

Graduate Institute Oral History Project

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)

Geneva, Switzerland

Pierre Ogay (he/him)

Interviewed by

Amanda Monroe (she/her)

November 1, 2022

Le Phare, Geneva, Switzerland

Background:

This collection consists of oral histories collected by students and researchers at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies as part of their coursework or research projects. The narrators come from diverse backgrounds and recount a wide range of different trajectories, allowing us to see a broader spectrum of historical experience.

There is not much documentation on the history of queer social spaces in Geneva, Switzerland. Despite same sex marriage being legalized in the country only in 2021, queer social spaces have been around for decades and allow queer individuals a safe location to socialize regardless of

surrounding political conversations. Historically, queer spaces have been dominated specifically by gay rhetoric and culture – such as the title of “gay bar” and being spaces primarily made up of men who love men. With the domination of gay-male specific rhetoric, the large remaining portion of the LGBTQIA+ community, in particular queer women and non-binary individuals, are left without a social space.

This interview aims to understand the beginnings of one of Geneva’s most popular queer bars, le Phare. It discusses the conception of the bar and how it came to receive the queer identity that it has today. Interestingly, this interview follows the founder, who has continuously owned the bar, on his journey of creating an “open bar,” gaining insight into defining the unique “queerness” of le Phare, extending beyond the typical “gay bar” definition oriented only towards men and into a more inclusive realm. The interview explores broadly why the bar attracts a queer audience.

Although in conversation with a native French speaker, the following interview was conducted in English with some French words maintained.

**Initially this was meant to be covered in two interviews, though the second had to be cancelled for unforeseen circumstances.*

Narrator:

Pierre Ogay is the founder and owner of le Phare, a queer bar in Geneva, Switzerland. He has lived in Geneva since 1998, when he relocated to the city for his mandatory civil service in place of joining the Swiss army. Prior to opening le Phare, he managed other bars and seasonal terraces. Though he does not consider himself an activist, Pierre has a strong presence within the

queer community in Geneva. Aside from running the bar, Pierre is interested in rock climbing and food systems.

Interviewer:

Amanda Monroe is a second-year master's student at the Geneva Graduate Institute in Development Studies. While her typical research regards the intersection of urbanization and humanitarianism, she also has a personal interest in queer histories and politics. She is an active member, and former Administrative Chair, for the Queer International Student Assembly. In general, Amanda considers herself to be active within the Genevan queer social space.

Format

1 m4a audio file: (1) November 1, 2022, 55:26

Transcript:

Initial transcription produced by Descript; edited and reviewed by Amanda Monroe. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Pierre Ogay. Square brackets [] indicate insertions made by the interviewee, mostly for translation purposes.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Audio recording

Bibliography: Pierre Ogay. Interview by Amanda Monroe. Audio recording, November 1, 2022. Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Pierre Ogay, interview by Amanda Monroe, audio recording, November 1, 2022,
Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Transcript

Bibliography: Pierre Ogay. Interview by Amanda Monroe. Transcript, November 1, 2022.
Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Pierre Ogay, interview by Amanda Monroe, transcript, November 1, 2022, Graduate
Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Pierre Ogay Interview 1/1, November 1, 2022

Amanda Monroe

All right, so this is an interview by Amanda Monroe with Pierre Ogay. We are in the back room of le Phare on November 1st, 2022. And we are here to talk about the history of le Phare and how it was created and Pierre's intentions behind starting the bar and fostering the space that it is today.

Pierre Ogay

Okay.

Amanda Monroe

And before we begin, I just want to make sure that I have your oral consent to record this interview.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, for me. So, my name is Pierre, and it's totally okay to record this interview.

Amanda Monroe

Great. All right. So, to start off, maybe, did you want to talk a little bit about how you started the bar?

Pierre Ogay

Okay, so I arrived in Geneva in 1998 for citizen service in place of doing the Army. And with a friend, we started, a terrace, a summer terrace in 1998, and then a bar a second down, down floor - so, I don't know how to say it second floor. . . the basement! I stopped the bar two years later and I stopped the terrace. It had to close too. But I had a couple of friends, who had this, this place, which is le Phare now, and it was a friend doing clothes. And the other, his boyfriend was organizing a dance event once per month, something like that, a performance. And I told them that if once they decided to, to stop, I would be really interested by this place because I felt very comfortable here and I like this place. And I remember it was 2-0-0-1. I think, yeah, in 2001. Martin came and told me that they stopped the activity in December, end of 2001. So, it was possible to put me in the location contract. Location contract?

Amanda Monroe

Yeah. Like the rental agreement?

Pierre Ogay

Yeah. Rental contract. Okay. And then I, I tried to open the bar, but on the City Department of Constructions something like that. No, not constructions, another one, a guy, was very, very in opposition with this project. While it was squat [squatters] in the basement here. It was le Madone Bar, like Madone, like Madonna, like the saint.

Amanda Monroe

Okay. Okay. Yeah.

Pierre Ogay

It was a Scott [sic] bar every Thursdays, and it was a crazy place. It was very alternative, a little underground, and this Madone bar refused, always, to open the basement to this guy. So he was, he didn't like this street and this building particularly. For the history, this building and a few buildings in the street was squatted, occupied, 20 or 30 years ago. And I think in the eighties, but they would squat for a few days and after that they had confidence contract. I don't know if you have that. The city allowed them to occupy these buildings with a contract of almost nothing, but it's still a contract. It was, I think it was 75 or 85 francs per room. In this building. And it was individual *chauffage* [heating].

Amanda Monroe

Oh okay.

Pierre Ogay

Like *chauffage* with wood.

Amanda Monroe

Yes. Like centralized?

Pierre Ogay

So, it was not centralized. No, it was nothing.

So, When I got to contract, it was a contract for three months only. Automatically renewable. Renewable, but for three months only. And this guy refused to let me open this bar and I don't know why but *son equipe* -

Amanda Monroe

His team.

Pierre Ogay

His team, yeah. They liked me and they told me, “He goes on holidays for three weeks. So, we will tell about your story to the boss of our boss, come between in these three weeks, and it'll be signed.”

And I came, I saw the boss of the boss. He said, “ah it's you!” and he signed.

So, it was possible to open the bar, but it was the end of summer, and I was thinking it's not good to open a bar.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah.

Pierre Ogay

And the people who had worked to open it told me we cannot block a few months just for three weeks or one months of working. So, I decided to open it for the springtime.

Amanda Monroe

Okay. And what year was this?

Pierre Ogay

The 21st of March of 2003. So, it took one year to get the authorization. And my mother died in 2002 March. And then I did a little *brocante* [yard sale/selling second-hand goods], so, I put all, all the stuff of the flat, of the flat of my mother and I sold things for a few months. This space began as a *brocante* for the stuff of my mother.

And then we opened in 2003, the 21st of March. And I wanted the terrace I had and the bar. We were two, but we were together, to work there. It was gay places. Known as gay places. And people ask me if I wanted to do this with le Phare, as a gay bar. And I told them no. I want to do it as an open bar. No categorizing.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, no category.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, no category.

Amanda Monroe

No putting it in a box.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, exactly.

Because I was thinking that Geneva is too small to have only gay bar. And also, I was thinking it was too restrictive. So, it was very quiet in the beginning and then in, in 2003 it was *canicule*. I don't know. In English, it was very high temperature.

Amanda Monroe

Okay. Yep. Yep. There was a heat wave. A heat wave is a *canicule*. It gets really hot.

Pierre Ogay

Well, I don't know if it was all around the world, but I think it was all around the world in 2003, in Europe! And so, in these years in Geneva, some politician decided to propose a few streets every summer to make pedestrian.

Amanda Monroe

That's cool.

Pierre Ogay

And this little street was decided to be for pedestrians for summer 2003. And while it's an alternative street with old squatters and for example, this building was an association. The association rents the old building, and after, inside the association, they decide who pays what.

So, and it was another building in this street. The general meaning of the street is alternative. They were organizing, once a year, a party in this street. It was a squat. So, in place of having official furniture for the street, the citizens of the street asked the city of Geneva to receive the money for the pedestrian street but to organize themselves the furniture. So, it was citizen work. And we did it all together, we organized all together the furniture of the street and the flowers.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, like the flowerpots.

Pierre Ogay

And all of them are from 2003 because after this summer they decided to keep these streets pedestrian. So, for me it was bingo - It was really a win-win. And this terrace, my terrace, the bank, had the dimensions from the decisions of this pedestrian street. The flowers were there to put my bank in the middle.

Amanda Monroe

So, all of this outdoor construction is remnants from 2003.

Pierre Ogay

Exactly.

Amanda Monroe

And it was all like very community based.

Pierre Ogay

Completely. Community work for three days. It was a long weekend. We did it all together.

Amanda Monroe

That sounds so nice.

Pierre Ogay

Right? And that's cool.

And for example, the bank in 2003 - it was also the G7 or G8 in Evian. I don't remember. It was a lot of *manifestations* [protests] against capitalism. And a lot of shops decided to put wood on the windows in prevention to not be destroyed by the anti-capitalist *manifestations*. And it was a shop on the corner of the street that put wood, and I bought the wood from this shop to build my bank outside. So, the story is just like that. Because I had no money. I opened this bar with 30,000 Francs. That's it. It's all I had.

And with the, how do you say *canicule*?

Amanda Monroe

Heat wave?

Pierre Ogay

It's h-i-g-h? like high?

Amanda Monroe

Heat. H-e-a-t.

Pierre Ogay

Ah, like a heat wave. Yeah, okay.

Suddenly some gays discovered that I was here. And suddenly the terrace was full. And it was very hot, of course, night and day. So, in June - July, the bar began to be very busy. I was thinking, to have a very cozy bar with people drinking a tea for hours, reading a book. My dream was to have a bar with people reading, speaking together, not a hectic bar, very quiet, with a place to lie. And alternative people behind the bar, not common people behind the bar, and music you don't hear in the normal way. And with this gay community using the terrace it began to be hectic. And from three, we had to be five together working on weekends.

I remember it was one guy Greg, with a lot of tattoos, and I was almost afraid sometimes. I'm a common guy I learned Italian and Greek at school, so not an alternative guy. And he told me once, "I like your bar. I want to work there." And I told him, "Yeah, okay but we are full. The staff is full." But he gave me his number and when it began to be crowded, I called him. And I think that Gregory brought the craziness here. Definitely. Yeah.

And from this time, it began to be a quite popular bar with alternative people. A lot of alternative people. It was possible to smoke in the bar until 2007 or 2008, I don't remember in Geneva. And so, we had an alternative crowd with a squat, with people like Gregory working behind the bar with the street, with the gay community, also. It was a lot of gays who told me, in 2003, 2004, 2005 – “too many women in your bar!” And I was answering them, “Don't you remember where you come from? The home of your mother!” That was my answer. So, because of this mixed crowd of people. It was never a typical gay bar.

Amanda Monroe

Exactly, yeah.

Pierre Ogay

It was always alternative gay, alternative artistic, a lot of people from the theater, the art school students and performers came to finish their evenings here after their representations. So, it was really mixed during the week and gay on Wednesdays, no Friday and Saturday nights. But it was very rare. Mixed.

And in the beginning, we were doing every Friday, a performance from five to 15 minutes. Most of the time it was a video projected and we stopped service during this time. It was difficult to do that every Friday. To find it, it's a lot of work. And in the beginning, it was full for months and then less and less and less, and I had no time to organize these things. And in the second room here, it was smaller. It was half, by the way, because the building was renovated from 2015 to 2017. And in the courtyard, it was, the floor and the. . .

Amanda Monroe

The roof?

Pierre Ogay

The roof, yeah. It was a roof inside the courtyard. Between the main floor and the first floor. So, it was completely dark. So, the library, which is here now was there and it was a closed room.

Amanda Monroe

So, it was really dark. And then the years it was renovated, it was closed right? During those years.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, for three years. And they destroyed the roof, and now we have light and it's double because we lost 30 centimeters in height. So, I asked them, because I'm losing space, I want more space.

And by the way, the law obliged to construct handicap - *handicapée*?

Amanda Monroe

Oh, handicapped. Yep, handicapped.

Pierre Ogay

Handicap toilets, two toilets and reserved. So, it's bigger than, than before. And more light in this place and in this room. So, it's very cool.

And from the beginning we had exhibitions. From the beginning it was once per month until 2015. So, it was very difficult too and after we decided to do only six per year, so for two months. And it's less because in summertime we let it go for four months because everybody is outside. It's more fair for the people showing this their work to do it longer. It's more qualitative than before. But from the beginning we have exhibitions in the second room. Voila. And then everything was changing, so we stopped the performances, organizing, also classical concept in the Sunday afternoon. The classical musicians in a bar, they don't want. I come for the classical music, but I don't know why so. And, then the bar continues. It was continuing to be a crowded bar, quite a crazy bar. I remember we were partying four to six nights per week.

Amanda Monroe

Oh, wow.

Pierre Ogay

With the staff. It was also, in Geneva, it was a lot of squats [squatters] everywhere coming from the eighties. It was a building crisis.

Amanda Monroe

To find an apartment was hard?

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, so a procurator decided that if a building is free and occupied by squat for more than 24 hours, I think, I don't remember exactly what hours, and the owner was not in the possibility to put out the squatters until they had the money to rebuild the building project and that project is accepted by the construction department. Without these three things, the, the, the squats can stay.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah. Okay.

Pierre Ogay

And so, in Geneva you had a lot of squats for living, but also for partying.

Amanda Monroe

Okay, interesting.

Pierre Ogay

So, we were partying here after closing the bar, but we were also going out Monday, Sunday Friday, every single day of the week we can party until six, seven in the morning because it was a lot of squats.

Amanda Monroe

And so, you really found yourself in this party culture and like you as well, were like every day -

Pierre Ogay

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

And then I had crazy staff and in 2012 I began to do *alpinism* [alpine climbing] and climbing, rock climbing. So, I was happy to sleep in the nights and to wake up very early the way of the mountain. So, I was going to the ice [sic] for the behaviors of my staff. And I get enough money to live working, I was still going to work, but no more in the evenings, it was less. It was more climbing and doing *alpinism*. I know that it was not very fair always with all the customers, but it was still a crazy place. When the finances were doing a little bit down, I had to work a lot, like three months to reorganize and re-put the principles.

In 2015 it closed because everything was renovated. I had to say also that I don't remember when, but a politician was named for the city buildings department. And this woman, from the socialists, decided that every people having three month's renter's contracts decided that if they were in the same place for more than five years, it was a normal contract.

Amanda Monroe

Okay. And this was around 2015 you said? Like when they were renovating?

Pierre Ogay

So, I think in 2010.

Amanda Monroe

Okay.

Pierre Ogay

I had a normal contract and no three months contract. So, when the renovations arrived, I had the possibility, because I had no more three months contract ending with the renovation, that was the deal. It can continue until the renovations comes and after I have nothing. Well, I had for years, a normal contract and I could ask to come back after the renovations. And it's why, le Phare is still here.

Amanda Monroe

I got you. I got you.

Pierre Ogay

And in 2015, 2016, I began to work with a friend from climbing in a food cooperative project. I think in the States you have a lot of food cooperatives. Here it's very, it is not known at all in Europe, and I began working for this project in Meyrin. I discovered the, the farmers' word, the ethic of farming, durable, climate durable. Actually, I was vegetarian. I was just thinking that eating bio, eating organic is cool, but it's not cool. You can be the capitalist industry, but organic. So, I changed my mind during this and I had the project to leave this life and to get a farm with a friend and to be a farmer. So, for the reopening, I decided that we, we would be three and in my mind, I was thinking to sell my part, to sell my part of le Phare to another one who could pay me for yours and give me the possibility of living in France on a farm.

In 2017, we reopened with a new way of seeing life. So, I decided to leave all, if possible, the big groups. The capital, non-ethic groups like Coca-Cola and Nestle. Before 2015, it was some tapas with seafood but, never meat, and after we went more vegan, more and more.

So, we were three, one was a worker before 2015, and another one was the guy I met few years, four years, before. He stayed six months in Geneva, and I was thinking about him, and I had a good feeling with him. I proposed him to work at le Phare, but he was going back to France, but I called him and he said “okay, I come.” So, I had just a feeling with him, it was not a friend, not a knowledge, not a date, it was just a voila and after one year we decided to. . . when you fire someone?

Amanda Monroe

Okay. Yep. So, let someone go, and hire new people?

Pierre Ogay

You said the ones to go out, it's a to -

Amanda Monroe

You fire them.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, yeah. So, we had to fire the one who was working here before because he didn't really have the same feelings about ethics.

Amanda Monroe

Was this the guy who you said that had all the tattoos that was -

Pierre Ogay

No, no, no. He stopped years before.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah. Got you.

Pierre Ogay

For the 10 years of le Phare in 2013, I was thinking to invite all the workers of le Phare. I don't remember them all, I had to go on the *fiche de salaire*.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, the salary slips.

Pierre Ogay

In 10 years, there were already more than a hundred people who worked here. So, some people stayed for a few months, some for a few years. It was a lot of students so when their studies finished, they left. That's normal. And this is continuing by the way.

So no, it was just a normal worker. So, he did not have the same direction for le Phare for the food. And also, he was a really really good worker, but he couldn't - [*unintelligible French*] - to take the sense to see what happened.

Amanda Monroe

Okay, like the bigger picture?

Pierre Ogay

Do you know the Peter Principle?

Amanda Monroe

No, I don't.

Pierre Ogay

The *Principe de Peter*? I don't know in English because it's an English book in the seventies, written. It was a joke for, for the writers, but this joke was studied by sociologists. And they discovered that it's true. The principle is, these guys discovered, that a lot of enterprises -

Amanda Monroe

Yep, businesses.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, businesses. You have a director, and often you have a lot of sub-directors, and then a lot of sub-altern directors. And they were asking, “why all these directors?” And if you are a good worker in the beginning, you begin to be a manager and you are a good manager, so you will be staff-chief, then if you are a good staff chief you will be named project chief. And, it’s not your job. You are a disaster as project chief. But it’s not possible to say to people “you are good here, but you are not good at the upper level, so go down to the level where you are good.” Because it’s like a dishonor. And all these people who have been named at this place, they are normally able here –

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, to bring them back down is –

Pierre Ogay

Maybe with the same salary because for the enterprise, it's not an incentive, it was a dishonor.

Maybe if they put on the low level, they will not be respected by - they receive a job as assistant director, but they do nothing, they receive the money. And the Peter’s principle is that everyone is called to be in a place where he’s not able.

When I speak English, I cannot find my word in French.

Amanda Monroe

No, that is okay! That is okay!

Pierre Ogay

You have to look at it. And for this guy it was typical. He was a really, really, really good manager of stuff but he can be –

Amanda Monroe

The next level up was too much.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, and we proposed him to go down with a good salary, but he refused because he was dishonored. So, we were two and then I think for the whole month, the second one, even if we were deciding everything together, it was my bar. This bar had already had 15 years of habits.

Amanda Monroe

And you've been the only one that's been there since 2003.

Pierre Ogay

Exactly.

So, we were working good together, but I think for him it was a little bit frustrating, I think. So, he left three years later during the Covid in 2020. We are still friends! He was here last Sunday for the karaoke, and he organized a party one month ago. So yeah, we are still working together for other things. So, I am again alone – no farm, nothing like this. Romain brought a lot of

things, the fact we were three for the reopening made the opportunity to do a lot of things I wanted to do before but when you're alone –

Amanda Monroe

It's difficult.

Pierre Ogay

It's difficult. For example, the karaokes, it was a project from 2013 and we were closed two years later, and I was climbing. We were doing parties but only a few in the year. So now, we have queer-aoke, three during the wintertime, not in the summertime. We organize a first Saturday of the month when a musician comes and plays his music or her music, or its music.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, or "their".

Pierre Ogay

They or its?

Amanda Monroe

Their music.

Pierre Ogay

Their music, oh okay. So, there's party organization now. And Romain likes to do public relations. He likes to be a party of organization. He made a lot of – bounce?

Amanda Monroe

Like connections?

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, like connections with other associations which is continuing. Before, when someone came to me and asked for a connection I would say “yes, of course!” but I was not searching them.

Amanda Monroe

Okay. Yeah. They more came to you.

Pierre Ogay

So, it's continuing to have connections with a few associations and also, I think that from the 2010 years or maybe 15, 17, the visibility of transgender people and nonbinary people – I remember for the food pantry project. I had to go to the States because I wanted to perfect my English because I did Greek and Latin in school, and I didn't know English. I wanted to, to go in a small country in the south of Italy, in an island. I don't remember the name, uh, where it's English speaking. Okay. And you have wonderful climbs on the sea. So, I was thinking to have English school in the morning and climbing in the afternoon.

Amanda Monroe

Sounds perfect.

Pierre Ogay

Because of the project of the food comparatives. At least two months in the States in Washington, DC. I like this city. I went to New York for the second time, so for the second time I left a few days before the ending because it's too hectic.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, it's a lot.

Pierre Ogay

So, I remember in 2016 on the radio, in the informations, almost all days, it was spoken about non-gendered toilets. And for me it was craziness to speak about that every day, about the *bataille* [battle], the combat, for nonbinary and nongender toilets. It was very new for me because here it is not spoken about that much. And I don't know when it began, but from the reporting it was in the Pride 2019, it was a big, big, big Pride in Geneva. The Pride for *Suisse romande*, the French part of Switzerland. They were organized from 1998, I think, and every city organizes the Pride every year. So, it was Geneva, Lausanne, Sion, then so on. And from the money, it was not that good. So, people were furious there was no Pride, so Geneva decided to organize a Pride and it was, I think 30,000 people, and it was never known in French Switzerland.

Amanda Monroe

And this was in 2019, you said?

Pierre Ogay

It was in 2019, yeah. And the village of the Pride was in this street, not because of le Phare, but because of the courtyard and so le Phare was completely known. When we closed in 2015, the 29th of June, the street was full. Literally full of people. I don't know if it was Pride, also before, there were a lot of connections with all these associations around transgender and nonbinary, also people with AIDS. I don't know this in English?

Amanda Monroe

Yes. People with AIDS or HIV positive or those communities.

Pierre Ogay

But I think you have the same organization in English, in French it's *personnes vivant avec PVA*.

Amanda Monroe

Oh okay.

Pierre Ogay

And I think in English it's also people with it or, I don't know, something like that –

I think le Phare is a really safe place for the communities, and it continues to be.

Amanda Monroe

Definitely.

Pierre Ogay

So, voila, that's the story of this place.

Amanda Monroe

That's so interesting hearing about the history of it. So, I'm kind of curious if you could speak more about how, you mentioned that initially opening le Phare, you didn't want it to be a gay bar. You were like "I want it to be a chill alternative bar," but when did you kind of find yourself embracing the queer identity that naturally came with the bar. And then you were like "okay clearly this is a lot of the clientele, and we are hosting events like queer-aoke." How did you come to terms with that, I guess?

Pierre Ogay

I wouldn't open a gay bar, but I wouldn't open a straight bar.

Amanda Monroe

That makes sense. I see what you're saying.

Pierre Ogay

I wanted everyone to be welcomed. That's it. I wanted it with no etiquette. It was important for me to embrace – to propose a place where everyone could come.

And, I remember for the first birthday of a friend, a customer, of mine was knowing an artist, a *vidéaste*. And he asked this *vidéaste*, quite known in France, if it was possible to project his short artistic films, made of pornographic materials. So, you can see sometimes things, but its more shadows. He makes something artistic with pornography. The artist said, “no problem, just say that it’s me.” That’s it. And I remember it was two guys who came in because it was full of people, and they were liking the place. They were looking at the production and suddenly they realized it was a gay and lesbian bar. And they broke a bottle, yelling “Oh what the fuck!?” So, I had to put out, even until now sometimes it happens, people who don’t accept it’s an open bar. I had to throw out people from the communities also because they were not accepting it was an open bar. It was a small advertisement written in 360 Magazine. You know 360 Magazine?

Amanda Monroe

Oh yes, yes.

Pierre Ogay

In 283, 4, or 5 I don’t remember why –

[Bartender enters le Phare to begin their shift]

Hello! [speaking to bartender]

Amanda Monroe

Salut [hey]! [to bartender]

[Pierre and the bartender have a brief interlude in French, then the conversation quickly restarts]

Pierre Ogay

It was written, the descriptions of this place were that it was small bar, on a small street, with a terrace. It was spoken about, but we were not with that. And it was written, only one rule “respect.” All ages. All genders. All styles. And I think from the beginning that’s the way I defend. A lot of people tell me that I’m an activist. But I am not an activist at all. I am just accepting. And just to be a part of this. If someone or some associations wants to organize something here, and I think it’s correct, I will say yes. That’s it. I am not searching to do big things. Of course, when I vote, I will say yes, I am for LGBT marriage, and I will do this publicly. But I am not looking for being a figure of activism. But hosting them, yeah.

Amanda Monroe

So, kind of providing the space and the way for people to then come and to have events.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, exactly. Without judgments. Only if it is respectful for the other ones.

Amanda Monroe

Definitely.

Pierre Ogay

Voila. I don't know if I answered to your question.

Amanda Monroe

Oh, you definitely have!

Pierre Ogay

Which one? I don't remember the question you had asked.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, it was just –

Pierre Ogay

Why le Phare began – I think it was just naturally.

Amanda Monroe

It just kind of came from this simple rule of respect and welcoming.

Pierre Ogay

And I think Romain did also, with being a part of the associations, and making boundaries. Not boundaries!

Amanda Monroe

The networks kind of naturally came with many queer organizations and things like that. Okay I got you.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah. And I mean it's not a lot of Geneva by the way.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah.

Pierre Ogay

I don't know if it's why, but you have *Dialogai*, it was the first gay, yeah, it was a gay organization. It was not gay. It was an organization against AIDS.

Amanda Monroe

Okay.

Pierre Ogay

I think it was in the nineties, maybe earlier, and it was the association working for people with AIDS or HIV. And then, in the nineties 360 was founded with crazy parties. And then, I don't know why, but it was split between 360 and *Dialogai* and it was complicated. People, I don't know why, I don't know exactly the story, it was not fun, and maybe we don't have good spaces – I don't know. A place which can bring together all the associations. Maybe when the first

people to leave the associations – I don't know. But, maybe at le Phare it's very neutral so everyone can come.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, I would say so.

Pierre Ogay

Yeah, maybe.

Amanda Monroe

I definitely feel like, at least in my personal experience of coming to the bar, there's always people from, I think all sorts of organizations from around Geneva that meet up and just come. So, I think that's something that's unique about le Phare is, like you said, that it's welcoming to everybody. It's a neutral, welcoming environment for people to come which is really interesting.

Pierre Ogay

And the staff is here for you in this way.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, very cool! Well, I don't want to take up too much of your time because I know that you are opening the bar and all that. Because I do definitely have a lot more questions and I'd love to maybe just set up a second interview to process all of this and ask you some more questions

about the history and about you. But this was so interesting so thank you for your time and for sharing. Awesome, so I'll stop the recording now.