sanitised’ and ‘colonised’ by the market (Talbot 2016; Hae 2012; Wolifson 2018), through increasingly stringent regulation of venues around licensing, insurance, and noise and a retreat from alternative or counter-cultures.<sup>9</sup> However, there is a possibility of oversimplification in contemporary characterisations of nightlife that rely on a theorising of the dominance of capital as an ‘inevitable’ feature of its being, or what Gibson-Graham dub a *hegemonic* capitalism (1996, 5). As Lee et al. point out (2020, 198), the ‘relative ungovernability’ of the night-time economy remains a key attraction for revellers, and in the next section I show how Sydney’s Kings Cross itself troubles simplistic formulations, as a complex site of interaction between shifting anxieties and identities, changing modes of government, and a long history of variously governed/ungoverned and fringe/mainstream nightlife.

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<sup>8</sup> Hobbs portrays drinkers who end up attracting bouncer or police attention as ‘the most thoroughly seduced of consumers’ (2003, 273).

<sup>9</sup> Resulting in, as Hobbs put it, ‘corporately-controlled good times’ (2003, 276).

## **Complex assemblages along The Golden Mile**

The discourses examined above introduce variables which counter the linear causality that is a feature of alcohol debates. A case-study of Sydney's Kings Cross allows further elucidation of a non-reductionist argument, revealing an 'overdeterminism' as defined by Gibson-Graham, where 'every entity or event exists at the nexus of a bewildering complexity of natural and social processes, constituting it as a site of contradiction, tension, difference and instability' (1996, 29).

Kings Cross, a locality in Sydney's inner-east (not officially a suburb) has long been linked to nightlife, gambling, drugs, drinking and sex work. In a pocket-history of the area, Girling-Butcher (2010) highlights central and interrelated factors in the development of organised crime in the early twentieth century, including the rise of the Christian Temperance movement, prohibitions on the sale of cocaine and heroin (previously legally available in chemists) and licensing restrictions that enforced pub closing times of 6pm from 1916 to 1955. As Sydney's outer suburbs grew via a doubling of the city's population in the 1920s, Kings Cross developed a complex demography with bohemians, a nascent gay culture, and in the Second World War the stationing of troops further expanded black markets in alcohol, drugs and prostitution (Race 2014; Faro and Wotherspoon 2000; Wotherspoon 1991). Another element in this mix was a web of police corruption that spanned decades, eventually brought to light in the 1995 Wood Royal Commission into policing (Wadds 2020, 62).

Nightlife in Sydney has been entangled with the spectre of 'The Cross' for over a century, and the media, police and governmental focus on the area that intensified at the end of the twentieth century presented a distorted picture of the prevalence and severity of violence, although there certainly were periodic increases (Wadds 2020). The fantasised 'infamy' of Kings Cross featured heavily in the moral panic over binge drinking and alcohol-related violence, merging with decades of literary, musical and televisual portrayals. Despite the earlier introduction of lockouts in the industrial city of Newcastle to Sydney's north, in all likelihood there would have been no NSW-wide 'lockout laws' without Kings Cross.

In many ways, by the 2000s 'The Cross' *had* developed into the type of night-time economy set out by criminologists such as Hobbs, with high-density licensed venues, 24-hour

consumption and so on. However, with its already-existing nightlife in a legalised red-light district that preceded the era of post-industrial urban entrepreneurialism, I argue that Kings Cross needs to be understood as a highly complex site that cannot be pinned down to ‘the night-time economy’.<sup>10</sup> Whilst nightspots in other parts of Sydney such as The Coogee Bay Hotel, The Manly Steyne, and Rouse Hill’s Mean Fiddler also appeared on ‘most violent’ lists, Kings Cross attracted a laser-like focus from the media, police, government and the public.

An element of this focus included the precinct’s portrayal on television. In charting the centrality of Kings Cross to my argument around the complex assemblage of alcohol, I draw on the locally-produced television program *Underbelly – The Golden Mile*, the third season in Australian ‘true crime’ series, *Underbelly*. Broadcast in 2009 on the commercial Nine Network, the show dramatised and amplified the notorious reputation of the neighbourhood, and its interpretation in popular culture as a risky and exciting site of dangerous cultural mixing (Gregg and Wilson 2010).<sup>11</sup> The third season, set in Kings Cross between 1988 and 1999, is centred on corrupt police and the activities of drug dealers and underworld figures, in a period where an ‘overground’ leisure economy developed concurrently with an ‘underground’ economy of illicit drugs (Gregg and Wilson 2010, 421).<sup>12</sup>

As Gregg and Wilson (2010) have written of *Underbelly*’s earlier seasons, *Golden Mile* investigates law and order and the social, economic, ethnic and gender anxieties of recent decades, including the association between criminality and suburban material aspiration as exemplified in real-life protagonists like nightclub owner and alleged underworld figure John Ibrahim. The opening narration of *The Golden Mile* establishes a tension between ‘the suburbs’ and the inner-urban area of Kings Cross, whilst revealing the porousness of the border between the two (‘most people in the suburbs have no idea what goes on here’... Kings Cross is a place for ‘western suburbs boys looking to get rich’), through conflicts between inquisitive journalists and corrupt police, and the diversity of ‘The Cross’, with its

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<sup>10</sup> In 2022, this era of nightlife may have passed, with gyms, restaurants, small bars and new residential developments replacing pubs, clubs, and ‘adult entertainment’ in Kings Cross.

<sup>11</sup> A critical and ratings success, *The Golden Mile* was the second-most watched of the six seasons and is considered to be one of the last mass-viewed local television dramas of the broadcast pre-streaming era.

<sup>12</sup> To me, this has resonances with Homan’s characterisation of the ‘pub rock’ era of the 1970s as both ‘underground’ and ‘mainstream’; where what governments *don’t do* in periods of lesser regulation is as important as what they begin doing when scenes go ‘overground’ and appear in governmental view (2008, 609).

bikies, sex workers, drug dealers, the trans community, tourists, backpackers, homeless and visitors from the suburbs. Police are depicted turning a blind eye to drug deals, street fights and other activities, receiving payments (dubbed 'the laugh'), and committing assault, yet this Kings Cross is characterised as at the end of an era: in the concluding episodes police are netted by the Wood Royal Commission. In the final episode, the incoming police Commissioner makes the point that policing practices in NSW had been particularly corrupt since the 1950s and that post-Commission, crime would be fought with 'half the manpower'. As discussed above, these same themes arose in Wadds' (2020) police interviews: perceived declines in resourcing, less latitude to implement 'natural justice' due to changing public opinion and CCTV technology, a shift to privatised (security guard) policing, and high workforce turnover.

In the development of night-time economies in post-industrial cities over recent decades, Wadds (2015, 95) identifies an attempt to reshape or reinvent the traditional concept of the urban night *away from* that of a sphere of crime and danger, towards a solution for stagnating economies and decline in public sector funding (Talbot 2016; Hae 2012). I contend that 'The Cross' is, in fact, characterised by the adjacency of these modes (traditional dangerous urban night and contemporary night-time economy), in a complex assemblage where a 'multitude of elements' go into shaping 'events-in-process' (Race 2014). To return to this chapter's central argument, as Race (2014, 301) shows, conceptualising causality as *emergent* 'makes it possible to see how any element in a given assemblage can acquire contingent agentic capacities' (Race 2014, 301), which enables us to further problematise the linear causal framing that dominates discourses of alcohol and violence.

Looking at Kings Cross during the 1990s and 2000s, one element that shaped 'events-in-process' was the various combinations of drugs and alcohol prevalent at the moment of global club culture's 'industrialisation', with a 2004 survey revealing 21% of Australians aged 20-24 had used Ecstasy (11.4% for the general population), the highest per capita consumption of that drug in the world (Greg and Wilson 2010). Despite this *mainstreaming*, party drugs remained illegal, with 'the divide between the metropolitan consumption culture and the suburban origin of the drug suppliers' highlighting a tension between the night-time economy celebrated by local councils and the reality of continuing criminalisation

(Gregg and Wilson 2010, 422-423). Another element could be found at the 'nostalgic' interface between contemporary headlines about 'lawless' and 'out-of-control' youth, and popular memories of the 'Sin City' of 'The Cross' and the corrupt NSW Police Criminal Investigation Branch, memorably depicted in *Underbelly*. Interestingly, in public visitation Kings Cross peaked in popularity *after* the broadcast of the *Golden Mile* series on the Nine network: in 2012 the area was frequented by up to 6,000 people per hour on weekends, with bars and clubs in the area holding a capacity of 45,000 (Wadds 2020, 171). This highlights the crucial point that rates of violence in Kings Cross were not necessarily out of keeping with substantial increases in patronage at the time of the 'lockout laws', in what was then the most densely populated urban region in Australia. I would argue a further element behind the mass appeal of Kings Cross in recent decades was the incremental re-regulation of culture in the suburbs over the same period. Nightlife in the suburbs had expanded significantly following the ending of 6 o'clock closing in 1955, underpinned by comparatively relaxed regulatory standards on noise complaints and maximum capacities, and seemingly less *substance-focused* policing. By the 1990s, however, entertainment venues in outer suburban areas had begun to significantly decline amidst the mass replacement of music and band spaces for newly permitted poker machines by venue owners.

Kings Cross' century-long history as a nightlife precinct confounds simplified theories of 'night-time economies' as 'packaged zones of enjoyment, managed by an alliance of urban planners, entrepreneurs, local politicians and quasi-governmental 'regeneration' agencies' (Rose qtd. in Binnie et al. 2006, 18), in which alcohol disorder is seen as a symptom of post-industrial malaise (see Hobbs 2003). The development of mass nightlife in the area needs to be seen as distinct from other post-industrial 'entertainment quarters', in that it developed at the site of an *already-existing* nightlife in a legalised red-light district. The 'contingent agentic capacities' (Race 2014, 301) of these eddying currents reveal an overlooked emergent causality: where a marginal and fringe space, deeply linked with sex work, drugs and alcohol, police corruption and organised crime, became more broadly popular in the 1990s when a 'night out in the Cross' became an 'event' in its own right (Lee et al. 2020), but importantly *whilst retaining* its already-existing features. I contend that the adjacency of two modes (traditional dangerous urban night and contemporary night-time economy)

ultimately rendered 'The Cross' as an 'overdetermined' nexus of 'contradiction, tension, difference and instability' (Gibson-Graham 1996, 29), irreducible to one element (alcohol).

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From the middle of the 1990s to the introduction of the 'lockout laws' in 2014, crime statistics, media and police discourse, and popular culture sedimented a causal link between alcohol consumption and violence in inner-Sydney, converging on the precinct of Kings Cross. In demonstrating its discursive production, I have tried to articulate that alcohol-related violence cannot be explained in a linear-causal way. This reductive association is also implicated in the increasing privatisation of public space through alcohol-free zoning, amongst other elements (as Chapter 3 explores in detail). In setting out my argument in this first chapter, I have highlighted the importance of considering various factors, including gender, space, drinking practices and cultural narratives in addition to what Brenner and Theodore (2002, 28) term the 'unpredictable mutations' of neoliberal strategies.

In chapter 2, I turn to how the 'alcohol imaginary' of 'civilised drinking' is used within 'global city' discourse as a way of both navigating the alcohol-violence link, and boosting Sydney's reputation as a fun, convivial world city. As explained above, while police and reductive crime statistic discourses concretise the link as causal, the night-time economy and 'emergent causality' theses present this association as contingent on spatial and other variables. In some ways, the urbanist discourse of promoting 'small bars' takes up (or exploits) this argument about contingent agency in order to refashion the inner-city as 'civilised'. Drawing on historical moments, my next chapter interrogates the work that invocations of 'drinking cultures' and 'culturalist' arguments do, in both obscuring histories of technical interventions around alcohol, and providing justification for new 'civilising' interventions.

## Chapter 2: Civilised Drinking

In my first chapter I demonstrated how discourses of ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’ are produced in statistics and the media, and how these converged around the suburb of Kings Cross in Sydney at the turn of the new millennium. Many accounts of Sydney’s nightlife at this time presented a dystopian vision of a violent and out-of-control social life, driven by deregulated licensing practices aimed at maximising profit at the behest of industry.

In this second chapter I look at how recent invocations of ‘civilised’ drinking within ‘global city’ discourse aim to placate anxieties about ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’. I examine how these discourses of civilised drinking back certain kinds of culture, while aiming to boost Sydney’s reputation as a fun, convivial and safe world city. To begin, I undertake a *genealogy* of sorts through local histories, cultural representations, popular culture and media discourse as a way of unsettling dominant discourses attached to drinking, revealing how invocations of ‘drinking cultures’ function to both obscure histories of technical interventions and to rationalise new and purportedly ‘civilising’ interventions.

### Drinking culture imaginaries

‘Alcohol imaginaries’ dominate much academic debate, popular understanding and policy, and the prevalent ‘alcohol imaginary’ of a ‘rowdy’ or ‘uncivilised’ Australian drinking culture illustrates Carol Bacchi’s (2015) assertion that alcohol problematisations function in an unquestioned way. Australia is regularly characterised as having a uniquely problematic ‘drinking culture’ in the media, political commentary, and popular understanding. For example, in the federal government’s *‘National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028’* Australian society is portrayed as an ‘alcohol culture’ where alcohol plays a ‘complex’ (and negative) role, apparently exemplified by drinking ‘to intoxication’, the ‘linking of celebration and alcohol’, the ‘glorification of public figures for drinking alcohol’, ‘widespread alcohol availability and affordability’, ‘social and peer pressure’ to consume alcohol, and the ubiquitousness of alcohol advertising (Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health 2019). However, what constitutes ‘intoxication’, ‘availability and affordability’, ‘social pressure’ and ‘ubiquitous’ advertising are highly contestable (in a

national and international context), and notions of a coherent 'national' drinking identity make little sense, given the heterogeneity of drinking practices and differences around gender, class, ethnicity, age and so on.

As a mode of analysis, Mike Savage (1995, 19) points to the difficulty of theoretically 'closing' the concept of 'class', a feature that he argues is also its strength, particularly following the successful challenge to monolithic constructs of a (white) singular working-class by feminist and cultural scholarship over recent decades. 'Class' as a category can be used to explain wealth, social disadvantage, education, cultural capital and so on, and it is also a political 'signifier' that operates under complex intersecting modalities, with much recent scholarship focused on the interface between class and gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Threadgold and Gerrard 2022, 12). Overall, we can conceive of class as a useful base for enquiry into 'the relationship between mechanisms that produce inequalities and various forms of cultural identity on the other' (Savage 1995, 25).

In Australia, class continues to play a central role in inequality, distribution of cultural capital, and conceptions of 'taste', in a complex way that is marked by contradiction and ambiguity (Noble 2022, 30). Class runs through how alcohol is thought about, debated, and regulated in Australia, often manifesting as a 'pathologisation of the local' (Binnie et. al 2006, 15) within a prevalent 'alcohol-related imaginary' that posits a European/Australian dichotomy, in which 'European' styles of drinking are cast as 'civilised' and Australian practices 'rowdy' and 'working-class' drinking coded as 'uncivilised'.

Within this imaginary, 'Australia's alcohol culture' is understood in a deterministic or teleological way, with the past simply unfolding to the present (Johnson 2004, 11). Former NSW Premier Bob Carr's opening address at the 1995 Premier's Forum exemplifies this alcohol imaginary: *'Our love affair with alcohol has its roots in the earliest days of the Australian colony when settlers were paid in rum... Drunkenness soon became part of life and we have been grappling with it ever since... How can we possibly be surprised at... excessive drinking when alcohol is so firmly embedded in our national psyche?'* (Carr qtd. in Drabsch, 2003, 13).

In uncritically asserting that behaviour patterns apparently forged in centuries past are unvaryingly repeated in the present, history loses 'its capacity to shock or surprise' (Johnson

2004, 11). Constructions such as this are in fact infused with 'historical geographies of drink' (Jayne et al. 2006), in a country where alcohol has carried a 'moral and political ambivalence' since colonisation, at times celebrated and other times seen as morally depraved (Wadds 2020, 18). In nineteenth century Australia, for example, discourses of 'respectability' were central to drinking practices, with popular pastimes often *public* in form including sport, gambling and drinking (Waterhouse 1995). Such pursuits had a strong association with public disorder and were negatively contrasted with the 'respectable' middle-class citizen who drank in private, away from the gaze of the population and the law (Wadds 2020, 22).

In contrast to popular belief, scholars have shown Australia has not ranked particularly highly in global alcohol consumption across time (Fitzgerald and Jordan 2009; P. Kelly 2011; Wadds 2020), however essentialised ideas of an excessive, masculine, often violent Australian drinking culture of imbibing 'to intoxication' continue into the present. Drinking culture tropes depend on superficial and anecdotal comparisons between 'national' drinking patterns, which are then reified to the level of 'common-sense', with 'European' modes of alcohol consumption (and those coded as middle-class) taken to be different, and socially and physically healthy (Jayne et al. 2008; P. Kelly 2011). In reality, alcohol in Australia as elsewhere functions as 'a means to meet strangers, entertain guests, celebrate religious ceremonies, signify social status and can mark distinctions of taste, social class, gender, and social and cultural identities' (Fitzgerald and Jordan 2009, 243).

### **Critiquing the culturalist argument**

In twentieth century alcohol literature, 'alcohol cultures' were traditionally split into two binary typologies of 'wet' and 'dry', the former typified by wine-drinking countries such as Italy and France and the latter beer or spirit countries like Sweden and the USA (Savic et al. 2016, 274). It was claimed that drinking predominantly took place with meals in the home in places like Greece and Italy and that drinking to 'excess' was a feature of beer cultures (an inversion of the 'Gin Lane' phenomena discussed in my introduction). Such idyllic descriptions of homogenous drinking cultures have been rendered problematic in later

literature that depicted, for example, male drinking practices in Greek tavernas and intoxication amongst young people in wine drinking countries (Savic et al. 2016, 275).

In *Diseases of the Will* (1998), sociologist Mariana Valverde recounts purchasing wine for her parents as a child in Spain, an activity she notes is considered shocking or illegal in other contexts. Valverde goes on to critique the ‘circular’ reasoning of the ‘culturalist’ argument where (to use her example) Italian families drinking at outdoor picnics is taken as *evidence* of differences attributable to culture. Instead, she asks ‘whether the culture that is regarded as causing behaviours can be considered instead a series of *effects* produced by certain, often trivial, mechanisms’, rather than national psyche or underlying culture (Valverde 1998, 146).

Valverde’s formulation is central to the way I understand ‘drinking cultures’ and takes us into the murky waters of culture and governmentality, raising the question of the relation between ‘techniques’ or ‘technologies’ and ‘culture’. As a way of thinking through this relation, I contend that whilst technical interventions *do* produce cultural associations, we tend to gloss over or forget about these interventions and just ascribe everything to ‘culture’.

Technical interventions are implicated in practices that get *read as* ‘culture’ and this process can be illustrated by taking one ‘alcohol imaginary’ which holds that a masculine and sex-segregated drinking culture is innate to Australia, with the ‘6 o’clock Swill’ often presented as evidence of this.<sup>13</sup> This is a prevalent imaginary, yet historians paint a more nuanced picture (Fitzgerald and Jordan 2009; Kirkby 2003, 2006; Wright 2003), arguing that in the colonial period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries drinking in Australia was not particularly segregated by gender, men and women drank in pubs, purchased take-aways and home-brewed alcohol (Kirkby 2006, 210). Prior to the introduction of early closing in 1916, pubs served as community hubs, ballrooms, dancehalls, billiards venues, theatres, hair salons and bathhouses (Wright 2003, 109). The introduction of 6 o’clock closing and restricted trading in 1916 saw pubs attempt to maintain profits through the *technical* transformation of space, including the removal of mixed-gendered spaces, billiards tables,

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<sup>13</sup> ‘The Swill’ refers to drinking practices during the period of 6 o’clock pub closing. 6 o’clock closing was essentially a localised form of prohibition driven by the Christian Temperance movement, under which NSW pubs were not permitted to open after 6pm between 1916-1955.

dart boards, tables and chairs, and nooks and booths, in turn facilitating a norm of ‘vertical drinking’ (Wright 2003, 115). In fact, Clare Wright (2003, 115) maintains that the public hotel was only ‘gendered male’ in the second quarter of the twentieth century as ‘the 6 o’clock swill’ transformed pubs from places of drinking and recreation to ‘male bastions’. The suggestion here is that, to some extent, technical intervention *produced* gendered behaviours, by virtue of the fact that it was mainly men who went on to become ‘6 o’clock swillers’, a behaviour that goes on in alcohol imaginaries to be naturalised as male and masculine.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 1:** Hotels like this one in Bondi Junction were ‘renovated’ to accommodate the crowds of ‘the swill’ (NSW Police Forensic Photography Archive, ‘Public bar of Bondi Junction Hotel’, Museums of History New South Wales, 18 March 1953).

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<sup>14</sup> As P. Kelly remind us, drinking and intoxication are generally framed in masculine terms world-wide (2011, 127).

In theorising the interface of technologies and ‘culture’, retaining a concept of ‘culture’ allows us to account for the fact that specific techniques or technologies will not always have the same effects. Therefore, we might use ‘culture’ to describe the *enculturation* of a particular technical intervention in a given place and time. This is not a deterministic process where x simply leads to y, however, as the enculturation of particular technical interventions is unstable, remaining superimposed or overlaid with an ‘overdeterminism’, to return to Gibson-Graham’s theorisation, where ‘every entity or event exists at the nexus of a bewildering complexity of natural and social processes, constituting it as a site of contradiction, tension, difference and instability’ (1996, 29).

In order to avoid slipping into our own ‘alcohol imaginary’, then, we need to keep in mind the complexity of the effects of early pub closing. For instance, the effects were not uniform but localised (Fitzgerald and Jordan 2009, 194) and tales of the ‘uncivilised wonder of the world’ and ‘depravity’ of drinking practices during that period were often apocryphal (Fiske et al. 1987). The proliferation of interior tiling in Australian pubs is often attributed to the myth that excessive ‘swilling’ necessitated the easy clean-up of bodily fluids, however this design feature had more to do with society-wide discourses around hygiene (Luckins 2022). As for the pub being a purely masculine domain, even at the height of their ‘infamous half-century exile from the public bar’ in the middle of the twentieth century (Wright 2003, 117), working-class women in particular continued to frequent pubs, with the more flexible nature and hours of women’s work meaning they were less impacted by early closing (Fitzgerald and Jordan 2009, 101). Furthermore, early closing was not uniformly enforced: drinking dens regularly flouted the legislation in certain Sydney suburbs, and Kirkby et al. argue the trade in take-aways and the ‘quiet drinking’ that took place at such venues after-hours had more ‘destabilising’ effects on drinking practices than 6 o’clock closing time itself (2010, 127).

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As discussed in chapter 1, societies which have historically ‘worried’ about alcohol tend to dominate alcohol research. One effect of this is that evidence of lower levels of alcohol-related crime in ‘less restrictive’ countries is anecdotal and understudied (Drummond qtd. in Jayne et al. 2008). The difficulty in making national comparisons is further compounded through different understandings of what constitutes ‘intoxication’ and ‘drunkenness’, or

even a 'standard' drink, and attempts at evidence-based 'hard' science flounder on various attributions and meanings (P. Kelly 2011). This tendency towards simplistic understandings of 'national' drinking cultures has an insularising effect on debate: in the decade leading up to the 'lockout laws' local commentary fixated on 'Australian drinking culture' missed similar discussions that took place in Italy, Spain, USA, and the UK (Rowe and Lynch 2012; Hobbs 2003; Wadds 2020), in similar narratives that centred on concerns around youth 'binge' drinking, drug use and the rapid proliferation of venues.

Whilst ideas of coherent 'national' drinking cultures are increasingly questioned in alcohol research (Savic et. al 2016; Savic and Room 2014), they maintain strong currency in policy, political commentary and popular understanding. Frequently, issues of drinking and violence have been portrayed in the media as culturally specific, for example *The Guardian* asked 'what inspires Australian men to drink to this level of senseless inebriation and express themselves through violence'... 'Berlin and Barcelona can happily accommodate late-night party culture and do so without requiring brawny, grim-faced bouncers' (Tan, 2014).

The argument contains a number of assumptions, firstly around the ubiquity of alcohol-related violence in Australia, and secondly that bouncers are 'required' to deal with a violent and senselessly inebriated drinking culture, rather than as a result of legislative edict around Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA). As P. Kelly (2011) points out, many European countries either do not have or do not enforce 'responsible service' legislation, and many countries have a lower or no minimum age limit for alcohol consumption or purchase. Claims of 'national' drinking patterns by journalists, politicians and urbanists are rarely interrogated, but instead assume 'factual status' in licensing and other alcohol debates (Jayne et al., 'Fluid Boundaries', 2008, 83).

I argue that attributions and invocations of 'drinking culture' in fact function to obscure *technical* interventions around alcohol and their 'cultural' effects. These invocations may be attached to former and often failed interventions (6 o'clock closing), or used to advocate for new 'civilising' interventions. Furthermore, these invocations of 'drinking culture' have been used to justify quite differing interventions over time. For example, in 1955 'drinking culture' was invoked to rescind 6pm closing. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was again attached to state government decisions to allow restaurants to serve alcohol and implement outdoor

dining, and extend pub trading hours (Lewis 1991, 92-95). In the 1990s, changing 'drinking cultures' accompanied the introduction of 24-hour pub and nightclub trading and rules allowing alcohol to be served in restaurants without a meal; a decade later it was deployed to shut down nightlife through the 'lockout laws'. In the 2020s, this invocation continued with the NSW Liberal State government's '*Alfresco Revolution*', as I explore in chapter 4. Often, these technical interventions have been accompanied by 'cultural' anxieties, for instance in the lead up to the Sydney 2000 Olympics a perceived lack of suitable nightlife and entertainment options for tourists and a desire to deliver a 'world-class' nightlife were coupled with concerns over local citizens 'ability to consume alcohol responsibly outside pubs and clubs' (Homan 2003, 29). Since the 2000 Olympics such anxieties over *un-licensed* public drinking have manifested in a significant expansion of alcohol-free zoning, and a near prohibition of alcohol consumption in public space.

I have attempted above to unsettle popular narratives around drinking cultures, including 'the swill' being presented as *evidence* of a monolithic 'Australian drinking culture'. I have argued the multifaceted permutations of 'early closing' demonstrate that what is attributed to 'drinking culture' resides at the unstable interstices of effects produced by technical mechanisms.

The remainder of this chapter details Sydney's shift to a 'global city' and the City of Sydney's attempt to interrupt the sedimented linear-causal association of alcohol and violence. The council appropriates a Hobbs-esque argument around contingencies in the night-time economy, in a way that is particularly classed and inflected by global city discourse, in a formation that I conceptualise as ***governing with and against alcohol***.

### **Sydney as a 'global city'**

In the 1980s Sydney began to openly vie for 'global city' status, as processes of globalisation, offshoring and neoliberal economic reforms led to the decline of local production and manufacturing. Governments sought to offset losses through the development of the tourism and service sectors, and the integration of Sydney into the global financial system saw multinational firms set up headquarters and branches in the CBD. This was accompanied by major changes in urban governance. In her historically framed study of

New York nightlife, Hae (2012, 18) points to the prioritisation of market interests, an 'entrepreneurial' approach, public-private partnerships and a focus on real-estate development as central to these post-industrial processes.<sup>15</sup> In Sydney, governments began investing in 'new' economies, creative industries and other businesses and services, driving a neoliberal urbanist transformation of space through renewed streetscapes, squares, high-end retail and residential developments. Formerly working-class suburbs like Bondi were gentrified, and a disused rail yard at Darling Harbour was developed into curated open space that included a conference centre and hospitality and entertainment precinct (housing the Entertainment Centre, Aquarium and Maritime Museum). These developments highlighted the shift from a production to a service and leisure economy, one heavily reliant on the expansion of tourist markets. Tensions within this process were laid bare during Darling Harbour's construction, with calls for the site to include a percentage of public housing rejected over its perceived impacts on tourism (Murphy and Watson 1997, 46).

The 'Sydney 2000' Olympics heralded further place-making strategies as governments moved to an entrepreneurial mode of governance, propelled by discourses of 'urban branding' organised around tourism, economics and international investment. Concerns around 'reputation', 'liveability' and 'safety' have increasingly dominated the way cities are thought about in this context, reconfiguring them as signs and symbols through marketing strategies (Waitt and Markwell 2006, 269). These strategies seek to *appropriately* 'program' urban space through 'activating' city spaces in a prosaic repertoire of laneway festivals, rooftop bars and outdoor dining (Scott 2006, 11). As I explore in the second half of my thesis, though also government-driven these attempts at 'activation' conflict with other forms of governmentality that have lately regulated street life and public space in urban areas like inner Sydney.

The City of Sydney council is the local level of government responsible for 25 square kilometres of the CBD and a number of (now wealthy) inner suburbs. According to Rowe and Lynch (2012), the council's aspiration to 'world city' status was first fully expressed in its

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<sup>15</sup> Other post-industrial urban governance includes 'deregulation, privatisation, liberalisation and enhanced fiscal austerity, and place-marketing, enterprise and empowerment zones, local tax abatements, urban development corporations, public-private partnerships, and new workfare policies, property-redevelopment schemes, business-incubator projects, *new strategies of social control, policing and surveillance*' (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 20-21).

1994 blueprint, which showcased a desire to create a multi-use ‘vibrant’ ‘24-hour’ city with a high volume of residents. Residence is an important factor here, as Adkins, Cooper and Konings indicate, property ownership is a ‘central organising principle’ of class in contemporary Australia (qtd. in Threadgold and Gerrard 2022, 11).

During the 1990s, the City of Sydney council oversaw a doubling of the population in the Sydney local government area. The type of people that the City has sought to attract are members of the so-called ‘creative classes’ (as imagined by Richard Florida), seen as key agents of post-industrial wealth creation and major contributors to the ‘vibrancy’ of contemporary urban cultures (McGuigan 2009, 295). The influx of government investment and business capital meant Sydney’s inner city largely avoided the disrepair and neglect common in Europe and North America (Connell 2000), however this changing demography was a factor in the moral panic traced in Chapter 1 and, as I will show in my next chapter, has impacted on the ‘publicness’ of public space.

### **Governing with and against alcohol**

Following the end of 6 o’clock pub closing in 1955, NSW authorities gradually relaxed liquor licensing regulations, with many pubs, nightclubs and bars across the state holding 24-hour operating licenses by the 1990s, often with a particular focus on providing ‘world class’ experiences for tourists and part of a revaluation of Sydney as a ‘cosmopolitan’ city (Homan 2003, 27-29).<sup>16</sup> As detailed in my first chapter, intense media coverage from the mid-2000s onwards foreshadowed weighty state-government crackdowns on nightlife which culminated in the 2014 ‘lockout laws’, resulting in a significantly diminished nightlife.

Wadds has argued that differing approaches to nightlife regulation by state and local governments are a specific feature of Sydney (2020, 77), and this is starkly illustrated during what I conceptualise as the *long lockout law era*. As detailed in Chapter 1, state governments have been central to curtailing Sydney nightlife, through state Labor’s introduction of sniffer dogs in the early 2000s and the implementation of various minor

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Cosmopolitan’ here is in the classed sense that permeates policy discourse, conceived of as certain refinement bound up with ideas of cultural capital, education and knowledge. This contrasts with notions of ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’, similar to ‘conviviality’, that is found in the practical negotiations of ‘being together’ (Noble 2009).

restrictions on nightlife venues, a 'three strikes' policy for venues with violent incidents, police raids and the closure of several venues, leading up to the Liberal government's 2014 'lockout laws' which obliterated much of Sydney's nightlife through a raft of legislation including 1:30am lockouts and 3am 'last drinks' rules.

Throughout this *long lockout law era*, the City of Sydney local council remained strongly *critical* of state government measures, continuing to promote *certain kinds* of alcohol consumption whilst the state government proceeded to shut down the city's nightlife. In 2009, as the NSW state Labor government declared 'war' on alcohol-related violence, the long-term City of Sydney mayor, Clover Moore, promoted a campaign to '*Raise the Bar*', seeking amendment of the *Liquor Act 2007 (NSW)* to accelerate the growth of 'bohemian' and 'intimate' small bars, which a range of urbanists (including the mayor) believed the city was lacking.<sup>17</sup> This push was opposed by others, sparking memorable exchanges including the Australian Hotels Association president representing the economic interests of pubs infamously declaring that Sydneysiders did not want to 'sit in a hole drinking chardonnay' (Creagh 2007). Former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating vividly accused Clover Moore of turning the city into an 'inebriate's spittoon', apparently overlooking the long-time association between the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Hotels Association.

In her study of nightlife in contemporary Sydney, geographer Peta Wolifson (2018) demonstrates that the City of Sydney exemplifies David Harvey's conception of the shift from managerial to entrepreneurial modes of governance under neoliberalism. Where previously the function of city councils pertained to mundane services such as rubbish collection, street cleaning and general maintenance, the entrepreneurial mode of governance is imbricated with a managerialist rhetoric, as governments promote selected lifestyle cultures articulated through buzzwords such as 'liveability', 'diversity', and 'vibrancy' that act as 'ciphers', according to Threadgold and Gerrard for 'middle-class qualifications and dispositions' (2022, 4). This top-down entrepreneurialist approach is evident in the mayor's introduction to the highly significant City of Sydney 2013 strategy paper '*OPEN Sydney: Future directions for Sydney at night, Strategy and action plan 2012–2030*', which puts forward a vision of 'a world-class, sustainable night-time economy... the

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<sup>17</sup> Threadgold and Gerrard (2022, 4) indicate the presence of a class-oriented public rhetoric that often elides the explicit language of class, a phenomenon that is very much present in rhetoric around alcohol in Australia.

Asia-Pacific's best dining, shopping, cultural and public space experiences... the best large night-time events globally' (City of Sydney [CoS] 2013, 1).

The '*OPEN Sydney*' strategy paper is situated within a framework of 'post-industrial thinking' (McGuigan 2009), underpinned by Richard Florida's 'creative cities' thesis that heralds the capacity of certain 'creative' class formations as 'the fountainhead of innovative energy and cultural dynamism in modern urban society' (Scott 2006, 4). While these 'transnationally mobile' (Kong 2014) discourses emphasise 'creative culture', they are primarily market oriented (McGuigan 2009, 298), and appeals to 'diversity' in '*OPEN Sydney*' focus not on (for example) a social or ethnic diversity, but on promoting a greater range of retail, dining, and entertainment night-time businesses, with the explicit aim of attracting a more 'civilised' consumer to the city. There are clear class implications embedded in such a move: as Wolifson (2018, 102) notes, whilst high-end dining and retail may attract different types of consumers into the local government area, it will exclude others.<sup>18</sup>

'*OPEN Sydney*' can be read as an attempt by the local council to navigate the state government's alarmist discourse of alcohol-related violence, and it does this not by arguing for prohibitions, but by imagining alternative *drinkscaapes* (Wilkinson 2016, 132). A key concern of the Strategy is 'improving' Sydney's drinking culture on 'reputational' and 'safety' grounds: 'Sydney's current drinking culture and the associated anti-social behaviour is an issue and left unchecked will continue to exclude many from the night-time economy and present a reputational risk' (CoS 2013, 19). The Strategy proposes 'An Inviting and Safe Sydney – including *welcoming public spaces* and *a more civilised drinking culture*' (CoS 2013, 2) and states, 'Sydney's current drinking culture and the associated anti-social behaviour is an issue' critical to Sydney's reputation as a 'safe and liveable global city' (CoS 2013, 15-17).

Here, we can see how questions of inclusion, safety and reputation emerge as key concerns within a discourse of city branding, in a formula that problematises alcohol consumption as an activity in need of 'checking'. The centring of 'reputational concern' also demonstrates the way alcohol problematisations are interlinked with efforts to enhance the reputation of Sydney as a 'world city'. This urbanist discourse of 'civilised drinking' seeks to offset anxieties about alcohol-fuelled violence and what I term 'rowdy' drinking, hinging on a

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<sup>18</sup> These concerns were in fact expressed by respondents in the council's own survey, but seemingly ignored.

dichotomy of the 'rowdy' versus 'civilised' drinker. In *'OPEN Sydney'*, night-time economy users are characterised as 'overwhelmingly young', with some engaging in 'pre-fuelling' in public space and transport (drinking prior to or instead of attending licensed venues). This 'rowdy' drinker is contrasted with the 'creative and innovative' residents of the City of Sydney, and the 'over-40s' whose increased nightlife participation will apparently help ensure a 'civilised' and safe late-night economy.

In her work on gentrification surrounding disco and dance music clubs in New York, Hae (2012, 61-68) coined the phrases 'gentrification with and against nightlife' and the 'culturalisation of gentrification' to illuminate processes where certain middle-class forms of urban culture and uses of space are legitimised over other pre-existing forms. Paradoxically, nightlife that had been central to the reputation and popular imaginary of New York historically (as a 'disco mecca', for instance) was used by real estate agents and developers to promote the city, whilst being simultaneously targeted by risk-averse governments. In this process, nightlife associated with deviance and criminality or which doesn't conform to 'quality of life' norms is shut down or zoned out of existence, easing conditions for private capital and upscale real estate investment. Building on Hae's ideas, I term the process of legitimising *certain kinds* of drinking establishments and practices ***governing with and against alcohol***. This post-industrial process has taken a technical form in Sydney, evident in the preferencing of 'small bars' (coded as middle-class) over popular forms including nightclubs and so-called 'beer barns', long linked to youth, queer and working-class populations (Wolifson 2018; Wadds 2020; Lee et al. 2020), as well as the shutdown of 24-hour nightclubs, sex on premises venues, and other establishments associated with a 'disorderly' nightlife.

Encapsulating the paradoxes of ***governing with and against alcohol***, *'OPEN Sydney'* claims on the one hand that '80 per cent of people think Australians have a problem with excessive alcohol consumption' (CoS 2013), at the same time as it exhorts CBD diners to visit bars, promotes the benefits that later retail trading will bring to bars, supports the 'activation' of rooftop bars, and the development of more small bars in Darling Harbour. This demonstrates the highly ambivalent and contradictory place that alcohol holds in world-city discourse, presenting as an object of violence, rowdiness and 'reputational concern' *and* a

conduit of conviviality, urban vitality and 'civilised' leisure, all understood as key components in making the city inviting for tourists and visitors.

Deploying global city discourse in a particularly classed way, in recent years the City of Sydney and urbanists in the media have drawn on the night-time economy thesis in advocating for a rearrangement of city space. In an article advocating for small bar legislation in 2007, *Sydney Morning Herald* Urban Affairs reporter Elizabeth Farrelly lamented Sydney's 'culture-phobia that ticks as true blue the ersatz, obesogenic screen culture of pokies and cocaine-fuelled football but resists and resents anything involving talk, engagement or creativity' (2007), highlighting the way such commentary relies on heavily classed and simplistic cultural stereotypes to criticise public behaviour and 'imagine alternative cultural arrangements' regarding alcohol (P. Kelly 2011, 181).<sup>19</sup>

The City of Sydney, Wolifson (2018, 35, 94) argues, sought 'enculturation' via small bar, with 'culture' the civilising agent and small bars the 'civilised' and class-based solution to alcohol-related violence and the increasingly prohibitory state government. Indeed, the name of the Sydney urbanists' *'Raise the Bar'* campaign itself implies a high-cultural improvement of standards, a ***governing with and against alcohol*** that establishes drinking as a site of tension and reform in the politics of identity and class in the global city.

### Technical interventions

To return to this chapter's central argument, whilst discourses of 'civilised' drinking and 'drinking culture' invoke and counterpose different *culturalist* imagery ('Melbourne', 'European', 'rowdy', 'Anglo', 'Sydney'), these attributions work to obscure histories of *technical* interventions. To illustrate, we can take the way *'OPEN Sydney'* offers up the southern Australian city of Melbourne as a model, with small bars predicted to provide Sydney with a 'Melbourne-like atmosphere, and a much-needed nightlife alternative to 'beer barns' (Wolifson 2018, 35). Here, Melbourne's earlier adoption of small bars is ascribed to a 'European' or 'cosmopolitan' culture, however this glosses over the historical legacy of the 20th century Temperance Movement and the greater impact it had on

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<sup>19</sup> This also illustrates the way 'creative classes' attempt to define what constitutes pleasurable and meaningful social and cultural activities.

Melbourne compared to Sydney, in what Elizabeth Taylor has called the ‘hangovers of licensing history’ (2019). For example, 6 o’clock closing lasted until 1966 in Melbourne (eleven more years than Sydney), and ‘dry area’ legislation prohibited the sale of alcohol in a range of Melbourne suburbs for over a century, as thousands of Melbourne hotels closed and were replaced by dry ‘coffee palaces’. As a result of this legacy of technical intervention, today Sydney has three times the number of pubs as Melbourne, despite being only slightly larger in terms of geography and population. In order to counter this, Victorian state governments in the 1980s reduced liquor licensing costs as a way of developing more drinking establishments, in the form of small bars.

### **A politics of class leisure re-emerges**

Whilst Sydney has long been divided by geography, wealth and other boundaries, Wadds (2020, 70) has identified a re-emergence of a ‘politics of class leisure’ in the re-regulation of Sydney’s night-time economy over the last twenty years. In this politics, a distinction is drawn between the ideal ‘civilised’ consumer in the new night-time economy (wine or craft beer drinking, middle-class, though not necessarily middle-aged) and the working-class consumer of ‘belligerent comportment’ (to use Hobbs’ 2003 phrase). As I have articulated above, these changes are embedded within a global city-oriented neoliberal urbanism that advocates for certain cosmopolitan lifestyles and sociability over other popular forms.

Neoliberal policies that are designed to shift the way patrons drink and consume more broadly can be found internationally, but they take shape differently in different places and need to be traced at a local level, as I have sought to do in this chapter. We need to remember that in Australia *who* drinks alcohol and *when* they drink are significant ‘caste marks’ (Fitzgerald and Jordan 2009, 105), and this is apparent in the dichotomy of the ‘rowdy’ and ‘civilised’ drinker which locates ‘respectability’ in the latter as a signifier of class (Skeggs 1997). A ‘class-silent politics’ (Giddens qtd. in Haylett 2006, 189), then, is a feature of both the NSW state government’s shut down of nightlife via the ‘lockout laws’, and the urbanist project of ***governing with and against alcohol*** where certain types of drinking are designated unacceptable or unsuited to contemporary cities. ‘Class’ is not *absent*, of course, but rather is contained within a geographic ‘othering’ of outer suburban youth and other

(often racialised) ‘troublemakers’ identified as the source of night-time ‘incivility’ (Wolifson 2018, 169, 177).

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In this chapter I have traced historical lineages of ‘drinking cultures’ to undermine their purported ‘naturalness’ (Garland 1998, 17), showing how these attributions work to obscure technical interventions and their effects. In a process which I have called ***governing with and against alcohol***, a discourse of ‘civilised drinking’ functions to shape and ‘civilise’ the city itself around the needs and desires of gentrified consumers, city branders and ‘creative classes’. As I will show in my fourth chapter, this limited and contradictory vision of ‘cosmopolitanism’ draws cynically on history, yet fails to concretise its aspirations (including the ‘activation’ of public space in the midst of a pandemic) due to limited understanding or appreciation of contingencies entailed in the production of drinking cultures, scant follow-through at the technical level, and the intrusion of other governmentalities.

Chapter 3 turns to one of these governmentalities, ‘alcohol-free zoning’, which contributes in a significant but overlooked way to new ‘spatiotemporal configurations’ and exclusions in city spaces (Wadds 2020, 191-192). As vast swathes of the city are zoned ‘alcohol-free’ and *public* drinking cast as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1991), a privatisation of drinking is enacted via the liquor ***license-as-mechanism***, where the licensee is made responsible for safety, customer behaviour and ‘responsible service’, with implications for democratic access to public space.

### Chapter 3: Alcohol-Free Zoning

When social documentary photographer Rennie Ellis (1940-2003) captured images of twentieth century life in Australia, he was motivated by a particular love for the crowd, the erotic and the bizarre (R. Ellis 2014). In the 1970s and early 1980s Ellis published a series of photographic collections depicting intersocial contact in everyday life, many of which featured drinking in outdoor public spaces: people with eskies at the beach, a family and a Greek Orthodox priest at picnic tables in a park, spectators watching a surfing competition from the rocks, an Italian street fair, and large crowds celebrating New Year's Eve.

The following two passages in Ellis' books are striking in that they reveal drinking practices quite different to today:

*'Sydney has hundreds of hotels and on a hot day it's not unusual to see the locals standing around on the footpath outside downing a succession of schooners'* (Ellis and Carnemolla, 1971).

*'The drinkers of today like to take their beer with them rather than drink it in the pub...it was the aim of this book to document this 'have beer, will travel' attitude to drinking'* (R. Ellis, 1984).

In contemporary Sydney, some pubs have 'footway trading' licenses which permit drinking at outdoor tables, but this is generally a highly regulated affair with security guards ensuring that no drinking spills over into the street proper; certainly, the first passage describes something I had never seen before travelling to Europe and South America in my early twenties. The second passage reveals that a very significant shift has taken place in the regulation of drinking practices in public space over recent decades. The focal point of this chapter is the governmental mechanism which has driven this shift, alcohol-free zoning, which was first introduced in NSW in the early 1990s.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the practices and cultures depicted by Rennie Ellis, the ability to consume alcohol in unlicensed spaces of Sydney has been significantly curtailed, representing a rupture with a 'long street drinking

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<sup>20</sup> This is not entirely unique to Australian cities, with legislation regulating outdoor alcohol consumption tabled in other Western countries in recent years (Pennay and Room 2012).

tradition in Western societies, at beaches, parks and public celebrations’ (Pennay & Room 2012, 93).

In my first chapter I demonstrated how discourses of ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’ are produced in statistics and the media, and how these converged around Sydney’s Kings Cross at the turn of the new millennium. Many accounts of Sydney’s nightlife at this time presented a dystopian vision of a violent and out-of-control social life, driven by deregulated licensing practices aimed at maximising profit at the behest of industry.

Chapter 2 looked at how ‘civilised’ drinking is used in global city discourse to placate anxieties about ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’, and boost Sydney’s reputation as a fun, convivial and safe world city in a process I have called ***governing with and against alcohol***. Drawing on historical moments, I interrogated the work that the invocation of ‘drinking cultures’ and the ‘culturalist’ argument do, in both obscuring histories of technical interventions and providing rationalisation for new interventions.

Chapter 3 turns to an under-theorised governmentality: alcohol-free zoning. Where most alcohol research has been preoccupied with the ‘pre-formed’ drinking spaces of bars, pubs and clubs (Wilkinson 2016, 133), my case study of alcohol-free zones contributes to the understudied area of alcohol regulation in *public* places (Pennay & Room 2012) and reveals a tension between urban regeneration strategies grounded in a ‘place-based model of orderly sociability’ (Rowe and Bavinton 2011), and broader ideals of democratic access to public space.

By way of introduction, I show how laws around public drinking have changed over time in the state of NSW. Next, various local government documents from 2005-2021 are analysed, revealing an exponential increase in the ***spatial and cartographic governmentality*** of alcohol-free zoning, as public drinking is increasingly cast as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas in Duschinsky 2016). I show how, as a majority of the city is designated ‘alcohol-free’, a privatisation of drinking is enacted via the mechanism of the liquor license, in which the responsabilised licensee is made guarantor for safety, customer behaviour and ‘responsible service’. Finally, I discuss how alcohol-free zone legislation ties drinking to affluence and actively contributes to new ‘spatiotemporal configurations’ and exclusions in city spaces (Wadds 2020, 191-192). I make the case that the tactics of fencing, zoning and policing

‘overprogram’ (McNeill 2011) and ultimately privatise contemporary city space, stigmatising non-affluent drinkers and pushing culture into the private sphere, with attendant effects on socialising and possibilities for conviviality.

### **Public drinking and the contours of criminalisation**

Laws and regulations pertaining to public drinking change over time and are enacted by various strata of government (local council, state and federal). It is important to note that public drinking is not *illegal* in New South Wales, however the changing ‘contours of criminalisation’ over time (McNamara and Quilter 2015) demonstrate that this ‘legality’ is not straightforward. In the 1850s, ‘drunkenness’ and related leisure activities were criminalised in the state, straining relations between police and working-class people (Wadds 2020, 50), and contributing to an enduring conception of the ‘respectable’ drinker as one who does their drinking in private. In 1979, the offence of ‘public drunkenness’ was abolished over concerns about discriminatory policing of vulnerable populations; amongst a tranche of what we can consider ‘post-‘68’ reforms to public order and offensive behaviour laws in NSW, including the decriminalisation of prostitution. By the late 1980s, however, a conservative turn by the state Liberal government led to the introduction of penalties for ‘offensive language’ and ‘offensive conduct’ as part of a broader ‘law-and-order’ election campaign. The *Summary Offences Act 1988 (NSW)* imposed significant police control over people’s everyday activities, with vulnerable populations (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, rough sleepers, and people with mental health issues) regularly targeted, often for swearing (McNamara and Quilter 2015). Successive legislation such as the *Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 (NSW)* forms a key component in the policing of public drinking, allowing police to ‘move on’ those adjudged ‘intoxicated’ or ‘disorderly in a public place’ (Methven 2014).<sup>21</sup>

Parallel to this law-and-order drive of the late 1980s, the *Local Government (Street Drinking) Amendment Act 1990 (NSW)* gave councils the power to declare public places such as parks, beaches and roads ‘alcohol-free zones’ or ‘alcohol-prohibited areas’, which prohibited the consumption of alcohol in those designated areas. The initial legislation allowed police and

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<sup>21</sup> Notions of what constitutes ‘intoxication’ are difficult to define, and often culturally specific.

council officers to confiscate alcohol following a warning and to issue a fine of \$20. The fine component was removed in 2008, with confiscation seen as a greater deterrent (McNamara and Quilter 2015). However, today zones allow police to confiscate alcohol without a warning, and to impose fines of up to \$2,200 under the *Summary Offences Act* to those who do not comply (Fisher et al. 2018).

Some have characterised the introduction of alcohol-free zones through the *Street Drinking Act (1990)* as simply a replacement for earlier laws against 'public drunkenness', noting that governments previously held powers to prohibit drinking in certain public places (Room 2020; Pennay & Room 2012). However, an important element of the 1990 Act is that it has made the *consumption* of alcohol within alcohol-free zones an offence (McNamara and Quilter 2015) which has played a significant yet overlooked role, I argue below, in the privatisation of public space. Another difference is that earlier laws against 'public drunkenness' and 'drunk and disorderly' behaviour were state-government created and state-police enforced, in contrast to the specificities of contemporary restrictions on public drinking which are primarily at the discretion of local government. This is a pertinent aspect, which accords with sociologist Mariana Valverde's characterisation of alcohol policy as a 'minor practice' of administrative techniques carried out by 'low-level public servants' (1998, 148), and Lewis' assertion that alcohol matters in Australia have generally been driven by public servants and professional groups, rather than lay interest organisations (1992, 181).

Here, it is important to comment on the unexamined racialised dimension that drove the development of alcohol-free zone legislation. In a legislative precursor to alcohol-free zoning, a 1983 amendment to the *Summary Offences Act* in the Northern Territory prohibited consumption of alcohol within 2kms of any licensed liquor outlet, however with specific exemptions for certain picnic and barbecue areas popular with non-Aboriginal people (Hennessey and Mark, 1991). In NSW, pressure to amend the *Local Government Act 1919 (NSW)* arose from a 'failed attempt' to prosecute an Aboriginal person drinking in the street in the western town of Bourke in 1990 (Hennessey and Mark, 1991). Furthermore, as McNamara and Quilter (2015, 5) have argued, the policing of public drinking is 'intimately connected with the history of the criminalisation and policing of Indigenous persons and communities', and First Nations and working-class people continue to be unduly impacted

by public intoxication and public drinking laws in NSW. For example, City of Sydney councillor Irene Doutney criticised alcohol-free zones as ‘class-structured’, for targeting those in public housing, First Nations people and street drinkers, saying she had ‘lost track’ of the number of zones that had been approved by her fellow councillors (Doutney, 2014). Despite this, the newly updated NSW government fact sheet on alcohol-free zones absurdly claims that zones do not discriminate ‘against particular community groups’, illustrating the fact that inequities around alcohol-free zones are largely ignored by all levels of government.<sup>22</sup>

### **Public drinking as matter out of place**

Mary Douglas’ seminal inquiry into *Purity and Danger* (first published in 1966) defines ‘dirt’ as any matter deemed ‘out of place’ in society (Douglas in Duschinsky 2016, 4).<sup>23</sup> This has a *stigmatising* component that is bulwarked by rarely questioned norms around what constitutes the ‘normal, acceptable or desirable’ within society (Brewis and Wutich 2019, 209).

In recent decades there has been a move away from the prohibition of public ‘intoxication’ towards a place-based regulation of consumption itself. In NSW this has occurred through the framework of the *Local Government (Street Drinking) Amendment Act 1990 (NSW)*. As drinking is increasingly linked to the place it happens in, it has been increasingly prohibited in public space through the mechanism of alcohol-free zoning.

In contemporary Sydney, alcohol-free zoning constructs *public* (particularly unlicensed) drinking as ‘dirt’ or ‘matter out of place’ as I demonstrate in my analysis of publicly accessible reports on ‘Outdoor Alcohol Restrictions’ from the City of Sydney’s (CoS) archives below.<sup>24</sup> Whilst all local government areas (LGAs) in NSW have alcohol-free zones, I have chosen to focus on the City of Sydney, an area of 25 square kilometres that encompasses

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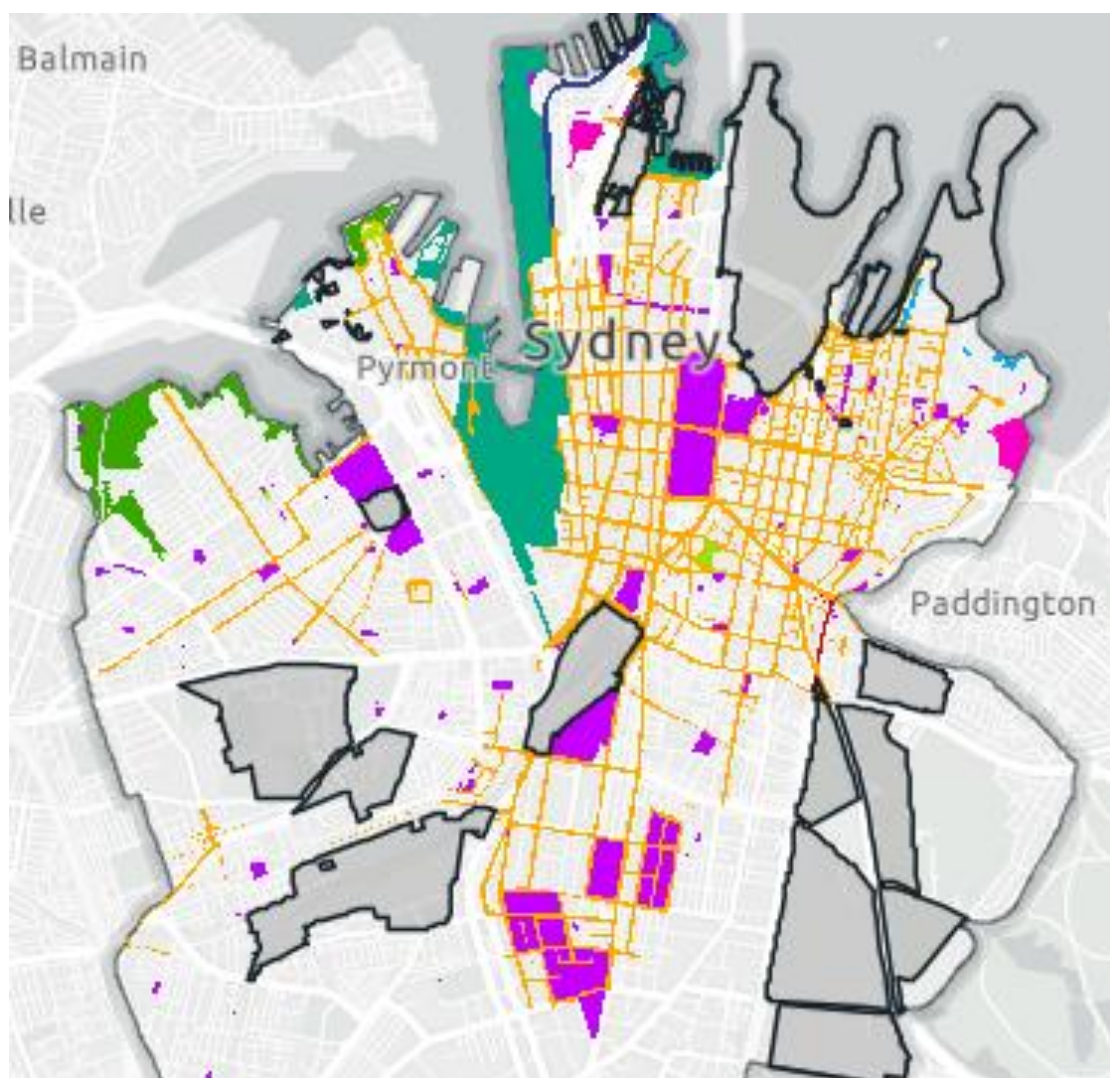
<sup>22</sup> For these reasons alone, alcohol-free zones should be a matter of urgent scrutiny, with their ongoing and unacknowledged impacts pointing to the importance of class-based research that centres Australia as a settler colony (Threadgold and Gerrard 2022, 7).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Dirt’ is defined by Douglas as ‘essentially disorder’ underpinned by ‘mental categories (which) function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience’ (Douglas in Duschinsky 2016, 4).

<sup>24</sup> A number of these reports were sent to me by the Data & Information Management Services team, at the City of Sydney council, in January 2021. Others I located within the council’s online archives.

the Central Business District, inner-city suburbs (such as Alexandria, Glebe, Kings Cross, Potts Point, The Rocks, Redfern and Surry Hills), and the primary entertainment, nightlife and tourism districts of the city (Kings Cross, Oxford Street, the CBD and Darling Harbour).

Figure 2 below reveals alcohol-free zoning as a feature of our neoliberal present where risk is increasingly ‘mapped’ in a way that speaks only of the ‘risk’ of danger, disregarding the ‘joy and celebration of human excitement that might take place in these locations’ (Lee et al. 2020, 204).



**Figure 2:** The coloured sections of this map indicate various forms of Alcohol-Free Zones in the City of Sydney LGA in 2022 (City of Sydney, 2022).

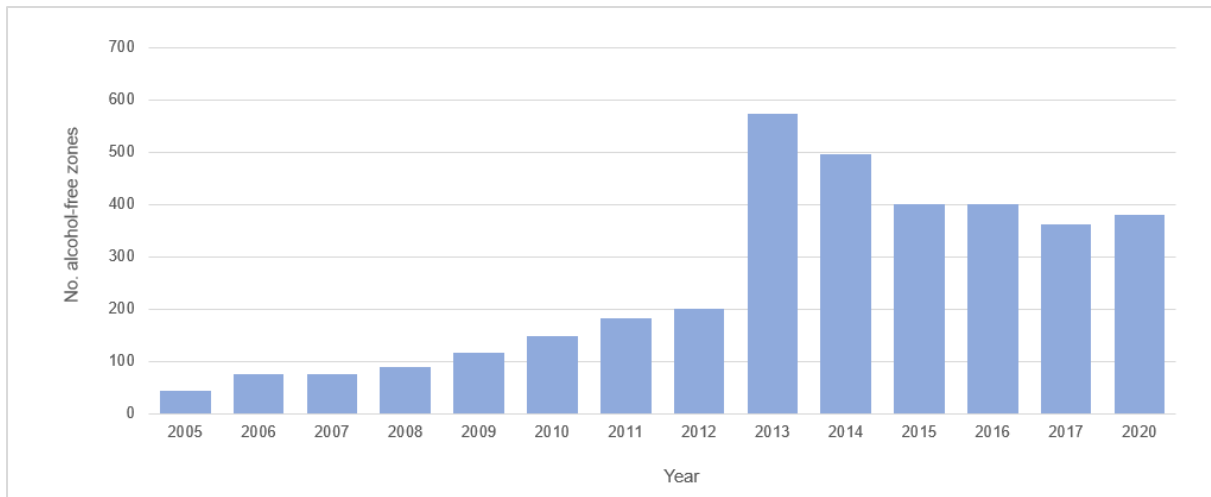
Alcohol-free zoning has played a central role in the spatial transformation of the city, to a far greater extent than is generally understood, with an opacity or slipperiness that is located within this technology of power. As Valverde has theorised, alcohol policy is a ‘minor practice’ of administrative techniques carried out by ‘low-level public servants’ (1998, 146). Despite the rampant ten-fold expansion of alcohol-free zones in the City of Sydney since 2005, the dearth of analysis or debate within council documents accords with Valverde’s claim that it is ‘institutional habits’ of governance that contribute to the under-theorisation of alcohol regulation strategies, even by those implementing them (1998, 146-148).

The council documents I have analysed include meeting minutes, reports and papers dating from 2005 to 2021. Prior to 2005 documents that deal with alcohol-free zones are scarce in the council archives, one reason for this could be that zoning had not yet sedimented as a ‘habit of governance’, and the number of zones appears to have remained low throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>25</sup> As illustrated in the graph below, council archives reveal an exponential increase in alcohol-free zoning over the last fifteen years: in 2005 the City had 43 active zones (CoS 2007), in 2022 this number stood at 379 (CoS, ‘Healthy Communities’, 2020), a ten-fold increase which underscores the increasing illegitimacy of public drinking as ‘matter out of place’.<sup>26</sup> As evidenced in the graph below, the number of alcohol-free zones exploded between 2012 and 2013 – a phenomenon seemingly connected to debate concerning anti-social behaviour and nightlife risk, driven by media coverage of ‘one-punch’ deaths in Kings Cross. At the time, this also manifested in a number of other ways including the aggressive over-policing of Mardi Gras (exemplified in the 2013 arrest of participant Jamie Jackson) and the introduction of the ‘lockout laws’ in 2014 (J. Ellis 2021).

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<sup>25</sup> This may also have been influenced by demands from hospitality and entertainment in the leadup to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, and expectations of tourists from countries with less restrictive alcohol regulations.

<sup>26</sup> Whilst there have at times been sporadic reductions in the number of zones in the City of Sydney, it is unclear whether these simply represent amalgamations of adjacent zones, rather than true reductions.



**Figure 3:** Total number of alcohol-free zones in the City of Sydney local government area from 2005-2020 (compiled by author from City of Sydney documents 2005-2020).

If we compare the position of alcohol consumption in public space from the mid-2000s, the transformation is stark. At that time there seems to have been a recognition that public consumption of alcohol was ‘appropriate’ at community events and could contribute to ‘amenity’: a large number of community and cultural events that did not fall within alcohol-free zones were either nominally ‘bring-your-own’ alcohol (BYO), and for others the license of a pub was extended down the street to encompass stalls (CoS 2007). In 2007, the council noted that the Primo Italiano festival, Danks Street Festival and ‘other major events in the City are either in parks or streets *not* affected’ by alcohol-free zones (CoS 2007). From the vantage point of 2023 this is striking, as there are few parks or streets in the entire local government area that are *not* alcohol-free zones, and consequently almost certainly no events would be unaffected.

The 2000s stands out as pivotal in the contested histories of technical and regulatory intervention into social drinking in Sydney and contested aspirations for public space and the city’s future, with the council’s archives revealing a significant shift in the governance of outdoor community events over the last fifteen years. This contestation is evident in the fate of various community events, with alcohol-free zoning seemingly contributing to their demise as ‘street-based’ events. For example, the Glebe Street Fair ran from 1984-2016 in the inner-city suburb of Glebe, regularly attracting up to 100,000 attendees. In 2006 the establishment of an alcohol-free zone at the same location as the Fair led council to propose

a temporary suspension of the zone for the duration of the fair, with council noting that in previous years The Nag's Head Hotel had served alcohol at the Glebe Street Fair through an extension of its liquor licence. The Leichardt police Local Area Command (LAC) argued that the Fair should continue as an 'alcohol-free family event', a view which prevailed and saw alcohol banned at the Fair (CoS 2007). Ten years later the Fair folded citing cost factors despite sustained high patronage. The intervention of the police into the management of the Glebe Street Fair prompted council to note the impasse facing other 'street-based community events' that were located within alcohol-free zones, including the Spanish Festival, Kings Cross Food and Wine Fair and Harbour City Bear Essentials (CoS 2007).

It is telling that none exist as 'street-based community events' today; as I discuss further in my final chapter, the decline of these type of outdoor cultural and community activities presents a conundrum for governments in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. At present, a governmentality of *enclosure* in relation to alcohol and socialising in public space more broadly has clearly prevailed; where previously festivals, markets and concerts in Sydney were BYO or the entire event area licensed, they are now generally zoned alcohol-free, save for a fenced-off *drinking pen* with a paid bar and entrances and exits guarded by security (Figure 4). This negatively impinges on principles of democratisation and access as those who cannot afford to pay are pushed out of *public* space and actually prevented from participating in social and cultural life. To underscore the extent of the contemporary governmentality of enclosure we can contrast to the City of Sydney's 2007 decision (with the support of Surry Hills Police and the NSW Premiers Department) to *suspend* the newly-designated alcohol-free zone on Oxford Street to allow street drinking at the Mardi Gras parades of 2007 and 2008 (CoS 2007). Such a decision is unthinkable today.

The contemporary governance of alcohol-free zoning, then, clearly represents a marked shift from earlier approaches. In 2005, alcohol-free zones were seen as a 'short-term strategy' and council strongly asserted the need to consult with representatives of vulnerable groups. Council meeting minutes from that period expressed 'care' towards street drinkers, emphasised consultation with representatives of Indigenous and homeless organisations and articulated a need to 'look to other medium term and long-term approaches' rather than simply expanding alcohol-free zoning (CoS 2005). In the intervening years, however, organisations consulted on new zone proposals now encompass the

Australian Security Industry Association and Destination NSW tourism board, a change that underscores the way an increasingly entrepreneurial City of Sydney council has intervened into processes of gentrification in its contest for 'global city status'. One consequence of this is that vulnerable populations are increasingly ignored as governments 'constitute, code and order place meanings' (Weber 2002, 177) according to the logics of capital, including real estate and tourism.

### **Enforcing alcohol-free zones**

Fisher et al. (2018, 100) argue that the link between alcohol-free zones and safety is 'tenuous' and that 'stakeholder desires' rather than rates of alcohol-related crime in specific outdoor spaces are the primary determinant in alcohol-free zoning. They also reveal that fines relating to alcohol-free zones raise significant revenue for the state, contributing 2.7% of the median gross annual income in 2015 (Fisher et. al 2018, 95).

The '*NSW Ministerial Guidelines on Alcohol-Free Zones*' provide councils with state government-mandated procedures that are to be followed when establishing alcohol-free zones. The guidelines stipulate that it is 'inappropriate' for areas to be zoned alcohol-free for reasons of 'general conduciveness' to business or tourist activities, whilst also clarifying that alcohol-free zones are to be primarily located 'adjacent to outlets supplying alcohol where drinkers congregate'. Areas are to be zoned alcohol-free *only* where the 'irresponsible consumption of alcohol' occurs, rather than for reasons such as 'the congregation of drinkers where irresponsible behaviour *does not* occur, general conduciveness to business or tourist activities or the personal beliefs of particular citizens' (Department of Local Government 2009).

Under the guidelines, zones can be proposed by council, police, community groups and individuals who live or work in the area, however in practice council reports show that new zones are *overwhelmingly* 'recommended' by police and business interests. In 2012, for example, all but one of the 144 new zones proposed in the City of Sydney (adding to the 200 already-existing) were applied for by police and local businesses (CoS 2012).

Beyond purported reasons of safety, bans on public drinking therefore need to be understood as a way of 'sanitising' the urban environment and policing 'incivilities' given 'perceived dangers do not necessarily constitute real dangers' around alcohol in public places (Pennay 2012, 187; Pennay et al. 2014). The City of Sydney itself has conceded that alcohol-free zones infringe on the 'ability of citizens to responsibly drink an alcoholic beverage with their friends and family in a public place' and are about 'perception' and public anxiety ('Police and Resident Action Groups have commented on the *higher perception* of safety that AFZs create'), with 'the actual risk...low to moderate, as the NSW Police have other powers to deal with alcohol related anti-social behaviour' (CoS 2012).

As discussed in previous chapters, this strategy of neoliberal governance involves a 'containment and the *management of appearances*' in relation to disorder (Teuber qtd. in Talbot 2016, 91, 120), rather than the control of crime itself. However, such 'risk assessments' around alcohol overlap with class and other prejudices, and a focus on 'image' and 'appearances' in no way negates the fact that enforcement of these laws has a very real impact on vulnerable groups. In fact, Pennay and Room consider street drinking bans to be a *stronger* tool of discrimination than earlier public drunkenness laws due to their 'radical preventiveness' (one does not have to already be 'drunk' to be within the ban's ambit) and the fact that drinkers in licensed premises are outside the reach of these bans, therefore privileging the serving of alcohol in those licensed places, and members of the community who can afford to drink there (2012, 99).

Most critically, the claim often made by state and local governments in NSW that there are 'no fines' associated with public drinking is utterly incorrect. In 2008 the original process of a warning and \$20 fine for drinking in an alcohol-free zone was abolished. However, the *Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 (NSW)* empowers police to 'move on' those adjudged 'intoxicated' and 'likely to cause injury to any other person or persons, damage to property or otherwise give rise to a risk to public safety' or are simply 'disorderly in a public place' (Methven 2014). In 2014, fines (distributed through Criminal Infringement Notices) were increased from \$150 to \$500 for offensive language or conduct and from \$200 to \$1100 for 'the continuation of intoxicated and disorderly behaviour following a move-on direction' (McNamara and Quilter 2015). In 2023, failing to comply with a 'move on' directive can result in an exorbitant fine of \$2,200, of which there is little oversight with

police effectively given ‘judge and jury’ powers, over alternatives such as informal cautions or a court attendance notices (McNamara and Quilter 2015). Charges relating to public drinking are discriminatorily enforced: a 2014 NSW Ombudsman’s Report found that 37% of people charged in relation to public drinking under the *Summary Offences Act* in 2011 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Regrettably, awareness of the discriminatory nature of alcohol-free zoning legislation and enforcement is not recent. As far back as 1991, the Anti-Discrimination Board expressed concern that ‘many local government councillors are dismissive of Aboriginal interests’ in the administration of alcohol-free zone legislation (Hennessey and Mark 1991). Hennessey and Mark (1991) also noted two frequently occurring and ‘significant’ breaches of Ministerial guidelines around alcohol-free zones. The first breach of guidelines centred on the way zoning had expanded beyond its original aim of deterring drinkers congregating in the immediate area outside liquor outlets, to encompass large tracts of the city. The second breach concerned a lack of adequate consultation with First Nations people by local councils. Three decades on these remain significant, ongoing and entirely overlooked matters of justice regarding alcohol-free zoning.

### **Justifying alcohol-free zones: ‘Community’ governance, anti-social behaviour and amenity**

As part of attempts to ‘civilise’ urban life, authorities stake their justification for the continual expansion of zoning on three main points: ‘community’ governance, preventing ‘anti-social behaviour’ and the enhancement of ‘amenity’. Authorities lean heavily on questionable claims to ‘community’ governance in relation to alcohol-free zoning; *The ‘NSW Police Alcohol Strategy 2019-2026’*, for example, asserts that alcohol-free zones ensure ‘safe drinking environments in line with community expectations’. As Peck and Tickell have noted, ‘selective appropriation of ‘community’ metrics’ is a feature of neoliberal governance (2002, 42) and we can see an example of this from 2012 when police applied to zone most of Kings Cross, claiming 91% support amongst surveyed residents (CoS 2012). Although only 82 people completed the survey, in what was then the most densely populated area of Australia, the application was approved by council, who in passing the motion, remarked on the ‘unprecedented’ step of zoning an entire suburb. Interestingly, an earlier attempt to

zone the entire police patrol area of Kings Cross failed as it 'would have amounted to a serious breach of the guidelines' (Hennessey and Mark, 1991), which again calls into question the legitimacy of the way this legislation is implemented in practice.

Preventing 'anti-social behaviour' regularly appears across various government documents as another justification for the zones<sup>27</sup> with a mentality of prevention appearing to override the intention of the legislation which technically requires a disorderly place to exist. What is classified as 'anti-social' behaviour is often undefined or subjective; the *'National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028'* includes 'street noise' and 'having to avoid public parks', for example. As a concept 'anti-social' behaviour was borrowed from the criminological and psychological fields by politicians in the U.K. during the 1990s (Burney 2013),<sup>28</sup> and has been applied in the local Sydney context through 'public order' laws, which expanded during the 1990s over youth and dance party concerns (Homan 2003, 138) as an aspect of increasingly 'reactionary and spectacular political formations' (Diprose et. al 2008, 283).

Finally, in a more recent rationalisation that exemplifies the 'entrepreneurial turn' in 'global city' governance, the City of Sydney increasingly depicts alcohol-free zones as enhancing 'amenity' and a range of other liveability metrics, including 'high quality and safe streets and spaces', economic prosperity, 'civic spaces for a diverse population of residents, workers and visitors to enjoy' and environments that promote 'health and well-being where people feel safe' (CoS 2016; CoS, 'Community Safety Action Plan', 2020). Further contradicting the claim that alcohol-free zones are 'unrelated' to business interests, the council's *'Community Safety Action Plan 2020-2023'*, asserts that outdoor alcohol restrictions are part of 'a creative and vibrant night life'.<sup>29</sup>

The ministerial guidelines clearly stipulate that areas are to be zoned alcohol-free *only* where 'irresponsible drinking' occurs and that 'conduciveness' to businesses should not be a factor. In light of this, it stretches credulity that 'irresponsible drinking' is so prevalent that

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<sup>27</sup> See the 2009 NSW Ministerial Guidelines, City of Sydney website, National Alcohol Strategy and NSW Police Alcohol Strategy.

<sup>28</sup> Burney also critiques the designation of 'anti-social' as having an individualising effect, allowing governments to avoid social and economic issues that may contribute to behaviour (2013).

<sup>29</sup> This is in a city ranked by The Economist magazine as the 'safest city' in Australia, and 'fifth-safest' in the world in 2019. According to the council's action plan, the maintenance of this ranking will 'contribute to increased economic prosperity, a thriving, globally connected community; and enhance the city's 'international reputation' as a place to 'visit, live, work, invest and study' (CoS, 'Community Safety Action Plan', 2020).

the City of Sydney local government area requires 400 zones. The zoning of essentially an entire city highlights a governmental shift from a focus on 'irresponsible drinking' to an elevation of risk management priorities and a mindset of 'prevention', 'above concern for the welfare of public drinkers' (McNamara and Quilter 2015, 19).

Presenting as a mash-up of global city, pro-business and resident, and vaguely public health rhetoric, these governmentalities reduce Sydney's public space to a predominantly middle-class zone where, as Delany wrote of a redeveloped Times Square, 'the working classes are welcome to come along, observe, and take part in, if they can pay and are willing to blend in' (2019, 159-160).

### **Responsibilisation of the licensee**

A form of *spatial and cartographic governmentality*, alcohol-free zones construct public drinking as 'matter out of place' or 'dirt' (Douglas in Duschinsky 2016), enacted via the 'system' or mechanism of the liquor license. As governments have zoned vast tracts of public space 'alcohol-free' over the last two decades, they have navigated this by increasingly restricting alcohol to privately licensed spaces, where the licensee is made guarantor and bears responsibility for safety, customer behaviour and 'responsible service'. In a move that exemplifies neoliberal 'government at a distance', the mechanism of the private license locates the responsabilisation for safe drinking with the licensee, presenting governments with a solution to pre-established discourses of alcohol-related violence and tying in with discourses of 'civilised' drinking (discussed in my first and second chapters). This 'patchwork' of drinking controls (Fisher et al. 2018) increasingly regulates public drinking through licensed operators and footway trading restrictions (where hospitality businesses are permitted to utilise public space such as footpaths and parks). Therefore, the existence of an alcohol-free zone actually frees up public space for responsabilised licensed vendors to profit, in direct contravention to the guidelines' stipulation that conduciveness to business *not* factor into zoning decisions (see image in Figure 4 below).

This governmentality privatises 'risk' through the responsabilisation of the licensee, utilising what Wadds has called 'controls by audit' (2020, 180) which include licensed areas, Liquor Accords, Responsible Service of Alcohol standards, increased liability, insurance

requirements and stringent policing of venues.<sup>30</sup> Such developments contradict the characterisation common to much nightlife literature of neoliberalism as ‘governmental retreat’, which depicts a ‘commercialised’ and reckless nightlife industry increasingly flouting social norms and governmental decree (see Hobbs 2003). Instead, as Talbot argues, these developments constitute a ‘*reframing* of regulatory strategies’ where partial de-/re-regulatory shifts have been accompanied by ‘responsibilisation through partnership and other compliance strategies’ (2016, 18). In the proliferation of alcohol-free zones, what is obscured is that reponsibilised actors such as businesses and local government (who argue that public drinking laws are needed for reasons of ‘amenity’ and public ‘order’) are also ‘vested interest’ groups who benefit financially from regulation (Pennay and Room 2012).

This has resulted in an incongruous situation where street drinking is increasingly banned at the same time as footway trading is increasingly legitimated (Pennay and Room 2012). The responsibilisation of the licensee and the interplay between alcohol-free zones and footway trading is observable in minutes from a 2016 City of Sydney council meeting, which noted that footway trading areas are covered by ‘responsible service of alcohol provisions and, therefore, any alcohol related anti-social behaviour is the responsibility of premises operators’, with a ‘clear physical delineation to show where the licensed area ends and the alcohol free zone begins’ (CoS 2016). The inherent contradictions of this approach are revealed on the council’s website, which is careful to claim that zones are ‘not related to licensed premises’, yet in the very next sentence declares it’s strong support for ‘the night-time economy and the thousands of businesses that contribute to our safe, diverse and vibrant nightlife’ (CoS 2022).

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<sup>30</sup> In 2021, the system of ‘three strikes’ for venues with incidences of violence was nominally replaced with a demerit points system, however licensees will continue to receive increasingly severe penalties for breaches.



*Figure 4: This photograph of a **drinking pen**, taken at a 'Streets Alive' festival in Sydney's Brighton Le Sands in 2022, illustrates how the mechanism of the license materialises in an alcohol-free zone: the fenced-off bar, exclusive vendor branding, and patrolling security guard (photo by author).*

### **Privatising public space and New Year's Eve**

In their history of Sydney's Oxford Street, Faro and Wotherspoon (2000) celebrate its 'vigorous street life' (4), noting that Sydney with its 'penchant for pleasure, excess and inversion' has had recurring moments of the *carnavalesque*, but these have rarely been 'self-consciously ritualised' (261).<sup>31</sup> The development and promotion of major events is a key strategy of urban entrepreneurialism, and for the City of Sydney 'spectacular' urban events such as Mardi Gras, the Sydney Festival, Vivid and New Year's Eve are central to the city's 'brand', attracting significant international tourism and domestic investment. Over the last decade, Mardi Gras and associated events have faced aggressive drug policing, and alcohol has been banned at the parade since 2009, when council endorsed a request from the Surry

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<sup>31</sup> Sydney's Mardi Gras is one such event, borne of protest in the late 1970s and influenced by global traditions of carnival. In recent times the parade has increasingly become a tourist drawcard, corporatised and regulated.

Hills Police Local Area Command with a 'key message' 'to ensure the parade is accessible, safe and accommodating for all attending...a family friendly event within an alcohol-free area' (CoS 2012). As I will explore further in my final chapter, this foregrounding of notions of 'family friendly' and 'safe' urban space is increasingly dominant in neoliberal governance yet has little to do with notions of street life or convivial public spaces. Rather, as Delany argued in relation to New York's Times Square, the foregrounding of 'family values' is often followed by the suppression of 'urban social structures, economic, social, and sexual' (2019, 153).

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*'The city was fundamentally risky, and so risk was also what Sydney's New Year's Eve festivities were about. Risk was there when celebration took place beneath night's mask'* (Forsyth 2011, 85).

In Forsyth's evocative portrayal we see New Year's Eve in Sydney depicted as a *carnavalesque* celebration, one that I would argue has value in the Australian context as a public celebration not directly linked to the colonialism of 'Australia'/'Invasion' Day, or the militarism of 'ANZAC Day'. Since the late 1800s, the focus of festivities has moved from the General Post Office building at Martin Place, to the El Alamein Fountain in Kings Cross, The Rocks, Darling Harbour and finally the Harbour Bridge, and the way it is governed today illustrates the broader implications of alcohol-free zoning.

On contemporary New Year's Eves, the privatisation of drinking renders a total privatisation of public space: of the 69 harbourside fireworks vantage spots on New Year's Eve in 2014, none permitted alcohol, except for 17 in ticketed 'public space'.<sup>32</sup> The official website for New Year's Eve 2022 again designated the entire city alcohol-free, except for bars within ticketed areas with entry fees up to \$600. Only one park in the suburb of Glebe permitted BYO alcohol but this was limited to 1,500 attendees, on an occasion which can attract over a million people to the foreshore. As with justifications deployed in favour of alcohol-free zoning in general, council foregrounds preventing 'anti-social behaviour', 'underage drinking, public intoxication and reducing the risk of alcohol-related incidents in the

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<sup>32</sup> The City of Sydney New Year's Eve planner drily declared: 'it's still well and truly possible to have a drink on New Year's Eve, there's just nowhere to take your own alcohol' (Dumas, 2014).

proximity of families with young children’, ‘ensuring a safe and attractive environment on New Year’s Eve for residents, businesses and visitors’ and enhancing ‘the safety and accessibility of civic spaces for a diverse population of residents, workers and visitors to enjoy’ (CoS 2019). These links are questionable, with the Council’s New Year’s Eve Producer conceding that ‘low lighting, beautiful infrastructure and proximity to nearby residents’ were key factors in designing the new restrictions, which were ultimately triggered by *a few* ‘negatively boisterous’ individuals (Dumas 2014). These concerns replicate those aired around the 2000 Olympics about the ability of citizens to drink ‘appropriately’ outside licensed areas (Homan 2003, 29), and also reveal the government’s ‘civilising’ intentions.

Whilst temporary bans on BYO alcohol are not unprecedented for parts of Sydney on New Year’s Eve,<sup>33</sup> what is different about the contemporary situation is that alcohol is banned across the *entire* foreshore, save for ***drinking pens*** within ticketed and fenced-off public space, patrolled by private security. This sifting, refining and ‘civilising’ of crowds on New Year’s Eve exemplifies the way the mechanism of the license ***governs with and against alcohol***: alcohol-free zones work in tandem with the licensing of certain ‘responsibilised’ actors (in this case boutique vendors) in a privatised, securitised and classed space.

What is particularly troubling about New Year’s Eve for contemporary governmentality, I believe, is that it is a mass public celebration that occurs *alongside* the night-time economy, rather than being embedded within it. Thus, we need to recognise the political intervention that occurs on New Year’s Eve as a commercialisation of this celebration, with the fencing-out of crowds who can’t or won’t pay effecting an ‘alignment of public space with market imperatives’ (Wadds 2020, 191). Observable too is a literal commodification of ‘order’, where order functions as a commodity and a pre-requisite for ‘undisturbed consumption’ (Fischer et al. 2004), attained through the enclosure of public space, ticketed entry to the harbour foreshore and sales of food and drinks from licensed vendors within those ticketed areas.<sup>34</sup> Such ‘changing geographies of privatisation’ fundamentally compromise the right to be in public space (Hae 2012, 35), through the framing of what constitutes ‘acceptable’ cultural practices. Tellingly, the few remaining events in the city where bring-your-own

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<sup>33</sup> Incidents of violence in New Year’s Eve 1980 led to a ticketed-only event at Circular Quay the following year, though festivities were so ‘subdued’ that ticketing was abandoned for 1982 (Forsyth 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Also enacted is a commodification of culture – by this I mean it’s profitisation, rather than the kind of Ardorno-esque argument in much nightlife literature that frames contemporary culture as ‘commercialised’.

alcohol is permitted include Opera in the Domain, the Tropfest Short Film Festival and Symphony Under the Stars, all ostensibly coded as middle- or upper-class activities that ensure 'civilised' drinking.

This notion of *who* is allowed to or capable of drinking 'responsibly' in public space is encapsulated by a police officer, who asserted that alcohol-free zones 'were not designed to prevent well-behaved citizens from activities like enjoying a quiet tittle on a picnic' or a 'mum and dad down the beach having a glass of wine... You have to implement the laws in the spirit of the legislation' (McNamara and Quilter 2015, 23). This revealing quote is laden with signifiers of respectabilising, middle-class family life (mum, dad, wine), confirming the 'sanitising' function of alcohol-free zoning, and the way 'community' – as understood through middle-class and heteronormative 'networks of identity and lifestyle' (Blomley and Sommers 1998, 262) – are key to the governance of alcohol in public space.

Alcohol-free zones - and the *drinking pens* that are set up within them - embody Rose's 'packaged zones of enjoyment, managed by an alliance of urban planners, entrepreneurs, local politicians and quasi-governmental 'regeneration' agencies' (Rose qtd. in Binnie et al. 2006, 18), and they underscore the way neoliberal cities are managed through the production of 'cosmopolitan' space, as I explore further in my final chapter.

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Throughout the era of '6 o'clock closing' (1916-1955 in NSW), the state situated disorder, violence and crime as inevitable consequences of mass public drinking, with public drunkenness laws used to harshly regulate public space, according to Lee et al. (2020). As I have illustrated above, there are clear resonances in contemporary regulatory mechanisms, though more subtly underpinned via appeals to 'liveability' and 'economic prosperity', and legitimised through a 'narrow vision of community governance' (Pavlich 1998, 103).

Opportunistic deployment of alcohol discourses by governmental authorities and police have heavily curtailed citizens' use of public space and continue to be enforced discriminatorily, revealing a 'stronger condemnation' of public drinking as 'antisocial, dangerous and a risk to public safety', and conceptualising of the public drinker as a 'risk' to be managed (McNamara and Quilter 2015). Through these processes of risk management access to public space is privatised and enclosed via a classed *governing with and against*

*alcohol*, a logic that on New Year's Eve in particular has resulted in the enclosure of the commons as a money-maker for private commercial purposes through ticketing, alcohol and food sales for government and private vendors. Such a move relies on the 'imaginaries' around alcohol-related violence and 'civilised drinking' discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 having been accepted in public discourse.

In analysing City of Sydney reports on alcohol-free zoning over the last fifteen years, alcohol consumption now appears to be understood as contributing to 'amenity' primarily when it occurs within a licensed area or a private home. Most damningly, concerns articulated in earlier reports regarding discrimination towards street drinkers are seemingly absent (or at least far less prominent) in contemporary reports, leading to the conclusion that they are now routinely ignored or not even considered in the push to 'civilise' urban life.

In my fourth and final chapter, I will explore how contradictory 'cosmopolitan' governmental visions (e.g. the *'Alfresco Revolution'*) in the COVID-era draw cynically on history, yet their aspirations fail to concretise. This is most evident in attempts to 'activate' public space in the midst of an airborne pandemic, which fail due to limited understanding or appreciation of contingencies entailed in the production of drinking cultures, scant follow-through at the technical level, and the intrusion of other governmentalities around public disorder and 'anti-social' behaviour that tend to make 'social difference the target' (Race 2016).

## Chapter 4: An ‘Alfresco Revolution’?

In my first chapter I demonstrated the ways in which discourses of ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’ are produced in statistics and media discourses, and how these converged around the suburb of Kings Cross in Sydney at the turn of the new millennium. These (and other) ‘alcohol imaginaries’ (to use Jayne and Valentine’s 2016 term) animated discourses of inner-city drinking in Sydney, dominated by concerns around ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’.

Chapter 2 looked at invocations of ‘civilised’ drinking and Sydney as a ‘world city’, including how the ‘alcohol imaginary’ of civilised drinking is proposed within global city discourse as a way of both preventing alcohol violence, and boosting Sydney’s reputation as a fun, convivial world city. Drawing on historical moments, I interrogated the work that the invocation of ‘drinking cultures’ and the ‘culturalist’ argument do, in both obscuring histories of technical interventions and providing justification for new interventions that ***govern with and against alcohol***.

In chapter 3 I undertook a case study of alcohol-free zones, demonstrating how the opportunistic use of alcohol discourses by governmental authorities and police have heavily curtailed citizens’ use of public space and continue to be enforced discriminatorily. In a context where public drinking is increasingly framed as anti-social and risky, the privatisation of public drinking has been enacted via the liquor ***license-as-mechanism*** through which civilised drinking practices and spaces are promoted. The enclosure of the commons relies on ‘imaginaries’ around alcohol-related violence, drinking culture and ‘civilised drinking’ discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 having been accepted in public discourse.

In my fourth and final chapter I interrogate the extent to which the state government’s ‘Alfresco Revolution’ and ‘24-Hour Economy’ strategies represent a (partial) reversal of mundane governance of alcohol, as they attempt to navigate the popular critique that took hold during the ‘lockout years’, which claimed that governments shut down nightlife in order to clear the path for developers. I argue that these ‘new’ strategies continue and extend prior discourses of small bars, world cities and ‘civilised’ drinking. They continue to ***govern with and against alcohol*** in courting and producing the profile of the ‘civilised’ drinker, however with a new focus on outdoor consumption to promote the local hospitality economy. Drawing cynically on history, these ‘alfresco’ aspirations largely fail to concretise

due to limited understanding or appreciation of contingencies entailed in the production of drinking cultures, scant follow-through at the technical level, and the intrusion of 'civilising' governmentalities around public disorder and 'anti-social' behaviour that continue to suppress public space.

Emphasising the importance of cross-class contact to life in the post-industrial context is a key commitment of my thesis, along with the conviviality that can stem from unscripted encounters. In making this case, throughout my final chapter I have drawn on Samuel Delany's (2019) work on the gentrification of New York's Times Square, in which he argues for the primary importance of 'socio-economic diversity' to public life and identifies 'cross-class contact' as both a target and casualty of governmental intervention and processes of gentrification. Much of the literature on urbanism is focused on various concepts of difference but not *class* which, when evoked, tends to be seen as an 'old' form of social relation (Giddens qtd. in Haylett 2006, 189). This coalesces in what Haylett has termed a 'class-silent politics', where middle-class groups are positioned at the vanguard of political projects and gentrifying processes, including in relation to nightlife and public space (2006, 189). As I demonstrate below, 'class' is everywhere and nowhere in the discourses that dominate urbanist planning documents, the rhetoric of the '*Alfresco Revolution*', and technocratic appeals to 'safety', 'diversity', 'vibrancy' and so on.<sup>35</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced a conjunctural moment, in which the epidemiological and economic logic of outdoor socialising presents local authorities with an opportunity to interrogate the rationalities that have increasingly shut down public space through alcohol policy, as city authorities have sought to navigate risk in public life in a punitive way. Whilst the current focus on outdoor socialising in the '*Alfresco Revolution*' might be seen as a reversal of previous trends, I argue that attempts to re-activate public space within the confines of the privatised licence are stymied and 'haunted' by histories of criminalisation and sanitisation, as well as memories of more dynamic public landscapes. Ultimately, more interesting, convivial and diverse possibilities of public life are eliminated within contemporary entrepreneurial governmentalities that purport to 'civilise', yet which fail to

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<sup>35</sup> 'Diversity' in these discourses continues to reference things other than class, including different types of business and cultural diversity.

recognise that 'urban culture' is produced through 'creative movement' that takes place within uncontrollable, residual and transient spaces of the urban (Farias 2010, 12).

### **The 'Alfresco Revolution' and '24-Hour Economy Strategy': a convergence of state and local government**

In February 2021, at the beginning of the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, state tourism board Destination New South Wales released an advertisement encouraging residents to shop, dine out, and book hotel rooms, with the aim of boosting the economy, particularly in retail and hospitality, in what was presumed to be - prematurely, as it turned out - the end of pandemic-related lockdowns. The advertisement was aimed at NSW residents in their 20s to 40s and featured a vista of the unfinished Barangaroo casino, and other class markers including shoppers at department stores, images of fancy cocktails and people dancing outdoors in The Rocks district.<sup>36</sup> The images appealed to a COVID-safe way of socialising, with dancing in the streets and outdoor drinking representing a shift from the casting of partying as purely criminogenic, which had dominated discourses and policing during what I have called the *long lockout law era* (the mid-2000s onwards). However, the advertisement obscures or ignores this broader history of the regulation of alcohol in public spaces and plays as ironic to anyone who witnessed the gradual and then sudden shutdown of nightlife in the city over the previous fifteen years. Furthermore, in the culture depicted in these advertisements, notions of 'safety' or 'freedom' continue to correspond to affluence.

As detailed in Chapter 1, recent decades saw nightlife 'risk' both marketed to young people as an enticing element of urban life, and instrumentalised to control these very populations at the same time. Wadds (2020, 90) argues that Sydney authorities, in an 'increasingly reactive, image-conscious policy-making process', condemned the very behaviour that appealed to many revellers in the first place (disorder, drug taking, binge drinking and sexual exploration). The NSW 'lockout laws', then, represented a culmination of this paradox, when nightlife risks were cast as too great and insufficiently governable through

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<sup>36</sup> The inclusion of the casino is significant, given the popular critique of governmental exemptions from the lockout laws enjoyed by the casino made by groups such as Keep Sydney Open and Reclaim The Streets during the 2010s. (Destination NSW, 'Love it like you mean it' advertisement, 2021).

individual responsabilisation (Lee et al. 2020), leading the state government to implement policies which resulted in the loss of over 270 cultural, entertainment and hospitality venues in the city ('NSW Police to increase patrols' 2020).

Attempting to shift from its own predominant narrative of nightlife risk, in 2020 and 2021 the state government launched the '*Alfresco Revolution*' and '*24-Hour Economy*' strategies in an effort to reverse the economic impact of both the 'lockout laws' and the COVID-19 lockdowns. The state government also appointed a 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, something long advocated for by supporters of nightlife who cited Amsterdam's 'Night Mayor' as an example that should be implemented locally. The successful candidate Michael Rodrigues (former corporate lawyer, chair of the Night-Time Industries Association and founder of Time Out Magazine) quickly convened a 24-Hour Economy Advisory Group, comprising Merivale chain owner Justin Hemmes, The Star casino, festival and music industry representatives, and local government bureaucrats.

The release of these two strategies represents a convergence between state and local (City of Sydney) governments. Compared with the moralistic regulatory agenda of the state government a decade ago, their language and policy shifts for Sydney substantially align with the City of Sydney's 'global city' aspirations of small bars, theatres, restaurants, late night retail, alfresco dining, large-scale events and so on. Tensions between state and local government over 'lockout laws' and the granting of new liquor licenses have receded, giving way to a merging of rhetoric around the importance of developing an 'alfresco city' on public health, economic and cultural grounds. This currently unfolding policy discourse seeks to change the character of urban space through a partial reversal of the 'minor practices'<sup>37</sup> that pertain to outdoor dining and alcohol regulations, including enabling hospitality venues to serve food and alcohol outside more easily, rescinding the decade-long liquor licensing freeze, and increasing 'small bar' maximum capacity limits (including permitting under-18s for a 'family friendly' atmosphere). This policy shift dovetailed with the City of Sydney's long-standing focus on 'activating' outdoor areas, and received extensive and sympathetic coverage in the media as Sydney came out of lockdowns, with column inches devoted to hospitality traders calling for the 'return of the street festival', and commitments to

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<sup>37</sup> In an inversion of De Certeau's 'minor practices', Valverde (1998) attributes 'institutional habits of low-level public servants' to 'low-status knowledges' that are key in alcohol regulation.

‘pedestrianise’ the city and create ‘la dolce vita’ via the utilisation of carpark, bowling greens and streets as ‘restaurants and beer gardens’ (Taylor and Thompson 2021).

### **Culturalist imaginaries and hauntings**

As I argued in Chapter 2, ‘culturalist’ imaginaries dominate alcohol debate in Australia, centred on a dichotomy of the ‘civilised’ and ‘rowdy’ drinker, with wistful and aspirational references to nightlife in other countries. These imaginaries continue to dominate commentary on the ‘alfresco city’ and the new ‘24-Hour Economy’ strategy.

Politicians now claim that the city has ‘grown up’ since the 2014 ‘lockout laws’, and that Sydney is destined to become ‘Manhattan’, ‘Berlin’ or ‘London’ of the southern hemisphere. State politicians Victor Dominello and Rob Stokes assure there is no longer a culture of ‘just getting drunk for drunk’s sake...we can’t pigeonhole ourselves into a time warp that is 20 years old’, that ‘Red tape should not get between us and a good NSW red wine in the sun’ (Thompson 2020). In this discourse of ‘growing up’, the timing of when this ‘maturation’ process began and even who it refers to remains unclear, leading one to ponder whether the authors may in fact be referring to themselves!

Politicians, media commentators and other important decision-makers have appealed to culturalist imaginaries in commentary around reviving Sydney’s nightlife. In a panel discussion at the University of Sydney, Michael Rodrigues cited Mexico and Rio De Janeiro as inspirations for Sydney with their ‘beach nightlife’<sup>38</sup> whilst City of Sydney deputy mayor Jess Scully proffered Berlin ‘for dancing’, and Bangkok for its ‘amazing food at all hours, you can dance all over the city, buy cool stuff at 1am on the street...a real 24-hour economy on the streets’ that is ‘affordable and accessible’ (Sydney Ideas 2022).<sup>39</sup> In contrast to affirmations of Sydney’s nightlife revival as a reward for ‘growing up’, such commentary frequently (re-)invokes changing ‘drinking culture’, exemplified in calls from the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner to diversify away from ‘Anglo-Saxon drinking culture’ (Koziol 2021), Sydney

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<sup>38</sup> An interview between Michael Rodrigues and a Sydney Morning Herald journalist questioned Sydney’s lack of night time beach culture, compared to ‘Thailand and Mexico where beach culture famously extends well into the early hours of the morning’ (Koziol 2021).

<sup>39</sup> Lauding Bangkok’s nightlife as ‘affordable and accessible’ (for whom, tourists?) reads as a grab-bag of buzzwords that makes little sense.

Ideas panellists lamenting a hospitality and drinking culture ‘holding us back’, urbanist thinktank VibeLab Asia Pacific claiming that ‘entertainment needs to be less alcohol-centred’ (2022), the City of Sydney seeking a *more* ‘cultural and creative city’ at night, and the state government claiming that Sydney’s ‘diverse’ nightlife had become ‘two-dimensional’ and centred on alcohol consumption (‘24-Hour Economy Strategy’, 2020).

These confused and contradictory statements, often articulated by the same people who claim the city has ‘grown up’, highlight the ‘imaginary’ aspect of the culturalist argument and the way it continues to be deployed to ***govern with and against alcohol***. For example, given alcohol consumption in Australia has steadily decreased over the last 50 years, from 13.1 litres per person in 1975 to 9.5 litres in 2019 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019), the claim that nightlife has recently become *more* alcohol-centred is difficult to support. At the same time, the notion that the past was simply one of a monochromatic nightlife is belied by the actual diversity of the over 270 businesses that closed due to the ‘lockout laws’, including pubs, nightclubs, restaurants, music venues, and bars. Perhaps the key point here is the hypocrisy entailed in laments from these major players and stakeholders regarding the dominance of ‘alcohol culture’. They remain close to industry, as evidenced in the make-up of the 24-Hour Economy Advisory Group, and the events these stakeholders continue to promote. For example, in 2021 the NSW state government, the City of Sydney and Time Out Magazine launched what was billed as a ‘6-week street festival’, a ‘convergence of food and cocktails, community and creativity’. In fact, the event took place inside small bars near Town Hall station, and was sponsored by Patrón Tequila, Grey Goose Vodka, Bombay Sapphire Gin and Bacardi Rum.

An ‘alcohol focus’, it seems, is acceptable for *certain* citizens.

Though current calls for ‘diversity’ in nightlife hit the right notes, as Samuel Delany queried in regard to the redevelopment of Times Square, ‘more diversity relative to what?’ (2019, 165). The ‘diversity’ appealed to in these discourses clearly doesn’t refer to socioeconomic or class diversity, at any rate. A fixation on ‘drinking cultures’ in Australia has meant scant attention has been paid to the diversity of venues or the ‘diversity of activities *within* venues’ themselves (Homan 2019), a point illustrated in the impact that the closure of over

270 venues during the lockout years had on diverse aspects of culture. <sup>40</sup> Never *only* about ‘drinking’, venues incorporated a myriad of social, cultural and economic activities.

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In 2023 the celebratory ‘global city’ discourses of the state government, the City of Sydney and other urbanists have now aligned. Yet left totally unexamined in these culturalist musings is the way their fantasies are undermined (and rendered spurious) by the technicalist visions of city life which they champion. The purported aspiration to develop ‘beach nightlife’ in Sydney, for example, is significantly encumbered by the spatial privatisation that has seen Bondi and other beaches zoned alcohol-free since the 1990s (further expanded to adjacent parks and streets in recent years). In contrast, the countries inspirationally referenced by industry, government and the media (Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, Germany) feature contemporary ‘cultures’ (or more exactly ‘regulatory frameworks’) that tolerate beachside bars, street drinking at parades, festivals, parks, and beach parties.

These culturalist musings also elide histories of cultures, such as those captured in Rennie Ellis’ photographs and Midnight Oil’s free concert at Wanda Beach in 1982 (see Figure 5), and that can be found in a description of Bondi in 2000 as a ‘party place for backpackers...a place free from normal rules, (where) usual restraints can be ignored’ (Sant and Waitt 2000, 200), or the fact that BYO alcohol was permitted at the Sydney Festival’s opening night as recently as 2016 (Feltscheer 2016). <sup>41</sup>

Proposals in the ‘*24-Hour Economy Strategy*’ to develop Sydney’s outer suburbs also elide history. A cursory look at Cold Chisel’s touring schedule from the late 1970s and early 1980s reveals scores of venues in suburban and regional areas that no longer exist as music venues due to factors discussed elsewhere in this thesis, including the government-driven expansion of poker machines into live music spaces, noise complaints, and prohibitive insurance premiums.

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<sup>40</sup> Two Sydney venues that I played at in Brazilian samba groups, Cruise Bar and Play Bar, ceased live music during the lockout years, despite being located in low-residential areas of Circular Quay and Central Station.

<sup>41</sup> The opening night of the Sydney Festival previously had free, un-fenced concerts around the city, and older programme notes demonstrate more proactive governmental decisions to block off roads, permit roving performers, and other less restrictive uses of public space.



*Figure 5: Midnight Oil playing a fundraising concert for unemployed youth at Wanda Beach, Sydney, January 1982 (ABC Radio National, The History Listen, 2022).*

These vanishings from Sydney's cultural landscape and memory are part of a broader decline in 'non-commercial' night time activities, with the exception of occasional outdoor concerts or cultural festivals that have 'strong commercial and quasi-commercial constituents' (Rowe and Bavinton 2011, 820-821). During the 2022 FIFA Men's Football World Cup the extent to which this celebratory, outdoor culture has been regulated out of existence was laid bare as local and state governments had neglected to even consider setting up a 'live site' where fans could watch the games in the early hours of the morning. Underlining the entrenchment of governmentalities around public (dis)order, the last 'live site' in Sydney occurred at the 2010 World Cup, four years prior to the introduction of the 'lockout laws'. When a site was set up in Darling Harbour's Tumbalong Park at the eleventh hour for the 2022 iteration, it was predictably alcohol-free.

In their allusions to overseas cities, Sydney urbanists gloss over the realities of public drinking and often minimal alcohol restrictions in those countries, whilst obscuring histories of local (Australian) regulatory frameworks. Contradictory yearnings and imaginings deploy a historical amnesia, yet remain 'haunted' by governmentalities of regulation,

criminalisation and sanitisation of socialising in public space, *as well as* memories of more vibrant pre-lockout streetscapes. Visions that appeal to certain utopian dimensions of public space ('dancing in the streets' in the '*Alfresco*' advertisement) are envisioned as packaged, curated and licensed entertainment within private-outdoor spaces, where the perceived dangers of *publicness* are corralled via class signifiers and technical measures however, at the same time, they remain haunted by imaginings of vanquished convivial publics.

This haunting-amnesia looms large in rhetoric around Oxford Street. Proclaimed desires to 'party like it's 1989' by property developers and a mayoral candidate's promise to make the area 'hum like 20 years ago' (A. Taylor, 'This will Darlinghurst hum', 2021) read as particularly paradoxical and cynical appeals to nostalgia, given the eras being invoked predated government-led gentrification and crackdowns through egregious noise complaints, alcohol-free zones, sniffer dogs, and lockouts. Oxford Street has been targeted for transformation in recent years due to declines in foot traffic, closures of pubs and nightclubs, and some vacant retail outlets, however the City of Sydney's '*City Plan 2036*' for its 'revival' has the familiar sheen of 'creative city' panacea: a 99-year lease of council buildings to developers,<sup>42</sup> office space for 'creatives', cycleways, galleries, theatres, restaurants, laneway activation, and bars (Chrysanthos 2022). Regarding neighbouring Kings Cross, Clover Moore-aligned Sydney MP Alex Greenwich declared the '24-hour beer barns gone', clearing the way for a 'sophisticated dining, small bar and entertainment offering' (Nunn 2021), as Michael Rodrigues heralded a 'democratic', 'affordable' and 'diverse' transformation towards night markets, barber shops, bike shops, live performance, and retail (Koziol 2021).

It is critical to point out that there is nothing 'new' in these ideas that might have been lifted from any urbanist planning document over the last three decades; as far back as 2008 a think tank urged Oxford Street to target 'diners, concertgoers and theatre enthusiasts' rather than 'clubbers and binge drinkers' (Gibson 2008). Fifteen years ago Sandercock critiqued the 'sterile and menacing' version of diversity promoted by planners and business, in the 'public-private spaces of the re-made city' (2005, 230)<sup>43</sup> and in 2021 the 'menacing'

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<sup>42</sup> Real estate developers Toga and AsheMorgan plans for Oxford Street include '9200 square metres of office space, dedicated cultural and creative areas, 2300 square metres of retail plus a slew of restaurants, bars, and cafés' (M. Kelly 2022).

<sup>43</sup> Sandercock (2005) noted 'al fresco dining, jazz bands and farmers' markets' as part of this vision.

component was lamentably evident in the outrageous demands from industry and government to remove the pioneering Kings Cross safe injecting centre, depicted as an ‘elephant in the room’ preventing the area’s transformation into an ‘experiential precinct’ for families, miniature golf, wine bars, cafes, and theatre (Thompson and Cormack 2021). In the state government’s calls for the creation of a live music and small bar ‘mecca’ in Kings Cross, the area’s hundred years of diverse cultural history (nightclubs, small bars, strip clubs, brothels, live music venues and, yes, *beer barns*) is erased, and yet the hauntological spectre remains.



**Figure 6:** Soundshells such as this one in St. Leonard’s Park, where rock band Cold Chisel performed in 1978, have been removed by councils across Sydney in recent years, due to disuse. Contemporary governmental concerns are easy to spot: no fence, no noise dampening, outdoors. In the twentieth century, soundshells, suburban town halls, dance halls, and rotundas were utilised for a range of activities, from concerts to meetings to dances (Homan 2003). Their disuse, I believe, can in large part be attributed to restrictive legislation around alcohol, safety and noise. (Jones, Chris. ‘St Leonards Park Music Shell, Miller St, North Sydney’, 2017).

Continuous with earlier attempts to transform Sydney into a ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘sophisticated’ city, the ‘*Alfresco Revolution*’ and ‘*24-Hour Economy*’ strategies promote certain *kinds of* ‘civilised’ culture, which includes ‘responsible’ modes of alcohol consumption lauded for their perceived social, economic and even health benefits (Haydock 2015, 144-145). At the same time, these strategies erase actual histories of urban life and overlook or bury the ways in which current *drinkscape*s are connected to previous regulatory interventions (often enacted by the same governments). Laden with class signifiers that operate as signs of ‘growing up’, these discourses articulate a politics of classed leisure, centred on an ideal ‘civilised’ consumer in the ‘new’ economy of small bars, cocktails and ‘red wine in the sun’, replete with aspirational international references. In their attempt to divert the narrative from alcohol-related violence, governments have re-focused on place-making strategies, however the tactic of ***governing with and against alcohol*** remains.

### **The persistence of governmentalities in ‘*la dolce vita*’**

One effect of discourses that obscure the histories and problematisations of public drinking is that aspirations for a less regulated outdoor hospitality economy have already come up against obstacles. Whilst there does appear to be a genuine desire on the part of governments for a post-lockout and post-COVID turn, any meaningful ‘activation’ of outdoor space would require rethinking and ultimately overturning the myriad habits of governance discussed throughout this thesis, such as the proliferation of alcohol free-zones in streets, parks and beaches, prohibitions on drinking at parades, community events and halls, the securitised ***drinking pens*** at markets, concerts and festivals and so on. Setting up a ‘street-based’ event today requires so many moving parts (temporary removal of an alcohol-free zone, erecting fencing, hiring security guards, selecting vendors etc.) that it is simply easier not to attempt. Another intruding governmentality that limits ‘activation’ remains the ‘privileging of the resident’ (Race 2016), where the onus is on venues, festivals or events to be ‘good neighbours’, rather than the other way around. As discussed in chapter 2, the City of Sydney has radically transformed demographically, to the extent that the former working-class and industrial area is now predominantly wealthy, save for a few pockets of public housing. The emphasis in 2013’s *Sydney Open* strategy on separating residential and

public/entertainment areas of the city and activating areas ‘*without* residential populations’ demonstrates the enduring aspect of this governmentality that privileges the (wealthy) resident,<sup>44</sup> and gives explanation to the limited implementation of outdoor ‘activation’ in the intervening decade.

Even in the context of COVID-19, the City of Sydney declared that existing limits on live music would remain in place in order to ‘protect the villages’ and ‘avoid noise impacts on residents, other businesses and sensitive land uses in these areas’ (Thompson 2021). Thus, rather than policies which could actually open up public space in an ongoing way, the council proposes piecemeal temporary ‘activations’; one-day street closures in wealthy suburbs and ‘roving musicians’ for two hours in summer (Thompson 2021), whilst continuing to incessantly draw up new alcohol-free zones. Likewise, at the adjacent Inner West council (despite its progressive and pro-culture self-image) avoiding ‘impacts on residents’ provided the justification for rejecting an application from a pub to convert its carpark into a beer garden (A. Taylor, ‘Council threatens beer garden’, 2021).

What this demonstrates, fundamentally, is that urbanist fantasies of ‘Berlin’ and ‘Bangkok’ nightlife do not get sustained follow through at the technical level. Appeals to public drinking and socialising are made, but technically disallowed, intruded upon by key ‘civilising’ governmentalities which impact socialising and public life in NSW, including but not limited to noise complaints, sniffer dogs, the 3:30am ‘last drinks’ rule and the increasing proliferation of alcohol-free zones. The fact that these are rarely mentioned in media and governmental narratives underscores the alignment of the ‘*Alfresco Revolution*’ and ‘*24-Hour Economy*’ strategies with prior discourses of small bars and ‘Europeanisation’, and the fact that ‘acceptable’ drinking remains tied to the mechanism of the liquor license.

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<sup>44</sup> The privileging of the resident is clear in this passage from *OPEN Sydney*: ‘we will cut fees and review operating hours of outdoor dining in some areas, where later hours could be permitted if the premises are *not near* residential dwellings’... ‘Noise is a significant factor for residents living in a busy night-time city’ (2013, 14-15).

## **Cosmopolitan quartering, managed diversity and safety**

In order to address contemporary governmentalities, we need to interrogate the ideologies that underpin neoliberal urbanist governance. It is my contention that governmentalities around alcohol and public space are underpinned and bulwarked by certain notions of 'cosmopolitanism', the desire for a 'managed diversity', and paradigms of safety and risk centred on a classed 'family-friendly' vision.

Geographer Jon Binnie has written extensively on the elitist and classed side of 'cosmopolitanism', which deems the 'cosmopolite' as skilled at navigating and negotiating difference and diversity, through competencies gained via education and cultural capital, in contrast to differently-classed subjects pathologised as 'somehow fixed in place' (Binnie et al. 2006, 8-10). In assurances that 'the beer barns are gone' we can see the cosmopolite's 'pathologisation of the local', and the way such performances of distinction and detachment from 'certain forms of localised popular culture' take spatial form (Binnie et al. 2006, 15). One way this spatial governmentality seeks to manage is through the creation of distinct cosmopolitan quarters and sectors and other urban governance strategies that contradictorily tend towards a certain cultural and aesthetic homogeneity, often eradicating rather than celebrating difference (May qtd. in Binnie et al. 2006, 16). The discourses of the '*Alfresco Revolution*' signal a vision to mould *public* space into gentrified and curated quarters, as a continuation of the cosmopolitan project of quartering private and commercial space in the city.

Contradictions within this cosmopolitan governmentality were evident in relation to the governance of World Pride 2023, held in Sydney. In November 2022, a few months out from the festival, Sydney mayor Clover Moore warned NSW Police against deploying sniffer dogs throughout the month long festival, and expressed support for the Australian Capital Territory's decriminalisation of personal drug possession (Koziol 2022). These public comments were commendable (one cannot imagine a Labor or Liberal politician making them), yet they contrast with the 'trigger-happy' alcohol-free zoning of inner-Sydney under her government (a ten-fold increase since 2005). The official government website asserted that 'drinking on the street' was prohibited at World Pride due to its status as an 'all ages activation, with families welcomed to enjoy the festivities'. As outlined in my previous chapter, the idea that families will not be welcome if there is street drinking is a rather

recent development, council reports from 2008 show that the City of Sydney, NSW Premier's department and NSW Police all supported street drinking during Mardi Gras. Furthermore, as governments have recently modified rules to allow under-18s in small bars for a 'family-friendly' atmosphere, and attempt to create a 'new' family friendly Kings Cross, we need to ask *whose* families this applies to, but also critically to question how 'the family' is discursively deployed to eradicate other already existing public cultures, in a way that renders 'contact' 'safe' in the name of family and corporate values (Delany 2019, 169).<sup>45</sup> The problem here isn't the desire to consider the needs of families or accommodate their participation in urban space, but rather the deployment of 'family-friendly' as a universal standard to be maintained at all times and spaces. This has the effect of shutting down forms of sociability and city uses (for example by sexual communities, sex workers, and others deemed threatening or inappropriate), without acknowledging their historical and ongoing significance in constituting urban spaces or the significance of those spaces for *their* community, livelihood and safety.

In August 2023 the federal MP for North Sydney, Kylea Tink (a member of the *teal* group of self-styled progressive independent politicians), launched a campaign to ban an alcoholic version of the *Solo* soft drink. In a number of radio interviews she expressed concerns about *Hard Solo* being marketed to minors, the rising popularity of pre-mixed drinks<sup>46</sup> and anything that would, in her words, inadvertently throw 'fuel on the fire' of Australia's 'quite unhealthy relationship with alcohol' (ABC Sydney Radio, 10 August 2023).<sup>47</sup> Critically, in such alcohol imaginaries, 'civilised drinking' is generally framed only as a potential problem of health or productivity, whilst the drinking practices and spaces of *other* sections of society are seen as requiring control through legislation. In addition to commercial imperatives that influence the freeing up of public space for profit-making alcohol vendors, such distinctions within contemporary cosmopolite urbanism may indicate resonances of Temperance 'legacies of concern' (Jayne and Valentine 2016) and the historic opprobrium reserved for drinking from some on the 'socialist left' (Talbot 2016).

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<sup>45</sup> See also the policing of 'moral' dress codes in current Mardi Gras parades undertaken by NSW Police.

<sup>46</sup> Alcoholic canned beverages known as RTDs are recognised as popular drinks in rural, regional and working-class areas.

<sup>47</sup> Kylea Tink interviewed on ABC Sydney radio 10/08/2023 (at 45mins50secs): <https://www.abc.net.au/sydney/programs/mornings/mornings/102685916>

As part of ongoing attempts to 'civilise' urban life, contradictory desires and discourses of alcohol imaginaries are sanitised by class markers and spatial controls and justified through appeals to 'safety'. They also opaquely articulate a desire for a 'managed diversity' that domesticates public space through reducing the 'risky mixing' of different social groups (Jayne et al., 'Fluid Boundaries', 2008, 97).<sup>48</sup> Brazilian anthropologist Teresa Caldeira has argued that rigid perceptions and constructions of social differences and boundaries, and a belief that 'different groups belong to separate universes' reinforce a new 'urban segregation' (1998, 136), and I believe this thinking is central to the governance of public space at present. According to Bennett, entrepreneurial governments place significant importance on 'cultural management' to stave off 'social instabilities that might arise from colliding identities' (2003, 56).

As argued in my first chapter, in the context of late modernity's paradigms of risk, *perceptions* of safety have contributed to the growth of risk assessment cultures (Giddens & Beck in Homan 2003, 158), and these calculations and frameworks inform both institutional thinking and personal action. On a practical level, this has resulted in a 'preoccupation with risk and safety at public events' (Talbot 2016), and substantial increases in public liability costs and enforcement.<sup>49</sup> Yet what constitutes 'safety' in these discourses is often very narrow, omitting for example the danger that sniffer dog operations pose to revellers (and especially marginalised 'others'). The narrowness of this definition of 'safety' is encapsulated in the response given by the 24-Hour Commissioner when questioned whether the ongoing use of sniffer dogs by police supported a 'fun and vibrant nightlife': 'the key is balance. We want nightlife to be vibrant, but it also needs to be safe' (Boon 2021).

In Sydney, policing strategies and urbanist governmental policies that include sniffer dogs, alcohol-free zones, noise complaints, 'controls by audit', the removal of community control

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<sup>48</sup> Jayne (2008, 97): alcohol-related regeneration strategies attempt to 'manage diversity', domesticate public space and reduce the 'risky mixing' of different social groups, formulated around assessments of perceived threats to security...'around an activity that is associated with, on the one hand, intoxication and acceptable if exuberant behaviour and, on the other hand, unacceptable and 'classed' models of citizenship that are ambiguous and difficult to define'.

<sup>49</sup> Live music in Sydney has declined through a 'steady erosion of venue rights' and enforcement of public entertainment statutes since the 1990s (Australian Arts Council's 2002 'Vanishing Acts' 43, 2), increasing insurance premiums based on perceptions of high risk, and increased regulatory requirements and responsibilities for event organisers.

of events, 'lockout laws', urban 'regeneration' and clearing the way for property developers, are all significant factors in the decline of the city's public life. Whilst urbanist imaginaries invoke a fetishised Europe ('Berlin' and 'Barcelona'), they lack any curiosity about how nightlife, public space and urban life in general might function in those cities. Instead, they offer up a 'safe' and 'vibrant' Sydney, organised around ideals of (purported) 'family-friendly' comfort within sanitised and surveilled spaces, with limited recognition of how aggressive policing makes places less safe or 'inclusive' and diminishes opportunities for conviviality. In this commentary, 'safety' regularly operates as a stand-in for 'class', and Haylett (2006, 189, 198) suggests that the 'effort of critical thinking that has gone into ethnicity, gender and sexuality has not extended to class cultures and identity'. This can be seen to manifest in the 'class-based but class-silent politics' of urbanist discourses, and in the way 'diversity' is increasingly endowed with *only* a 'racialising' sense (as opposed for example, to notions of *social* diversity) within Australian governmentality (Morris 2014). Of course, family-friendly neoliberal multiculturalism continues to police and exclude difference based on classed ethnicities.

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*'in the name of 'safety,' society dismantles the various institutions that promote interclass communication, attempts to critique the way such institutions functioned in the past to promote their happier sides are often seen as, at best, nostalgia for an outmoded past and, at worst, a pernicious glorification of everything dangerous: unsafe sex, neighborhoods filled with undesirables (read 'unsafe characters'), promiscuity, an attack on the family and the stable social structure, and dangerous, noncommitted, 'unsafe' relationships—that is, psychologically 'dangerous' relations, though the danger is rarely specified in any way other than to suggest its failure to conform to the ideal bourgeois marriage.'* (Delany 2001, 122)

As a counter-politics to the dominant discourses of urbanism, Samuel Delany's (2019) work focuses on the gentrification of New York's Times Square at the end of the twentieth century, in particular the regulating out of porn theatres and other sex-related venues. Delany poses a countervailing notion of 'safety' to the classed 'family-friendly' visions of

urban planning, in which he argues that safety comes from interclass contact and busy public areas. He identifies 'cross-class contact' (defined as unsanctioned, unscripted and often, importantly, *outdoor* interactions) as a target and casualty of government intervention and gentrification, increasingly suppressed by authorities under the guise of 'safety' and a 'conservative, stabilising discourse' that portrays interclass contact as 'dangerous, unsafe, or undesirable' (2019, 127-129, 164).<sup>50</sup> In limiting 'contact', urbanist and technocratic strategies literally fence-off different publics, solidifying the idea that 'safe' friends are met through 'school, work, or preselected special interest groups', gyms, reading groups, volunteer organisations and the like, as opposed to via encounters in public spaces (Delaney 2019, 199).

Invocations of the 'resident', 'amenity', 'civilised' consumer and the 'family' in the discourses of the '*Alfresco Revolution*' and '*24-Hour Economy*' evince such fears of interclass contact and socio-economic diversity in public life, and reveal the way top-down corporate-driven attempts to rearticulate public culture hinge on a series of cultural oppositions between the 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' (Comella 2008, 317). The City of Sydney's vision for World Pride as a privatised, heavily securitised, family-friendly 'street party' activation with selected vendors, draws parallels to the 'Disneyfied' reinvention of New York's Times Square as a homogenised and policed theme park with a 'wholesome' image (Comella 2008). These efforts to discipline 'contact' demonstrate the state's power to regulate and intervene in cultural practices, and have the practical effect of actually *decreasing* the diversity of public cultures through suppressing 'forms of public sociability that do not organise themselves around either the family or legitimate consumer markets' (Race 2018, 42).<sup>51</sup>

As anti-'contact' discourses and policies take effect and heterogenous contacts diminish further, this leads to an 'ossification' of the perception that 'different groups belong to separate universes' (Caldeira 1998, 136); which is then looped back as doctrine into urban planning processes and governmentalities.

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<sup>50</sup> Violence against minorities actually increased after mayor Rudolph Giuliani's 'clean up' of New York's Times Square under the guise of 'family-friendly' safety (Munoz 2009, 64).

<sup>51</sup> In governmental visions of 'family-friendly activation', seemingly excised is Berlant and Warner's notion of 'forms of sociability that un-linked money and family from the scene of the good life' (1998, 565).

## Negating conviviality and the carnivalesque

In their attempts to 'civilise' urban life, governments have expanded into areas not previously considered the domain of direct state intervention (Hae 2012, 25) with attendant impacts on the diversity of public cultures, and a diminishing of integral aspects of convivial public space and possibilities that can emerge out of the 'communitas' of the carnivalesque. As Wadds et al. (2022) have shown, regulatory intensification in Sydney (typified by aggressive policing and a fixation on the elimination of risk from urban life) has resulted in a nightlife that is *less* 'diverse', affordable or accessible, as multiple forms of leisure are curtailed. At the same time, selected leisure cultures of small bars, alfresco dining and 'inclusive-niche' arts events that appeal to a certain 'cosmopolitan aesthetic' are elevated, as space is regulated and made 'safe' for consumers and businesses (Binnie 2006, 25).

In the Sydney context, over the last fifteen years urbanist policies have promoted government-sanctioned and curated leisure whilst accelerating the decline of community-based events and stifling those that don't conform to consumer market logics (as discussed in Chapter 3). Alcohol-free zoning and policies like the '*Alfresco Revolution*' function in tandem to purify public space of 'disorderly people' and facilitate 'disciplined consumption' (Fischer et. al 2004, 359), in a double move where authorities approach street-based festivity as criminogenic, at the same time as responsabilising licensed vendors to maintain civility within the city. This has the very real effect of diminishing integral aspects of public life that Caldeira identifies, including the free circulation of crowds, unprogrammed public enjoyment and congregation in streets and squares, and the presence of people from different social backgrounds, using spaces designed for mass enjoyment (1998, 125). In their absence are the 'formal open spaces' of places like Darling Harbour (Sant and Waitt 2000, 216) and the newer Barangaroo development (lushly landscaped but patrolled by security and devoid of its industrial history), which have the effect of condensing public space to a 'managed thoroughfare to the private domain' (Skennar qtd. in Gleeson 2006, 26).

Urbanist strategies also reveal a 'fear and condemnation of the carnivalesque' (Haydock 2015) and can work to negate the possibilities that can emerge from it. In some scholarship, contemporary manifestations of carnival are critiqued as an 'impoverished', commodified and marketed 'suspension of the everyday', one of romanticised liminality and subversiveness and 'paradoxical spaces of transgression and social control' (Wadds et. al

2022, 14). Such readings stem from a misreading of the dialectical nature of carnival: I would argue that contemporary manifestations do not represent a significant break with earlier or more 'traditional' modes of carnival and, in fact, in places like Brazil and Louisiana, USA, both 'traditional' and more 'commercialised' forms of carnival co-exist at the same time. As Haydock (2015) notes, the 'licensed affair' of carnival is ambivalent in terms of resistance and conservatism, and has never been entirely *outside of* commercial, legal, power and other dynamics.<sup>52</sup>

In places where formal traditions of carnival have disappeared, Hae (2012, 40) argues that spaces of social dancing and nightlife have acted as a revival of these traditions. In contemporary Sydney, New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras are carnivalesque in nature, and unquestionably there *is* a power or at the very least a *communitas* in the carnival. Reportage on the 1988 iteration of Mardi Gras (Michaels 1988) depicted the parade itself as a 'prelude to ... the deeper sources and darker power of Carnivale', which the author identified in the collapse of the line separating the last float and the audience, a 'taking over the streets' for a protracted moment in a contestation of social, sexual and spatial boundaries. Writing a decade and a half later, Faro and Wotherspoon remarked on the physical barriers that had gone up between audience and parade participants, pondering whether a future Oxford Street would be 'denuded of its vigorous street culture' which stretched back a century to Easter Show parades and May Day marches that saw 'pubs disgorging hundreds of revellers onto the pavements' and more recently 'incoming trains and buses full of spectators: families clutching eskies with refreshments' (2000, 242, 267, 295). Indeed, the authors' predictions were prescient, since 2009 Oxford Street has been an alcohol-free zone, alcohol is banned at the parade, and the exponential increase in sniffer dog deployment by police means that other intoxicating substances are clearly banned too, through modes of policing that dissuade participation in, and generally scrutinise, street culture.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> In Rio de Janeiro carnival is sometimes described as a 'sweet illusion' of a world turned upside down, but one where the illusion 'all ends tomorrow', on the last day of carnival.

<sup>53</sup> Justifications that drug and alcohol controls have been deployed to prevent violence are questionable, as Mason and Lo noted, Mardi Gras 'attracts hundreds of thousands of heterosexual spectators with few reported incidents of serious violence or harassment' (2009, 102).

In his seminal 1984 work *On the Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau describes the 'popular procedures' and 'ruses' that 'manipulate' and 'evade' mechanisms of discipline. According to De Certeau, these spatial practices (or 'ways of operating') temporarily re-appropriate space from urbanism, forming a 'network of antidiscipline' (1984, xiv-xv). Such a politics may contain a foundation for challenging contemporary urbanism; and even within the current landscape of heavy regimentation and control, temporary *re-appropriations* are observable. Following the Mardi Gras 2022 parade, I had the chance to survey the diverse street scene on Oxford Street: in spite of the heavy presence of police and sniffer dogs, there was drinking in Taylor Square; an unofficial party in a laneway; bottle shops that closed early in recent years were open; a man wandered the street in underpants and a singlet; and long queues snaked in front of nightclubs.

In this final chapter I have attempted to show the ways in which naïve 'cosmopolitan' governmental visions draw cynically on history, yet their 'civilising' aspirations fail to concretise, due to limited understanding or appreciation of contingencies entailed in the production of drinking cultures, scant follow-through at the technical level, and the intrusion of governmentalities focused on public disorder and 'anti-social' behaviour. These efforts to discipline 'contact' have the practical effect of decreasing the diversity of public cultures and suppressing 'forms of public sociability that do not organise themselves around either the family or legitimate consumer markets' (Race 2018, 42).

## Conclusion

Writing on the eve of the 2000 Olympic Games, geographers Connell and Thom predicted that in Sydney, a 'healthy city' with epidemics unknown to contemporary residents and a conducive climate, 'tourist and leisure markets' would increasingly move outdoors (2000, 340). Whilst they were not alone in this kind of commentary, what instead transpired was the shutdown and privatisation of public space in the city, rationalised through appeals to safety and order and driven by the causal linking of alcohol consumption and violence in crime statistics, media and police discourse, and popular culture. In a process that I have called ***governing with and against alcohol***, certain kinds of drinking establishments, practices and crowds were legitimised through urbanist discourses and particularly classed modes of responsabilisation that sought to 'civilise' urban life.

Offering solutions for the difficult issues surrounding alcohol-related violence has been beyond my scope of study. However, by interrogating responses of the state and the unreflexive positionality of urbanists, I have sought to raise questions regarding the place of class and the role of alcohol governmentalities in the privatisation of public space and the suppression of aspects of urban life. I have also tried to convey that liveliness and stimulation in urban life flows from understanding the city *not* as one thing but as an 'active assemblage of assemblages' with multiple forms (Bender 2010, 312). Perhaps above all, I have sought to critique the seemingly pervasive perception that 'different groups belong to separate universes' (Caldeira 1998, 136).

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In mid-2023 the state Liberal government which caused so much damage to Sydney's cultural life is finally gone, though Clover Moore's City of Sydney council goes on, seemingly eternal. As I have argued, whilst the COVID-19 pandemic saw attempts to re-activate public space, these have remained stymied and haunted by histories of criminalisation and sanitisation, a class-silent politics and the continuation of other governmentalities.

At the time of writing, some nightclubs, pubs and other venues in the city appear to have been quietly allowed to revert to 24-hour trading, perhaps signalling the end of the 'lockout laws'. Regarding public space, though, tensions remain unresolved. Recently, I attended the

annual Serbian Festival in Glebe's Pirrama Park. Despite the weather, bands were playing popular folk songs to a big crowd engaging in group dances known as *kolo*. A long way from the stage, a securitised and fenced-off pen contained drinkers unable to engage in cultural practices due to alcohol governmentalities. At World Pride 2023, in contrast to the successes of community-run programs and events, the City of Sydney followed through on its promise to enforce the ban on street drinking for its 'family-friendly activation', setting up *drinking pens* for chosen boutique vendors on Oxford Street.

In their critique of contemporary urbanism, scholars such as Zukin, Caldeira, and Soja primarily focus on public-private phenomena of gated communities, corporate plazas and shopping malls in the neoliberal *postmetropolis* 'of protected and fortified spaces' (Soja qtd. in Macleod 2002, 258). I believe that it is increasingly difficult to clearly delineate between public and private space in contemporary everyday life, and that conceptions of 'gated' private space can be extended to *public* spaces, which are increasingly enclosed on the grounds of noise, 'safety' or profit-making, providing a topic ripe for future study.

To conclude, whilst 'social melange' is not devoid of conflict or tension (Faro and Wotherspoon 2000, 6), solutions to mechanical concepts of 'diversity' proffered by authorities appear unable to appreciate negotiations of diversity that occur at the level of the everyday, what we might consider a 'fuzzy' and 'unlegislated' cosmopolitanism 'by default' (Germain and Radice 2006, 118, 125). In demonstrating how governments and others have reduced possibilities for public space through governmentalities that purport to 'civilise', I'd like to leave the reader to consider possibilities for future public spaces, including how we might envisage multiple enjoyable spaces that interact based on an understanding of and appreciation for the heterogeneity of urban life. Might a politics with an affirmative and more expansive understanding of difference, driven by a commitment to public cultures and safety not hemmed-in by class markers or universally applied standards, provide a way past contemporary urbanisms marked by an absence of concern for 'conviviality and camaraderie' and thus destined to remain 'radically unfinished' (Scott 2006, 15)?

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